

Notes from Nowhere  
by Christopher Damitio

## Chapter 1

2020 was a terrible year to be a socialist. It started well enough with a string of leftist candidates on the docket to be Democratic Candidates for President of the United States but it quickly went downhill. First there was the pandemic, then there were the capitulations by all the socialist leaning candidates to the iconic Neo-liberal former Vice President, then the Black Lives Matter protests happened, then the rich started getting even richer as the government loaded \$6 trillion dollars into the equities markets to 'save capitalism'. Finally, there was the election itself and during all of this, the pandemic hadn't gone away.

Harold Haggins was one of those who survived, but he wasn't happy about it. Prior to the pandemic he had seen a big influx of youth and energy into the Democratic Socialists of America. It was a heady and wonderful time. Once a month in Honolulu, he would kiss his wife goodbye and head out to a Korean karaoke bar where he and three dozen other socialists would drink, talk, and 'Sing with Socialists'. It was wonderful. Over the previous two years, the 'sing with socialists' group had grown from five dedicated (and rather dusty) comrades to nearly two score.

Being a socialist in the USA had never been easy, but as 2020 dawned, it felt like it was getting easier. Harold worked in a far from socialist career. He worked for a venture capitalist firm. To be fair, the firm he worked for was focused on funding sustainable, transformative, and community-centric startups with founders who wanted to create a better version of the world. So, in one sense, it was the perfect place for him. Still, he was a socialist who put on a button down shirt every morning and often had to wear a tie and coat - though, one of the advantages of living in Hawaii was that he could wear a crisply pressed 'aloha' shirt most days. Formal business attire in the islands.

The pandemic had put an end to the 'Sing with Socialists' meetups but unfortunately it had not put an end to having meetings with bankers and 'angel' investors in order to convince them to invest in young entrepreneurs who wanted a better world instead of a place on the Forbes billionaire list. These meetings usually happened on Zoom group calls and they were far more exhausting than the sit downs they used to have in plush offices with complimentary coffee and fresh tropical fruit. Harold still had coffee and fruit, but it wasn't as nice when he had to provide it for himself - even if he didn't need to change out of his pajama bottoms for most calls.

The exhaustion that set in after the election hit everyone hard. The much desired certain outcome never came - it would, but the court cases and arguments just seemed to drag on forever. There was no winner. The fascist leaning billionaire president remained in charge, everyone still had to hear him, and with the election 'complete but not decided' there were no hopeful messages being propagated on the internet or the airwaves in order to inspire voters to give their support to change. More than exhaustion - it was like a toxic sludge had settled over everyone.

Looking at his iPhone, Harold saw that he had a message in his Signal app. Even though he was a socialist and in general didn't want to contribute to capitalist society, there was no way to avoid having a phone, a laptop, or to avoid using the apps and programs his life required. Harold used an iPhone because Apple was one of the only tech behemoths that put an emphasis on respecting privacy and personal data. In fact, he used many Apple products. He even owned stock in the company (which

wasn't a very socialist thing to do) because he had decided early on in his life as a socialist that supporting companies that did good was just as important as fighting against those that did not. His work would have been impossible without this cognitive peace accord.

Signal was built on open source and funded by grants and donations. It allowed messaging and texting without being tracked. It was fully encrypted and not owned by any of the tech giants or government entities. This was the kind of technology and company that Harold made it his life's work to find and help secure funding for. It was also a very popular app within the socialist community. He opened the app - which was one of the only apps he allowed to give him notifications.

#### *Socialist Group Chat:*

*"Come sing with socialists. If you're tired and need a boost it's time to violate the lockdown order and come sing with your comrades. We know that the social distancing orders are still in place. We know that singing is one of the ways the virus spreads. We know that and much more ... but we also feel that this year has eroded the social out of socialism. So, if you are symptom free, haven't been diagnosed with Covid-19, and want to take a break from all the commercial Christmas promotions - join us for a special Sing with Socialists event at Karaoke King on the Solstice. We've rented out the whole place. Feel free to bring your favorite drinks and bring your singing voices. Also, wear a mask, don't come if you feel or have felt any symptoms in the past seven days, and let's be social. -- note-- this gathering is potentially larger than the City and County of Honolulu allows so please don't share outside of known socialist circles. We will have new member meetings in 2021 after treatment and vaccines are better developed - this is a gathering for known friends only."*

The City and County of Honolulu only allowed for gatherings of ten or less - so it was most likely going to be a violation - plus the fact that bars, taverns, and karaoke joints were all still closed under the lockdown orders. Still, Harold decided he would go. He wasn't alone. Quite a few members were already responding to the group text - not very good security practice, but most of them were too young to remember a time when socialists were considered in the same vein with pornographers, terrorists, and cult fanatics. Harold would go, but he didn't see any reason to RSVP.

Harold's biggest reservation was telling his wife - he thought she would berate him for being an idiot, but, as frequently happened in his marriage, he had completely misjudged this woman he thought he knew so well from twenty years of marriage. She squeezed his hand and said 'Good, I think it will be good for you to spend some time with your socialist friends.' She'd never had any interest in politics or economics - but she consistently surprised him by encouraging him to push for a world that could only exist by completely re-tooling the society she was so comfortable in.

They lived slightly better than paycheck to paycheck. She was the daytime executive chef in a resort hotel - or had been prior to the pandemic destroying tourism. Her job had been to make all the tropical themed food that tourists dreamed about when they went back to dreary lives in Iowa. Since the pandemic, Harold had been eating far too much of her delicious food. He had become middle aged with a rotund belly and a round face. She had retained her girlish figure, but her face had begun to show the cares of age. At forty-four she was still young but at fifty-two, Harold was no longer able to make that claim. Middle aged was the best he could do.

Their son was living in the San Francisco Bay Area. He was nineteen and wanted nothing to do with his father's socialism. They both shared a passion for startups but Harold's boy was more interested in becoming the next Elon Musk than in finding a way to create a better world. Harold had just as hard a time understanding his son's willingness to get on a rocket and leave Earth (or get on a plane and leave

Hawaii) rather than working on ways to make Earth (or Hawaii) better for everyone. Still, they loved each other despite their differences and Harold was looking forward to the family being together over holidays again - something that they had opted to not do this year due to quarantines and finances.

They lived in a nice apartment in a nice building in a nice neighborhood. Nice but not luxurious. It was enough. Both Harold and his wife were guilty of sometimes wanting more - a better view, a bigger bedroom, a place closer to the ocean - but they were both equally good at reminding themselves that they lived in paradise - and most of the rest of humanity did not. They were fortunate.

## Chapter 2

The 'Sing with Socialists' event was a success. People were conscientious about not hugging and shaking hands at first but there was a fair amount of elbow bumping and once alcohol worked its way in their systems, there were plenty of them who removed their masks and forgot about social distancing. Frankly, it didn't matter. They had all selfishly decided to be social. It was a conscious decision.

Harold was happy to be among them. Living in isolation for months on end had been psychically draining. As humans, we are social animals and when we take that away - all the Zoom meetings in the world can't make up for it. They sang, they danced, and many of them sat together in small affinity groups while others played the roles of social butterflies moving from table to table to say hello.

The Honolulu DSA meeting was a joyful success with many comrades engaged in lively discussion about the world they hoped to someday live in or at the very least, the world they hoped to help bring into being. None of them knew what a fully developed socialist society would look like in Hawaii, North America, or the world - but they all had ideas. This was one of the best parts about spending time with socialists - there is a naturally sunny optimism that exists in every socialist. They look at the world and they see what it could be rather than just what it is.

This is not to say they were fools looking at the world through happiness tinted glasses. They saw the problems and they tried to understand them. They knew just how far the world had swollen into pain and suffering for those trapped at the bottom, but still they were willing to posit a potential for utopia from the dog's breakfast of the present.

Fifteen people came to the event - they were diverse, ranging in age from nineteen to seventy-four. As might be expected at a socialist gathering, with fifteen people present there were fifteen different branches of socialist thought present. From anarchistic, socialist, and communist traditions on the far left to anarcho-syndicalism to free market socialism to libertarian-socialism, and Ayn Rand loving anarcho-capitalists. Marxism, Bakuninism, Trotskyism, Chomskyism and Maoism all were represented. They even had a Leninist, though, at twenty-four she tended to ignore the harder edges of the philosophy.

Not so with the seventy-four year old comrade who sat silently and sullenly through most of the evening but after a rousing rendition of the Internationale decried them all for fools and pawns of the capitalist machine as they started to wind things down and make their ways out of the venue. This did not stop nearly all of them from hugging him and wishing him the best holiday season of his life. Truth be told, it was he who had suggested they get together, he who had arranged the venue, and he who was the last to leave, wiping a tear from his eye as he walked back to his home, just two blocks away. Harold, however, had no way of knowing that because he was already on his way home.

It had been a wonderful gathering. It had re-inspired hope in him during a dark and dreary period of the world. Sitting in the Lyft (Lyft because it was less awful in a capitalistic sense than the alternative, Uber) with his temporary driver, Harold was not willing to let the night end.

"Have you ever heard of socialism?" he asked the driver.

The driver, a true son of Honolulu, had recently started looking at socialism as an alternative to the mess they lived in. He was working as a contractor for the company which meant that they didn't give him health insurance, he had to pay higher taxes, and since this was Lyft - the gas, wear and tear on his vehicle, insurance, registration, and any other fees were his responsibility. On the one hand, he loved that he didn't have a boss and could work when he wanted to but on the other hand, he had to work all the time to make up for the extra expenses and lack of benefit.

"I'd love socialized medicine," he said "I pay half my earnings to keep my family covered, but how would it work?"

The ride home was almost as enjoyable as the meeting had been. By the time they arrived at Harold's apartment building in the Moanalua neighborhood - the driver was convinced that he had always been a socialist but just hadn't been introduced to it properly before. That was the way that conversations usually went with Harold. He found that most people were already living partly as socialists without knowing it, driving on public roads, using public libraries, sending their kids to public schools and more - they just didn't think of those things as socialist - they considered them benefits of capitalism - which was a bizarre kind of twisted logic. It wasn't the taxes of the rich corporations or billionaires that paid for those things. That money invariably went to influencing the state to create a more business friendly environment - which invariably meant a less friendly human environment.

As Harold walked into his building, he was in a dreamy state of mind. The fully developed new socialist society almost seemed real - he could almost touch it. "If only I could experience it," he said to himself "I would love to see it, touch it, feel it. It would be wonderful to know how it comes about."

The elevator arrived. When the door opened, three of his neighbors rushed out. An old woman on her way to work at a local bakery, a janitor heading to Waikiki to clean during the night, and paramedic who would probably face death more than once before the sun rose. Harold felt a moment of anger at the idea that the old woman still had to work so she could afford to pay her rent, get her medicine, or eat. She was in her seventies at the earliest and quite possibly in her eighties. Here she was putting on her bakery duds and heading out at nearly midnight. If it were something she did through love, he would have supported it fully, but he knew better. He had overheard her speaking to another neighbor in the laundry room not long ago. Her daughter had gotten involved with drugs and ended up getting arrested and then sent to rehab. The state was going to take away her children which meant that this woman, the baker, was going to lose her grandchildren. She had convinced her son to adopt them but this made his house too small since he already had two children of his own. His mother (the baker) went back to work at her old job so that she could help pay the rent for a bigger house that her son and his now expanded family lived in. She had been retired for several years and was just eking out enough to pay her bills with social security but this tiny expense had pushed her over the edge. Going back to work meant she had to pay a higher tax bracket which actually meant that she didn't have enough for her medicines. And it went on and on...This was why he wanted a better world. Not for himself but for her and the people like her and her son and her grandchildren. Millions of them. Billions of them. Old age should not be a time of fear and uncertainty. Drug addiction should not be a crime but a condition that should be treated. Child care should be something that a community takes care of. The list went on and on. All of this went through his head in an instant.

He smiled and wished them a good evening, but his mood had turned dark. Rather than taking the elevator to his floor he took it far higher to the top floor. He opened the fire door and walked up the stairs to the roof. From there he could see the vista of the the Waianae Mountains and Pearl Harbor. The cool trade-winds and twinkling of the few stars bright enough to make it past Honolulu's light

pollution mellowed his mood. He found some of the peace and hope the evening had mostly consisted of. Still, he was troubled. Would the socialist society ever arrive? Was there any cause for hope?

"If only I could see it," he said.

With that he wandered down the steps, took the elevator back down to the third floor and went home for the evening. The apartment was silent. His wife was deep asleep in her bed. After ten years of marriage, they had finally realized that having twin beds that could be pushed together was far better than a queen sized bed that could never be pulled apart. He kissed her forehead gently. She had a smile on her face as if she were already living in the world he dreamed in. He was grateful that on nights like this he didn't have to worry about waking her as he pulled down the sheets and climbed into his own bed several feet from hers.

Within minutes he descended into the abyss of dreams but then, in what seemed moments, his eyes snapped open as often happens when one's body has had all the sleep it needs. The morning light was coming in the window. He heard the cheerful sound of birdsong. He turned to see if his wife was awake, but she was gone. In fact, Harold awoke in a room that wasn't his bedroom at all.

### Chapter 3

Harold had a moment of panic. He closed his eyes, took several deep breaths and then opened them again. Nothing had changed. Being a logical person and one who had at various times in his life delved into lucid dreaming and transcendental meditation, he decided not to panic. Using his breath, he firmly grounded himself in 'this' and looked at his 'new' surroundings in more detail.

He was lying in a bed that wasn't terribly different from the one he had gone to sleep in though he found himself to be more comfortable than was usually the case. The bedsheets were softer, the bed itself seemed to support him better, and definitely this was not the generic patterned comforter his wife had bought at some retail store. Instead it was a beautiful Hawaiian quilt - the kind that he and his wife admired but would never splurge on because they were thousands of dollars. He sat up.

Just as in his own bedroom, there were two beds - one of them neatly made and the other with him in it. His clothing lay draped over a chair, just as he had left it the night before. Khaki slacks and a pale blue 'inside-out' aloha shirt. His socks were there too. Next to the chair were a pair of what he thought of as Japanese house slippers. The window was open and the trade winds blew through gauzy curtains. The birds outside were having a row of some sort as the birdsong had gone from a sort of gentle medley to more of a raucous cacophony. He imagined the birds as hooligans at an English soccer match.

Remembering a lesson from his attempts at lucid dreaming, he looked around for something written - any sort of words or numbers. A funny quirk of the part of the brain that dreamed was that it had no access to the part of the brain that dealt with reading and alphabet or number recognition - so one way to bring on the control portion of a lucid dream was to recognize that you couldn't quite make out numbers or letters. There was nothing in the room that caught his immediate attention. He looked for a clock but didn't find one.

Getting up and moving to his clothes, he reached into his pocket hoping to find his cellphone, but then remembered he had left it charging in the living room the night before. He did, however, find his wallet.

Opening it up he pulled his driver's license out. He felt slightly disappointed when he discovered it was still his wallet and he could read it without issue.

Harold Haggins  
DOB 9/27/1968

The letters and numbers were clear. This was no dream. He looked around for a mirror and found a small one above a beautiful koa wood dresser. One thing for certain, the furniture and ornamentation - though there was a decided lack of knick-knack and tchotchkie - had been upgraded from that he went to bed with. Underfoot, a beautiful rug over a tile floor and in the room itself a complete lack of ornamentation with the exception of the furnishings and a single painting. In the painting, a lone figure stepped from a wall of flame into a deep blue sky filled with dreamy clouds. There was nothing horrific about it - it projected a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. In different circumstances, he would have spent considerably more time looking at it - but this was no time for contemplation of art.

He pulled his clothing on and rather than having the luxury of contemplating his next move, he was

compelled by his bladder to find a toilet. It's the funny thing about finding yourself in reality instead of a dream or a movie - you are driven by your biological urges. In movies, the protagonist would never wake up and immediately be concerned with where they could pee - it was another sign that what he was experiencing was an actual waking life and not some sort of dream or delusion. He put his feet in the house slippers and walked across the room to the closed wooden door.

In truth, he was a tiny bit terrified at what he might find when he pulled it open. This was all uncharted territory for Harold - he wasn't sure how to proceed but the pressure on his bladder made him bolder than he might otherwise have been. He pulled the door.

A hallway stretched to either side. There were doors on each side of it - four on each side, to be exact. On the left side he could see that the hall ended in a staircase which led upwards on one side and downwards on the other. He really should have looked out the window before he left his room, but the golden liquid filling his bladder was also clouding his brain. He would go to the opposite side - there must be a toilet on this floor and it made sense to him that it would be on the other end of the hallway.

Harold was nothing if not practical and he looked to see if there was a number on his door - there was. His was room 42. Across from him was door number 47. Walking towards what he hoped would be the bathroom he passed rooms 43 and 46, then rooms 44 and 45, and finally he reached the end of the hallway. An imposing stone wall blocked his path and open archways led to either side. There were no doors. Harold felt comforted by this. It felt like the sort of institutional restrooms you find in airports and shopping malls - or a commercial kitchen - but he buried that thought. He saw no indication of male or female and decided that going left was his best bet.

Yes! Individual wooden cubicles each with a door that closed on what was unmistakably a toilet, though of a particular design he had never seen before. Harold stepped inside, closed the door behind him and as quickly as he was able began urinating in the basin before him. As he stood before the basin and began unzipping his trousers, the seat of the toilet retracted into the device and thin walls rose up to either side of him. There was no water in the 'bowl' - instead his urine simply filled the basin. He wondered if he had made some sort of mistake as he looked for a way to flush it and didn't see one. Either way, he was relieved in more than one sense of the word. As he re-zipped, the splash walls lowered and the seat returned to where it had been. He was so distracted by these movements that he didn't notice that his urine had disappeared. The toilet looked just as it had when he had walked into the cubicle. Curious and not quite willing to go out in the world again yet, he turned and sat on the toilet. It was comfortable, but he knew he couldn't stay there and besides, he didn't have to poo yet, though he was fascinated by the fact that there was no obvious paper nor a means to 'flush'. If this wasn't a dream, he would certainly learn in time.

He opened the door and stepped out at the same time as the cubicle door next to him opened. It was too late to avoid interaction and Harold turned his head to see his neighbor. Much to his surprise, she was a woman.

"Oh, pardon me, I am so sorry." Harold said. Obviously he had come into the ladies room. She was dressed in a curious manner. Her dress was a multi-colored silk fabric which was matched by pieces woven through a rather large hairdo.

She laughed at him. "Have you done something I should know about?" Her laugh was genuine and not mocking. She was beautiful. Generally, Harold didn't favor blondes but she was the type of woman that any man would gaze upon with admiration. Obviously Caucasian but not overly white. She didn't have

that tanning bed bronze that made women look like they spent too much money on makeup even when they weren't wearing any. She seemed to have some makeup on, but not enough that he could be sure of it - just a bit of dark eye-liner that emphasized the sky blue of her eyes. She was in her late twenties or early thirties, he judged, and looked neither ultra-fit nor out of shape - just womanly. Her laughter was a bit deeper than it should have been coming from a frame that must have been somewhere around five-foot-two.

Harold was embarrassed and entranced. "I thought this was the men's room. I didn't see any signage."

She looked at him curiously for a moment, her head cocked to one side as she considered several ideas and eventually came to a conclusion.

"Oh, you must be the visitor. I heard that you had arrived last night but didn't know that I would be so fortunate as to meet you right away." She held out her hand "I'm Klee."

Automatically, he took her hand and said "I'm Harold."

She smiled warmly at him. "Have you had a chance to look around yet?"

Harold was still embarrassed. She hadn't let go of his hand. She was looking at him with an intensity that he wasn't really sure how to think about. "No, I...well...I had to use the bathroom."

Klee laughed again "Oh, right, about that....you didn't come to the wrong one Harold. This is the only one so there is no wrong one. Nothing to worry about."

Now Harold was more embarrassed as he looked at their hands - still clasped together in a warm hello.

"Uh, Klee....I am so terribly sorry, I haven't washed my hands yet."

Klee's laughter was slightly embarrassed now "Oh my goodness," she said and he thought he detected just a hint of an accent in her pronunciation. "I haven't washed mine either. You must think that we are complete savages. Well, come on then, there's nothing to do but to wash our hands together." She let go of his hand and led him to a line of sink basins with mirrors in front of them. She held her hand under the faucet and soap was released. Harold copied her move. She vigorously rubbed her hands together, so Harold did the same. She put her hands under again and water poured over her hands. Again, Harold copied her. The sinks weren't all that different from those he was used to, though he contained an urge to ask how they knew whether to release soap or water.

Hands washed, Klee turned to him. "Where are you from Harold?"

"Honolulu," Harold answered.

Klee frowned "You must have been away for a long time. Your accent has become very eff-ess and those clothes...I've never seen anything like them. No offense."

Harold was still trying to get a handle on his situation and asking questions seemed to be the only way forward - but he was loathe to give too much information about himself in the process. Her reaction to Honolulu made him cautious. He needed more information.

"Eff-ess?" he asked.

Klee looked horrified. "Oh, right, I'm terribly sorry. I shouldn't have said that, I mean you're the first person I've met from there and it's just what we call it here. You're the first person I've met from the RSA."

Her attempt at clarifying things confused him further. "The RSA?"

Klee smiled in embarrassment. "Yes, the Republican States of America, you call it the RSA, right? I'm sorry, I know some of your people like to call it the Republic, but I just can't do it. I can't call it that and I really am sorry for calling it the eff-ess."

Harold tried to hold himself together. "What does it mean? Eff-ess?"

Klee looked angry at herself. "Oh, I really shouldn't have said it...please don't tell anyone. I've really put my foot in my mouth and done it. Eff-ess. The F S - the failed states. Really, I hope I haven't offended you."

Harold felt a strange sense of relief. "I'm not offended in the least, Klee. Don't think a thing of it."

Klee looked joyful. "I've never met one of you before. To be honest, I didn't expect you to be so easygoing."

Harold was beginning to feel an overwhelming sense of joy. It was hard to hold in check.

## Chapter 4

Harold's new bathroom buddy insisted on leading him to breakfast. They walked up four flights of stairs to a rooftop balcony. It was Harold's first chance to see where he was and orient himself to the new reality he had awoken in.

There were four large communal tables filled with people who overwhelmingly looked to be in the late twenties to early forties stage of their lives. They were generally dressed in bright colors and light fabric.

The balcony was outdoors but the tables were covered by open walled canopies that served to protect from rain and direct sunshine. Judging by the temperature and the feel of the climate, Harold was sure that he was still in Hawaii.

Klee was leading him straight to the food but he grabbed her hand to slow her down. "Klee, I haven't had a chance to enjoy the view yet, do you mind if I take a moment and look at where we are?"

She smiled a bright smile. "Oh, you must think me a terrible host. Yes, you absolutely must. The view from here is spectacular. There are few places as beautiful as Wai Momi." Harold thought that he had heard the name before but he wasn't exactly sure where it was - perhaps he had awoken on one of the neighbor islands.

Harold's apartment building, the one he had gone to sleep in, was in the town of Aiea. It looked out over Pearl Harbor and the Pearl Harbor military base. He was used to seeing the Arizona memorial, the USS Missouri, and the red and white control tower on Ford Island - as well as the military industrial shipyards and the reserve naval fleet.

The view he was looking at now was completely different but similar enough that he knew he was looking at the same place. The difference was that there was no military base, no shipyard, no battleships, no memorial. He was looking at a beautiful tropical island in a Hawaiian harbor surrounded by sandy beaches, swaying palm trees, and low bungalow style houses which started several hundred yards inland and stretched back to where he stood. He may well have been in the same spot where he had gone to sleep but the view had improved immeasurably.

Starting where they were, a series of five and six story apartment buildings ringed the bungalows. Harold was fascinated by the idea that no one had an obstructed view that he could see. It would bear investigation.

His clothing had drawn some attention and Klee was happily chatting with friends who had wandered over to see who this oddly dressed newcomer was.

A smiling young man who looked a lot like a healthier and happier version of the cab driver he had met the night before came forward and held out his elbow, no doubt looking for an elbow bump. Harold obliged him and smiled back - they both threw a shaka, the universal Hawaiian surfer hand gesture that consisted of an extended thumb and pinky with the other three fingers folded.

"Aloha, Comrade. I see you've already learned the shaka. I'm surprised an RSA man would have picked that up so quickly."

"Oh, I'm from here," Harold saw the look of confusion that jumped to many of the faces around him "...originally. I've been away for quite a while. It's nice to be home."

The young man's smile grew brighter. "Hawaii no ka oi. I don't know how anyone could ever leave. I look forward to learning about what you've learned in your travels."

Klee grabbed Harold by the elbow before anyone else could engage him in conversation. "I promised to get you some breakfast." She hadn't, but Harold wasn't going to argue. He was in a gentle kind of shock - the kind you have when wonderful things you didn't expect are happening. So far, he hadn't had the chance to put his thoughts in order but he was definitely starting to come to some conclusions - which he would have to test soon.

First, however, it made sense to follow the rumblings of his stomach and his beautiful tour guide. The buffet was beautiful. Fresh papaya, pineapple, fried and boiled eggs, rice, tomatoes, fried fish, and a wide variety of delicious things that he recognized as all being locally grown or sourced. This was the best 'Hawaiian' buffet he had ever experienced. One thing he didn't see that he definitely wanted was coffee.

"Klee, is there coffee?" He could smell it but he didn't see any big self serve style coffee pots.

She laughed. "Of course there is - we'll get it at the table." Looking around now, he could see that people were drinking coffee - but it was served in small glass cups - like large shot glasses. No one had a big mug of coffee.

Harold went light on his plate of food - though his temptation was to load the plate to the brim. He wasn't sure about the customs of this place yet. Half a papaya, a boiled egg, and a small scoop of fried rice.

They sat down at one of the smaller tables instead of one of the larger, more social, communal tables. "I don't want to overwhelm you right away," Klee told him. "They can't wait to interrogate you and find out every detail of your life...me too...but I'd like to give you the chance to eat first. Oh, I almost forgot - you wanted coffee. Do you have a preference?"

Harold wasn't sure what to say so he did what every great traveler does, he deferred to his host. "I'll have whatever you recommend."

Klee laughed. "That's a lot of pressure. Let me see...okay, I'm just going to go for it. If you don't like it, I will get you something else." She pushed a button on the center of the table.

A voice asked "Hot drink?"

There was no greeting between them. Klee simply said "A shot of Waialua and a shot of Ka'a'awa - also a beaker of boiling water and a mug." There were no pleasantries exchanged - no thank you or good bye.

A few minutes later a smiling young woman brought two shots of pitch black coffee, the beaker of boiling water, and an absolutely stunning stoneware mug.

"Aloha," she said. "Enjoy this coffee. It was grown, harvested, roasted, and brewed with love."

When the girl had set the tray of coffee on the table, Klee stood up and hugged her. "Mahalo nui loa sister." The two hugged like close friends and then the new girl left to go back where she had come from.

"Is she a friend of yours?" Harold asked. Klee looked confused for a moment but then seemed to figure out what he was asking.

"Of course she is...but I think you are asking if we know each other well or have some sort of special relationship. No, not that I would mind, but I love the barristas here - they take coffee so seriously. She's been my server a few times already on this trip. You sir, are in for a treat."

Klee picked up the blackest of the coffee shots. "First you must try this - Ka'a'awa beans have a rich and robust taste. You can almost catch the trade-winds and the smell of night blooming cirrus in the flavor of it."

Harold had never been a big espresso drinker but he did as Klee said. Just a tiny sip. It was as if his mouth exploded. He had never tasted coffee that hit as many tastebuds in his mouth at the same time. Klee smiled a huge bright smile as she saw his reaction. "Good, now try the Waialua. It's probably closer to what you drink in the RSA." The Waialua espresso was also rich and vibrant, but it was much closer to what he had previously thought of as very good espresso. With that, Klee poured both shots into the mug and added an equal amount of boiling water from the beaker before handing it to him. "I think this is how you drink it, right? The old fashioned way? A l'americaine?"

Harold would have been fine with just drinking more of the Ka'a'awa espresso - or the Waialua for that matter - but he took the mug from her and had a sip. It was, without a doubt, the single best cup of coffee that he had ever had. It was magnificent.

"This is astoundingly good," he said to her.

She beamed. "I'm having so much fun! I'm going to keep you. I'm so happy that I found you in the bathroom." It was an extremely strange thing to say, but he understood and totally agreed with her sentiment. He was also glad that she had found him in the bathroom.

There were several minutes of silence while they both gave their full attention to the delicious food and coffee in front of them. Finally, Harold couldn't contain himself any further, he had to ask.

"Klee, can you tell me what the date is?"

"It's Octo 42, 271." This meant absolutely nothing to Harold. She saw it in his face. Klee had already become a master of reading his confusion. She thought about it for a second and then motioned to a young man who had been sitting at a nearby table, trying hard not to look like he was only paying attention to them - but failing miserably. Harold had noticed him surreptitiously looking at him, then at Klee, then at him.

The young man came over.

"Harold, this is my friend Brian. He knows all kinds of things about the RSA...you may have noticed

him sitting over there anxiously waiting for me to invite him over."

"Why didn't he just come over?" Harold asked.

"Oh, no one here would ever interrupt a small table without an invitation. When people sit at the small table they obviously want to be alone and we all respect that." Harold had wondered why he had felt such curiosity directed at him but that people had kept their distance. Now he understood."

Brian looked to be in his early twenties. Harold couldn't put him in a box - he wasn't Caucasian, but he also wasn't Asian, he was possibly Latino or maybe Middle-Eastern, but then maybe he was Filipino or just a tanned white guy. It was impossible. Harold realized what he was doing and forced himself to stop. When had he started doing that? Brian held out his hand to Harold. Harold shook it, despite the almost compulsive instinct to withdraw which he had developed since the pandemic started in 2020.

"Nice to meet you, Sir." Brian said.

"Just call me Harold," Harold replied. "Nice to meet you too."

"Brian, Harold was wondering about the date...I know they use the old system still in the RSA but I don't know how to translate into it." She turned to Harold now. "Brian knows everything about the RSA - his uncle is one of the foremost experts on it and I suspect that someday Brian will take his place at the institute. He's a real genius."

