

*It's murder in the worst degree when an executive at a knife factory is killed with its newest product. Could the reason be "private project" that threatened to expose a dirty secret? Is the dead man's hand on a world atlas a dying clue?*

## **Tiger Claw**

By Michael Allan Mallory

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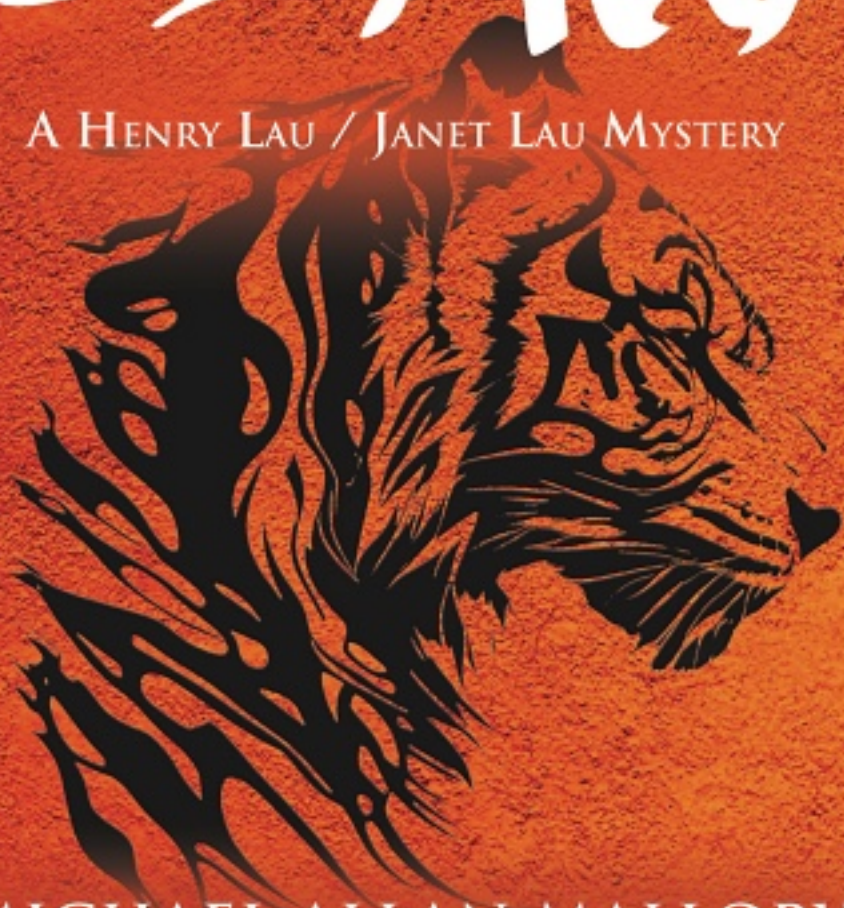
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*"A joy of a read. Loved Henry and loved his relationship with his niece."*  
— William Kent Krueger, *New York Times* BEST SELLING AUTHOR

# TIGER CLAW

A HENRY LAU / JANET LAU MYSTERY



MICHAEL ALLAN MALLORY

## **Praise for *Tiger Claw***

“With great affection and an aplomb reminiscent of the glory days of detective fiction, Michael Allan Mallory has penned a mystery that’s a joy to read. Police detective Henry Lau is a man with a heavy stone on his heart, but lightning in his body thanks to a deep knowledge of the martial arts. Carefully navigating between clues and red herrings, with beautiful pools of ancient wisdom to refresh him, Lau is as captivating a protagonist as you’ll find anywhere in the genre. His police partner, niece Janet Lau, adds her own deft touches to the action. The result is a winning duo involved in a fast-paced double-murder investigation that’s sure to please even the most demanding of mystery fans.”

--William Kent Krueger, *New York Times* Best Selling Author, Edgar and Anthony Award Winner.

