

# The Fortune Teller



Seth Atwater Jr

# THE FORTUNE TELLER

By Seth Atwater Jr

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*Dedicated to all our futures.  
May they ever remain unknown to us.*

I pull back the curtain of the gaudy tent and step through. It's even worse on the inside—the walls are marbled with bright colors that are a capital offense to the eye, and dozens of cheap plastic stars and planets are hanging from the ceiling on invisible wires. In front of me is a small round table with wicker lawn chairs on either side of it. The seat across from me is occupied by a short, middle-aged man with a round face who is wearing a cheap blue magician's cloak that looks like it came from the Halloween costume section at the supermarket. He motions for me to sit in the other chair.

“Before we get started, I want to make it clear that I don't believe in this kind of superstitious stuff.” I say as I sit down. “I'm just here because a friend thought it would help me to relieve some stress, so you can skip the theatrics and just pull out your crystal ball or whatever.” I don't know why I feel so insecure that I have to defend myself like this to a total stranger. I am a bit high strung on account of the

presentation I have to do at my company's business trip that's coming up, but I'm not *that* worried about it...am I? Huh, maybe I really do need to blow off some steam.

The little man on the other side of the table leans forward and looks into my eyes. He just sits there, silently. He's not getting overly close, yet I'm starting to get the kind of uncomfortable feeling that comes when someone is getting up in your personal space. I want to break eye contact, but somehow I can't. He raises an eyebrow, and the corner of his mouth follows. He folds his hands together, and suddenly I can look away again. I inhale sharply. It seems I was holding my breath the whole time he was looking at me, although somehow I wasn't aware I was until just now. My eyes feel dry. My hands are shaking.

"Your future is not the kind I can divulge lightly." The man says. His voice is higher pitched than I had expected. I think for a moment that it sounds almost ethereal, but I quickly put that thought out of my mind.

“When you hear what I have seen,” he continues, “the course of your life will change forever. I cannot dictate how you will react, I can only give you this warning. If you truly wish to know your destiny, despite the anger and grief it may bring you, you need only say ‘tell on, old man.’ If you wish to remain in blissful ignorance you may turn and walk out of this tent, never to hear from me again. Of course I know which choice you will make, but until you make that choice for yourself I can say no more.”

He sits back in his lawn chair and smiles at me. He clearly doesn’t intend to talk again until I choose.

“You can’t possibly know anything of the sort.” I protest. I don’t know why but it’s taking effort to keep myself from shouting at him. “And what if I were to choose a third option? What if I just sat here quietly, like you’re doing now, and didn’t ask to know anything? I bet you’d feel pretty dumb then, mister all-seeing diviner.”

The man smiles at me.

“I said you could skip the theatrics. Just get it over with already! We both know you’re going to spout some vague nonsense that could apply to literally anyone and then I’m going to hand over a couple bucks and be on my way. Is that what you meant when you said you know what I’ll choose? That’s clever, but I’m not so easily taken in by con men like you. So what are you waiting for? Tell me my fortune before I decide to leave and take my money with me. Well?”

The man smiles at me.

I groan. “I see you’re nothing if not committed to your bit. Alright, fine. I’ll play along. What is it that you wanted me to say? Tell on, old man? Well there, I’ve said it. I want to hear my future. Are you going to tell me, or not?”

The fortune teller’s smile abruptly disappears, replaced with an ominous, somber expression. I’m detecting something in his eyes that wasn’t there before. Something

like...pity? He unfolds his hands and places them on the table.

“Very well.”

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You will arrive at the San Francisco International Airport at 7:14 AM this Friday. You will not be in a hurry—your flight won’t leave until 10 AM after all—so you will take a moment to bask in the familiar sight of people running one way to catch their plane or another to catch a taxi. It will be a busy morning for the airport. The air will buzz with hundreds of conversations, drowning out the sound of whatever new pop song they will be playing over the speakers. You will chuckle to yourself as you are reminded that most people would think you strange for feeling relaxed in a place like this.

