

Earth Dance

“A person who never made a mistake never tried anything new.” ~ Albert Einstein

“You must learn from the mistakes of others. You can’t possibly live long enough to make them all yourself.” ~ Samuel Levenson

“I’d rather be strongly wrong than weakly right.” ~ Tallulah Bankhead

Terry and Betty were best friends. Terry was a dancer and had been training since childhood. Betty was talented in many disciplines including dance, music, photography, and painting. Because Betty’s perspectives were always unique and inspiring, Terry regarded her as her personal muse. One Friday, after working very hard in the dance studio, Terry set out with Betty for a relaxing hike to the Lava Cliffs to find a spot to paint the ocean. It seemed like another “Lucky Live Hawaii” day, with a cloudless blue sky, bright sunshine, and a gentle wind. They wove their way in and around the contours of an old lava outcropping on the edge of a swirling ocean in Portlock, a Honolulu suburb, gradually descending to a level spot to paint. Always prepared, Betty had brought all the painting materials in her backpack. As they painted, they heard the wind whistling around the cliffs and the waves crashing against the rocks below, a symphony of nature that precluded talking.

They hardly noticed the passage of time until the sun began to set. As they realized it was getting dark, they hastily packed up their supplies, preparing to hike back. Betty started to retrace their steps, but Terry stopped her short. “Which way are you going, Betty?” “The way we came.” Terry pointed up the side of the lava cliff. “Let’s go this way, straight up. I can see the top from here.” “I think we should go around the cliff, the way we came.” Terry agreed it was the best way to return, but she was concerned that it was getting dark. She stubbornly insisted, “That’s the long way. Look, the sun is almost down. We don’t really have time to go back the way we came and the top is right there. Straight up is the shortest distance.” Terry confidently headed up the steep incline. Betty followed reluctantly. It was easy at first. The shelves of lava they used as hand and foot holds at the bottom of the mountain were wide, thick, and sturdy. But as they ascended, the shelves gradually grew narrow, shallow, and brittle. “It’s still not too late to descend and go back around the long way,” Betty suggested. “Maybe if we had flashlights...but we don’t and, look, the sun is about gone now. It isn’t that much farther to the top,” Terry replied. Betty shook her head and kept following Terry as she ascended the receding cliff. When they looked down now, the level area was far away. The comforting warm plateau on which they had painted looked menacing, as if it could crack a skull. And the waves, rendered almost inaudible by the distance, thrashed hungrily below. In the faded light, the shallow lava outcroppings began to crumble as they touched them. Terry was no longer confident she’d made the right decision, but it was too late, too far, and too dangerous to go back and walk around the cliff as Betty had suggested.