

*What is the Bronze Dragon?
And why does someone covet it
so much he's already killed for
it? Those are the questions
Detective Henry Lau must
answer to solve the mystery. A
cryptic clue left by the dead
man may be his last hope.*

THE LOST DRAGON MURDER

By Michael Allan Mallory

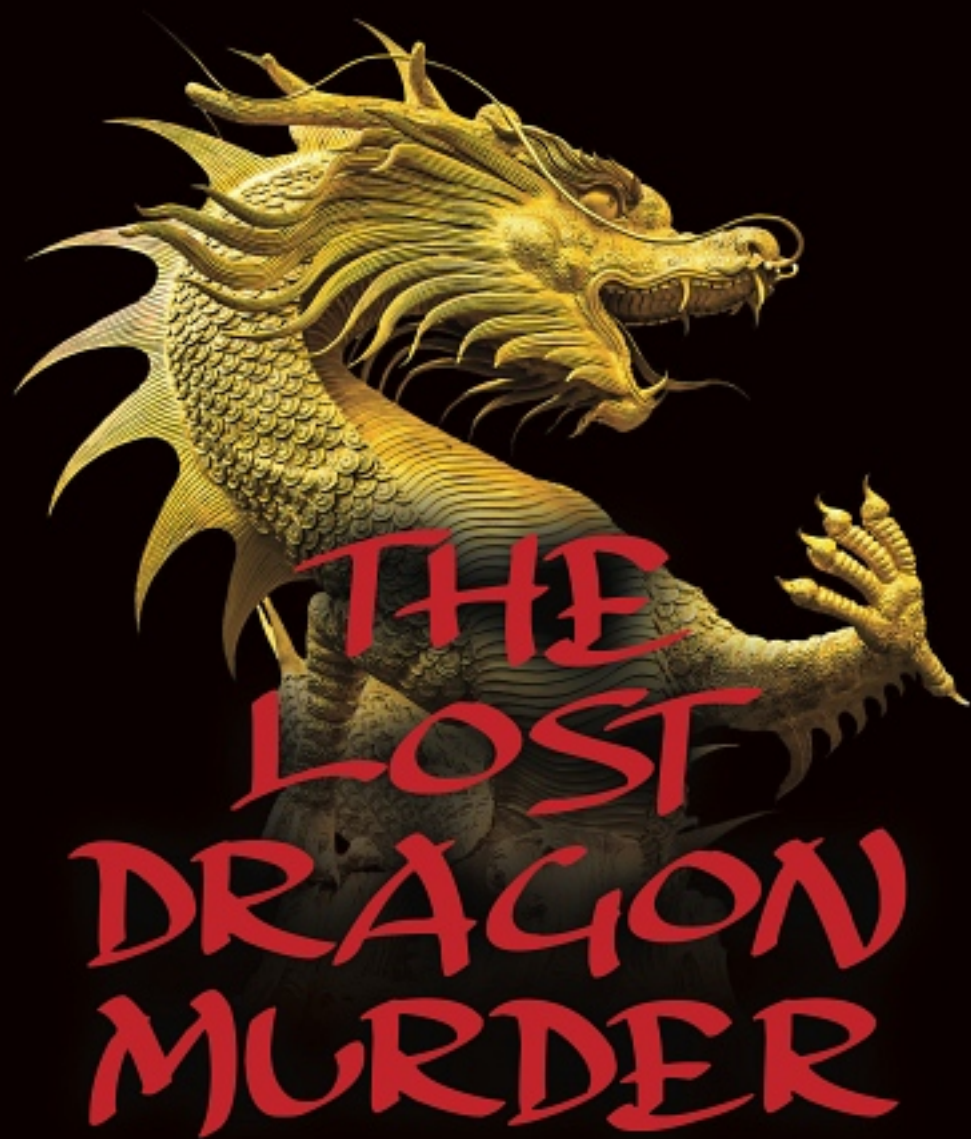
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"...a perfect story to curl up with on a winter's night,"

— Ellen Hart, MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA GRANDMASTER



MICHAEL ALLAN MALLORY

Praise for *The Lost Dragon Murder*

“With nods to both Dashiell Hammett and Agatha Christie, Mallory’s newest mystery is a perfect story to curl up with on a winter’s night. Twists and turns abound as we follow Detective Henry Lau and his niece, Detective Janet Lau, as they sift through the motives and means of a potential historic art theft, one that may have led to murder. Mallory’s strong writing and atmospheric Minnesota setting grabbed me from the first page!”

--Ellen Hart, Mystery Writers of America
Grandmaster, and Award Winner.

“Delightful! A fun whodunit with characters I want to hang out with.”
--Anne Frasier, *New York Times* Bestselling Author

"Michael Allan Mallory's talent as a storyteller shines through in *Lost Dragon*. The first paragraph captured me and I relished the story to the end. His characters seem like real people. Some you'd like to hang out with and others you'd want to avoid. I loved walking alongside protagonists Henry Lau and Janet Lau as they worked through a complex investigation to uncover a killer's identity. Mallory's impressive knowledge of martial arts is keenly woven into the plot and adds a key element in this compelling story. I hope *Lost Dragon* is the first book in a series because I'm ready for the next. Two thumbs up!"

--Christine Husom, author, the Winnebago
County Mysteries and the Snow Globe Shop Mysteries.

“Filled with great details and wonderfully crafted language, *The Lost Dragon Murder* is sure to please readers of all tastes. In Henry Lau, Michael Allan Mallory has created an exciting and welcomed new addition to the fictional detective family.”

--Sue Ann Jaffarian, author of the popular Odelia Grey and Ghost of Granny Apples mysteries

THE LOST DRAGON MURDER

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CHAPTER 1

For a man who hated violence Henry Lau was awfully good at it. Well schooled in the way of the fist, he had considerable experience in its use. Not that you'd know it to look at him. Slightly under average height with an affable face and a rangy, athletic build more suitable to a tennis player than a fighter, there was nothing remotely intimidating about him.

Until he touched you.

By then it was too late. By then the pummeling had exploded on you with the heart-stopping suddenness of a high-speed car wreck in whose aftermath laid the rubble of contusions, numb joints or broken bones. Henry's niece, a perceptive young woman who appreciated both the fine arts and word play, liked to call him a virtuoso of destruction. At the moment he didn't feel like a virtuoso of anything unless it was of aches and pains. A bum knee and dodgy lower vertebrae made him feel every day of his forty-four years as he loped along the sidewalk, glad his car was parked a block away. A vigorous workout had left him looking forward to home, a hot shower, and leftovers.

A sound—faint, transitory—pinged into his awareness, a blip against the urban street noise of West Lake Street. Most people wouldn't have noticed. Henry did. Two decades of training and experience had sensitized him to things out of the ordinary. As his first kung fu teacher had said, "In nature, animals are vigilant to disturbances in the world around them, no matter how small. If they aren't, they get killed."

Henry paid attention.

Another sound. This time a muffled chuff against the pavement.