Brian smiled gratefully at Klee for the introduction. Harold still wasn't convinced that Brian didn't have the hots for Klee as well as having wanted to come talk to Harold. He chuckled to himself internally, who in the world wouldn't be attracted to her?

Brian didn't waste any time on pleasantries. "We use the new calendar here exclusively," he explained. "An eight month year with eight day weeks...but we all have 24-hour clocks and 365 day years," he laughed nervously. Harold joined him, it was a good joke. "In terms of years we date back to the establishment of the municipality system so Octo 42, 271 would translate to an RSA date of December 22, 2300."

Harold tried not to spit his coffee out. He succeeded but only because the coffee was so incredibly delicious.

## Chapter 5

"Is this your first time to the Mutual Nation of Hawai'i?" Brian asked Harold.

It was the first time Harold had heard the name but needless to say, he liked it. Mutuality was one of those keystone principles in building a better future that he and nearly all of his comrades could ever agree upon. The idea that people are responsible for people - he had never heard it put in front of the word nation but it instantly made complete and total sense to him.

A nation was a group of people unified by a shared culture. A mutual nation would be a group of people who put taking care of each other first. He had no doubt whatsoever that there were other mutual nations and that there was some sort of a legislative body called the Mutual Nations. It was one of those concepts that once he heard it, it would never make sense for it to go away.

Harold had decided to hold on to the useful fiction of his having been originally from Hawaii but that he had been living in the eff-ess, the failed republican states. He didn't know how long he would be able to maintain the fiction - but if he were found out - the worst that would happen was that he would have to explain that he was from two hundred and eighty years in the past.

"I left Hawaii when I was quite young," Harold said. "I wanted to know about the people who live in the RSA - the eff-ess - it seemed like they must be different than we thought of them, I thought there must be some piece of information they didn't understand which made them behave as they do. I wanted to understand them - and so, I left and lived among them for many years. Now I have returned."

"It must have been difficult to arrange," Brian said. "I've never heard of anyone coming or going freely - though of course we are in contact with them and offer to have ho'o'ponopono several times a year. We want to offer aid, open dialogues, or even to learn what went wrong but they have no interest. It's truly astounding that you are here."

Harold didn't want to manufacture more of a fiction than he already had - in fact, having figured out where and when he was - he was more interested in learning about the Mutual State of Hawaii than anything else. He decided to go on the informational offensive.

"It's nice to be home, that's for certain," he said. "Before I can really process what I've seen, I feel like I need to learn about the changes that have taken place here. You will pardon me for saying that it feels like a completely different world from the one I left. I feel like a stranger in a strange land but with the memories of this place still strong enough to make the whole experience rather dreamlike."

"Pardon me for asking, sir," Brian said "But were you gone for a very long time?" Harold suddenly felt incredibly old. In fact, looking around the room, he was the oldest one there by at least several decades. These were all healthy, fit, happy young people in the prime years of their lives.

"Yes," Harold said. "Though it feels like just yesterday I was here and looking at a completely different world."

Klee jumped in. "I knew you two were going to hit it off. I'm going to get more of that delicious melon...would you guys like some?" They both said yes. It was delicious - a beautiful vibrant green

honeydew melon that tasted of flowers, honey, and yet carried the full creamy goodness of the melon itself. Harold had never tasted better. She left the table to go get more of it.

Harold realized that this was a perfect opportunity for him to get information about the fictitious life he had chosen to portray for himself. He would have preferred to simply tell everyone he met "Hello, I'm a time traveler and I don't know how I got here" but he suspected that even though things had changed dramatically, a person making such a claim would be considered delusional. He didn't like the idea of lying, but he liked the idea of being taken into the custody of a mental institution even less.

"Brian," he said "before you ask me any more questions - I think it would make sense to tell me what you know about the RSA - I've been gone a long time and I'm sure that there are many different ideas about what happened than when I learned about these things."

As he had suspected, Brian was eager to show his expertise and needed no further encouragement to jump into explanatory mode.

"The history certainly hasn't changed, but since you've asked I'll be happy to share what I know. The three elections of the 2020s were the end of the United States of America. By the time the 2nd Trump administration came to power, the writing was on the wall. In 2028, after the sham election in which Republicans took 100% of the vote - it was clear to the states of the Western and Northeastern USA that the democratic process was never going to recover. Led by California and New York - the dissolution took place. I won't bore you with all the dates and battles but by 2030, the modern borders of the Republican States of America had mostly been defined by walls and troops."

This wasn't a surprise to Harold, even in his time it had seemed pretty obvious that it was the sunset of the USA.

"What were the borders? Do you remember what states were included?" Harold was eager to find out if his suspicions were going to play out.

Brian looked at him with curiosity. "Surely you can't wander about that...the borders are the same as they were back then."

Harold realized he had made a mistake and he took a calculated risk. "I'm guessing you haven't been there - but the history they tell is quite different - please assume that I know nothing while we establish this baseline."

This satisfied Brian and he answered Harold's question. "The RSA was originally made up of everything from Florida to Washington DC and then east all the way to Washington State. The California Republic originally contained Nevada, Arizona, and Colorado and the New York Alliance originally had the Great Lakes states of Minnesota, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. In 2031, the suitcase nuclear attacks on Denver, Phoenix, Chicago, and Detroit caused chaos and the RSA was able to consolidate all of those states under Republican rule by blaming the attacks on California and New York even though history has pretty clearly showed that they were detonated by Trumpers. The RSA contained everything east of Nevada and south of Pennsylvania until 2050 when the Texican Nation declared independence and took control of what was formerly Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and Mexico. Today the RSA is made up of what used to be known as the mid-west, the south, and the mountain states - excluding those states which joined the Texican Nation."

Harold had to interject. "So, by 2050 - North America was made up of the New York Alliance in the Northeast, the California Republic on the West Coast, the Texacan Nation, and the RSA. What about Canada?"

Brian smiled like a school boy who had figured out a trick question. "Ha! You thought that maybe I didn't study that part of history! Well, of course I did. Eastern Canada joined the New York Alliance and the Western Provinces requested annexation with the California Republic - which is why many Northwest CR natives still call it Cranada and also why the maple leaf is prominent in both the NYA and the CR."

"And Hawai'i just reclaimed it's sovereignty and became a mutual nation." Harold knew this question might get him in trouble but Brian was enjoying the game of sharing what he knew and was happy to jump right in with the answer.

"Of course not. I mean, well, sort of. With the wars on the continent going full steam, Hawai'i set about forming alliances with - first - the island nations of the Pacific - Polynesia, Japan, the Philippines, Australia, Indonesia - soon the Southeast Asian nations became a part of it - it was a very different sort of Pacific in those days. Hawai'i played her diplomatic and military cards extremely well and introduced the concept of ho'oponopono as the main means of dispute resolution. Vietnam and Australia brought some amazing innovations in governance and the old mutual assistance concept went from an under utilized idea to the foundation of all of our cultures. Climate change and the devastations of the 2100s really brought all of us together and by the time the continent had settled its borders and recovered from the Republican Wars - there was nothing those powers could do. United, the Pacific Mutual Nations held more power than China or North America especially broken up as they were into multiple antagonistic nations."

All of this was more than a little disappointing to Harold. He had hoped that the entire world had become one huge socialist utopia.

"And what about Europe, Africa, and South America?" Harold hoped that the progressive thinking of European nations had continued and evolved and that the Southern Hemisphere was finally sharing in the world's prosperity - or - he caught himself - at least not being exploited and despoiled as has happened up to his own time.

"You really want all that too?" Brian asked but went on good naturedly. "The South American nations have largely become Mutualistic and form a fairly unified block. Africa is a whole different story with the religious and cultural divisions making unification a near impossibility. The Afrinese countries tend to be loaded down with the state run communist policies of the mainland Chinese colonial state but Islamic Africa and the so called 'Middle East' have thrived under the mutual non-interaction pacts of the early 22nd centur. They are officially 'the Semitic Mutual States' but a lot of us call them the 'Semi-Mutuals' because they tend to be much more focused on naval gazing. It's funny how long it took the interventionist states to understand that local people actually know how to govern themselves and get along with one another. Madagascar, Sri Lanka, and the other island nations have all joined the Mutual Nations as a whole and now with India form the Indian Ocean Mutual Nations. As for Europe..."

Harold sensed that something terrible was coming.

He was right. "Russia along with North Korea and Angola remain the only allies of the RSA. After the atrocities in Belarus, Seoul, and West Africa - the rest of the world turned their backs on them. The

Chinese still trade with them all, of course. When the Russian terrorists set off that suitcase nuke in London - the solidarity of the rest of Europe brought the former UK fully into the fold. It was the only positive thing to come out of those terrible times. The Russians tried to run the Trumper playbook of blaming it on Europe, but the people of the UK didn't fall for it."

They were far off track from what Harold had originally asked about. "You have some impressive knowledge of history, Brian. What about the RSA internal governance and policies? Are you familiar with any of that?"

Brian nodded. "Every child in the Mutual Nations learns about the re-introduction of slavery, the indoctrination schools, the attempts at forming Caribbean and Central American plantations, and the fall of the USA. As far as we know, the forms haven't changed much since the Trump the First took power. The RSA is a farce democracy with hereditary 'elected' rulers. Each 'state' is governed by a house of nobles descended from the ruling political parties of the 21st century. The Congress of Lords is composed of three senators from each Republican State. When the American Papacy was formed in early 2200, Fundamental American Christianity was declared as the official state religion with the Supreme Leader as highest authority of the faithful and all decisions in matters of morality decided by his or her Supreme Court. All elected officials must be officially vetted and approved by the Supreme Leader to run for election - so all elections are between 'rival houses' who are both friendly to those in power. There has never been a more totalitarian regime in the history of the world and there have never been more effective control systems put in place over any other population."

Brian paused from this horrific telling "Which is why you are such a big deal. You're the first independent observer that I've ever heard about that experienced the modern RSA but comes from the Mutuals. The only contact we've had with the RSA for centuries has been through their ponderously bureaucratic official channels with totally indoctrinated and brain washed officials or with people who were rescued after hare-brained misadventures. Even those few eff-ess citizens have been so completely buried in propaganda that they have begged to be sent back to the RSA - which our officials have done - even though none of our citizens have ventured there - on purpose or accidentally - ever been returned to us. Until you..."

Harold's jubilation at waking into this world had morphed into a kind of horror at learning of the nuclear bombs, the policies of the failed states, and the fact that humanity was still not coexisting peacefully even hundreds of years in his future. He felt tears in his eyes. Brian noticed them.

"I'm sorry. It can't have been easy for you. Please, let's stop talking about the world you've been suffering through and allow me to show you what we hope is a model for the future for all of humanity. The Mutual Nation of Hawai'i has only gotten better since you left - so many decades ago."

Klee returned. She noticed the somber mood and immediately changed it. "Check out this amazing melon, you guys! And guess what - you are both invited to my birthday party tomorrow!" Her smile alone was enough to make Harold forget the dark thoughts he had been drowning in moments before.

## Chapter 6

From this point forward, Harold was carried along by the events around him. While there was a part of him that wanted to take control of what he was doing, he quickly realized that he needed to ignore that and just let himself go with the flow. It wasn't until Klee suggested they get up from the table and 'go do something' that he realized his bank cards and currency probably wouldn't work to pay for anything here.

"Klee, Brian..." he said with some embarrassment. "I know this may sound a little bit odd but I'm truly a stranger in a strange land and I don't have any money. I'm in the embarrassing position of not really knowing how to pay for what I've just eaten..."

Klee looked at him with complete and total confusion. "Money?" she said.

Brian laughed. "That's fantastic. I've heard of that. I wondered if they still did things that way in the RSA. I mean people joke about it sometimes, but that confirms it. Klee, he's asking us about money!"

Klee still looked confused and she didn't look a bit amused by Brian's glee. "What is 'money'?"

All the joy Harold had felt earlier which had been dampened by hearing of the tragedies of the world now came rushing back into him. He had never imagined that he would hear these words. He had never considered that such a reality could even come to pass. Klee looked utterly confused and Harold tempered his sudden joy with the realization that maybe they just called it something else. He brought himself back down.

"Money is what you pay for things with," he said. "It's how..."

Brian interrupted him. "He's talking about cash, Klee. Fiat currency. Nation issued notes of debt and trade." She still looked confused. "The way they used to do it in olden times was that you would trade the hours of your life doing things you hated for pieces of paper or metal and then you could trade those pieces of paper or metal for things you wanted."

"I really don't understand," Klee said. "First of all, why would anyone spend any of the hours of their life doing something they hated and second if you want something, why would you have to give bits and bobs of metal and paper for it. Besides, if you were trading wasted time doing something you hated for something you wanted, wouldn't that sort of make the thing you wanted a representation of all the time you spent doing the thing you hated? Wouldn't you sort of hate the thing you bought with your wasted hours?"

Harold heard her words on two levels at the same time. The first was with a sort of cultural arrogance that was judging her for being so naive and not understanding that you have to work hard to get the things you want but the second part of him was having this amazing fucking a-ha moment as he realized that she was completely right. In his time, he had seen people slaving away and trying to fill the hole in their lives with a bigger house, a better car, more stuff for their family - all the consumerist things that people bought to try to give meaning to their lives and which - he now realized - they all hated because they had bought those things with hours of their lives performing tasks and drudgery that they never actually wanted to do.

Brian was still trying to explain things to Klee. "Yes, exactly. That's right. It was even worse than that though because it stole the value from work and replaced it with this consumerist value that could never replace it. People actually used to say things like "I hate work" or "I wish I could never work again."

"No way," Klee looked shocked and doubtful. She turned to Harold "Is it true, Harold? Or is he just having a go at me?"

Harold nodded. "Yes, it's true...and even though I am starting to understand a little bit about your society, I still don't understand how we pay for this wonderful melon and the delicious breakfast and coffee we just enjoyed. Do we need to go into the kitchen and help out? Do we need to go do the dishes?"

Klee and Brian both looked at each other and laughed. Brian decided to explain a bit more. "You really have been gone a long time. Okay, I'm going to do what you said and explain things as if you don't know anything...please don't get offended by any of this."

"No, of course not," Harold said. "Please, explain."

"Okay, first of all. We could sign up to do kitchen and food help, but there are probably hundreds of people ahead of us on the list. There are lots of people who want to help feed other people - in fact, I've heard that the wait to be a public dishwasher is something like two years. It's never been for me, but lots of people are deeply drawn to the zen of dish washing. I do a little bit of it at my parent's group home - but in a place like this - we'd have to jump the line in order to get in and that's not really fair to those who have waited."

This almost sounded reasonable to Harold. Certainly it was presented as the most normal kind of logic. Brian went on.

"As for money. Most of the Mutual Nations have stopped using it for the past couple of centuries. There are a few holdouts - I hear that there is still a sort of time trade in New York which uses some tokens but for the most part - money like you are talking about has completely disappeared. Think of it this way - we need to eat, right? If we don't eat good healthy food, then we aren't going to be as good at doing whatever it is that we do that day. So, as a society, it really makes sense to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to eat the best food possible. Otherwise, people wouldn't really be able to do the things they do as well as they do them."

The last part was a little bit confusing for Harold but overall, he understood what Brian was explaining. People function better when they have good healthy food.

"But who grows it? Who cooks it? Who brings it from the farm to the city? How do all of those people get what they need?" He already knew he was asking an impossible logical question before he saw the looks on their faces. In their world, what he had just asked made no sense at all.

Brian looked like he was having inspiration. "Hey, I know you probably already have a million things you want to do but my father and I have an annual coffee farm day scheduled for day after tomorrow. I'll ask my dad if he will be willing to let you work in his place. It's something we do every year, but given the circumstances - I'm sure he'd be willing. I mean, if you don't already have plans for day after tomorrow?"

"Actually," Harold said "It might be hard for you to believe, but I don't have any plans at all except Klee's birthday party tomorrow. My schedule is wide open."

Klee was smiling. "Hey, are you going to Waialua or Ka'a'awa? Because if you're going to Waialua, I'm on the list to work there on that day too."

"We go to Ka'a'awa but if you want to join us I'm sure you could trade Waialua for it. Everyone wants to work at Waialua - that place is off the hook. The worker surf breaks are usually pumping at this time of the year - and it will probably be raining in Ka'a'awa."

"I'll definitely do it," Klee said. "I'm so excited."

Harold was still trying to understand. "So everyone just does what they want? And no one has to pay for anything?"

Klee decided to make everything clear for Harold. "You can do what you want on an individual level but you have to be patient in order to get the work you want on a societal level. Obviously, some people are really good at some things and other people will never achieve anything like mastery in certain areas. I know some people who are still looking for the work that truly makes them satisfied, the thing they are really good at - but most of us just sort of naturally move to the right thing. Those who don't - well, sometimes they are the ones who eventually give the most - they are really revered. It's not easy to keep looking while everyone else has their thing."

"Okay...so Brian is a sort of historian and what do you do Klee? What's your thing?"

"I'm a surgeon," she said. He had not expected that, his cultural bias was still in place. "I also sing and teach yoga," she continued. His expectations were met and exceeded in two sentences.

Brian wanted to make sure that he wasn't misjudged. "I'm a structural engineer too, but that's more of a hobby. My designs are more aspirational than practical."

"We don't need to do anything about paying for breakfast then?" Harold asked. They both shook their heads no. "In that case, I would really love if you two could show me more of your world. Do you have the time?"

Klee laughed. "What a silly question. Time is the only thing we have."

## Chapter 7

There was a smell in the air that Harold couldn't identify as they walked through the apartment building. He couldn't identify it because it was actually the lack of smells. He had never smelled air without hydrocarbons in it. It had taken him all morning to figure out what it was.

He had also been trying to figure out how he had gotten here, where he was staying, and what to do about all of it. The fact that no one had screamed - "There's a time-traveler in my bedroom" was interesting to him. His room must belong to someone.

"So, do you guys live here?" He asked his two new friends as they walked down the open-air steps. It was a silly question but he figured it would be best to start with the obvious.

They both laughed. Klee was the first to respond.

"I live on Maui but this is my favorite hostel on Oahu. I've been coming here since I was a kid."

"I remember the first time we met here," Brian said. "You were still finishing up your residency at Queen's Medical...seem's like ages ago."

"That's because it was," Klee said. "You were barely out of diapers."

"That's not true at all," Brian said. "I was old enough to ask you out."

A-ha! Harold had thought the way Brian looked at Klee had some attraction in it. He was busy trying to put all the pieces together. There was still a Queen's Hospital, people still took trips from neighbor islands, and he was staying in some sort of a hostel. He was so busy putting the pieces together that he didn't really understand or latch onto what Klee said next.

"I already had grandchildren who were already older than you," Klee laughed at Brian and gave him a flirty hit on the shoulder.

"You can't blame a guy for trying."

Harold was still fixated on the hostel situation. He really needed to understand it. "Okay, so this is a hostel. I get that, but do I need to check in or check out - I don't have a key to my room. I know this sounds weird, but I'm having some culture shock that might be affecting my memory."

They were on the ground floor now in an open air lobby. There were glass walls that swung inwards on central hinges creating a beautiful space that was neither indoor nor outdoor. Hundreds of years hadn't changed the value of rattan and wicker furniture nor Hawaiian print cushions. Attractive young people sat and enjoyed one another's company in various areas. There didn't appear to be any desk or security. There was no elevator, just the stairs.

"I keep forgetting where you came from Harold, but those clothes should really remind me. That shirt - I've seen historic old photos of guys in shirts like that - it's wild. You won't need a key here. We don't use locks or keys for anything except the data centers. No one will bother your room as long as you are not checked into another hostel or staying in a home registered to you. It is your place and you don't

need to worry about any kind of security. Comfort specialists will make your bed and make sure that everything is clean but they won't bother you."

"But, I don't think I checked in," Harold said. "How will they know I am here?"

"You ask the strangest questions, Harold. It's a smart building. The moment you opened the door of your room, it knew you were here. When you've found another place to stay or leave the island the sanitation and comfort specialists will remake the room and recode the door so that it is ready for the next guest."

"How do I pay for it?" Even as he asked, Harold knew he was beating a dead horse.

"You're alive aren't you?" Brian said. "As long as you are alive, your account is fully credited for whatever you may need."

"I'm sorry, I know this is a bit like the conversation we had upstairs, but do I need to do anything? How do I fund my account? Where does the credit come from?"

They both looked at him blankly. They simply couldn't understand what he was talking about.

"You're fine Harold. You don't need to worry about a thing. Okay?" Klee smiled at him like she was comforting a child on their first trip to the dentist. "It's going to be okay. It's a beautiful day and I suggest we go to the marketplace and get you some clothes that are less...dusty."

Brian looked disappointed. "I was really hoping to take him to the institute so my uncle could meet him. I think it would be a real treat for him to meet him dressed like this. He's always wanted to meet a real RSA man but by the time he gets to them, they are already begging to go home and dressed like us."

Klee looked thoughtful as she considered their options. It had become apparent that she had the power to decide what they should do but she took his ideas into account.

"Harold, are you very uncomfortable in those clothes?" He was actually fine in his clothes though he realized he did stick out like a sore thumb. He wasn't sure he was ready to wear the gauzy silk and cotton he saw everyone else wearing - the colors were so bright - but he was getting used to it.

"I'm not quite ready to change into the local dress," he said.

"Good. That makes it an easy decision. We'll head over to the institute but first we'll stop by the marketplace. I want you to see it and experience it. After that we'll head to the institute to meet Brian's uncle. From there, we will go back to the marketplace and I insist on helping you pick out some new clothes. You absolutely cannot come to my birthday party dressed like you are now. I won't have you taking all the attention away from me on my big day."

This sounded good to everyone. Klee was a wonderful leader. She was doing exactly what she wanted and in the process making everyone else happy. She was obviously quite popular. All morning people smiled when they saw her, waved from a distance, and if they were close enough greeted her with a warm and sincere "Good Morning, Klee."

This continued as they walked through the lobby and out into the gardens. Harold didn't know how else to describe it. If he had walked out of his building, he would have been in the parking lot or on the street. That was as far from what he was experiencing as he was from his own time.

They walked out of the lobby and there were winding paths that led through flower beds, under trees, and among carefully tended gardens.

"Can you ride a bike, Harold?" She asked him. He nodded yes.

The path they were walking on was paved but with a substance that Harold was unfamiliar with. This wasn't asphalt or cobblestones or concrete. It was a neutral red-brown color which led him to think it was clay but the slight spring in it made him think of asphalt. They walked for several minutes through the gardens. People passed by on foot, alone or in couples. There were also bike riders who whizzed along. The path was about ten feet wide with foot traffic on either side and bikes in the middle. Flowers grew everywhere and the smell of plumeria filled the air.

They arrived at a new building. Harold could only think of it as a hangar. It was a yellowed ivory color and was open on one side. It was almost like someone had taken a blimp, put it on the ground, covered it with paper-mache and then cut open one side of it. Inside were hundreds of bicycles. Several women and a mustached man were working on bikes in a sort of open workshop in the center. A staircase on the far left side of the building led downwards (Harold had no idea to where) but that wasn't why they were there.

"Good morning Klee!" the man called out heartily and the women all echoed him in unison "Good morning Klee." She smiled at them.

"Good morning Kavika. Hi Dongel, Fatima, Malama, and Kim!" There were obviously warm feelings all around. "This is my new friend Harold and you guys remember Brian, right? We're going to take Harold for a bike ride."

Harold could see that they had questions and was impressed that they held onto them. He was glad. He hated lying and the position he was in was such that he wanted to avoid having to make up more stories. He had found a decent fiction to live with Klee and Brian but bringing more people into it would complicate matters. He was both dreading and looking forward to meeting Brian's uncle.

Kavika stepped forward and shook Harold's hand. "We hope that you enjoy your time on our island," he said. He grabbed Harold by the shoulders and kissed each cheek. "Aloha." Dongel, Fatima, Malama, and Kim all came and did the same. While the girls were kissing Harold's stubbly cheeks (and he was blushing), Kavika was grabbing a bike from the racks surrounding them. "This one should work perfectly for you, my brother."

Klee put her hand on Kavika's shoulder and he turned to her. They touched foreheads and each inhaled deeply with eyes closed. After a moment, they both opened their eyes and gazed at one another. Kavika broke the silence "It is always so good to see you. I can smell Maui on you. I still dream of the last time I was there."

"I'm sure you will be back, Kavika. Thank you for all you do. I've been looking forward to riding your bikes for quite a while now. They are the best in the islands."

"Oh, I have a great one for you," Kavika turned back to his shop and pulled a green cruiser down from the rack where he had been working on it. "I heard you were on island, so I've been getting it ready."

The bike Harold was given was lighter than any bike he had ever held. The overall design was not very different from the bikes of his time. A perfect design from nearly the beginning. The bicycle could only be improved by better materials. It had been years since Harold had ridden a bike - in his own time, not to mention hundreds of years since then. One of the young women, Harold thought it was Fatima, fit a plastic device around his neck. Brian and Klee both were outfitted with one as well.

"We're heading to the marketplace," Klee said to Kavika.

"It's a beautiful day for it," Kavika said. "I may see you there later but right now I promised my apprentices that I would teach them the secrets of my craft."

Klee turned to Harold "Kavika is one of the most admired materials designers in the islands. He prefers to work with bikes, but his materials are used in almost everything. He is a true master."

"What is this for?" Harold asked in regards to the plastic device around his head.

Klee gave him that funny look again..."It's your PPD." She noticed the look of incomprehension on his face. "It's your personal protective device. Helmet and airbag." Harold found himself curious about how the PPD would work, but not so curious as to ask more questions.

They mounted their bikes and rode into the garden.

## Chapter 8

The ride through the gardens was a joyous riot of color and scents. At first Harold didn't notice that there were people in the garden beds themselves - weeding, pruning, planting, harvesting. It wasn't just flowers - there were fruits and vegetables mixed in with the flowers. Plentiful aromatic herbs that he didn't see so much as smell. Gradually, he noticed people cutting flowers, filling baskets with fruit, and even digging up potatoes!

None of this looked like organized or official work. There were no uniforms that he was able to discern and no standardized equipment. For all the world, it simply looked like people were just taking what they wanted and working where they wanted to. They rode for an hour, Harold's best guess was that they were somewhere in the vicinity of Kalihi, but without the buildings he was used to, nothing looked positively familiar. He thought that he recognized the Punchbowl volcano in the distance, but again, with the landscape totally changed, he wasn't sure at all. Klee led the three of them off the paths and into a grassy field where the tall skinny trunks of papaya trees thrust upwards from the ground. Ripe papaya clustered around the tops of the Dr. Suess looking trees.

"Let's have a snack!" she said. To be honest, Harold didn't want to get off the bike. The machine had almost seemed to propel itself. He could feel his body doing the work, but with no gear shifting, no need to strain - he had been able to catch up without effort. The ride had also been one of the smoothest he had ever taken. He had thought that perhaps it was the material the paths were made of until they had pedaled into the field - at that point he had found that the bicycle retained its smooth ride. He could feel the roughness of the ground underneath, but without the kind of jarring he was expecting.

Klee and Brian leaned their bikes up against a couple of papaya trees - Harold did the same. Strapped to another was a papaya net. Harold, being from Hawaii was familiar with the long pole that had a bail and basket on the end. Brian unstrapped it from the tree and used it to reach up to a beautiful golden papaya. Klee beamed at Harold..."Well, what do you think? Are you missing the eff-ess yet?"

Harold was able to answer her smile with his own and an emphatic "Not even a little bit!"

He was curious about the gardens and the bicycles though.

"Are these bikes powered in some way? I mean, besides us pedaling?"

Brian had captured the papaya now and it was he that answered. "Pretty cool, right? Kavika managed to bond silicon solar cells into the high tensile aluminum. It makes the bikes stronger and lighter while at the same time providing energy for the internal dynamo that connects to the crankshaft. And the best part is they are pulse proof - just like the path and stucco. Wait until you see them at night...the entire frame glows."

Harold's head felt like an internal explosion had gone off. He had heard the part about Kavika and materials but he hadn't really grokked it. Kavika wasn't a bike mechanic - well, he was - but his primary work wasn't working on bikes, it was working on materials as a scientist - wait that wasn't right either. Kavika was... and that was where his brain exploded. He was so used to being able to put people in boxes. He realized he was doing the same thing with Klee..and Brian. His 21st century brain was trying to tell him that Klee was a surgeon who also sang and taught yoga and Brian was an engineer who also liked history but those were wrong too. The 'occupation' box was no longer a thing. You could no more

say that Kavika was a materials scientist than you could say a bike was a piece of metal. You had to call a bike a bike and you had to include all of the interests a person held in the definition of that person. Bigger explosion. It was more appropriate to say that bikes and materials were Kavika than it was to say that Kavika was a bike mechanic and a materials scientist. That didn't quite sound right either - he was still trying to check off boxes on a multiple choice form. Kavika was Kavika. Klee was Klee. Brian was Brian. Harold was...what was he exactly? He'd never really spent that much time trying to define Harold because he had been trying to put Harold into one of the convenient boxes that his society had laid out for him.

"The material is smart too," Brian said. "It knows not to glow during the day and it optimizes the bounce of the bike to the cushion of the shocks. Did you notice how smooth it is?"

Harold pulled himself out of his head and nodded. He hadn't imagined the smoothness of the ride.

"This is some really high tech stuff," he said. "I was starting to think that maybe technology wasn't a huge part of your society."

Brian shook his head. "We love our tech. The hard part has been finding the balance between using the tech to make us happy and letting the tech use us. Not to mention dealing with the pulse. I've read that they are still using hand-held and personal devices in the RSA? Everyone runs in panic when it's time to put them in the basket. Do you miss your connection?"

Very little of that made sense to Harold. He had no way of knowing what they used in the RSA but he thought about his smart phone, his smart watch, his laptop, the navigation apps, the smart speakers and smart TVs. He thought of all the technology that his culture worshipped and clung to.

"No," he said with conviction. "I don't miss it at all. I'm a little different than most of the people I'm usually around though. I suspect that they would go through withdrawals and if you were to ask any of them if they missed their devices - the answer would most certainly be 'Yes'. As for me, I've been actively trying to distance myself from personal tech for quite a while - unsuccessfully, I might add. The world I've come from makes it almost impossible to put things down."

