

# The King's Day

A Koa Kāne Hawaiian  
Mystery Short Story

By

Robert B. McCaw

**Robert McCaw** grew up in a military family, traveling the world. He is a graduate of Georgetown University, served as a U.S. Army lieutenant, and earned a law degree from the University of Virginia. Having lived on the Big Island of Hawaii, McCaw's writing is imbued by his more than 20-year love affair with this Pacific paradise. He now lives in New York City and San Diego with his wife, Calli. ***Retribution*** is the fifth in his **Koa Kāne Hawaiian Mystery Series**.

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The day broke cool and sunny with little powder-puff clouds skittering across a blue sky, sending their shadows racing before them. Koa Kāne, Chief of Detectives of the Hilo Police Department, left his deputy in charge of the detective bureau for the day. Nālani, the love of his life, took a rare day off from her ranger duties at Hawai‘i Volcanoes National Park. With their *‘ohana* of friends, relatives, and some of the school children they mentored, they gathered for the ritual *lei* draping of the 14-foot-tall statue of the great king in front of the North Kohala Civic Center in Kapa‘au village on the Big Island.

It was June 11—King Kamehameha Day in Hawai‘i. First celebrated by Kamehameha V in 1871, the day commemorated the birth of his grandfather, Kamehameha the Great. Considered by some the Napoleon of the Pacific, Kamehameha was the warrior king who forged the Hawaiian Islands into a single kingdom. A nation subsequently recognized as sovereign by the US and the rest of the world for a hundred years before the US expropriated the islands in 1893. Native Hawaiians regard June 11 as Hawai‘i’s Independence Day, and it stands in sharp contrast to the Fourth of July. The former honors Hawaiian sovereignty and is widely celebrated in

Hawaiian communities, while the latter honors the birth of a different nation and is largely ignored in traditional Hawai'i.

For Māpuana, Koa's mother and a native healer, Kamehameha Day celebrated the unique traditions of the Hawaiian islands—traditions often disrespected by the *haoles* or non-native Hawaiians who had long ago invaded and often plundered the islands for commercial gain. For Ikaika, Koa's wayward brother, the day offered the opportunity to hang with some of his activist buddies who had come decked out in Hawaiian flags in symbolic protest of the loss of Hawaiian sovereignty.

As midday approached, all eyes focused on the giant statue of the king. Workers atop cherry pickers draped dozens of long strings of yellow flowers over the outstretched arms of the great warrior king in honor of his birth not far away on the northwestern shore of the Big Island.

After the ceremony, Koa led their small retinue down Akoni Pule Highway through picturesque Hawi town to 'Upolu Point Road. At the tiny 'Upolu Airport on the ocean's edge, they turned south and followed a rutted dirt road to King Kamehameha's birthplace, a patch of bare ground surrounded by

a double rock wall. They were not alone. Dozens of native Hawaiians had, like Māpuana, already gathered with flowers to honor the occasion.

Once Māpuana laid her wreath and finished her chanted prayer, the group returned to the highway and headed south through Kawaihai town and past the historic Pu‘ukoholā *Heiau*. The *heiau*, a massive trapezoidal structure comprised of thousands of dry-stacked lava stones, was commissioned by Kamehameha in 1790 and used by him to lure his chief rival, Keōua, to his death, consolidating Kamehameha’s power over the Big Island.

When Koa’s group arrived at Hapuna Beach for their *o’hana ho‘olaule‘a*, or family festival, they spotted Hook Hao, Koa’s commercial fisherman buddy and long-time police confidant. Hook brought ‘*ahi* fresh from the sea. Everyone pitched in to lay out the traditional Hawaiian picnic fare, each contributing their favorite delicacy. When Māpuana was satisfied with the tantalizing array and had chanted another blessing, they feasted on ‘*ahi poke*, *lomi lomi* salmon, *kalua* pig, *pikikauka*, *poi*, *laulau*, *kulolo*, and sweet bread rolls.

As the afternoon wore on and the sun dropped closer to the

horizon, adults sat chatting under the trees, and the youngsters swam, played volleyball, and threw frisbees on the beach.