“Michael Allan Mallory deftly weaves murder, Asian history brought to life, and what honor truly means into an unputdownable mystery that kept me turning the pages deep into the night. Mallory tosses in some fascinating Wing Chun kung fu, awesome and sometimes hilarious turns of phrase, the strength of family, and some sticky affairs of the heart into a book I can't recommend more! This is an incredible follow-up to the award-winning first installment in the Henry Lau mystery series *Lost Dragon Murder*. I can't wait to devour the next one!”

--Jessie Chandler, author of the Shay O'Hanlon Caper series

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## CHAPTER 1

The dumbest thing you could do in front of Henry Lau was to pick on someone unable to fight back. The next dumbest thing was to do it with a sense of entitlement.

The arrogant loudmouth four tables away was doing both.

Until that moment, Henry had been enjoying a late afternoon latte at his favorite neighborhood coffee shop. Minutes earlier, two men had noisily entered Windjammer Coffee House, ordered hot drinks, then took them to the little table. A guiding principle of Henry's was to be careful about judging people on first impressions, though some folks made it too easy. The older man, clearly the one in charge, was like a faulty cast iron radiator, giving off nothing but heat and noise. Fiftyish, condescending eyes, a sharp nose, and a brutish cleft of a mouth, he wore a tan sports jacket over a black polo shirt and faded jeans. Taking up most of the other side of the small table was a large, brawny, much younger man who listened to the other talk but contributed little to nothing to the conversation as if in deference to him. During their exchange, Henry heard the younger man call the other "Mr. D."

And then it happened.

Mr. D removed a cigar from his jacket, shoved it into his mouth, flipped open a lighter, and began puffing out streams of acrid blue-gray smoke. Not much later, one of the baristas, sweet-faced and barely on the cusp of adulthood, hovered apprehensively by his table.

"I'm sorry, sir, smoking isn't allowed," she said in a voice as fragile as butterfly wings.

She might as well have been talking to the table for the response she got. Ignoring her, Mr. D inhaled a lungful of stogie smoke and expelled a pungent cloud of blue-gray contempt.

"*Sir?*" she prompted, shifting uncomfortably.

The obstinate patron turned to her and spoke through the cigar. “Go away, little girl.”

She swallowed, wavered for a second before slinking away, her lower lip quivering.

The rude son of a bitch threw a self-satisfied smirk to his associate and took another puff on his tobacco roll.

Henry stared at him. He hated bullies. They spat on the rules of common decency. Henry made a barely audible low growl, being of an age when his tolerance for rude behavior was worn paper thin. He was inclined to give this jerk a piece of his mind. But his inner voice cautioned him to let the situation play out. He waited. Ground his teeth but waited.

Moments later, the coffee house manager, Glenda, arrived on the scene. As a regular customer, Henry knew her, and he could tell she was not happy. Big-boned and stocky, her gray-streaked wavy hair was pulled back into a dense bunch that tried to be a ponytail but was too frizzy to behave. Glenda wiped stubby fingers against a green apron. In a throaty voice that struggled to be polite, she confronted the smoker. “Sir, I’m the manager. Smoking isn’t allowed here. Signs are posted on the walls. My employee asked you to comply. Other customers are complaining. You can smoke outside, just not inside.”

The offender sneered in a voice loud enough to carry to the four walls and beyond, “I don’t give a flying fuck about the other customers. I’m enjoying a smoke. Leave me alone. It’s a free country.”

“Not when it comes to smoking. It’s state law. The Minnesota Clean Indoor Act says you can’t smoke indoors in public buildings except in designated areas. That includes us. We don’t have a smoking area, so I need you to put out your cigar or go outside.”

No reaction.

After a count of six, Glenda heaved an impatient sigh. “Sir...”

Mr. D blew a column of smoke into the air.

Glenda had reached her limit. “You were also rude to my employee. I gave you a chance. I want you to leave. *Now.*”

With a look of total disdain, Mr. D rested his forearms on the small table and looked back spitefully. “I’ll go when I’m good and ready, dearie. Not before.”

*Now he’d done it!*

That was the last straw for Henry. The arrogant shithead had gone too far. Nearby customers, who’d watched the exchange with varying degrees of discomfort, looked appalled but did nothing, afraid to get involved. Henry pushed back his chair and surged to his feet. Seconds later, he stood beside the man with the smoldering tobacco torpedo.

