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Donna Emerson

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This May Only Happen Once

by Donna Emerson

We swam in the sea at Maui's North Shore.
You, my mid-life child, now a distant
sixteen to my seventy years.
We walked a jungle trail to Honolua Cove.

Lime-streaked lizards surprised us,
yellow and red hibiscus. The canopy rang
with myna bird chirps and screeches,
the scent of plumeria.

Our fumbling, putting on floppy fins,
face-covering masks, the fit
of that giant mouthpiece
prompted laughing and bouncing
as we struggled over rocks.
Our sudden drop into deep salt water.

Being your first time,
you reached out your hand
and clasped mine.
Held on.
Like you did at four.

I pointed to the clown fish,
you saw the Moorish Idol,
we nodded our free hands, sign language
for yes, at the rolling sea turtles.

We dipped down to striped snakes
tucked in the reef near the white coral,
saluted the Picasso Triggerfish.
We were both young, swimming.