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It began with a corpse. A flaccid, bloated, waterlogged corpse late on a Sunday morning. When you sought refuge in a bottle of whiskey on a Saturday night, Sunday mornings were your time to crawl out of it slowly and cautiously, but I was dragged into Sunday suddenly and rudely by the telephone. Too soon to leave the past for the present.

Make no mistake, for a homicide dick, corpses were the present. The past was something you started hunting down the moment the corpse made its presence known. The future was something that was in the hands of lawyers and out of yours. I stared the present in its puffy, crab-ridden face after it had been pulled up out of Honolulu Harbor. The heavy and damp air around Pier 23 reeked of the sea and old cardboard boxes. Above the tin gables of the rusting warehouses the green peaks of the Koolau Mountains jutted up against the sky. By the time I got there I was working on my third Lucky Strike. That's what happens when you smoke in a convertible; your cigarettes burn fast in the artificial breeze.

I stopped staring at the bloated face for a moment to look about. Rusting maritime junk, the kind that looked like it belonged in the muck at the bottom of Pearl Harbor, littered Pier 23. Industry's graveyard. One old tug with a black hull and near-empty ballast bobbed on the sluggish ripples of the harbor like a balloon. Above its stern, Aloha Tower rose skyward across the water, the water of Honolulu Harbor like dark green glass. Striped manini and other more colorful

reef fish made an occasional appearance near the surface then drifted back down into the hazy abyss.

“Sheik. Did you bring ‘em?” Gid Hanohano had shambled up from behind me and I nearly jumped off the pier into the still murk, his movements remarkably silent for someone his size. I pulled the cigars out of my jacket and handed one to him. Gid bit the end cap off and spit it into the harbor, then ignited the other end with his chrome Zippo. A small fog billowed about him in his brown suit. He handed me his lighter and I did likewise, adding to the general cloud he created. The smoke hung in the hot, still air like cobwebs.

“Whoa! This is really good! What is this, anyway?” Gid asked. He took another draw off the stick.

“Partagas, Gid. From Havana.”

“You mean to tell me that the old Pake at your place sells these?”

“Chang? Hell no. He’d shit if he knew how much one of these sticks sold for. I picked these up at the Moana last Thursday when I was interviewing the housekeeper who found that tourist’s body.”

“Well, remind me to send you into Waikiki more often.”

“No thanks. Steel guitars make my fillings ache.”

Gid stood there squinting and puffing on his cigar and looking content in the shade of his brown fedora. For such a big man he never seemed to sweat. Watching him look so cool only seemed to make me stickier. I took another drag and expelled smoke which hung around our heads until the sun burned it away.

“It’s a good smoke. Thanks, Sheik.”

The Sheik. That’s what all the rest of the Homicide Detail called me. One of the haole dicks, Jack Morris, thought Yoshikawa was too long for him to pronounce or remember, so he shortened it to “Sheik.” Not *Shaykh*, the way it’s properly pronounced in Arabia, but *Sheek*, as in *Yoshikawa*, or “The Sheik,” as in Rudolph Valentino. The irony is, Jack married a girl whose last name was Kaumeheiwa.

Francis Hideyuki Yoshikawa. That's what was typed on my birth certificate. My Japanese parents couldn't even pronounce the Christian name they gave me, so they called me Hide-kun. Most people who knew me well called me Frankie, as in the bow-tied Sinatra when he had Ava Gardner and a full head of hair. But not the cops I worked with. Having a nickname meant you were a colorful part of their colorful family, like the New York Yankees. Or the Mafia. So Sheik it was.

Gid was the father of that family, or at least its big brother. Detective Lieutenant Gideon Hanohano of the Honolulu Police Department's Homicide Detail was a dormant volcano. He stood about six foot two and weighed in close to three hundred pounds. Once upon a time, he played tackle at Kamehameha and was damn good at it. He was someone who could trace his lineage back to the islands' monarchs. A lot of good it did him. His family's land on the windward side, a consolation prize awarded to them in the Great Mahele, was sold to a haole-owned company that bled its water supply for sugarcane on the leeward side; all Gid's family got out of the deal was enough to build a house on a patch of land near an old fishpond. During the monarchy, the Mahele, or "division" as it's roughly translated, was supposed to introduce the concept of modern property ownership to a society unfamiliar with it. It ended up being a means for white men to take away land from brown men without having to shoot them to get it.