Suddenly, a scream pierced the tranquility, and two teens came racing toward Koa, waving their arms and yelling at the top of their lungs. As they approached, Koa saw that they were overwrought, and it took him a moment to grasp the source of their panic. While swimming, they had found a dead body floating in the ocean.

Koa asked Nālani to calm the distraught boys, wrap up the day's festivities, and shepherd their party safely home. With help from two lifeguards, Koa dragged the corpse of a man from the water. From blood stains and cuts in the man's shirt, Koa could tell that the man had been stabbed multiple times. He was confronting a homicide, not an accidental drowning. Before proceeding, Koa called for police backup and a forensic team. He also checked with headquarters for recent reports of missing adult men, but there were none.

Forty-five minutes later, the coroner, a police photographer, and a forensics tech joined Koa at the beach. Under a portable floodlight, they photographed and examined the deceased. The victim appeared to be a Hawaiian in his late thirties or early

forties, of average height, and heavily muscled but toned and not overweight. He was clean-shaven with coarse black hair. Oddly, neither fish nor seabirds had attacked the man's eyes. Although obscured by a blue-gray opacity that occurs naturally after death, his irises appeared black.

The man's still heavily blood-stained tee shirt told Koa that he'd likely bled out sometime before being dumped in the ocean. Otherwise, the salt water would have washed most of the blood away. Long shorts and heavy boots, like those preferred by laborers, completed his outfit. Callouses, only somewhat softened by salt water, covered his hands, indicating a man accustomed to manual labor. Perhaps a construction, dock, landscape, or utility worker. Something like that.

Extensive tattoos in the geometrical patterns favored by ancient Hawaiians covered the man's neck and heavily muscled arms. Koa studied the lines of ink. Even after immersion in seawater, the edges were surprisingly sharp. Probably not prison ink. Maybe sovereignty ink. Many sovereignty activists, Koa knew, took pride in sporting traditional tattoos.

A black leather cord hung around the body's neck with a cheap replica of the 1845 royal Hawaiian coat of arms. The

insignia depicted the triangular flag of ancient Hawaiian chiefs and the *kapu*, a *kapa* cloth-covered ball on a stick that served as the chief's emblem of authority. The pendant only added to Koa's initial impression that the man might have been a sovereignty activist. Maybe that's what got him killed.

Although Koa would ultimately rely on experts, Koa's experience told him that the body had likely been in the ocean for two or three days. Just long enough for the natural decomposition process to bloat and float the body. Yet, that timing only added to the mystery. If the man had been incommunicado and away from home for at least two days and possibly more, why had no one reported him missing?

The wind and ocean currents along the Kohala coast were tricky, making it hard to guess where the body might have first entered the sea. Still, Koa knew that the recent prevailing patterns would probably have moved the body south while keeping it close to the coast. That meant someone had probably dumped the corpse in the ocean along the Big Island's northwest coast.

The forensics tech checked the man's pockets. No billfold. No identification. But something. Koa watched as the tech

withdrew a soggy paper from the man's left shorts pocket, carefully unfolded it, and placed it in a plastic evidence bag before handing it to Koa. He saw random markings that might have been a map or a sketch but had mostly dissolved, leaving the document largely illegible. Maybe, Koa thought, Cap Roberts in the police technical support unit could decipher it.

As he processed the initial forensics, Koa felt a quiet rage build within him. Since leaving the Army Special Forces and returning to his home state to become a police detective, Koa pursued his passion for finding justice for victims of crime. No one deserved to be brutally stabbed and cast into the ocean. Whatever this man had done in life, he'd met a gruesome end. As the on-site exam ended and the coroner took the body to the morgue, Koa vowed to find the killer and bring the bastard to justice.

Questions and more questions. All complex investigations started with questions, and Koa had learned to let them accumulate, serving as guideposts in his subsequent search for answers. But first, he had to solve the most pressing question—who was this man?

Koa had no leads to the victim's identity and no idea where

to start. Ordinarily reluctant to involve the press in a murder investigation, he made an exception, deciding it was the best way quickly to identify this mysterious John Doe. Koa asked the police press office to create a release with a headshot of the deceased and a request for information. Concerned that the papers would ignore it or bury it on an inside page, Koa called his friend, Cecil Goodly, at the *Hawai'i Herald Tribune*, the Big Island newspaper with the greatest local circulation.

