

Some Time Alone

by

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Cover Letter

Sitting down to read is a selfless act while also being a selfish one since a person is putting aside time for themselves but it's for enrichment. If the writing is good it'll show you a moment, that gets elongated by a paragraph or even a page. That written moment could have lasted a second or a minute in real life, but the writer can translate that into a whole page, showing what was experienced in intricate detail. A moment elongated by imagery, a moment built up by suspense, or a moment cut by honesty. Consequently, one or two sentences can't show the infinite array of neurons that are firing in a mind when the act of thinking happens. One thought can only be expressed at a time when you sit down to write. Thus the sentence arises and another continues on that movement of thought. "Some Time Alone" is a creative nonfiction project where thoughts appear as they come from the space of observation both internally and externally. When I look at the big picture I see my manuscript as a book, although my aim this year is to just go as far as I can. Over 80 pages have sprung from me this academic year, but I'm only using 60 pages for the project's outcome.

My writing looks back at a time when I worked on a farm in Hawaii. With my work, I received housing accommodations in a high-rise tent, so I spent most of my time outside where I was alone. During my stay in Hawaii, I kept a journal that I continue to use as a guide when I write. Reading through these pages marked by their dates, I am reminded more clearly of the events and also how I wrote. Through this reflection, I saw how my voice has changed into more

of an enhanced form over the last three years. There is a good deal of dream recounting in the journal and sweet, short pondering with the reality of what was going on around me. This influenced my writing, giving my project a dream-like setting, while also being slightly eerie as if something is afoot. Whereas this relatively new voice from the past year generated more of a flow, one where I can carry on a story rather than my previous revelations.

The farm was up in the mountains, and not many people lived there, a few farms and properties scattered among the valley. The nature was absolutely wild, with green everywhere, earthquakes from the volcano, and ancient rocks with energy. The place is magnetic and events seem magnified. Danger is hidden throughout the project, something to be picked up on. The people who took care of the farm were strange, and their personalities come out through dialogue and some actions. Every time they appear something is off, yet looking back I was naive to the environment at hand, I didn't see it all. The eye-opening experiences happen near the end of my time on the farm when Buddhism helped me get through the rough time, which is a big influence on my writing. There is a build-up and a climax that resulted from me having to leave the farm in a hurry after 8 weeks. There was no service, I had few outside connections. My electricity came from a single solar panel that barely gave enough light. No fridge or toilet. This book gets real and primal at times, especially through the internal dialogue I express in this.

The main literary tool I am using is foreshadowing and suspense. So much happened when I was actually there, which means I can't write everything, but I can write what works within a story in general. The moments I want to share from outside characters mostly foreshadow what's going to happen in the book. This is paralleled by the magnetism of the island; what has been spoken out loud will manifest in one shape or another. Spirituality is a big

creative force throughout the piece with it being portrayed in nature while also a sort of prayer that was happening, one of protection.

Within this project, elements of the island of Hawaii will surface up to the pages. The location that is locked by water on all sides, has a certain ebb and flow to how the society moves there. The inhabitants (characters) are diverse and come from all walks of life, uniquely their own. I want to highlight the familial guidance shown by the Hawaiian people as well as share some of the wisdom I heard, embedding the spirituality of the location in the project. The waters give their teachings, the plants speak gently, and actions ripple into consequences through a greater force. The Island itself is forceful and gentle through its elemental conditions of water and light. The way things move mesh in with Eastern mysticism, through the teachings of Daoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. These teachings will take more of a shape later on when I am writing this, post-graduation.

A big influence of mine is Joan Didion, especially her book *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. I read Didion's book a year after I left the farm, and something in her writing showcased a similarity to what I was planning to write, and how I originally started organizing my project. Didion's book is a collection of essays and nonfiction prose that is incredibly location-oriented. The stories illuminate a world of what the people around her were doing and saying, while also being in tune with Didion's emotions and perspectives. Her book feels like it's written in the third person omniscient yet her narrative is ultimately very much in tune with her voice and point of view. Her writing in that particular book is the kind of fashion I would like my writing to gear towards with how I'm telling my senior project, including what is happening around a location. In a similar vein to the journalistic perspective, tapping the boundaries and

pushing them to reach higher levels of thought and human behavior. The location of *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* also coincides with some of the locations I will be writing about, mainly San Francisco. I was stunned by the honest detail Didion recounted in the passages marked by San Francisco and the people there. As a result, when I look at my own chapters joined by that same location, I see some similarities through the people I met, including my honest thoughts on the project.

The themes in my project definitely bridge those themes expressed in creative nonfiction manuscripts. Authenticity and research through the experience of life unravel in the story with events of this current society braiding in the foundation of the project. In the beginning, there is a strong presence of drug abuse, the pandemic, and myself as the observer in the changing environment. These trends continue throughout the whole project and unravel in different directions yet the strands reflect through what was expressed right on. I am allowing myself to be completely free when writing this project, not holding back any thoughts. It's going to get weird, especially with one of the other workers on the farm who is a very paranoid man who I suspect has some mental problems while also always mentioning a sickness. While we worked together he told me about alien abductions, government conspiracies, and out-of-body experiences. I'm hoping that his past live rambles will be a branch that sways away from the story's movement although create its own rhythm that will blend in with the piece as a whole. These rambles can also parallel my own, with how I communicate in the narrative. This is where imagination and the faculties of the mind play in and create a chunky part of the narrative that acts as a vehicle of freedom. The freedom to think and live beyond what the trajectory of life has us fit into. The

whole backbone is really driving away from how a normal society operates under, since this all happened in such an isolated place, an island that has a world of its own.

Essentially, this project will encapsulate a time in my life that I want to share with others to read, what happened on the farm with all its intricacies and beauty. Writing has blended itself into my life, like a third leg or a third eye. It is a part of who I am, and I find myself thinking about it every day. There are days that I battle with the thought and action of writing, but I push through those days and find enjoyment in the practice and try not to make it a chore. This project is carving out space for me to have fun and love what I'm writing rather than dwelling on writing with making myself feel as though I have to do it. With this project, there is every fiber inside me wanting to do this and create it for eyes to see, anyone who is willing to listen to my story. The title "Some Time Alone" also plays with the perspective of the reader, since they'll need some time alone to actually read the words on the pages. Through the cover held upright, anyone who sees the reader would notice that they are experiencing the words on the title. Some time alone, please.

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For Lorena and Jane

Maybe I'll do something I've never done.

Prologue

Underneath the current of the city, the metro seemed quiet for a moment. I sit down under the San Francisco airport, waiting for a train towards city hall. I observe the black windows displaying nothing but the passing of other trains. All these moving parts inside a man-made tunnel, and I get reminded of Grand Central. Both points are disconnected from what happens up on the ground level. Not much is shown as I step out and walk up the stairs, just some colorful murals on the walls and the light from the sun brightening up the darkness of the tunnel. I stop right as I'm about to make it outside, checking my phone for the next direction in finding where my hotel is. A man is there with nothing on him, and he pulls down his shorts and bends over, showing his whole ass. I see this plenty in New York as well. The term is mooning, when someone strips their ass in front of you and I've seen it a handful of times.

I walk out to the street, and see business buildings harboring around a square that allows buses to come and go. This is the Tenderloin District, a place that is inherent to itself. I drop my bags on the floor just as I find myself a seat next to two people under the covering that bus stops usually occupy. Without any time to look up and catch a glimpse of my surroundings, the woman next to me lights a crack pipe. I jump up from my chair, nearing a shout.

“What! Are you serious?” I exclaim.

The woman with the lit up pipe, looks into my eyes and says,

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” she whispers. Continuing lighting up her pipe, but this time you can clearly see how upset she is by the way she bows her head to her chest.

“It’s ok,” I came up to say.

She hands the pipe to the man next to her. I stand up and lug my backpack over my shoulders and throw my duffle bag on top as well. I look at them as I am about to go. Her face looks like it’s falling down with her eyes speaking words of slowness. “Be gentle, I’m hurting,” the unspoken words gesture from her drooping eyelids.

The walking directions show fifteen minutes and I start walking, needing some space. It’s windy here yet the sun feels stronger, warming up the skin that my t-shirt doesn’t cover. I look down on the floor and see needles sprawled about everywhere with tarps and homeless people laying on them. Some people are standing up and smoking out of a crack pipe, our eyes connect, and they start hissing and snarling towards my direction. I look down on the beige sidewalk and watch my sneakers catch up to one another. Cars are passing by with people getting in and out of them.

On Market Street we are all vulnerable to a gravity that brings us closer to ourselves, huddling in whatever we bring around. I walk heavy with the weight of my backpack carrying clothes and pieces of myself; the snarling men not carrying much but a heaviness within. They shoot heavy noises towards my way, but there’s a barrier that keeps them from getting close to me. All of us are tired, from what we are carrying, and that could be the very barrier of what is separating the contact that can so easily occur. I keep walking and this time I chose not to look.

I turn on Polk Street and walk towards Music City Hostel where a bed costs 30 dollars a night. I ring the doorbell and walk up the steep stairs to the second floor. There's a man sitting at the desk, and he asks out for my name. We greet each other, he's handsome and he keeps asking me questions about where I'm from and why I came alone. He tells me my room isn't ready, but I can leave my stuff here while I wait. I drop my things and go out for another walk. This time the streets are filled with people who are dressed in blue jeans and colorful shirts, enjoying the warmth that the sun is bringing. I walk around and look at the solitary trees at every corner that were left for decoration, the neighboring ones cut for room. There are bookstores, thrift stores, and lots of options for food. I head down further down the hill and see the wharf at the distance bringing the bay at view. I turn around knowing my room would be ready by the time I make it back.

The room is empty when I walk in and there are three sets of bunkbeds with a kitchenette at the corner, and large windows by the beds. The ceilings are high with large windows showing views from the streets below. On one side I can see the lively movement on Polk Street and on the other shows an alleyway with tents and people living inside them. I have a roommate too, only one since the pandemic requires social distancing in rooms. Usually, this room can host 6 people resulting in the low price but state regulations are cutting it down to half that amount. My roommate is from Dallas and is resting on the bed. She gets up at 5am everyday to catch a bus to her job at Goodwill. Rent is cheaper here and she informs me about the cafe down the block that gives us free breakfast. I lay down on the bed and rest for a little while thinking of what I would

like to see. The Golden Gate seems like a popular point and I call a cab for the 20 minute drive over.

