

Four Trails

A Quartet of Country Tales

by Anthony Roberts

Copyright © 2011 Anthony H. Roberts.

Smashwords Edition

Smashwords Edition, License Notes

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please return to Smashwords.com and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

To George Washington Hardy

An Oklahoma cowboy and my great-grandfather.

He loved me even though my hands were soft
and it was clear that the Cherokee had done run out.

Four Trails

A Quartet of Country Tales

The Forgotten Trail

Sweet Kahilu

The Twisted Trail

Rattlers

The Broken Trail

The Beautiful Shore

The Blazin' Trail

Honky Tonk Gal

The Forgotten Trail

Sweet Kahilu

Keoni Yoshida sat in an old brown recliner in the shade of his garage on Spencer Road. The paniolo house had been in his family for generations. It was a simple home, single wall construction with exposed pipes, a rusting tin roof and a rat's nest of electrical wire running beneath it. In places, you could see the ground through the cracks in the floor boards. Outside of the addition of electricity, it hadn't changed much since his grandfather's days. The old place had been repaired many times over the years and there was hardly a board that Keoni had not laid hands on: three bedrooms, a small kitchen, one bathroom, a covered garage with a wash house and a dilapidated horse barn out back.

The barn had long fallen into disrepair from lack of use and maintenance. It had been many years since he had ridden, not since the time he was thrown and had broken his wrist and pelvis. That was over twenty years ago and he still felt the stiffness and pain whenever the mornings were cool and damp. After a long hospital stay his last surviving daughter, Aulani, had told him that his riding days were over, and his body sadly agreed with her. Too many years with the wild three year olds had taken its toll, but in his dreams he still rode the hills of Waimea with the cool mountain mist on his face and the confidence of a powerful animal in stride beneath him. Such were the dreams of old cowboys.

He was young and strong when he first joined the ranch, back when the horses and cattle still ran wild in the hills and the names of the Kings and Queens of Hawai'i still held their power. Now he sat on his lanai, another lonely old man who watched the cars pass by. He raised his good right hand to each one as they passed: sometimes they waved back, or tapped their horn, but mostly they drove on.

He sat far enough inside the garage to keep out of the rain in case a mauka shower suddenly swept down the mountainside and surrendered its waters to the valley below. Next to his chair was an old workbench that held his daily necessities: a radio set to Hawaiian Oldies, a box of tissues, a thermos of coffee, some crack seed and a portable telephone which he never touched. His granddaughter, Betty, would arrive soon. She worked at the hospital and checked on him every morning and again at lunch time when she could. Betty would be angry that he had left his pills inside the house again. She would lecture him, "Those pills gonna save your life but cannot less you keep 'um close. If you get one heart-attack, no way you gonna make it back into da house for those pills. How many times I gotta tell you, Grandpa, huh?"

He didn't want the pills but he wouldn't tell Betty that, it would make her sad and worry for him. He was 93 years old and his wife and five children had all passed. He raised them as best he could, loved them all, and watched them grow into adults, have families of their own, and then grow old and sick

and die. No man should have to bury his love in the cold, hard ground. No father should have to watch child after child pass before his eyes and into the solemn earth.

Sometimes he would hear a song on the radio and warm tears would flow down his wrinkled face. There were days now when his memory was so clouded that he could not remember their faces or their names, only how much he missed them. When the next heart attack came, he did not want pills. He would welcome its crushing embrace and pray to find his lost loves on the other side.

Keoni noticed a black cat jump up on a fence post next to the garage. He called the cat *Boots* as it had white fur on its two front paws. It was a stray that wandered the neighborhood and looked for mice and hand-outs. Sometimes it would come visit him and rub up against his leg for a while before it moved on. His last friend. On clear days Boots would lie in the driveway and soak up the warmth of the sun and occasionally flick his tail in indignation. Keoni saved scraps from his meals-on-wheels for the cat but today he had none.

"Eh, Boots. You going sit on da fence post all day? How come you no come ovah here see me, you?"

The stray cat looked at the old man for a second and jumped back into the alley and out of sight. He must have sensed there were no treats today and decided to look elsewhere for his meal. Keoni hoped Boots would find a nice fat mouse to eat.

It was spring, the rains fell and life renewed. The cherry trees along the front fence line were all in bloom. So much beauty wasted on an old man. A sudden gust of wind whistled across the driveway and lifted a thousand cherry blossoms gracefully into the air, swirled them around then dropped them as a blanket of tender pink blossoms on his yard. A small bit of magic for Keoni's tired eyes, but there was something else too... that cat, it was something about the cat and the wind... but he couldn't remember.