But of course you wouldn’t care. The thing is, you like people, and you like watching them, seeing what you can decipher about their lives based on what they’re wearing,



how they walk, and who they talk to. Like the mother who will be bending down to tie her son's shoes, with an expression that betrays the fact that it is far from the first time she will have done this that day. Or the large group of people who will be standing near the baggage claim holding signs that read, "Welcome home, Elder Rivera!" Or the security guard who will be having a friendly chat with an elderly woman, who will be holding the leash of a large white service dog whose fur will look clean and freshly groomed.

Yes, you will find comfort in your observation ritual as you always do when you go on trips like this one. That is why you will arrive at the airport so early. You will be sorely needing that comfort.

After your brief moment of respite you will go through security and head toward your gate. On your way you will stop to buy a coffee. You will spend several minutes just letting the warm, smoky smell permeate your senses

before deciding that you had better drink it before it gets cold. You will pick up a sports magazine from a nearby rack and start reading it, but that won't last long before you realize that all the jargon is so meaningless to you that it may as well be written in Norwegian.

At this point you will have to face the fact that you are stalling. You will know what you will see when you reach that gate, and you will be dreading it with every fiber of your being. You will become frustrated. You could have been just mildly anxious about the presentation you will have to give once you get to Hawaii, but it will be too late for that now. You just had to talk to that damned fortune teller.

Sighing, you will put the magazine back on the rack and drain the remains of your coffee. You will throw the paper cup in a nearby recycling bin, the very purposeful side effect of which will be that it gets you to stand up and start walking. You will continue in the direction of the gate. You

will know that if you stop now you may never end up getting on that plane.

You will recognize her as soon as you see her, the woman sitting alone in the chair fifth to the right in the second row of the waiting area for your flight. Her long, dark hair will be lightly curled, creating the illusion of a cascading chocolate fountain. You will be able to tell that her bespectacled face would look absolutely gorgeous even without the simple, yet expertly applied makeup she will be wearing. Her long legs and slim, yet robust figure will be concealed by a simple red sleeveless dress. She will seem out of place in a crowded airport, in your mind she would fit better at some sort of high society party. You will immediately be smitten, which you will curse yourself for. What you will be about to do would be much easier if you felt no attraction toward her whatsoever.

You will walk toward her, coming to a stop next to her large carry-on bag that almost matches the color of her

dress. She will be looking at her phone and will not notice you, so you will stand nervously for a moment before sitting two seats down from her—directly next to her would be too difficult—and clearing your throat. She will look up at you with an expression that is less startled and more inquisitive. You will take a deep breath, then speak.

“You shouldn’t get on this flight.” You will tell her with as much confidence as you can muster. “It’s not too late yet to go home and rethink things.”

The woman will blink twice, then exhale a burst of soft laughter. You will be expecting it, yet its authenticity will still surprise you. She won’t be mocking you, merely taking amused interest.

“I’m sure you’re right,” She will say, “but I’m a bit too excited to take you up on your offer. Work or no, it’s not every day you get an all expenses paid trip to Hawaii. I’m sorry if I looked like I was worried about it, unless perhaps you were hoping to buy my ticket from me?”

“No, it’s nothing like that. I’m going on the same business trip.” You will hold up your ticket as evidence.

“Oh really? We must be from different departments.” The woman will extend her hand in greeting. “I don’t think we’ve met before. My name is Melissa.”

“I know.” You will reply, without shaking her hand.

“And you are?” She will inquire, apparently unshaken by your poor manners. That will make things more tricky for you.

“I’m Michael. But that’s not important right now.”

“Oh, that’s funny. We’re like—”

“We’re like M&Ms.” You will say, cutting her off. “Because of our names. Michael and Melissa. M and M.”

This will finally surprise her. Her eyes will widen and she will lean back a little, then scrunch her nose and look at you sideways.

“...That’s exactly what I was going to say.” She will observe suspiciously.

“I know that, too.”

She will raise an eyebrow, causing her glasses to shift down very slightly. “And how is it that you know so much about me, Michael?”

You will wait a second to answer this question, just long enough to avoid sounding defensive. “I’m not a stalker if that’s what you’re wondering, but if I told you how I really know I’d sound like one, so let’s just say I’ve been watching you around the office when I get the chance. That’s much more believable, yes?”

“It’s difficult to say. I don’t have anything to compare it to.”

“Point taken.”

“But you still aren’t going to tell me, are you?”

