

From Chapter Twelve:

Garbage, bottles, cans and a variety of street trash filled the gutter of the empty parking stall in front of the bar tucked along an offshoot of Packers Avenue. The analog clock in the dash ticked to five past eleven. Checking his new persona in the rearview mirror before exiting, TJ squinted slightly. He thought it was a menacing touch. He liked it and would work it into his performance.

TJ had been in some dives, but Dink's would be a hands-down winner in a sleaze contest. By comparison, the Jury Room was the Grand Palace.

His hand stuck to the handle as he pulled the door open and made his entry. Seven classy patrons, all dressed worse than him, occupied seats at the bar and booths. The gamey scent of stale smoke and old beer grabbed him by the throat and dimmer than dim lighting wasn't enough to mask the rundown accouterments of the tavern. And there was an overwhelming presence of evil in the joint that made the hair on the back of TJ's neck tingle.

A hand-printed sign pointed to the restrooms. Knowing the quality of mutt who patronized the dump, TJ knew that Dink never had to worry about anyone stealing a bar of soap. Probably not toilet paper, either.

Along the bar closest to the office, three stools with green vinyl tops and wooden legs were vacant. TJ slid onto a stool, leaving an empty one between him and the office door, affording him the opportunity to box in his suspect if the need arose. He studied the customers and tried to decide if one of them was the criminal. A young man in a booth watched TJ closely. Best bet was that he was either the contact or was there to cover the seller. Everybody else in the saloon looked like they'd fallen into a bottle years ago and weren't trying very hard to crawl out.

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From Chapter Thirty-One

"Cute, TJ. I'm so happy it was me who answered. A dozen people down here and I'm the one who wins the lottery."

"I'll bring you some donuts if you get me the information."

"No thanks, I don't like the day-old garbage that Charlie distributes."

"I'll buy fresh ones."

"Not necessary. I've come to realize that I was put on this earth to make Toby Jenkins happy."

"Like my guardian angel?"

"No, your personal records slave. Far as I can tell, your guardian angel abandoned you a long time ago."

"My ex-wife would tell you it coincided with our divorce."

"That's very nice of you to refer to your ex as an angel."

"I didn't. But she thinks she's one."

"TJ, any woman who would marry you would have to be an angel."

"But, she divorced me."

"One smart angel, that ex of yours."

"You sure twisted my story around in her favor," he protested.

"Chalk up another one for the sisterhood."

"Story of my life."