"I've read about that," Klee said. "In fact, I went to a docu-drama a few years ago and they interviewed a couple of the RSA refugees before we helped them go back home. It was all they could talk about - they sounded for all the world like drug addicts."

"Yes," Harold told her "It's like that. I have to admit though that I'm sorry to hear that there are still drug addicts here."

Klee shrugged. "It's a choice. I went through my own addict phase a few years ago - I have to admit that before my time ran out, I was having regrets about having only scheduled three months for it. In hindsight though, I'm really glad that there was no way for me to extend once I was in it. Looking at my experience now, I can't believe how easily I was fooled into thinking I was happy or fulfilled. It was a powerful experience. I'm glad it was an option for me, so I don't mind that we still allow it."

Harold had no idea what to think about what she had just told him. It was too much. There was simply too much that was foreign wrapped up with something that he thought he understood quite well. He decided to move on to his questions about the gardens.

"I noticed people harvesting - and working in the gardens along the way. How does that work?"

Now Klee looked confused. "What do you mean?"

Harold tried to explain "Well, it seems like some people work really hard to grow the vegetables and fruits and other people, like us with this beautiful papaya Brian is cutting - we just come along and eat their hard work."

"Yes, that's right." Klee didn't see the issue in what he was asking.

Brian had pulled a sharp knife from his shoulder bag and cut the papaya in half. He dug a small hole and was dumping the black papaya seeds into it.

Harold tried to get Klee to understand his point.

"Don't the people who grow the food get upset that other people come along and eat it?"

Klee laughed. "I've heard you say some funny things, but that's the funniest. Why in the world would they get upset? Isn't that what food is for? To feed people? It's not like you can own a plant...I mean that's the biggest reason to grow food in the first place, right? And besides...if they want a papaya...there's no scarcity of them. No one could eat all of these...in fact, there are people who dedicate their time to figuring out what to do with the ones that don't get eaten."

"So who are the gardeners then?" Harold asked.

Klee looked at him with surprise "Anyone who enjoys gardening. Is this some kind of trick question?"

Brian had sliced the papaya into wedges. He put them down between the three of them. Klee sat on the grass and grabbed one.

"I really can't imagine what the eff-ess is like?" she told them. "Who gardens there? What happens to all the food that grows if people don't eat it."

Harold tried to explain. "Gardeners and farmers grow the food and then they sell it to the stores and restaurants. The stores and restaurants then sell it to the people. If the people just ate it at the source or could just go pick it whenever - there wouldn't really be any need for the shopkeepers or wholesalers." As he explained it, Harold was aware that he was telling about his world of the past, not the RSA and he was aware of the absurdity of the middlemen he had put in.

Klee was trying to understand. "So the farmer spends their time to get fruit and then trades the fruit for time tokens...eh, money...and the store owner takes money of other people and gives them food...hey, does the farmer have to spend his money on food too? And doesn't the food get old by the time it reaches the people who want to eat it?"

Harold had no desire to promote the system he had come from. "Yeah, it doesn't make any sense at all. The store owner gets more money than the farmer did and the farmer has to pay more for old food than he got paid for fresh food."

Klee laughed. "It's really stupid!"

Brian and Harold laughed with her. The papaya tasted even better than the melon had. Harold watched people tending plants and then leaving them - no fences, no plots, no ownership. The land, the food, the work - they didn't belong to anyone. They belonged to everyone.

## Chapter 9

Back on the bikes, they rode for about an hour. There was no hurry and they probably could have reached their destination sooner, but Harold's companions didn't seem to be in a hurry and he certainly wasn't. Knowing some of the secrets of the bikes and gardens, he was in awe, almost effortlessly riding through astoundingly well kept orchards, gardens, and public spaces.

They rode towards Waikiki - it was a little hard for Harold to pinpoint the exact location because most of the landmarks he had known were no longer there. There was no Hilton Hawaiian Village towers, there was no Trump Hotel, no Ilikai hotel - in fact there were no tall buildings at all.

"When were the high rises torn down?" Harold asked when they took a break somewhere in the vicinity of where Kapahulu Avenue had been. A big part of the reason why he was so disoriented was because there were no longer any streets. He hadn't realized how much he oriented himself with the roads and streets of his time. No Ala Moana Boulevard, No Kapahulu Avenue, no Kuhio, Kalakaua, or Kapiolani Boulevards - there was no Young Street, no Nimitz Highway, no H-1, H-2, or H-3 interstates or Likelike Highway. He had been looking for the streets, but there simply weren't any. There were paths which were almost never more than ten feet wide and gardens. He had not seen a single building over seven stories since they left the hostel in Aiea.

"Now that's some ancient history..." Brian said. "Certainly they were all gone by the time you left - unless you are even older than you look."

"Brian!" Klee hushed him and turned to Harold. "Sorry, he's so young. Some people seem to have forgotten how to speak to their elders." Harold noticed it this time, Klee acted as if she were far older than Brian but they looked like they might have gone to school or university together. In fact, he thought he had heard them say so earlier - but perhaps he was mistaken. "Tell him Brian."

Brian looked abashed but as he started to recount some history he started to return to his normal cheerful self.

"By 2100, there was no longer any such thing as 'pleasure travel' from outside of Hawaii - they called it tourism. People didn't really want to leave their families, their careers, their homes and hobbies. As a result, all those high rise buildings were mostly falling into disrepair. As you know, we aren't blessed with abundant natural resources here - Hawaii doesn't have mines or metals and we have never really been a manufacturing hub. Eventually, people realized that the tourism era had blessed us with a huge abundance of resources. All those hotels and high rise buildings were covered with glass, framed with steel, and filled with wires and pipes. Not to mention the wood."

"Were they demolished?" Harold asked.

Brian laughed "That's the kind of thing they do in the eff-ess. No, they were slowly and methodically taken apart - piece by piece, brick by brick, rivet by rivet. Much of what you see is made from them. The kupuna in charge at that point made some really wise decisions to guide us forward. They declared that no building could be higher than seven floors and also that we would no longer use electric elevators or electric climate control. Those were controversial decisions but their wisdom has become apparent. If you live on the top floor now, you are in top shape!"

"But you can't have possibly used every bit of them?" Harold said, trapped in his 21st century capitalist citizen mentality - it's just not efficient.

"There is no waste but an abandoned resource," Klee said - almost as if reciting a mantra.

Brian went on "Everything was put to use and that which couldn't be used right away was set aside where people who were interested in such things could study it and figure out useful things to do with it. The paths we are riding on are a good example - a mixture of plastics, concrete, asphalt, and other non-organic materials - some of them toxic. Kavika's mentors figured out how to combine them and create an inert and stable material which is ideal for path surfacing and does no harm to the environment around it."

"Has everything been used by this point?" Harold asked.

Klee jumped in. "Heaven's no. There are still stockpiles of materials, chemicals, and more that draw some of the best minds from the islands to them. Healthy minds like nothing so much as a good challenge and in this case the challenge is to discover how to use those materials in a way that will benefit everyone while hurting no one."

This reminded Harold of one of the big challenges of his day - the cleanup of Kaho'olawe - one of the most sacred of the Hawaiian Islands. Kaho'olawe was used as a bombing range by the U.S. Navy after World War II. The U.S. Government dropped thousands of tons of explosives on the island and turned a sacred space into a hell of unexploded ordinance and ruined landscape. Harold had often wondered at the fact that anyone in their right mind would look at a Hawaiian Island and say "Let's use it for bomb practice" but that was what had happened. They dropped so many bombs that they cracked open the island's fresh water aquifer and flooded it with salt water thus making the island virtually uninhabitable for any but the most hardy of plants.

In the 1970s, Hawaiian activists had occupied the island in protest and demanded that the bombing stop and the island be returned to the Hawaiian people. Eventually, they succeeded and by 2020 there were a handful of people living on the island again - mostly engaged in trying to locate unexploded ordinance and trying to repair the landscape. It was one of the most tragic mis-uses of land that Harold had ever heard of - but at least they hadn't dropped a nuke on it - and thankfully the occupiers led by Uncle Walter Ritte had been successful, though they faced many legal battles, arrest, and more in the process.

"What about the neighbor islands? How are things with Kaho'olawe and Ni'ihau?" They had gotten back on their bikes by this point and were riding and talking at the same time.

"Oh, they are wonderful Harold - but we'll have to tell you about them later because we've arrived at the marketplace."

Harold knew exactly where they were now. There was at least one landmark in Hawaii that couldn't be hidden. They had ridden uphill for quite a while and now they went through a tunnel and emerged into a bowl shaped valley. The inside of the Diamond Head crater hadn't changed at all except that the National Guard base had been replaced with row after row of open sided bungalows.

As they'd ridden, Harold had noticed a sharp increase in the number of additional people they encountered or rode beside. The flow of people had started verging on what he would describe as a

crowd as they got closer to the tunnel. Entering the crater he was assaulted by the smell of food cooking, the sounds of music and laughter, and a complete and total explosion of colors. Also for the first time since he awoke - Harold saw flying machines. They weren't drones - they didn't make the high pitched annoying noise he associated with drones - in fact, they were completely silent from what he could tell - or at the very least not louder than the noise of the music and the crowd.

The machines did, however look quite a lot like the recreational drones of his time - only bigger. They came down from high above in the sky carrying bales of cloth, boxes of fruit and vegetables, and other goods. They seemed to come straight down from so high that he wasn't able to see them moving horizontally when he looked up - only moving up and down. There were no people on them - only food and goods.

Harold felt like he had walked into a high tech medieval marketplace. There were stages where performers entertained crowds, children chasing one another through crowded aisle ways, and more sensory overload than Harold was cognitively able to understand.

"Ha!" Klee clapped him on the shoulder. "Now you know for sure you are in Hawai'i nei!"

## Chapter 10

They put their bikes in the big public bike racks. Klee turned her seat sideways and started to walk away.

"Aren't we going to lock them?" Harold asked Brian. There were no guards or sentries, they could have taken any bike there. It was obvious that not all the bikes were public units as some of them had outlandish paint jobs or other unique individual designs.

"Why would we do that?" Brian asked him back. He was genuinely confused. Harold had been to Japan several times and one of the most remarkable things he had noticed was that even in a huge city like Tokyo was that people didn't lock up their bikes. When he had asked a Japanese friend whether bikes were stolen - he had gotten the same answer and surprised look as he had just received from Brian.

So, this wasn't a complete surprise to him, but in the Hawai'i that he came from - a bike left unlocked would soon disappear. It was nice to know that theft wasn't a problem. Also, much to his surprise, Harold was relieved to find that there was personal property and personal items - like the decorated bikes.

There was a bit of everything in the market.

Klee turned back to them "Are you guys coming or what?" They both hurried to catch up with her.

She was excited to show Harold the marketplace. "Everyone knows that a woman's favorite thing to do is to go shopping," she said to him. "I'm sure it's the same in the RSA. I love coming here. It's the opportunity to dream, to see new things, and to try on anything that might change your life forever."

Harold was again surprised. He had sold himself the idea that he was in the midst of a socialist utopia and with that idea had come a sort of grey picture of barren shelves in soviet block architecture. He knew that socialism wasn't really about brutalist architecture and empty shelves - but the propaganda machine of his time had worked on him as well as everyone else - sure, he was able to see past it. He was able to ask himself the important questions like "Should a single child be allowed to starve so that someone else can have luxuries? Should anyone be forced to live a life of stress doing work that they hated so that they could have food, medicine, or shelter?" but the capitalist propaganda had convinced him that a socialist world would be a world of enforced austerity. Nowhere had he seen visions of vibrant and gay public markets filled with beautiful happy surgeon/singer/yoga instructors who loved to shop. It was only now that he realized a part of the blinders that had been imposed upon him.

"Harold, we will come back to get you clothes - but is there anything you need? Anything that you wish you had?" It was a hard question. Even though he wasn't an addict to his iPhone, he found himself missing his device, missing the ability to share and connect with the people he knew. He knew it was silly the moment he thought of it. The people he knew were all hundreds of years dead and gone. Even if he had a phone, he wouldn't be able to share photos on Instagram or text his wife a sudden revelation.

Harold was excited to be seeing this world but the sudden remembrance that everyone he cared about was dead and gone was an incredibly heavy thought. "I woke up here which seems impossible, so maybe I'll wake up back there again," he thought - and then a more discreet voice in his head said "but I hope not. I never want to leave this place. I never want to go back to the traffic, the exploitation, the

suffering." It was a dilemma that he could do nothing about. He pushed it all aside and tried to think of what he might need.

"I'd really love some way to write things down," he said. "It would be great to have some sort of pocket notebook and some pencils." His thought about his phone and Instagram had made him think of photos and photography..."Also...I've noticed that people don't have phones....but are cameras still a thing? I'd really love to take some pictures."

This brought them all to a halt.

They both turned to face Harold. He really hadn't expected this reaction. Brian looked excited and Klee looked slightly annoyed.

"I forgot they were still doing personal photography in the RSA," Brian said. "That's amazing. I've played with some cameras and even helped make some movies when I was younger. Surely though even when you were young, the photography customs here in Hawaii had already come into play."

"Honestly, I have no idea what you are talking about. If I knew, I have completely forgotten. From both of your reactions, I can tell that I've hit some kind of a nerve...I'm completely at a loss. Please explain."

Klee softened a bit upon seeing that he had asked from a place of ignorance. "Think about what you said Harold. You said "I'd love to 'take' some pictures". That's exactly the problem. It's really easy to think of photography as being harmless and not victimizing people but the truth is - the indigenous people of the world saw it really clearly right from the beginning. Even the colonizers saw what they were doing and you can hear it in the phrase you used. They 'take' pictures. They don't give them, they don't memorialize, they don't record a picture or share a picture. They take it. In the process, this taking opened up the door to all kinds of problems - sexual exploitation, oppression, cultural appropriation, dehumanization, and a huge number of mental and psychological problems. Plus, imagine if you had a camera right now - would you be able to do photography without including people in your pictures? Are you willing to go and ask each person for permission for recording their image, stealing their moment, freezing their memory in a particular moment in time? Would you just take the pictures anyway and colonize all these people's minds and history?"

It was a lot to take in. Harold was trying, but it was a huge leap from 'taking pictures is harmless fun' to 'taking pictures is colonial exploitation'.

"So, there isn't photography any more? It's not a thing?" He asked cautiously.

Klee and Brian laughed. The mood was lightened by his naivety.

"Of course it's still a thing," Brian explained. "It's just not a thoughtless thing. You can't just go through society taking snaps and stealing people's lives to profit on. There are still nature photographers and movie makers and even portrait photographers - in fact there are several here in the marketplace. The difference between what you were talking about is huge though - having your picture taken is a conscious choice and you have the right not to have your picture taken. No one has the right to take your picture. When we go to the photographer, they give us a portrait. We go to get a photo which is a very different thing than someone taking photos. Do you see?"

Harold wasn't sure he understood completely, but he was starting to. He looked around. There were no

obvious security cameras, no one taking his photo, no checkpoints with big oppressive cameras.

"What about security cameras?" they must have some sort of surveillance system set up.

"Oh, Harold, ewwww..." Klee looked physically ill. "Don't even joke about it. I've read about the panopticon of the 21st century. I've also heard that the average citizen of the RSA has their picture taken hundreds or thousands of times a day. It makes me feel sick to even consider it."

Brian jumped in. "Nope, no photos. No satellite photos, no surveillance cameras, no one taking your picture without you knowing it. We don't do any of that here."

The idea of satellite photos raised a dozen new questions in Harold's mind but he kept them to himself. He really wanted to see the market - though he was glad to have learned about the photography rules. The more he considered it, the more it made sense.

Klee was smiling now. "Harold, you're a genius! Let's go get a portrait of the three of us! My friend Marko is usually up here - he's an astoundingly good photographer. Let's find him. Do you guys want to?"

It was such a quick turnaround. Harold thought that maybe he should consider carefully before agreeing but Brian was quick to say yes. "I love Marko's work. To be honest, it's been years since I sat for a portrait - I'd love to. Harold, will you sit with us?"

He didn't see any harm in it - though the way that he thought about photography in general had just undergone what could only be described as a radical shift. "Sure, this seems like an important day to remember. Let's do it!"

Klee clapped and did a little jump up like an excited schoolgirl. "Hooray. This day gets better and better. First, though, let's go find you a notebook and some pencils - or maybe a nice ink pen." Harold was relieved to know that paper and writing were still on the list of acceptable activities.

The photographer, Marko, worked in a tent. It was all very old fashioned. They went in and he asked them about backgrounds and props. Klee said that they wanted something old fashioned and Harold wasn't sure what to expect but was surprised when a scene that looked like it came out of the Jetsons or Lost in Space was pulled down behind them. They put on fake space suits and stood in front of the funny science fiction future screen - the old fashioned future from the distant past. They posed for about a dozen pictures in this way and the photographer told them they could pick them up later in the day. It was all very 'normal' in a strange way.

They walked through the market and Harold was amazed at the diversity of items. There was art in abundance. Paintings, ceramics, carvings - though the vast majority of items appeared to be more crafty in nature - functional but individually well made things of beauty. Pottery jugs, clay plates, and hand made quilts. Klee kept them out of the clothing section for now but Harold could see that there were glass blowers and blacksmiths. Food stalls were scattered throughout. There were stalls filled with fruit and vegetables and others where vendors displayed meat, fish, and even live animals like goats, chickens, and sheep.

They passed a knife maker's stall. Harold had always been in the habit of carrying a small pocket knife with him. He had found it to be a useful item that would get used multiple times in a day for a variety

of purposes. Cleaning his fingernails, cutting the skin from an orange, cutting a piece of string. He had stopped carrying his pocketknife after the September 11th attacks of 2001. The silly TSA rules had cost him several knives and after the third one, he had simply not replaced it.

There were a nice selection of knives laid out. The knife maker was working on a folding knife as they walked by. Harold stopped to admire his work. The knife he was working on was a masterpiece of simplicity and utility. It was a sort of simplified Swiss Army Knife with a small cutting blade, a scissors, an awl, and a small magnifying glass surrounded by a ring of stunning Damascus steel. The handle was polished koa wood that was shaved thin enough to almost see through and then enameled on the tempered sides of the knife. Harold had never seen such a beautiful knife.

The other knives were laid out on the table. There were only a few of them and they were equally beautiful. There was a chef's knife, a sort of hunting knife in a stunning leather sheath, and a couple of larger folding knives. The knife maker noticed Harold's admiration and looked up.

He smiled. "Aloha. Mahalo for your appreciation of my work."

"Aloha." Harold smiled back. "Yes, it's stunning. I can't say I've ever seen the like. You are obviously a master knife maker."

"It's what brings me joy," the knife maker said. He was a bit older than many of the people Harold had seen today. In fact, he may have been the first person whom Harold had met who had any grey showing. His pointy goatee beard was a light shade of grey. He handed Harold the knife he had been working on. "I've just finished this one. I spent almost a year on it."

"A year?" Harold was astounded. It must be incredibly expensive.

"Yes. I wanted to find the right metal for this one. It took me a long time. This is a really unique kind of steel that originally came from Japan. The steel itself is perhaps a thousand years old. I reforged it and folded it on itself hundreds of times. I poured a couple of the pieces into molds that I'd carved from limestone just for this knife. And the scales - the wood pieces - they come from the oldest koa tree on this island. It's a living tree and I harvested just enough to make this knife. The tree has already healed. Oh, but perhaps my favorite part of this knife wasn't a knife at all...I had to learn how to make the magnifying glass. Making glass is hard enough but making a convex piece like that and polishing it to where it is now. I don't mind telling you - I had many failures along the way."

Harold held the knife in his hand. It was excruciatingly beautiful. It was a treasure. He found himself a bit afraid that he would drop it. He had never seen anything like it. The action on the opening and closing of the blades was smooth, the small scissors with the delicate watchmaker quality spring, the glow of the koa scales on the side, and the clarity of the magnifier. It was magnificent.

"I'm pleased to see that you like it," the knife-maker said. "I knew that it would find a home when it was ready - though I must admit - your timing was perfect as I've just given it the final polish."

"Oh, no - I couldn't," Harold said. "I don't really have any way to pay for it. It's far too nice a knife for me. It should be in a museum somewhere." He didn't know what to say. It was obviously worth a fortune.

"What is your name, Brother?" the knife-maker said to him. "I can see from your clothes that you are a

stranger here...also from the way you talk." He came around the stall and extended his hand "I am Ku Mohammad Mo'okumuhika Satori."

Harold took the extended hand, the knife in his other. Ku pulled him into a brotherly embrace.

"I'm Harold Haggins," Harold said. It felt like a very vanilla sort of name.

"Brother Harold," Ku said to him. "I insist that you take this knife, comrade. The timing tells me that it was meant for you."

Klee and Brian wandered back to Harold when they noticed that he had stopped. Ku looked surprised.

"Harold, are these your friends?" Harold nodded. He really couldn't think of anything to say. Ku let him go from the embrace and the handshake.

"Aloha Klee. Aloha Nephew." Both Klee and Brian embraced Ku. Kisses were distributed on cheeks. Breaths were shared while foreheads were pressed one against the other.

"Uncle," Brian said "I didn't know that you would be here today." Harold wondered if it was possible that Ku was the historian uncle whom he had already heard about. He was soon to find out. "We were planning on coming to the Institute after showing our new friend the market. I really wanted to introduce Harold to you."

"It's too late," Ku said. "We have already met and he's taken the finest knife I've ever made."

"I didn't take it..." Harold said weakly.

"I insist you do," Ku said. "It is now more obvious than ever that I was making it for you." Ku looked at Harold with some kindness. "Now, take him away so that I can find the owners of these other knives I have brought today. I will be at the institute in a few hours...will you be my guests for dinner?"

They all agreed.

"Good. It's decided then...get this guy out of here." He turned to Harold again with a gentle kindness "Thank you for receiving my knife, Harold. It is a joy to meet you. I will look forward to our further conversation."

Brian and Klee herded Harold away before he could protest about the knife any further. Harold still couldn't believe it was in his hand. He felt guilty.

## Chapter 11

Harold let them get him around the corner before he planted his feet and demanded answers.

"You shouldn't have let me take this. It is obviously worth a fortune and he put years into making it. You should have at least let me give him something for it."

Klee was looking at him like he was a confused child again. "You did give him something, Harold. You gave him your appreciation for his work. More importantly, you gave him the opportunity to do more work that he loves. You validated his time with your appreciation."

"Yes, but how will he buy new materials..." Harold suddenly realized he had painted himself into a corner. There was no money here. "Wait a minute...so he would have just given this knife to anyone?"

Brian jumped in. "Nope, not a chance. He would have given the knife to anyone he wanted to give it to and knowing my uncle, that knife might have sat there for a long time. Okay, so anyone could have come up and said 'I want this' and he couldn't really say no - but I know him - he would have talked with the person, seen if they needed it, felt if they appreciated it, and if they neither needed nor appreciated it - he would have convinced them that he was still working on it or directed their attention to a different knife. No one can force an artisan to give up something they are still working on, but when it's put on the table in the market - it's generally available to anyone. That being said, Uncle Ku has almost never put one of his knives in someone's hands who he didn't already want to have it."

"I'm really confused," Harold said. "All these people - these merchants. There's no money changing hands. Nobody is earning their living doing this..."

Klee interrupted him. "That's a really interesting phrase, Harold. Earning one's living. Why should anyone have to earn their living? You're born and you get to live. It's not for someone else to say that you have to earn your right to exist...but more importantly, I think you are missing something more important. These people are 'worthwhile their living' - they are doing the things that make them feel fulfilled and happy and then bringing the output to the marketplace. Ku makes these knives because he loves the material, he loves the function, he loves the process of making them, and most importantly - he loves the joy that his work brings to other people. Think about how much pleasure you have already gotten from that little knife. The reason we pushed you away from the stall was so that you wouldn't take away any of the joy and satisfaction you just gave him. You just paid him for all the sweat, the time, the love that he put into that knife. Every time he sees you, he will know that he made your life a little better - by doing what he loves. And trust me - he won't miss it. He is already planning his next obsessive creation."

"She's totally right," Brian said. "He makes lots of knives - and other things - but there is always a special thing that he pours his love into like that one in your hand. I have one - in my kitchen - it's a chef's knife that can cut hairs in half. It too has those thousands of Damascus folds in the blade..."

Harold heard what they were saying but he was feeling exasperated. "So everyone here just works for free and no one has to do anything at all?"

They both looked at him like he was a lunatic.

"Seriously....what's to stop everyone from just sitting around and doing nothing, just sucking up all the labor of others and sponging off of everyone else. Maybe I'll just get a bunch of food and grab a bunch of jewelry and sit on a well made and hand crafted sofa in a free hotel room watching movies for the rest of my life." He knew he was being a drama queen. He wasn't sure if they would even understand what he was talking about. He felt like some fanatical Republican from Fox news talking about lazy welfare recipients...he saw this, he hated it, but he couldn't help it. Yes, this was the world he had always dreamed might be possible, but it was impossible, it wouldn't work. People would take advantage of the system. People would just become parasites...

His rant had drawn a mild amount of attention from those around him.

A young girl laughed and shouted "Yes, I want to watch movies and vids forever!" She skipped away and other people went back to their shopping, talking amongst themselves. Maybe they were talking about him or maybe he wasn't that interesting to anyone but himself.

Harold felt like a fool and shut himself up. He had never realized how much he had internalized those conservative talking points - even though he was a leftist, even though he was surrounded by people in his world who dreamed of a better humanity - he had been indoctrinated.

Klee looked confused. "Is that what you want to do Harold?"

He felt even more idiotic. He tried to imagine what he could say to explain himself. Thankfully, Brian came to his rescue.

"You were in the RSA for waaaaay too long." Brian looked both excited and concerned. He turned to Klee. "The RSA and the old United States before it used this crazy piece of policy that said if you didn't force people to work, to 'earn their living' or 'pay their way' that they would spend their lives just sitting and becoming piles of useless goo. It's sort of understandable because all the mind control systems were largely designed to kill individual initiative and the schools were used to turn children into drone laborers who did their jobs and focused on just one thing or one path - the 'career' path with the idea that it was all they would ever be allowed to do. I've read a lot about 'burnout' and 'couch potatoes'. This was where people would hyper-focus on one thing until they were incapable of seeing anything else - it led to all kinds of obsessive and self-destructive behavior. People weren't allowed to use their own time - they had to give it to companies, bosses, and schools."

Harold had recovered somewhat from his outburst, though he was still embarrassed. "I really don't understand," he said "if no one pays for anything and no one has to do anything then how does anything get done? Why do people work if they don't have to?"

Klee openly laughed at him this time.

"Work is the thing that makes life worthwhile," she said to him while giggling through the words. "Why in the world would anyone not want to work? I can't imagine how awful that would feel...to have no purpose, to have no joy of satisfaction and completion, to have no reason for being." She was no longer laughing - the whole idea seemed to have infused her with a deep sadness. "Are you serious Harold? I mean, we're humans. It's what we do. We love to work. We love to make things. We love to build things. We love to help each other and care for each other. We love to discover, explore, design, assist...I can't imagine a world where people weren't encouraged in that. I can't imagine a world where

people are discouraged from finding their work. I can't imagine how sad it would be to look around and see people wandering aimlessly with no purpose and no way to find one or a world where people were forced to do things that didn't fulfill them."

"Work is what makes us human," Brian added. "Harold, look around you...it is the work they do that brings joy into all of these people's lives."

"But there must be unpleasant work that no one wants to do..." Harold was calmer and more logical but still couldn't bring himself around to their way of thinking - it was so radically different than the entire concept of the world and time he had come from. "Garbage collectors and sewage workers...laborers..dishwashers." Suddenly, he remembered the conversation they had had earlier. People put their names on waiting lists in order to wash dishes here.

"The harder the job, the more respect and honor there is for those who do it," Brian said. "Believe it or not - some of our cultural heroes come straight from those jobs you mentioned - the essential workers doing the essential work - but you know that, you grew up here - it can't have been so long that you didn't hear the stories of Sven the Sewerman, right? He worked in the sewers and recognized that all the waste could be put to better use...he recruited the chemists and farmers to his cause and even though he couldn't read, he managed to spearhead the effort that led to our most effective biofuel and our most potent land regeneration materials...right? You have to remember Sven."

Once again, Harold's mind was blown. "Work is what makes us human," he repeated. It was the single biggest misunderstanding of the ages. Capitalism and nationalism and serfdom and all the other economic and control systems had stolen the most valuable thing from humans they had - the ability to work for fulfillment. By commodifying work, the systems had turned a joy into a torture. By turning schools into institutionalized worker factories and putting children on direct trajectories to pre-determined careers, they were robbing their youth of the greatest joy in being human. They were robbing their culture of innovation and creation. Suddenly, Harold understood just how joyless his world really was.

"Come on," Klee said. "We can talk about this later. Let's enjoy the market." Harold was happy to leave this conversation for now and Brian reluctantly dropped it.

As they walked, Harold had a new understanding of the people and the goods in the marketplace. This wasn't a place where money was exchanged, this was a place where ideas, work, and time were validated. Klee found a necklace. Harold couldn't tell who was happier, Klee with her new necklace or the jewelry maker who put it on her.

"I can't wait to tell my daughters how happy this necklace made you," the jeweler said. "They helped me polish the stones for it."

"Let's get a snack before we go," Brian said. "I heard that the kids have created a new kind of sandwich."

Harold had noticed that there were a lot of children at the market. Not just running and playing but also many of them were working in booths or carrying things. Brian led them to a food tent that seemed to be staffed completely by kids under ten years old. Not one of them could have been in their teens though there might have been a small twelve year old among them.

"Is it a school holiday?" Harold asked. The food tent seemed far too permanent not to be, but he couldn't imagine that the kids were always there.

Klee looked at him with her head cocked to one side. He'd done it again. Thank god for his cover story. She had no idea what he was talking about.

"All the kids here and in the market...don't they go to school?"

"Only if they want to," she said. "I'm sure some of them do or will or have tried it before."

It was a really weird answer.

"But how do they learn to read? Or do math? How do they learn history?" She cocked her head at him again.

"Those are really strange questions, Harold."

"I'm serious."

Brian had gone to order them food. He was at the counter where a young girl, a child, was explaining the menu to him, making recommendations, and writing down what he ordered. She seemed to know what she was doing. Brian treated her just as he would have treated an adult in a similar situation.