It was late evening in mid-October, a Minnesota October, one where darkness fell like a steel curtain before the first snowfall made the night world bright again. The glow of street lamps didn't quite reach into the shadows between the rear of the buildings across the street. Henry couldn't get a bead on the sound. Slowing his gait, he squinted into the dark recess between Jasmine Imported Foods and the Falafel Palace. Perhaps it was nothing, someone taking out the trash, a stray cat. His instincts said no. He crossed the street at an angle to ensure the street lights didn't backlight him, moved with caution into the alcove. As he drew near, vague outlines took on solid shapes. He could make out three figures by a dumpster, a fourth crumpled on the asphalt, clutching his belly and groaning.

It was a mugging. Or worse.

Henry noiselessly slipped off his backpack and reached inside.

No gun or badge.

Locked in the car with his smartphone. Bringing a loaded weapon to a martial arts class wasn't a good idea. For everyone's safety, he thought it better to leave his sidearm locked in his trunk, where it was useless right now. He estimated the distance to his Chevy Malibu. Too far. By the time he got there and back, it might be too late. Retrieving his gun would be the smart thing to do, so would calling for backup. Walking unarmed into a potentially dangerous situation was reckless. Even so, he was compelled to do it. Long ago he'd made a bargain with himself never to let a person come to harm due to inaction on his part. That kind of thinking might not have made Henry Lau a prudent lawman, but it went far in addressing the guilt of an old wrong.

Henry slipped on his backpack again to free his arms, sucked in a deep breath, and entered the lion's den. The thugs hadn't noticed him yet, too focused on their prey whose wire-framed glasses sat askew on their victim's battered face. Hurt and disheveled, a puppy among

hyenas. His attackers enjoyed his suffering. Their leader had a hard rawboned face whose mouth twisted into a cruel grin. Long stringy hair dangled over his eyes like a ragged curtain. Legs covered in dark sweatpants with white side stripes stood over the fallen man; an arm above those legs raised a clenched fist.

Glasses raised an arm to ward off the blow. "I don't have it," he said in a desperate voice, one near the breaking point.

Stripes smacked his head. "Don't lie. You got it."

"No! It's the truth."

"Yeah, how's this truth?" A steel toe boot rammed into unprotected ribs. Glasses grimaced painfully. Stripes shook his head. "Stop wastin' my time, chump. You got one last chance."

Glasses grabbed the dumpster and struggled to his feet. "How many times do I have to tell you I don't have it anymore?"

"Even if that's true, you know where it is."

Glasses glanced anxiously between his attackers and remained silent.

One of the thugs threw up his arms in frustration. "Screw this." A beefy, thick-necked brute with a raspy voice opened and closed disturbingly large, meaty fingers. "I say we beat the crap out of him and call it a day."

"Maybe you're right," Stripes admitted, his cruel grin directed at Glasses. "After Crusher gets done with you, you'll wish you were dead. Last chance, chump."

Glasses shook his head in a useless effort to persuade the others to stop. Narrow shoulders drooped in grim acceptance of his fate.

"Hey, who's that?" said the third attacker, a twentyish, wiry Asian man with scruffy sideburns and chin whiskers.

They all turned toward Henry.

Stripes glared daggers at him. "What do you want? If you don't wanna be dead, get your sorry ass outta here."

Whiskers couldn't believe it when Henry kept advancing. "This dude must be deaf. Or stupid."

Henry moved forward in slow, measured steps, assessing the situation. *No guns. None he could see. Good, that was a relief.* "Let him go," Henry said with as much authority as he could muster. "I called the cops; they're on their way." It was a bluff. He had nothing to lose.

Stripes snorted contemptuously. "Bullshit."

So much for that. Henry didn't relent. Kept a determined face. He knew he'd inspire more apprehension if he'd been larger and uglier like the big goon with the face like sixty grade sandpaper. Even in the dim alcove light, he could see the man called Crusher was one scary-looking guy. In macho stare-downs, Henry did not fare well. His youthful good looks and manner could charm the bite out of a junkyard dog. Charm and looks were lost on men like these. Ugly sells tough. Inspired fear. *If you were smart, you'd leave.* But intelligence had nothing to do with it. The warning would go unheeded. Some things were more important than personal safety.

Henry advanced.

Stripes turned to the big man with the ham hock fists. "We don't have time for this shit. Crusher, waste this shithead."

"Glad to." Crusher flashed a malignant smirk, stepped forward, inflated his chest and brought up meaty paws—

Too late.

Henry rocketed at him with startling speed, closing the distance between them in three steps. He yanked down the other's lead arm as it extended, jerking a wide-eyed Crusher's face into Henry's fist. A volley of chain punches erupted with machine-gun speed, followed by a triple knife hand to the throat. Crusher crumpled like paper mache, gasping for air. With no time to waste, Henry grabbed handfuls of hair and wrenched Crusher's head around. The rest of him had no

choice but to follow. Sensing movement in his periphery vision, Henry's head snapped to the side just in time to see Crusher's two friends charging toward him. With a hard yank of the bruiser's head, Henry spun him around and, with double palms, propelled him into the others. Stripes managed to jump out of the way. Whiskers wasn't as lucky, receiving the full impact of the big man slamming into him.

Henry's attention swung back to Stripes, who lunged at him with a razor knife in his outstretched hand. Henry barely pivoted out of the way, the blade grazing off his sweatshirt sleeve. Henry jumped back, ripped off his backpack and held it in front of him as a shield. He didn't have time for this! The others would be up any second. Stripes jumped forward. Henry barely parried the thrust to his stomach with the backpack, then hop-stepped forward to deliver a savage side kick to his attacker's thigh. Henry's extended foot stomped down hard on the other's ankle. After he stripped away the razor knife, Henry's palm macerated into a conveniently nearby nose. The head jerked sideways, whiplashing lank hair across his face. Stripes dropped like a sack of bricks.

Henry's eyes flicked back to the first two attackers, still down and moaning. They weren't going anywhere soon. Relaxing out of his ready stance, Henry felt his heart thudding against his chest. The rush of fear was slow to ebb, a survival fear that sensitized nerves and supercharged muscles. It wasn't over yet.

"You okay?" he said to Glasses.

"Yeah."

"Wanna press charges against these guys?"

"No. Just get me to my car." Glasses glanced anxiously toward his three attackers curled up on the ground like yesterday's trash.

Henry stepped aside to let him pass. Not wasting a second, Glasses scurried by him in labored steps, eager to get away. Henry followed, finally getting a good look at him. Fiftyish and fit, the man

had the tawny, undernourished build of a long-distance runner. Clad in a denim shirt and khaki slack. His short, rust-colored hair crowned a high forehead. Soulful eyes looked out from behind wire-framed glasses as if they'd seen too much of the grungy underbelly of the world that evening.

"That's my car," he said after half a block. "The blue hatchback." The Honda was parked by the curb under the glow of a street light.

"Do you know those guys?"

"Never saw them before."

"What'd they want?"

"Money. Just money."

"Just money?" Henry was skeptical.

Glasses let the remark pass without comment. At the car, he fished for his keys, turning to Henry afterward, haggard, scared yet sincere. "Thanks for your help back there. I don't want to seem ungrateful, but I don't want to hang around or talk about it." With a shaky hand, he unlocked the door. Not before one nervous glance toward the alcove.