“You heard the manager,” he said in a voice like flint. “It’s time for you and your friend to leave.”

“Who the hell asked you?”

“You’re not moving.”

“Get lost, pal. I’m not done with my cigar.”

With startling quickness, Henry’s fingers plucked the cigar out of the other’s hand and crushed it against the wooden tabletop. “There, you’re finished. Now get out.”

Indignant, beady eyes bore into him. “*Do you know who I am?*”

“Yeah, a self-important asshole who thinks he doesn’t have to obey the law.”

“Nobody talks to me like that!”

“Shut up and show some respect. The manager told you to leave. Now get up. Or do you need help?”

Mr. D swung toward his barrel-chested associate. “Lou.”

Lou lurched to his feet like a trained grizzly bear. He lumbered over to Henry, towering above him by at least seven inches and easily carrying an extra fifty pounds of bone and muscle. He brought up a paw of a hand to grab Henry by the shirt, warning ominously, “You should stay out of things that don’t concern you.”

Glenda's eyebrows shot up in alarm. "Stop! I don't want trouble. Don't hurt him."

"Too late, lady," Lou jeered with relish. "This schmuck needs to learn to mind his own business." He clenched the fabric tighter.

Rather than looking afraid, Henry turned to Glenda. "You're a witness to what he's doing?"

The coffee house manager nodded back slowly with worry-filled eyes.

Having anticipated a move like this, Henry could have intercepted the grab but didn't, not wanting to appear as the aggressor in so public a venue. He was also glad Big Lou hadn't sucker punched him, which would've been tough to deal with. The shirt grab was easy.

Much to Lou's annoyance, Henry didn't flinch or tremble with fear. Instead, in a calm yet menacing voice, Henry instructed, "Let go of my shirt."

Lou mocked, "Or what?"

"Or I'll help you let go."

Iron fingers clenched the fabric tighter.

Henry clamped a hand over Lou's fist to anchor it, swinging his free arm over and against the big man's forearm while twisting his waist. This cranked Lou's arm and entire body, dropping him to his knees. Henry's hand slid to Lou's throat, whose face contorted in silent agony as claw-like fingers dug into his carotid artery.

Big Lou was subdued. Not wasting a second, Henry's eyes flicked to a startled Mr. D, whose hand slipped into his jacket. *For what? A gun?* His heart thumping, Henry—fingers still locked on Lou's throat—shifted his stance to kick the small table into Mr. D's chest, pinning his arms.

"That better be another cigar you're reaching for," Henry warned. "*Don't move.*"

A startled Mr. D froze in place.



Henry looked back at the muscleman. “If you promise to behave, I’ll let go. Do you?”

Watery, pain-filled eyes blinked as the color-drained face bobbed up and down.

Henry released his grip. On his knees, Lou gulped in lungfuls of air as the blood returned to his pallid complexion. Stepping around him, Henry moved the table back a little.

“Show me your hands,” he said to Mr. D. “Slowly.”

A pair of rough, empty, pudgy hands came into view.

A distrustful Henry patted his jacket and pulled out a switchblade. With a press of the button, a nasty-looking blade flipped out. He gave its owner a disapproving look. “This would’ve been a very bad idea.” He closed and pocketed the knife. “Now gimme your wallet.”

“What for?”

“Shut up and do what I tell you. Your wallet. Or do I have to take it from you?” Henry feigned a move toward him.

Mr. D shied back. “Okay! Okay!” He tossed a bifold leather wallet on the table.

Henry snatched it up, removed the New Jersey driver’s license, memorizing the name, city, and state before tossing everything back. “I know who you are now, Frank Del Gatto of Jersey City.” He paused to let the point sink in. “Don’t ever come back here. Don’t threaten anyone here—*ever*. If there’s any trouble, I’ll hold you responsible. You got that?”

Seething yet compliant, Mr. D nodded.