“Don’t hear from you often, Koa. Bet you want a favor,” Cecil replied with good-natured sarcasm.

In his time as Chief Detective, politicians and county officials often threw up roadblocks to protect their turf, conceal corruption, or protect favored constituents. Koa had become proficient in circumventing their efforts, and he knew just how to motivate Cecil.

“A favor for a favor,” Koa said wryly before explaining that he wanted front-page treatment for the photograph and would, in return, give Cecil an exclusive interview on the case if and when they caught the perp.

“Send me your press release, and I’ll see what I can do.”

Koa sent the release and was surprised to get a call back

from Cecil in less than an hour. “Your man is Makua Kalama.”

“How do you know that?” Koa asked.

“I knew I’d seen that face before and dug into our archives. He’s one of those sovereignty types who want to turn the clock back to the independent kingdom days. Jimmy Chin, one of our reporters, interviewed and photographed him in 2019 when he and other activists blocked the Mauna Kea observatory access road to prevent the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope at the summit. You remember those crazy days, don’t you?”

“Sure do, thanks,” Koa replied, realizing he’d caught a break. “Can you email me any pictures you have of him?”

“And my exclusive?” Cecil asked.

“You bet.”

Fifteen minutes later, Koa had a half dozen pictures from Cecil. One, an individual portrait, was of the former mystery man’s face. The other images showed Makua with other protesters, all dressed in Hawaiian flags and other traditional regalia, holding anti-development signs and blocking the observatory access road.

As Koa studied the pictures, Cap Roberts stuck his head in the door. “Got a minute?”

“Sure. What do you have for me, Cap?” Koa replied, hoping the police tech guru was on to something.

“You know that paper you took off the Hapuna body. Well, I’ve reconstructed it as best I can. So, this is what I’ve got.” He placed a paper with black lines on Koa’s desk. “Looks to me like some kind of map. Kinda looks like the ocean at the top, with this point of land and two big squares not far inland from the coast. The left-hand square has some sort of symbol—maybe a circle with an ‘X.’ Afraid that’s not much help.”

“You never know,” Koa said as he studied the crude drawing. “Thanks.”

Checking the DMV database, Koa found Makua’s address on the outskirts of Hawi. Like most police officers, Koa hated notifications of next of kin. Experience had taught him that it was usually better done by two officers, so he asked Makanui, his latest senior detective hire, to come along. Previously with the Honolulu anti-terror unit, she’d resigned to rescue her parents from a bizarre hostage situation before coming to the Big Island. Tall and athletic, she regularly competed in the island triathlon, usually scoring among the top ten women. Most importantly, she shared Koa’s passion for finding justice for

victims, especially murder victims, who had no one to speak for them.

When the two officers arrived at Makua's home, they found a tidy, matchbox-like structure. A decade-old Honda Civic, sorely in need of a paint job, sat parked on the grass beside the home. A child's pink plastic tricycle left in the yard tugged at Koa's heartstrings. The presence of children made death notifications all the more wrenching. Makaanui knocked. They heard footsteps, and a frazzled Hawaiian woman in her late twenties or early thirties opened the door.

Koa identified himself and Makaanui. "You are Mrs. Kalama?"

"We live together. I'm Noelani," she responded dispassionately.

"May we come in?"

The neutral expression on her face changed to alarm as recognition dawned that the arrival of two police officers on her doorstep could not be good. "Oh, God. Has something happened to Makua?" She posed the words as a question, but her eyes told Koa she'd been expecting the worst.

"Please, Ma'am," Makaanui said softly, "It would be best if

we came in.”

Noelani seemed dazed and nearly stumbled as she stepped back to let them enter the home's main room with a small dining table in one corner. As she settled into a chair, Noelani began crying.

Glancing around, Koa took in the hand-me-down furniture, a tiny kitchen, and a door askew leading to a bedroom. A young child, perhaps five or six years old, emerged shyly from the bedroom door, plainly confused by the presence of strangers. “*Māmā*,” she said hesitantly, “why are you crying? Is it about *Makuakāne*?”

Noelani held out her arms, and the child ran to her mother, who lifted the little girl to her lap, enveloping her in a tender embrace.