"They're gone," Henry assured. "I heard them slink off the other way."

Relief washed over the other's face. "Thanks again."

"You were lucky I came along when I did."

"I was." The words tumbled out like a confession. "You were amazing back there. I do martial arts, a beginner. I've never seen anyone move like that. Do what you did with your hands."

Henry shrugged. "It worked out. Sometimes it doesn't." He could afford to be sanguine about it now, knowing all too well things could have turned out differently and not to his favor. "You sure you're okay? Those guys worked you over pretty bad."

"I'm fine."

"Don't be macho. See a doctor. I mean it."

Glasses nodded an anemic half-smile and climbed into his car with a groan. A trembling hand fastened the seatbelt harness and started the engine.

Henry stepped back and watched the car pull away to fade into the darkness, already second-guessing himself. Glasses hadn't been totally honest. More was going on here than a simple mugging. Should he have pressed harder for answers? Henry wondered. The thing was, he was tired and off duty, and this wasn't even his jurisdiction. And he could have been wrong. A man had to choose his battles.

Crisis over, he could finally let his guard down. Sore muscles barked at him at being further abused after a hard workout. That hot shower was looking better and better—

He stopped. Looked down at his white sneakers and saw a fresh splatter of crimson. Then another. Blood. Fresh blood.

CHAPTER 2

Detective Janet Lau folded her arms across her chest and willed herself to view the body sprawled across the checkerboard floor like a broken manikin. Her slender fingers squeezed into the backs of her arms to steel her nerves. She hated this part of the job. This was only the second death call she'd handled in the five months since making detective, the first actual homicide. Not that she was squeamish. Viewing human remains didn't really bother her; it was the cruelty behind this killing. Some person or persons had taken perverse pleasure heaping abuse upon the body. The dead man wasn't just beaten to death; it was punishment.

Janet exhaled softly. *Be calm. Stay professional. Would she ever develop a thick skin to this stuff?* "What a mess," she said with more distaste than she had intended. She hoped Kowalski hadn't noticed. She stole a glance in his direction.

Officer Kowalski shifted his weight with the finesse of a Mississippi river barge. A burly man with a broad chest and a fence post for a neck, subtle movements were not his forte. The breath wheezing out of him sounded like a truck tire deflating. Did the mangled corpse bother even him? Janet wondered. If a veteran like Dan Kowalski was disturbed by the condition of the dead man, Janet didn't feel like such a rookie.

"Who is he?" she asked in a pleasant, educated voice.

"Name's Roger Beckman. He's a professor at St. Luke's."

"A teacher? He live here alone?"

"Yeah."

Beckman, in a plain gray T-shirt and pajama bottoms, lay on his back, face battered, bruised, and scratched, lifelessly staring at the ceiling. A pair of wire-framed eyeglasses lay under the kitchen table,

likely knocked there from a violent blow. One of many violent blows, judging by his condition. Janet winced at the bruised and tortured arms, bent in ways that would make a contortionist wince. The tops of Beckman's bare feet were deep purple.

"So vicious." The graceful contours of Janet's face turned away from the human wreckage to address Kowalski. "Looks like multiple fractures in both arms, bruising everywhere—and that's just the stuff we can see."

He grunted back. "Yeah, bruises on top of bruises. Nasty."

"Ever seen anything like this?"

"No, and I've seen guys worked over. This is off the chart. Whoever did this enjoyed it."

"Yeah, a little too much."

"The son of a bitch just kept going and going and going. Really sick."

"You think it's one guy?"

Shoulders the size of a Mack truck shrugged. "Can't say."

Her brow creased as she remembered something. "Didn't you say Beckman was a prof at St. Luke's?"

"I did."

"What was his subject?"

"Asian Studies. Hey, that makes you perfect for this case!"

Janet Lau silently counted to five. Okay, she was half Chinese. That much was obvious from her looks. If Beckman had taught Celtic Arts, would Kowalski have made the same remark? Probably not, even though she was half Scottish. Kowalski grinned at her as if he'd made the insight of the decade. She offered a tight smile back. He was harmless. Meant well. No point in making a big deal out of his remark, even if it could be considered marginally crossing a line. He didn't understand what it was like having your race regularly pointed out to you. Perhaps she was being too sensitive. She didn't want to

make waves. The police department in Gillette, Minnesota, wasn't that large, and she didn't want to start her promotion to detective by getting a reputation for being difficult.

Putting on her game face, Janet tucked back a stray lock of dark brown hair and looked at Kowalski. "Who found the body?"

"Cleaning lady. Mrs. Dorsetti."

"Anything there?"

"Not really. She comes in every other Wednesday. Has her own key. Soon as she saw Beckman, she freaked. Ran to the neighbor to call 911."

"No mobile?"

"Nope, she's old school."

Janet's eye went to the kitchen wall phone. In a world overtaken by mobile technology, Beckman had a museum piece mounted on his wall, a classic retro Princess phone like her grandmother used to have.

"Does that phone work, or is it just for show?"

"It works. She just didn't want to be near the body."

"I get that. I'll want to talk to her."

"She's still at the neighbor's."

"Good," Janet replied in a faraway voice as her gaze swept the room to make sure she hadn't missed anything. The kitchen was vintage 1950s era with flat-fronted cabinets and lemonade yellow Formica countertops banded by an aluminum edge. The appliances were fairly new. An open bread bag lay on the table. Two slices of cold toasted bread sat in the toaster. The faint scent of cinnamon raisin reminded her she'd rushed out the door that morning without eating breakfast.

She felt her stomach rumble. "No stab wounds or bullet holes. Going out on a limb here and thinking Beckman died from blunt force trauma."

A grunt from Kowalski. "Probably a safe bet."

“Find any weapons?”

“No.”

“I suppose the killer could have taken it with him.”

Another grunt from Kowalski. Grunting seemed his preferred method of communication, perhaps because it required less effort than forming actual words. Although a moment later, he did make an effort. “Maybe a weapon wasn’t left behind ‘cause there was no weapon.”

“Oh?”

“My first years as a cop were in Chicago. I’ve seen guys beat up with all kinds of things: pipes, bats, chains. This isn’t like that. The M.E. will say if there are any weapon marks, but it’s possible someone did this with his bare hands.”

Janet felt a cold chill in her gut; such sadistic cruelty was unimaginable to her. A sudden desire for a change of scenery took her into the living room, which was like walking a minefield. Each step had to be carefully taken to avoid the litter of papers, magazines, books, sofa cushions, and knick-knacks that had been strewn on the carpet. The place looked like a tornado had hit it. Standing by a padded armchair, she surveyed the mess. Her nose scrunched thoughtfully.

“What does this tell you, Dan?”

Kowalski didn’t miss a beat. “This was no smash and grab. Beckman’s wallet is on the table by the front door. Full of credit cards. Eighty bucks cash.”

Janet’s caramel-colored eyes flicked toward the slender walnut desk then sized up the entertainment center nearby. “The flat screen TV is untouched. Neither are any of the other electronics. And that’s got to be a jade figurine, worth a few hundred, if not more.” The object of her attention rested on the entertainment center, a twelve-inch tall statuette of a medieval Mongol warrior astride his war pony.

