

## The hole

“This island used to have a heart,” Mama says, abusing the coral necklace between her thumb and her ring finger. “Then someone started to dig it and went on and on until there was nothing left.”  
“Do you know where we’re living Jeff?,” she continues. “On a hole, love, we’re living on the edge of a hollow heart”.

We’re always about to fall, me and Mama. She’s always been telling me: she’s my aunt and my only love. I’m 31, I don’t have a job, I’ve been living with her all my life, and my name’s Jeff. Today the monsoon will come.

Before it was different: if someone was exploiting us, at least he was giving everybody a shovel to dig with a salary at the end of the month. We even had a hospital, a new school and solid houses. Mama used to say: “Jeff, you’re the richest child on earth.”  
“More than a white child?” I would ask. “Definitely more.”  
“More than a blonde child?” I would insist. “Yes, for sure.”  
“Even more than an Australian child?” I would finally whisper.  
“Even more than an Australian child.” she would say.

It was true. We the people of Nauru were the richest on Earth. The island isn’t much more than a small raft in the ocean, really. “Not a common raft, though,” Mama used to say. “A raft made of bat shit”. For centuries bats had been flying and shitting around Nauru. People didn’t like them. But then the shit mixed with coral and solidified, morphing the center of our island into something visually akin the moon’s surface. When they found this out, foreigners thought to themselves: “Phosphate!”  
They asked us to dig it in exchange for money, and it was in that moment that something broke forever. “You can’t dig out your heart for money,” Mama said. She was right, but we did it, and the bats began flying away from Nauru.

Today virtually no one on the island has a job. The foreign phosphate men left the caves empty and others came, people who deal with accounts and investments. They don’t even open an office. They don’t offer us a single job. Bankers, I’ve heard. “Wankers”, Mama says.

When you don’t have a job, all you can do is walk, and each night after dinner Mama and I take a walk down to the phosphate mines.

“Can you see the hole?” Mama says. “Yes, I can.”  
It’s like an inverted mountain. I can feel it inside, as well. Perhaps it’s the hunger.

We stay there for another bit, Mama and me, contemplating our bankruptcy, secretly hoping that this time the monsoon won’t bring rain but rather some brown sticky substance to fall from the sky straight onto our heads and make us rich once again.