What had begun as a difficult task for Koa and Makanui had become excruciating. Everyone sat still for a long moment before Noelani broke the tension. Setting the child back on her feet, Noelani said, “*Māmā* needs to talk to these police officers. Go play in the bedroom.” Reluctantly, the little girl obeyed, and Makanui followed to close the bedroom door behind the child.

“*Makua's* dead, isn't he?” Noelani asked through tears.

Koa nodded, "We're so sorry for your loss."

Noelani shuttered as she sobbed. "I knew he should never have taken that job."

"What job?" Makanui asked, softening her voice in empathy.

Noelani pulled a tissue from her pocket and wiped away her tears. "He works construction, mostly operating heavy equipment. He got a job on that new development, the one on the coast."

"You mean that new hotel project, the one they're calling "*Nani*?" Koa asked, referring to a highly controversial hotel and condo development on the Kohala coast south of King Kamehameha's birthplace. Although Sunset Hotels, the developer, made all sorts of concessions of open space, public beach access, and other public amenities to secure the necessary permits and approvals, the project had drawn strong opposition from many in the community, and sovereignty activists had attempted unsuccessfully to block the initial prep work. Objections ranged from the increasingly common antipathy amongst the local population toward further Big Island development and tourism to concerns over the site's proximity

to King Kamehameha's birthplace and other cultural landmarks.

"Yes, that's the one. I told Makua the coastal area near our king's birthplace was sacred. That it was *kapu* to build there, but he wouldn't listen. Said the money was too good. But after a couple of weeks, something scared him. Something '*ino* . . . some frightening evil . . . that's what he said. Then he disappeared."

"When did you last see Makua?" Makanui asked.

"Wednesday evening. He went out after dinner. Said he was going to meet someone."

"Who?" Makanui asked.

Noelani shook her head. "He didn't say."

"Was it related to work?"

"Maybe, but I don't really know."

"Do you know the name of his supervisor?"

Noelani struggled to recall. "Bucko, Gordo, Jocko, something like that. There was an 'o' at the end . . . I think. I'm not sure."

"Do you have any idea what scared Makua?" Koa asked.

"He wouldn't say, but my Makua didn't scare easily."

Koa paused, then asked, "How did Makua get to work?"

“His truck. He had an old Ford 150 pickup.”

“We didn’t see it outside. Do you know where we can find it?”

Noelani shrugged and turned her hands, gesturing that she didn’t know.

“Why didn’t you report him missing?” Koa asked as gently as he could.

“I . . . I didn’t know what to do. He sometimes stayed out with his friends. And I was . . . afraid something had happened to him . . . I couldn’t face . . . face that.” She dropped her head into her hands and again began to cry.

Makanui promised that a family social worker would come by to help her, and the two officers left. Once they were back in Koa’s SUV, Makanui said, “What a nightmare for that mother and her child.”

“Makes me doubly hot to nail whoever did this,” Koa responded. “Shall we see if we can find Bucko, Gordo, Jocko, or whoever? The guy with the ‘o’ at the end of his name?”

As Koa started his vehicle, he asked Makanui to call headquarters to authorize an APB for Makua’s truck. They drove south on Akoni Pule Highway before turning right onto a

dirt track toward the ocean. Pulling up to a construction shack next to a steel gate in a fence surrounding a massive construction site, they saw bulldozers digging a giant pit north of the center of the site.

A hulking Hawaiian man stepped from the shack. Seemingly oblivious to the blue police bubble light strapped atop Koa's SUV, he gruffly announced, "This is a private construction site. You'll have to turn around and leave."

Koa displayed his police shield. "We're police officers here to talk to your supervisor."

"Marco? He no say nothing to me about no visitors."

"I think you'd better call him and tell him we're here to see him."

Ten minutes later, Koa and Makaanui found themselves at the edge of the pit, where they met Marco, a tall, bulky Filipino. Koa guessed he topped six feet and might weigh north of 270. He was formidable with broken teeth, a prominent scar on his right cheek, and huge hands. Koa caught sight of a knife in a sheath on his belt and wondered if that knife had killed Makua.

"I'm Marco. I run this site, and I got work to do, so don't waste my time."

