Sea Madness

My radar and emergency communications system mysteriously failed. I pulled into port and stared in utter disbelief. I thought it must have been a movie. The main surf break where I had learned to surf as a child. The lefts where I surfed daily directly in front of the jetty had all looked normal.

But my home since birth was unrecognizable. My loving wife did not wave, my two children didn’t excitedly jump up down with their joyful screams. Heat rose off the wind scorched frothy water. Smoke filled the sky and ash had swirled in the air. It was clear to me a sudden unexpected fireball had raced to the water’s edge. Nothing had withstood the horrific blaze. Charcoal and wisps of smoke had replaced all the buildings, storefronts, and homes. I vomited violently.

Panicked, I dropped anchor, and jumped overboard. When I reached the shore, the intense heat suffocated the oxygen in the air. I wept uncontrollably back onboard.

Overcome with a deep sense of loss, I ached from the hole burned into my chest. I had lost everything. I floated between two worlds. Though not religious, I begged God for mercy. I promised never to drink again if he would just save my family from the pain. I happily offered my life in exchange for my family. I promised to do anything to bring my ohana back to me.

Exhausted, and dizzy, I screamed up to the sky, why am I still alive? Why me?

I began to hallucinate. I was trapped in an endless terrifying mind loop. The fire breathing dragon rose from the sea. The dragon raced across the suspension bridge of old dead sailors’ skulls. The deadly fireball bellowed by the dragon’s deadly oxygen had been pay back for banishment from the island. I compulsively revisited the terror in my wife’s eyes. I watched her and my children engulfed in thirty-foot flames that had slowly burnt their flesh. My family’s charred bones became ash and then disappeared in a gust of wind.

I kept telling myself this was not real. It was just a dream. I had just sailed the stranger to the Island of Nuku for two hundred and fifty dollars paid in advance. I departed Pukalani the day prior, and I had promised my wife and children a night out on the town upon my return thanks to the crisp hundred-dollar bills in my pocket.

I drank straight from the fresh bottle of rum. Drunk, I sailed aimlessly back out to sea haunted by my endless mind loop of terror.

It was preposterous. I would never again see my daughter’s cheerful smile, my son’s goofiness, my wife’s loving eyes. Impossible. I had studied hard in school. I became a captain. I was a loving son, husband, and father. Yes, I drank too much and regularly cursed and spit. I often surfed instead of working. But I had a big heart and helped friends and strangers alike. People enjoyed my sense of humor and story telling.

But now I just feel useless. I was a useless father. I couldn’t do anything. I couldn’t even protect my family. I went below and flew into a blind rage. I shattered my compass. I punched the walls repeatedly. I had soaked my charts and maps in kerosene and burned them.

Dolphins swam off the bow, and I cried until no more tears flowed. My swollen face had reddened from the salty sea. My knuckles bloodied, I meticulously tore off several more layers of skin. I ran back and forth from bow to stern as my fifty-foot sloop awkwardly sliced through the water. I could not outrun my endless mind loop filled with the terrified screams of my young beautiful innocent children.

I drank steadily until I had seen the squall. The scud off the bow was dark. Impending death washed over me. I succumbed to drowning.

Loud thunder and lightning unexpectedly pierced my veil of darkness. It pushed me instinctively into survival mode. I lowered the mainsail, a large triangular sail located aft of the boat’s mast. I tended to all the lines and secured everything above board. I finally closed the hatch and braced myself to ride out the storm below deck.

A night of bobbing about in monstrous waves gave way to calm and sunny skies the following morning. I robotically moved about seemingly rudderless. I trolled with a taut line and caught several fish that languished in a bucket tied to a cleat on the aft. The Tropicbird had brilliant long tail feathers, white plumage, distinct markings around its eyes, and a red bill. The distinctive tropicbird cleverly snatched up the biggest fish in the bucket and flew away. I wasn’t annoyed. I admired the bird’s timing, beauty, and grace.

The ship's logs were my record of important events in the management, operation, and navigation of my ship, and had to be filled in at least daily. I forced myself into this familiar routine to keep from going completely insane. Weather conditions, times of routine events and significant incidents, or what ports were docked at and when were mandatory. The weathered pages had transformed into a memorial to the tropicbird and the time we spent together.

I painstakingly wrote in my ships log on August 8, 2019, weather conditions: dark smokey skies. leeward winds of 30-40 miles per hour. Pukalana fire, PTSD? Followed by August 9, 2019, weather conditions: rough seas, leeward winds of 50-70 miles per hour with ominous clouds on the horizon. Drifted further out to sea and rode out an intense storm below deck overnight. I mustered my last bit of strength, and wrote August 10, 2019, weather conditions: calm seas, leeward winds of 3-5 miles per hour. Deeply depressed, I could barely scribble. I desperately missed my ohana. I finally finished my entries, and wrote, after catching several fish a distinctive tropicbird stole the biggest catch. Tropicbird later returned and hitched a ride on the mast. Befriended bird and had spoken to it incessantly. Tropicbird had stayed the night and led sailboat to a small group of unknown Islands. The Forgotten Islands of Aka.