You will shake your head. “Look, I know this won’t change your mind, but I have to say it regardless. If you go on this trip, you are going to die.”

“Now there’s an intriguing idea.” Melissa will sound like she means what she says. “Would you mind telling me why you think I’m going to die?” She will reach down and put her phone away in her bag, then she will fold her hands in front of her, indicating a readiness to listen. You will doubt that she would feel that way if she knew the answer to her question.

You will shrug evasively. “You wouldn’t believe me if I tried to explain it.”

“And how do you know that?” She will ask, a hint of incredulity sneaking its way into her tone.

“Because I will try to explain it later and you won’t believe me.” You will answer.

Melissa won’t immediately process your meaning, so she will stop to contemplate it. After a moment, she will say, “You know Michael, I don’t think I’ve ever met someone quite like you before.”

“I know. That’s one of the things that worries me.”

You and Melissa will continue to talk until the plane arrives. Despite your best efforts you will not be able to convince her to stay behind, so you will walk to the gate together and show your tickets to the woman at the check-in counter. By complete coincidence your seats on the plane will be right next to each other. The fact that you will be unsurprised by this will make it hard to convince Melissa that it wasn't planned. She won't mind at this point though. She will say that she finds the strangeness and air of mystery about you fascinating, if still somewhat unnerving. You will wish you could be less strange and mysterious.

During the flight she will talk about her life. You will already know the broader strokes, but you will find yourself engrossed in all the small details. She will tell you about her parents, who made this career path possible for her by saving to send her to college before they were both injured in a car crash six years ago and had to retire. She will explain that she takes joy in the novel and unique, the things that make



life really exciting. You will learn that she is actually quite athletic. She is a hiker in her spare time and likes to tread new trails whenever the opportunity arises. She will ask you about yourself, and she will seem to find your answers just as riveting, despite the fact that none of them will be nearly as interesting as hers.

After several hours Melissa will suggest that you watch a movie together. You will agree and allow her to select the film. Her choice will be an action-packed romantic drama, which fortunately for you will be an in-flight version with the steamier parts edited out. You wouldn't be able to handle that at the moment.

After five and a half hours in the air you will finally land on the island of Maui in Hawaii. As you get off the plane you will put your hand on Melissa's shoulder and speak emphatically. "Now that you're here I obviously can't convince you to leave, but I can at least give you a warning. Whatever you do, don't go hiking on the mountain."

“I’m going to do just that as soon as I get settled in to my hotel room.” She will say defiantly. You will be learning that she is nothing if not stubborn. “Parking is limited, so I have to be proactive. You’re welcome to join me, if you’d like.”

“Come have dinner with me instead.” You will say quickly.

Melissa will stop walking.

“Michael, are you asking me out?” She will look into your eyes. With the heels she will be wearing she will be a bit taller than you, making her gaze almost imposing. Nevertheless, you won’t back down. You will know you have to do everything in your power to stop her from going up that mountain, and you would be lying to yourself if you were to say you didn’t want to spend more time with her.

“Yes I am.” You will respond confidently. “I’ve been on a trip like this before, so I know a few good places in the area.”

Melissa will take a moment to consider. “I suppose hiking can wait until tomorrow. Take me to one of these ‘good places.’” She will look down at the red carry-on bag you will be holding for her. “But let me drop off my things at the hotel first.”

The Hawksbill Kitchen will be just as lively as you remember. The open air pavilion will glow in the evening light, radiating energy from the convivial atmosphere and the live music. You will have reserved a table on their website while Melissa was getting ready, so the staff will greet you warmly and lead you to your seats as soon as you arrive. It will be their busiest time of day. In fact, if by your good fortune a different couple didn’t fail to show up at the time of their reservation it would have been impossible to get in. You enjoy being surrounded by so many people, and you will be relieved to find that it won’t seem to bother Melissa. Unfortunately you won’t get a chance to pay much

attention to what will be going on around you. This date will have a more important purpose.

After ordering your food you will have a long time to wait before it arrives—the chef will have a lot on his plate at that time after all. You will want to use this time to explain to Melissa the reason that you invited her to come here, but infuriatingly she will only want to ask more questions about you. Interesting questions. Questions you won't be able to stop yourself from wanting to answer. A sommelier will come by your table with a Sauvignon Blanc wine which Melissa, not you, will have ordered. You will avoid drinking more than a little. Now will not be the time to let yourself get intoxicated.