Makanui, tall for a woman at nearly six feet, stepped close to Marco, challenging him eye-to-eye. "Marco, we'd appreciate your cooperation. That way, we might get the answers we need and avoid dragging you back to the police station in Hilo."

"Sh . . . it," Marco drew out the word. "Okay, lady. What do ya want?"

Koa held back a smile at Makanui's skill in bringing the giant to heel. She was good at that. He watched Marco's eyes as Makanui began firing questions.

"You hire Makua Kalama?"

"Yeah."

"When did you last see him?"

"Dunno. Maybe four or five days ago. He jus' didn't show no more. Probably off surfin'. Hawaiians are like that, you know." Koa bristled at the cultural chauvinism but refrained from reacting as Makanui continued questioning the man.

"You saw him last Wednesday night?"

"Nope. Never seen 'im outside workin'."

"Anything unusual happen here last week?"

"Nope. Jus' digging."

Koa thought maybe Marco had answered too quickly but

otherwise saw no sign of evasion. While Makaanui continued her rapid-fire questioning, Koa left them to walk around the site.

Marco objected. "You can't just wander around here."

Koa spun around. "You'd rather I come back with the building inspectors? Maybe do a safety check?"

"Sh . . . it" was Marco's only response, and Koa continued walking.

As he reached the southern side of the pit, he noticed a large square patch of ground with hollows and piles of loose dirt. Koa guessed that workers had dug into the earth and then replaced the soil. Why, he wondered, would anyone do that over such a large area? Looking out toward the ocean, he saw a point of land protecting a small cove directly in front of the disturbed ground. Probably reserved for the resort beach, he thought.

He started to turn away but then looked back at the point. Makua, who worked here, had died with a hand-drawn map in his pocket. How, he thought, would this point of land look on a map? Something like the point on the map Cap Roberts had reconstructed. And the squares, they could be the pit and the disturbed earth. Could this, he wondered, be the place in Makua's drawing? If so, the circle with the 'X' would be in the

middle of the patch of disturbed ground. The more he thought about it, the better the pieces fit.

Koa continued to circle the pit but saw nothing else of particular interest. Returning to Marco, Koa pointed to the patch of disturbed ground just to the south. What happened there?"

After a brief hesitation, Marco said, "Oh, that . . . that was a mistake. Some crazy kids—or maybe sovereignty protesters—moved the surveyor's stakes. Cost us three days wasted work."

"You mean you started digging foundation footings for the hotel in the wrong place?"

"Yeah," Marco responded coolly.

Incredulous at Marco's explanation, Koa probed further. "Who's your boss?"

"Corrigan. Henry Corrigan. He runs Sunset Hotels here in Hawai'i."

"And you told him about this digging mistake?"

Again, Marco hesitated. Just long enough to betray his discomfort. "Yeah, I told 'im."

It was late when Koa and Makaanui got back to headquarters in Hilo. Late enough that the county planning office had closed. Koa, famous for pushing investigations, felt compelled to pursue

his hunch about Makua's map. Despite the hour, he called the planning director and persuaded him to send a young staffer to search the planning commission's files. By eight that evening, he had the official plans for the *Nani* project on his desk.

Unrolling the overview sheet from the thick bundle of architectural drawings, he found the point of land, the cove, and the location approved for the main hotel building. The hotel was supposed to sit directly inland from the cove protected by the point of land—precisely where Koa had observed the large patch of ground with hollows and piles of loose dirt. After double-checking to be sure, the obvious conclusion left him stunned. Marco had lied. The construction crew had commenced work on the hotel's foundation in the right place, only to abandon that effort in favor of an unsanctioned location.

Koa could think of only one reason for such a change. The workers had stumbled upon something unexpected at the official site. There were many possibilities, but the discovery of archeological artifacts or ancient Hawaiian graves was the most likely. It happened frequently on the Big Island and usually resulted in years of delay, if not termination, in many building projects.

Koa disturbed the county planning director for the second time that evening to verify that the commission had not approved any change in plans for the *Nani* project. Since unapproved construction violated Hawai'i law, Koa contacted county prosecutor Zeke Brown for help securing a search warrant. Repeatedly elected by a constituency that loved his plain talking, sometimes profane style, Zeke favored white *paniolo* hats and flashy, leather cowboy boots. With his help, Koa would find out what lay beneath those piles of loose dirt.