Hotel hallways have always been interesting to me, since it often reflects the energy in which a certain place emulates. The hallways here show portraits of famous musicians from the 60s and 70s. Photos of Janis Joplin, Jonnie Mitchell, and Bob Dylan are everywhere, and I can tell that some of the people staying here are replicating this swagger that these musicians carried. I open the door leading me onto the street and there's this tall older man with long curly brown hair and a cool jacket, looking like a character in *Almost Famous*. Next to him is a thin woman wearing tights both smoking on their American Spirit. We smile at each other and the guy asks me how I'm doing. I'm rebelling my way out of the ordinary, I thought, refusing to go home to my family and venturing off with the little money I managed to save. Not particularly a California dreamer, but a nineteen year old girl looking for a space to write. I get in the cab and drive towards Baker Beach.

As I head out of the car, the landscape changes drastically. The usual design of houses and pavement vanish with the cliffs showcasing the powerful tides of the bay. I walk along this cliff up the path that leads up to the bridge. The wind is strong and I thank myself for the wind-breaker I have on, something I brought on accident. It's strange how alive the nature is here, completely green with pockets of color from the flowers sprouting on the ground, yet the wind brings a chill like no other. The wind's force stronger than what I'm used to and I can feel myself move while standing still. There's a huge structure nearing the bridge with a sign referring it as

the engineered maintenance with posted signs talking about how a bridge can be earthquake proof. I read the words that talk about what an earthquake is and why San Francisco is prone to them. The bay tips the perimeter of the ring of fire and the Golden Gate Bridge has steel like no other to protect the shaking that can so easily occur. The bridge is massive, larger than any man-made structure I've seen; larger than a skyscraper in a sense, maybe not in height but definitely in width. I stay near the bridge for hours until the setting sun forces me to retreat back indoors.

I walk over to the cafe that offers a free cup of coffee and meal. As I step out onto the street I see a boy around my age sitting down with his back to the walls. He just has a backpack by his side and stares out into the road. He's the skinniest boy I've ever seen. When I get to the cafe just on the bend of the street I'll order him something along with that I'm getting. I wonder what I'll say to him, not wanting to upset him by plainly ordering him food because I assume he can't afford it, but to say it in a gentler way. The guy who helps me messed up my order and gave me an extra, I think that's the story I'll give him. I buy a blueberry danish and walk back with my bag of food. I see him at the same spot as before and I'm glad to see him, in a way. There are some butterflies in my stomach, giddy that I'm helping him out with breakfast. I get up to him, about to utter some words and then I look down and a pit sinks inside my stomach. He's injecting a needle in his arm. "Hi" is all that escapes my mouth and he quickly hides the needle away from me. His big blue eyes look up at mine, all glossy and bright.

"The coffee place gave me extra food, would you like to take what I'm not eating?" I ask him.

"Whaaaat? Oh gosh, yeah I would. They just gave you free food?" he drags his words. His head is moving slowly as if he was in water. I explain the story I came up with while waiting on the

line, how the guy messed up my order. He takes the danish and stuffs the bag by his side with the needles falling on the ground. He moves around quicker this time, not wanting me to look at what he's doing.

“Are you from here?” I ask.

He tells me his name is Eli and that he ran away from home, in Sacramento. He tells me about his parents, how they wouldn't want him back after what he's been doing. I just listen to him not really knowing what to say and then he asks if I'm from here. I tell him about the book I want to start writing, how it's hard for me to write at home so I found a job on a farm in Hawaii, I'm going there in a few days. He gets excited and smiles,

“Your going to Hawaii to write a book, oh man that is so cool. It's people like you that are the future,” he says all while smiling. I trip up for a moment at what he tells me. I'm the future?

We're the same age and I think about how he's the future too, not much difference between the two of us.

“So are you,” I shyly say and he laughs. I've heard his laugh before from boys not knowing if they want to burst in tears or laugh the pain off. It's a laugh that comes from the deepest part in the chest, rummaging in and avoiding the root of the gravity that is buried deep. I go back inside and eat my food, writing out the points of the city I wanna check out for the day. When I go outside I don't see him anymore.

I focus on the houses as I walk around the city aimlessly. They look small and appear flat instead of the usual length that take shape in most large cities. There are purple houses and orange ones and ones with decadent carvings on the outside. I take pictures of the houses until I find myself

in the Castro area of San Francisco. There are rainbow flags along the businesses, I heard that this is the LGBT district. There's an incredibly friendly air on this part as people are enjoying brunch and drinking beer. It's cloudy today and there just might be rain. I continue on a hill, it seems that hills are never ending here, always climbing. I'm trying to get to the Sutro Tower that is nestled by the Twin Peaks, giving an incredible view. There's a Tibetan store to my right and I glance through the windows. I open the door and get a feeling of instant calm. A single stick of lavender is slowly burning throughout the store, rising up to my nose. There are two women behind the counter, one just sitting and the other organizing rocks in a plastic bin. I look at the rocks that are placed in a wooden display and the woman sitting down smiles at me and we say hello. One other customer is inside looking at what's out on the edges, some rugs and singing bowls.

"Are you looking for anything special?" the woman behind the counter asks.

I curl my lips and look at the wall, thinking of what I would like.

"Maybe something to burn," I tell her. She recommends some Palo Santo and I've heard of that before from a friend who works with the medicine in Peru, at least that's how he put's it. She hands me this carved out bark that is a light tan, almost yellow color. Doesn't smell like much when I lift it up to my nose but I buy it and then ask her how much the singing bowls are. She shows me various kinds with different colors that are aligned with the colors of the chakras. Not really what I want, so she shows me another one that is black and golden with Sanskrit written along the sides. It's not too much and she gives me five dollars off so I place the souvenirs in my drawstring bag. I walk a good deal uphill with rain pouring down and just as I reach the bottom of Twin Peaks the rain goes away. The Sutro Tower stands tall up on the highest point of the hill,

or small mountain. The whole Bay Area looks visible from this high up and I watch the distant city.

I wake up early for my flight and stuff my clothes back into the green backpack I brought with me. It's a third of my size, meant for easier travel although it's a bit heavy. I drink my last cup of coffee, that they put out in the morning along with a large container of creamer. Outside, it's still cloudy from yesterday and I call a cab this time, instead of taking public transportation to the airport. My driver comes around and he helps me load my things into the trunk. He's smiling a bunch and talks very lightly, "Your going to Alaska?" he asks.

The airline I'm taking is Alaskan and I tell him about the farm work in Hawaii. He jumps up from excitement as I tell him my destination.

"Oh that is so special! You're gonna stay there, you're gonna end up falling in love and stay there," he tells me while laughing. I laugh too and say maybe, but I need to come back to New York and finish school. The thought of staying there is enough to sustain the joy in my heart, let alone the joy of falling in love.

"New Yorkers are the meanest people I've ever met," he tells me.

"What, you think so? There are definitely mean people there but I think their mostly friendly. It's the pace of life that makes them short," I tell him a bit defensively but in a playful manner. He starts telling me stories about the people he picks up and how the ones from New York treat him poorly, commanding him to take them places and that's all that they utter. "Take me here, take me there," they'll say and never want to talk further than that. Usually businessmen he tells me and they never continue on a conversation, always so angry. I look out the window solemnly.

“Oh yeah, those business guys can be mean, but I promise we’re friendly,” I tell him everyone isn’t like that.

“Your the first nice person from New York that I’ve met,” he tells me.

CHAPTER 1

The plane is filled with empty rows, with each passenger seeming to have a couch for a seat. All the flight attendants are wearing leis in their hair, speaking with calmness as they were saying a lullaby, assuming most of us are coming home. Big Island isn't accepting tourism, trying to keep the people on the island safe, but I am entering on the condition of work. It's a comfortable plane ride for a 6 hour flight over the Pacific, so much space to myself. I doze off and when I open my eyes to the turquoise waters I get hit with nostalgia. Memories from my first time seeing these waters, surface in my mind from when my mom, sister, and I went. At fifteen I was swimming on a beach in Oahu and whispered into the water that I'll come back, secretly wishing I could live in such a beautiful place.

Big Island is the largest of Hawaii's Islands and the closest to the West Coast. I land in Kona, a city blessed with the sun, in contrast to Hilo, on the other side of the island which rains almost every day. Security at the airport is requiring a lot of documentation and questions making sure no one was arriving on the basis of vacation. I stand in a line where everyone meets an officer of sorts, I approach a young woman sitting down when my turn comes.

"Where are you staying on the island?" she asks while smiling.

"In Pahala," I replied and write down the official address on a piece of paper.

"What is the reason for your visit?" she continues.

"I'm working on a farm for the summer," I say.

I write down the names of the people I'm staying with as well as the farms number. She asks to see my plane ticket home and I show her the ride scheduled in over two months from now. She informs me of the self isolation period, two weeks in one's room. The state of Hawaii will call me periodically within that time frame making sure I am obliging to the rules, and I nod.

Excitement and also the hunger brewing in my stomach. I look at my phone and see a message from Andrea, the woman who's going to pick me up. She's the caretaker's wife and will be here in about an hour. I say goodbye to the woman helping me and get myself some food at the airport.

The airport in Kona is built with no walls and just an overhead covering, completely outside. I eat my food on a bench and my mom calls me. I pick up and tell her I got here safely, and she asks if the woman I'm staying with has picked me up yet. She's on her way, I tell her and mention the mountains that appear before my eyes. The mountains are at the center with their slope falling down perfectly towards the sea, and the airport gets cuddled up in the space between mountain and ocean. These mountains look almost identical to the ones in Oahu, how pointed and green they are.

I wait some more for my ride and watch the remaining passengers from our flight get picked up. There's a woman who runs towards a car and gets embraced by another woman holding a little child. Looks like two best friends after a long time apart, and they get in their jeep driving off. There's also a man next to me on the phone with a taxi company, his driver stopped at the Costco and is asking him if he needs anything. My breathing is steady, but I can feel the pulses in my

hand jump, from excitement probably. I get a call and then see her park, by then everyone has left. Andrea comes out of her car, she's wearing a dress and has long black hair. I give her a hug when I see her, she's much shorter than me.