“The killer wanted something specific, something whose hiding place he had to beat out of Beckman.”

Kowalski grunted affirmative.

“Makes you wonder,” Janet continued, “if the killer found what he was looking for, or did Beckman die keeping that secret?”

“The rest of the house looks the same. Closets emptied. Every drawer ripped out, contents dumped. Valuable items left untouched. A back window was broken. That’s how the killer got in.”

Janet glanced at her watch, a gesture somewhat uncommon in the smartphone era as many women no longer wore wristwatches except as a fashion accessory. Not her. She liked the convenience of a handy chronometer. “It’s 9:40, so rough time of death may be three hours ago, going by that cinnamon toast and the condition of the body.”

“Unless he wanted toast for a bedtime snack,” Kowalski suggested. “I’ve done that.”

“Me too. In any case, the autopsy’ll give us the actual TOD. Too bad there wasn’t a witness,” she joked.

“Funny you should say that.”

She gave him a side-eye. It was the way he said it.

Smiling cryptically, Kowalski motioned for her to follow. He led her to a small sun porch on the other side of the kitchen. His mitt of a hand indicated the house beyond Beckman’s backyard on the other side of the block. Janet’s eyes were assaulted by a terra-cotta-colored stucco bungalow with deep purple shutters and yellow trim where a woman in her senior years watered her garden. Her outfit was a fruity fiesta of color: a neon yellow blouse, flamingo pink capri pants, green canvas deck shoes, and a violet headband. No doubt the homeowner. A scruffy little dog sniffed at the flower bed by her feet.

“The neighbor lady,” Janet said. “She’s your witness.”

“Um, no.”

Janet swung toward Officer Kowalski, her face a question. “I don’t understand.”

He cleared his throat. “Not her, the dog.”

Janet’s eyebrows arched.

“That’s Mrs. Stademeyer,” he said. “Barnaby is the dog. She lets him out at 5:30 every morning to do his business. He’s very protective of his yard. Always barks at strangers. Normally that early in the morning, no one’s around.”

“Except today.”

Kowalski nodded. “Except today.”

She eyeballed the connecting lawns. “The killer went through her yard. That could be useful down the road. Should help us with the time of death.”

They left the sunroom and returned to the kitchen where Kowalski’s portable radio squawked, followed by a female voice. He pressed the button on his shoulder mic and acknowledged. “That’s all I got,” he said to Janet afterward. “DeMarco’s outside.”

“One second.” Janet held out her Nitrile-gloved hand. The CSI techs could wait in the crime scene van a little longer. A thought had flashed through Janet’s mind, and she jammed shut her eyes, trying to recapture the image. This was her first homicide, and she wanted to make a good impression. She broke off from Kowalski, strode to the middle of the kitchen, and knelt on the checkerboard tiles to study the purplish-blue stains on Beckman’s arms.

“What is it?” Kowalski asked.

“I just thought of something. May be nothing. This bruising is likely postmortem, caused by the beating Beckman took. Check out his forearms.”

Kowalski leaned in, squinting. “What am I looking for?”

“Under the fresh bruises are faint yellow patches. Old bruises. Right? You can see them in the gaps.”

The big man squatted down for a better look. His duty belt creaked from the effort, as did his knees. “Yup, definitely old bruises. Quite a few of them.”

“A week old, I’d say. And only on the outside edge of both forearms, along the radius bone.”

“You an expert on contusions, Detective?”

“No, but I’ve seen bruising like that before.”

And she knew just the man to help her decipher them.

CHAPTER 3

The attacks were relentless. Punches, pulls, jabs, elbows, knife hands, wrists, forearms, kicks. They flew at Henry one after the other. Each one he flicked aside or neutralized with a single hand without altering the calm, almost meditative expression on his face. *Pak sau* (slapping hand) flipped to *tan sau* (deflecting arm) into *wu sau* (praying hand) or *bong sau* (wing arm) with a slight pivot of his body, each movement utilizing different surfaces of the same arm.

As the attacks intensified, he recruited both arms, one to intercept the strike and the other to simultaneously counter-attack. Then came a flurry of multiple attacks that required more subtle, quicker countermoves, the last of which slipped by Henry's defense. Henry pivoted just in time with a covering elbow to deflect the sizzling *fak sau* (chopping hand) flying toward his windpipe.

"Nice save!" Alan Zhu said with admiration. It was a natural break in the action. The friends stepped apart, catching their breaths. "For a second, I thought I had you."

"So did I!" Henry laughed. A mistake, a rare one, had left an opening that took someone with Alan's advanced skill to exploit. While not a real fight, the intense sparring honed skills developed over several decades.

Alan, shorter, skinnier, and rounder in the shoulders than Henry, didn't seem bothered at being bested. One of the things Henry liked most about his best friend was his appreciation of other people's skills. Alan was so positive and encouraging; he just radiated good vibes. He now grinned unabashedly at his old friend. "Man, you're on fire today! You really made me work."

"You were pretty good yourself."

“Not quite quick enough. How many times did you get me? Twenty?”

“I wasn’t counting.”

“How many times did I get you?”

“Five.”

Alan’s agreeable round face beamed with triumph. “Five’s good! But you had twenty.”

Alan’s top kung fu students, many of whom had trained with him for years, couldn’t stop even one of his attacks, let alone land a blow on him.

“You’re getting better,” Henry said with an appreciative nod. “Your movements are tighter than ever.”

“Thanks. But I’ll never catch up to you!” Alan lamented behind an amiable grin. They both knew Alan was being generous, that part of the reason he’d done so well owed as much to Henry’s current physical challenges as to any improvement in Alan’s skill. Lower back tightness and knee joint flare-ups still dogged Henry from time to time.

Among other ailments.

But he was making progress on those and believed they’d soon be a thing of the past.

Taking a break, the two friends rested by the room’s bank of windows that overlooked the rooftops of west Minneapolis and the trendy Uptown neighborhood. It was then Alan noticed something, indicating the pine bench across the room near the weathered wooden door.

“We have a visitor,” he said.

Smiling at them was a lovely young woman with sleek dark hair and soft, intelligent eyes. Her looks were simple and unfussy and more appealing because they seemed natural and not overdone. It was

a face that drew you in by its warmth and honesty, a face you felt you could trust, a face with vague similarities to Henry's.

Janet Lau had been quietly watching Henry and Alan for the past ten minutes, not wanting to disturb the class. Not that difficult to do, considering the size of the single room. Alan's *kwoon* was compact. *Kwoon* not *dojo*. *Dojos* were Japanese. This school taught Chinese kung fu. The training space was just under a thousand square feet, little more than a hole in the wall on the sixth floor of an old office building converted into art space and hobby center. You couldn't get any more bare-bones than this. A large row of mirrors dominated the front wall. Nine students stood in the middle of the floor, some working on two-person drills, others working independently. She was thrilled she'd arrive there in time to see her uncle and Alan working out together. After a friendly wave to her, they resumed their sparring. Witnessing two high-level practitioners applying their skills fascinated her. Wing Chun kung fu was famous for its aggressive, close-range fighting style. Janet had never seen a fighting art with such dazzling and efficient arm and hand work. Henry moved with the fluidity of a dancer as he flowed from one position to the next. Poetry in motion, as the saying goes, albeit poets trying to wreak havoc on each other.