“You said you have three sisters?” Melissa will ask, taking a sip from her glass. “Do you get to see them very often?”

You will shake your head. “Not generally no, they all live on the other side of the country and I have too much

going on at work to be able to travel much. I did fly over there to visit them this last week though. They're all doing well. Lainey, the youngest, just aced her driver's license test, so she was really excited to tell me about that."

"You flew across the country and back just before coming on this trip?" Melissa will ask. "I'm starting to feel guilty for letting you take me to an expensive establishment like this."

You will wave your hand dismissively. "Oh, don't worry about money. It's transient, here one day and gone the next. Kind of like you."

Melissa will give you the same strange look as she did earlier when you first met.

"You keep saying ominous things like that. You really believe I'm going to die, don't you?"

"I know you are." You will reply sadly.

You will be able to tell that Melissa won't know exactly how to take this. She will go quiet for a long,

contemplative moment, long enough for your food to finally arrive. She will look at it eagerly, but she won't eat anything right away. Instead, without looking up, she will speak.

“You said you would explain how you know that later and I wouldn't believe you, right?” She will pause and meet your eyes with a look of morbid curiosity. “Well now is later, so are you ready to explain?”

You will sigh and put down your drink, which you will have been swirling absently. “I know,” you will say, “because someone told me your future. I don't normally put much stock in fortune telling, but I'd never heard anyone tell a fortune like this before. He knew about intimate aspects of my life that no one could have possibly told him, like the way I like to watch people. All I asked about was reassurance that the presentation I'm giving tomorrow would go well, which he did tell me, but he also explained everything that was going to happen to me on this trip, down to the most

precise detail. Even this conversation we're having right now."

"So you know everything I'm going to say before I say it?" She will posit questioningly.

"That's right."

"And that's how you beat me to the punch earlier with the M&Ms joke?"

You will nod.

"So if I think of something right now, you could tell me what it is?"

You will shake your head again. "No, I couldn't."

"Why not?"

"Because you aren't going to tell me what you were thinking."

She will hum to herself in a way that suggests that you are right, and that bothers her.

"It could be just a lucky guess." She will say under her breath.

“Like I said, you won’t believe me.” You will find it difficult to keep your tone from sounding a bit begrudging.

“It’s a little hard to take seriously,” she will admit, “but I do believe that you believe it, if that helps at all.”

You will pause. “I don’t want to let myself hope, but on the off chance that the fortune teller could be wrong...”

“Yes?” Melissa will be leaning forward, anticipation building for what you’re about to say.

“If you really believe that I believe, then humor me for the next couple days while we’re on this trip. I know you’ve been really looking forward to hiking up the mountain, but will you forgo that desire and spend the evenings with me instead? I promise I can make your time here more novel and exciting than any slightly challenging walk could.” A part of you won’t believe you just said that, but another part will revel in this newfound confidence. Who knew that facing down inevitable tragedy and death could be such a powerful motivator?



Melissa won't respond immediately. In fact, she won't speak again until both of you have finished your meals. As you stand to leave the restaurant she will affix you with that piercing stare of hers. The one you will be coming to love.

"Alright, I'll do it." She will announce resolutely. "But if you break your promise and our time together isn't as exciting as I want, I'll be on that trail before you can blink. Got it?"

"Got it." You will respond with more enthusiasm than you feel. The thing that will unnerve you the most is that her response will only make it more clear that things are playing out exactly as that fortune teller predicted.

The next morning you will give your presentation. Considering the situation you will have a hard time focusing on the preparation and you will be quite nervous going into it, but against the odds it will go over without a hitch. Your

boss will even congratulate you on a job well done after it's over. *Maybe the principle of "fake it 'till you make it" really does work*, you will think to yourself. It certainly will seem to be working for your courage in approaching Melissa.