The volcanic islands were distinctive for their white sandy beaches, crystal-clear waters, and lush tropical forests. The archipelago was a small cluster of unknown islands.

I cautiously walked onto the beach. The eight-foot tall, hairy monster had jumped out of the bushes and proudly displayed its face covered in blood. Its bear-like smell was overpowering. It howled like a coyote that broadcasted a recent kill. I explained that I had drifted at sea for several days after having suffered the devastating loss of my family.

It gestured that I should leave at once. I pleaded for fresh water. It screamed that I was a weak man filled with sad stories no one had wanted to hear. I climbed the narrow aluminum ladder back on board in tears. I felt distraught, small, and thirsty.

The second Island was grotesque. I witnessed thousands of chickens that literally had run around with their heads chopped off. They darted about until they bumped into one another which further increased their frantic behavior. The day went on to night and to the next day in a matter of minutes. Everything was demanded all at once. I made my escape undetected.

I was eagerly waved on shore of the third Island. The muscular shapeshifter sported eight-inch fangs. He ran about in circles and shifted himself into several monstrous terrifying animals. Then he explained he was a hunter and gatherer. I inquired as to what he hunted. Big game, small game was the reply. When was the last kill I pressed? *Crickets*. What had you gathered on the Island, I asked. Wild plants, herbs, fruit, and vegetables. When was the last harvest, I inquired. Jeez, I’ll get to it tomorrow was the reply! I retrieved enough water to last a week after having taken the initiative and hiked up to the waterfall encircled with human skulls displayed proudly on bamboo poles.

I was waived onshore to the fourth Island with an oddly submissive gesture from a gigantic Kraken. The sea monster strutted about and puffed out its chest. It was intimidating, fierce, and scared me. It’s fifty-foot tail swung wildly and had proven deadly. The monster boasted how the beach, ocean, and sky had admired him so. He continued in this vein having demanded admiration from the lagoon, trees, and rocks. He asked me to comment on the beauty of his Island. The grand finale was when I was prompted to speak directly to the beauty of the Islands’ Sea monster himself. I departed discouraged and dismayed.

I needed solutions. I had been waived onshore to the fifth Island by a large, bellied man adorned in beautiful shells and feathers. A tattooed, tanned, and kind king, he wore a pink coral anklet. He used a walking stick to compensate for his limp. His long grey hair had been tied back with fresh green jungle vines. His front tooth had been removed but his smile was warm and friendly. We hiked to the king’s personal le cave for prayers. I begged the king to see my wife and family again. The king assured me everything in the universe was always connected.

The king had blessed me in old Hawaiian. He then blessed my journey with spiritual assistance. He gave me a small sacred fish bone carving which helped me to see my family. The king carefully explained the ancient sailing “way finder method” of his people to me. I now understood what was required to reach my voyage’s destination safely, shared intention, and harmony in the universe.

I discussed everything that I learned on the Islands at great length with Tropicbird. We dove into the importance of kindness, mindfulness, and letting go of one’s ego. How everything was connected. We discussed at length the issues that had resulted from my own procrastination. Tropicbird insisted I find my way forward.

I felt loved unconditionally by Tropicbird. When we parted ways, we each knew we would miss each other’s company. The Tropicbird’s final screech forced me to immediately return home buoyed by the sea of solutions beneath my sailboat.

Throughout the weeklong sail home, I systematically threw each of my possessions overboard. I started with my favorite surfboard and continued with everything below that wasn’t attached too securely to the walls. With each possession I tossed into the sea my vessel and I became lighter, eventually untethered. I nonchalantly tossed overboard my last drink of fresh water.

Thanks to the ancient “way finder’s method” I sailed into the bay of the historic town of Pukalani well before sunset. I dropped anchor and positioned myself cross legged on the bow. I clutched the sacred fishbone and meditated to see my family. I had done this repeatedly ever since meeting the powerful king.

Then I fired my flair gun and created a gaping hole in the bottom of my boat.

Water rushed in through the hull. Then I the sea took a big gulp and me with it. Slowly, I sank deeper. I repeated the king’s prayer and stared straight directly ahead onto shore, trance like.

The last bit of oxygen remaining in my lungs, and the traces of oxygen in my red blood cells formed a bubble that rose peacefully to the surface. My eyes were inexplicably drawn to a big flat rock at the end of the soot covered jetty. That is when I saw my wife smile like she always did. My children waved to me, jumped up and down, and screamed with joy!

I mused, had my family somehow miraculously survived the fire? Was it thanks to my broken heart, that I drowned, committed suicide, and passed over to the other side? Or had it been the Tropicbird, the king, and carved fishbone that had facilitated my visit to the spirit world and reunite with my family?