“Good,” Henry grunted. “You’re not so tough without someone to do your dirty work.” Some might consider the last comment overkill; he didn’t care. Reason and courtesy were wasted on men like them. Henry didn’t like sinking to their level, but he knew the only way to reach some people was in a language they understood. With this jerk, it was threats.

From his peripheral vision, he noticed Lou was having trouble getting to his feet, so he went to help. “Give it twenty minutes,” he said to the big man, “and you should feel okay.” A bit green around the gills, Lou offered no resistance as Henry pointed him toward the exit. “You too,” he motioned to Mr. D. “The manager told you to leave. Move it. Or am I gonna have to get you started?”

With malice oozing from every pore, the boss man hoisted himself out of his chair. “Can I get my knife back?”

Henry shoved the switchblade into Lou’s back pocket where he thought it would be safer than in Mr. D’s hands. The men walked toward the exit. The moment the door closed behind them, Henry was there, watching through the window as they went to an oversized SUV. He waited for the car to drive away, every muscle in his body still alert. The threat wasn’t yet over. He wanted to be certain the men didn’t grab guns from the vehicle and come back shooting. He’d seen it happen before. A warning his first kung fu teacher had branded into him was never *to assume your opponent can’t hurt you even when he looks beaten*.

Only after the SUV was out of sight did he feel the threat was over, and his heart stopped thrashing against his chest. He took a moment to catch his breath and settle his nerves. Turning away from the door, he was met by a burst of applause from the coffee house staff and customers. At a table off to the side, an attractive Asian American woman with lustrous, straight black hair gawked at him with incredulity. Her companion, much older, had Cherry Kool-Aid hair, a square jaw, and an animated face that regarded him as if he were some magical apparition. Shrugging past them and others with self-deprecation, he returned to his table.

Just then, a short man with glasses emerged from the restroom, turning his head every which way at the fading ovation as he walked to Henry’s table.

“What’d I miss?” asked a puzzled Alan Zhu.

Henry updated his friend on the encounter with Mr. D and his goon.

“For real?” Alan’s eyes widened behind his black-framed glasses.

“Ask around.”

“I step out for one minute and look what happens.”

Henry laughed. Friendly digs from his lifelong pal were typical. Alan had known him since grade school. A tad shorter, skinnier, and rounder in the shoulders than Henry, Alan was the poster boy for kind-heartedness. He teased with affection. The man didn’t have a mean bone in his body.

“You have all the fun,” he mocked. “If not for the call of nature, I could’ve helped you with those guys.”

True enough. Alan was also a highly skilled kung fu adept who’d been Henry’s training partner since their teens. His go-to guy.

“*Henry!*” a voice called over the whirl of a juice blender. Windjammer’s manager shuffled over, looking overwrought and still finding her equilibrium. “Thanks so much for helping! I was freakin’ out.”

“How’s the young lady?”

“Julie? Pretty shaken. I thanked her for doing her job. I just hope the experience doesn’t sour her on people. For crying out loud, this is her first real job. She’s been here less than two months, and *this* had to happen!” Glenda sighed as if trying herself not to sour on the public.

“Tell her from me she handled the man well.”

“She’ll appreciate that. And as thanks, let me get you and Alan coffees on the house.”

“That’s so nice of you, but I have to decline.”

“No?” Her voice was heavy with disappointment. “Please. You have to let me do something.”

Reluctantly, he said, “Really, I can’t. You know I’m a police detective. I can’t accept gifts.”

“If you insist. But if you change your mind, there’re jumbo lattes waiting with your names on them.” Glenda squeezed his shoulder and smiled at Alan before returning to her duties.

Alan cocked an eyebrow. “Way to go, buddy. I would’ve enjoyed another coffee.”

“Life is tough.”

“Change of subject,” Alan said, turning serious. “Those guys you encouraged to leave. Wouldn’t it have been easier if you’d flashed your badge?”

“Maybe. The thing is, I don’t want to be that cop who abuses his position by threatening people that he’s a cop. I don’t like using my badge to intimidate people.”

“No, you’d rather use your fists.”

Henry laughed uncomfortably. Then said, “Joking aside, I like giving people a chance to realize they’re doing something wrong. Or that there are bad consequences if they do.”