You will meet up with her at the front of the hotel you and your fellow co-workers are all staying in at precisely 2:57 PM. You will have successfully rushed through your client meeting for the day to make sure you would have time for the plans you made for that afternoon. Melissa will look much different than she did the day before, having swapped her dress for shorts and a gray tank top with white lettering that reads "No mountain I can't climb." The slogan will make you a bit uncomfortable, but you'll decide not to mention it. Her hair will be pulled back in a ponytail held together by a pink scrunchie. She will still be wearing glasses, but you will swear that it is a different pair than she had on before. They will be the same shape, but the rims will seem to be a slightly different color.

She will wave to you as you approach. She will seem more natural like this, more in her element, as if this was always who she was supposed to be. Though her fancy clothes and makeup will be gone, you won't find her any less attractive.

“Good afternoon, Melissa.” You will nod courteously. “I see you came prepared.”

“I told you I was planning on going hiking while I was here. And you can just call me Mel. Although you already know what I'm going to say, so you could have called me that all along, right?” She will flash you a sly smile.

“I'd think it would be rude to use a familiar nickname without a person's permission, even if you know that they will give you that permission in the future.” You will respond.

“Good point. Well, shall we go then?”

From the hotel you will walk the short way to the nearest bus station and ride from there to where your rental car is waiting. It will be a modern reproduction of a 1957 Porsche Speedster, excellently crafted. You will have justified the high cost when you reserved it days before leaving on your trip by telling yourself that even if that fortune teller was making it all up it'd still be worth driving around on your own. You will open the door for Mel and let her sit down, then take your place next to her in the driver's seat.

The fresh island wind will blow in your faces as you drive toward the Road to Hana. You won't have time to do the whole driving tour, but one of the first stops is a place you remember well and have always wanted to revisit. Now will seem like a perfect time. You will park in the first lot beside the road and head to a nearby farm stand, where you will buy a loaf of banana bread and two fruit smoothies to serve as a picnic dinner. Mel will tell you that bananas are

her favorite fruit, and the two of you will say in unison, “I know.” It will be hard to eat while you are laughing so much.

Following your meal you will start on the trail toward Twin Falls. It won’t be a difficult hike, but nevertheless Mel will seem to enjoy it immensely. You will chat the whole way about this and that—no serious talk yet, you will be saving that for when you get to the falls. You will tell jokes and Mel will laugh, an honest laugh, not an obliging one. You will smile despite yourself. This day will be going quite well.

The short cliff face where the first waterfall cascades down into a large pool at the end of the trail will be as understatedly beautiful as you remember. A group of people will be swimming in the water, probably a family, as they will appear to be two adults and several children all playing together. It will remind you of the time you spent with your sisters when you were around their age. You will be glad that

you had to come here late in the day, earlier it would be much more crowded.

You and Mel will walk around the top of the waterfall and take a seat on a nearby rock so you can admire it from above. You will watch the water cascading into the pool, droplets sparkling in the sun like millions of tiny stars. You will hear birds chirp in the distance, as well as other animals that you won't be able to identify just by sound, but which will be just as pleasant to listen to. Almost as pleasant as the sound of the falls hitting the water below. Forever would be too short a time for a moment like this.

“So, how do I die?”

“Huh?” You will remember that Mel is going to ask that, but in the moment you will be distracted and be taken off guard regardless.

“How do I die? In the fortune you heard, what is it that is going to kill me if I go hiking on the mountain?”

“It will.”

“It will...what?”

“The volcano is going to erupt.” You will explain.

This time it will be Mel’s turn to be surprised. She will struggle to regain her composure. “That— that seems... unlikely. I know it’s technically considered active, but it hasn’t actually gone off for hundreds of years. Why now?”

“I don’t know.” You will say. “And it’s the worst timing possible, since according to the fortune teller there’s no way I can stop you from going up there.”

“But you’re still trying?” Mel will ask.

“Yes. I don’t have a choice.”

“And why not?” She will say indignantly, though it will not be directed at you. “Why do you have to do everything this fortune teller says?”

You will clench your teeth, sharing in her frustration.

“Because no one else will try. No one else can.”

On that pleasant note you will suggest that the two of you move on to the second waterfall before you run out of

time. The hike there will be a bit more difficult than the first one, and you will start feeling rather tired out by the time you make it to the end. Mel will be as spry as ever, but that won't surprise you as she clearly does this kind of thing more often than you do.