Although it was past ten that evening when Koa reached the small cottage in Volcano village he shared with Nālani, he was not surprised when she greeted him at the door with her usual welcome—a lingering kiss. He'd grabbed some pizza earlier, and she'd already eaten, so they retreated to the garden Nālani had nurtured behind the cottage to sit beside their fire pit for late evening drinks—chardonnay for her and Maui Pale Ale for him.

They'd first met at a charity fundraiser, and he'd been captivated by her native Hawaiian beauty, long glossy black hair, and especially her mischievous smile. Although opposites in many ways—she was lithe like a bird, and he had a physique

like an athlete—they shared an abiding love of the islands and quickly bonded before becoming inseparable.

He told her about his visit to *Nani* and his suspicions.

“God, I hope you find something to stop that dreadful project. The planning commission had no business allowing that development in such a culturally and environmentally sensitive area.”

She paused before continuing. “You’ve got Kamehameha’s birthplace to the north and the remnants of the old Lapakahi fishing village to the south. And we know there were other native Hawaiian communities in that area. So that land has to be rich with archeological sites and graves.”

Sipping her wine, she continued, “Before you know it, we’ll have tourists picnicking at Kamehameha’s birthplace. Hawai‘i is already the endangered species capital of the world. We’ll lose more native birds, like the *pueo* and the *nēnē*. The last thing we need is another ugly commercial blight for rich tourists on that stretch of pristine coastline.”

“I agree,” Koa responded, “but I’m a cop, Nālani. I’m not a lone ranger out to stop environmentally or culturally offensive developments, even though I’m upset about them, too. And

remember, without those tourists—more than a million of them visit your park annually—you wouldn't have your dream job.”

“If everyone says ‘not my job,’ we are doomed,” she retorted hotly.

“That’s not fair, *ipo*,” he complained, using a Hawaiian term of endearment.

She knew she'd gone too far and put her hand on his. “I’m sorry. It’s just frustrating and ironic that the ancient Hawaiians had more respect for the *‘aina*—the land and its environment—than we do. The ancients understood the necessity of preserving the world for subsequent generations. Now, we indulge our greed and feed our avarice, mortgaging the future until our children and grandchildren will have nothing.”

“Let’s see how things unfold tomorrow.”

The following morning Makanui was in court on another case. So, while Zeke went to see Judge Hitachi about a warrant and other officers assembled a team to search *Nani*, Koa decided to take the next step—interview Henry Corrigan—on his own. He wanted to catch the man off guard and chose to go without advance notice even though the trip might yield nothing useful.

Reaching Kamuela, a quaint *paniolo* cowboy town, he

passed the headquarters of the vast Parker cattle ranch and the 1850s New England-style Imioloa church before locating the Sunset Hotels office on the second floor of a commercial retail strip. After badging his way past an assistant, Koa found Corrigan in his office.

Corrigan was a *haole* from Chicago in his late thirties. He was a senior VP of Sunset Hotels, an international hotelier with a dozen properties run by his uncle. Of average height and beefed up like a bodybuilder, he had an air of arrogance about him.

Pictures and plaques on his office walls established that Corrigan had been a US Marine who'd seen action with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Expeditionary Brigade in the 2010 battle of Marjah in Afghanistan. As a former Special Forces officer, Koa was well acquainted with the battle and had seen the subsequent HBO documentary.

"Who the hell are you?" Corrigan hid neither his surprise nor annoyance at Koa's abrupt entrance.

Koa introduced himself, and Corrigan became more conciliatory. "What can I do for you, Detective?"

"I'd like to talk about *Nani*, your hotel project on the

Kohala coast. ”

“Take a seat, Detective.” He waved to a chair. “What’s your interest in our latest project? ”

“I’m investigating the death of an employee, Makua Kalama. Ever meet him?”

“Can’t say as I have,” Corrigan responded offhandedly. “We have dozens of workers on our crews and rely on supervisors to handle the labor.” Then, after pausing, he asked, “What’s his death have to do with Sunset Hotels?”