"The same way anyone learns anything, Harold. They find someone who knows and ask them to teach them."

"So none of these kids go to school? Aren't there labor laws? Shouldn't there be rules to protect them from being exploited?"

"Sometimes I think you came from another planet, man. Are you saying that you think these kids shouldn't be allowed to work? That they should have to go learn how to read or do math instead?" It sounded different how she said it, different than how he was thinking it. Sort of opposite. Still he decided to press on.

"Well, yes. I mean they won't just teach themselves. They need to be grounded in the basics, right?"

"I taught myself to read - with a little help from the librarian. I'm really confused Harold. I can't think of anything worse than not letting a child work, but you're saying it as if it's bad to let children work...I mean look at these kids - they are doing something really special. This kids co-op is completely run and operated by children - they get all their food from child farmers and gatherers, they make their own recipes, kids built this tent and probably the tent itself was made by kids. Wait until you try the food...I mean sometimes it's a miss, but generally - they do everything every bit as good as adults and the joy of the work, the experience, it leads them to where they need to go. If they need to learn math, it becomes apparent and they know where to find a teacher."

"Why did you learn to read?" Harold was having his worldview flipped on his head. As he thought about it, he realized that without money there was not really an incentive for child labor to be exploited. He thought about his own childhood and his education - the important things, he had generally taught those to himself as well - with the help of the one or two good teachers he had been blessed with in

nearly twenty years of inefficient and forced education.

"I didn't know any brain surgeons," she told him.

Brian arrived with the food and drink. The drinks were in beautiful pink glasses that appeared to have been hand blown. The food was on stout wooden plates. Brian carried it all on a tray...

"One of the perks of having worked here when I was a kid is that they still let me carry my own tray," he said. "Check this out - they've apparently started making bread from ulu-flour - so it's breadfruit bread and the stuffing is made from soybean paste and coconut..."

The little sandwiches were snack sized and served hot. The smell made Harold's stomach take control of his brain. Thankfully. The kids had done something incredibly wonderful...and delicious.

## Chapter 12

Harold was experiencing more than a little culture shock. His trips to Japan and other countries had given him his first taste of culture shock but this was on a completely different level. As they finished the delicious meal made by the kids, his new friends were eager to show him more of their world. Brian's eagerness to learn about the RSA had been replaced by an enthusiasm to demonstrate the superiority of his world to that which Harold had come from - it was a far easier task than Brian may have suspected.

Klee, on the other hand, seemed to have developed an almost maternal feeling towards Harold. She was incredibly good looking and Harold wasn't averse to the fact that she held his arm or gave him frequent touches, but he was also aware that there was a motherly aspect to it that communicated nothing sexual whatsoever - because, after all, he was married and despite all of his faults, he had always been a loyal and good husband.

This line of thought led him to troubling thoughts however. He had no way of knowing if he would somehow go back to his own time, his own life - if he did not, then his wife, his friends, everyone he had ever known were dead and gone for hundreds of years. If that were the case, then he most certainly was not married. Harold knew himself well enough to know that his libido was seeking excuses by which to free itself to his most hedonistic desires. Despite his many flaws, that was something he had never allowed to happen. There had been opportunities and his libido had argued convincingly that he was justified in taking them - but he never had.

This, of course, was different and time might change the way he felt but for the moment, even if his wife were gone - it had only been for a day in his experience and there was no need to rush into allowing his desire to make mistakes for him. He caught himself - if such an opportunity should even arise - which, so far it most certainly had not. Klee held his arm as they walked through the market.

"We won't forget your notebook and something to write with," Klee assured him. He broke away from her touch for the moment - motherly or not, he knew why his mind had lingered on the previous thoughts.

The section of the market they now walked through was neither food nor artisanal - this was a section of what Harold could only describe as used goods. It looked like nothing so much as a flea market or yard sale.

"What's going on here?" Harold asked. "These don't look like things that these people have made."

"You're right, old boy," Brian said. Harold was fairly sure he didn't like the new nickname and hoped Brian would not use it again. He frowned at Brian and hoped he saw a flicker of recognition cross the young man's face. "This is the re-use section. The smaller vendors are people who want to pass on their things to someone else who will appreciate them, the larger vendors are professional re-users. They move through neighborhoods and towns collecting the things people no longer have a need for and they bring them here."

There were toys, tools, clothing, books, jewelry, umbrellas, furniture and kitchen items. The one thing Harold didn't see were the kinds of things he was used to seeing at thrift shops. There were no TVs, computers, cell phones, copiers, printers, or information age gizmos. No video game consoles, no auto

parts, and very little in the way of what he would call 'collectibles'. The vast majority of items seemed incredibly practical with little to no frivolity among them.

Harold stopped in front of a table that held a part of what he wanted.

A girl of thirteen or fourteen sat at a table filled with pens, pencils, crayons, and markers. Harold didn't see any of the brands from his time, so maybe calling them crayons was the wrong word but in any event - this was obviously the place to get writing implements.

"Hello," said the girl. "Are you an artist?"

Harold smiled at her. "Not really, but I do like to do a little bit of sketching and to write down my thoughts and observations from time to time."

"Ah, a journalist! How lovely!" Harold almost corrected her but then realized she was perfectly describing what he did. It was strange how in his time, a journalist was generally the same thing as a reporter which was the same thing as a correspondent - as he thought of the words, he was surprised to discover that each of them were exactly the wrong word for what news people did. Actually, 'news reporter' might work but it wasn't really the right word. In any case, she had described his desired activity perfectly. He was an aspiring journalist but he had neither pencil nor paper at the moment and he was in need of both.

"I'm looking for a nice ink pen and perhaps a couple of pencils for sketching," Harold told her. "What do you recommend?"

"Oh, I've got exactly what you want. Let me find the pen I have in mind." She had the pens and pencils in jars like flower arrangements. She moved her hands from section to section. "Are you familiar with how a fountain pen works?"

Harold was delighted with the question. He did most of his personal writing with a fountain pen - or had - back in his own time and world. "Yes, most definitely, but I'll also need to get ink in that case."

"Terrific," she said "I got this fountain pen from a very old man over in Kailua. He said that his father had used it and his grandfather before him. I've been waiting to find just the right person for it - and I've got a bottle of ink to go with it."

"You have an amazing collection," Harold said to her. "I'm curious how you came into this business and where you get all your merchandise." He knew he was probably using the wrong words - business carried the idea of profits and losses and merchandise - well, that would be stuff that you sold.

She didn't seem put off by it though. She held out her hand. Harold took it. "I'm Evie," she told him. He shook her hand. "I'm Harold. Nice to meet you Evie."

Now she handed him a beautiful copper colored fountain pen. It had a sort of tiger stripe burnishing to it and gold highlights on the pocket clip which clearly said 'Waterman'. When he opened the cap the nib sparkled brightly at him and he was able to make out 24k on it.

"It's gold," he said with surprise. He felt a light touch on his shoulder and looked to see Klee smiling at him with encouragement. Her glance reminded him of where he was and the way things worked here.

"It's also incredibly old. I think this pen might be more than three hundred years old!" He almost said 'as old as me' but stopped himself just in time. Evie smiled at his appreciation but looked concerned.

"Is it too old for you? Were you looking for something more simple?" He could hear the disappointment in her voice.

"No, no - it's absolutely beautiful. It's perfect for me. I don't think there is another that would be better suited for me." Her smile lit the already perfect Hawaiian day.

"Oh, goodie. I was hoping...actually, when I saw you in your old fashioned clothes, I just knew it was for you. You asked about my endeavor," she said. He was surprised at the word but it actually seemed to fit quite well.

"Yes, I'm very curious - as most journalists should be." Harold liked describing himself as a journalist. It felt right.

"Well, it's not a very fascinating story," she told him. "I've always wanted to be a writer - I mean I am a writer, I write all the time - but I wanted to write stories and novels and histories and since I'm still quite young, I don't really have the experience to share all those things. My parents and family - they aren't really interested in writing - they enjoy physical work - and so do I but it's not my main focus right now. We live over in Kailua and when I decided to start writing, I had to go to several of the neighbors before I was able to find a pen that worked. I discovered that lots of people have drawers that contain pens and pencils but most people don't use them anymore..."

Harold would have to find out later what people were using instead of pens and pencils...and get many more of his questions answered but for now, he let Evie go on with her story.

"Word got around that I was looking for a pen and by this point, I'd gotten a few of them and started experimenting with different ways of writing, sketching, drawing, and even some calligraphy - pretty soon, people started to bring me their pens and pencils. At first I was like 'No, I've got enough' but then my auntie suggested that I bring them here. I didn't want to be a vendor but her idea was really genius..."

"I'm not sure I understand," Harold said.

"She knew that I wanted to meet writers and artists and that I wanted to write about them. What better way for me to meet them than to become the vendor for their tools?"

It really was a genius plan. "You come here every day from Kailua?" he asked her. "How do you get here?"

"Oh, no. That would be too much. I still like doing physical work in the lo'i with my family and on some days I write - but I come here two days a week. Depending on the weather some days I ride a bicycle but mostly I take the hyperloop through the Pali."

"The hyperloop?" Harold thought he had heard the word before but he wasn't sure.

"You know, the super-train." She said it so matter of factly that Harold put it away. "I don't want to hold you up too much because I see you are here with your friends...but do you think it would be

possible for you to come to Kailua and let me interview in a few days?"

Brian jumped in. "We're going to be on that side in a few days for a coffee day in Ka'a'awa. We could bring him by after that."

Evie smiled at Brian. "That would be great. I could probably get some work time for you guys in the lo'i if you want and I'd be happy to have you stay at our place overnight too. Are these your parents?"

Harold was shocked at the question - not for himself but for Klee. She looked like she was the same age as Brian - certainly not old enough to be his mother.

Brian shook his head "No, we're friends."

"That's awesome," Evie said. "Now we're all friends too." She wrapped up the pen and an old fashioned looking bottle of ink and put them in a shoulder strapped satchel. "You should take this bag too. I notice you don't have one yet. If you go down a few stalls, Uncle Albert has beautiful blank old paper diaries and books. They make them on his farm in Wahiawa. See you in a few days Uncle Harold." She came out from behind the table and gave him a quick hug and kiss on the cheek.

Uncle Albert did indeed have beautiful journals but there was no one at the stall when they arrived. Klee and Brian assured him that it was okay that he pick one. He picked a small hand bound journal that appeared to be bound with the bark of a rainbow eucalyptus. The paper inside all appeared to hand made and was a light yellow - a hand stamp inside said "Made with Aloha Hawaiian Papyrus at Victoria and Albert Farm."

Harold put the notebook in his woven satchel with his pen, ink, and knife. He left the marketplace a wealthier man than the one who had entered it - but it was the ideas that made him wealthy, the goods simply made him feel love.

## Chapter 13

It was time for them to make their way to the institute for dinner with Uncle Ku. The snack at the kid's place had done just enough to give Harold the energy to get back on a bike and they began pedaling. He had hoped that the institute might be on the grounds of the old Kapiolani Community College - right outside of the Diamond Head Crater - but that hope was soon shown to be misguided.

Leaving the crater they followed paths through what Harold had known as Kaimuki - the hipster neighborhood on the slopes leading mauka from Diamond Head. As they rode through neighborhoods made up of cottage after cottage, each with an individual garden and each built and decorated in such a way as to reflect the personality of the owner, Harold was struck by the vast differences within what was a remarkably similar building style. The small houses could really only be described as cottages though they were of very different shapes and sizes. They looked very similar to the single wall plantation housing that had been being phased out in his own time - but more modular.

They paused at a fountain about a mile from where they had left the crater. The fountain was an interesting design made to look like a waterfall but one that didn't really come from anywhere. Brian and Klee pulled cups from their satchels, dipped them in the fountain, and drank deeply. Harold watched in amazement as they drank directly from the fountain.

"Is it safe to drink that?"

Klee looked up at him. "Ah, I knew we forgot something. We should have gotten you a cup! You can use mine," suddenly she looked suspicious. "What do you mean is it safe? Is what safe?" She filled the cup and handed it to him.

Harold took it with one hand and motioned at it with the other. "The water. Is it safe to drink it straight from the fountain like that?" He didn't really know what else to call it. It was a grassy hill about fifteen feet high. Water gushed from the top and flowed down a rocky path to a beautiful tile walled enclosure where it pooled about a foot deep. He could see fish swimming in it and there were plants growing from the sides of the enclosure, but the water didn't seem to flow anywhere, just as it didn't seem to come from anywhere, so he assumed it was a closed loop.

"Is the water safe? Of course it is. It would be pretty silly to put a fountain somewhere and fill it with dangerous water. Do they do that in the RSA? Put deadly fountain traps to catch unwary travelers?" She was laughing. He knew that she was having a little fun at his expense, but he wasn't particularly bothered by it.

"How does it work? How does the water get cycled and how does it get cleaned? Don't you need to worry about leptosporosis or some sort of fish disease? What if someone were to pee in it?"

"These are really strange ideas, Harold. Why would anyone pee in a drinking fountain?" He never would have thought to call it a drinking fountain.

Brian came to his rescue. "It's all solar powered. The solar collectors on top create the electricity that runs the pump. Then, using ozone osmosis differentiators, the water is completely ozonated at the top before it is released back into the waterfall. So all of the water is filtered and cleaned every step of the

way and it is all done by Mother Earth. In terms of leptosporosis - we don't have to worry about that anymore - we have a universal vaccination program that includes lepto-immunity....but Klee is right about it being a really strange idea to pee in a drinking fountain...I've never heard of someone doing that - it's a strange idea - but the good news is that unless you were drinking it within fifteen minutes of their peeing in it, the water would be completely filtered and cleaned again. It's an ongoing process. Sometimes on hot days, people bring their kids here to play in the water and during those times, no one drinks the water until a while after all the kids are out of the pool."

So, it wasn't really such a strange idea that people might pee in a pool - it had simply been the way he had presented it. In his own time, it was something that misguided teens or drunk and disgruntled men might do. He was glad to hear that the idea sounded so outlandish.

Harold drank deeply from the cup Klee had given him. It was every bit as good as the best water he had ever drank.

"Brian, I wanted to ask you about the houses we've been passing. The designs are unique but at the same time - they are similar. Are these homes centrally planned, individual, or something else?"

Brian was happy to explain. "It's all three. While there are some people who want to build and experiment with new materials and design, for the most part - the families who live in this area are more interested in function than in form. The materials are all made in such a way that they can be fitted together with snap-bolts in a layout that suits the needs of the family. The best part is that the snap-bolts can be undone without too much effort and the walls can be reconfigured. Same thing with the roof panels - they are light enough for two people to lift them off and move them to a new area. As you've probably noticed - most people go with the foundational design of studio, one, two, or three rooms. Everyone knows how to build it and it's comfortable and functional. I love though, that some people take the old forms and add new function or design to them. I have a friend who has built his home from modular components but he managed to build it in concentric circular rings. He has the kitchen in the central hub, surrounded by a garden ring that has two bridges leading to the next ring where he has restrooms, salon, and family room. Two more bridges lead over a circular swimming pool ring to the bedrooms and entryway. He's planted fruit trees on the outside - it's really wild and it works and he did it all with the modular materials. So - planned, individual...and something else. Pretty cool, right?"

"What are the materials?" Harold was genuinely curious. These weren't wood or brick houses.

"Most of the modular panels are made from arti-stone or plasti-glass." Harold was a little surprised to hear this. He had thought they would be made of more natural materials.

"So you're still making plastics and synthetic materials?" he asked.

"Oh, no, not at all. In the 20th and 21st century they made so much plastic and material that we are still finding ways to use it all up. The micro-mesh hoppers manage to pull several tons of plastic out of the ocean every day just by filtering the water around the islands. We have gyre miners that go out to collect the larger plastic pieces from the Pacific Gyre. It's absolutely astounding what they did in the past. The fact that they could pull fossilized carbon up from the ground made them giddy with power. They emptied the layers beneath, destabilized the crust, converted the coal and oil into synthetic material, and then just seemingly dumped it into the oceans and air...they were like people who cut out their own organs and then choked themselves with them. It's inconceivable and impossible to even

know what they were thinking."

"They weren't thinking," Harold said. "They were simply greed. It was a time of take, take, take and exploit, exploit, exploit - land, resources, people - it didn't matter. Their motto was take it before someone else does - or it might as well have been. They had a sense that time was running out and instead of trying to save themselves, they just tried to fatten their wallets."

Klee had rested long enough and was back on her bike. "Come on guys," she said "I'm hungry and we still have a way to go before we reach Manoa."

The Institute was in Manoa. Harold had no doubt it would be at the old University of Hawai'i.

## Chapter 14

As they rode their bikes (although to Harold sometimes it felt as if the bike was riding itself and he was just a passenger) through Mo'ili'ili and into the Manoa Valley, Harold was in awe of the landscape. In his day, he had seen plenty of restored landscapes that looked like this - the botanical gardens and arboretums - but this wasn't walled off sections of the land - it was everywhere. Houses and buildings were easily blended into the environment in a way that enhanced the beauty of nature and made the people an integral part of it - rather than a blight on it.

He was astounded at the amount of work that must have taken place to dismantle the roads, the parking lots, the buildings, the entire structures of his civilization. If there was one thing that Harold was coming to realize it was that his civilization was defined by cars and roads and parking lots. The absence of them here made room for so much that he hadn't even realized he missed.

Harold's body felt amazingly energized and he wasn't sure if that was a result of having eaten and drank only additive free foods since his arrival, an overall exuberance at being in the midst of such wonder, or maybe his body had simply gotten a very good rest over the hundreds of years between when he went to bed and when he awoke. Perhaps it was a combination or none of those reasons. He only knew that he was not tired despite engaging in more exercise and intellectual astonishment than at any time in his life.

The institute was not at all what he had expected. Harold had been picturing a kind of Star Trek city of the future - like the Star Fleet Academy - and while there were certainly some elements of that in what he saw as they rode into the Manoa Valley - it was a completely different experience. No big shining white monument buildings or glistening silver organic structures. Everything was green.

At least at first, that was how it seemed to Harold. There were buildings that pushed the limits of what he had seen so far, though he didn't think they were more than seven or eight floors. The paths diverged in dozens of directions and while there were no signs, Klee and Brian seemed to know exactly which paths to take to get where they were going. Harold would easily have gotten lost.

Harold couldn't count the buildings, mainly because they were many and among them were giant trees of diverse species. He recognized some of them - Monkeypod, Acacia Koa, Albizia, Mango, Eucalyptus - but there were many that looked unfamiliar to him. Harold wondered if there was still a serious concern about introducing foreign species and invasive species wiping out indigenous plants. In particular Harold was struck by giant evergreens that shot up between the buildings. In his time, only the Cook Island and Norfolk Pines had been able to thrive in Hawaii's climate - these looked very much like Sequoia and Giant Redwoods - but they were of a size that he doubted they could be. He hadn't been gone long enough for a thousand year old tree to grow and he certainly would have noticed them in his time.

The buildings were all covered with foliage - some of it ivy, pothos, or other climbing plants he was familiar with - but much of it seemed to be made up of crop plants which were being grown in a vertical environment. A latticework of material held soil in place which allowed the plants to root and grow. Windows in the buildings seemed to be rare in comparison to the buildings of his day. The overall effect of all of this was that Harold didn't feel like he was on the campus of UH so much as he felt like he was coming into some ancient Mayan ruin deep in the heart of the rainforest.

There were clearings and open areas as well as intensive agricultural zones mixed in. People worked in the wetland agricultural fields - the taro patches or lo'i - and others tended to other things. There were largish groups of people numbering between five and twenty who sat in outdoor areas where they seemed to be attending classes or lectures. Harold wanted to stop and hear what the courses were about but he would have time for personal explorations later. Right now, they were expected for lunch and Harold felt that he owed his time to Ku Mohammad Mo'okumuhika Satori, the knife-maker who had gifted him that beautiful knife - and Brian's uncle. In truth, it was no sacrifice for Harold to meet with Uncle Ku because he had many questions and he suspected that Ku would be even more capable of answering them than Brian had been.

There was an air of knowledge and learning about this place - but it was not like the university campus' of his day. What was missing was that 'institutional' feel - the almost arrogant aura that connected universities and schools to government and industry. This did not feel like a place where workers were trained. It did not feel like a place where boxes were checked off and grades were handed out. This actually felt like a place where curiosity was met with knowledge. This felt like a place of learning. Harold chuckled to himself as he realized that it was the least institutional 'Institute' he had ever encountered.

They came to a central bike parking area. Harold noticed that some bikes had their seats turned to the left.

"Does that mean something?" Harold asked Klee, pointing to the bike seats.

"Yes," she told him. "It means that the person who rode that bike wants to reserve it so they can use the same bike later. People sometimes get attached to a particular bike but mostly it's because if classes end for the day and they are staying late, they want to ensure that they have a bike to ride home."

"Everyone will respect that?" Harold asked. Harold thought of all the times in his life when he had seen people upset because someone ate their yogurt from the company fridge or other instances when individuals had put themselves first above everyone else. He could easily imagine a student seeing just one bike left -with a turned seat - and deciding to take it regardless of the turned seat.

"There are always going to be inconsiderate people," Klee said, "but for the most part, no one wants to be known as that person. We're not perfect, but our society has tried to use the art of gentle social engineering rather than surveillance and enforcement."

They were walking while they spoke and getting closer to one of the larger buildings Harold had seen thus far. Large carved wooden doors were wide open and people moved in and out in groups of two and three. This place felt very academic - there was art hanging on the walls and even though Harold had not seen windows on the outside - natural light flooded through entire walls on the interior.

"This is Uncle Ku's building," Brian told him. "I hope you're ready for some stair stepping, he's on the seventh floor."

"You don't use elevators?" Harold was actually fine with going up seven flights of steps - though he couldn't remember the last time he had done so.

"The elevators are just for freight or those who can't use the steps," Brian said. "One of the keys to a long and healthy life is using your body instead of a machine."

Brian said it with the ring of someone throwing off a well known maxim.

"What are the other keys?" Harold asked on a hunch.

"Oh, there's a bunch of them," Klee jumped in. "Let's see "Fix what you can, adapt to the rest. That's one of my favorites." They had reached the stairs now.

"Fifteen plants for every animal protein," Brian threw out.

"Breathing is better than fighting," Klee said. Harold liked that one a lot.

"Helping others is really helping yourself." Brian was taking the stairs one at a time but he seemed to be holding himself back from taking larger strides. Harold was glad. He was also glad that the two of them were doing the talking.

"Appeal to your enemy's better nature..." Klee held the pregnant pause at the end waiting for Brian to finish it.

"...eradicate them if they don't have one." Brian finished it. It was a far more grim adage than the ones before. Harold looked to see if they were pulling his leg, but they weren't.

They had moved on to more positive vibe hippy ideals again. "Well begun is half done," Brian said.

"Don't wait for someone to bring you flowers, plant a garden and take someone flowers!" Klee shouted. They were having fun. The echo of their voices in the stairwell was triumphant.

"Why you do, not what you do!" This was Brian again. Harold liked this one a lot too. There was a lot of wisdom packed in each of these.

"Pain is the precursor to growth," Klee said. Harold stopped paying attention after the third floor. He was in pain - but he tried to tell himself this was the precursor to growth. Climbing the steps was all he could pay attention to. He had wondered if his body had become more fit in the transition from then to now but the climb up the stairs told him that he had more work to do. The relative ease which Klee and Brian had as they went up versus the growing sense of exhaustion he felt told him everything he needed to know. At the fifth floor he stopped to have a rest.

"We're almost there, Harold," Klee told him with the exuberance of youth "Come on, you can do it."

"I just need a moment," he huffed out. Then, his masculine pride came out, wanting to impress this gorgeous young woman - he pushed on when he really wanted to lie down on the floor in a bit of a puddle..

Finally, they reached the seventh floor. Harold was gratified that the two youngsters showed some signs of being out of breath when he caught up to them. They all were still smiling - even Harold.

## Chapter 15

It seemed that Brian's uncle was an important man. The entire seventh floor was his domain. It wasn't an inconsiderable amount of space - in fact, largely because of the light flooding in from the walls, it felt like they were not confined by the walls of the building at all.

Harold could see that there were restrooms to either side of the stairs. An open plan kitchen stood in the center of the room where Uncle Ku was busily chopping vegetables and cooking several things on a flat stovetop. The far side of the floor opened up into a sort of library/study/lounge where several people were sitting on brown leather sofas reading - oblivious to Uncle Ku and his mad-chef routine.

A breeze blew in from a lanai on the opposite side. The floor plan of the space was only broken up by a series of large sliding panels that could obviously be pulled into numerous different configurations. Harold took all of this in while he caught his breath. He felt largely like he had just climbed up into a mad Englishman's treehouse.

Uncle Ku, however, looked more the part of a Spaniard - so maybe it was more like they had come to visit Don Quixote in his secret retreat. Harold looked around to see if he could find Sancho, but instead a stunningly beautiful Asian woman suddenly appeared in the 'kitchen' and told Uncle Ku "I'll take it from here, your guests have arrived."

It was only then that Uncle Ku looked up and greeted them. "Perfect. I was afraid that you would come sooner and as you can see - I wouldn't have had things ready. Satomi will finish up while we settle in." He turned to the woman and kissed her "Thank you, darling. I would be lost without you." She nodded and was obviously pleased with the praise but kept her focus on the work at hand.

"Aloha Auntie," Brian waved at her. She looked up and beamed at him but went back to the task of finishing Uncle Ku's creation. Whatever it was - it smelled incredible. Harold could identify ginger and cinnamon but there was much more going on there.

Uncle Ku went to the sink, washed his hands and then removed his apron before coming around the counter and speaking to them.

"Welcome. Mabuhay. E Komo mai. Youkoso, dozo." He gestured grandly to the entire space making it clear that they were free to make themselves at home. Next he was hugging Klee and kissing her on the cheeks.

She giggled and fake swatted him away. "Oh, behave you old lech. Your wife is right there..."

Uncle Ku exchanged breaths with Brian, briefly touching foreheads and then came to Harold. Harold was quickly wrapped in the warm embrace of an old friend. Uncle Ku pressed his forehead against Harold's head and just as with Brian, the two men inhaled and exhaled deeply.

"Salaam a leycum, my friend." Harold was surprised by the Islamic greeting but responded without a delay in the expected manner "Wa leycum a salaam."

There was a knowing familiarity about Uncle Ku which Harold was confused by, but he tried to hide his surprise. "It's very kind of you to have us here. I'm honored to be your guest."

Uncle Ku smiled in surprise. "No less honored than I at having you as my guest," he said. There was a sparkle in his eye that Harold hadn't noticed before.

Uncle Ku led them to the library room. "Meli, Dustin, Ayesha... would you mind helping us set up for lunch and by all means please join us." The young people who had been reading or studying before were happy to help. In a short while, tables had been brought from behind where the partitions were and everyone was doing their part in putting out chairs, plates, tablecloths, and more. There were perhaps a dozen more people who were all introduced to Harold, but whom he was not able to remember very well after the fact.

In a short time, they were all seated. Uncle Ku sat at the head of a long table with Auntie Satomi next to him. It was obvious the two were deeply in love though from looking at them Harold would guess that she was at least twenty years younger. Harold was a bit surprised to be asked to sit at the other end of the table. He had sort of thought that the paternalistic idea of table 'heads' might have disappeared in a sort of 'round table' future but upon considering it, he realized that was pretty silly. As long as there were rectangular tables, there would be places that held more distinction. Thinking of it rationally, he couldn't think of any reason why the host shouldn't sit in a place of prestige and the guest shouldn't sit in a place of honor. A completely egalitarian society would quickly become dull and boring.

The food was put on the table the same way the tables had been set up - by a joint effort. Dishes were handed around and each served themselves as much as they wanted. Harold was a little surprised to see how much Klee put on her plate. She obviously had a large appetite.

"Harold, I know you probably have lots of questions and believe me, I have lots of questions - as does everyone else - but my request is that we hold off on discussing anything about our guest until later. I confess this is a bit selfish as I plan to sequester him with me for some time after we eat and I don't want him to be tired of answering questions before then. In the meantime, let us eat and talk about work, politics, and religion - the safe topics."

Harold thought he was making a joke but soon realized that Uncle Ku had literally set the tone. With Klee on one side of him and Brian on the other, Harold was a bit shielded from conversation with the other diners but he was glad to eat, listen, and reflect.

Most of the conversation seemed to revolve around work or hobbies but he did hear a little religion and politics thrown in - mostly a sort of universalist moral philosophy along with some gentle griping about how other mutual nations were using natural resources in unsustainable ways. The food was good and it was nice for Harold to observe that even though things had changed a great deal - the best things - food and fellowship - had largely stayed the same.

At the end of the meal, Uncle Ku made an announcement.

"I realize that all of you have things you want to do today but if you want to do them here - you will have to wait for another day. With our guest's permission, I would like to spend the next several hours in deep conversation - just he and I." He nodded to Harold asking his permission.

"Of course, that sounds terrific." Harold felt a slight nervousness at being alone with Uncle Ku but neither Klee nor Brian looked concerned at leaving him.

"We'll be back to get you later this evening," Klee said. "I'm going to go pick some clothes out for you."

I've got a pretty good idea of your size and what will suit you now."

Harold was relieved on two counts. He was glad that his new friends were not abandoning him for good and also relieved that he would not have to do his own shopping. The lack of exchange was incredibly difficult for him - something that he hoped would ease over time. At the same time, he couldn't help wondering what sort of outfit she might get for him.

As the younger guests slowly filtered out, Harold helped Satomi and Ku to clear the plates and dishes. He had wondered if they would be washing up but the question was quickly answered. Satomi brought a bin over and started dumping everything in it. Harold could hear dishes and glasses breaking as she rather joyfully hurled them into her bin.

Ku laughed at the look of shock on Harold's face. "At Kuhio Hall, we use 3-d printed flatware and glasses. They are printed from vege-lon which is made from organic waste. The 3-d printers run on sunlight and most of the food we just ate was grown in the outer walls of this building. Nothing will go to waste."

"It's astounding." Harold was floored by the idea of throwing good food into the bin. "Couldn't that food be fed to someone else though?"

"It could," Ku told him. "Hunger though, is not a problem in our time."