"Hi, it's so nice to meet you," I smile as I talk, feeling the magical presence of this island, the air is too pure to not take in with a smile. She brought her puppy with her and her car is filled with boxes containing work materials from home depot and some food in Costco bags, I fit my backpack in the trunk.

"How was the flight, are you tired, hungry?" she asks me.

"No, I'm not that tired, it was only 6 hours since I flew from California," I add.

She asks me questions about the flight and how I liked San Francisco, filling in the silence that terrifies some strangers.

"I flew from San Francisco, it was cheaper to buy a plane ticket from there and it was beautiful, but nothing like this." I neglect to mention my pondering of scenery I was experiencing there, the Golden Gate still fresh in my mind. I would like to talk about it with someone. We go inside her car, and she tells me that she's taking me to target so I can get food and whatever else I may need for my stay, especially for the cold nights that come up on the mountain.

"You have a kitchen, and a room at the camp, it'll be just you there. We have towels and blankets for you, but the rest you have to get like paper towels and toilet paper," She says.

The drive is a short distance to the point of commercial stores on the island. She stays in the car with her dog and I go in by myself. I hurriedly drop food in my cart, not entirely planning but acting on impulse as to what I may need for the night. I go over to the home section and grab plastic plates and utensils along with soap and shampoo. I look down at the cart while on the line and apologize to the cashier who is ringing me out. I bought too much and I am spending too much but I just don't know what to expect at the camp. The cashier, a younger guy tells me there's no need to apologize and that I'm simply getting what I need and that it isn't too much. Andrea is right outside where she parked and is giving water to her Shar Pei, a puppy with a flat, chubby face. I load my bags and we start driving towards Pahala, south of the Big Island. There are only a few main roads with the mountains and the land between being mostly untouched. The shores brim the most construction.

Our drive down is filled with conversation, both of us trying to get to know one another. Andrea is twenty-eight and she grew up in Mexico, in the Yucatan region near Cancun. She met Matt online a few years ago and then moved to Pahala to be with him.

"What is Mexico like?" I ask her.

"The town is small and the heat is too much sometimes."

"Sorry, what's too strong?" I can't make out what she just said.

"The heat you know, the hot air, it's very hot there," she adds.

"Oh the heat, yes I can imagine." I notice the uncomfortableness after I said that, she becomes silent for a minute, or irritated. I didn't mean to point out her accent, my parents also have a strong accent, and all my family does. Picking up English is a remarkable feat on its own, no

matter the proper pronunciation of words. I also struggle at times with my words, so I understood her defensiveness. My “row” sounds like “roll” something with consonants that get mixed up inside my mouth. My little sister says, “worm” instead of “warm”; such simple mishaps.

A heavy rain starts. The drops start falling hard on the car, and the road turns into the grey color that storms bring. Andrea turns on the windshield wipers at full speed, she’s surprised since it rarely rains on Kona while Hilo, just on the other side gets rain every day.

She looks at me and says, “You brought the rain.”

I let out a chuckle, shy at the weight of the statement, not entirely knowing what she means by that. The street we are driving down is deeply immersed in the Hawaiian landscape, the wilderness of a jungle with deep green and thick bark casting a canopy from the sky. With each mailbox that passes by every minute there is also a fruit stand that accompanies its space. Andrea stops at the side near one, there isn’t anyone tending the stand but a box with a thin rectangular hole. She leaves her car and picks up pink pineapples and some mangos, dropping the cash in its slot.

“Here take a pineapple, they’re pink on the inside.”

“I didn’t know they could be pink,” I said thanking her.

Many farms pass by as we drive and my curiosity grows as I think about the farm where I have agreed to work for. I ask her about it, trying to get more information since so far not much has been mentioned about where she’s taking me. The description I got online barely shows the entirety, I’m sure. She tells me how her husband Matt works every day and there are some other people who help out most days, one is a worker they found on the same website I applied for.

She tells me how he doesn't live in the tents anymore where I'll be staying but at the house that Matt and her used to live in.

"Who is he?" I ask.

"He's sweet, he's thirty, we always joke around that he looks like a nineteen-year-old boy, he's been working for us for about." Andrea looked up and squinted her eyes trying to remember the years, "two years now."

"Have there been other girls my age that came here to work?" I ask her as she turns her head opposite of me for a second. She pauses for a while and then tells me that most of the girls come in pairs and that they haven't had many solo girls my age come around. She mentions this Italian man that came by himself and stayed all of last summer, they enjoyed having him around. I asked her about the ones my age that came by themselves and why they left. Her voice grew monotone, she spoke of the girls before me lightly, and watched her words. I didn't get much except that one only stayed for three weeks. I think she left early.

"How long are you staying again?" she adds.

"My plane back is for the end of August," I tell her.

She assures me that she can drive me to the airport when my time comes to go back home. That's a long time from now, and for the time being I sink into my seat and watch the surrounding nature, enjoying where I am. I've wanted to be here for a while now and everything is just beginning, this farm work on an island that always grabbed my interest. We trail by the water now, away from the canopy that hides the sky. The road touches the land's end, with deep blue water stretching far into the horizon, grabbing most of the sky's place.

And the sky is grey with sea looking lonely. The southernmost tip of the island brings crashing water onto the black rocks, with a quiet hook harboring the black sands. We stopped there for a moment, watching the cool tones of the day start whispering into the night. Andrea started driving inward, instead of the previous hours' cruise along the shoreline. I saw a pharmacy, somewhere I could pick up my monthly prescription. The walk up and down the mountain to get to the tiny business area would be horrible, I think to myself. Their farm hides a ten-minute drive up. Complete wilderness on all sides, darkening to a true forest green with the of passing minutes. I think back to the canopy of jungle we were just in, with this one being higher in elevation.

She pulls into a house that nestles the fields with stout palm trees, glowing flowers, and overpopulated grass surrounding the area. There's a man all burnt red from the sun at the entrance. I step out of the car just as Andrea goes over and gives him a kiss on the cheek, proving him to be Matt. Five dogs run towards me and either smell my hand or jump up my legs. All of them are sweet, and they don't try to bite me. Matt is standing tall talking to Andrea and at the line close to my core, I glance down at his belt. There's a handgun on his waist, I quickly look back up and could only see smugness from his movements, parading his gun for us all to see. Three other people on the farm seem to be wrapping up for the day as they load their truck with boxes of vegetables sprouting at the top. A pregnant girl and two other men are at, what looks like, a shed. I follow Andrea to the house and it shows a similar design to the airport, with an

outside section that has a covering as a roof from the rain and sun. It's a big house. A boy with shaggy, oily blond hair pops into my view. He introduces himself as Yuri, and I can clearly see why Andrea says he looks like he could be nineteen.

"It's nice to meet you," I tell him and instinctively shake his hand.

"How was the getting here like?" he asks me.

I tell him about the drive, how Andrea stopped at the Target in town for me, and how I don't really know how to feel being here. Everything looks so different from what I'm used to in New York.

"It's sinking in for me," I tell him and he replies with the common mention of jet lag and how it's going to take some time for me to get used to the change. I ask him about his work.

"It's a lot," he tells me "I'm here five days a week, from seven in the morning until around 4."

"Do they pay you?" I ask. He's silent and taken back for a moment.

"No," he says this quite frankly, "I live in the house that Matt and Andrea used to live in before they moved to this farm."

"Oh, so before you used to live in the tents, where I'll be staying?" I ask.

"Yeah, I used to live there. I like the house more, it's better for my health, I get sick a lot."

"How many days did you work when you lived in the tent?"

"Three days a week," he says.

"Oh cool, that means I'll only work that much, I was worried for a second." I let out a laugh. Andrea comes by as Yuri leaves to help Matt with a box.

"You guys seem to be hitting it off," she says in an amiable tone and gives me a pat on the shoulder. It must be a good thing for her that Yuri and I are becoming friends.

Matt comes over from the shed and calls Yuri back to where we all are standing. He goes over to his pickup truck and tells me and Yuri to get in.

“Bring the dogs in the back with you,” he tells Yuri. He opens the passenger door for me and lets the littlest dog in to stay near me in the seat. All my bags are already in the pickup truck and I go back to Andrea’s car to grab the groceries I forgot were in there. When we get in the car, he asks if I brought enough food for the night, showing some worry on his face.

“Yeah, I brought enough,” I tell him and he mentions that Andrea will take me into Hilo tomorrow and there I can buy whatever else I might need for my space at the tents. He describes them in detail, how the only livable one got cleaned up today by Yuri. He did the laundry for the bed and cleaned the dresser and desk for me. We drive up the hill even further up and I look back to see Yuri smiling as the wind hits his face, he’s sitting outside the pickup trunk, resembling the four dogs beside him. A small terrier sits on my lap, Matt tells me her name is Pelé.

“Did you guys name her after the soccer player?” I ask him.

“Oh yeah the Brazilian guy,” he lets out a laugh and tells me she’s named after a Hawaiian mythological goddess who controls the volcanoes on the islands, the goddess of fire. He pauses for a moment and I look out the window noticing the new terrain unfolding before my eyes. I’ve been wanting to be in nature, not knowing why but just knowing that this is where I need to be. After a minute of silence he asks me if I speak Portuguese. When I was applying for farms to work at online, I added my language skills. Portuguese was the language I learned first although my English is clearly better since I never went to school in Brazil except for a day or two whenever I go to visit my family. I also added that I have previous farm experience from

working on family farms on my personal bio, even though I hardly had any experience.

Whenever I would go to a family farm I would milk the cows and take care of the animals, once I harvested coffee beans. Picking up eggs from the chickens who laid them was always a no brainer, just place them in your basket; although once I picked up one that was over due, spilling out a chick fetus when I cracked the egg on the pan.

“My parents are from Brazil, the rural parts of the country. Minas Gerais looks a lot like here,” I tell him, answering his question.