An image grew slowly in his mind and rose through the distant fog of memory, a moment from over 70 years ago of a tall slender woman in a tightly cinched riding skirt who leaned against a stone corral fence and held a black cat with white paws. The young woman's long braided hair and ebony eyes were as lovely and dark as the cat's jet-black fur. The wind suddenly swirled around her and kicked up a dust devil in the corral. The woman laughed and pulled the cat close to her bosom to calm its nerves. The wind died just as quickly as it came, and she whispered to the frightened animal, "Oh, such a pretty kitty, such a lovely little kitty". Keoni could hear the cat purr as it nestled against the comfort of the young woman's bosom. Sweet Kahilu.

Keoni saw the white Chevy Impala turn the corner and lumber down Spencer Road. The car pulled into the driveway and his granddaughter Betty got out with a bag of take-out and her phone. They all

had phones these days and wore them like paniolo used to wear knives. Always ringing, so much calls and talk, talk, talk -- too much for Keoni. He had no use for them. He preferred the quiet, to enjoy the wind and the rain, and listen to the songs that played softly on his radio.

"Eh, Grandpa. I brought you one bento roll for your lunch. How you doing today?" asked Betty as she walked up the driveway.

"Okay, same same," replied the old man but with a slight tremor in his voice.

Betty put the take-out on the bench and sat down in a white plastic chair across from her grandfather. She looked at the old man's red and swollen eyes. It was so hard to grow old, especially for men like her grandfather, tough old cowboys whom time had left broken, crippled and alone.

"You sad today, Grandpa? You been crying little bit?"

"Little bit. I was thinking of Kahilu... da kine... Elizabeth Carver," said Keoni.

"Eh, she was that Mr. Sharpe's mother? You knew her? Whoa, long time ago that, huh? What you remembering?" asked Betty.

"Yah, long time ago when I was small boy. We spoke Hawaiian back then, all the cowboys, Carvers too. I can't remember -- you speak?"

"I can understand some, Grandpa," replied Betty. "You like talk-story 'bout Elizabeth Carver in Hawaiian? I would love to hear that. We go eat some lunch and you tell me, OK?"

The words formed in Keoni's mind; the dancing language of his mother and his grandparents and of generations before stretching back a thousand years. To think and speak in Hawaiian took him back to the days his youth, back to the time of wild horses and iron men, before radio and television and computers and cell phones, back when the Big Island was still Hawai'i and the Carver family ruled the Ranch like the Ali'i of old. The old man let the language flow through him as he told the story to his granddaughter.

"Elizabeth Kahiluonapuaapiilani Carver, her name meant 'The Quiet One, Descendant of Piilani' from the line of the great Maui King. Her father died when she was a baby and left her sole heir to the ranch. She was raised by her mother as royalty, which she was, and by her legal guardian, D. W. Perkins, who taught her the ways of the ranch."

"I first met Elizabeth Carver when I was six years old, she was a few years older than me. My father was a top-hand and would get called to the Big House, the Carver Estate. Sometimes he would take me with him and I would play by the wash house while my father met with the bosses."

"One day a beautiful little girl came around the corner of the wash house. I was playing with a stick and drawing circles in the dirt, and she came and sat down beside me. I was a cowboy's son, dirty and a

little rough around the edges, but to me she was an angel, all dressed in white with long flowing hair sprinkled with silk white ribbons. Her dress had a ruffled collar and sleeves that came down her arms and ended in fancy lace around her wrists. She picked up a stick too and drew a cowboy roping a horse beside all my scribbles, and she spoke to me."

'Are you Hoshi Yoshida's little boy, Keoni?'

"I was so stunned that she knew my name that I couldn't speak. I just nodded and looked back down at the dirt again. She touched me on the shoulder and asked,"

'Are you thirsty, Keoni?'

"She took me into the Big House - my father never allowed me in there - and she gave me some juice. I think it was guava, though I am not sure, but at the time I thought it was the best juice I had ever tasted. I finally worked up the nerve to speak to her and asked her for her name. She laughed and told me, 'Kahilu'."

"For the next few years I played with my friend, Kahilu, whenever my father took me to the Big House. She was an only child and treated me like a little brother. Never made me feel that I was beneath her, that I was just a paniolo's son. When Elizabeth turned fourteen, they sent her off to school in America. She came come back to Waimea every summer, but spent most of her time with Mr. Perkins who was teaching her the business of the ranch."

"It was during Elizabeth's summer trips home that she started to call me by my English name, *Johnny*. She spent so much time with the haoles that English became her first language, or perhaps she liked to tease me as older sisters often do. I didn't mind. I was happy to be her Johnny.

Like her name, *Kahilu*, she moved gracefully through the ranch like a gentle breeze. She gave her aloha to all. All of us cowboys loved her; some as a daughter, some as a niece, or as a sister, and some of us loved her as a woman. We watched our Sweet Kahilu grow from a loving child into a beautiful and regal Princess. She was our Ali'i. My father and the older cowboys respected her and looked forward to the day when she and Mr. Perkins would run the ranch together."

"It was after Elizabeth graduated from High School that distance grew between us and we became who we always were, a dirt poor cowboy and his wealthy boss. This was also the time that William Sharpe arrived in Waimea."