Alan, who’d been fingering his coffee’s cardboard sleeve, stopped to look up. “Does that work? Does some guy drop the brick he’s about to chuck through a window because you tell him it’s wrong?”

“Not often but sometimes.”

“That’s good of you.”

Henry liked to think so but knew every situation was unique. He did what he thought was right. And fair.

A companionable silence fell between them. After a while, Alan stirred. “I should hit the road. Mei-Yin’ll be starting dinner soon, and I’m in charge of the salad and getting the kids ready.” He seized his jacket from the back of his chair and slipped it on. “Will I see you in class this week?”

“I plan on it.”

Whatever the vagaries of life and work, one constant in Henry's life was his workouts at Alan's studio. Although it was Henry who'd introduced his friend to the kung fu style of Wing Chun back in high school and Henry who was the more experienced and skilled practitioner, it was Alan who'd opened his own *kwoon* (training hall).

A ping came from inside Henry's bomber jacket. Slipping out his smartphone, he read the text message. The timing for his departure couldn't have been better.

He had a murder to get to.

## CHAPTER 2

Detective Janet Lau strode across the lobby on a mission. Images of the past forty minutes flashed before her eyes as she ticked off the boxes on her to-do list. Then double-checked them, not wanting to mess up. This was only her second homicide as an investigator, her first since returning from a short medical leave, and she didn't want to disappoint her partner or her boss. Or herself. For the moment, her mind was clear and sharp; she hoped it would remain that way. Casting a long shadow over her was the reality that she still suffered brief bouts of mental fog and occasional headaches from her recent injury, which could rear up at any time.

That bothered her.

Normal stuff, her neurologist had explained. Recovery from even mild concussions took time. A kick to the head had jostled her brain. Not seriously, though enough to trigger her symptoms and warrant the appropriate care. Except at twenty-seven and having the impatience of youth, Janet was more than ready for this remnant of her first homicide case to be over and done with. Now. She'd been raised to always do her best and make a good impression. And these annoying mental fog spells made her feel she was letting people down.

*Did you forget something?*

She stopped dead in her tracks.

*Crap. Wait. No...that was another thing. You're good.*

*Focus!*

She expelled a frustrated sigh.

Janet approached the glass lobby doors. Catching her reflection, she was troubled by the woman looking back at her. Beneath the sleek, dark bob brushing against her collar, a delicate face of Scottish and Chinese ancestry appeared stressed and tired. Not good. If she were to

inspire confidence in others, she'd have to staple on her game face and be ready to take on the tasks ahead.

Gazing through the door into the darkness, she frowned at the empty parking lot. *What was keeping him?*

Movement on the wide concrete steps caught her eye. Officer Felicia Chavez was walking to the doors, visibly cold in her winter jacket. Hours earlier, a light dusting of snow had fallen, which Chavez now stomped off her duty boots at the threshold before entering the lobby along with a cold blast of air.

"You look chilly," Janet said.

"I don't like winter," Chavez announced, snuggling inside her coat collar.

Janet made a sympathetic noise. She thought it prudent not to inform Chavez it was technically autumn, Thanksgiving being less than two weeks away. Felicia Chavez, a recent transplant from Florida, was experiencing her first northern cold snap. Twenty-six degrees. Downright frigid to a West Palm Beach girl, although a mere chill to a native Midwesterner. Janet didn't have the heart to tell her that harsher—far, far harsher—temperatures were on the way, frostbite-inducing temps that would make a beach-loving Floridian freakout. No point in alarming her; Officer Chavez would learn the hard way come January. Besides, a change of subject had just rolled into the parking lot.

Earlier, the sun had closed shop for the day, turned out the lights and gone home. The ensuing darkness was depressing to those who thought sunset before 5 p.m. unconscionable. Welcome to mid-November in the northern hemisphere. Twin headlights swung into view out of the gloom, making the fresh snow glisten like a field of jewels. A black Chevy Malibu came to a stop by the front entrance next to several police cruisers. Janet broke into a smile as the driver emerged. Youngish-looking mid-forties, slightly under average height,

a black shag of hair fluttering in the wind as the lean, athletic body took the steps in a smooth wolf-like lope.