The waterfall here is taller than the previous one, so you won't climb to the top this time. Instead you will find a nearby log bench and sit down again. Unlike before there will be no one else around. You will sit together for a long time, not speaking, just enjoying the sights and each other's company. There is a question you will know you have to ask her but thinking about it will fill you with dread, not only of what is to come but also of breaking this beautiful silence. Nevertheless, it must be asked, and you will do so.

“When we first met at the airport you offered to sell your ticket to me.” Mel will look at you as you speak, but you won't be able to make eye contact just yet. “You said it



jokingly, but in reality there was more to it than that.” You will not phrase this as a question.

“And you’re going to tell me all about it since you already know.” Mel will guess.

You will shrug. “I do know, but it’d be more meaningful to hear it directly from you.”

Mel will sigh in endeared exasperation and lean back, putting her hands behind her to prop herself up. “You know, you baffle me sometimes, Mike. I have no idea how to predict what you will do next at any given moment, but you seem to understand me perfectly. It’s uncanny.”

“But you still don’t believe me about knowing the future?”

“I don’t know, maybe I’m starting to. But I’ve never believed in things like that before. I’ve never believed in anything really, so you can probably guess how hard it is for me to accept what you’re saying.”

“I understand.” You will assure her. “Now, you were going to tell me why you offered to sell your ticket to me?”

Mel will nod. “First thing you need to know is that I’m a very stubborn person. When I make up my mind to do something it’s hard to get me to back down and make another choice, even when I honestly know that it’d be better for me. You might call that my biggest weakness.”

She will take a deep breath before continuing. “I don’t like my job. There are aspects of it that I appreciate—it’s stable, keeps my parents from worrying about me, and I get to go on trips like this every now and then. But it isn’t what I want to be doing. You know I love hiking and the outdoors. I certainly enjoy those things much more than being cooped up in an office all day. Being a hiking tour guide or something like that would be living a perfect dream for me. But I would lose those benefits I mentioned before, not to mention my parents need some help supporting themselves in their retirement. So, yesterday the National

Park Service held a job fair, and for a while I really considered skipping out on this trip and going there instead. But at the last moment I made up my mind that leaving my current job would be a bad decision right now, so I packed, dressed myself up nice so I couldn't even consider walking around in a dusty park, and headed off to the airport. I had made a decision, and I was going to stick to it if it killed me. But then you showed up, and offered me a way out. I was too stubborn to just leave, but I made a joke about giving you my ticket, because a small part of me hoped that you would take it seriously."

The irony of her saying she would stick to her decision if it killed her will not be lost on you, but you won't be able to get mad at her over it. It would be so much easier if you could. Instead you will take her hand and look into her eyes.

"Do you think I made the wrong decision?" She will ask you.

“You did,” you will tell her, “but despite that, and despite everything I know about what’s going to happen tomorrow, I’m still happy to have met you.”

“Such a strange way of expressing your affection.” She will joke as she leans in closer to you.

That perfect kiss will feel like it lasts a lifetime. *In a way*, you will realize sadly as you and Mel slowly pull apart, *it did. The remainder of one at least.*

The next day will be your final day on the island. As such you will have something big planned—a luau, one of the best in the area. You will have less work to do than the previous day, so you will be able to get together with Mel even earlier. This time she will be wearing a Hawaiian shirt and cropped jeans rolled up at the hem to just below the knee, along with white sandals, white rimmed glasses, and a wide sun hat.

“You look like a tourist.” You will remark.

“Well, seeing as that’s what I am, I’d say it’s not a bad look.” She will say, grinning.

“Not a bad look at all.” You will reply.

You will be pleased to see a bit of color rush to her face from that remark.

You won’t have time to enjoy it though, as your next pronouncement will change her expression to one of confusion.

“Now, today we need to avoid doing anything too... distracting.”

“Distracting?” She will frown. “What do you mean by that?”

“We can still have fun, but we need to be on our guard in case a warning of some kind goes off and we have to evacuate. If we aren’t ready to go the moment that happens—”

“I get it, we’re watching for the volcano, right? Okay then, I’ll resign myself to not doing anything *too* crazy.”

