

School for Hawaiian Girls

A Novel by:
Georgia Ka'apuni McMillen

This book is a work of fiction. All characters and all actions, events, motivations, thoughts and conversations portrayed in this story are entirely the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events or locales, is entirely coincidental. References to real people, locations, and organizations are used solely to lend the fiction a sense of authenticity and irony.

Copyright © 2001 by Georgia Ka'apuni McMillen
All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission from the author.

ISBN: 0-7596-2733-9

This book is printed on acid free paper.

Part of this book by Georgia Ka'apuni McMillen originally appeared in the Bamboo Ridge, Journal of Hawai'i Literature and Arts, No. 79, Spring 2001, and is reprinted by permission of the author.

Cover photograph: Photographer, R. J. Baker.
Printed with permission of the Bishop Museum,
Honolulu, Hawai'i.

1st books rev. 11/14/01

**1922, Kohala
Sam**

Patience was hard to take straight on, her and her squash-nose, fat-lip face. Which was why I kept our meetings secret. Besides, it was no one's business what we did in private. Let's keep our afternoons special, I told her.

On the days she carried the lunch pot down to the church ladies, I would wait for her outside the gate, the School for Hawaiian Girls at the top of the valley. Patience always acted surprised to see me, then she would scold me. Then she would say she couldn't come with me, but that girl was game – 100 percent. Like last week when I pretended I was the plantation *luna* and she was the new girl, fresh off the boat from Manila. Only knew how to say yes, no and good morning.

That Friday I was waiting for her outside the gate, on the road going down to the church. The wind blew off Kohala Mountain and down through the valley. The trees creaked, and now I smelled the lunch they were cooking in the school kitchen. My stomach twisted. I crawled through the wrought-iron gate and ran across the school yard to the classroom building. Inside the open window, the lady with blue hair was walking up and down the desk rows, her hands behind her back. "Small, neat

Georgia Ka'apuni McMillen

stitches, girls," she said. "You want to be proud to wear your handiwork."

There was Patience, holding the needle and thread up to her face because that was how blind she was.

"*E i nei*," I said.

She looked up, her right eye going left, the left eye going right. I could never tell what she was looking at.

"I need some handiwork."

One of the girls started laughing.

"*Hūi*, where's my lunch?"

The blue-haired lady walked to the window clapping her hands. "Who's there?"

Quick, I ran back to the gate, crawled through and hid behind the mock orange until I heard the kitchen door open, then footsteps. I looked - it was my sister Lydie, taking her long steps across the school yard, the lunch pot hanging from her arm. I waited for her to close the gate before jumping out, "Now you the delivery girl?"

"You! I almost dropped this." She shifted the pot to her other hand.

"Where's Patience?"

Lydie walked ahead, "You're supposed to meet her in the forest after school."

"Patience's giving me orders now?" Catching up, I lifted the pot lid, "Stew! How you knew that's what I wanted?"

She pulled away, gravy spilling on her skirt. "I'm gonna kick you."

"Patience always gives me a helping."

Lydie stopped. "Do I look like Patience?"

Nope, not by a long shot. Patience looked like the dead fish me and Gramps found the day before at sunset. My sister Lydie looked like the sunset - the curve of her forehead, the color of her skin. And it was funny how that went in our family. We all had the same features - me, Lydie and my other sister Bernie - only on me and Bernie they looked like shit. Our skin was too

black, our hair too frizzy - and on Bernie, one eye was round, the other *pākē*.

Lydie walked to the bridge over the stream, in the valley the old-timers called *Ka 'īlio*, The Dog. She put down the lunch pot and pulled out of her pocket an envelope stuffed with dollar bills.

"Who gave you that?" I said, but I knew. Every Friday the headmistress gave Patience the lunch and money for the church ladies.

"Mind your own business," Lydie said.

"How about a loan?" I said, watching her count the bills. I could've told her: there was always 10. "I pay you back with interest. After this weekend, I'm gonna be rich."

"After this weekend, you're gonna be in jail - you keep it up."

"Nobody knows."

"Everybody knows because you can't keep your mouth shut."

One month before, I'd found Sheriff Pua's stills in Pololū and started pouring off a little each day. That Saturday, I was selling the booze at the cock fight.