If Gid was bitter about losing his birthright, he never showed it. In fact, Gid never showed much of anything. He had two facial expressions: irony and fatigue. He was an intelligent man who managed to get his point across with a wonderfully stingy economy of syllables. The lieutenant walked with a limp, the souvenir of an arrest gone south when he walked the beat in Chinatown as a young cop. He was my teacher and sometime chaperone.

I moved up into Homicide after just two years in Patrol, partly because of my college degree and partly because Homicide needed a

Japanese speaker. We comprised a good forty percent of the Territory, each one of us a former agent of the Emperor of Japan if the haole elite of the islands were to be believed. Now we were Stalin's agents. Gid took me under his wing because I appreciated his theories and tolerated his moments of deep thought. "We need more *thinking men* like you," he once told me. He might well have changed his mind if he really knew what I thought about most of the time.

It was hot. The weather report on the radio said kona winds. Winds out of the southeast up to fifteen miles per hour. Sometimes, the kona winds brought rain. Sometimes, if you were lucky.

Kona winds. What a misnomer. Most of the time they weren't winds at all—just a lot of wet, dead air that got under your shirt and into your psyche and made your manners really bad. Sometimes they'd last up to a week before the tradewinds came back to cool things down. It was another one of those Turkish bath days; a day to make you drown by filling your lungs with the dampness in the air; a day to make you put your fist in the face of the first person who looks at you the wrong way; a day to take a look at a body and wonder how it turned into a rotting corpse and ask yourself why the hell you do what you do for a living.

Gid let more smoke out of his mouth. He was enjoying the taste. This made up for the last time when I forgot to bring the cigars. The cardinal sin for any homicide dick was to forget the cigars; the dense smoke covers some of the stench of decaying flesh and blood. If you didn't smoke cigars before getting into Homicide, you learned to take up the habit quickly. We stood side by side puffing and staring at the mess on the pier.

Our smokescreens did little good that morning. The cloudless sky was bleached white by the burning sun; the heat released the aroma of the corpse, a heady mix of sea salt, kelp, and buckets full of wet, nauseating death. The bloated face looked like a round loaf of pao doce, the puffy panned bread from the new Portuguese bakery in Kapahulu,

but a hell of a lot less appetizing. Black a'ama crabs skittered sideways across the forehead and over the body like overgrown ants. I choked a little and loosened my tie, my collar as wet as the corpse. It had been a woman, but whether she had been pretty or not was impossible to tell. She wore what looked like a once ritzy black velvet cocktail dress and patent leather pumps. The whole body was a sickening mess like soggy Saloon Pilot crackers from Hilo Macaroni Factory, the kind that came in a giant tin.

The heat became oppressive and everybody on the pier sweated profusely except Gid. I took my coat off and threw it in the backseat of my car, rolling up my shirtsleeves and loosening my tie. Why the hell did we wear coats and ties like dicks on the mainland? Were we stupid? I kept the front brim of my porkpie hat snapped down for scant shade.

The uniforms started cordoning off the scene in a fairly generous perimeter, bringing the line all the way up to the bow of the tug where I had parked my car. The medical examiner entered the corral, as comfortable in the damp heat as a shell-less turtle. His observations were general: the body had been in the water for some time, she had been Oriental based on her hair. *Shit, I could have guessed that on my own.* Beyond that, we'd need to wait for the autopsy for more.

An hour or so later, after combing the pier and squatting to examine every little errant speck, the patrol boys packed up and left. Before Gid got into his maroon Ford Crestline, he turned to me and said, "Sheik. Use your na'au. When somebody dumps a girl into the harbor, we're dealing with a different kind of mind." Na'au. Guts. Gid told me it's where everything comes from. Sure, the head and the heart were sources of inspiration, but how else can you explain the butterflies when you're nervous or have the urge to shit when you're scared? The head misleads, the heart deceives, but the na'au never fails to tell you something is amiss. I wish I knew this before I got shipped off to Europe in 1944. It might have saved a friend's limb.

Gid got into his car and started the engine. I tapped the ragtop of the Ford Crestline a couple of times with the palm of my hand and stepped back. Gid waved and drove away, his car turning and disappearing behind the rusted hull of a small vessel dry-docked for repairs that never happened.