Much to your frustration Mel will seem to be brushing you off. You will understand why she won't want to focus on something like her inevitable demise at a time like this, but for that very reason it will be a time that your focus is most required. But she will run off toward the party before you have a chance to argue, so not seeing any other choice you will follow her.

You will have some time before the luau starts, so once you catch up to her the two of you will agree to take a detour to a nearby beach. While making plans the previous night Mel will have told you that she doesn't like swimming, so instead you will take a walk together and enjoy the ocean breeze, as well as some shaved ice. It will be relaxing, almost enough to make you forget all your troubles. Almost. Imminent danger is hard to forget.

At 4:00 PM you will return by bus to the spot where the luau is taking place. You will be greeted warmly and escorted to where you can participate in the activities that are

starting. You and Mel will join in on some dance instruction. She will catch on much quicker than you, and when she tries to show you the steps you will bump into her and almost knock her over. Fortunately this will only send her into a fit of laughter, which will soon spread to the whole group. When you apologize, she will call your clumsiness charming. You couldn't feel better about yourself than you will then.

Dinner will follow shortly after the activities, and it will be fantastic. You will watch your hosts dig the Kalua pork up from the underground oven and have difficulty not salivating over it as the sweet smell starts to fill the air. You will find the serving staff just as friendly as the dance instructors, and you will be surprised by how much pork Mel will be able to wolf down when no one is telling her she should stop.

Once the sun starts to set the performance will begin. Hula dancers and fire spinners will demonstrate their skills,

quite literally setting the night on fire, and though you know that they only practice these things to bring in more tourism you won't be able to help being impressed.

Mel will be uncharacteristically quiet during the dancing, because she is being attentive to the performance or has other things on her mind you won't be able to say. She will only speak to you again when the luau is over and the other guests are beginning to leave.

"Can we go talk somewhere?" She will ask.

"Why not right here?" You will respond.

She will look down. "It needs to be somewhere private."

You will sigh. You will know her well enough by now to recognize that you won't win this one. "Okay, let's go."

As you walk together back toward the beach you will feel the dread building within you, bubbling and boiling until



it starts to burst out in the form of panic. You will know what happens next. And you won't know how to stop it.

“You know, Mike, we haven't known each other for very long.” She will squeeze your hand a little. You will swallow.

“Yeah, we haven't.”

She will look at you. Those deep, beautiful eyes of hers will be open wide, inviting you into her world. You will start to feel warm.

“And yet,” she will continue, “I feel like there's some kind of a special connection between us. You could call it fate—”

“Please don't.” You will interject.

She will stop walking and put a hand on your chest. “Well whatever you call it, I think it's growing. I think it's becoming too big for us to possibly ignore.”

The panic will hit you all at once, like a violent wave.

“Um, I think we can ignore it pretty well, for at least this one night.”

You will feel her breath on your neck as she leans in close.

“Come back to the hotel with me, Mike.”

“Mel, we can’t.” Your heart will pound in protest, but you will brush your feelings aside. “Remember what I said about not letting ourselves get distracted.”

Mel will step back and fix you with a look that will rip your soul in pieces.

“Can we not just stop thinking about that silly fantasy of yours for one minute?” She will say. “I’ve been willing to tolerate it so far, but I think it’s gone far enough.”

“Mel, I—”

“You nothing. You act like this is all about me, but it isn’t, is it? It’s been about you all this time. You, you, you, never a thought for how off putting it might be for me to be

told I'm going to die all the time. Well you know what? I'm going to prove you wrong. This evening hasn't been as exciting as I wanted, so our deal is off. I'm going up that mountain."

"Mel, wait!"

But she will already be storming off in the opposite direction, as fast as she can manage. You will chase after her. You will know it's too late, that there is nothing left that you can do for her, but you will follow anyway. You will catch the bus right after the one she gets on. Once you get off you will run full speed in the direction of the trail she will be taking. You will think that maybe, just maybe, if you catch up you could apologize and get her to turn around. You will think anything to make this last moment a little less devastating.

You will catch up to her, just as you start to smell the sulfur in the air. You will try to call out to her, but it will be too late. In an instant the air will be gone from your lungs,

and you will collapse to the ground. As your vision blurs, you will see her laying a few meters ahead of you, gripping her throat. Then all will go black.