"How'd you like a rich brother?" I jabbed her with my elbow.

She shoved me back.

"Lydie, I get one question."

"You *have* a question," she said.

"How come they let *you* take down the lunch?"

"I'm late." Lydie picked up the pot.

"Church ladies not gonna starve."

Lydie crossed the bridge.

"*E i nei*. What's the big secret?"

A year ago it was the baby in her belly. When the gossips in Kapa'au and Hāwī began sniffing the air, trying to find out if the rumors were true, Mama made plans to get rid of Lydie. She told me and Gramps to take Lydie through the sugarcane field down to Keawa'eli Bay, then by canoe to Māhukona Harbor where she would catch the Maui-bound steamer. There was

Georgia Ka'apuni McMillen

someone named Gladys on Maui, Mama had said, who would take care of Lydie until the baby was born.

"Least let me carry the lunch pot," I said, following her.

"If Mama sees you up here, you're in trouble."

"Ho, make me laugh," I said. "What else's new?"

We walked to the bend in the road. From there, we could see the church further down, the whitewashed walls, the green bell tower and the meeting hall. After building the church, the missionaries had named it Light in the Darkness. Then they renamed the whole valley because they couldn't keep their church in a place called The Dog - some kind of Christian bad luck with dogs, pigs, rats and spiders. You name it, they had a problem with it.

I heard the trade winds blowing through the forest. They'd begun in March; now it was late April. Plus, on the Big Island up in Kohala, we had a wind called *Inuwai*, Drinking Water. I heard it rolling in from Kai'opihi.

So did Lydie. She lifted her chin and *Inuwai* washed over her face. Now I saw that her eyes were red. "Tell me," I said. "What's going on?"

"I'm running away, Sam. I need to find Angelina."

"Who?"

"I'm the mother and that's the name I choose. The Maui-lady said I could come and visit."

"Don't sound like you going to visit."

"I'm taking her back," Lydie said.

So that's it. "Anybody knows what you up to?"

"Charlie does."

That *lōlō* - the one who got Lydie in trouble in the first place.

"He's waiting with a canoe at Keawa'eli."

"What? He's paddling you across the channel?"

"He's taking me to Māhukona. I'm catching the steamer for Maui."

"*You* catching the steamer?" I said. "What about that dumb Hawaiian?" Listen, my sister Lydie could've had any boy in the

School for Hawaiian Girls

District. I even saw the plantation manager's son looking at her. But she chose Charlie Moku, who could only talk about fish and fishing. Didn't even own a pair of shoes.

"As soon as he's saved enough, he's coming too," she said.

"And how you got your fare in the first place? What you gonna live on when you get there?"

"Gramps gave me his coins last night."

"You joking, right? His money's not even American." Most were English coins.

"Some are," Lydie said.

"Don't go today," I said. "I'll give you what I make tomorrow night. Then go next week." The steamer left for Maui every Friday.

"I've got enough," she said.

"You got shit. You don't even have extra clothes."

"Everything's in my school bag. I hid it in the cane field this morning."

We heard the church ladies laughing in the meeting hall. Lydie picked up the lunch pot. "Promise you won't tell, Sam."

"Write me as soon as you get there," I said. But either Mama picked up the mail or my other sister Bernie - Mama's spy.

"Don't write," I said. "I'm gonna meet you on Maui next Friday."

"Really?" It was the first time I'd seen her come close to smiling in a year.

"And I'm walking you down to Keawa'eli," I said. "It's about time Charlie Moku heard from me."

"Then forget it. I don't want your help." Lydie began walking to the meeting hall, but inside something fell. It rolled around and around on its rim, the church ladies whooping. Lydie waited, then walked in the door.

"Finally!" I heard them say.

I ran around the meeting hall to the kitchen in the back. Ho, it smelled good in there. Through the screen door I saw the cakes for Sunday coffee cooling by the oven. The church ladies

Georgia Ka'apuni McMillen

wouldn't miss one, I thought, or two. I tried to open the screen door but the hinges squeaked. One of the church ladies heard and looked back through the kitchen.