"On the passage home from San Francisco, she met this William Sharpe, a wealthy haole boy from Georgia. They fell in love on the ship and three weeks later they were married at the St. James church, the same church where I married your grandmother."

"We didn't know this foreigner, this Sharpe character, but we immediately distrusted him for being haole and because he snatched our Sweet Kahilu from us, but he was a good match for Elizabeth: very handsome and an excellent horseman. He always wore the finest clothes. What they called a *Southern Gentleman* back then, which made us cowboys hate him even more."

"Elizabeth and William had baby James their first year of marriage. The baby brought new life to the ranch and acceptance for William. It was around this time that I first met your grandmother. We were young sweethearts too, but your grandmother's story is a much longer one and it comes after Elizabeth."

"I saw little of Kahilu during her marriage. It was only natural that she spent her time with her family and, of course, she now had the responsibilities of the ranch. She was nineteen and just a year away from her inheritance. On her twentieth birthday she would take her place as the Big Boss beside Mr. Perkins."

"I remember that William caused quite a stir on Elizabeth's birthday when he gave her a very fancy automobile. Automobiles were nothing new to Waimea, but William's car was different. It was a *Sportster*, which he called *The Silver Ghost*. It had a convertible top and was very fast, at least for those days. He and Elizabeth would race up and down the backroads of Waimea and scare the hell out of the horses and cattle. She loved that car, and William too, I suppose."

"The last time I saw Elizabeth, now Elizabeth Sharpe, was not long after her birthday. I was assigned to mend fences out at Punahale station. The other paniolo rode out early to sort cattle, but my father made me stay behind as punishment for something, I don't recall what. I was sixteen and a bit of a rascal, always got scoldings."

"You Grandpa? Mama told me you was always GIVING scoldings!" said Betty.

"That came later. When I was young, I got them," said Keoni.

"I dug out rotten fences posts all morning and planned to set the new ones in the afternoon. I was pulling up a post when I saw Elizabeth on one of her grandfather's prize palominos. She rode paniolo style, not like the English ladies who ride for show. Elizabeth was a true horsewoman. I waved at her, and she turned her horse and trotted over to me. I was very hot and sweaty and a little embarrassed for her to see me in such a state, after all, she was a Royal Princess and almost the Big Boss. She rode up to me with a smile on her face, the way she looked on that horse melted my heart."

'Good morning, Johnny. Are you in trouble again? Pulling posts while the rest of the men are out doing real work?'

'A little bit trouble, Kahilu, but I do more work here than all of them put together.'

'Yes, I can see that,' she said. Then she asked me to water her horse while she took a short break from

her ride. I was happy to spend time with her again. I lead the palomino to a water trough and pasture with plenty of long grass. I took off the bridle, saddle and blanket and slung them over the fence rail and cleaned myself up a little before I returned to the paniolo house to meet Elizabeth."

"She sat on the front lanai with her feet propped up on the porch railing, and said to me, 'I thought I might sit down and let you wait on me. I'll have a cup of coffee if you don't mind.'

"There was a half a pot still left in the kitchen from the morning crew. I put it back on the stove and added another chunk of wood through the feed door. I poured fresh water for both of us while we waited on the coffee. When I returned to the lanai I found Elizabeth had set up the checker board. Cowboys all like to play cards and checkers, and she was no different."

'I bet I can still beat you,' she said. 'I recall that I was always much better at checkers than you.'

I laughed and answered her, 'Maybe so, but I am not a little boy anymore, Mrs. Sharpe. You might be in for a surprise.'

"I sat down and played checkers with Elizabeth. She was so different from her mother. Mrs. Carver was a very reserved and proper woman. Like Elizabeth, she had much aloha for all of us, but there was a distance to Mrs. Carver's love. Perhaps it was because her own husband had died so young from the great fever that had swept the island. But with Elizabeth, there was no distance. From when she was a little girl she rode out to spend time with her cowboys, talk-story with us, and play checkers and cards. Sometimes she stayed so long that her mother would send one of the house staff to fetch her home. She was our friend, almost like a cousin, and to some us, she was a cousin. Small towns lead to many cousins."

Keoni stopped for a moment as a dark cloud passed before his mind.

"What...? Where was I?" asked Keoni.

"You and Elizabeth Carver were playing checkers, if that's what you were really up to," said Betty with a mischievous grin.

"Don't talk like that!" scolded the old man. "Show respect. Yes, we played checkers, talked and laughed like the old times, as a brother and sister would. She told me about a great voyage they were planning and how excited she was about it. She was going to Paris though she had been before. She wished to show off her favorite places in Europe to her husband. She said that this would be her last chance at freedom before taking over the heavy responsibility of running the ranch. Her mother did not want her to go, and neither did Mr. Perkins, but they could not talk her out of it."

'What will you do with your little boy?' I asked her.

'We'll take him with us, of course,' she said. 'James is two years old and that's old enough to travel.'

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