The students wore simple workout clothes: T-shirts, shorts or sweatpants, athletic shoes. A few students glanced sideward to get a view of the two elders "going at it."

While the curriculum at Alan's *kwoon* was traditional, the school itself was not. In your typical martial arts school, the head man, the "master," is the top-skilled martial artist, the one with the highest ranking. Here that honor belonged to Henry Lau. He'd always been the more skilled fighter than Alan but had never wanted to run his

own school. Besides, as Henry was quick to explain, “Alan’s a better teacher than me. He’s much more patient.”

But there was no misunderstanding. This was Alan’s *kwoon*. Henry was a sort of professor emeritus, a respected elder who always deferred to Alan when he visited class. These were Alan’s students, and Henry made sure everyone understood that and treated their *sifu* (teacher) with the respect he deserved. Janet admired her uncle for that. He was never showy, didn’t need to prove himself, didn’t want his best friend to feel second rate—not that Alan was. She was so grateful for that friendship. Twenty years ago, when the worst tragedy of Henry’s life knocked him down, it was Alan who’d picked him up and got him through the worst of it. And six months ago, Alan was there when Henry needed him again.

Janet would never forget the phone call.

It had come on a rain-soaked evening in April. Janet was off duty, staring into her fridge, trying to decide what to make for supper. Even the way her smartphone rang had seemed ominous. Her mother wasted no time.

“Janet, thank God you answered!”

“Mom? What’s wrong?”

“Get to North Memorial Hospital. Your Uncle Henry was hit by a car.”

Janet’s stomach twisted. “Is it bad?”

“Yes,” Abby Lau rasped. “Very bad, honey. He may not make it. He’s in a coma.”

“What? No!”

“It was a hit and run. They say the car jumped the curb and went right for him. Knocked him in the air ten feet.”

“Did they get the guy?”

“No. We can talk later. Get to the hospital. We’re on our way.”

“Wait! Don’t hang up. How’s dad doing?”

“He’s pretty shaken up. The doctors aren’t sure Henry will last the night.”

Waiting at the hospital was agony. Janet never forgot the look on her father’s face. For twenty-seven years, her only image of Douglas Lau had been of a caring and confident man whose hugs comforted her when she crashed her tricycle, the man who’d always encouraged her, the man who always knew what to do. Except now. Like them, he was powerless except to wait in anguish over the thought of losing his little brother.

For days Henry was touch and go. In time his vital signs strengthened. Not long afterward, his eyes fluttered open to view his family gathered round his bed staring down at him with grave expressions. His scratched and swollen face managed a quirk of a smile, one that gave them hope. The prognosis wasn’t good. Eight broken bones, three in his right leg, including a compound fracture, a cracked pelvis, skull fracture, a punctured lung. Henry, in his surgeon’s estimation, would never walk again without the aid of a cane or walker.

Now look at him!

Six months on he was not only back on his feet without leg braces or crutches, he was whupping Alan’s skinny little butt with masterful kung fu moves. His recovery had amazed his doctors. She was glad he’d put back on the weight he’d lost during his recovery and had regained his stamina, most of it. She was also happy his hair had grown back after the surgeon had shaved it off to insert the metal plate in his skull. He’d always worn his hair long, contrary to the military cut of most cops. It suited him. His thick black shag was now etched with a few new strands of silver.

God, he looked healthy! She knew he wasn’t a hundred percent recovered, still suffered a few aches and pains, but for as far as she was concerned, Henry Lau was back!

A heavy grunt from the other side of the room stole her attention. A muscular young man twenty feet away struggled with the first form. He looked barely in his twenties. Swedish American, going by the flag on his T-shirt. Well-developed shoulders and pecs filled out that shirt. Impressive biceps too. Muscle Boy could scarcely hold the *Yee Gee Kim Yeung Ma*, the Wing Chun basic training stance. Low stance with knees almost touching, butt tucked under, back straight. All the while relaxing—or attempting to—in this impossible configuration for twelve minutes. Janet was sympathetic. A new student, she could tell. You could always tell from the agony in their faces and the tremble in their legs.

“Sink lower,” Henry said, by now at the struggling student’s side, having finished the special workout with Alan, who was adjusting the body alignment of another student.

The young student clenched his jaw. “It’s hard.”

“Yes, it is hard. Try to relax. Your neck muscles are tight. Keep your butt tucked under. Watch out. Now your knees are too wide. Don’t lean forward. Oh, your butt’s sticking out again.”

Muscle Boy grimaced while his legs trembled for ten more seconds before he gave up. “This is bogus!” He stood up in defeat, shaking out his legs.

“You’ll get there. It takes months of daily practice to get comfortable,” Henry explained in a nonthreatening manner. “It takes time to build up knee muscles you don’t normally use. We have a saying: ‘You have to first taste the bitterness of the fruit before you can enjoy its sweetness.’”

The college kid blew him off. “That’s martial arts bullshit. I’m a collegiate wrestler. I’ve done golden gloves boxing, some karate, and Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. I think I know a little about what it takes to be a fighter. This is a waste of time. I’m not going to learn kung fu by standing.”

Janet's eyes went wide. She mouthed a silent "Uh-oh" to herself. She noticed a few students stopped their practice to look at the beginner. Sure, his wrestler's physique was impressive. His attitude, however, revealed a lack of maturity and ignorance. Young and dumb. Full of himself. He showed appalling disrespect to the *kwoon*, if not to Henry. Janet held her breath, wondering what would happen next. She would not be disappointed.

A stone-faced Henry eyed the young man. "What's your name?"

"Rick."

"How long have you been training here, Rick?"

"Three weeks."

"You think beginner's training is a waste of time?"

"Sure do. It's just busywork to weed out people and to collect fees."

Henry shook his head. "People weed themselves out. At this point, you need to develop your foundation skills. Everything else depends on those. A tree is only as strong as its roots."

Rick wasn't impressed. "I already have a solid base from my other martial arts. I didn't come here to learn how to stand. I came here to learn Wing Chun."

Henry drew in a deep calming breath. After an appraising look at the moody man-child, he bent his middle-aged knees and elevated his arms to the ready stance. "Hit me," he said. Not an invitation; it was a command. He was all business. His expression focused. Alert.

Ready.

"Sorry?"

"Hit me."

"You want me to hit you?"

"You think you know all about fighting. Show me what you've got. Hit me."

"I don't want to hit you."

“Either you hit me, or in five seconds, I hit you.”

The young man sized up Henry. Saw his resolve and raised his fists. He shifted his weight and launched a probing jab.

Henry didn't react. Not even a blink. But his eyes analyzed. Janet knew that look. Long ago, Alan had told her that when Henry first started, he had spent hundreds of hours watching and re-watching old boxing and other fight videos. Any fight video he could get. Any style. He studied how fighters moved. Looked for “tells.” Like some poker players have a tell when they had a great hand and are trying to hide it. Henry analyzed the biomechanics of movement, watched how some fighters would make a tiny preparatory motion or tense up before a strike or kick or grabbling move. The action might be subtle—the eyes or head, the shoulder, a foot or weight shift—but it was often there. Over time, augmented by his own natural perception, he had developed skill in reading those movements.