Mama was president of the Christian League, the club for Hawaiian women. She sat with the ladies at the round table in the middle of the meeting room. Above the table, they had hung a cluster of blue and red ribbons from the ceiling light. Mama led them in a prayer, then dished out the stew. And now I saw Lydie, crawling on her hands and knees picking up blue and red ribbon scraps. "Lydie," I tried to whisper.

She turned her back to me.

Then a church lady pointed to the other side of the room. Now Lydie was crawling on the floor over there - and I didn't like this. She had a one-hour walk through the sugarcane field to Keawa'eli. Then a three-hour paddle down the coast to Māhukona - if the wind was at their backs. If Charlie Moku paddled his canoe as hard as he fucked my sister.

They finished their lunch. Mama walked into the kitchen carrying the empty plates. "Lydia," she said, standing at the sink. "Bring in the lunch pot."

Lydie carried it into the kitchen. "You don't have to."

"Of course we have to wash it. And just look at you, gravy down your skirt." Mama washed the pot once, then twice, then she put it on the rack. Lydie grabbed it and started walking out.

"What will I do with you?" Mama said, holding out the dish towel.

Lydie began drying, but Mama grabbed the pot and towel out of Lydie's hands and did it herself - wiping and wiping. Finally she gave the pot to Lydie. "After school I want you to help finish the decorations for Reverend's birthday," she said.

"But -"

"I told Bernice to wait for you."

In the main room, a church lady said, "Lydia, play us something." There was a piano against the wall.

School for Hawaiian Girls

“Play some of that colored music,” another said. It was Patience’s aunty, Louise. She put her hands on her hips - wide enough for bookshelves.

“Reverend’s down at the manse today,” another said.

Lydie sat at the piano and found the rhythm with her left hand, the melody with her right.

“Stop this!”

Ho, Mama even made me jump.

“Suppose Reverend heard?” Mama said, walking across the wood floor to the piano, still holding the dish towel. “Does this look like a dance hall?”

Lydie left the piano and walked to the door carrying the empty lunch pot. Aunty Louise handed her the bag of ribbon scraps, “The dressmaking class can use them.”

“Play from the hymnal,” Mama told Lydie.

“But I’m late,” Lydie said, walking out.

“Lydia!”

“Let her go,” Aunty Louise said.

Amen and about time.

“The money,” another lady said.

Mama walked back to the kitchen, “I’ll get it later.”

Quick, I ran to the front of the church, across the road then into the forest. I reached the clearing before Lydie. When she saw me she said, “I told you to leave me alone.”

“This’s where Patience said I gotta wait, right?”

She pulled the envelope with the money out of her pocket and wrote on it, ‘Please return to the School for Hawaiian Girls.’ She put the envelope in the lunch pot, and the lunch pot at the edge of the clearing.

“Keep the money,” I said. “You gonna need it.”

“I can’t.”

“Why didn’t you give it to Mama in the first place?”

“I forgot.”

“Oh yeah? You weren’t thinking of keeping it?”

“Stop arguing with me!”

Georgia Ka'apuni McMillen

Fine. I wasn't gonna argue. I wasn't gonna follow her. I let Lydie walk away, while I got comfortable. But my empty stomach started moaning, and then I heard a voice: Psss.

I looked around, and then I heard it again.

Uh oh. That lunch pot filled with money was calling me. What else could I do? Better if I took the money home for safe keeping. Suppose someone found it before the school girls? Suppose the girls didn't return it? I knew them. Some were worse than me.

Then I heard branches snapping. The clearing dropped off into a gulch. Down in the gulch I saw someone running, his red shirt flashing through the green leaves. On Friday afternoons all the boys came up to the forest to meet the girls. I whistled my whistle, but the red shirt didn't stop - and I didn't like that. Not like I was king of the mountain, but all the boys knew me and would've stopped.

And whoever he was, he was too early. The girls' school didn't let out classes until 3:00. By then, they would be wondering what happened to Lydie, and Mama would be telling Bernie to go and find her. By then, Lydie would be sitting in a canoe, Charlie Moku paddling like crazy so she wouldn't miss the steamer.

And that made me think about her plan. It was the dumbest thing I'd heard all year. As far as I was concerned, Lydie had no plan, except that she was going to Maui and praying for a miracle. On top of that, she had no money except the 13-dollar fare. Better if I caught up with her and gave her the 10 dollars from the lunch pot - might as well. I wasn't doing anything the next couple of hours except listening to my stomach grumble.

