

A convoy of three shiny onyx automobiles chauffeured urgently into the premises, snatching the attention of anyone who had eyes.

“Oh, for God’s sake, what is he doing here?” Mayor Mike queried under his breath.

A visit from Colonel Jackson was never friendly, not since the war ended and his influence was relegated. The Colonel was a stout man in his early sixties with expressions that were either stilted or stoic. His uniform was a snug fit around his imposing physique and he walked with a lopsided gait, as though he carried an invisible heavy bag of rocks in one hand.

“Mayor Mike, I knew I’d meet you here. Hello, Dave Harp,” greeted the Colonel when he emerged from his vehicle. “I did not believe it.”

“Hello, Colonel,” Dave answered, sharpening his resolve to not be lured into a heated exchange with this unwanted guest on a day of celebration.

Promptly, the Colonel stated his reason for gate-crashing. He had come to see Dave Harp’s new restaurant that he’d heard so much about. Dave spoke no words back, and neither did Mike—but the Colonel was just getting started.

“Unfortunate that you lot have made a wasteland of what would have been the finest asset to the country of South York...”

“This is not the time and place for your divisive political propaganda, Colonel,” Dave retorted. “Gold Island will never be part of a country run by a despot.”

“I see,” Colonel Jackson grinned and stroked his greying stubble. “You’ll rather hold hands with the weak North, run by...what’s it called...?” he asked derisively. “Ah, I recall. Democracy.”

“If you must know, Colonel,” Mayor Mike answered, “Gold Island will not align with the South or the North. As you can see, we are putting the madness of war behind us and looking to a peaceful future.”

“Peaceful?” mocked the Colonel. “Have you looked around, Mayor Mike? You govern a tiny island trapped in the middle of two belligerent countries that were once one. The war is far from over, Mayor until you pick a side—our side. South York has sacrificed too much to let cowards of North York claim Gold Island!”

Dave could feel his self-control melting away under the heat of the Colonel’s provocative words. How dare he prattle on about sacrifice? “I was born into this war, Colonel,” Dave blurted out. “I lost my parents. I lost my youth! All to the bloody seventy-year war of York...”

“With what I see, your parents left you with more wealth and fortune than heartache—”

“You should leave now, Colonel,” Mayor Mike intervened. “This is a significant occasion to Gold Islanders and you will not make a spectacle of it. Leave.”

Satisfied that his sinister mission was at least half-complete, the Colonel receded for his final remark.

“Very well, then, Mike. I leave you to...eat your scones and cut ribbons as frail as the peace you celebrate.”