“We’re trying to determine whether his death had anything to do with problems at your construction site,” Koa replied.

“Problems? What problems?”

“Having to do with the unapproved relocation of the main hotel building.”

Koa saw a flicker of concern on Corrigan’s face before the man suddenly went on the offensive.

“Look, Detective. We’ve spent millions acquiring that property, fighting your crazy sovereignty activists, and getting the project through the county’s incompetent planning commission.” Corrigan’s face grew red with anger as he continued his tirade. “If you do anything to slow or jeopardize it,

you'll have a nasty fight on your hands, and it will get personal. Our investigators know a hell of a lot about local corruption, including in the police. Even you, Detective. We've done our due diligence on many county officials and have a file on you. You're not as clean as your record might indicate." He glared malevolently at Koa. "Now, get out of here. Talk to our lawyers."

Corrigan's vehemence and his reference to Koa's own background stunned Koa. His gut instinct was to fight back, but his police training cautioned restraint. So instead, he said simply, "You'll be hearing from us, Mister Corrigan," and left.

As he drove back to police headquarters, Koa mulled over the bizarre encounter. With respect to Koa's personal background, the man had to be bluffing. There was no way he could know Koa's secrets. No one did. Koa had made sure of that.

Still, Corrigan's outburst spoke volumes. Koa guessed that Corrigan had used similar tactics to steamroll the planning commission members, who had plenty of dirty laundry to hide. That might explain why the *Nani* project got approved over strong community objections.

Corrigan's outburst also made him a suspect in Makua's murder. Deeply invested in the *Nani* project, Corrigan appeared willing to go to extraordinary lengths to bring it to fruition. He had a temper, and the Marines had probably trained him as a killer. Koa could envision him doing the deed himself or, more likely, directing Marco to do it.

Given all the necessary prep work, Koa and Makaanui didn't get to *Nani* until 2 p.m. Koa served the warrant, and Makaanui confiscated Marco's knife. Then, while the police began digging in the loose dirt corresponding to the approved hotel site, Koa confronted Marco.

"You lied to me and obstructed a police investigation," Koa told him. "Now, you want to tell me what happened?"

"I ain't talkin'," Marco said defiantly.

"That's your right," Koa conceded, "but I'm guessing you didn't relocate the hotel building site on your own." He paused. "And we'll soon know whether your knife killed Makua Kalama. So, you have a short window to help yourself by telling us what happened."

"I didn't kill nobody," he said, raising his voice.

"But you knew about the *'ino*--the evil—that frightened

Makua.” It was a shot in the dark, but the surprise in Marco’s reaction confirmed Koa's guess.

It took the police excavation team less than an hour to make the discovery. The original Sunset contractors had cleared less than ten feet of soil and rock before breaking through the ceiling of an old lava tube—an underground channel where eons earlier lava had flowed before draining away and leaving a cave. Koa suspected the cave, like so many others scattered around the island, was an ancient Hawaiian burial site.

Always respectful of ancient traditions and concerned that the cavern was a burial vault, Koa refused to explore the hole or permit the other officers present to do so. Instead, he’d leave that task to the state archeologists. Still, he guessed that one or more of the original construction crew, most likely Makua Kalama, had made their way inside.

It was the most logical explanation for Makua's fear of *‘ino*—evil. Besides, Sunset Hotels would never have moved the hotel for an empty lava tube. They must have known it was a highly significant cultural site that would delay or kill the project. In hopes of proving his theory, Koa had officers corral the workers so that he and Makanui could interview them. He

got nothing from the first five hard hats and was discouraged until Makanui interrupted him.

“You need to hear this,” she said, leading Koa to a slim, boyish young Hawaiian laborer, introducing him as Nainoa. “Tell this officer what you told me.”

“Makua was friend. We look out for each other. The digger machine broke the lava tube, and Marco sent Makua down. My friend Makua, he didn’t want to go down. No one did, but Marco, he make Makua go down.”

“And?” Koa prompted.

“He come out like *lōcō* man, screamin’, and runnin’ like he seen *kepolō*, the devil.”

“What did he see?” Koa pushed.

“He see bones, people bones, hundreds of them. Scared the hell out of him. He were gonna tell the county people, but Marco said he had to tell the boss first.”