I ran down the path, then grabbed an overhead branch to keep from falling into Government Road - empty in the middle of the day. Across the road lay the field, the sugarcane standing as high as our house. The white-fringed cane tassels waved against the blue sky.

Next to the field someone had left his horse. Her coat was brushed and shiny, and the saddle was polished. I crossed the

School for Hawaiian Girls

road and she looked up from the patch of grass she was munching. "Who left you out here all alone?" I said, then ran my hand along her smooth, brown neck.

Then, in the nearby field, the cane tassels bowed. I called to Lydie, "Wait up."

I followed the irrigation ditch into the field. "I got something for you - to help find the baby."

I ran along the ditch, then out onto the cane-haul road. It cut through the field, all the way down to the sugar mill at Keawa'eli. There was Lydie, walking down the middle. The midday sun turned her black hair red, and her faded skirt bright white. "Wait," I said, running to her.

She put her hands on her hips and threw her head back. "I told you to leave me alone!"

"Let me go with you."

Her voice changed, "Will you?"

"Next week, after the cock fight. We go together."

"Don't you see? If I wait, I won't go."

"Then here." I gave her the 10 dollars.

"You stole the church money."

"No, it's my money."

She crossed her arms over her chest, "Prove it."

"Take it. You going with nothing."

She walked on.

"Fine. Beg for food." I followed her to the rock outcropping beside the cane-haul road. She climbed up the rock.

"Lydie," I called up to her. "You got any water?" I was so thirsty I was ready to drink from the irrigation ditch.

She didn't answer.

I climbed up, "Lydie?"

She lay belly-down, her arm shoved in a crevice. "My bag's gone," she said, sitting up.

"Got any water?"

Lydie climbed down, "My fare. Gramps's coins." She leaned against the rock, "The blanket I made for the baby."

Georgia Ka'apuni McMillen

Then *Inuwai* rolled in, blowing in sets of three gusts. The first swept over the field. The second blew over the cane-haul road and sent the dust swirling. The third swept over Lydie's face. She pushed herself away from the dead rock. "I'm going anyway."

"Lydie..." I loved her so much.

"I don't need the bag."

She was braver than all of us put together.

"Give me the 10 dollars," Lydie said.

Shucks.

"Hurry. I'm late."

I gave her the church money.

"What else you got? I need it, Sam."

I emptied my pocket. There was another eight dollars and 30 cents.

"Where'd you get this? Why didn't you offer it before?"

Business was business. There would be operating expenses tomorrow night.

"And you'll come next Friday?" she said.

"How will I find you?"

"Charlie will know." She began running down the cane-haul road, then turned. "Sam! Don't tell anyone."

Then, just inside the field the tassels bowed, and there was the flash of red cloth again. At the edge of the road I looked into the sugarcane, but I didn't see anything.

I knew what it was. My eyes were playing tricks on me. My stomach was behind the whole thing - pissed off because I didn't feed it since breakfast.

Now I heard the school bell. I ran back to Government Road. The horse was still there. "Why don't you come home with me?" I said, walking toward her. Then two girls stepped out of the forest on the other side of the road.

"They let you out early?" I said.

"Better hurry, Sam," one said. "Patience is waiting for you."

Patience was blabbing about us?

School for Hawaiian Girls

I ran up the forest path. Four girls stood in the clearing, along with Eddie-Boy Kauka - his arm slung around two of the girls' shoulders. That greedy dog.

Then I saw Patience walking down the path to the clearing. I ducked behind a bush. She walked into the clearing, over to the lunch pot still sitting at the edge. "Has anyone seen Lydie?" she said.

The girls shook their heads, and Eddie-Boy just stared. He was like me that way. He didn't like answering anyone's questions.

"She was supposed to take this to the meeting hall," Patience said. Then she looked up, her cross-eyes going every which way. "Has anyone seen Sam Kaluhi?"

Eddie-Boy choked, then laughed. "That's who you meeting?"

And that did it for me. It was one thing that Patience was cross-eyed. Then she made me wait all day. And now, on top of all of that, she let everyone know my private business with her. A girl had to know her place. A girl had to keep a secret. Especially girls like Patience.