Satomi had disappeared. It took Harold a moment to process what Ku had just said. They were alone in the room now. Ku had said 'in our time.'

"It took me a while after I got back here from the market," Ku said, "but I knew your clothes weren't RSA. I had to dig fairly deep but finally, I found clothes that matched yours."

Ku was walking into the library and motioned that Harold should have a seat. He poured a brown liquor into two glasses and handed one to Harold. It was scotch. Harold sat with the drink in his hand. He waited to hear what else Ku would tell him.

"I know where you are from," Ku said. "Or, maybe I should say, I know 'when' you are from."

There was really no use in denying it. Harold was relieved to not have to carry on the fiction about being from the RSA any longer. Ku was smiling in a reassuring way.

"Well, that's a fucking relief," Harold laughed and took a big sip of the excellent scotch Ku had handed him.

## Chapter 16

"When I saw your clothes in the marketplace, I had this feeling there was something off about you," Ku said. "Then when my nephew and Klee had to drag you away after I gave you that knife..." He paused thinking about the knife "That knife is a real beauty, isn't it. It might be the best I've ever made."

"I've met people from the RSA. They don't react to a gift culture the way you did. They have an intense mentality of scarcity and limited resources and sadly, because of the way they have been subjected to mental control systems and systemic conditioning, their first reaction in a gift culture isn't to react with a sense of fairness...it's to hoard."

Harold considered that. "I think it's the first instinct of a fair number of people from my time as well...the pandemic taught us that."

"When exactly do you come from? I'm guessing that it's sometime in the 2020s but I don't really have enough information to get any more specific than that." Ku felt like he was sitting with an old friend. He hadn't realized what an act of exertion it was to wear the lies he had cloaked himself in. The sense of utter and complete relaxation was certainly temporary - but the scotch tasted incredible, the couch was comfortable, and with Ku, he felt like he was visiting with an old comrade.

"December of 2020," Harold said. "Donald Trump just lost the election but has not yet conceded and the pandemic of COVID-19 is still raging without any vaccine ready yet."

"Yes! I was right, but just on the edge. So you come from the beginnings of the chaos. It's a time I have many questions about but like most things on the cusp - there is more speculation about what was happening at that time than actual documentation - mainly because of the pulse."

"The pulse?" Harold asked.

"I wonder if I should tell you anything about your time...to be honest, I've never met a time traveler before. I don't think anyone has. Do you know how you did it?"

"I'm afraid I have no idea. I drank a bit more than usual, went to bed, and woke up in your hostel over in Aiea. I've been trying not to think about how or if I'm going to be able to get back." Harold really had been trying to avoid those thoughts. If he couldn't get back - everyone and everything he had ever known before today was dead and gone - there would be a literal world of grief to deal with - but if he could return - that wouldn't be the case. He was in a deeply liminal state of not knowing.

"Oh, I have no doubt that you'll make it back," Ku told him. "In fact, I may even remember a reference to something like that...but I still need to decide whether to tell you about your own history or not." He held up his glass, looking at the amber liquid in the natural daylight that filled the room. "Yes, I'm going to tell you whatever you want to know. I will just have to hope that I don't paradox myself or my world out of existence."

Harold was relieved on two counts. First of all, he appreciated the fact that Ku seemed so certain he would be able to return because it eliminated any need to grieve - he could simply think of this as a sort of vacation. Second, he was deeply appreciative of the fact that Ku had decided not to hold anything back from him.

"Let's start at the beginning...Brian has told me some of what happened but I am extremely short on details. Can you start with the end of Trump?"

Ku laughed. "I'm afraid there is no end of Trump, just as there is no end of troubles. I think I know what you mean though. I have the broad strokes but much of the detail was erased in the pulse - at least everything that wasn't set down on paper and preserved - but here you are."

"The divisions that arose from the first Trump presidency never went away. Our scholars have argued that the dissolution of the United States of America actually took place in 2016 as soon as DT took the Republican Party. From 2020 to 2024 there was chaos as the left tried to solve poverty, disease, global warming, and racial injustice and the right accelerated all four to achieve a greater level of control through fear and coercion - although I should clarify - we classify your Democrats and Republicans all as the right and also call them neo-libs, lib-cons, and other terms. When I say left, I'm referring to the broad coalition of the democratic socialists, greens, and black lives matter."

"Amazingly, the form of the USA held itself together long enough for two more presidential elections. DT's second term starting in 2024 was incredibly contentious and the human rights abuses that took place during that time are said to have been the worst in human history - at least up until that time. The election of 2028 was when it all fell apart. Trump abandoned trying to hide his despotism behind democracy at that point. He claimed to have won 100% of the vote and made it illegal for anyone to claim they didn't vote for him. With the House, the Senate, the Supreme Court and every other court behind him - there was nothing to stop him or his policies. It was at this point that the West Coast states and the Northeast States seceded. Did Brian tell you about the suitcase nukes?"

Harold nodded sadly. "Were they completely destroyed? Denver, Chicago? Detroit?"

Ku looked incredibly pained. "Not completely, but they might as well have been. Along with plenty of other places. When the RSA marched in, the greatest exodus in history took place. Latino's, Blacks, Asians - they could see the writing on the wall. They took what they could and fled to California, Mexico, and Canada. Thankfully, they brought a large number of cultural treasures with them but when I think about all the people who died - both in the explosions and then later in the camps."

"So it was definitely the RSA? I mean that makes them straight up nuclear Nazis." Harold was having a hard time bringing himself to see this as reality. "How many died?"

"Tens of millions..." Ku said. "We were largely insulated from it."

"How? How did Hawaii avoid becoming part of it? I mean there was Pearl Harbor, the Marine Base Hawaii, Schofield Barracks, the Hawaii Missile Command..." Harold had wanted to ask about this before.

"In the beginning, Hawaii was allied with California and the Pacific States. There were a few defections to the RSA but for the most part, the command in Hawaii tended to be more aligned with democratic principles and since most of the Marine Corps and the US Navy brass were based in either California or Japan there was a continuity of leadership that chose California and New York. The Air Force was a no brainer. Just about every fighter jockey in any branch was a university graduate and they saw through Trump's sham democracy. Most of the US Air Force flew out of the RSA on the first day of the RSA taking control. Trump and the RSA were able to lock down bases in Georgia, Texas, Florida, and the Carolinas - but most of the biggest assets fled to either New York or California. Still,

there were a lot of ground battles as infantry fought to take tanks, trucks, and weapons south. Cheyenne Mountain in Wyoming did the world the biggest favor of them all. Those heroes somehow permanently disabled the nuclear codes and then self destructed but not before they set up the pulse."

Harold had more questions than he could ask - it was almost impossible to keep them in order. "You keep mentioning 'the pulse'. I don't know what that is, but I gather that it was extremely important."

Ku looked startled. "Of course...that's crazy, but of course you don't know what it is. In our society - it's one of those things that everyone knows, it's foundational, it's like...let me think of a good analogy that might make sense and tell you the importance. It's like the printing press or the invention of agriculture. It's foundational."

Harold couldn't even begin to imagine what it was. He didn't want to try. "What is it?"

Ku took a deep breath. "The US Space Force developed it in conjunction with NASA and the US Air Force - the pulse. It was designed to be the ultimate weapon. It was an electromagnetic beam weapon that when fired from space could disable electronics over broad areas. It was set up with the Starlink Network to be able to completely disrupt and disable any nation's computing and electronic capability permanently."

"It was an EMP? They used it on the RSA?" Harold hated acronyms but there was no choice but to use them.

"It wasn't just 'a' EMP," Ku said. "It was 'the' EMP and they didn't use it on the RSA - they used it on the entire planet. Not a single life taken and the entire world was brought to a halt. Human civilization was forced to abandon digital culture and relearn alternatives."

"How long did it last for?" Harold asked.

Ku laughed. "It's still going. If we can help it, we'll keep it going forever."

A whole bunch of things suddenly clicked in Harold's head. The lack of phones and other devices, the lack of vehicles, and the overall - non-digital, non-electric nature of the society he found himself in. He knew he would find out more about the pulse, but for now he was still focused on the historic aspects. He wanted all the answers - but he needed to pick and choose about what he asked right now.

## Chapter 17

Harold realized that while the history was important to him, what he really should be asking about was the policy and the way things were done here. He wanted to know about the governance and the social safety net, policing, and more. Still, he couldn't help wondering more about the history.

"There's so much I want to know," he said to Ku.

Ku nodded. "I'm sure and as you can imagine - there's a lot I'd like to ask you about. However, given the circumstances, I'm not sure that we should waste any time. Wait...I've got an idea." He stood up and moved to a large bookshelf. He pulled a thick tomb from the shelf. It was a beautiful book with hand tooled leather binding and gold gilt title. In fact, most of the books looked like they had been made by craftsmen - though there were some he could see with the old paper and cloth bindings Harold was used to.

Ku handed the book to Harold. *'The History of Hawai'i after the Fall'*. He returned to the shelf and grabbed two more volumes. *'Mutual Nations and the People Who Make Them'* and *'The Unusual Culture and History of the Republican States of America'*.

"I wrote that one about the RSA," Ku told him. "These will give you a lot of the answers you are looking for - and the RSA book should help you to keep your cover - which, by the way, is something I highly recommend you do. Time travel is - problematic and while I'm willing to take the chance of teaching you about the future - I don't think you should let people know that you come from the past. It could disturb the delicate balance we live under."

Harold nodded and took a sip of the whiskey. He put the three books in his satchel - they pretty well filled it up but he was glad to have them. "I'll return these when I'm done with them."

"If you wish - that would be nice. For now, however, they are yours." Ku was smiling in a big way. "Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?"

Harold shook his head "I don't mind, but I'm afraid you'll probably find it rather boring."

Ku laughed. "Nothing could be further from the truth. Okay, first question - How old are you?"

Harold was surprised by the question because it seemed so banal and unimportant.

"I'm fifty-two," Harold said. Ku's look of complete surprise was not the reaction he had expected.

"You're barely an adult," Ku laughed..."I'm sorry, no offense. I sort of expected but didn't really believe it would be the case. Whatever you do, don't tell anyone else your age - especially Klee, if she finds out she's older than you, you'll never be able to get away with anything."

"Klee?" Harold said. "There's no way. She can't be older than me. She's a young woman. I'd bet she's still in her early thirties at the latest."

Ku laughed more. "I'm sure she would love to hear that, but you are completely wrong. She's turning seventy-five tomorrow." This completely blew Harold's mind.

"Seventy-five years? Are we talking dog years or something? Did solar years get shorter? A year is still three hundred and sixty five days, right?"

Ku waved his hand. "Yeah, yeah...same years now as before. The treatments though, they have gotten very good and we've managed to shave off a bit of the genetic decay that used to age people prematurely. Guess how old I am."

If Klee were seventy-five, Ku must be ancient. Harold would have guessed that he was in his late fifties to early sixties but now - he decided to guess extreme so as to avoid offending his host.

"Two hundred?" It was far higher than he believed possible.

Ku roared with laughter now. "I see what you are doing there. I won't torture you. No, I'm not two hundred but I'm nearly half of that. I'll be ninety-seven next June." This was inconceivable to Harold.

"Well, you certainly look younger than that." He didn't really know what to say. All the history and culture and time travel had been shocking but the fact that he was talking to a man who was nearly a hundred was the hardest thing for him to accept so far.

"Do people still die?" Harold asked.

"Oh, yes. Of course they do - most people are happy to live for a century but some decide to push on. There's only so much that we can do to stop time. The oldest in our society tend to be in the one-forties but I've heard that the Chinese sometimes push it further than that. After a century, the body just starts to decay and go downhill - that's unbearable for most people and they choose to pass."

"So is dying a choice for most people?" This was an astounding idea.

"The choice is whether to die while they have all their functions working or whether to live with degraded functions. Most people choose the former."

"I haven't seen many people who look like as old as we do," Harold remarked.

"That makes sense," Ku told him. "Most people prefer to cling to the blossom of youth. I've decided to let my age show." It was a remarkable statement from a man who looked nearly half a century younger than he actually was. "And that reminds me - we should determine an age for you. My suggestion is that you go with something like eighty. That makes you older than Klee but since everyone knows the RSA doesn't have as good a treatment regimen - that will sound believable given how you look."

"So how old is Brian? Is he like seventy-two?" It sounded ridiculous, but he had to ask.

Ku shook his head, "Nope, Brian is a pup. My little sister had him when she was sixty. He's only barely in his thirties." Had he not been a man who had somehow gone to bed and traveled through time, he wouldn't have believed a word of it. Sure, Brian's age was believable but becoming a mother in the sixth decade? Astounding.

"I have some more questions for you.." Ku said "Did you use," he made air quotes " 'social networks' ?" Harold briefly allowed his thoughts to wonder what other hand signals and gestures had survived the passage of time.

"Sure, " he said. "Everyone did. You almost have to use them. I probably used them less than most people after the first ten years - something about them started to really feel creepy, but in 2020 you pretty much had to use a cell phone, social networks, email, and the internet."

"You had a choice and you still used them?" Ku seemed shocked by this idea. "Why would you do that?"

Harold knew that social media and social networks were having a bad effect on his world and the people who lived in it - but Ku's reaction seemed pretty extreme.

"I don't understand," Harold said, honestly "I think I need more information. Tell me what you know about social networks - maybe we aren't talking about the same thing."

"The privacy apocalypse," Ku said. "The data vampires. The control systems." He said these things like he had said 'the pulse' - they all sort of made sense to Harold but not in the way that Ku was obviously intending them - as cultural tropes that everyone understood as a sort of shorthand for an era - much like in Harold's time they would talk about 'robber barons' or 'the 1%'.

"You have to explain further," Harold said. "I was born in the dawn of the digital age. Where I was yesterday, Facebook is only a teenager and the internet isn't old enough to have become a doctor yet."

Ku still looked surprised but he tried to explain "The pulse happened a couple centuries ago. We've been living without the sort of electronic network you are talking about since that time - we have tech, but it's very different - and as you might have noticed - we don't allow ourselves to be constantly monitored or surveilled. We use smart buildings, smart roads, smart tech - but that data is under very tight control because of what happened in your time - or, in the time shortly after your time."

"What happened?" Harold asked.

"What didn't happen would be a better question. People were completely exploited and manipulated. It's how the Trumps came to power, it's how the Republican States were born, it's how the suitcase bombers were made, it's how people watched passively or even helped while their neighbors, friends, and coworkers were marched into death and slavery camps. There were cases where rogue data-tech convinced parents to kill their own children - and that's not even the worst of it. People were manipulated into poisoning themselves, destroying the environment, ignoring destruction happening right before their eyes....and, pardon my surprise - but I'm just amazed that at the beginning you just accepted it, let it happen, embraced it. I mean, Facebook - come on - it's like the foundational strength of the RSA..and you mention it like it's a cooperative or a shared industry."

Harold didn't know what to say. "We didn't know. It all happened so fast. There were people who sounded the alarm but most people didn't listen to them. So there are no phones here, no laptops, no internet? I've seen some tech - like in the cafeteria this morning...for coffee.."

"The pulse changed everything. I guess I need to tell you more about that. Essentially, every day the entire planet is blasted with a super EMP. It's been refined over the years - so it doesn't do any damage to people like the old ones did - no cancer or lymphoma from it - but it still fries any circuitry that gets exposed to it. Any memory or silicon data that isn't shielded gets fried."

"But Brian said they still use a lot of electronics and hand held devices in the RSA..." Harold was almost sure that was what he had heard this morning. "How do they do it?"

Ku sighed. "We're not completely sure. We think they have built underground bunkers and they force everyone to either leave their devices or take themselves into them when the satellites are passing overhead."

"If you have satellites, why don't you look?" Harold was a little surprised to hear there was still space tech up there - but on reflection - he was in the future so he should have expected it.

Ku looked at him askance, maybe to see if he was joking. "We wouldn't use our technology to violate their privacy that way. They can do as they want."

"But you mentioned they are using control systems to control their population. Doesn't that kind of make it a responsibility to find out."

Ku shook his head. "You really are from the past. They would do that, they would violate our rights, they would violate our sovereignty, but that doesn't make it right for us to do the same. We give them ideas, we try to find out what we can from those few people we encounter, we have tried to send people in to observe - but we would never watch them from space. Never."

"Do they watch you? Aren't you worried about space weapons?" It was a serious question but Ku brushed it off.

"They don't have access. We won't let them. The mutual nations have complete autonomy and authority in space and we don't let anyone else up into orbit."

This was an astounding revelation to Harold. "How do you stop them?"

"If something shows up in space and we haven't sent it, we destroy it. We have a treaty among the mutuals. Everything up there has to comply."

"Doesn't that violate their rights to go there?"

"Of course not. Space covers everything. they can have their own land but the air, the water, and the space around our planet - that is not available for claiming or utilizing outside of the Commons Treaty."

"What if they want to go to another planet?" Harold was genuinely curious.

"We'd be glad to help them. They've tried before but they won't take our assistance and frankly, it's not the kind of thing that can be done by just one country or nation - it's too big."

Harold wanted to ask more questions about space but he was more fascinated by trying to understand what he had already seen.

"So there are no laws here? No police?" It seemed unlikely.

"That's right," Ku told him. "You can do what you want. No one will stop you."

"What if I want to smash this glass? Or break a window? Maybe throw the glass through the window."

"You can do as you like, but I don't know why you would want to do that."

"No one would stop me. Would I get a ticket or be fined?"

"No one would do anything. I suppose we would clean it up if you didn't and fix the window but aside from that..."

"Okay, I kind of understand that robbery and property crime don't exist because anyone can have what they want but what about crimes of violence or passion? What about deviants? How do you protect people?"

Ku took a sip of his drink. "How did you protect people?"

"Well, we had jails and police. We had a whole system of laws and punishment."

"Did that protect people? Were they safe? I've read about your time, it seems there were a lot of murders, a lot of awful things people did to one another...maybe I read false accounts...didn't those things happen?"

Harold was stuck. "Yes, of course, but it probably would have been worse...I mean, well this isn't really what I believe but I'm sort of trapped by my own indoctrination here....No, people weren't safe in my time. The laws and police didn't stop terrible things from happening to people...but, do you just let people murder each other? I mean what happens to child molesters? What about rapists?"

"These things do happen. In my life, I've seen some of it. My daughter was sexually assaulted by a man when she was still in her teens..."

"What happened to him? I mean, I'm very sorry that happened. " Harold realized he was treading on a traumatic event.

"Well, she told me about it. I asked her what she wanted to do. She was angry and dealing with the emotions and I tried to give her the space she needed."

"Was he arrested? Did he go to jail?"

Ku looked at him like he was crazy. "Of course not. I thought about it for a few days and then I killed him."

"What? You just killed him? And that was it?" Harold was astounded.

Ku was looking serious as he explained "No, of course that wasn't it. I went to the man's family and I explained what he had done. His mother told me that it wasn't the first time he had been involved in such a thing - something my daughter had already told me. Then, after considering the circumstances, I drafted a letter to his family and told them that I planned on killing him. This gave them the chance to warn him so he could either leave, possibly come after me, or maybe the whole family would come after me. It could easily have led to a long bloody feud if it had been handled incorrectly. It turns out

that they knew it was a problem and they didn't even warn him. I didn't let him suffer, but I couldn't let him continue to do such things."

"There were no consequences?" Harold could hardly believe this.

"Of course there were consequences. I live with it. I always have to wonder if maybe there was something I could have done differently. His family lives with it."

"What if they'd have come after you?"

"I have a very big family," Ku said. "Given the circumstances, no one would have called coming after me justified. They knew that and they were complicit in it. They probably should have done something about him after the first or the second incident."

"Okay...but what about a non-justified murder...that would be different, right?"

"We have had feuds," Ku told him "Eventually someone has to have a better nature."

Harold remembered the adage Klee and Brian had used in the stairwell... "Appeal to your enemy's better nature, eradicate them if they don't have one." Apparently, these were not just empty words.

## Chapter 18

They talked for hours. Ku was fascinated by the little things in the world of 2020 - the corruption of politics, the intricacies of shopping and investing, the many fragmented 'cultures' that had disappeared in the intervening centuries - things like 'tech bros', 'shopping culture', 'you-tubers', and 'partially paid employer provided single user health care plans'. Harold wasn't an expert on any of those things in his own time - but in Ku's world - there didn't exist a better authority. Everything from reality television to how supermarkets were filled with hundreds of types of cereal but they were all produced by two or three companies - and the same of course was true for almost everything else. Ku sometimes referred to Harold's time as 'Monopoly Times'.

Ku was fascinated about how the people of Harold's time had let themselves be corrupted, manipulated, and subsumed by big tech, big oil, big banks, big data, big government, and big personalities. Harold was surprised that some of the names he would have expected to be still remembered were long gone - Jeff Bezos, Warren Buffet, Bill Gates - Ku had heard of them but they were culturally less important than many others - it was similar to how no one in 2020 knew who Stephan Girard was - even though he had been the richest man in the world in 1820. Two centuries was a long time.

"I'm curious how all this works," Harold said. "What is the governance structure? Is it uniform throughout the Mutual Nations? How does economics play it's role? What is the education situation? How did the transition happen? Was it a peaceful revolution?"

Ku sat back in his chair and sighed. "I wish that I could tell you it had been. There was a lot of bloodshed even here in Hawaii. Everywhere. The suitcase nukes were probably the worst of it in terms of numbers, but the individual suffering - it was a horror for everyone and nothing was resolved quickly."

"Maybe I should start with how things work now and then I'll tell you how we got here. Our society is governed from a bottom up democracy. Every person from ten years to death is required to participate. You can't opt out. You can vote 'pass' but you must vote."

"From the age of ten? That's insane. Aren't you worried about your policies and structures being ham-stringed by ten year old thinking?"

"Ten year olds make up a small portion of the population. They are the largest stakeholders who can make rational decisions on their own. They will have to live with the consequences for the longest. How old did you have to be to participate in your time?"

"It was generally eighteen," Harold said.

"And was there a top age as well? That would make sense given the health and medical technology of your time. I've read that a great number of people over seventy had fairly severe diminished intellectual capacity - not all mind you." Ku was serious.

Harold laughed. "That would have been a good idea. The past several decades," he caught himself "in my time, were more or less money, power, and land grabs by the baby boomer generation. They set policy that clearly favored those over fifty as soon as they all turned fifty. Then, they just kept cranking it up to favor themselves at whatever cost it took - the climate, democracy, poverty for billions...they just kept going." Harold was starting to see the value of allowing ten to eighteen year olds the power to

vote. They were disenfranchised in his time but they provided balance here. "Okay, I see your point, but go on, please."

Ku continued. "Each neighborhood is made up of a maximum of one-hundred people. It took some time but what we found is that more than that is unmanageable and less than that is too easily dominated by strong personalities. Everyone from ten up gathers monthly for neighborhood meetings. This is where they decide on the things that matter to them - which services they want to contribute to, who to put in charge of daycare or maintenance, how to distribute neighborhood agriculture, what infrastructure they want to adopt or retire. Things like that."

"So are householders beholden to these decisions?" Harold was curious.

"Of course they are. There are generally a few neighborhoods available for a householder or family group to be a part of. They can choose the one that best suits them but then they are bound by the majority rule - unless they choose to leave and join a new neighborhood."

"You mentioned daycare," Harold said. "I'm curious about schools - how does it work with not having schools?"

Ku looked at him as if he had said red were blue. "Of course we have schools. You are sitting in one right now. What in the world gave you the idea there are no schools? Schools are one of the pillars of our society."

"Well, this is a university, an institute, right?" Harold felt like a fool seeing the obviousness of where he was sitting. "So this is a place of higher learning, but I saw tons of kids today and when I asked Brian and Klee about school, they told me that there is no mandatory schooling so I just assumed that there were no schools." He was seeing the gap in his logic now. As he said the words, he realized that Klee and Brian hadn't said there were no schools, only that kids weren't forced to go. His conditioning had taken the leap to assuming that kids wouldn't go to school unless they were forced and therefore there must not be any schools - but he realized - they had even said that some of the kids in the marketplace had tried school.

Ku rescued him. "Oh, I think I see what you are thinking. No, we don't have elementary schools or high schools or junior high schools. Those institutional programming machines were one of the first things we did away with. There is no 'age based' learning in our society. Only learning."

"So how are the classes broken up? How do you standardize the curriculum if you don't know who you will be teaching?"

Ku was shaking his head again - almost in exasperation. "If you can't read - you go to a beginning readers class. If you want to know detailed history about socks - you find an expert on socks. If you want to learn to be a farmer - you go to the farm. To a large extent - we are all teachers and students in our society. Would it surprise you to know that one of my most knowledgeable pupils on RSA culture is an 11-year-old boy? I have him lecture for junior courses - some of them filled with people four and five times his age."

"They respect his authority?" Harold was trying to imagine an 11 year old controlling a class of forty year olds.

"He's not telling them to mop floors! They respect his knowledge, his expertise, his ability to share that knowledge. His authority is obvious - there is no ignoring it. Speaking of which, I need to keep you away from him, he'll see through you even quicker than I did."

It was a lot for Harold to adjust to. He decided to go back to the political structure. "Okay, but back to governance - the neighborhood is the foundational structure. How do you keep neighborhoods from conflicting with each other or fighting over resources? What if, say, two neighborhoods both claim the same papaya tree?"

"Ho'o'ponopono." Ku said. "Other mutual nations use it as well, some have different structures but they come out to the same thing. The representatives of the two neighborhoods are locked in a room together and they can't come out until they both agree on a mutually satisfying outcome."

"What if one kills the other?"

"You are obsessed with murder, my friend. It has happened. In this case, almost every time I've heard of this happening - the neighborhood of the killer yields to the other side. Even if one person is violent, the majority of one hundred are almost never. If you think about it, it's pretty unlikely that a neighborhood would vote to send a violent killer into ho'o'ponopono anyway. They would send a negotiator or a person with persuasive skills. The shame of someone dying in negotiations - it is unbearable. As I said, it has happened - but it is very rare."

"Are you familiar with the laws of numbers and averages? Statistics?" Ku asked him.

Harold nodded yes.

"Think of it this way. A huge jar filled with grains of sand. It is extremely unlikely that any one person would ever be able to guess the exact number. The guesses of those asked would vary - some would guess a billion, others - maybe ten year olds - they might guess a thousand. Nearly everyone will miss the true number by a long shot. But here is the amazing thing about true representative democracy...about every person's vote being counted, about giving everyone - even the senile or the dimmest witted a vote. When you take all the votes of a community and you add them up and then divide by the total number of votes (or guesses) - the result will generally be closer than any one person was able to get. The larger the sample of people - the closer you get. So that ten-year-old who said one thousand was way off - so was the senile codger who said a billion - but their numbers average out to much closer than either of them got. Then when you add in all the sane, rational, educated, erudite guesses of the rest - you come pretty close to the answer - sometimes exactly to it."

"But you force everyone to participate?" Harold asked.

"There is no forcing. If you live in a neighborhood, you will be asked. You can pass, but you have the chance to voice your preference. Neighborhoods send recallable representatives to community boards - these are made up of fifty neighborhoods - two from each. A neighborhood represents one hundred and a community represents five thousand people or so. Neighborhoods can ask community boards to settle things like the papaya dispute you mentioned if ho'o'ponopono doesn't work. Neighborhoods can choose to leave communities just as householders can leave neighborhoods. Each neighborhood sends two recallable delegates to the city boards - city boards are made up of one hundred delegates - so fifty neighborhoods or up to a quarter million people in each city - and again - communities can choose to leave a city if they don't feel represented. Here in Hawai'i we have a city board on each island - though

some are smaller than others. On Oahu we have six city boards - we represent the majority of population in our nation - but our nation board - which we call congress - is made up of two delegates from each city board - so twelve delegates from Oahu and two each from Kauai, Maui, Lanai, Molokai, and four from Hawai'i island. Ni'ihau has one delegate because of the small population - but they play a very important role. Our congress is made up of twenty-five recallable delegates who directly represent the people. There is no need for an executive as simple democracy works well with twenty-five. We send delegates to the larger governing bodies as well. It's a simple democratic federated system built on municipalities and total representation." Ku paused "Pretty neat, right?"

Harold was impressed by the simplicity. "Is there no representation of unions or workers? Are disputes settled the same way all the way up and down the system?"

Ku smiled. "Yup, it's super effective. Unions are represented in the neighborhoods and cities they exist. If you respect the individual, you respect the work of that individual. You tend to have whole neighborhoods that fall into similar interests."

"Do people have to move in order to change neighborhoods?" This sounded silly to ask, but Harold was genuinely curious.

"Usually," Ku told him, "But there are some cases where people live on a cusp and can simply change - as long as the other neighborhood want's them."

## Chapter 19

There were millions of questions they wanted to ask one another and the night grew long. Eventually, Brian and Klee returned. As much as Harold would have liked to stay and talk through the night with Uncle Ku, there was no way that could happen. He was simply too exhausted. Uncle Ku and Auntie Satomi - who had reappeared at some point, though remaining clear of their conversation, were also showing signs of being tired - and given their age, that was no surprise. Harold still couldn't believe they were as old as Ku had told him - though to be fair, he was making an assumption about Auntie Satomi - but perhaps she was quite a lot younger than Uncle Ku.

Klee looked absolutely radiant. It was her 75th birthday eve, a fact that was far harder to believe when he looked at her than anything else he had learned. She was absolutely stunning. There was a glow about her that simply radiated health and energy. When they got down to the bikes, she indicated a flat package strapped to the back of his bike.

"I got your new clothes! I really think you are going to like them. I can't wait to see you in them tomorrow." She grabbed him and gave him a quick hug. Seventy-five? That simply couldn't be right.

As they rode, Brian was silent and riding ahead of them but Klee pulled her bike next to Harold's so they could have those breathless bike chats as they pedaled, though, the bikes did seem to be doing most of the work.

"Did you leave family behind in the eff-ess?" she asked him. "I'm fascinated by the family structures there - though, I have to admit - I'm horrified by it as well. It sounds a lot like punishment."

Harold wasn't sure which aspect she was talking about and decided to just answer her question without asking details about what he was already supposed to know. He wished he would have asked Ku a bit more about domestic arrangements - both in the RSA and in the Mutuals.

"My wife and son are still there," he said - which was sort of true but only if there was actually here but in the past - although, his son being in California - that wasn't really true. "My son is away studying."