A calm, loose, alert Henry waited like a panther ready to pounce. The muscular young student changed to a ready stance, shifted back and forth. Arms in guard position. A quick shoulder fake was followed by a blistering jab—

To a target no longer there.

Henry flew at the other, deflecting the left jab, neutralizing the right cross that followed before it got halfway to him. With impressive agility, the young man lurched to the side and circled his right cross fist into an uppercut that would have clipped Henry's jaw had he not been ready for it, shooting out his left forearm into a *jum sau* that jammed Rick's punching arm. But Rick realized he had another hand, closing the fingers into a fist. However, to load it, he had to shift his weight.

The punch was shut down before it was launched.

The instant Henry sensed the release of pressure against his *jum sau* forearm—angled conveniently toward Rick's face with fingers

only inches away—he fully extended the arm. The suppressed palm thrust into the other’s throat forced back Rick’s head. His body teetered backward. Any power he’d applied to his left hook dissipated like smoke in the wind. In the blink of an eye, Henry circled his palm strike hand to the back of the other’s neck and pulled his head into a savage punch to the nose—or would have if Henry had not stopped his fist two inches from Rick’s astonished face.

Janet cracked a smile. She knew from long conversations with Henry how fine-tuned his reactions were after decades of training. Even she could read his actions here.

Rick was beaten and knew it. She could see in his face. Henry pantomimed striking him in the nose before he let go and stepped away. “You’re bigger and stronger than me,” he said. “You’re half my age, yet I had total control of your body.” He leaned in for emphasis. “You have no root. It only takes a few pounds of force to move a person. Wing Chun isn’t about techniques, isn’t about hitting or kicking, although they have their place. Wing Chun is about energy. First you learn how to find your center and how to redirect energy inside yourself, then you learn how to feel that energy in your opponent and put him at a disadvantage with a simple touch. How is that done? From spending thousands of hours in that stance you think is a waste of time. Without that, the punching and kicking are just waving your arms and legs. Some students never get that part. They only see the external.”

The young student swallowed hard and gave a nod of understanding. Chastened, he resumed his horse stance. In a low voice intended only for him but which Janet overheard due to her proximity, Henry added, “You don’t know what you don’t know. If you don’t like what we teach, you can leave. No one is stopping you. No one has to teach you, either.” Henry paused to let the point sink in. “It

doesn't matter what you've learned elsewhere; if you want to get this, you need to open your mind."

Rick nodded.

Henry said, "You were disrespectful. If you'd spoken like that to Alan, he would have shoved you into the wall. And make no mistake. He can do it."

Janet suppressed a smirk. No way would Alan have done that. Henry maybe, but never Alan, who was about the mellowest guy she'd ever known. Henry was messing with Rick, and it appeared to have had the desired effect. The know-it-all beginner glanced at Alan with new respect.

Minutes later, Alan stepped in front of the class and clapped his hands to get their attention. "Time to wrap it up. Let's do our closing exercises."

At the end of class, students gathered their belongings. Janet moved out of their way, relocating to the wall where the *mook yan jong*, the wooden dummy, was mounted. To the uninitiated, it was a bizarre-looking contraption made up of a vertical log of wood supported by two springy slats of rosewood set in a frame. Within this core were mounted three short conical arms and a bent leg of wood. The *jong* was the most famous and most copied training device in Wing Chun. On the wall above the wooden man was a line of black and white framed photographs. Two were of old masters from the mid-twentieth century, Leung Sheung and his teacher, the legendary Yip Man. A third portrait showed Eric Kwan with Leung Sheung in the late 1960s. The final black and white photo showed a very young Henry Lau and Alan Zhu grinning to the camera as they posed with the *jong*.

They looked so young! Younger than she was now.

She gazed upon the photo with contentment, relishing her uncle's youthful face bursting with enthusiasm. You couldn't help liking that face.

Movement caught her eye. Henry was walking over. The same youthful face greeted her, though one tempered by hardship and experience. The photo made her realize that she'd never seen her uncle looking as jubilant or carefree as he was in that old picture. She felt a touch of sadness that life had left such an indelible stamp on him. Perhaps time hammered on everyone this way. What did she know? She wasn't even thirty.

As Henry drew near, she banished dreary thoughts and put on a cheery face. "How'd it go at the doctor? Did he give you a clean bill of health?"

"Blood work is normal. Knee and back are holding up, though my doctor thinks I'll probably need a knee replacement in a few years." Henry shrugged it off, eyeing her with curiosity. "What brings you here on a work day? Not my health."

Janet patted him on the cheek. "You need to check for messages. I called your cell hours ago. Left a message."

"The phone's in the car."

"I figured. That's why I came. Good thing I remembered there was a class this morning."

She got him quickly up to speed on the death of Roger Beckman. "Take a look at this." On her iPhone she showed photos of Beckman's bruised forearms. "What does remind you of?"

"Beginner *lap sau*."

Her thin lips curled with vindication. Around the third month of training in Alan's school, a student began the *lap sau* drill, a coordinated two-person exercise in which each partner sent out a punch that was intercepted and deflected by his partner's *bong sau* arm. Back and forth dozens if not hundreds of times. The punches

were relaxed but forceful. Bruising was common in the early days until the skin toughened, at which time the bruising ceased. The exercise was also called “bone-building” in that it built up the ulna bone in the forearm, which was why Henry and Alan’s forearms hit you with the impact of two by fours.

Janet seized on Henry’s words. “Maybe our murder victim had recently started studying Wing Chun.”

“Or another southern Chinese system that teaches bone building. Some of these are odd.” Henry indicated a couple of strange patterns from a close-up of the chest and thigh, partial rectangular bruises in a three-bar pattern. “Is that from a weapon?”

“No idea. Whatever it’s from, the pattern’s minor compared to the rest of him.”

By now Alan had joined them. He’d caught the tail end of Janet’s narrative and was peering over her shoulder at the photos. “What’s his name?”

“Roger Beckman. He’s a professor of Asian Studies at St. Luke’s University.”

Alan shook his head. “Not one of my guys.”

Janet searched her uncle’s face. “You know most of the martial arts schools in the area, especially those that teach some form of Wing Chun or variations like Jeet Kune Do.”

“There aren’t many. And these days, some people are cherry-picking techniques, not wanting to learn the art, just pieces of it.”

“Still a good lead,” she said, hoping for his approval.

“It is,” Henry agreed. “Hey, I’ve met this guy.” He’d been thumbing through the other photos and was now looking at a close up of Beckman’s battered face. “I think it’s the same guy. A little hard to tell. The guy I’m thinking of wore glasses.”

Janet was taken aback. “So did Beckman. They were knocked off his face. Wait. You’ve met him? When?”

“Last evening. I never got his name, but this looks like him. He drove off in a blue hatchback.” He told her of his encounter in the alley a block away from where they were now standing. Then he lifted his left forearm to show a three-inch bandage. “I even have a souvenir. The guy with the razor knife nicked me.”