Detective Henry Lau pulled open the door and entered the lobby.

But it was much more than that.

A knowing smile tugged the corner of Janet's mouth. Despite the grim task ahead, she allowed herself a private moment of indulgence. It wasn't that her uncle had opened the door; *it was how he had done it*. The casual observer would have missed it. Not her. She'd first noticed it as a little girl when he'd visited her home.

"Why did you open the door like that?" her eleven-year-old self had wondered.

Her uncle, on the back side of his twenties, was impressed. "Good eye. You're the first person ever to notice."

"Yeah, but why do you do it?"

He explained how most people use their hand and arm muscles when pulling open a door. He didn't. He tried to incorporate his kung fu skills into everyday moments. A key element in Wing Chun was instantly connecting and disconnecting different parts of the body. When he opened a door, he engaged his ankles, knees, hips, and shoulders. The only job of his arm and hand was serving as a connecting rod. It was his body opening the door, not his hand. Quick and fleeting as the beat of a wasp's wing, muscles were engaged and released, an action beyond the notice of the average person.

None of that mattered to her. "Yeah, but why do you do it?"

"I just told you."

"No. You talked about arms and stuff."

"Okay. Have you ever seen a bamboo forest?"

"Not for real. Just pictures."

"Close enough. Bamboo is flexible and tough. In heavy winds, big, stiff trees break or fall over. But bamboo doesn't fight the wind; it



bends to it and stays standing. I try to be like bamboo. What I do teaches me to use different parts of my body without thinking.”

“But *why*?”

There was a long pause before he said, “So I can stop bad guys from hurting people.”

“Oh. Okay.”

*Stopping bad guys.*

Janet never forgot those words or that moment. It was only later, as a teenager, that she understood the lengths to which Henry went to hard-wire his body to react to danger, how intense and persistent his training had to be to achieve his level of skill. A level of commitment that inspired her. She liked to think she could be as committed and passionate about something someday, yet not from a passion driven by tragedy as was his.

The lobby door closed behind Henry. He unzipped his jacket and nodded a greeting to Janet and Chavez. He ran a hand through his wind-blown hair to smooth it out. “What’s up? Your text mentioned a 10-89 but no details. What kind of homicide are we looking at?”

“A different one.”

“Different, how?”

“You’ll find out,” Janet promised. “We’re in the lobby of a knife factory, Hancock Blades. Our victim was stabbed by one of their new products.”

“Seems eerily fitting.” He slipped on the nitrile gloves and disposable shoe covers she’d handed him.

Janet led him through a propped open door to the executive suite wing, where they walked along a corridor lined with colorful abstract art paintings illuminated by nickel-plated wall sconces. This was no fly-by-night operation. “You familiar with the Hancock product line?”

“They make high-end sports and hunting knives.”

“Why am I not surprised you know that? I’m told they have factories in two other states. We’re in their headquarters and main facility.”

“The parking lot’s empty. No weekend shift, I take it.”

“Nope.”

They paused in front of an office whose frosted glass door was kept open by a rubber wedge. Entering, the detectives stopped after a few steps to survey the room. Opposite them was an adjustable height desk upon which stood two widescreen LCD monitors, a tablet, and a cordless mouse. A Hancock marketing poster hung on the wall behind. A Korean moon jar painted with a school of fish sat on a nearby sideboard.

The body lay on the carpet away from the desk amid a litter of paper and pens.

Looking in his late forties, the man had rugged though handsome Korean features: thick black hair, wide-spaced eyes, a high nose, a narrow chin. He wore a long-sleeved flannel shirt, gray chinos, red socks, and penny loafers. The body lay on its stomach, the right arm extended beyond the head and resting on the page of a large open book. What grabbed your attention was the deep red stain on the lower back and the curve-bladed knife on the floor next to him.