"Does your wife have other husbands?" It was a very odd question and as he considered it - it disturbed his sense of equilibrium. If he had left the past and never returned it was possible that she had remarried and it was also possible that she had remarried multiple times or never remarried. He knew this wasn't what she was asking and it raised all kinds of possibilities in his mind. This got him to thinking about his wife though and her death. It was likely that her bones were still here, under him somewhere - in a grave. He wasn't sure whether this was something he should be thinking about at all.

Of course, there was more to his thinking about it than just curiosity. He was a man and Klee was beautiful and - if he wasn't mistaken - at least a little bit interested in him. Harold was self-aware enough to realize that he was looking for liberty to see where this could head. Still, he was so disoriented by everything and there was no need to make rash decisions when he was tired and confused - definitely a bad idea. He was also aware that the scotch had loosened him up a bit.

"I really don't know her domestic situation these days," Harold said. "I don't even know if I will ever go back - so if she did have other husbands, I certainly would understand."

Klee seemed impressed. "That's really cool. I respect that. From what I've read, most male-female

relationships in the RSA are more like ownership contracts - it looks like you keep a little bit of the Mutuals with you."

"What about you, Klee? What's your family situation?" He had wanted to ask Ku this question, but something had told him that digging for information from a third party was considered very rude -and so he hadn't.

"Well, you know....it works really differently here. My two oldest boys share a father - he and I were partners for a long time before we realized that it just wasn't fun any longer. We still spend some time together but we haven't lived together for a long time. It's better this way. My daughter - she was an implant. I know lots of people don't think implants are a good idea, but the more I read about it, the more I realized just how good an idea it was. She's really thrived and one of the best things about being an implant is that every man who donated prior to her birth - they all share a bit of paternal feeling towards her. She's worked it too - there was never more of a Daddy's girl than her."

Harold might have been shocked to find out she had three children if he had learned it earlier, but now, knowing her age - it seemed a very reasonable number. He had no idea what an implant was and he had to ask.

"What's an implant?"

"Oh my god, I forgot the genetic manipulation is completely banned in the RSA. It probably started here after you left. I've heard that the anti-genetic propaganda is so high in the eff-ess that there are people who don't even believe it's real."

Thinking to his own time and the people who had been admitted into hospital critical care units with severe COVID-19 but who still didn't believe the disease was real, Harold completely believed what she said to be true.

"I'm not one of those people," Harold clarified. "I just don't know what an implant is and I don't want to make any assumptions."

The night air was cool and the smell of night blooming jasmine wrapped them in a magical aura. Brian pedaled ahead. Soft accent lights illuminated the trail ahead of them where Brian led the way. Harold glanced over his shoulder and confirmed that the lights went out when they had passed by. There was no light pollution where it wasn't needed.

"Maybe the best way to explain is just to explain. There were over ten-thousand male samples in the database when Suki was constructed They took my egg and made sure that there were no inherited defects or abnormal markers and then in the lab they fertilized the egg with a constructed male sperm that had been given all the genetic traits I had asked for. They don't reveal who the donors of the traits were and I've never told what it was I selected. Then they implanted the fertilized egg back in me and nine months later - out came my awesome daughter."

"Ethnically, she is super-neutral. She is a natural athlete, has a quick mind, and a super easy going personality. She is my best best-friend and as we both get older, it just becomes more and more amazing that I carried her and helped raise her to be the woman she is."

"You helped?"

"Well, yeah, of course. Kid's aren't property and they aren't objects. She was raised by all the people around her. We had some pretty serious battles at times and there were some periods when we didn't talk for months at a time. I can laugh about it now, but it was difficult back then."

"Ah, so you haven't solved the problem of teenagers..." Harold laughed.

Klee laughed with him. "Oh, her teen years were fine, it was her thirties that were difficult. She was such a righteous bitch...but then, so am I. Thank god for her dads."

Disjointed again, Harold looked at the radiant beauty riding next to him - her daughter was potentially older than his wife. Maybe older by a decade...it just wasn't possible, but then, it was. Here they were.

They had arrived back at the hostel. The trip back had seemed far too short. The cool air, the long breaks between questions and answers as they pedaled, lived, and came to know each other a bit more. They parked the bikes in the rack, Harold took his package of clothing from the bike and they walked back up through the hostel. There were people lounging in different areas, it felt like a mellow sort of cocktail party - soft conversations, gentle breezes.

"You must be exhausted," Klee said to him.

"I am." He was.

Brian saw a group of friends and wished them both good night telling them he would see them the next day. Harold wasn't so sure he would see tomorrow - at least here - and the idea had occurred to him that it was possible that he wouldn't see any tomorrow at all. Perhaps he had died and somehow was seeing the last thing he had wished for. Here he was.

And there they were. Klee and him. Alone strolling through the lobby.

"I'll walk you up to your room," she told him. "This place can be a little disorienting at first."

She took his arm and they went to the stairs. To his room where they stood facing each other outside of his door. How was this woman this beautiful? Could this be anything other than a dream?

Harold was at a loss. He desperately wanted to kiss her. He thought that she wanted to kiss him or wanted him to kiss her. He was too old for this. He had thought he would never have to suffer through this sort of lusty confusion again when he got married. And with that, he thought of his wife. He pictured her and he remembered how lucky he was to have her.

"It has been a remarkable day," he told Klee. "I am so grateful that we met in the bathroom this morning."

Klee laughed a loud horse snort. "That's the first time I've ever heard that! You sure know how to sweet talk a girl."

"I'm mentally and physically exhausted," Harold said to her. "Please excuse my horrible choice of words. I must have heard someone else say it sometime..." He was also laughing.

He took her hands and kissed both of her cheeks. "You have a big day tomorrow. I'm grateful I get to be a part of it."

She pushed her forehead against his and they both inhaled deeply. "You better be. Now go get some sleep old man. Aloha."

With that she kissed him directly on the mouth and before he could react turned and walked away down the hallway.

It was a dreamlike ending to an extraordinary day. After one more visit to the infamous bathroom, Harold returned to his room, took off his dusty old 21st century clothes and lay down on the astoundingly comfortable bed. He wondered where and when he might wake up - or if he would wake up at all - but the power of his exhaustion was such that he fell asleep within moments of his head touching the pillow.

## Chapter 20

Harold woke up.

It was remarkable - any way that you thought about it. He was waking up. He had become conscious and left the dream state but wasn't sure whether to open his eyes or not. He wanted to enjoy the feeling of liminal power as he lay there, not knowing if he were in his time, the future, or maybe even somewhere else. He thought about all that had happened the previous day. Was it real? Had he simply dreamed it? Was he going to open his eyes and return to his life in 2020?

He tried to gauge whether he would be relieved or disappointed. On the one hand, his wife and son. His friends, his entire life. On the other, he didn't want to give up what he had found the previous day - a far better world...and...being honest with himself, an exciting and beautiful woman who had kissed him goodnight.

Harold tried to tell himself that there was a third possibility - that he would be somewhere or somewhere else - but he already knew where he was before he opened his eyes. The lack of freeway sounds, the songs of the birds, the amazingly clean smell of the air. He was still in the future.

He opened his eyes and a sense of profound relief rushed over him. He felt a moment of guilt - that he had chosen this world over his wife and his son, but then allowed himself to negotiate the guilt away. His wife and son were still in the past - and it was very possible that he was too. In any event, he was here and all he had known before yesterday was dust and history.

He was alone in the communal bathroom today and after having a wash, he returned to his room and opened the package of clothing Klee had picked out for him. The clothes were folded into a beautiful square of silk cloth about a yard on each side. It was a vibrant electric blue and once the clothes were removed from it, Harold saw that it was obviously meant to be used as a scarf. He had seen men and women wearing them the day before. The color was masculine but also alive. So alive.

On top of the clothes themselves was a cardboard folder with a hand written note on it. "I had so much fun with you yesterday. Mahalo. Klee." She'd written a big heart next to her name. Harold felt his heart respond but told himself he was being silly.

Opening the folder, he saw a copy of their portrait from the day before. With a backdrop that looked like some sort of lunar colony - there he was in a space suit - looking slightly amused while Klee leaned down and said something to him while Brian stood with his hand on Harold's shoulder looking heroically into the distance. The photo was black and white and it was truly spectacular - like something from a magnificent space opera. They were the future personified. He put the photo in his satchel with his books, pen, knife, and journal.

The clothes themselves were far less exuberant than he had feared. Light and loose black trousers that cinched up at the waist with a drawstring - something like a hybrid of sweatpants and business slacks but with a far looser and more comfortable cloth than either. The shirt was a simple button down white linen shirt, it too was loose fitting and the buttons were that same deep blue as the scarf. The shirt had three quarter length sleeves with a sort of natural cuff sewn in. As far as shoes, some things never change and one of them is that in Hawai'i- less is preferred when it comes to shoes. The shoes were black with stout rubber bottoms and mostly open on the foot. They were something very close to sandals but with closed toes and a single strap that tied from the heel to over the top of the foot.

All in all, the clothes were much more comfortable than any he had worn in the past or future. They were made for comfort and usability, not for profit. Harold didn't feel silly putting them on, they were, to his sensibility, a bit theatrical - but not ostentatious or too showy. He felt that they would allow him to blend in perfectly while not making a show of himself. Klee had done an amazing job. On top of picking a style he found himself liking quite a bit, she had gotten his measurements nearly perfect. The clothes fit like they had been tailored for him.

Wrapping the scarf around his neck and feeling just a little bit foolish in the unfamiliar clothes, Harold set out to find the dining hall and his new friends.

He found it without too much bumbling. Walking in, he looked for Klee but she was nowhere to be found. Brian was sitting at a large communal table and waved him over. Harold went over to the table and decided he wouldn't ask where Klee was. He was feeling a bit like a teenager with a crush and was determined not to let others know about it.

Brian introduced him to the people at the table. Harold noted their names but knew that he wouldn't remember them later. They ranged in age from late teens to thirties - though, he reminded himself, that didn't mean it was how old they were. After getting a plate of food he found himself sitting next to Brian on one side and a woman named Eliza on the other.

Eliza was an advocating consultant. Brian introduced her as such and of course it was as if he had said she was a blimply mundlestiff to Harold, but Harold welcomed the opportunity to learn.

"What does an advocating consultant do?" Harold asked pleasantly. He was guessing it was a sort of lawyerly profession based on the name but in a society that seemingly had no laws or enforcement, that seemed rather pointless.

Eliza didn't look surprised he was asking. "Brian told us you've been living in the RSA. It must be so nice to be back home. I can't imagine what it was like for you."

Harold smiled. "Thank you. It is more than a joy to be here again."

"An advocating consultant is something unique to the Mutuals," she told him. "In the RSA they have courts and lawyers and judges but here, because we settle everything through councils and ho'o'ponopono - we don't have any need for that. Instead, there are multipot people like me who are able to consume exhaustive research on any subject and help one side or the other to build a better argument or understand an issue better."

It all sounded very matter of fact but despite the words mostly making sense, Harold still had no idea of what her work was. "What's a multipot?" he asked her. It seemed an important piece of the puzzle.

She looked at him a little funny. "Brian said that you would ask some strange questions...and that sometimes he felt like you were from another planet. I see what he meant now. A multipot is a person who doesn't specialize in one field or another. The unique strength of a multipot is the ability to do a deep dive into any subject and achieve expert status on it in a relatively short time. We're not very common, but most of us end up either finding a path like mine - as an advocating consultant or else moving from one career to another to another to another - because the downside of being a multipot is that we tend to get bored and restless and then become interested in something new."

Harold knew several people who fit that bill in his time. It was interesting that here, they had managed to identify it as a skill and, as in the case of Eliza, they had harnessed it as a career or a superpower.

"Jack of all trades," Harold said.

"Encyclopedia Jill," Eliza replied with a laugh. "Thanks for leaving that 'Master of none' bit off though. I know that's how the old phrase goes."

"What are some of your favorite advocacy topics?" Harold asked her. He had no idea what to call them but she seemed to understand what he was asking.

"Oh, everything. Recently, I've been working with cattle shepherds on the West Side. There are a couple of communities and they had issues with overgrazing in shared areas and to a lesser extent with distribution of water for gardeners versus livestock."

Harold was a little surprised. "You mean everyone doesn't always get along here? I was really sort of under the impression that all this kind of political and property stuff had been worked out."

Eliza almost spit her coffee out. "Yeah, right. People will always have these issues as long as there are people. Well, if you mean the grabbing something in your hand and holding onto it for dear life while saying 'mine, mine, mine' then yeah, we've done a pretty good job of that but there's always the battle of possession - those that have want to keep and those that don't have want to take - there is a balance but it's a delicate one."

"It's what we had government for," Harold said without thinking about how his statement might be taken.

"When you say government, are you talking about a controlled enforcer class?" Eliza asked him.

"Well, yes - that - meaning police and the like but also courts and laws. They were designed to keep the peace."

"Did your laws protect the have-nots from the haves? Because I've heard that the RSA system is pretty much exactly the opposite - the enforcer class works for the judicial class who work for the legislative class who work for the capitalist class, right?"

Harold tried to work it out in his head. That sounded about right. Lobbyists and finance funded politicians who installed judges who used police to create better situations for the capitalist class. She'd nailed it.

"Does the RSA government exist for any other reason than protecting the rich from the poor or the strong from the weak?"

Harold couldn't really speak about the RSA government but from what he had learned so far, he was probably safe just discussing the American system in general.

"That's what people said - they said it was for things like protecting the citizens from attacks from foreign powers or terrorists as well as protecting the rights of all citizens."

"People actually believe this?" Eliza said with obvious disbelief. "They think, for example that the RSA would protect citizens from an attack from California or the New York Alliance?"

"Well, it's what they say," Harold replied.

"Okay, so if the RSA invaded and conquered Russia, they would then protect those people and their work?"

"I would think so."

"And if the opposite happened?" Harold was starting to understand that Eliza was really good at what she did.

"I am a bit out of my depth," he admitted "but yes, I think so."

"So really, neither side does anything for the workers - except put them in harm's way by engaging in warfare."

"Well there is taxation," Harold said. "We can't forget that the RSA still operates on a monetary system so all the work done is monetized and taxed and then that tax is used to pay for the defense and the government programs that protect citizens."

"One of the great lessons of history is that the wealthy don't need to be defended and the other is that government is a means of the rich taxing the poor. When nations are at war with one another, the wealthy men of those same nations dine on expensive meals and gamble with one another just as when the nations are at peace. The true function of the governments and the courts and the judiciary and the police and the military is to take the wealth generated by the poor and distribute it to the wealthy. The inequality of wealth is a direct result of government."

"You're saying that governments create poverty?"

"That's exactly what I am saying," Eliza said. "Where there is the necessitus man or woman, there is the opportunity for hoarding of power, tyranny, and fascist control systems."

"But you are free," Harold point out, gesturing to all in the room, "Are you not?"

Eliza smiled and nodded. "We are free because we have no government. Do you understand now?"

She was very good at her job.

## Chapter 21

Others at the table had become interested in the conversation. Brian leaned over and whispered in Harold's ear "Never debate a multipot unless you enjoy losing."

"All of this sounds wonderful," Harold said, "But how do you keep the peace? How do you keep people from robbing each other?"

Eliza was ready for this question. "Perhaps it's because of the time we've been living this way, but essentially, I think it comes down to the fact that it is easier for us not to rob and steal from one another than it would be for us to do so. It happens, but it is generally an aberration of some sort - it's harder to steal and cause strife in the community than it is to exist within it."

Harold considered this. If everyone had food, shelter, the ability to learn, and essentially could get whatever they wanted - there wasn't any need to take anything with violence - in this case violence would be for violence sake alone.

"So there is no criminal class here?" Harold asked.

"How could there be?" She asked him back. "We don't have a state stripping away the necessities of the needy which is what breeds such a class. We don't need laws that say 'stealing is bad' because we allow people to work and to enjoy the benefits of that work without worrying about shelter, security, or sustenance."

Harold was having a hard time coming to grips with the idea that there were no courts, no enforcer class of police, and no criminal code.

"There are no prisons?" Harold knew this from his conversation with Ku the night before but he still found it hard to believe. "Nowhere to send people who need to reform?" He knew better than mentioning punishment.

There was collective laughter. "No one was ever reformed in a prison. I remember reading that they used to call the police who worked in prisons 'corrections officers' and other kinds of silly terms. If someone needs reform, they will not find it locked in a cell. We are more likely to lock the people who don't have a better nature out than to lock them in. Lock them out of community, lock them out of fellowship, lock them out of work opportunities, lock them out of the Mutuels themselves. We have bad people and like bad pieces of rice or rotten fruit - they either flow to the edges and drift away or they are disposed of."

Harold was again aware that there was an almost blase' edge of violence when discussing people who 'lacked a better nature.' He was interested as to where the bad seeds would drift to, but Brian let him know it was time for them to depart.

"Most of us are going to Klee's party today. It's going to be epic."

"Where is she?" Harold had wanted to ask since arriving and welcomed the opportunity.

"She went to Waikiki early to get things ready. Her family is already gathered down there and it's Klee so you know it's going to be one hell of a party. By the way, she told me to make sure that I bring you

and not to let you escape."

"I wouldn't dream of it, " Harold said. "There is nowhere I would rather go today." It was true. Not in time or space.

There was a huge group of them, almost more than there were bikes outside, but with quite a few deciding to walk or take alternate transportation (Harold didn't see the alternate transport, but didn't have time to ask anyone) it all worked out. It was a wild thing to be riding in this gang of happy people. They were a real horde - at least a couple dozen people. Harold was a bit surprised that Klee's party had this much of a festival atmosphere to it - but went with the flow.

The ride from Aiea to Waikiki was a totally joyous experience. It was only about ten miles and took just a little more than an hour but along the way the group sang songs, had spur of the moment challenges, and waved happily to whomever they met along the way, though Harold definitely saw some scowls directed at them from a few people that either disapproved of the size of the group or the noise it was making.

Nearly every bit of memorable architecture along the way that he might have recognized was gone. The buildings of downtown, Ala Moana Shopping Center, the high rises of Kaka'ako and Waikiki, and the industrial areas that had lined the Nimitz Highway and in his time had extended out onto Sand Island. On this ride, because they stayed closer to the shore, Harold was much better able to keep his bearings about where he was. Diamond Head was visible to him almost the entire way there.

There were ships and boats in Honolulu and Pearl Harbors and there seemed to be an airport of some kind roughly where Hickam Air Force Base and Inouye International Airports had been - he didn't see anything that looked like aircraft though - but they were skirting the far edges of that area. What he did see was lots of cottage type housing, plenty of gardens, and a fair number of buildings similar to the bike shed he had visited the day before. The taller building like apartments and hostels were pushed back from the shoreline. They passed several beach parks - one of which was certainly Ala Moana Beach Park but without the roads and buildings, it was hard to say for sure - the contours of the shoreline had also changed some - which he made a mental note to ask someone about.

As they came into Waikiki, there were far less large trees and far more large open grassy areas. Festive flags were flying in many places. Large groups of people were gathering with barbecues, ukulele, and other instruments. There were hula dancing troops and literally thousands of people. They passed a small cluster of cottages - almost what Harold would describe as a village and he saw that they had unfurled a huge banner.

"Happy Birthday," it said.

Finally, they arrived in the neighborhood of Queen's Beach and parked their bikes. There were people everywhere. This was quite literally a festival. Harold had seen many more banners that said 'Happy Birthday' along the way. Obviously, Klee's birthday was a big big deal.

Walking towards a temporary stage where a number of hula dancers were performing, Harold was feeling a deep and profound sense of culture shock - combined with the fact that the girl - or woman that he had been unable to stop thinking about - was a much bigger deal than he had known. He was filled with pointless self doubts that he immediately recognized, laughed at, and buried away.

He was looking for Klee but not seeing her but then Brian gave him a nudge and pointed up at the stage. She was one of the hula dancers. It was a very traditional kind of dance from an obviously well respected hula halau. The kumu hula, a woman who looked like she might be fifty (and so was probably well over a hundred) stood to the side of the stage watching approvingly and sometimes chanting mele' to keep time with the accomplished movements of her troop.

They were a mixed group of men and women with no dominant ethnicity, though most of them seemed more on the brown side than Klee. Still, she didn't stand out as an outsider, she was obviously one of them. Brian and Harold sat in the grass and watched the performance.

Harold wanted to ask about so many things, but followed the will of the crowd and silently observed while they danced and enthusiastically applauded when they were done. The dancers left the stage with the kumu hula and went to an area off to the side where they sat and were led in quiet prayerish chants by the matriarch. The stage however, did not stay empty - a group of children dressed in flowery aloha prints climbed the steps and assembled in classic chorus form - each of those in the front carried an ukulele. Their teacher/conductor got them arranged and they began to sing and play.

Hawaiian music had remained incredibly consistent over several centuries. Harold felt like he could have been at one of his son's school concerts. Nothing much had changed - except everything else. Harold was enjoying the music and the vibes so much that he stopped thinking of Klee for a while and somehow didn't even notice that she had joined them.

He turned and there she was, right next to him. She smiled, noticing that he had noticed her (how long had she been there?) and then she leaned in and kissed him on the cheek.

"Aren't they wonderful?" she whispered.

Harold couldn't agree more.

## Chapter 22

Eventually, they stood and Klee led them away from the stage. Her family had set up a big barbecue area near Kaimana and there was food, drink, and plenty of everything. A surfboard rack was set up near the water and people seemed to be free to take any that were not in use. Harold looked out and saw that there was a small swell out beyond the reef, just one to two feet - enough for fun without any real danger.

There were tents and tables and plenty of water gear for everyone. Harold was relieved that there were perhaps a hundred people in their area and it wasn't just one huge festival of thousands upon thousands of people all celebrating his new friend, his crush. Still, he didn't understand what was happening?

"Is this all for you?" he asked Klee, gesturing so as to indicate all of Waikiki. "I saw Happy Birthday banners all over the place. Are all of these people celebrating your birthday?"

Klee laughed. She started to answer him but then lost control and began laughing again. Finally she gained enough composure to stop laughing. Harold didn't feel bad about the laughter, obviously she wasn't laughing at him - it was good natured and uncontrollable. He laughed with her, though he had no idea why they were laughing.

"You are incredibly sweet," she said to him. "Did you really think that all of these people, these tens of thousands of people, were here to celebrate me?"

He had to admit. It did sound outlandish. "Well, it is your birthday and I noticed yesterday that you are a bit more popular and well known than most people, so yeah, I admit it, the thought occurred to me. Tell me, Klee, are you famous?"

She was laughing again but more in control this time. "I'm not famous Harold, I'm just old! But no, let me explain, these people are not all here for me - or that's not quite true - they aren't all here for me alone."

"But this is your birthday party?" He was really having a hard time understanding.

"Well yes...it is my birthday. Exactly and truly my birthday which doesn't happen every year - but it's also the Winter Solstice Festival and so it's also the birthday celebration for all the people born in the winter months. This is a birthday party for thousands of people."

Harold had a glimmer of understanding but he still wasn't completely clear.

"Bear with me here while I figure this out. I know it may seem pretty clueless to you but keep in mind that this is all new to me."

Klee looked confused. "But you grew up here..."

Harold was caught "Yes, but it was a very different time. Please, humor me for a minute."

She smiled. "Okay."

"Everyone born in winter celebrates their birthday at the Winter Solstice Festival?" he asked.

She nodded. "Everyone that wants to. There are festivals on all the islands. I like to come to this one because it's the biggest. Some people, of course, like smaller parties or more intimate gathering. Some goes for Summer Solstice and the Spring and Fall Equinox festivals. They are universal holidays for birthdays, anniversaries, or passing celebrations."

"So what if my birthday was in a month and I wanted to celebrate then?"

"You could if you wanted. There are no rules about it. Most people though, like to celebrate with their seasonal cohort. We all share something special because we were born at the same time of the year."

She saw that he understood. "It's coming back to you now?"

He nodded and smiled at her. "Thank you. For everything. Thank you so much Klee."

She hugged him. "The clothes look really good on you. My daughter asked me who the handsome old gentleman in the stylish outfit was...speaking of which, come on, I want to introduce you to some of my family."

It was an astoundingly celebratory day. There were activities and games as well as organized classes, performances, and plenty of food. For the most part, Harold saw that food in Hawaii had remained pretty stable - lots of fish, pork, rice, and things like manapua and Okinawan sweet potatoes. Apparently, the future was not vegetarian. Harold was glad - he enjoyed eating meat. He was curious about the processes of fishing and livestock farming and engaged with a friendly auntie who was manning a barbecue.

"How are the fisheries managed these days? Does everyone just catch their own or do people form cooperatives to run fish?" She gave him a strange look, one he was getting used to, the one that said "What planet are you from?"

"You feesh how you want. You want make big net though, you gotta find others want same ting, right? Not like one guy can manage a long line boat. But you like sit at the end of day and just catch some ulu or snappahs...well, you just go right head." There was a lot more pidgin being spoken at the Winter Solstice Birthday festival than he had heard in other places. He was glad, Pidgin or Hawaiian Creole was one of those unique Hawaiian things that brought a sense of shared history to the islands. He had been afraid that everyone had moved on to the West Coast accentless English he had so far encountered, what he thought of as 'newscaster' - but thankfully, dialects remained.

Harold avoided the temptation to slip into pidgin. In his time at least, old white guys often made themselves look foolish when they tried to speak local - he had a knack for it and probably could have earned some respect points (as he sometimes did in his time) but he had already painted himself as a malahini with his questions and ignorance of the local ways of doing things, so he decided to stick with newscaster.

"Are there regulations or rules about how much or when you can fish certain things?"

Now she knew he was lolo. "Honey-child, why would someone take more than they need? Then the next time they go, no can find the feesh cause they all wasted from time before. And, you know, there are good times for some feesh and then good times for other feesh - the moon, the weather, plus you want make sure you let the babies dey get bigger and gotta let nature run it's course, you know?" She

winked at him.

"Same thing for meat?" He'd already heard about cattle ranches.

The large woman was laughing as she flipped racks of ribs on the barrel grill. "What you tink? Someone gonna go out and throw a net in the ocean to get some pigs? You tink maybe fisherman gonna catch a cow on some real heavy line - maybe just put some hay on a hook and throw it out there?" She gestured to the ocean.

It was obviously not what he meant and it took him a minute to realize she was having fun with him. She slapped him on the back and laughed loudly.

"We got one serious lolo malahini here. He tink ribs come from da sea." She was speaking to the air, to no one in particular, though several people around them laughed - a few of them clapped him on the back good naturedly.

"But seriously," she said. "It's same but different. No one like keep more than the aina can provide for, not like the old days when they stack the chickens in boxes and shove twenty pigs in one small area. Plus, we still like go hunt - you know? That a big part of our culture - specially for the men."

Harold had earned his chops by not getting offended or embarrassed while she busted his balls. Her pidgin flattened out a little bit and she fell into a kind of newscaster-pidgin hybrid that was easy for Harold to think of as 'local'.

"You from California or something?" she asked him.

It was another question that had stayed the same despite a couple hundred years. "I grew up here but I've been away for a long time."

In Harold's time the next question would have been "What school you go to?" the ultimate in checking to see if someone was bonifide local or not - but without mandatory elementary and high school, that question did, in fact, seem to have gone extinct.

"Yeah, I could tell," she told him. "I mean obviously you lolo, but you feel grounded. I figured you got some roots here."

"Auntie, are you giving my new friend a hard time?" Klee had found him. Harold had made an effort not to follow her around even though that was what he wanted to do. There was no shortage of friendly people and interesting activities, so he really had no excuse to attach to her like a limpit. He was glad she had found him.

The auntie gave Harold a hard look "Hmmm...I was starting to respect you, but now I see you spending time with the likes of this trash woman..." Harold was shocked and felt the urge rising in him to defend Klee. He had no idea what the problem might be but he couldn't just sit there while she insulted his new friend so brazenly.

Before he could open his mouth though, both women were laughing and hugging. Harold was immensely grateful that he had followed his own rule of waiting for a few breaths before saying anything you might regret. The two were obviously friends - Klee looked the younger but it was just as

possible that she was the older - given what Harold knew about her age.

"Now I know you in trouble," the auntie said, looking at Harold seriously. "This one, she gonna cook your heart like I cook these ribs." Again, Harold didn't know what to say. The auntie put a rack of ribs on Harold's plate and Klee led them off to an area where they could sit together.

"Are you related to her?" Harold asked Klee.

"One way or another, definitely." She told him. "Our bond is stronger though because of our shared birthday. It's her birthday too."

"They're making her cook on her birthday?" Klee burst out laughing and covered her mouth.

"Who else would be cooking? You think we would let some summer brats steal all the work from us during our celebration?" Harold looked around with an idea dawning on him - there were people cleaning up, people washing surf boards and kayaks, people hauling the trash, others were cooking, telling stories, playing music, or entertaining.

"The work..." he said.

Klee nodded. "The work. There is nothing more valuable or which makes us more human than the work. The meaning of life is work. Joyful work, enthusiastic work, work that tries our muscles and challenges our brains. The work is everything."

"So, here, today...all the work is given to the birthday cohort?" He was getting it. "It's their gift."

Klee was smiling and nodding. "On this day, at these festivals, no one gets to do the work except the people being celebrated. We are given meaning and validity through it. I came out here with all of my cohort at 4 am this morning. We brought food, carried tables, set up chairs, made everything ready. It feels amazing - that's why no one else was allowed to come until late morning. Now, we get to see the fruit of our labor, the people we love enjoying themselves and our nation." Somehow she had snuggled herself close to him.

Harold didn't know what to say or do. There was nowhere he would rather have been.

A conch horn blew followed by many bursts of horns.

Klee jumped up and grabbed him by the hand. "Come on, it's time for the presents!"

She dragged him back to the beach where her family was all gathered. Harold still carried his plate of food. Klee pointed at an empty spot at a large table and he took his plate and sat there - among strangers he hadn't met yet who all smiled at him. Many were eating. He began to eat too. A good many of the people bore a familial resemblance to Klee - who had disappeared with about a quarter of the assembled guests.

The food was amazing and they ate with light conversation all around. Harold avoided letting anyone know he was a stranger in their beautiful land. He wondered where the other guests and Klee had gone but was soon lost in listening to the conversation, jokes and stories that flowed around him.