Her mouth fell open. “You saw Beckman on the street a block away? And geez! You got cut? Did you need stitches?”

“No. Wasn’t deep enough. Just grazed the skin.”

“You’re okay. That’s what matters. When was this?”

“Right after class. Around ten after nine.”

“And nine hours later, Beckman’s murdered.” Janet’s face lit up. “Maybe the same guys caught up with Beckman later at his house. Do you remember what these muggers looked like?”

“A general idea. It was dark, and I was a little busy trying not to get killed. I might be able to come up with a description.

“Cool. We’ll see what that turns up. By the way,” Janet shot him a disapproving look, “thank you for not getting killed. I’d be really pissed off at you if you had.”

“Give me a few minutes to change, and I can join you.”

“Aren’t you taking a PTO day?”

“Half day for my medical follow-up.”

“Well, then I guess you can come with me to St. Paul. Ever been to St. Luke’s University?”

CHAPTER 4

The faculty offices for the history and social science departments were tucked away in the basement of the Carl G. Noman Building, a remote outpost on the small campus of St. Luke's University. The joke on campus was that the more esoteric the subject, the farther away your office was from the Administration Building. The Noman building—aka Noman's Land—was the farthest structure from the main office. The windowless basement corridor and Linoleum floor tiles suggested an old library annex, a place where musty and forgotten books went to die.

The detectives found the door with Roger Beckman's name on it. A stream of young people flowed around them on their way to their next classes. Seconds later, the students were gone, leaving the corridor eerily quiet. Henry removed the key he'd borrowed from the secretary at the front office, inserted it in the Yale lock. It turned. He could never explain why something as mundane as turning a key in a lock made the world feel right. But it did. In a world going virtual, the simple tactile feedback of a mechanical lock moving tumblers and the sensation of a metallic bolt sliding back seemed disproportionately satisfying.

Beckman's office was small. Room for a desk, two chairs, a bookcase, and a tiny work table, and not much else. Tidy and well kept, stark as a zen garden. Few frills save for a poster of a lush green bamboo forest and a framed color photograph of a much younger Roger Beckman standing in triumph on top of the Great Wall of China. The desk was clean. An empty computer docking station, a slim LCD monitor, keyboard, and mouse. No loose papers. Papers would have disturbed the sparse aesthetics of the room.

Henry looked to Janet. “Was there a computer laptop at Beckman’s house?”

“No, nothing. Not even a cell phone. The killer may have taken them. Hard to know.”

“We should check with the university IT department to see if we can access Beckman’s e-mail. Might be something there.” Henry surveyed the tidy state of the office. A wire basket of papers rested on the file cabinet; a weekly planner sat on the desk. He pulled back the cover. “Beckman’s calendar is fairly open this week. Meetings with faculty and students, an entry for an appointment this Friday with L.H. Interesting.”

“Oh?”

“For everyone else, he writes in a first name, last name, or both. L.H. is the only one with initials.”

“Someone he was familiar with.”

“Right. And get this, he had an appointment with L.H. yesterday.” She looked over. “The day he was killed. Coincidence?”

“Maybe.”

“There’s another reason why Beckman might’ve used initials for L.H.: secrecy.”

“That, too.” Henry was taken by a doodle in the margin. “Check this out.”

Janet moved beside him. “S...A...C...H. SACH. Is that a word? All caps. An abbreviation?” Her eyes lifted to meet his.

“Made two weeks ago, going by this notation. See how he circled the word three times? And two exclamation marks after it with a line going to a day when he had a meeting with L.H.”

“Is SACH is an acronym for something? I’ve no idea what for.”

“Me neither.”

Henry scanned the office one last time in hopes of finding any reference, any crumb that might be helpful. The place was too

orderly, as perfectly organized as a *Better Homes and Garden* photo layout. Which is why Henry didn't like neatniks. He preferred slobs. Slobs left things lying around, often for months, sometimes years, Easter eggs waiting to be found. There was nothing here.

Outside the office a minute later, Henry locked the office door and—because he'd once gotten in trouble as a boy for not checking the door and the dog got out—pulled the knob twice to make sure it was indeed locked.

“Did Roger finally get in?”

The inquisitive voice came from down the hall. It belonged to a middle-aged woman with untamable frizzy hair and mirthful eyes. She wore a tea-colored blouse, dark brown slacks, and black comfortable-looking sneakers. Her left arm clutched a canvas messenger bag to her chest as though it contained priceless objects. Walking beside her was a man with rugged Hispanic good looks. Wary brown eyes regarded them from behind rimless glasses. He wore a black T-shirt beneath a sports jacket with rolled-up sleeves. Contrived cool, Henry thought, and a little too 1980s.

Henry gave Janet a look, a nod to take the lead. She was in training, and he took his responsibility seriously. And though leading by example was important, so was letting her try things on her own.

“Actually, we're the police,” Janet explained, displaying her badge wallet. “Perhaps you can help us. Do either of you work with Dr. Beckman?”

Polite, professional, authoritative. Henry smiled inwardly. Detective Janet Lau was a far cry from the fumbling, awkward little girl he once had to coax into speaking in front of strangers to sell her Girl Scout cookies.

The woman with unruly hair gestured to the office next to Beckman's. “We're colleagues. This is my office. Paul's is down a

few doors. Did you have an appointment with Roger? I haven't seen him today."

Janet broke the news.

"Murdered? Did you hear that, Paul?"

Considering the excellent acoustics around them, Henry thought it would've been nearly impossible for Paul not to have heard, and yet his face barely registered a ripple of emotion. Total indifference to the death of a colleague? Or wasn't the death news to him?

After the initial shock, the woman collected herself. "Sorry, I'm Maureen Levy. This is Paul Rivera," she said with a heartfelt sigh, her voice almost quavering. "Yes, glad to help. But not out here." Levy motioned to her office door.

In size and layout, Maureen Levy's office was the twin sister of Beckman's. But there the similarities ended. While his was a mantra to Asian austerity, hers was a belch to ordered clutter. Leaning towers of magazines and papers. If it was loose and could be stacked on something, it was. Books, folders, three-ringed binders, paper plates stood in precarious-looking columns.

Janet took the chair opposite Levy; the men stood by the closed door.

Levy sighed. "I can't believe Roger's dead. And murdered, you say?"

"Beaten to death," Henry elaborated.

She visibly winced at the news. On the other hand, Rivera remained unmoved. Henry found that odd. He'd intentionally mentioned the beating for its brutality to see how they'd react. Rivera hadn't. Henry felt compelled to comment. "Mister Rivera—"

"Doctor."

"Dr. Rivera, pardon me for saying this, but you don't seem disturbed by any of this."

A puzzled Rivera looked back. "What do you mean?"

“You just learned someone you know was brutally murdered, yet you’re remarkably unfazed.”

“Oh, it’s not that. What you said was horrible. I was thinking about Mary Jo, Roger’s ex-wife. This’ll be a shock to her. Has she been told?”

“Not yet,” Janet said.

“This’ll hit her hard.”

“I’m sure it will.”

“Well, not quite as bad as you think. Mary Jo and Roger have been divorced for two years. The divorce was amicable.”