When the last of the uniforms had left, I stood alone on the pier. I pulled my hip flask out of my pocket and took a long, caustic swig. The edges of the world softened around me and I stopped hearing the hammering of my heart in my head. It had been that way with me since the war. The bottle was the only place I felt safe from myself, from the guilt and despair. And the shame. The shame was back again, the same shame that burned my insides for managing to stand there breathing while other boys from Kakaako were torn apart by German lead. I thought about the drowned girl, whoever the hell she was, spending her last moments in the murky green of the harbor. Dante's Fifth Circle of the *Inferno*. The Sullen are submerged beneath the fetid waters of the River Styx, choking on the mud at the bottom for all eternity.

It seemed that was all my degree in Medieval Literature was good for—conjuring up grotesque images like the gargoyles on the Cathedral of Chartres, the kind of crap that gave kids nightmares. God knows what attracted me to such an obscure course of study. Maybe it was because there was a certain Gothic bent to my samurai-like upbringing, but probably more likely because the stark, vivid imagery was so like the blood-soaked passion play that was the war in Europe. A poor kotonk kid from Fresno left me with his copy of King Arthur stories before he was riddled with bullets on a hill in the Vosges woods. That book set me down a path of useless knowledge. All that illuminated manuscript stuff never taught me to see life in literature; it made me see literature in life. The whiskey made those pictures of a medieval hell sharper, cantos resonating in bright crimson gore. But it also made those images tolerable in a strange way, like sitting through

some macabre performance where you always had box seats, safely high above the stage.

It was then when my mind was lurking under the naves and buttresses of *The Divine Comedy* that had sprung up in my bourbon-hazed view of Pier 23 that I felt the eyes watching me from the shadows under the dry-docked hull.

The eyes were filmy and dull milky gray with a veneer of mucus stretched over them. They belonged to an old haole guy with faded maritime tattoos on his wrinkled bare chest and forearms. He was barefoot in dirty dungarees, and scabs crisscrossed his bare flesh where he had raked himself with his filth-encrusted fingernails. His scraggly hair was yellow-gray like the crotch of an unwashed dog. The charmer was also missing most of his teeth.

Gid had told me about this wino when I first arrived at the pier. I didn't pay much attention at the time because I was too busy sucking cold black coffee out of a paper cup and wishing it were Four Roses. Besides, Gid had already interviewed him. This was the stellar citizen who brought the body to our attention.

I motioned to the old drunk to join me at the cleat at the bow of the tug, mooring lines wound taut about it. He staggered along behind me and sat cross-legged right on the pier while I pulled a pad and pen out of my pocket. I guess in some places like the movies, dicks get to interview beautiful starlets or arrogant millionaires in their dining rooms with long tables with sixteen chairs around them. They eventually make accusations in a sunken living room with gorgeous people all around, all dressed up and waiting to hear their brilliant deduction. The butler did it. Yeah, right. I got to talk to a piss-smelling wino on a pier on a kona winds day. So much for *The Thin Man*.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Jacob," the man said. He sullenly picked his nose.

"You have a last name, Jacob?"

“Mooney.”

“Occupation?”

“What?”

“Never mind. How’d you come to find the deceased . . . uh, the body?”

Jacob Mooney pulled his knees up to his chest and started rocking frantically on his ass. Most of his “statement” was incoherent mumbling and croaking, but the gist of it was that he was trying to fetch the remainder of a fifth of gin he had inadvertently knocked into the water. My guess was that everything he did was inadvertent. He saw the dark spot in the water just below the surface near his precious bottle. When he realized he was looking at a human head, he ran for Route 92 and nearly ended up under the front wheels of a prowler. All this I knew from Gid’s synopsis of his own short interview with the character.

Something was missing. What didn’t they ask this citizen of the pier?

I asked him if any cars or trucks ever came to the pier after dark over the last couple of weeks. On this point Mooney was surprisingly clear and firm: no vehicles ever came at night, and certainly not over the last two weeks or so. The swinging chain-link gate allowing access to Pier 23 was always chained and locked at sundown. Mooney knew where to sleep and drink so he couldn’t be found and chased out during those early morning and early evening times when the harbormaster’s truck came to the gate. When I asked him if boats came during the night, he told me that sometimes they do, including the tug; sometimes they tie up for a while and sometimes only briefly, mostly to fuel.

I chewed on this then I tossed Jacob Mooney a nickel. He greedily tucked the coin away in his dungarees and continued to stare at me, swaying like a palm trunk. I realized then that his eyes were locked on my hip flask, which I had carelessly tucked into my waistband before interviewing him.

“Sorry, Jacob,” I told him. I genuinely felt bad. “You may not believe it, but I need it more than you do.”