About twenty minutes later, the conch horn blew again. Three bursts. The conversation stopped and people moved their plates aside. A group of young people appeared and began taking the plates away, they walked among the guests with hand washing stations and sprayed plumeria water on the guests hands after they had been dried.

By this point, all of those who had been in the water had come out and Harold looked around and saw scores of similar situations playing out all throughout what had been Waikiki, Queen Kapiolani Park, and even stretching up into Kaimuki via Monsarrat.

Now, those who had disappeared began to appear. The first was an ancient looking woman.

"My name is Susan Lee Barngay Harada Napoli and I'm one-hundred and thirty-seven years old."

After her came a man and some women in their one-twenties. Then there were a couple in their early hundreds. Then came a slightly larger group in their nineties and eighties. Each of them introducing themselves and stating their age. Klee was in a group of eight. When it came her turn to speak she said

"My name is Klee Ka'iulani Ko'olau Jack London He'e Naomi Norstenberger and I'm seventy-five years old."

It was the first time he had heard her say her age and it was still unbelievable. Still, her age was more believable than her name. Harold had noticed that the Hawaiian tradition of giving children incredibly long names had survived. He hoped he wouldn't be quizzed on her name though he could remember a good bit of it due to familiarity.

Strangely, the numbers of people in each group got smaller as the ages got younger. By the time they reached the thirties, there were only three in the group. In the twenties, there was one lone man. At that point, the numbers started to go up again. There were nearly a dozen teens and perhaps thirty children - the largest cohort by far. Harold wondered what the reason was - perhaps a birth curve that had steadily gone down as life expectancy went up until there was zero or negative replacement at which point it might have started going up again.

Now, all the birthday cohort gathered and they sang. What else could they sing but "Happy Birthday" but in place of names they sang 'Dear Winter'. It was beautiful.

Picking up gayly wrapped packages from where they had been hidden under tarps and cloths, they began moving through the group, giving gifts. At first, Harold was confused as to why it was the birthday people who were giving the gifts but then, due to his earlier conversation with Klee, it hit him.

Giving a gift is more valuable than receiving one. Despite being a newcomer, Harold was handed several packages which he stacked in front of him as the other guests did. Once all the packages had been distributed, the conch horns blew again. Guests opened their packages while the birthday cohort watched with aloha.

The gifts were sometimes personalized but many of them were of a general nature. Harold opened his first package and found a brightly colored pair of swim trunks - he saw several people with similar gifts but in sizes more appropriate for them. A tag on the trunks said "Swimwear by Tutu". He also had a small book titled "Aspirational Poetry" by The Winter Poet's Collective. There was a bag of sweets and several other dried snacks with labels "Winter Crack Seed". Finally, Klee came to him and handed him

one more package.

"I know the RSA took years from your life, but I think we can bring you back to youth and health," she said to him. "I got you some yoga and workout clothes so we can start getting you back into shape."

She gave him a hug. All around the encampment, people were hugging and talking and being grateful to one another and for one another. None looked happier than the Winter cohort. Harold felt tears in his eyes, but he wasn't sure what they were for.

## Chapter 23

The Winter Solstice/ Winter Birthday Celebration was a huge success - for many reasons, not the least of which, Harold came to understand that a big part of the success of this future culture lay in a couple of key areas that his time and place didn't seem capable of understanding.

First, he finally realized that this was a culture that valued work without a monetary amount being involved - the value of work wasn't judged by billable hours or the size of your house, it was valued by the satisfaction that it gave your life and the societal benefit that it provided to you and those around you. By taking the idea that work should provide you with health, safety, security, or even life itself out of the equation - not to mention things like luxury, comfort, economic status, or a false sense of happiness or life satisfaction - there was no longer an incentive to do things just for the sake of doing them. There was no incentive for 'bullshit work'. Things were done because they were necessary, because they brought satisfaction, and because they brought benefits to those one cared about or interacted with.

Second, the gift giving and celebration itself had shown Harold the lesson that he had not quite been able to understand in the marketplace. There is more value in giving than there is in receiving - this is true in the case of building relationships as well as in building a 'market' for the produce of one's life. The accepting of a gift implies a sort of honor and respect towards the object being gifted and the person doing the gifting. The girl who gave him the ink pen, his happiness at that gift and his appreciation for the usefulness of the object made her work valuable - and probably sent her on a mission to find more and better ink pens. Maybe she would even end up making them herself - and as a bonus, it brought her into contact and built a relationship of reciprocity with the very people she wanted to learn from - writers, artists, and other pen users.

Third - not finally, but only a third thing he noticed that day - was that this world was built on relationships of joyful dependency. The more you could give to someone, the more you could provide someone with the materials they needed to feel joyful and to fulfill their own purpose or desires - the more that person, and those around them, wanted to help you achieve your own purpose. In his time, people were largely defined by what they did and what they had - here, however, a person seemed to be much more defined by the relationships that came inbound to them.

Still, there were plenty of things which he was still confused about. Things like how were rules enforced? Yes, he understood that there were no laws, not really any 'rules' to speak of, but certainly there were policies, customs, and everyday courtesies. He doubted that everyone in the society abided by all the unspoken/unwritten rules all the time. Who were the enforcers? How was anything enforced if there were no enforcers?

On that level, he was very curious about defense and how the Mutuals defended themselves. Did they have a military class of citizens? Were citizens expected to volunteer or do a period of service? Even if that was the case, how did they prevent the men and women with the guns from turning them on the society they were supposed to protect? How did they keep them from taking the best the society offered and just keeping it?

Finally, the other area that he was still largely in the dark on was the question of technology and data. He understood that the Pulse had largely made hand held and always on devices impossible and that there had been a strong reaction against the data control systems of his time - but the fact remained - they were using some pretty high technology here and that meant that data was being collected. He had

even heard several people mention the 'data center' or 'data storage' but he had yet to really find out what that meant, how it was controlled, or how it was used.

Throughout the day in Waikiki, he spent most of his time with Klee and her family. If he hadn't of been told that some of the women he met were Klee's daughter or granddaughters, he would have simply thought they were her friends, classmates, or co-workers. The difference, he finally began to notice was the reciprocal relationships that the women had with other people. As he had noted the day before, Klee had used her seventy-five years to build a huge network of reciprocal relationships. Everywhere she went, she was met with joyful hellos. She had shared her skills as a surgeon, a yoga instructor, and a singer with many people but being a multi-talented person - she had also dedicated many years of her life to helping other people do what drove them. It showed very clearly.

To put it in visual terms, her web of influence was huge and this wasn't even the island that she called home! Her daughter and her other family members had webs of their own that connected with Klee, but which didn't carry the same power as her first degree connections. Those could only be built over time.

As darkness descended, there were alcoholic drinks as well as bonfires, performances, and quiet areas where people sat and talked story. Looking towards the center of the island, Harold saw what must have been a thousand fires burning in the open areas of Waikiki. Each of them open to anyone that might come by, but generally made up of groups of family and close friends.

Brian, had largely been absent for most of the day and when he reappeared, he looked sheepish as he explained to Harold. "Sorry to abandon you, but there's a girl I'm kind of keen on..."

Harold gave him a friendly wink. "No need to explain. I've had a great day. Just out of curiosity..will we be heading back to the hostel?"

Brian looked surprised at the question. "We can, but...do you really want to?"

Harold, in turn, was surprised but then realized he shouldn't be. "People will just stay here? Sleep in the parks and on the beach?"

Brian motioned up at the sky. There were a million-billion stars twinkling and the firelight itself wasn't bright enough to dim out even a tiny portion of them. "It's not going to rain tonight and no one is going to freeze, but if you want to head back, I can take you..." Brian started to stand up. Harold stopped him.

"No, you're right. I'm just surprised. Where I come from, you can't just decide to sleep outside."

Brian looked even more surprised. "Why not?"

It was a question Harold had never bothered to ask himself. He wasn't ready to answer it but he decided to give it a try. "Well, you might get robbed or killed," that sounded fairly dramatic but was probably why most people didn't just sleep outside, "...and you know, if everyone just slept wherever they wanted..." he didn't really have a way to finish that statement with a definitive and lapsed into "...it would be hard for everyone to enjoy..." that wasn't true at all "...and besides, parks aren't campgrounds, you need to have a permit..." oh, that probably wasn't even a thing here, "...or pay for space, or at least have permission to camp..." This wasn't going well. He trailed off before finishing. "The police state has a bunch of rules about sleeping outside because otherwise the homeless would be everywhere...." Still no good.

Brian was intrigued. "What are homeless?"

It was a question Harold had dreamed of hearing. Homelessness had obviously been conquered. "People without homes. The people who sleep outside and drop out of society."

"Like rangers?" Brian was truly baffled by the concept.

"No, they sleep in bus stops and set up tents on trails and sidewalks, they go to the bathroom wherever they want..." Harold couldn't imagine what Brian would connect that with.

"Oh, you mean the mentally ill..." Harold started to say no but then realized that the majority of homeless he had met or interacted with had been mentally ill on one level or another. Brian continued..."I've heard there are lots of them in the RSA...a result of the pressure of trying to conform."

Harold considered all of this and finally decided it was as close as he would get to satisfying Brian's question without going into far greater detail than he wanted to.

"I'm really fine with staying out here tonight," Harold said. "In fact, it would be a shame to go back indoors on a night like tonight. I'm just curious, where am I going to sleep?"

Klee had wandered back to their fire and came up behind Harold just as he asked this. She put her hand on his shoulder and said "I've got just the place for you."

Truly it was one of the most wonderful days and nights of Harold's existence.

## Chapter 24

Late nights and early mornings but made better by fresh coconut handed to him by a smiling uncle in the morning followed by a dive into the cool blue waters of Waikiki. In Harold's time, the coconuts were all trimmed from the tourist areas - but this morning he could see that the coconut trees were loaded with them...which was probably the reason Klee had insisted that they should sleep on the open grassy area set back behind the sand and the coconuts.

She was nowhere to be found in the morning, but he had no doubt she would turn up when she was ready to. Harold came out of the water, grabbed a towel from the smiling aunties who were handing them out and walked back to their 'campsite' so he could change back into his daytime clothes. It was funny that he'd felt any compulsion to go back to the hostel, he had everything he owned with him. He had graduated up from his shoulder satchel to a gifted backpack that a birthday celebrant had bestowed on him the day before. Everything he 'owned' was in the bag.

He found himself cringing even as he mentally said it. Already, in just a few days he had grown uncomfortable with sounding like a propertarian. It was wonderful that he had these things for his use, but to say they were his was ridiculous. The books came from Ku and the rest of it - he doubted that any of it would travel back in time with him, if he ever did manage to reawaken in his own time. Even if he were here until the day he died, the old adage was as true now as it was in the Depression era Broadway musical 'You Can't Take It With You.'

He had watched a couple of plays the day before - they were familiar themes but in a completely new way. The whole culture of possession that he came from had put an imprint on everything and when that imprint became meaningless - everything had to change. He remembered a lawyer friend telling him one time 'possession is 9/10ths of the law'. He had misunderstood the statement from then until now when it finally hit him - 9/10ths of the law was built on protecting possessions and building the systems that took possession from the people and gave it to the elites. He had thought his friend was saying that in court possession determined nine out of ten cases, but that hadn't been it at all - his friend had been saying that ninety percent of the legal code was built around possession. Eliminate propertarian possession and you eliminate ninety percent of the need for the law. The other ten percent was punishment.

Klee and Brian came strolling back through the field. Klee had obviously been out in the ocean and Brian had met her at the beach and come back to their site with her.

"Oh my God, Brian, you should have been out there. There was an offshore and this swell just perfectly formed to make a set like I've never experienced. I swear, it was the perfect wave - I thought I'd seen a perfect set before but this was just ridiculous...I rode it all the way into Grey's Beach..." She was even more beautiful than Harold had thought the day before. How had this happened? How was this possible?

She came into the campsite and seeing Harold threw herself into his arms. She kissed him with a sort of exultant passion reminding him of just how much they had shared the night before. Brian, didn't look surprised or bothered by this.

With a mischievous look on his face he said "Maybe you're just in love, Klee."

Klee sat up and broke free of Harold's arms "With this old man? Are you joking? I'm only seventy-five

and besides, he's married." Her tone was joking but the words actually stung Harold. He had somewhat conveniently convinced himself that since his wife had long since died in this world, he was free to do whatever it was that he and Klee were doing. Alcohol had helped, but that wasn't the whole story. Not even close. It wasn't that she said he was old - it was that it still felt like he was married - because he was - and her words had put it in the present. Klee fell back, forcing him to catch her and looked up into his face with a tender glance. "Will you go back to her?"

For her, it wasn't serious. Harold tried to brush it off but it had brought a dark cloud to his brain. "I don't even know if she is still alive. I'm not sure I'll ever see her again...it seems very unlikely."

Seeing that she had brought some real pain to him, Klee immediately changed her tone. "Oh, don't pay attention to me. I'm just having some fun and I apologize it was at your expense. We've got a big day ahead of us. I managed to switch my day to Ka'a'awa so we've all got a coffee work day ahead of us. No time for gloomy thoughts or sad regrets." She looked at Harold from the side of her eye, he sensed that she was looking to see if he had any regrets about her.

"No regrets here," he said, knowing that here meant now but that any regrets he might have lay firmly in the now distant past. "I'm excited to be able to finally do some work here in the Mutuals. So far, I've mostly just felt like some sort of test object."

His words passed like a fleeting scent and they all set about cleaning up the area and preparing to depart.

"Will we bike there?" he asked.

Brian looked at the sky, there were dark clouds over the Ko'olau Range - as if they had appeared with Harold's troubled thoughts. "I don't much like the look of this weather and besides - I think none of us got as much sleep as we should have last night. I vote that we ride up to the marketplace and then take the hyperloop all the way to Ka'a'awa."

This sounded like an exciting prospect to Harold and there was no objection from Klee. They got on nearby bikes and with far less effort than seemed appropriate they pedaled up the trails leading around the back side of Diamond Head. The hyperloop station was only about a hundred yards from the crater tunnel entrance.

## Chapter 25

The big egg-like shelter over the top was very similar to the bike shed they had visited two days earlier and at that point, Harold realized he had been in a transport hub when they visited with Kavika. He'd wandered where the stairs went when they had been there. Now he knew.

"Hey, was Kavika's bike workshop above a hyperloop terminal?" Brian looked at him with curiosity but Klee was the one who answered him.

"No but there are some transport tunnels down there, so you're not far wrong. It's a transport station."

This hub was filled with different workshops where people were doing all sorts of stuff. There were glass blowers and wire makers and people doing a wide variety of things that he didn't recognize but that were obviously manufacturing.

"Is all industry on a small scale like this?" he asked his friends.

Brian answered. "We have bigger industrial areas but for the most part, cottage industrial is the mode in which production happens. Very few people want to work in a big, anonymous factory. The bigger industry gets, the harsher effect it has on workers, the aina, and more. Small scale works well for most things. It just lends itself to better quality. Mass production leads to mass waste."

Harold felt like they were descending into a modern subway station in Tokyo or Europe as they went down the wide steps at either side. The difference was that there were no pay stations, no gates, no security to make sure everyone paid. No one had to pay.

Harold had heard of hyperloops but he had never seen one. He had read about them. In his time, very few people were familiar with them since they were still largely experimental and never implemented on a mass scale. A hyperloop is essentially, a pneumatic tube where most of the air is pulled out and passenger capsules can be 'shot' at high speeds to reach a destination without having to suffer air resistance. There was no particular reason to have them underground, but when Harold thought about it, it made sense because they were out of sight, protected by basalt, and able to function just as well as if they were built above ground.

The cavern they descended into was obviously hewn from the volcanic basalt and was at least three stories below where they'd entered. Reaching the bottom on a series of escalators there were two platforms where black capsule like trains were being embarked and debarked from. Harold was excited but for most people, it seemed a very run of the mill thing to be doing. As usual, he had many questions.

"Is there more than one destination or is it a single back and forth journey?" he asked.

"How old are you?" Klee asked "It's been here more than a hundred and fifty years."

He decided to answer her truthfully "I'm only fifty-two."

Her laugh echoed through the cavern and drew looks from all the people nearby. "Oh, whatever, it's fine. You don't have to tell me. I will get the truth from you though." She was smiling at him in a way that made him know it was true, even though he already had just told her, so he decided to play along

and let her tease it out of him over time. It had been a long time since he played these flirty games.

Brian had no problem answering his questions, however. "The tube was bored all the way through the heart of the Ko'o'lau Range," he said. "This is the southern terminus but there are stops in Kailua/Waimanalo then in Ka'a'awa which serves the mid-windward and finally the other terminus in Laie."

Harold liked the term mid-windward, it hadn't existed in his time. "So four stops. How long does it take between each one?"

"About three minutes," Brian said. Harold wondered if his jaw had dropped. He did the math in his head. In his time it was no less than an hour and fifteen minutes to go the forty miles from Laie to Kaimuki - longer if there were traffic. Assuming that under the mountain was still something like forty miles - that meant that the hyperloop was traveling at around 200 miles per hour if it made the trip in twelve minutes (not counting stops).

"What about the west side and central parts of the island?" Harold asked.

"There's a line that runs from Kaneohe through the center of the island and over to Waianae that has a middle stop in Mililani. It's a little inconvenient to have to transfer but you can get to the Waianae Coast in about fifteen minutes from any other hyperloop stop. They used to talk about building one in the Waianae, but nobody wants to bore under those mountains - they're sacred. The sky train will get you anywhere else you need to go, it just takes a little longer."

Not for the first time, Harold was in awe of the casual way these people accepted what to him was nearly miraculous. He had to ask what was probably a very stupid question.

"The sky train, does it fly?" he was picturing a fleet of those drones he had seen carrying cargo in the marketplace, each one loaded with a person. In his bizarre mental picture they were all hanging off of them like hippies on a Christmas train, waving.

Brian, Klee, and a few people on the platform nearby all laughed. Yup, it had been a stupid question.

"It's an electric train on a raised platform, not too different from what we've had here for hundreds of years. It's slow compared to the hyperloop but faster than a bike." Harold wondered if it was the descendent of the HART project, the \$10-billion dollar buffalo of the Honolulu Area Rapid Transit project - the above ground commuter train that in his time had broken budgets and politicians multiple times without ever carrying a single passenger.

The doors on the hyperloop capsules lifted open and the crowd on the platform began to enter the capsules. Inside there were high seats with full harnesses that would lower in place over the passengers. It wasn't too dissimilar to the seats of high speed amusements at Disneyland or other theme parks. Harold felt a giddy excitement.

He sat and the harness automatically lowered over him.

Light vibraphone jingles played on hidden speakers. The music was both calming and (at least to Harold) held an aspirational quality. For the first time since he had arrived, he felt like he was strapping into something like a space ship. He was giddy. Klee sat next to him and on a whim he reached out and

grabbed her hand. She looked at him in surprise but then smiled and gave his hand a reassuring squeeze.

No one else seemed excited at all. The doors lowered and sealed shut. He felt the cabin pressurize. His ears popped. The vibraphone music slowly built in intensity.

"I love Kaimuki's jingle," Brian said.

"It is really good," Klee replied "but my favorite is Waianae's - it's so dark and torn. Sort of like a big wave day."

Brian nodded. "They're all awesome but Laie's creeps me out a little. It's just a little...floofy and conformist." The woman sitting next to Brian gave him a little bit of a scowl as he said it. Harold guessed that she was a Laieite. In his time Laie had been almost homogenous in it's Mormonism - he wondered if that was still the case - or if there was religion at all here in the future. Certainly, the woman next to Brian looked like she could be Mormon - Harold caught himself. He hadn't come all the way to the future to stereotype people.

The jingle music reached a sort of plateau - it had slowly been rising and now it paused. Klee's hand almost imperceptibly tightened on Harold's and at the same moment - he was hit with a force that felt like someone had pulled an invisible blanket over his body and then yanked him back on his seat. The initial jolt was a little alarming but within seconds, his body adjusted to the tension. He blinked to see if it was any more difficult, but couldn't detect a difference. He lifted his free hand and found it only slightly more difficult than usual - something that he might not have been aware of if not for the invisible blanket feeling.

The jingle had picked back up and was now galloping through a sort of interlude - it was an amazingly complex piece of music. What he had at first taken for a vibraphone solo was now revealed as having a subtle and complex baseline and an almost imperceptible rhythm section. He caught the sound of horns as if in the distance blowing a fanfare. This was amazing! The only thing he could compare it to was Miles Davis, Sketches of Spain - but there was an element of Charles Mingus in there along with a progressive movement he could almost touch.

He was so engrossed in the music that he didn't notice his friends pushing his harness up over his body and only became aware when the music came to a close and silence filled the capsule. His friends helped him stand up and complete awareness returned to him. He was ecstatic. He felt like he had touched the divine. His mind was clear. He had never felt more alive.

Harold saw people smiling pleasantly at him. He could feel the love between them. He was immersed in the wine of brotherhood.

"Stenotoxication," he heard a smiling woman say to her smiling male companion as they both passed by him on their way out. He heard his own laughter and the sound of his voice saying things like 'wonderful' 'miraculous' and 'connected'. He also heard more than a few other people saying in friendly voices things like 'That guy is totally stenned out' and 'I miss getting that stenoed.'

He sensed that he was between his two friends. Gradually, his full awareness came back to him and a sense of normalcy returned. He had been conscious of going up at least one escalator and they emerged into a glorious world of vibrant emerald green foliage and turquoise blue skies. The air smelled like

rain had recently fallen on fertile soil.

"You okay, buddy? Are you coming out of it alright?" Brian asked gently.

Klee was holding his hand and looking at him with a mixture of concern and amusement. "I swear to god I've never seen anyone get that stoned from hyperloop pressure...that was amazing. Are you alright? Can you feel my hand?"

Harold wasn't sure what had happened. "What was that?" He wanted more of it but at the same time, he was aware that he had pretty much been operating without full consciousness for some time now.

"Did you ever hyperloop before?" Klee asked him.

"No, that was my first time. We don't have them in my era." If they noticed his words they attributed them to his being stoned.

Brian and Klee both began laughing again. "No wonder he got so looped," Brian said to Klee - then to Harold "Hold onto that feeling buddy, the first time is always the best."

Klee turned him to face her. "You should have told us. Nobody dies from stenotoxication, but there have been cases where people came out of the capsules and did really stupid things. Some warning would have been nice."

Somehow, Harold's mind accessed a long ago physics class and he gave the word meaning. Stenochoria was the ancient Greek word for external pressure so stenotoxication would be the altered state that would come about from putting the brain and other organs under an abnormal burst of pressure. His body had been alarmed and had filled his brain with dopamine and dozens of other hormones and neurotransmitters that had made him incredibly stoned.

"Can we do it again?" Harold asked.

## Chapter 26

Harold would get more chances to hyperloop, but on that particular day, he had been steno-stoned all the way through Kailua and to their destination. Like a nitrous-oxide buzz, the stenotoxication wore off fairly quickly - but the memory of it made him want to jump back on the hyperloop even though everyone assured him that he would never feel effects as strong as that first ride had hit him.

The Ka'a'awa hyperloop station was set in the hillside and they emerged surrounded by emerald rainforest. The clouds were huddled together over the ridge line of the Ko'o'lau mountain range and turquoise blue sky extended out above the verdant jungle until it met with the crystalline waves that rolled in and scattered at the edge of the reef. Inside the reef, the water was a remarkable deep royal blue color that turned into an aqua azure around the dark reef heads that could be seen flowering just beneath the surface. From their vantage point - Harold could see the Crouching Lion to the north and the distinct cliffs of Kualoa to the south.

Hu chuckled to himself as he realized that they must have come out in what had been called Jurassic Park in his day. Kualoa Ranch had been the filming location that many films had used. He wondered if that idea or the films themselves had survived the passage of time.

"Are there still dinosaurs here?" Brian and Klee both looked at him like he was still stoned. He realized that he couldn't very well explain the concept of Jurassic Park without revealing he had traveled through time and so he let the moment pass.

What had been a cattle ranch and private reserve of some 8000 acres was now a patchwork of small scale agricultural ventures. While he couldn't see fences or lines, it was clear that these were not large agri-business types of farms. Cottages and houses that he now recognized as being a sort of standard prefabricated model were scattered around the landscape and while there were the same red paths here as there had been in Aiea, Honolulu, and Waikiki - there were far fewer of them.

The bike racks outside the hyperloop terminal also had far fewer bikes - but still plenty for the number of passengers who were debarking.

"The coffee farms are back in the valley" Brian said. "The one we go to is a fairly large co-op so they have bunkhouses for transient workers and a fairly well developed tourist program. "

This statement surprised Harold. He needed clarification.

"Tourism is still a thing?" Klee and Brian both giggled.

"What do you think we are doing?" Klee asked him. "This is tourism work. We come, we get to experience the work for a day or a week or a month and then we go back to our lives. We bring work tourists to the hospital on Maui all the time - but to be honest, medicine is one of those things that people either love or hate so most of them stay a very short time or they end up coming and exploring healthcare as a full time vocation."

"Are there still 'vacation' tourists? Like do people still pack their bags, come stay in a hotel, take tours, go to luaus and then go home?"

"That's so gross," Brian said. "They still do that in the eff-ess, don't they? Full exploitation and

economic adventurism. Using people and cultures like disposable objects. I've read about how it used to be and I am grateful everyday for the general strikes and the suffering that the people of the Mutuals went through to end that. It's hard to believe that our home used to be a sort of cheap prostitute for propertarians to come and exploit."

"Me too," Harold said, not sure if he could or should ask the questions that came to his mind. "This sort of tourism is far better." He didn't know what he was talking about of course, since he had not yet experienced it - but he was sure it must be better than the tourism of his time. The type of tourism where exploited people with big gaping empty quicksand pits in their souls tried to fill their cavernous black holes with experiences, food, spa days, and stories to help them survive after they all too quickly had to return to being exploited by capitalist bosses.

They arrived at the coffee farm after a short bike ride. The work tourists were divided into daily, weekly, and monthly guests. Brian, Klee, and Harold were with the dailies. There were about twenty of them total and they were walked to a large bunkhouse - it was a red single wall construction building with white trim. Inside there were - what else - bunks and cabinets for each guest.

The young woman who had been tasked with leading them there told them to choose a bunk, stow their gear, and then meet her back outside in five minutes. She pointed out where the commode house was - another red building nearby in case anyone needed to use it before their orientation.

They gathered on the grassy area behind the bunkhouse and waited for the rest of their group to join them. It was more like ten minutes before everyone was there, Harold was pleased to see that Hawaiian time was still a thing. He'd noticed that virtually no one wore a watch - it seemed like time was more of a judge it for yourself kind of thing though he had seen clocks on the walls in some of the buildings he had been in thus far.

"I'm Lindsey," the young woman said to them when they were finally all there. "I'll be your mentor and guide while you are here. First of all, is there anyone who has been on a coffee day before?"

About half of them, including Klee and Brian raised their hands. Lindsey motioned to all of those with their hands up."

"Great. I don't need to give you guys the orientation so if you want to grab your boots and head over to the south plot, there will be someone there to point you in the right direction. We're in the first week of the second harvest so you'll be picking the coffee cherries that are ready - later on we'll move you over to drying, sorting, and roasting - so get ready to have an awesome coffee day. Oh, and if you want to stop and grab a cup at the brewhouse, feel free - but please, don't spend too long - we rely on your work. Also, I'd like to encourage those of you who have come back to book a longer stay with us in the future - you obviously like it here enough to come back - why not get a little deeper into things?"

She waved them off and the group split into two. Those leaving moved to a large rack of open boxes where they selected big rubber boots. Just like in a bowling alley, they left their shoes behind in the rack they had taken boots from.

Once Lindsey had the newcomers by themselves she began her orientation. "Who knows where coffee comes from?"

Harold thought he knew but didn't want to single himself out. He was strangely nervous without the

assuring presence of his friends to support him.

Others in the group shouted out their answers "Texaco" "The South American Mutuals" "Vienna" "Australia" "Jamaica" "Africa" "Turkey" - they pretty well covered the entire map.

"Whoever said Africa was right. We don't know who the first was but the story we have been passed down goes a bit like this. Some very observant genius-goatherder in what used to be Ethiopia saw his goats eating red berries and becoming agitated. When the goats didn't die, he tried himself and felt the light intoxication of caffeine. Well this genius made it into a tea and introduced it to his friends. Everyone loved it. The desert nomads concocted a better way to brew it and they gave it to the Turks and Arabs. The Turks and Arabs refined the process of brewing and roasting. All the math and science exploits of the Islamic Era are to some extent attributed to a bunch of caffeine wired Arabs drinking too much coffee. In any event they gave it to the Italians and it spread like wildfire through Europe creating the enlightened period of the Renaissance. We can thank coffee for Davinci but it probably also gave us the Medici and banking too and when it spread to the Netherlands and England, it certainly contributed to the birth of capitalism. The Spanish realized they could grow it in South America and when the colonial American's had their famous Boston Tea Party and threw their king's tea in the harbor, they became coffee drinkers too and I've heard that the entire American Revolution and the creation of the rights of man came about because of those guys drinking too much coffee. One thing for sure Marx and Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto while meeting in coffee houses and when the RSA started pulling their totalitarian stunts - it was the Island and Asian Mutuals - Indonesia, the Philippines, Hawaii, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand that created a system that was able to reject their dictatorships and give us the world we live in today. When the women of the mutuals organized the first General Strike - the picket lines were fortified with coffee and when the first communities were created - the sleepless nights on caffeine diets were how the best decisions were made. So, does anyone think coffee isn't important?"

She had seemingly just defined the history of the world as the history of coffee and she had done it in what Harold suspected might have been a single breath. Everyone in his group looked as impressed as he was.

"So, here is what we will do this morning. First, you'll change into some good work boots. Then, I'll take you on a quick tour so you can see the whole process of coffee farming. Along the way you will get to try the best coffee of your life. Then, we'll rejoin our friends among the coffee trees and you will be able to take part in this awesome and incredible work. You will be making a difference today. You will be making the world a better place."