He tells me how he grew up in northern California near Salinas, the setting that *Of Mice and Men* starts in. We talk about the landscape for a bit and how he never wore shoes as kid, with him explaining to me what grounding is, walking barefoot on rocks to hit the nerve points of the feet.

“My dad tells me to do that all the time, a good way to connect, he’ll say,” I tell him about my personal anecdote with stepping barefoot on rocks. He drives up the road deeper into the mountain. The distance feels long but the car ride lasted maybe 5 minutes until we reach the gated property where Yuri lives and where I will be living. This farm is completely disconnected from the Mamaki farms yet it’s in conjunction with what Matt oversees. Yuri jumps out of the pick up truck and opens the gate for us. We drive through the gate and pass by a quaint home, that belongs to Yuri, and then another larger home sits on top of a hill a bit further out. He points to it and mentions that, it’s a rental home, although it’s not being used much right now since the pandemic started.

“That’s where you’ll do your laundry, it’s also the only point on the farm that gets service or WIFI,” Matt adds.

He keeps driving, this time downward past a field and another gate pops up in our view. I turn around and see Yuri running through the back window of Matt's truck. Yuri excitedly unlocks the gate and continues running as we drive into a camp that houses four tents. The car stops and the two help me unload my backpack and grocery bags, Matt hands me a walkie-talkie.

"Take this so we can communicate with you. You'll have to quarantine here for two weeks, Andrea can take you into Hilo tomorrow, to get you whatever else you need," he says.

"What time should I be up?" I ask.

"She'll be at the gate at 6:50," he concludes.

I look around the site and see the nature that reaches high from the ground, with different-looking plants and trees.

We go into the tent that's closest to the kitchen tent, with the others being on the other side of an unmanaged grove that has a tiny wooden work station at the middle, housing some tools, although they look hidden amongst the bush. Inside my tent there is a queen sized bed with a mosquito net hanging from the ceiling, covering the whole bed. The floor is wooden and its lifted up on a platform, flood proof I assume. There is a desk, a mirror, and two dressers in the space. After I take my peek inside he walks out the zippered door and checks the solar panel hanging right out. He tells me that it's dead, and that he forgot to turn it on before I came.

"Do you have a flashlight?" he asks me.

"No," I said frankly.

"Well, that was one of the items that the website said to bring," he says with an attitude back.

“Sorry I forgot to pack one,” I say and feel a bit tense as if this was the first mistake I did as an employee. He turns on the solar panel and tells me that it should charge up tomorrow, ready for me to use before it gets dark.

“Let’s see if the kitchen panel got charged, so you can have some light in the meantime,” he says.

We walk over to another tent. Inside there’s a solar panel, all of them are tiny five by five’s. It works and some light gets revealed in the space. The kitchen has a sink, a fridge, and a stovetop with bamboo peeking out from the backdrop. He shows me the stove,

“Do you know how to work a propane stove?” he asks.

“Yeah, my family's house in Brazil has one,” I tell him.

“The fridge isn’t working, but I’ll come on Saturday to fix it and cut down some of this grass.”

“You don’t have to cut the grass it already looks beautiful,” I tell him.

“No, we need to make it look good, especially when other people start coming to work here,” he quickly adds back.

We leave the kitchen, with Yuri hanging behind Matt’s tail. Yuri hands me his flashlight for me to use in my room at night and both of them get in their car leaving me to unpack. I stay in the kitchen because of the light, organizing my food, and watching the sky turn darker by the second. It’s quiet until I hear something bounce on the wooden floor, I jump up and see a black cat staring at me from the open door. Our eyes are glued to one another, with its yellow eyes looking alien to mine.

CHAPTER 2

I wake up to the sound of my alarm. Tussling myself upright to see the cat by my feet. Smiling only for a moment and then pushing him off the next. Cats make my nose all stuffed and itchy. It's 6 am and the morning is cold, but there is light. My steps to the sink are accompanied by wet grass and the cat, that just won't leave my side. I don't know his name and he doesn't know mine, and yet he nestles by my side like a child. Both of us alone, magnetized by our likeness and watching a wilderness of plants.

I walk up to the gate all ready for the day with a towel I found in the tent and my bathing suit already on. Andrea is in her car and we start driving through the dirt. It takes a little over an hour to get to Hilo, mostly single roads. There's some construction happening on the road with workers stitching up the cracks in the ground. Andrea says there have been a lot of earthquakes with the volcano being overly active. The cracks in the ground happen due to the earthquakes and rumblings of the volcano in Pahoa.

"Do you feel them on the farm?" I ask her.

"Yeah sometimes, they usually happen once or twice a month, but it's never dangerous."

She explains that it depends on the location of the island to be able to feel it. Where we are causes the most commotion apparently since our proximity to Kilauea, one of the four active volcanoes that happen to be on this island. I've never felt an earthquake before but they've always piqued my interest in school.

You can tell when you've arrived in Hilo with the booming businesses and homes on a rather quiet island filled with its natural components. The capital city of the island is colorful and tropical with ravines connecting itself to the sea. Every Wednesday at eight, Andrea takes her puppy Frida to be trained. When we get to the parking lot, I stay in the car by myself to use my phone. I get connection in Hilo, the only part of the island where my service works. I call my mom and message my friends. I tell my mom I'm loving the beauty and I tell my friends that internet connection is my nicotine. It's the perfect fix, only given a handful of times and I need to reach out to get it.

Andrea comes back to the car with both of us being hungry we stop by a food store up on a hill. It's the only business around houses that are blessed with the greenest grass. I watch the people who are inside and also the ones sitting outside from the open windows that border the store. They all have a breezy appearance with a woman having hair down to her waist and carrying her child that has hair of a fairy. I order a sandwich and ask for a side of Poke. Outside, Andrea sits with her dog that doesn't stop squirming everywhere, still needing more training. The man at the table next to us is on the phone with someone, and I listen in to his conversation. He's talking to someone that isn't on the island since he mentions how he is liking the place and whether or not he's going to stay, he's also doing work on his computer remotely. The food comes out and I see that the poke isn't what I thought it would be, no raw fish but a type of mayonnaised vegetable. Surprised but delighted, I eat the fresh food.

We drive down the hill and towards the center of Hilo, passing schools and the ocean. We stop in front of a grocery store that orders produce from the Mamaki Farm. Outside of the car I see another canopy of green and I walk over breathing in the fresh air. There's a river that certainly flows into the ocean and the water, though a bit muddy, looks refreshing and I start craving a swim. I turn over to Andrea and see her picking up some boxes and I head over to carry some. She mentions that if the people in the store ask, to tell them I've been on the island for 3 weeks. The people here are very strict with abiding by the rules, she adds. Inside there are cacao bars and exotic fruits and vegetables along with the ones I typically see at the market. I look at the packaging of each product, all designed with flowers and cursive fonts. All of the food in here is made by farmers on the island and I fill my grocery bag with macadamia nuts, honey, and raw chocolate bars. The fruit stand sprouts of color and I grab a pineapple and a papaya. Andrea talks to the woman at the cashier and both are engaging in writing numbers and checking lists off on a yellow note pad. The woman stands up and lifts a box of vegetables over her head and displays the armpit hair she has. I haven't seen many women with hair on their armpits, some girls at my school have them and I recently started letting mine grow out as well. She walks over the to end with her strong arms keeping the box up and comes back to ring me up. The two continue on their conversation about what this store needs in the next two weeks. We both go back outside and to the car where Frida stayed.

After our store runs, Andrea drives over to the beach. The sun is peeking out more and more each time the minute passes, contrasting with the rainy morning we got. We walk over to the grass and eat our lunch which are the leftovers from breakfast. She's on her phone while Frida runs free

and I just stare into the ocean, a bit emotional since I wish my friends were here with me, enjoying this afternoon. I drift the conversation over to past lives, something I've been thinking about since I got here. She tells me that she believes in it too and how the island is powerful probably with the volcano around. Something about a magnetic field that seems to bring this remembrance back up. I tell her how I used to always think that this is my first life, but since coming here I feel as though I'm thinking differently about it.

“Matt and I talk about how we met once before on a train ride during the great depression. I remember his green eyes, but he was a girl and I was an orphaned boy wearing a fiddlers hat,” she says and I laugh.

She lets me stay at the beach while she goes to Home Depot. I lay my things and walk over to the water. There isn't much sand, mostly rocks, and coral with most of the swimmers being families. Everyone is smiling and laughing, while I smile quietly to myself. I jump in and start swimming to where the people are. There are some colorful fish while I dive down. I swim a bit further out and the waves are calm, so calm that I don't even notice it. On this bay, there are some tiny islands and I go over to the bigger one stepping on the sun-hitting rocks. There's another woman there and she starts talking to me. She asks if I'm from here and I reply with my general notes “I'm from New York but I came here to work on a farm.” She's from Seattle but lives here now. I leave and return to swim for a bit longer and then settle myself on the rocks, laying down on my towel. Andrea messages my phone and I meet her in the lot, and we drive back.

Back on the farm, she drives into the Mamaki tea leaf fields, the main export on their property. Matt is there, finishing up the day's work. I wait around for him to drive me back since I bought too much to carry for a 20-minute walk back to where my tent is. He comes out after a few minutes and we drive up the hill. I follow him out of the car and listen to some of his directions for me to complete while I'm isolating on this other extended property of his. We go to the rental home, the three-story Hawaiian villa that people rent on occasion. Fig trees are sprinkled around. I have to cut the weed vines that grew around it. He hands me some tools to cut vines with and refers to the crescent blade as a sickle. He also hands me a machete, something I know. "There's internet here and laundry," he tells me.

At this point, he's just pointing things out very casually as they appear in his mind, with no further direction, just statements. I nod and reply with, "will do" missing a salute from my forehead. There are cows, goats, a sheep, and a horse here with me.

I look over at the wild animal eating the grass on the field. A white horse with brown spots splattered around the body.

"What's his name?" I ask.

"That's Oreo," he points to the horse and continues "almost got me a few times, he can be aggressive so be careful."

Such a shame to be given a name that doesn't fit the wild that is contained, an animal too beautiful to be named Oreo. Thinking of animals that live on the farm, I remember the black cat that woke up by my side this morning and ask what his name is,

“That’s Rupert, poor guy was raised by two little girls. They would drag him by his tail everywhere they went,” he tells me.