“Marco tell the boss, or Makua tell the boss?” Koa asked.

“Donno. Jus’ tell boss.”

They arrested Marco and transported him to an interrogation room at police headquarters in Hilo. “Let’s see if we can get him to talk about the discovery of the burial cave

while the forensic people get us an answer on the knife,” Makaanui suggested. Koa agreed, and they read him his *Miranda* rights. “You’ve got a big problem, Marco. You broke into a burial cave,” Koa explained.

“It was an accident,” Marco said. “We was just diggin’ for the foundation of the hotel.” Handcuffs and a long ride to police headquarters appeared to have tempered Marco’s bravado.

“Okay,” Koa conceded, “but you were required to report the existence of the burial cave to state authorities and cease work. Instead, you covered it up. That’s a crime punishable by a year in jail and a fine of \$25,000 for every day that you failed to report your find.”

“Sh . . . it,” Marco said. “It weren’t my decision.”

“Whose decision was it?” Koa asked.

“The boss man, Corrigan. He told me there was no way he was gonna let a few dead Hawaiians stop his hotel project.”

“It was his idea to refill the existing hole and move the hotel site to the north?” Koa asked.

“Yeah. But fuckin’ Makua was freakin’ out. Saying we let the devil loose and he’d haunt us all. Said we was marked men. I couldn’t talk sense to him. So, Corrigan told me to send him to

the Kamuela office.”

“When?”

“That night . . . Wednesday night.”

A knock on the door interrupted their interrogation.

Georgina Pau, Koa's favorite crime scene tech, popped in and summoned Koa and Makanui to the hallway where they would not be overheard. “Sorry to interrupt, but you need to know two things. The knife you took off Marco is not the murder weapon. Not the right size or length.

“In addition, officers located Makua Kalama's pickup. Somebody dumped it off Old Coast Guard Road near the abandoned Coast Guard facilities. They must have tried to set it on fire, but the sovereignty guys who hang out there apparently doused the flames before they consumed the truck. We're having it hauled into the police garage, but officers on the scene said there's dried blood in the truck bed. I'll have my people on it as soon as it arrives.”

Four hours later, Georgina was back. “We found Makua's blood in his truck bed. Probably got there when the killer transported his body. We accessed a GPS unit on the dash. On the night Makua disappeared, the truck traveled from his home

in Hawi to a commercial strip mall in Kamuela and then to Old Coast Guard Road near the ocean. We also found a knife in the vehicle. It's likely the murder weapon. Finally, in addition to the deceased's fingerprints, we found a second set of prints on the knife and the steering wheel. According to the FBI database, they belong to a former US Marine named Henry Corrigan.

Late that evening, Koa felt a rush of adrenaline as he and Makanui arrived at Corrigan's home with an arrest warrant for the man. Koa had found justice for Makua and stopped the desecration of a native burial site. Nālani and others who respected native Hawaiian traditions had prevailed. And how ironic, Koa thought, that sovereignty activists had put out the fire in Makua's truck and thus prevented the destruction of evidence against Corrigan.

Still, Koa could not quell his nagging concern that Corrigan had somehow discovered the secret in Koa's past that would trigger the retribution he'd always feared. He told himself that Corrigan did not know and could not know what had happened all those years ago. Yet, Koa had also learned—often the hard way-- that life could veer into unknown territory at any moment.

When Corrigan opened his front door and saw the two

officers, he shouted, "I told you to deal with our lawyers."

"Sorry, Corrigan," Koa responded, "You are under arrest for the murder of Makua Kalama."

Koa couldn't suppress a sense of satisfaction at the shocked look on Corrigan's face. The man said nothing as Makaanui handcuffed him and led him outside, where he stopped and turned toward Koa. "You'll regret this, Detective."

"I wouldn't count on it if I were you," Koa responded with more confidence than he felt.

Having solved the Makua Kalama case, Koa now owed Cecil Goodly at the *Tribune* his exclusive. But Koa only hoped he'd still have his badge when the story ran.

BY ROBERT MCCAWE

Koa Kāne Hawaiian Mysteries

*Death of a Messenger*

*Off the Grid*

*Fire and Vengeance*

*Treachery Times Two*

*Retribution*