“They kept in touch?”

“Somewhat.”

Henry cleared his throat. “Nice of you to think about her.” Though he wondered why concern about the ex-Mrs. Beckman was forefront on Rivera’s radar. First impressions made Rivera seem like a bit of a cold fish. A little too detached. Or was he being protective? Henry changed the subject. “How often did you and Dr. Beckman talk?”

Rivera made a dismissive gesture. “Not often. We had different schedules. We didn’t have much in common. My area is Central and South American native cultures. Sure, we’d bump into each other, talk for a minute in passing. Not much beyond that.”

Henry looked to Levy. “And your subject?”

“Ancient Middle Eastern History,” she answered. “Unlike Paul, I spoke with Roger at least once a week. Our fields overlap around Central Asia. We also shared an interest in art.” Her wide mouth stretched into a polite smile.

Janet stirred. “Any idea—either of you—who might’ve wanted to hurt Dr. Beckman?”

Blank looks came back from both.

“Did he mention upcoming plans? A trip? A new project?”

Maureen Levy made a vague gesture. “Roger taught several classes on Asian culture and history; he was also an authority on Chinese art. Did freelance appraisal work. Last month I saw him in the parking lot; he was really excited about a new consulting gig.”

“Excited?”

“Jazzed.”

“Did he say what the gig was for?”

“No. In fact, he cut himself off. Realized he was blabbing too much. This was a confidential client, and he wasn’t supposed to say anything.”

“Confidential client,” Henry repeated, liking the sound of it. “I suppose he didn’t mention who this client was.”

“No.”

It was worth a shot. Henry shrugged to Janet, who lobbed the next question carefully. “Do the initials L.H. mean anything to you?”

“No idea.”

“How about S.A.C.H.?”

Levy shook her head.

Janet shifted her weight. “This consulting gig. Any idea what it was for? A painting? A ceramic?”

Levy’s hands rose behind her head and grabbed handfuls of hair as if tugging hard enough would pluck free the memory. “Oooh, man, it’s on the tip of my tongue. I want to say it was a statue or figure. Remember, Paul? Roger told us about it when he first got the gig, before the parking lot episode. The three of us were in the hall, one of the few times all of us were in our offices at the same time.”

“Oh, right.”

“Roger mentioned some art piece.”

“A figure, a bronze figure,” Rivera said, recalling. “A dragon, I think. Roger didn’t think much of it at first.” Well-manicured fingers

came up to adjust the rimless eyeglasses. If eyebrows could shrug, Rivera's did.

Janet looked back with interest. "A bronze dragon figure. Thanks. That's helpful. Anything else?"

Rivera shook his head. "Sorry. Although, like Maureen, I do remember seeing Roger some weeks later, and he seemed pretty stoked about something."

"How stoked?"

"Like a kid in a candy store. Now that I think about it, it might've been the same day Maureen saw Roger."

"And you think his excitement was about this dragon figure?"

"Yeah. I asked him directly how the appraisal was going. After a burst of enthusiasm, he clammed up like he was saying too much. The way he was talking, it sounded like he might be onto something big."

"Big?"

"That was the word."

Janet turned to Maureen Levy. "And this was around the time you said Beckman was jazzed about the artifact?"

"Seems like it."

"I think that's all for now." Janet glanced at Henry for confirmation. He had nothing else. Handing her business cards to each of the academics, Janet said, "If you think of anything, please call."

Just as Rivera tucked the card into his jacket pocket, his cell phone chirped. "I should take this." He excused himself and exited. The sound of his retreating hard-soled shoes echoed off the empty corridor.

"Was there something else, Dr. Levy?" Henry had noticed her suggestive face trying to catch his eye.

The professor shifted uncomfortably in her chair. She seemed to wait until she was certain Rivera was too far away to catch what she

was about to say. “I’m not sure I should be telling you this. It probably has nothing to do with Roger’s death, but...well, Paul’s been seeing Roger’s ex, Mary Jo.”

“Seeing as in dating?”

“Yeah.”

“For how long?”

“Eight months, give or take. I’ll bet that was Mary Jo on the phone.”

“She calls him often?”

“All the time.”

“That doesn’t sound like a casual relationship.”

“They’re way beyond casual, let me tell you. They’ve got the serious hots for each other.”

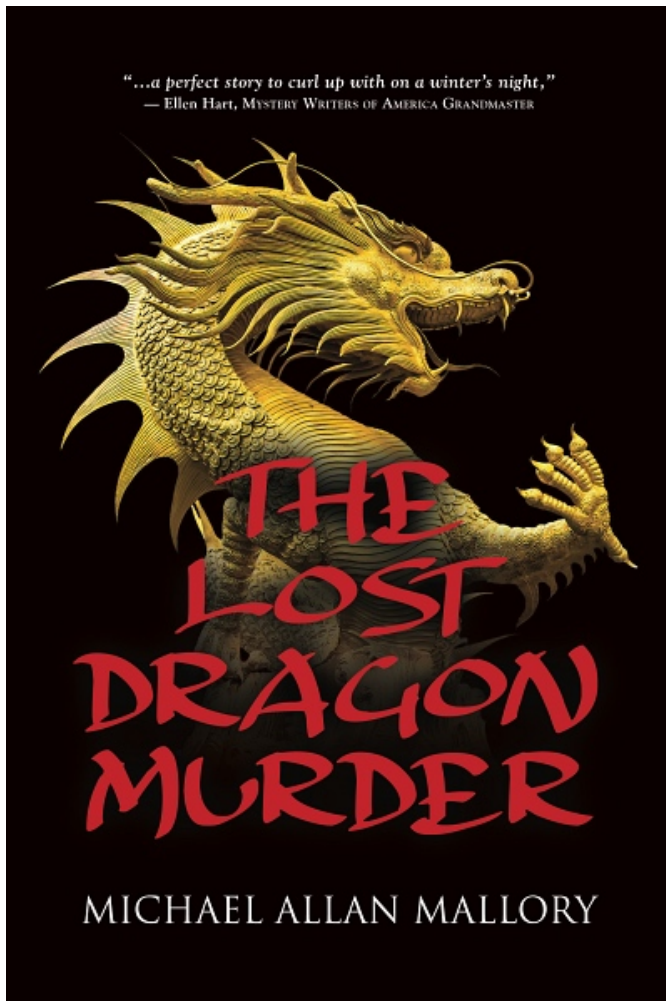
Janet lowered her voice so it wouldn’t carry. “Did Rivera cause the Beckmans marriage breakup?”

Levy gave an emphatic shake of her head. “No. I’d never say that. Paul and Mary Jo didn’t start going out until a year after she divorced Roger.”

“As far as you know,” Henry suggested.

“True,” she admitted, “though what I can tell you is that in the past four months, Paul’s been seeing a lot of Mary Jo Beckman.”

Henry shot Janet a private look. He could see she also found the news about Dr. Rivera’s love life interesting.



*What is the Bronze Dragon?
And why does someone covet it
so much he's already killed for
it? Those are the questions
Detective Henry Lau must
answer to solve the mystery. A
cryptic clue left by the dead
man may be his last hope.*

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