“Name’s Samuel Park, Chief Operations Officer.” Janet’s gaze lingered on the red-stained shirt. She could imagine the confusion, the shock, and the pain he felt as life ebbed from him. Death was her business, but that didn’t stop her from feeling like a voyeuristic intruder at times like this. It was unsettling. Made her feel a little tainted, even though she was there on Park’s behalf. She was getting better at handling her emotions and hoped never to become jaded at the sight of death. She knew her Uncle Henry never did. How could he, with the murder of his college girlfriend scorched to his bones? That one terrible event had changed the trajectory of his life to create

the man standing beside her. Solving the homicides he worked on, Janet believed, was his way of paying tribute to Kay McAdams, whose killer was never known, let alone caught and brought to justice.

Janet watched him survey the room with an analytical eye, taking mental snapshots, trying to get the “vibe” of the crime scene as he called it. Moving near the body, he leaned in closer. “Looks like Park was stabbed near the kidney, maybe even in it.” His eyes narrowed on the weapon, lying a foot away on the carpet: a five-inch curved blade attached to a curved black polymer handle that ended in a finger ring. A thin stripe of dried blood smeared the shining blade. He grunted in recognition. “A tiger claw.”

Janet swung toward him. “You know this knife?”

“It’s Indonesian, a *karambit*, a favorite among martial artists and tactical fighters.”

“It’s part of Hancock’s new product line.”

He nodded. “Nasty things. I saw them years ago...in Hong Kong.”

A rare reference to long ago days. For reasons Janet never understood, her uncle didn’t like talking about his time in that distant city. Too many unpleasant memories?

She indicated a two-drawer filing cabinet behind him, atop which sat a large acrylic stand supporting a colorful rigid foam board display. Emblazoned across the top in big, bold, colorful letters was “Hancock Blades.” Printed in bright graphics were actual-sized photos of three knives. Mounted above those photos were the knives themselves: a deer antler blade, a fish filleting knife, and the noticeably absent top spot. “The tiger claw knife was attached there. Way too convenient!”

“Too easy not to grab for someone already riled up. Suggests the murder wasn’t planned but a heat of the moment thing.”

“Yep.” Janet detailed what she thought happened. “Park and his killer have a confrontation. It gets out of hand. Enraged, the killer sees

the display, snatches the tiger claw, and goes after Park, who was moving away from his desk.”

“And gets stabbed in the back.” Henry lowered to a squat to examine the carpet. Scattered pens, Post-it note pads, paper clips, pushpins, and a Sharpie marker were strewn near the body. “The struggle started at the raised desk, which is how all this stuff got here.”

“Looks that way to me.”

“Any defensive wounds on Park?”

“None that are visible.”

Henry nodded, rising to his full height. “The atlas is interesting, don’t you think?” His gaze fixed on the open volume under the dead man’s hand.

“Very,” she said, excited he’d noticed.

“What d’you make of it?”

She’d been waiting for that! Janet continued with restraint as if giving testimony in court. “Mr. Park is stabbed and drops to the carpet. To all appearances, he’s dead. The killer is unnerved, frightened at what they’ve done. Drops the knife and runs off. *Except Sam Park isn’t dead.*” Her eyes blazed, underscoring the importance. “There’s a tiny spark of life left in him. Alone now, with only seconds left to live, Park rallies enough strength to crawl a few feet to the book stand. You can just see some marks on the carpet. There, he pulls down the atlas.”

She gestured at the nearby wall where stood a slender walnut book lectern, glaringly missing its book. The missing volume, a folio-sized hardcover world atlas, lay open on the floor beneath Park’s outstretched hand. With care, Henry stepped around the litter of pens and paper for a better view of the large atlas. “Must be a special book.”

“I’m told it’s a special edition reproduction. Looks hefty. The maps are gorgeous.”

“So I see. It’s open to...South America.” He crouched closer. “What’s his hand on? Looks like Argentina?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Does that mean anything?”

“No idea. It might.”

Something in the way Janet said that made Henry look at her oddly, his eyebrows lifting.

“Bear with me,” she said, barely reigning in her excitement. “Sam Park went to all that trouble getting the atlas. Placed his hand on that page? Why? He’s telling us something!”

“Leaving a message?”

“Yes.”