I laugh, knowing that is something children do. We walk down a path that leads into the part of the property where my tents are, pointing out more tasks for me to complete in the meantime.

There is vegetation filling every opening of the earth, a whole society of life beyond what I can interpret. He points to the perimeter of the farm where a fence separates the property. On the outskirts there are ginger roots, invasive to the area. After he says all he needs to, he gets in his truck and drives off.

It’s dark now, as the setting sun is hidden behind the trees. Insects whine all around, creating a frequency of their own, the silence becomes something I can hear. I go in the kitchen and place the machete on the wooden table. The light grows dim, as the battery on the solar panel wanes. I look at the stove and at the food I bought for myself, searching for a point of reference that proves my standing. I stare at the wall, not thinking or possibly thinking too much and then the cat hops inside. He’s dazed by the day, moving with frail balance and his yellow eyes look up at mine. We breathe in the same air, comforting ourselves in this space. I feel my body sinking further and further into my senses. Suddenly the ground starts wobbling, with our eyes not losing contact. The whole room shakes and all the plates rattle against each other, my breathing increases by the seconds and then the shaking stops. The floor is still and we are in the same place as we have been. It must’ve been an earthquake, I think to myself, from the volcano nearby. I retreat back to my tent, running from the dark.

Chapter 3

My assignments for the day are to put bamboo leaves in brown bags, remove weed vines from the fig tree, and to do laundry. I have the whole day, the whole thing where the land around occupy's my current belonging. My pans are sitting in the kitchen, and the papaya I bought from the store lays on a bowl waiting for the day it becomes ripe to cut. My morning started early, waking with the sun and I carry my laundry pass the gate, up the hill, and into the basement of a glamorous home. My access is only granted to the basement where all the tools are kept and the steps of the terrace where the internet reaches. Not many people are on the list to rent this place out, since Hawaii isn't letting tourists rent places until they complete quarantine in a hotel room for two weeks.

I plop my laundry into the machine, something I desperately hoped I would have here during my stay. Hand washing would be a whole other ball part I would have to learn, especially with the rain. When I turn it on, I go up to the terrace and try to connect to the internet. It doesn't work so I go in the house. The living room shows a well furnished area with sofa's, wooden tables, and high ceilings. I turn the router on and off, yet nothing connects. I sit down on the sofa, defeated. I explore inside the house for a bit, there are 3 bedrooms and science fiction books scattered in one of the rooms. There's no food in the fridge and my stomach churns. I go back to my tent and make breakfast, it's plain cereal with warm almond milk since I can't get the stove to work. I read a little, waiting for the sun to warm up the day and then gather my tools to start work.

I head over to the fig tree and start cutting all the vines that aren't a part of the tree. I clear the branches and give room for the figs to be able to grow prosperously. These vines have sticky fibers on their stems, slightly burning my forearms as I cut. The gloves are useful, and the long pants I have on. I cut and cut away and step out to look at the tree from a wider angle. It looks clean enough yet I feel like there is more I should have done. I start walking over to my side and see the goats crossing the path down. Standing still, some of them come over to smell my hand, the one holding a knife filled with plant residue. They like to bite, the goats, the cow, and the horse seem to be constantly biting. They chew on the grass beneath me or on the plants hanging from the bushels around. This one goat gnaws on my glove and I smile letting him stay for a little, watching about seven skid from bush to bush. There's a little one, called a kid near his mom I believe. They stick together as all the infant ones like to stay near where it's safe. A distance over pass the gate, and no animals reach this clearing, just the four tents spread amongst a circle with the wooden shed in the center. The northern tip of the circle, houses the kitchen tent with bamboo tree's providing their canapé as a roof. Most of the leaves are around the kitchen and I rake them up in bags. The leaves trail all the way into the shower which is hidden within the bamboo, so no one can see, although it wouldn't matter since no one comes back here but me. I rake the leaves from this part as well, listening to music while being shaded from the steaming sun. Near here, Matt told me to chop down the thick ginger roots that have been growing along the perimeter where the property is. I look over to them and swing the machete, with a swing only cutting half way through the root. They are tougher than I imagined, and a

swing leaves the base of the root still intact. I leave the area with only about three roots cut, tired from what I previously did.

I sleep until 10 am, and the sun is experiencing its hottest day yet. It could be a beach day, I think to myself as I'm walking over to brush my teeth in the kitchen sink. There are some bamboo leaves that have stayed from yesterday and a few that fell down last night, and I grab the rake to start piling the rest in the bag. It's hot today and 2 bags in, I begin sweating. I go over to the bamboo tree's and turn on the shower. There's a solar panel in here that controls the heat of the shower with the water being connected to a hose. The canopy of leaves shade this private act, and I realize how tropical this place really is. A jungle would be too extreme to call without the presence of wild predators, but certainly a rain forest with all the tropical fauna. I wash away the remnants of the ocean water out of my hair and walk out into the sun letting it dry my skin. I place my towel on the floor, by that tall grass and lay naked. I feel myself sinking in the soil and drying up in just a minute, getting tinted by the sun. Rupert comes up stretching his paws beside me and lays to nap in the warm embrace of the sun. I am completely safe here, with my body bearing its most natural state yet I feel vulnerable. A thought enters my mind to look up to the tent and see if there are any camera's around. I don't know who Matt and Andrea really are and having camera's around wouldn't be a far stretched thought, since this is part of the property that they over see. The only object that bears familiarity with a camera is the solar panel, so I drown that paranoia away and stay laying here. Simply tanning.

After a while of laying out on the sun I go over to the kitchen to feed Rubert, who is tossing his bowl with his paws. The cat's bowl is empty and I grab bits of food noticing there's only a meals worth left in. I feed him what I have and wonder how Rubert ate when no one was here. I write down a list of what I need from the main farm. Food for the cat and saw grass for myself to use. I dress myself and walk down to the Mamaki farm, seeing Matt tend the fields. He's talking to another man with a white beard who I learned to be Jesse from when Andrea first pointed him out my first day here. I shyly come their way and call Matt's name, trying to get their attention without disturbing whatever work they are doing. He sees me and looks surprised, I start with just saying the basics, how I need more cat food for Rubert and some saw grass for myself. He tells me that the cat food is in the basement of the rental and that he'll have Yuri come by later to drop me off the saw grass. Andrea comes out and asks how I'm doing, I tell her I may need a ride to the pharmacy soon since my medicine is running low.

I walk back up and watch some of the neighbor's animals that are between the main farm and where I am staying. They have a whole open field filled with goats and there's a kid that just ran into their mom's utters, tumbling them both. I walk straight up to the rental home and search the basement for cat food. I find a container identical to the one I've been using and find it full with food. While I'm already there I check up on the internet connection and successfully connect it with my phone. I get some messages from friends and my mom and also one from a guy I used to see. Surprised at his message, we continue on talking for a bit and both of agree to call one another. I have him wait and I call my mom first. She answers, asking how I'm doing and if I feel safe. She's listening and I tell her I'll try to call every other day or so. We kept it short and

then I see a message from my best friend at home, and we call each other. We stay on the phone for a while, telling her about my days cutting vines and ginger roots, telling her I miss her. She fills me in on what she's been doing and how my whole friend group at home is doing, they went to the beach the other day and met some boys. They wished I was there. I stop looking at my phone for a second and look straight off into the distance. The sun hasn't set yet, still another hour or so before it gets dark, and I can still see the ocean right in front of me, but miles away. My phone starts ringing and I see his name on my screen, his first and last. I don't know why I did that since I know who would be calling me, but some people have full names that need to be acknowledged. I pick up and his voice fills the temporal loneliness that I have been experiencing for some time now, being away from any connection, romantic or not. I haven't seen him since the pandemic started 4 months ago and our recap entertains while also hurting a deep part in my mind and heart. When we hang up rather awkwardly, I go back to my tent and write down my wonderings of that phone call with him. Deep down I know I won't call him for more than the time we previously were at a distance, to heart breaking to keep calling. The closure is hanging by the door frame, and today I left it open just a crack. I wonder how he processed this split, we never dated but we were close. We never entirely separated by our own accord but greatly by the accord of a lockdown. Now we rarely speak. I go into my bed and light two candles bearing the dimmest light. Insects chirp and whine in the night and I write down the dreams of last night. They have been loud and vivid since I got here, perhaps hearing more of myself in a place that bears only the natural components of life.

The morning light hits my face and I go over to the kitchen grabbing my lighter to figure out this stove. I am tired of eating cold food, so I turn on the gas but nothing comes out. I find the propane under the table, a small 2 gallons worth and connect it to the stove. Gas lets out and I grab a lighter and stick my hands on the burner to light it and release my hands back to my side when the fire lets out. I warm up milk and make oatmeal as well as scrambled eggs, happy to be eating this food.

In my tent, I go in the bathroom section and notice that I need to clean out my bucket. There's a poster on the wall detailing the instructions of a compostable bathroom and how I am supposed to go far from camp and dig two feet into the ground to dispose my waste. That's too much for me to do at the moment so I just grab a plastic garbage bag and dispose it in there, throwing the bag in the garbage provided by the shed in the center. They are closed and I double bagged it, returning with another bag to put over the clean bucket. I place saw grass in the bag, a halfway point of how I should be composting. Stuffed by the camp, I go out on a walk to see the surrounding area of the valley.

Where I am staying is referred to as Wood Valley and the road is a 3 mile radius taking the shape of a circle with farms and houses on the perimeter of the circle. The roads are filled with stout palm trees, flowers, and avocado tree's. A ravine presents itself on the side that leads further into the wilderness , but I keep walking. A bigger ravine opens up and I lead into its dried rocks, imagining the river that runs through here when it rains. I peak up at the sky, catching the blue that is hidden among the tree's and step in without any fear of sudden rain. The walk turns into a

climb as I hop through rocks using my hands as a balance. These must be volcanic rocks formed years ago. Back in Brazil, my dad would always point out the rocks usually those in strange formations, and talk of the untouched standing. Volcanoes would erupt and the magna formed rocks in those peculiar locations.

“How did they get there?” I asked my dad then.

