

...

The Monarch had a good crowd when Koa walked in a little after ten. The odor of stale beer and cigarette smoke hung heavy in the air. A classic Wurlitzer jukebox pulsed neon colors as it filled the room with Peter, Paul and Mary's "Blowin' in the Wind." Koa hadn't heard that one in a long time.

Judging from the frayed clothing and work boots on the thirty or so patrons, Koa figured them to be stevedores, forklift operators, and cargo handlers from the nearby port. Most were beer drinkers, but a few guarded shot glasses. They were mostly spread out in ones and twos at separate tables, but five rough-looking men with weather-beaten faces and sunburned arms, and a rougher-looking woman

with heavy wrinkles and what appeared to Koa to be skin cancer, had a poker game going at one of the large round tables. They announced their bets loudly and swore like sailors when the cards disappointed them.

Koa scanned the room as he moved slowly toward the bar. He recognized Drake, the bartender, but the patrons were strangers. He saw no pay phone and no phone visible on the bar or the wall behind the bar.

A large, ratty black cat slept on the bar, oblivious to the noise. It looked to be infested with fleas. Koa eased up to the other end of the bar, watching while Drake filled a half-dozen beer mugs that looked none too clean and carried them to the poker players. A cockroach scampered across the bar, not far from the sleeping cat. Koa wondered how many years had passed since the last health inspection.

"What'll ya have, my man?" Drake turned toward the detective. He was in his late sixties. Yellowish white hair hung almost shoulder length in tangles. His gray eyes had a dull, glazed quality that made Koa think of untreated cataracts. His black T-shirt displayed beer stains that even the color couldn't hide.

"A draft and some information." Koa laid his police identification on the bar.

"Ah, shit."

"You don't like the police?"

"Cops ain't good foah business, my man."

"You give me what I need and I'll be gone."

Drake moved to the tap, picked up an unwashed mug, drew a beer until the head overflowed, and slid it down the bar to Koa. "You gonna run a tab?"

Koa ignored the stupid question. "You got a phone under the bar?"

"Huh?"

"You got a phone, a telephone, under the bar?"

"Huh, you need a phone. County forgit to pay its fuckin' phone bill?" Drake laughed nervously. "Yeah. I got a phone." He reached under the bar and lifted an old black telephone, the kind with a rotary dial, onto the bar.

Koa examined the circle in the middle of the dial, but couldn't read the telephone number through the encrusted grime. "This telephone have a number, Drake?"

The barkeep seemed surprised that Koa had used his name. "You bin in here 'fore?"

"What's the telephone number?"

"327-6867." The number matched the one that Jenkins had called over a dozen times.

"Who uses this phone?"

"Me, I use it foah supplies and stuff."

"Anyone else?"

The crow's-feet at the corners of Drake's eyes crinkled ever so slightly. "Customers might use it sometimes."

"You get calls from Garvie Jenkins?"

"Nevah heard of no Garvie Jenkins."

That's what Koa expected him to say. He pulled out a faxed photograph of Garvie Jenkins. "Recognize this man?"

"Nah."

Koa always found it useful to have something to hold over a witness, and the Monarch was a gold mine of leverage. "Let me see if maybe I can jog your memory, Drake. Suppose I get the health department in here. What

do you think they'd say about the cockroaches and that ratty black beast on the bar? And what do you suppose the licensing bureau would do about the gambling over at that poker table?" Koa nodded at the poker players. "And you know what? As a matter of fact, maybe you'd like to lock up and come down to the station to help you concentrate on my questions."

"Aww, shit. I knew ya was gonna hassle me."

"Maybe if you'd answer my questions, I might overlook the roaches and the unwashed dishes you got behind the bar." Koa tipped his head toward the stacks of unwashed mugs and shot glasses.

Drake picked up the picture of Garvie Jenkins. "I swear on my mother's grave, I ain't seen this here dude, least I ain't got no memory of it."

"But one of your customers got a bunch of calls on this phone, starting back in October." Koa saw a dim light dawn in Drake's dull eyes. The man knew something.

The same evasive drawl. "Might've been a customer."

"This customer have a name?"

"Sure he must got hisself a name, 'cept I ain't got no memory of it."

Koa started to drum the top of the bar, one slow, loud tap at a time. "What's he look like, this mister no name?"

"Little guy, greasy hair. Wears dem tourist shirts from Hattie's."

Koa broke off the tapping. "Look, Drake, we can do this two ways. Either you give me what I need, or you deal with the boys downtown tonight and the health department and the licensing bureau guys tomorrow. It's your choice."

The bartender was looking a lot older and a lot paler. "Okay, okay. There's a dude. I swear on my mother's grave I ain't got no memory of 'is name, but he's in here a few times. Okay, more than a few times. He's in here. He gets calls."

"And you answer the phone when it rings?"

"Yeah, most times I do. I answer it."

"And so how do you know the call is for this dude . . . this dude in the Hilo Hattie shirts?" Again, Koa detected the slightest brightening in Drake's glassy eyes.

"Oh. The caller, he asks for the fuckin' private eye. He always asks for the fuckin' private eye."

"Then what happens?"

Drake was getting upset, realizing that he'd been used by one of his customers. "Shit, man. He's bin sitting at the bar, so I jus' shove the fuckin' phone in his ugly face."

"What's he say?"

"How am I supposed to know that?"

"Well, you're standing right there, you shove the phone in his face. You got ears. What does he say?"

"Hey man, I got a bar to keep. I ain't got time to listen to some toadie in an *aloha* shirt talkin' story on the fuckin' phone."

Koa wasn't buying that line for a second. "How many health and safety violations you think the inspectors could find in here, Drake? A hundred, maybe? Two hundred? At five hundred bucks a pop, that's somewhere between fifty and a hundred grand. You got that kind of bread, Drake?"

"Shit, I don't know." The bartender wrestled with his conscience, but Koa had made his way crystal clear.

“‘Gar’—nah, that’s not right. ‘Garv’ . . . ‘Hi, Garv.’ Something sorta like that, best as I kin recall.”

“That’s good, Drake. Maybe I won’t need to call the health department.” Koa held out a carrot. “Tell me about the conversation?”

“What fuckin’ conversation?”

“The conversation that’s going to keep your bar open.”

...