“A dying clue?”

“Possibly.”

“Very Agatha Christie.”

“I know,” she agreed with restraint and a solemn expression. Inside she was squeeing, “Holy crap!” A tantalizingly bizarre clue left by the murder victim. How interesting! Stuff like this never happens in real life—

*Whoa...Slow down. Keep your head.*

A man had died. She needed to treat his death with the proper gravitas, regardless of other considerations. Janet cleared her throat, looking to her partner for his insight. “Your thoughts?”

Henry was noncommittal. “You could be right.” He studied the large atlas with a thoughtful scowl. “Although something’s not right about this.”

“Like what?”

“That’s just it. I don’t know. The atlas means something. Maybe Park *is* trying to leave a message. But something’s off.” Henry shook his head, annoyed. He stood up and looked at her. “What else you got?”

Maneuvering to the spill of paper and pens by the desk, she pointed to a yellow Post-it note pad with writing on the top square.

Henry stepped over. Printed in block letters were the words: *An Actionable Crime*. Below it was a name: *K.J. Hazzard*.

Janet said, "This *is* in Mr. Park's handwriting, I'm told."

"Which may or may not have anything to do with his death," her partner cautioned.

"Yeah. Curious all the same. Makes you wonder what the 'actionable crime' is. And is Hazzard the one who committed it?"

"Or has info on it." Henry gave an understated sigh. "A lotta stuff to process." He glanced round the room again without enthusiasm.

"Speaking of process," Janet chimed in pleasantly, trying to lift the mood, "DeMarco's outside." The CSI team was waiting for the go ahead to process the crime scene.

"Tell her to come in."

"Will do."

"Who found the body?"

"Park's boss, the factory owner, Aimee Hancock. She's waiting for us in a conference room."

"Then let's not keep her waiting."

Thank you for reading *Tiger Claw*! If you enjoyed it, please consider posting a short review on Amazon. A few words are always helpful to an author. You might also enjoy the first Henry Lau / Janet Lau mystery:

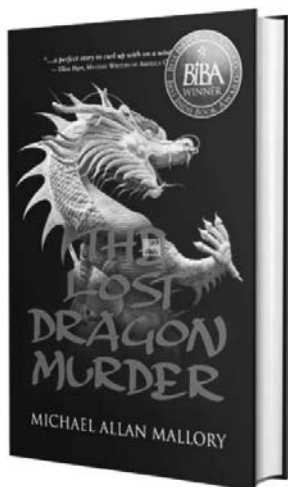
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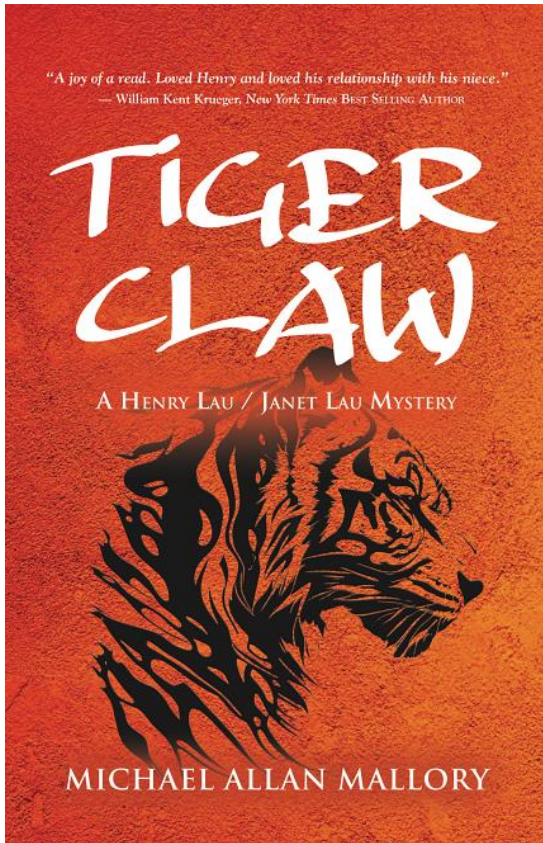
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