“The volcano exploded and it froze in place over time,” he’d say.

I trip over a rock and my leg starts bleeding a little, so I walk down from where I came into, retreating back. I go the long way on the paved road, and keep going to take a peak at the buddhist temple, that Andrea mentioned was nearby. The cut on my leg stopped bleeding, just a minor sore. I see a car parked about 30 feet from the temple and smoke comes out of the windows. I pass by the car as I’m walking towards the temple and there are three men in there, just hanging out. We make eye contact and I smile as I walk ahead, entering the cobblestone path towards the temple. It is beautiful with traditional Japanese architecture, a triangular roof covering most of the blackened silver base. There are Tibetan prayer flags blowing in the wind and a space to pray or meditate inside. I just look in, and head back knowing that I’ll return again another day.

Chapter 4

My medicine is almost running out, just a pill left. I need to take it daily. I called the pharmacy in town before I left New York to transfer my pills and I can pick them up 6 miles down the mountain. I asked Andrea if she could give me a ride a few days ago but she keeps forgetting. It's been 5 days since anyone came to check up on me. A 12 mile walk doesn't sound too awful. It would be easier if I could rent a car or even a moped, but both are too costly. I eat a good breakfast with heating up canned chili in the stove and some bread. It's hot today and a Monday, everyone should be on the farm working including Yuri. I pack my backpack and head out the farm. It'll take me about 2 hours each way to walk so if I'm lucky I'll be back for dinner.

From the farm down to the pharmacy lays a downward slope, an easy walk as my calves bounce with the steady drop in elevation. It's a single road of concrete with nature exploding on all ends, the rain forest swallows every inch that has been marked by construction with vines entering in on the road. As I reach further down I pass the lonely buddhist temple. A car comes down the road, and then another soon after. On the third, I impulsively stick my thumb up at them, hoping to catch a ride. The cars kept passing me by, until I see a pickup truck halt at some distance ahead of me, waiting for me to meet up to its door. There was an older man smoking a cigarette in the passenger seat.

"Need a ride?" he asks while motioning his hand for me to come in.

"Could you take me to the pharmacy down the road?" I ask.

I get in the car and he starts driving down the mountain.

“Why do you need to go the pharmacy?” he asks rather strictly,

“I just need to pick up my medication, it takes too long to walk down, so I just decided to hitchhike.”

“Yeah hitchhiking is normal here, not so much where I’m from in Oregon,” he says and I ask some more questions to fill up the space. His name is Troy and he lives in the same valley as I. He’s the kind of guy that is just angry at the world around him, spitting as he talks. I notice his rotting teeth and speedy talk.

“How long have you been here?” I ask.

“About 9 months, and it’s fucking difficult,” he starts asking me where I work and who I work for. I neglect to share too much information, just saying the basics, but I fear that may be too much already as I mentioned my boss’s name in a valley where everyone must know each other. He’s a bit weird and I look out the window watching the tree’s pass with the speed of a moving vehicle. There are farms, tractors, and fields of what is growing to help feed an island. Troy asks me if I want to go on some errands with him after I get what I need at the store.

“I have to do some other things in town it’s ok,” I tell him.

“What else you gotta do? I can wait for you and drive you back,” he says.

I see the pharmacy approaching and my words start choking up,

“Could you just drop me off here?” I say.

“It’s a long walk back up don’t worry, I’ll take you back,” he says.

“It’s ok, here is good,” I say more aggressively.

He laughs and says, “ Ha, I get it, you don’t wanna go with me, that’s fair I could be a murderer for all you know.”

I laugh out of pure fear. In a daze I say thank you as I close the door of his truck and walk into the pharmacy where my medication waits for pick up.

I place my thyroid pills in my backpack and peek out the door to see if I can make out Troy’s car. It’s not in the parking lot, but I decide to hang around the stores for a little. Pahala’s commercial point is up on a hill leading down to the black sands beach, which is another 6 mile walk down. There are less trees around here, blending in with the drier parts close to the sea or close to the volcano, I can’t tell from where I stand. Not many people around, seems like a ghost town but in paradise. I see a super market and go in, it looks familiar and calming. The walls are wooden and so are the counters filled with fruit, sponge candy, and peanut butter. I buy a few things, and try to ask for cigarettes but the lady deny’s me. Disappointed, I walk out and see a man sitting down with some of his possessions on the ground. He’s wearing an orange robe, a Buddhist monk. I smile and start walking up to the valley. It’s nice and steady on the concrete. The music playing in my headphones amplifies my pace. I get up to the temple, finally close to home and a car stops, a woman calls out to me. There is a smile on her face and we exchange hello’s.

“I saw you walk up this whole mountain, are you far from where you live?” she asks,

I point to where the gate is and tell her I’m almost home. Her car is parked on the side and there is a man in the car as well as about five puppies.

“I’m Yolanda and this is my son, Malakai,” she says as he waves and shoots a smile. She continues,

“I used to live in this valley when I was younger, we moved to Kona. We came by the pick up these puppies at our friends farm.” I pet her dogs while Malakai steps out to smoke a cigarette. She brings out a bowl and asks if I smoke, I tell her that I do.

“There are a lot of spirits by this mountain, my son gets scared when I start talking about them.” She looks over to him,

“ He has autism and lives with me, my daughter is in California,” she tells me about the Kanaka people who are her people, native to the island. Where I am standing belongs to her ancestors and it is protected by these spirits. My eyes widened and I listen attentively.

“There are outside forces at play and the spirit of Hawaii come and lend you help when you need it. Right now, the Kanaka have been misbehaving over in Pahoia and Pele is mad, releasing the lava over to them,” she says.

There has been a lot of crime and theft over in Pahoia, a part of the island I should avoid at the moment.

“Do you like it here?” she asks me.

“Yes, I love it, I came alone to work on a farm right there, I’m trying to write a book.”

“Wow, a book!” she says excitedly, “ What is it about?”

I tell her about my vision and where I want to take it, talking about the connectedness of humans and how it’s set in the past, present, and future with lives effecting each other, even if they have never met. She asks for my number and for me to visit her in Kona, although my phone died and doesn’t work here, I put my number on her phone.

“The spirits say that a granddaughter is returning to the island, and that Hawaii is returning to how it once was because of her,” she says and I smile, happy that some beauty is coming back.

Both of us hopeful for a natural future where order is placed in the right hands. Too much of this island is corrupted by greed and commercial standings, not truly understanding the simplicity that should be left at bay. Her son comes back and sits in the car, we chat for a bit longer and she tells me to visit her in Kona.

“Today we are just cruising,” she tells me, to Hawaiians cruising means coasting along the island in a car, looking at the whole beauty that the island has. She gives me a handful of flower nugs, “I get this flower here from the land, take some.” She gives me more than enough and I accept the gift from Yolanda.

I start walking back up and think about the words she told me. I knew this land was filled with spirits of native origin, and I feel protected as I reached the gate. When I get internet I want to read about the Kanaka and learn about the native forces, the land in which I stand is centuries old, filled with power, although I am too tired at the moment to look on my phone. I pass by Yuri’s house and look in to see if anyone is there, I walk over to the meadow down to where my tents are.

The horse stands by the distance and starts charging towards me. He runs with all the speed of a wild horse and I freeze, something he has never done before. He’s angry, not slowing down his speed, I fall down to my knee’s and yell.

“Please, please don’t let me die right now!” I scream up at the sky.

I make myself as small as I can be, a technique I learned with dogs, to not make yourself a threat. His giant size and speed of charge can kill me in one hit. He runs and stops suddenly right under me. He is panting and shaking, breathing heavy breaths down on me. I feel his warmth.

“It’s okay, it’s okay,” I say out loud to him.

“It’s me, you know who I am.” I stay on the ground for a few minutes, waiting for his breaths to return to a normal pace. He’s panting. I reach out and let him sniff my hand, thankful that he stopped when he did. I walk back trembling as he follows me to the gate, not sure of his intentions. I squeeze in from under and run back to my tent. I sit down on the steps of the kitchen. Was I protected or did the horse realize it was me when I was under him? These thoughts are all I have, a marker of being alive, being able to think. I met a lot of people today, a lot of different energies and maybe Oreo smelled something different in me, and thought I was someone else. He stopped running when he got close enough to smell me, to know that it was me and not a stranger to this place.

I sit and stare out blankly from the kitchen steps, holding a warm bowl of chili on top of my legs. My breath feels alive and I’ve been trying to slow them down, just staring out and slowly breathing. I’m tired and I retreat to bed at 7:30, just when the darkness completely settles in. I hide under my covers and close my eyes. Moments pass, maybe just a few minutes and I hear rustling out my tent. The rustles start to get closer and louder, when they turn into snorts. Must be the hogs.

Chapter 5

My medicine stood full on top of the desk, enough to sustain me for a whole month and soon 10 days will pass when I can start working on the farm and freely walk around the island.

It's so quiet here, where the tents are, not so many birds are singing. It seems they are hiding from the mountains. Not wanting to be swallowed by the dense bamboo, even by the foot of an avocado tree, I can never find a bird. Rarely, do I step out to the beaches, but I always find them perched there on a Koa tree, marking the last possible standing before the sea. I hear plenty of cicadas though, persistent in the day and at night the katydids make their noise. Even in the silence of this location hidden by everything modern the sound of nature harmonizes with the beat of nothing.

I feel as though there is nothing left for me to do since the trek yesterday. My battery, both emotional and mentally drained. I put on an outfit comfortable for lounging and notice the clouds in the sky blocking the sun. They don't look heavy with rain, but just a cloudy day. I hope to have a relaxing walk, one where I don't run into the man that picked me up yesterday. I pass by Yuri's house and see him watching T.V. out on the porch smoking his weed. The animals are lounging by him, all sleepy things. I wave and simply carry on. I've been walking the 3-mile road that loops around ranches, houses, and farms of animals, nearly every day. Each house definitely hosting a shotgun. The people who live in these houses don't come out much, but sometimes I'll see a figure through the curtains looking out. A few even make their steps out to

the porch, calculating my steps. The walk mostly shows the wilderness of this island with rotting fruit and dry leaves on the ground and rich, blossoming fauna from above. It always feels alive here, the plants always breathing but recently the energy feels chaotic in a way. Yesterday the horse was bothered by something, he sure bothered me by almost giving me a heart attack if he didn't kill me first with his own personal stampede.