On September 3rd, 2024, the final day of your trip, Mount Haleakalā will erupt. Fortunately, the news reporters will say, there will only be two casualties. A man and a woman, identified as Michael Green and Melissa Vásquez, will be found lying dead in a pocket of sulfuric air from one of the volcanic vents that, according to experts, will have been there for at least several days before the main eruption at the caldera. All other inhabitants of and visitors to the island will be safely evacuated and escape unscathed.

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“What? That’s it?” I stand up and shout at the little man sitting in front of me on the other side of the small tent. I’m livid that he decided to stop on such a miserable and unfeeling ending, but I’m even more so because I actually believe everything he said is true. How could I doubt it after

hearing something like that? I thought for a moment that it was a prank and my friends had set me up, but he knows things about me that I had never told any of my friends. This is real. I am going to die, and so is Melissa, who I feel a strange attachment to despite the fact that I have never met her. Curse this bastard clairvoyant! Why couldn't he just do stupid party tricks like any other fortune teller?

“That is all.” He confirms calmly.

I am anything but calm. “So that’s it, huh? And you expect me to go and do all that even after hearing you tell me to my face that if I do I’m going to lose my life?”

The fortune teller shrugs. “It is still your choice.”

“It’s not!” I roar, entirely unable to contain myself at this point. “If I already know everything I’m supposedly going to do, how can I still have the freedom to choose otherwise? Either I do something different and you’re completely wrong about everything, or I follow what you

just told me to a tee and there's no choice to be made at all.  
Isn't that right?"

The man shakes his head. "Foreknowledge of a decision you will make doesn't make that decision any less yours." He replies. "That is why my vision adjusted itself to account for the fact that you will know everything I told you today when the time comes for you to decide what to do. When you have dinner with a good friend and they accurately predict what item on the menu you order, does that mean that you had no agency to pick which order you would place?"

"But that friend can't be right one hundred percent of the time." I argue. "It could be just a lucky guess."

"Then assume for a moment that it isn't. Assume that your friend will be right one hundred percent of the time. Is he miraculously granted the ability to not only predict your choices, but to control them as well? Is random chance the only thing that determines the difference between free will

and mere deterministic proclivity? That would be a truly dark world to exist in, because all you *could* do would be to exist. Nothing more, and nothing less.”

“And the world you describe is one where in a week’s time, I won’t exist at all!” I can feel my eyes itch as tears begin to form. I don’t know if it’s because I’m angry, sad, scared, or just resigned to my fate, and I don’t know if I even care. I just want an excuse to get out of this place.

“Why on earth would I ever willingly put myself in that situation?” I say, my voice wavering in reaction to both my emotions and my throat, which is starting to get sore. “If I go I’m guaranteed to die, so if I stay I’ll be saving at least one life. Right? Wouldn’t that be the better choice?”

“It may be.” The man before me concedes. “But if you never go, if you never confirm that my words to you are true, what then? Will you live your whole life questioning if you made the right decision? Will you be able to live with the knowledge that you could have met her, and never did?”

Will you be able to live with yourself, knowing that you never even tried to save her?” He puts his hand up in front of him, cutting me off before I can interject. “These are not questions I can answer for you.” He continues. “As I said, it is still your decision, and it is one you must come to on your own. Of course, I think we both know what choice you will make.”



## Author's Note

*The Fortune Teller* came about as the result of a couple of distinct conversations. I won't bore you with all the details--suffice it to say that I was discussing person and tense with some of my grammar-fanatic family members, and I realized that very few stories are written in second person, or future tense. Not a single one came to mind.

In retrospect I can site examples of both, like how *Choose Your Own Adventure* style books in which you assume the role of the main character are usually addressed directly to you, and the novel *Aura* by Mexican author Carlos Fuentes is mostly written in future tense. I am also aware of the fact that the English language doesn't have a true future tense grammatically. Neither of those facts have or will deter me from finding the idea of a second person future novel to be extremely interesting.

Whenever an idea interests me, I want to write it, doubly so if it seems challenging, and triply if I am told that it can't be done. I *really* wanted to write this story. And, with the support of the same family members who inspired me to create it, I did. I hope you enjoy the consumption of it as much as I did the creative process.