

BELIEVE WE ARE MAGIC

BY

Melissa Llanes Brownlee

1980

She pretends to skate around the living room. Bobby-pinned to her dark hair is a rainbow of used plastic ribbons she took from the special birthday and Christmas box her mother keeps in the closet. She imagines them cascading down her back, the breeze blowing them gently behind her as she swirls in her bare feet on the golden area rug. She wants pale flowing hair and real roller skates as she sings *you have to believe we are magic*, wishing she were a muse and not a little girl.

1984

She stares hard at the man who is not a woman but wears makeup like he is. She knows there is something special about him. He rides a motorcycle, wears puffy sleeves and tight pants, his eyes lined, his lips full. He's not a mahu as her mother would call him, and she wants to go crazy just like he sings, wear purple and white and pile up her curly hair to cascade down around her, but she doesn't know how, and she's too afraid to ask.

1988

She doesn't tell anyone how much she likes the guy who is the blue alien, his golden skin, and dark-lashed eyes so different from the boys at school. She sings *'cause I'm a blonde* even though she isn't, her boobs bigger than everyone else's. She shakes her cosmic thing. She learned how from the hula and Tahitian lessons her mother made her take even though she insisted she didn't want them.

1992

She is drawn to the lounge singer pretending to be a nun in order to hide from her mobster boyfriend. She isn't someone her mother would think is beautiful, but she is enchanted by her otherworldliness. She remembers listening to her mother's albums, her body surrounded by the halo of the living room rug, singing *I will follow him*, blending her voice to the one on the stereo. Now, she imagines all of these different voices and hands and bodies entwined, worshipping, *there is not a man today who could take me away* and they'd all chorus together, finally believing she is magic.

Editor's Note

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Author Biography

Melissa Llanes Brownlee (she/her), a native Hawaiian writer, living in Japan, might own too many ukuleles but probably not. She's trying to get better at playing them, so you can catch her videos on Instagram @lumchanukulele. She has work published or forthcoming in *Smokelong Quarterly*, *Cheap Pop*, *The Razor*, *Lost Balloon*. Read *Hard Skin*, her short story collection, from Juventud Press. She also tweets @lumchanmfa and talks story at www.melissallanesbrownlee.com.