Even last night, when I was nuzzled up under my blanket, as safe as one can be with a piece of fabric hanging from around and above the hogs made their wild dance by the edges of where I lay. I could only hear their snorts and the rustling of their weight running past my camp. Am I allowed to be here, with all this wild movement? It's not like I'm allowed to leave either, isolating in this remote spot, a circle of houses owned by people tending their plotted land.

Behind the fences and gates, all show a manicured version of bushes and vegetation sprouting from the same unmanageable land. It doesn't need to be managed either, the trees look pretty away from the fences and the flowers, the beautiful purple flowers that you can find just ten steps away from the road. By the rocky stream, where the water is evident by the rainfall, I pick up some avocados. There are a lot of them fallen from their source, but on the floor, they are all too mushy and broken apart from the impact. I kneel between steps looking for one I can use at dinner and hear a rustling in the not-so-distant passes. There's a hog running, but it's alone just like me, and looks like a child if you can call a hog at that age a child.

I quickly stand looking around for a stone, not a rock. The mom is lurking around somewhere, searching, so I kneel and pick a 10-pound stone and swing it above my head, cautiously moving not to make myself known. I pass down the slope of the hill beside a bungalow, a modest one-story home, the closest one to the road. A Hawaiian family lives there, I see their kids playing outside sometimes with chickens or puppies. I think the same one Yolanda, the woman I met yesterday, had in her car. A group of hogs runs further into the ravines by the road of this family's home. I place the stone down. Down the hill, I pick up my pace and jog for a bit only stopping to see the farm that hangs with the horizon. It's a perfect view with the ocean as a distant, blue line and the green that belongs to the two horses behind the gate; pairing together with the oceans blue, horizontal line.

Back on the farm, the dogs and cats are lounging along Yuri's balcony in the late afternoon sun. I see him watching something on his laptop outside and just wave, he shouts out asking how I am. "Oreo gave me a scare yesterday," I tell him.

We talk about how long the horse has been here. Raised alone, never tamed, and sometimes gives trouble. He talks casually about the manner of the wild animal that lives amongst us. I look around the porch and see his bowl of weed and a comedy show paused on the laptop. He lights his bowl and blows the smoke into Rosie's face. The white dog squints her eyes and it looks like she almost shows a smile. Yuri says he likes to get the animals high with him, that it relaxes them. With the time nearing 5, I tell him I'm about to make myself dinner and walk down the hill to my side that hangs on the bottom of the 5-acre land. The horse stands in the middle of the gate to my tent. I feel nervous walking down and hope that my increasing heartbeat won't be

interpreted through his senses. I trudge slowly and breathe deeply to make myself calm, he comes closer and nuzzles his nose on my hand, and I toss his face away showing I have no food in hand. I smile and stay with the horse for a little, hearing his steady breathing. Staying in this space and just breathing in the wild, a familiarity brews. He knows me and I know him there's no reason to bear any fear between the two of us. I grab a handful of grass and feed him, with this I bounce over the gate walking to my kitchen. The sun is setting by now with just another hour of light.

Chapter 6

The next morning, I go and load the laundry first thing, also bringing my phone to use the rental's WiFi. While I wait for the laundry to wash, I see my emails and messages. Some from school pop up asking about my semester coming up in September and if I were to dorm or continue attending through home. I wonder about extending my stay here through the semester and see a message from my mom come up on my phone. I call her and talk about school and she gets angry at me for something. It was going steady and then her voice just raises, shouting at me through the phone, something about how she can't help me. I tell her I'm trying my best and might just stay here and this makes her yell at me even more, usually, I hang up in times like this but she hung up on me.

I start crying and notice it's raining, but I think it has been raining all morning long. It just got heavier and I knee in the grass weeping into my legs mouthing out words in the form of a prayer. After a little I calm down and call my dad who I know is at work. He answers and starts talking about being with god, someone I don't believe in anymore like I used to. He also reminds me how mean my mom can be sometimes and tells me to not think about it. I walk back in the rain with my clean clothes with a towel covering it from getting wet. It's dark so I just stay in my room and light a candle, bringing my notebook out. I spend the whole day writing, 15 pages come out about a boy who plans on running away. It's set in the past around the 80s and he just isn't happy where he is, his brother died when he was younger after both of them did some

drugs. An overdose. He starts to hitchhikes with San Francisco as his destination leaving his boyfriend behind.

I tossed and turned last night and my eyes opened right as the first light of the day appeared. Frozen in place, the overhead part of the room is the only point I can focus on. Just one image, an unmoving wall. At the same minute as being awake the bed starts moving. Laying still but jolting at every end, this one shook the ground for a good 20 seconds. More violent than the earthquake that came on my second night. I start to cry when the shaking stops. Scared to be with the natural forces, knowing that the unexpected will always come. The act of waking up isn't always a pleasurable feeling like that of the smell of coffee lingering between rooms but sometimes its waking up cold and alone in a land of flowing magma from below and sometimes above. I bury my face in a pillow and fall silently back to sleep, when in what feels like an instant but only an hour later I hear a car rolling through outside.

I hop out of bed and peek out of the tent to see five dogs running through the tall grass and past the empty tents that line up before mine. I remove a layer and head out the zippered door. It's Matt's truck and as it turns off Andrea and him step out. He has some tools in hand and she brings pots and pans.

"I'm going to check the fridge and try to fix it," he tells me.

We walk into the kitchen tent as he details the tasks that he wants to get done on this part of the farm. He handles the blades of grass.

"On Saturday, I'm bringing the lawn mower to clean up the area," he says.

“You don’t have to, it looks pretty how natural it’s all growing,” I tell him.

“Well, no I need to mow down all this grass, I’m trying to fill this camp up with people to help us out on the Mamaki fields.”

We reach the steps of the kitchen and he bends down grabbing a single cigarette bud.

“Do you smoke?” he asks while holding the bud up in the air. I look up and almost let out a sigh.

“I used to work at a coffee shop and got influenced, all my coworkers did. I’m trying to quit, I brought a pack but it’s all out,” I say.

Interested in my previous barista experience he started asking questions about the job and shares his own experience about catching the habit while working as a chef in a restaurant. He was able to quit since he can hit his vape pen.

“This is so much better for my health than cigarettes,” he says while taking a hit from his vape and a cloud of smoke enters the air.

Andrea starts putting pots down and Matt looks at the fridge. I tell them about the possibility of extending my stay.

“All my classes are online next semester and it’s only two days of the week where I have class in the morning,” I tell them.

I looked at the time difference, and picking a 2:30 class would make it 8:30 am in Hawaii.

“Yeah, that would be great,” he says.

“You could use the office space for your class and come to work after,” Andrea says and they both amicably agree. Matt continues sharing his vision for the camp.

“I want to fix the two empty tents, there’s some water leakage and broken furniture, your tent is the only one livable,” he laughs.

“There’s a beehive in one of them,” I say.

“Did you see the first tent? How ripped everything got. The last person who was here trashed the place after we asked her to leave,” he tells me.

I asked them what happened. They told me how she was twenty-seven, and they always started talking about people by stating their age first. She had a little kid with her and never went to work and when she did, she would just focus on her child.

“You could also tell she was shooting up,” Matt says. The woman told them she was in recovery but she was still using when she was here. I remember seeing a crib and baby books in the tent where the beehive is. News like this is shocking to hear, imagining a woman with a little kid living in such a beautiful place but haunted by something like heroin, and more so feeding a child with that stuff around. They talk a bit more about how terrible of a person she was or how terrible of a worker that is. The police had to come and take her out.

Matt bangs on the fridge and apologizes to me that he can’t seem to fix it at the moment. He says I can use Yuri’s fridge if I need to store any meat or cheese but being here for 2 weeks already, I adapted to food that doesn’t need to be refrigerated. They go outside and show me a garden that’s hidden by the overgrown grass.

“Could you start watering and tending this garden daily?” He quickly goes into the kitchen and comes out with a notebook and hands it to me. I look through the pages while Matt bends down

in the garden, picking at the land. There are lists of dates of the seeds planted as long as what type of vegetable is growing. There's an entry by the couple who planted the seeds in a notebook. They write about how they are enjoying the land during their 3-week stay. I think to myself how I have planned to be here for 8 weeks all alone, they sound giddy through the words of the journal entry.

"This is taro," Matt says as he raises a root off the ground that looks like a combination of potato and coconut. They go into the kitchen and place a pressure cooker on the stove, cut up the taro into slices, and toss it in the boiled pot.

"After it boils, throw it in a pan with oil," Matt says and then Andrea adds, "It'll taste like fried potatoes, so delicious."

"Yuri needs to put wire on the chicken coop, I told him you'll help him out, you can start working for us tomorrow," Matt says and before they leave he instructs me to meet Yuri at his house at 8 am the next morning. The dogs and them leave in their truck and I go into the kitchen and cook some eggs while placing the taro in a pan of oil. The plate looks incredibly good, each time I eat warm food I'm always taken back. I sit outside by the newly discovered garden and eat under the blazing sun that reflects off a plastic plate.

I lay out a folding chair by the garden when I'm done eating, and grab the book I've been reading *The Electric Kool Aid Acid Test* by Tom Wolfe. I bought the book two years ago when the boy who called me a few days ago recommended it to me. I tried starting it then, but its 400 pages daunted me. I brought it to the farm with me knowing that I would have the time and space

needed to fully immerse myself in Wolfe's words. I am nearing the end with only 20 more pages left. I finish the story leaving a feeling of afterglow from the rich stories and observations gathered on a group of hippies with their movement of chaos and love. I close the book and hold my head up high to the sun, my eyes being protected by sunglasses. I reflect for a while, mostly on where I was when I was reading the book. I see myself laying on the large bed I have here covered by a mosquito net and relaying on light of the day to provide the ability to see. When the sun faded I was forced to close the book or light multiple candles, though I only had two so I could continue reading. Those nights I read about Ken Kesey, how he would do mescaline at work, the experience that gave us *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Wolfe's book mostly follows Kesey's life since he was the ring leader for the hippies that lived with him on his farm in Northern California. Hell's Angels, the iconic motorcycle gang, would visit their farm causing disruption and even an insane orgy, I devoured the words on that protected bed of mine. Now, I finished one of the best books I've read in a long time, and I walk over to the tent that houses the beehive. I peek in the space that has been abandoned by the woman who would do heroin there. There's the crib and nursery books along with toys. I search through the desk, that looks similar to mine and find two books on sailing. I read some of the pages, seeing this manual as a thorough explanation on how to properly sail. The pages look completely foreign to me yet the desire to sail into the ocean overcomes me. I grab my notebook and write a poem about myself on a sailboat leaving my first love behind.