He gave the flask one last longing look and staggered off into the shade of a nearby warehouse where he lay down on the concrete. He was snoring in seconds. At that moment, I truly envied him. They say a man’s home is his castle; Pier 23 was Jacob Mooney’s very own Iolani Palace. I left him to his nap.

I looked up at the hull of the old tug. In rusted letters that were once white, I could make out the name, *Hinalea*. The patrol guys checked out the vessel but found nobody aboard. There wasn’t a soul around Pier 23 except Jacob Mooney and me, and he was out cold. I looked back at the end of the pier where we had laid out the body that was chained to a small anchor, the type used on small fishing crafts berthed at the piers near 23. The chain was about thirty feet to forty feet in length, the draft of the Harbor about forty feet and probably between thirty-five and forty where it met Pier 23. Our perpetrator didn’t intend for the body to be discovered. But someone did a sloppy job with the chain, winding it around the body like a spool after initially fastening it. Once the body was dumped, the chain eventually unraveled to its near full length when the gases that built up in the corpse started floating it upward like a buoy. I looked at the tug. I felt something like heartburn.

I turned back to the tug and hopped aboard. The *Hinalea* was a little worse for wear and looked quite frankly as if she may have already been put out to pasture. Her deck was poorly maintained and loose lines lay about like so many earthworms at the bottom of a tin can. I carefully moved my way aft, trying not to scuff my new wingtips when I saw it. The midday sun caught something small but brilliant on the deck. The sharp flash nearly blinded me. Gingerly, I tiptoed between the strewn lines and pulled a handkerchief out of my pocket. It wasn’t fire that caught my eye. It was ice. A whole string of it. I squatted near the stern and picked up a king’s ransom in diamonds in the form of a bracelet.

Pinched between my fingers through the handkerchief, I could feel the hardness and heft of the thing. I'm no jeweler, but I could tell it was real—as real as my fatigue and the growing sinking feeling that I had many more sleepless nights ahead, and not just because of kona weather.

I folded the handkerchief with its staggering contents and secured them in my pocket. Then I got the hell off the tug. Something about the *Hinalea* gave me the creeps. It had the feeling of every victim's bedroom I ever searched—a lonely place that had seen the last of its former occupant. A place where dust motes swirled in the scant light and whispers of an insignificant life echoed off its walls unheard. All of those places seemed to have a chill that wouldn't go away. As soon as I hopped back on the pier, the cold dissipated as quickly as it overwhelmed me and I was once more standing in the hot, muggy, dockside air.

I stumbled back to my car and sat down behind the wheel. I took a couple of long drinks from my flask and beat down the urge to weep or shout or throw myself into the harbor. The last swallow brought back the warm, hazy light that always framed the grotesque images I imagined Dante had in his head as he wrote. Devils in sooty gray-black or maggot-white hides, angels resplendent in tempera scarlet and cobalt trimmed with antique gold. Another big sip took me even further back, before my college dreams of a Gothic afterworld were fueled by weak-lipped poets in baggy hats. The fuzz around the edges of memory grew thicker and the images were impressions of a different kind of verse from deep in my consciousness. Bold black strokes on delicate white paper, kanji characters done by To-san's hand—virtue, enlightenment, power, void—all of them hanging on the tongue-and-groove walls from red-orange or purple silk cords in our steamy Kakaako parlor.

Then, inevitably, pictures of the war. Bleak, gray skies over red tiled roofs and white plaster walls torn asunder by mortar fire, exposing the broken timber bones of villas. Narrow cobblestone streets littered

with rubble and spent brass shells. Children in torn clothing with grubby faces and desperate eyes. All of it edged with that glowing, pulsating frame of gentle light that tasted of haupia and blood at the same time.

I pulled my handkerchief out to wipe the sweat off my face and realized there were diamonds in it. That brought me back from the shadowy little chamber of memory to Pier 23. I tucked the handkerchief back into my pocket with that exaggerated caution that drinkers often employ and looked toward the shade of the warehouse where Jacob Mooney lay snoring. Sometimes I felt just like that, when the guilt and the self-pity threatened to swallow me up before the booze did.

I shoved some Sen-Sen in my mouth to mask the scent of the liquor. Lately, I had been chewing more and more of the stuff. I was still at the stage where I could successfully hide my drinking from the world, but only barely so. I hit the starter and swung the car around, away from the *Hinalea* and the pier, out through the chain-link gate and between the warehouses back to Route 92.