This was exactly how the day was spent. Harold had been a fairly knowledgeable coffee drinker in his day. He'd actually known it originated in the region of Ethiopia, but he'd never really put all the other ideas together before. He wondered how accurate it was? Was human civilization really just the result of an advanced fire-making monkey eating a specific berry? It made as much sense as anything else. He remembered reading how Terrance McKenna had claimed that the human mind had evolved because it was expanded when early human's ingested psilocybin. Why not? Why not human culture being a side effect of pleasurable substance abuse.

This reminded him of his intoxication that morning. He hoped that he hadn't embarrassed himself too much. In any event, it made him glad to have a little bit of time away from Brian and Klee. Also, he still needed to sort of figure out what was going on with he and Klee. Was this just a birthday fling for her? What was it for him?

Lindsey hadn't lied. The coffee they were given was extraordinary. Through the orientation he learned that he hadn't really known much about coffee at all before. He hadn't known that coffee is in the cherry family or that coffee cherries were sweet or that the beans were actually the pits of the fruit or that the tiny white coffee flowers were so fragrant. He hadn't realized that a darker roast meant less caffeine and he definitely hadn't ever been exposed to the amazing permaculture philosophy that they used to grow coffee in Ka'a'awa. Nothing there went to waste. Humans were an equal part of the coffee ecosystem.

By the time he was rejoined with Klee and Brian, it was time for lunch. They all sat together at a table under the shade of a giant monkeypod tree. The food had been distributed in what Lindsey had called 'co-op style'. Harold would have thought of it more as buffet. The folks doing the cooking and washing up were excited to have their guests eat.

"Are these people work-tourists too?" Harold asked

"Some of them probably are," Klee said, "but mostly when people come out to the farms on work tourism, they want to do the farm work. My guess is that most of these folks live around here. It always amazes me how something so similar can be so different."

"What do you mean?" he asked her

"Well, take this rice for instance. This rice tastes totally different from the rice we ate in Waikiki yesterday and the rice on Maui, forget about it, a totally different creature. Same thing with the way they cook the fish here or the corn. And...it's not just the food. The way people talk, even the gestures they make. If you pay close attention, the little regional differences are so amazing."

Harold had nothing to say to this. The changes he had witnessed were mind-blowing. And yet...

"But the beautiful thing," he said "is how they can be so different but at the same time you can recognize them as being the same. We used to say 'same same but different'."

Klee laughed "I've heard old women say that before. You must actually be as old as you look. Oh, I'm still going to find out."

This coming from the woman who just turned seventy-five.

After the mid-day meal, they all were allowed to go work in the section of their choice. Brian wanted to work in roasting but Harold and Klee decided to keep hand picking in the coffee orchard. Every coffee cherry had to be hand picked, selected for perfect ripeness, and gently plucked from the tree. It was a joy to be working in the orchard with Klee and while they may not have gotten as much work done as a couple of seasoned farmers would have, the relative privacy of the orchard allowed them to enjoy plenty of distractions as they got to know each other better.

By the time night had come, they were exhausted but they joined the others in singing, dancing, playing games, and telling stories around bonfires. Harold could see why this was such a sought after and highly respected experience. It was far better than any tourist vacation he had ever been on.

They were all exhausted when it was time to hit the rack. Klee snuggled up next to him on his bunk and

they both fell asleep without even taking their clothes off - though, in true timeless Hawaiian fashion, all the boots and shoes were piled up outside the door.

## Chapter 27

Harold was sorry to leave the coffee farm. He would have enjoyed staying there for several more days but this had only been a short scheduled holiday for Brian and Klee.

"I actually had three days scheduled up at the North Shore," Klee said with the tiniest amount of regret. "Why did you and your dad book such a short stay, Brian?"

"My dad's health isn't all that good. He was exposed to a lot of toxic material when he was younger, they were deconstructing some of the old military tunnels and a bunch of them in his work crew ended up getting sick and dying before they discovered what had happened. Lucky for my dad, he has a strong constitution and he probably had limited exposure - so he's lived a pretty normal life but now that he is past the century mark, it's starting to catch up with him. We do this and a couple other work holidays through the year, but we have to keep it short because getting his infusions when he's away from home isn't really possible."

"Infusions?" Harold asked.

"Yeah, they essentially filter the mutated toxins out of his blood and replace them with DNA-similar nutrients. It tricks his body into not going into full self-destruct mode. A couple of days away from it and he really starts to degrade. I think he might choose to pass in the next couple of years, but then, we've been thinking that for a while and he just keeps moving on. He's a Spring Equinox, so hope springs eternal in him."

Klee was smiling in that sympathetic way people do when there really isn't anything they can say. They were all packed up and ready to head back to the hyper-loop. This time it would be a shorter trip. They would go from Ka'a'awa down the coast to Kailua-Waimanalo. Klee had told Evie that they were coming down and Evie, the girl who had gifted the beautiful fountain pen to Harold, had replied that she had space ready for them.

So far, Harold hadn't seen anything that looked like a communication device so when Klee informed them she had been talking with Evie, he decided it was time to find out what was going on.

"I'm a little confused," Harold said "How did you contact her? And while I'm at it, how did you and Brian make the arrangements for us to all come here? Are you guys using some sort of telepathy?" He was joking when he said it but quickly realized that he was far in the future and anything was possible.

In unison, Brian and Klee both said "The coconut wireless." This didn't serve to clear things up for Harold because in his time the coconut wireless was a metaphor for the rumor mill and how a story could travel from one part of the island to another without using any technology.

"You communicate by rumors?" he didn't know if they would get the joke and they didn't.

"What?" Klee looked at him like a teenager looking at her parent when they talked about rotary phones or dial up internet.

"You don't know about the coconut wireless?" Brian asked him. Harold pictured a sort of Gilligan's Island radio made out of coconuts - 'Professor to Gilligan, Mr Howell needs more money.' No, he was sure that wasn't what it was.

"I do not," Harold said. "Please tell me."

"Sometimes I feel like you are from another planet," Klee said. She had no idea how close she was to the truth but Brian now explained the secrets of the coconut wireless.

"After the pulse began we had to develop a way to communicate over distance that wouldn't be disrupted by the daily EMP. The problem was that radios, walkie talkies, and even wired telephones all operated on some level of electro-magnetic dependency. Of course, it was impossible to use the data networks for the same reason. What eventually developed is a pretty cool marriage of old technology with new and a bit of modern bio-tech thrown in."

Harold was waiting for a ground shaking lecture on something far out from the future.

"Every community and many neighborhoods have allocated resources to build a central Faraday shield beneath them. There are even some householders who are focused on communications or tech and have private servers. The Faraday shield protects a small number of electronics from being fried in the daily pulse. What we discovered was that using ham radios was an effective way to enable communications between locales. On top of that we built mesh networks that allow for information exchange, higher level communications, and more complex data structures - all completely decentralized so that if one Faraday cage fails, the entire network doesn't get blasted. One of the greatest innovations we came up with in the Pacific Mutuals though was the discovery that we could actually use the mineral content of coconut trees to create a broadband antenna and weave the mesh network together."

Harold understood about half of that but he got the point "So, you literally created a coconut wireless system."

He was getting used to them looking at him like he was crazy - as they did now.

"Yeah," Klee said "It's all there in the name - 'the coconut wireless'." She didn't throw a sarcastic 'duh' on the end of it for which Harold was grateful - but it was there. Apparently, the old meaning of the coconut wireless had been lost when an actual coconut wireless was born.

"Just out of curiosity," Harold asked. "What do you call the rumor mill? Or how ideas and stories spread by gossip?"

They both smiled and again in unison said "Cheezemeez." Harold was slightly disappointed to realize that the future hadn't managed to solve the problems posed by those who love to gossip.

The hyperloop ride to Kailua/Waimanalo was only three and half minutes. Harold felt a mild intoxication this time and once again was taken away by the complexity and beauty of the station jingles - but this time he didn't lose himself in the stenotoxication - he remained aware and conscious though he did feel a hint of giddiness and probably just a little too much brotherly love. Brian had been right - there was no comparison with the first time he had looped - but it was still a pleasant experience.

Evie was waiting for them at the Kailua/Waimanalo transit station. There were hugs and alohas all around.

"I hope you don't mind," Evie said "But I brought horses so we could ride back to the farm. Do you all know how to ride?"

Harold had been on horses very few times in his life but the gentle old horse Evie had brought for him did all the work on her own. She had explained that while there were bike paths that would get them to the farm, horses were the best way because they would have to go through some particularly muddy areas. "Horses make the world a better place," Evie said and Harold realized that if everything else in the world changed, little girls would always be little girls. Past, present, and future - the connection between girls and horses was one major constant.

## Chapter 28

Evie hadn't been exaggerating about the mud they would go through. There was no way a bicycle would have made it.

Harold was pretty sure that they were following the route of the Old Pali Road most of the way down but as they descended into Kailua town, it was very much like looking at a different world. Glittering apartment buildings sat on what had been the Marine Base Hawaii in Kaneohe out on the Mokapu Peninsula. It was the most futuristic view that Harold had seen so far in the future.

"What is that?" he asked.

"Arendy Island," Evie said. "It's where all the technophiles go to explore what can be done with new materials, computing, and other research and development projects. There's a lot of agricultural science that goes on out there too, everything from fish farming to developing beneficial insect species. From here though, it really looks like a colony on the moon."

"Are there colonies on the moon?" This was the first Harold had heard of it.

They all laughed at his breathless question. No one answered though. They thought he was joking. Harold wasn't sure if this meant it was obvious there were colonies on the moon or that it was obvious there were not. He decided not to pursue it and laughed with them.

As they descended their brief view of Arendy Island faded away. The horses carried them through the lush rainforest of Maunawili and then down into what Harold had always thought of as the Hamakua Swamp, though most people called it a marsh.

Ahead of them a latticework of farmland stretched out all the way to the shoreline. There were scattered houses and cottages but the dominant feature of the landscape were the terraced taro patches, fields of sweet potato, and row after row of corn growing closer to what had been Kailua Town. Nearly all of the urban or 'town' structures and buildings had been cleared away. There were residential buildings but the shops and business districts all seemed to have disappeared.

"Is there no longer a town or markets here?" Harold asked, remembering that Evie traveled to the Diamond Head marketplace to sell her pens.

"Small kine," Evie said. "Mostly you get what you want from those who produce it but there is a public market that happens here a few times a week - but it's nothing like the marketplace where we met. Very small scale and mostly people bringing chickens and bok choi."

It was an interesting idea for Harold to consider. As much as he'd dreamed about living in a world without capitalism, he's never really considered how it would remake the urban landscape. There was no need for banks or mortgage companies. Without a profit motive, grocery stores and restaurants didn't need to be focused on location, location, location - and there was actually no real incentive for restaurants to exist at all except as passion projects and without government regulations saying what could be built where and putting health and safety rules in place as barriers to entry - a chef with a yen for being a restaurateur could start in whatever kitchen he currently resided in. As for grocery stores - without a profit motive, there really wasn't an incentive for the kind of grocery store Harold had known - instead it made sense that people would be more focused on locally produced foods - though he had to

wonder if there was trade in exotic foods. People in cold places probably still enjoyed eating pineapple and mangoes and Hawaii wasn't a place you could easily grow asparagus.

So, there were no large stores and no gas stations and no cars and no restaurants and very little in the way of financial or retail establishments - because, really, all of those things were capitalist when the chips were put on the table.

The horses clomped through swampy mud at least a foot deep as they trekked to Evie's family farm. Gradually, the ground solidified under them and they seemed to gain a little in elevation until they were on a sort of island that sat surrounded by a sea of green taro leaves growing out from the intensive swampy grounds surrounding them. The taro, called kalo by the Hawaiians, was farmed in terraces that climbed up the sides of the mountain and descended down into the lowlands. Harold had a clear view of several large stone platforms. They seemed to act as sections of a dam that held the swamps back from the slightly elevated coastal plain. A levy crawled between the stone monuments. One of the stone platforms looked familiar to him - though in his time it had been nearly obscured by huge mango trees.

"Is that the Ulupo Heiau?" he asked.

Evie was surprised. "You've been here before?"

"Yes, a long time ago. It's a very ancient monument." Even in Harold's time, the Ulupo Heiau had been ancient - a gargantuan stone platform built thousands of years in the past which no one properly knew the origins of - though looking at the world as it existed now - Harold could see where it fit in in the system of dams and dykes that created the possibilities for this intensive wetland agriculture. The past became more clear in the future.

The 'island' upon which Evie's family lived was not their personal domain. There were at least twenty dwellings and a great number of people who moved about doing the necessary work that would yield the crops. Men, women, children - they were all engaged in all different kinds of work from those who pounded the taro to create poi to those who pulled the immature quorms from the harvested plants so that they could be planted, to those who wore high rubber boots in the lo'i and planted or tended the growing taro.

Those they passed greeted Evie and the strangers but were more engaged in their work than anything else though some of them did look at them with appraising eyes - perhaps wondering if these newcomers were there to visit or to become new members of the community.

"We're here now," Evie turned to them and gestured at a modest little complex of buildings joined by covered walkways. A stable and corral were nearby - Evie helped them all to dismount and remove the tack from their horses before she released them into the corral. "My sisters and I will come back a little later to brush them and clean up the gear but right now I want to introduce you to my oldest grandparents. Please come pay your respects to our kupuna."

She led them to a two walled structure - what Harold might have called a shed - where a number of old people - actual old people who looked old - sat on the floor amidst stacks of dried lauhala. They were weaving baskets, making hats, winding together fibre into twine and rope and doing many other tasks that required the skill of age but not the vigor of youth. Mostly, what they were doing though, was talking story. Telling stories of their youth and tales of the distant past.

Evie, followed by Klee and then by Harold and Brian, went around the room, hugging, kissing, touching foreheads and greeting the assembled senior citizens. It was an almost normal experience for Harold as he had been in Hawaii long enough that he had become a part of many local families. The strange part came when he realized just how old these people must be. If they looked like they were eighty or ninety in his time - there seemed a very real possibility that they could be close to centuries old.

"We'll come back," Evie told the kupuna when they indicated that the newcomers should sit and join them, "I want to show these guys where they are staying and I think they might need to use the bathroom."

This last sentence seemed to strike a particular nerve with the oldsters and there was no protest as Evie led them out, down a network of covered walkways and to a smaller version of the bunkhouse they had stayed in on the coffee farm. This particular bunkhouse was for no more than eight or ten people.

"We don't get a lot of guests," Evie explained, "but we cleaned everything up for you and if you need anything just let me know. The toilets and washrooms are down the long walkway behind this building. I'm going to give you guys some time to settle yourselves then I'll give you the tour...get ready to answer lots of questions."

Harold had become a bit shy about asking questions. He was feeling particularly exhausted suddenly and after he had used the toilet and washed up, he sat down on the bunk - his shoes were at the door and he brought his feet up on the bed for just a second and then decided it wouldn't hurt to close his eyes until Evie returned - and then he was fast asleep.

## Chapter 29

When he woke, he discovered that his companions had allowed him to rest for several hours. He stepped out of the bunkhouse found his shoes and set about looking at the world. He was glad to have the opportunity to wander around a bit freely.

The farm was a mixture of traditional agriculture with modern techniques and some things that he recognized as being uniquely of this time which he dubbed new-modern. A good example was the buildings themselves. The roofing material was a new-modern polymer - he couldn't identify it. It was like something between plastic and ceramic. When he touched it, it felt cold and hard - like tile or slate but the texture was smooth and non-porous like the hard plastic used to make cars and phone bodies.

The walls of the houses, however, were in the old Hawaiian mode, these were made of the lauhala that the old folks had been working with in the shed - woven together into tight flat sheets. In ancient times, the Hawaiians had made their walls, the sails of their voyaging canoes, their flooring and much more from lauhala. The windows were glass and much of the decoration was similar to his own time with flowered cloth curtains and furniture that was generally so similar to that from his time that he didn't notice a difference.

As he made his way on the covered walkways between the hale (it made no sense to describe these houses with anything but 'hale' the Hawaiian word for house), Harold was surprised that he didn't encounter anyone. It was mid-day and there was no one about. He came to the stable and corral and saw that the horses were still there. He reached the hale where the kupuna had been working on the lauhala and saw their projects set aside as if they had left with the intention to come back to them.

He hadn't yet ventured to open doors or shout to see if he could find anyone, but there was a rising tide of panic within him. Anything could happen, after all, he had fallen asleep and awoken hundreds of years in the future. What if everyone had now disappeared?

His rational mind soothed the animal panic he felt and soon he had reasoned that waking in the future didn't necessarily equate with all the living people on the planet disappearing when he had a nap. He kept looking. The island village was far larger than he had at first thought and soon he abandoned the covered walkways of the complex he was staying in to venture across the sea of grass to another such complex. Still, there was no one.

Finally, he sat in the sun and closed his eyes only to have Klee shake him awake.

He was in the bunk where he had fallen asleep, it had only been a short while - perhaps a few minutes and now Evie was back to give them a tour of the farm. As the girl led them from hale to hale introducing them to her uncles and aunties, Harold was amazed that his subconscious mind had so accurately picked up the details upon their arrival to have given him such a dream. His mind had mapped out the complex and recreated it in his sleep.

He touched a roof tile and was astounded to experience an intense deja-vu - he hadn't touched it before, but it felt exactly like he had. His observations and his dream had put him in a funny mood. He saw everything that was presented to them - the kalo terraces, the people working in the lo'i, the aunties and uncles talking story, cooking, eating, playing music...but now he had a funny sense that simply wouldn't go away.

Now, he felt like the Chinese philosopher who said "Last night I dreamed I was a butterfly and now I don't know if I am a man who dreamed he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming that he is a man." Still, here he was.

They put on mud boots and waded out in the lo'i where Evie showed them how to expose the bottom portion of the quorm before gently placing it in the mud. This was a sacred process. Her mother waded out to where they were now working.

"We believe that the Kalo is our older brother and it is our job to take care of him. In turn, he feeds us and provides us with the things we need. This is the cycle. One leads to the other and back to the one." Evie's mother put the stalk of the taro into the mud and chanted "*Ku'i i ka 'ai, ku'i i ka 'ai, ku'i i ka 'ai pa'a 'ai.*"

Gradually, the day came to feel like just a day and less like a dream, but the sound of Evie's mother's chant reverberated in Harold's head. It gave him a grounded sense of place and colored the way he saw everything - not just on the farm but everything he had seen and experienced since he had awoken here in the future.

The day was pleasurable and they worked together, learned together, laughed together. There were countless stories told - stories of dogs that ran off with important bones and stories of grandparents and great-grandparents and 2nd and 3rd-great-grandparents. These oral histories and connection from one to the other - from the past to the present with an unending chain of custody brought Harold to a place where he could almost feel the presence of the ancestors they spoke of. He might have actually known some of them - which was a strange thought, to think of himself and his life in the past tense.

"Do you write down all these stories?" he asked Evie, remembering that she wanted to be a writer.

"I do," she told him. "My mother says that I'm the family historian but I write down much more than just my family's stories. I'm going to write down your story too - the story of the man I gave a pen to."

"Oh, I really like that," Harold said. "Maybe you could write a story from the perspective of the pen itself. You could start with the pen being made and given to the ancestor of the man you got it from. Then you could follow the pen through the life and adventures of the people who carry it."

Evie loved this idea. She hugged him. "I knew that meeting you would help me to write a story. I love it. Mr. Haggins has some really interesting stories too. Thank you."

At first Harold thought she was referring to him. "I'm happy to share any stories with you, but honestly I think your stories are far more interesting than mine."

"Oh, I'm sure you have some amazing stories, but tomorrow, I'm going to go see Mr. Haggins again and I'm going to find out the history of your pen, he's the one who gave it to me. Would you guys like to come and meet him?"

Harold was ready to say yes, but Klee shook her head. "I'm afraid I've already scheduled my berth on a voyage back to Maui for tomorrow - so we are going to have to leave pretty early."

"What?" Harold was shocked by this. "You're leaving?"

Klee looked down at the ground, not something that was in her usual catalog of gestures. She looked up and met his eyes.

"I have been meaning to tell you, but the right time never came." Harold felt devastated. Suddenly, he realized just how quickly the feelings he had for Klee had blossomed into something very deep. He felt the loss but she was still there right in front of him.

One corner of her mouth was being tugged into a smile. She took his hands. "I did something...and you can say no if you want, I'm not trying to own you or tell you what you should do...okay?"

Harold was still trying to deal with the hurricane of feelings that were spinning inside of him. He wanted to be angry and sad and so many things but he maintained his composure, aware that all of those around him were watching. Somehow, he was soothed by the look of care in Klee's eyes.

"What?" he asked. "What did you do?"

"I asked them to reserve an extra seat for you. I know that you probably have an agenda and things that you want to do - so it's not a problem if you say no, but ... and please, I'm not trying to manipulate you in any way... but ...this time with you has been...wonderful and I don't want it to end. I'm needed back on Maui - I really have to go back tomorrow - but I would really love it if you would come with me...so we can spend some time exploring what exactly this is between us."

This strong, powerful, beautiful, ancient woman in front of him looked vulnerable as she pled her case to him. There was nothing Harold could do - in that moment - with a half dozen people around them, listening to them, witnessing this moment with them - Harold saw nothing but Klee.

"Of course I'll go with you," he said and she was in his arms. The world melted away and there was nothing but the two of them in that moment.

"I'm definitely going to write this story," Evie said.

## Chapter 30

The day on Evie's farm was one of the most pleasant Harold had ever spent. He felt like he had landed among an extended family that he never knew. There were no distinctions between the villagers in terms of race or ethnicity. Some of them were white, some of them were brown, some looked distinctly Asian and others like they had come from Samoa or the Caribbean, but he never heard the term haole, hapa, portagee, pake, or any of the other racial markers that had existed in his time.

Even in Harold's time, Hawaii existed as a sort of a world apart from everywhere else. It was further from everywhere else on the planet than anywhere else and where the USA had branded itself the great melting pot, Hawaii had always been more of a mixing bowl - a place where the Portuguese guitar became the ukulele and Japanese ramen became saimin. The bits and pieces of other cultures washed up on the shores like flotsam that was then used to build the cultural house of the castaways. In a mixing bowl, you don't really want the chocolate to melt because chunks of chocolate make the cookies better.

This existence, this place had become even more like that. People seemed to have stopped putting so much importance on where the pieces had come from and had simply started appreciating what each piece could bring to the overall table-full of cookies.

During the day they worked, they talked, they sang, they listened to masterful story tellers. As evening hit, the farmers gathered for a performance of shadow puppetry and by the time it was over, Harold's eyelids were incredibly heavy. Several of the keiki had fallen asleep, either in their parent's arms or in funny little piles of kids that made Harold think of happy puppies or kittens all snuggling together.

Walking back to the bunkhouse, the three friends walked arm in arm, the walkway was wide enough for them to move abreast of one another. Harold was in the middle.

"I noticed something about you today, Harold," Brian said to him as they broke their formation and headed to the washrooms. "You seem younger than you were a few days ago."

This was a startling thing for Harold to hear. He looked in the mirror. He smiled. "I certainly feel younger," he said "and now that you mention it - there does seem to be a bit less grey than there was..." He was joking as he said it in the universal trailing off manner of all comics but as he looked, he realized that it was quite possibly true. He did look younger.

"We have enzymes in the water, that actually help to repair your recombinant DNA, I've heard that because of the radiation and the chemical pollutants in the RSA water table that people age prematurely there. Also, from what I've heard of the food - it just isn't healthy." Brian was now next to him. "A few more weeks and you might start looking as young as me."

Harold was startled by the idea but then smiled to himself realizing that he was actually closer to Brian in age than he was to Klee. Beautiful, wonderful Klee. "I'll never have that bright innocence that shines from your eyes, my friend. You are youthful in ways that I can never be. I hope that it is always so."

They walked back to the bunkhouse where Klee had already climbed into her bed.

"I'm so excited to show you Maui," Klee said to him. "Wait until you see the wave powered voyaging canoes - they have solar backup but oh my god, they are so cool. We are going to have such an

amazing time. You'll get to see my practice and meet my colleagues and we can take a trip into Haleakala's crater - this time of the year there are some amazing things happening there...and the spring and summer festivals are coming soon..."

Harold stepped over to the bunk. She had the top bunk, he was on the bottom. He stepped onto the ladder and leaned against her mattress. He was adjusting to this new reality - he had decided not to try to deal with what he had left in the past and to simply focus on being here, in this moment, in this time.

"I'm so happy I met you in the bathroom," he said to her. It was now their private joke. Harold leaned in and kissed her. "I can't wait to see everything you want to show me."

He stepped off the ladder and hung his clothes on the hooks next to the bed before climbing into his bunk and falling deep asleep.

In the morning, there was an astounding amount of activity. They woke before dawn and found Evie waiting for them with the horses saddled. She led them through the Hamakua Marsh and the kalo terraces and back up to the hyperloop station.

"Promise you'll come back next time your on island," she demanded from them as they all hugged outside the terminal. They all swore they would.

Going inside, Brian revealed that he was going to be heading back down to the marketplace at Diamond Head instead of heading to Wai Momi, formerly Pearl Harbor, with them. He was going south while they were going west. They all promised to stay in contact with the coconut wireless but soon it was time for them to part ways.

Harold and Klee stepped into the hyperloop capsule ready to take the next leg of their journey. West to Wai Momi and there they would board a modern voyaging canoe which would take them to Maui by way of Molokai, Lanai, and Ko'ho'o'lawe. They would be several days at sea with overnight stops on several islands. If they chose, they would be able to work on the voyage. It was something Klee said she always looked forward to. Harold caught her excitement and was eager to learn more.

They strapped into their seats and the Kailua/Waimanalo jingle began to play. Klee squeezed Harold's hand as the hyperloop accelerated. Harold felt his bag in his other hand. The pressure squeezed his whole body and he began to see darkness at the edges of his vision. Stars danced over his consciousness and his body began to feel hot - too hot. He closed his eyes and tried to concentrate on the jingle but it changed as he tried to capture it. The sudden crash of symbols and harsh rejoinder of taiko drums caught him by surprise and soon, he lost track of the music as it was replaced by a steady "beep...beep...beep..."

He could no longer feel his hands, Klee, or his bag. Light gathered around the edges of his vision, He was able to recognize words and voices became clear.

"His breathing seems to be autonomic again..." a man's voice was saying. "I think we can remove the ventilator. Oxygen levels have skyrocketed in his blood. He's almost at par."

A female voice now remarked "How is that possible? What just happened? Have you ever seen anything like that?"

"We still know almost nothing about this disease," the doctor said "I'm surprised by it everyday. Let's hope the vaccines don't have any long term negative side effects - God knows they were rushed."

"Heart rate has steadied Doctor. I think he might be regaining consciousness..." the nurse still sounded like she was saying something she didn't believe possible.

"Well, let's give him a little bit of a sedative. Whatever has happened with his body, it won't hurt for him to have a bit of a rest before he wakes up - and nobody should have to wake up here."

Harold felt a light fog crawling over his consciousness. He was warm and the sound of the medical team faded as he fell into a deep drug induced sleep.

When he awoke, his wife was next to the bed, holding his hand, looking into his face with concern and relief.

"There you are," she said. "I wondered if I would ever see you again. They only let me in because I seem to have the antibodies in my blood."

Looking at her, he felt the love and respect he had always felt for her. He was filled with joy to see her face. He briefly felt a deep sadness and confusion at the thought of Klee but then realized that the old beautiful lady he had known and loved in the future wouldn't be born for centuries.

"I wasn't sure I would ever see you again," he said to her.

"Well, you idiot socialists are lucky that more of you didn't die. That Gronski kid was your super-spreader and he gave it to nearly all of you. I'm just going to tell you, the old guy who arranged the meeting, he was the only one of you who died - though, it looked like maybe you were going to be next."

Harold thought of that old man - the radical old senior who had sang the Internationale with such gusto on that night that now seemed to be so long ago. Harold thought it might have been a reasonable way for the old guy to have gone out. As for the Gronski kid, Harold wasn't sure who that was...probably one of the libertarian capitalists - selfish pricks.

Realizing what his wife had just told him, he tried to bring himself back to the present, back to the now.

"Covid?" he asked her. She pursed her lips and nodded. "How long have I been here?"

"Almost a week - it's the 27th today," she told him. "You're lucky they had a bed for you. They told me that they pumped you full of one of the new vaccines and there may be some side effects."

To be honest, Harold felt great. He felt much better and much healthier than he had in a long time.

"All I remember is getting home and climbing into bed after the Sing with Socialists event," he said. "I don't know anything beyond that."

It wasn't actually true. He remembered waking up in the future and spending days seeing the world of his dreams. It was all as clear as day in his head. Suddenly, a terrible thought occurred to him, what if none of it had actually happened? What if it had all been a feverish dream? What if Klee, Brian,

Kavika, Ku, and Evie had all been a drug induced hallucination?

Harold closed his eyes, remembering his friends. Wondering if he had imagined them all.

"Well - there's not much to tell beyond that," his wife told him. "I'm not sure what you guys were drinking or smoking at that event - but yeah, you made it home and then at some point - you got out of bed, put on some really funky clothes - I have no idea where you even got them because I've never seen them before - and then you went out early in the morning and they found you lying on the ground outside the Pearl Harbor Visitor Center when they opened up that morning. I know you came home because your bed was rustled up, but I didn't see you until I got the call from the hospital. They kept you in quarantine the whole time and it's only now that they are finally letting me see you."

"They thought you were going to die," she was crying now, holding his hand, leaning over him.

Harold had latched onto one thing. "The clothes, do you still have them?"

His wife looked at him suspiciously. "Yeah, they're at home...I brought you some regular clean clothes for when they let you check out. Why?"

"Did I have anything else with me?" Harold was really grasping at straws.

His wife got up and went to closet and opened the door.

"You had this backpack with you - I've never seen it before. It has some books in it, a knife, and this..."

She pulled out a beautiful copper colored fountain pen. The tiger stripe burnishing and gold pocket clip on it brought an astounding amount of joy and relief to Harold. He felt the tears of happiness coming from him. His wife was by his side instantly, embracing him, holding him, reassuring him...

"It's a really beautiful pen, but my oh my, this reaction...I think you probably need to get more rest."

Harold had never felt more joy. The bird outside his window started whistling and he swore it was the opening of the Kailua Waimanalo jingle.

The End