I'll sail from Hawaii to Tahiti one day, I conclude. When the time comes I'll see if my best friend wants to join me. For now, I close the book that was scattered amongst children's toys and keep

it there. It's too much for me to read just on the basis of reading, and the book would serve me better at another time when I have some rope I can practice with and the hope for an actual boat. I walk on to the other tent that's empty. It's dirtier than all the other ones but there's an entire book shelf in this one. I grab three that interest me, ones I can see myself reading. I pick up *100 Plants That Changed the World*, *Awakening the Buddha Within*, and *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran. The books are covered with dust and dirt, I bring them to the kitchen and clean them up with a moist rag. One of them has some mold and I try to clean it up as best as I can. While scrubbing the insides of *Awakening the Buddha Within* I find some note cards that were left inside. They are steps from a yoga asana and how to interpret the body through these movements. I unfold one of the notes and see that it's a letter and I read it like a little kid reading their siblings diary. It starts off with "Dear Andrew" and how they miss him very much and how sorry they are for cheating on them. It was the biggest mistake and regret of their life, one they wish they could undue and promises to never hurt Andrew again. At the end of the letter it writes, "With deepest love, Siobhan". I feel for Andrew, the owner this copy of *Awakening the Buddha Within*, how crushing it may have been to receive this letter on an isolated mountain. I wouldn't know what to do but reflect on the relationship and if this apology would carry over to be truly genuine. Would I take her back? In his position, he would have to think about his options and in a place like this, I think he made the right decision, whatever it may have been. I step outside and leave all three of the books out in the sun to dry.

Chapter 7

I've been on this farm for fifteen days only stepping away from the valley to collect food about 3 times. My work is consisting of cutting plants and organizing the surrounding area. The best way to visualize the area is through looking at it like a triangle. The top point is the rental home, the highest locale on the estate sitting on the hill. You can see the ocean with how high up the house is, the sea being 14 miles away. A long blue strip in the distance. The left point further down is Yuri's house, and it's facing the road with the gate guarding any entry. The right point, the one tucked furthest away, is where I am. The four tents, one for myself, the kitchen, and the two empty, futile ones. What extends the right point are simply more ginger plants, trees, and vines. Deadlocked by what Hawaii grows.

The morning dew leaves my socks wet with a specific temperature that evades through only in the earliest light. Clouds hang in the sky and the chilly air, designed for the morning linger until the sun starts heating up for the 9am heat. I have my rain-boots on, shyly walking over to Yuri's house where work should start. He's there, standing on the porch and feeding the cats. There's a pretty one, brown and white spots all over with green eyes. She likes to hunt bringing back tiny animals covered in blood with their guts out. For the cat its a present and for their owner its a chore to clean up after. Yuri steps into the shed collecting wires and its cutters.

“The chickens keep escaping,” he tells me on our walk over to the coop. There is a whole lot of them and I chase some into their designed area. The chickens are jumping out, the perimeter not being high enough to keep them enclosed.

One flies over my head, the wind from its black wings wakes me up even more through a certain tone. A memory comes in when my sister picked up a chicken in Brazil. Our dad’s friend has a house by the water, not the beach since my parents come from inland, but a reservoir. The state is landlocked with plains, valleys, and mountains. The land, wild with more room for the soil to expand. I was watching the water turn to glow while my parents laughed on with their friends and then I see my sister walk up the steps, 8 at the time, with a chicken wrapped in her arms. I exploded with laughter, how did she catch a chicken?

“Maybe we can pick them up?” I ask Yuri as chickens keep flying away from the coop. I turn my head to see him trying to hurdle one in his arms. One goes in and one comes out.

“Let’s just fix the coop and then we’ll put them in,” I tell him.

We need to add a foot of wire and we start by tying it around on the first wooden stilt. Yuri and I start talking more than our regular hello’s and what was presented in the day. We start by where we’re from and he listens to my stories about who my family is and what I was doing before the pandemic. He tells me he’s from Richmond, Virginia and how he can never go back and that it’s safer for him here.

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“The CIA tried to kill me after I was abducted by aliens.” My eyes widened with shock as he says this.

“I woke up in a hospital room after a coma, the nurse wanted to inject me with something that would’ve killed me,” he says.

The information was coming in fragments, and I’m trying to believe him. I do believe him to some extent, he’s confiding with me out of trust so why would I hold his words as false. When someone tells you something troubling you have to really listen, even if you don’t want to, even if it feels like someone is shaking the cage, just stay and listen. It’s an unharmed distraction from the thoughts we so easily attain to. It’s not like you need to keep what you heard, toss it in the pantry and decide when and if you want to chew on it.

I settle into my skin and wrap wire around the wooden edges while talking. He brings up the akashic records,

“Do you know what that is?” he asks me, and I actually do know what that is. A few months ago, a yoga teacher recommended me a video about some metaphysical teachings. How in our consciousness there are points of connection that can activate higher realms. It’s a fun practice to do in meditation, seeing where you can go with your eyes closed. Yuri starts telling me how these akashic records have been in the CIA’s knowledge for a while and are using astral projection to gather information on the whereabouts of some people. Using remote viewing to locate. He starts this whole story of how one night, a bright light came in his room when the window was open and then he was on an operating table with tall, thin beings touching him.

“They usually erase your memory, but sometimes people remember, either a mistake or they want you to remember,” he tells me.

My eyes are bigger than ever, a sponge just taking these words in I feel for him and hear the vulnerability on his tone, it’s all so wild. I’ve always thought that there was more out there in the world and outside of it, in a remote location it already feels alien as it is. People move differently here, according to their own terms, a society made within themselves. Separate. Isolated, but on one island. Secrets exist, sure, but do military tanks roam these roads at strange hours like Yuri insists that they do? I haven’t seen any. What marks a strange hour, is it at 4am where the milky way can be seen? I’m always too scared to leave my tent with wild hogs roaming around.

“It’s just a big car, doesn’t mean it’s part of the military,” I tell him.

He’s wrapped up in his head, not counting my differences. I listen to his rambles as we move on to the greenhouse, our next task. The dirt turns to a redder shade, looking like mars, with an unassuming white structure hosting seeds and propped up plants.

“What does he want us to do here?” I ask Yuri and he hands me a ho, so we can start tearing the failed vines from the untended seeds. I dig them out, noticing how strong the roots are, yet the long green sprouts are all brittle and dead. No one watered them. There isn’t much sunlight in here either, but I guess that’s the point of a greenhouse. It’s the afternoon yet the shaded structure isn’t doing much to shield the heat as the sweat drips down into my eyes. Yuri lights a bowl of weed signaling for a break and I take the time to eat what I brought for myself, stuffed crackers. He starts talking about the astral realm again; detailing the space we cannot so easily see.

“How do you know it looks like that?” I ask.

“I died for a little, before I came to a coma, I was naked in a cartoon type field, kinda like how Dr. Suess illustrates his worlds. I was naked too, flying across. There are no attachments there,” he concludes.

I went back to ripping the soil, wondering about a place in between life and death. I wonder if it’s real?

It’s nearly 1pm, “We’ve got 5 hours in,” Yuri says placing his tool down, but there are still so many more plants to rip out, I tell him. He’s leaving but that I am more than welcome to stay. I look around at the different shades of brown and green that are bleeding out at every inch of the floor. I walk back to my point of the farm and shower under the bamboo. The water is heated, by a solar panel, one of my few points of electricity. The dense wood and canopy of leaves shield my body from no one but myself but if someone came I would still be covered. I don’t feel the time moving, but it’s nearing the end of light. Taking advantage of the openness, I am to finish the book I’ve been reading. As the pages near the end of *Pride and Prejudice* I climb into the canopy of my bed. The webbed veil protects me from the mosquitos that fly across, constantly buzzing with their incessant hums.

My alarm wakes me up early at 6am and I walk over to the gate waiting for Andrea. Minutes pass and I don’t see her car. I walk over to the rental to grab the WIFI and I send her message. She’s running late, and if I can meet her on their farm. I walk down the valley, watching the dew melt away with the fog leveling up in the air. She’s there in the garage sitting in her car, and Matt is pacing by the office.

“We had to fire Jesse,” she tells me, something about him stealing hours.

“I’ll get the locks, babe,” she tells Matt with a laugh.

I notice a bigger gun attached to his waist as we pull out of the driveway on our way to Hilo.

She explains how Jesse, the man who was working for them started getting too independent with the work creating a division with what was distributed. He would take too many breaks, take too much produce, and lie on his time sheets. The pregnant girl, younger than I, also got fired. He calls her on the drive over a bunch. His voice shakes and she calms him down. Jesse is mad, I think he’s there on the farm and Matt is wondering about calling the police or handling it himself. In what capacity, I don’t know.

We go to home goods and separate. I scurry along the aisles picking up warm things for the cold nights. There are cider scented candles in a kinder light and plush blankets that smell like the one’s you would find in an aunt’s house. Every home goods has the same wooden color and dim lighting, a great sense of familiarity hits me, as if I might bump into someone I know. The checkout line boasts of curiosity with all the tiny things to look at like caramel covered popcorn and printed stationary. I grab both and the lady at the cashier compliments my choices. Andrea waits for me outside,

“I bought too many things,” I tell her while lifting 2 bags up. She peeks at the bags with bras and underwear showing at the top.

“No, not at all, you bought what you needed,” she tells me with an undertone of understanding in which women seem to share.

She drops me off at the beach so she can go to home depot.

“I’ll pick you up in two hours.”