

A stylized illustration of a tropical landscape. In the foreground, there is a blue body of water. Above it is a green grassy bank with a grey stone wall. In the middle ground, there is a blue body of water. In the background, there is a green and brown mountain range under a light blue sky with white clouds. On the right side, there are several palm trees with green fronds and brown trunks.

Tropical Lies

A Novel By

David Myles
Robinson

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Chapter One

The sun was high over Diamond Head, and just beyond the mansion's manicured lawn and small strip of beach, Maunaloa Bay glimmered and sparkled.

In the bottom of the blue-tiled pool, a man's head bobbed lazily. Thin strands of hair floated up, waving gently as sea grass, and streams of blood seeped from the bloated neck into diluted shades of pink. His bulging eyes stared upward, as though he could see his armless torso above him, a grotesquely beautiful, weightless dance.

A red-stained chaise lounge faced the view and two arms trickled blood from their cleanly severed stumps on the flagstones nearby, bare, hairy, and oiled with suntan lotion, crumbs of potato chips stuck to one hand. The metal barrel of an air rifle rested against a small koa wood table. On the table, a monkey pod bowl of potato chips spattered with red drops sat next to a quarter-full glass of clear liquid. A greasy iPhone lay on the deck next to the chaise.

Thirty feet from the chaise on a lanai side table, lay a book of matches, the glossy white cover embossed in gold letters: *La Cannelle, 53 quai des Grands-Augustins, Paris*.

Chapter Two

Twelve miles west of the Portlock mansion, Pancho McMartin's hands trembled as he smoothed his tie, the one he wore to every verdict, royal blue dotted with tiny images. He sat at the counsel table facing Judge Wong with his heart pounding, while at the prosecutor's table, Harry Chang's left leg was bouncing a mile a minute. Harry caught his eye and nodded.

Even Drew, the big, astute Samoan, had cautioned Pancho against taking this case. "You can't win, boss. It's a slam dunk for the prosecution. It'll ruin your winning streak, destroy your reputation."

Pancho's client sat rigidly at his side—the new Don Ho they'd called him, his blend of Hawaiian, European, and Chinese features now pale with fear. Pancho had never seen a brown man so white before.

Despite the frigid air-conditioning of the courtroom, beads of sweat were forming on the back of Pancho's neck. *Should he not have gone after Detective Green so aggressively on cross examination? Should he have put his client on the stand?* He ran a hand through his hair and breathed deeply.

The courtroom was packed, not a space left on the spectators' benches.

The jury was just being seated.

When juror number ten took her seat, a middle-aged *haole* with the timid air of a schoolteacher, she glanced at Pancho, and he thought he detected a slight smile.

The clerk pressed a buzzer, and the door behind the Judge's bench opened.

"All rise. The Circuit Court of the First Circuit, Twenty-Fourth Division, the Honorable Terrence Wong, presiding, is once again in

session." The bailiff glanced back to confirm that Judge Wong had taken his place on the bench. "You may be seated."

Judge Wong cast stern eyes over the courtroom, nodded to Pancho, then to Harry. "I understand the jury has reached a verdict. Will the foreman please stand?" Judge Wong's voice was sonorous and deep with authority.

A lanky Japanese man wearing an aloha shirt rose nervously in the jury box.

The Judge nodded. "Will you please identify yourself, sir?"

"Leighton Watanabe, Your Honor."

"Mr. Watanabe, will you confirm that you have reached a verdict?"

"We have, Your Honor."

There was nervous murmuring among the spectators. Pancho had been watching the jury, and now juror number ten looked directly at him and smiled. Harry Chang glanced at him, and he could tell Harry had seen her also. Pancho fought to keep his face impassive.

"And is the verdict unanimous?"

"It is, Your Honor."

"Has the verdict form been signed and dated by you?"

"It has, Your Honor."

The bailiff took the sealed envelope and handed it to Judge Wong, who opened and read it slowly, then leaned over and handed it to the clerk of the court.

"Will the defendant rise?"

Pancho stood in the dead silence and steadied his client's shaking arm. Pancho's stomach churned and his heart hammered. There was nothing on earth he hated and loved so much as the moment just before a verdict is read—the competing fear of failure versus the thrill of victory.

The Judge spoke again. "Will the clerk please read the verdict?"

The clerk cleared her throat. "We the jury in the above-entitled cause, as to the charge of negligent homicide, find the defendant —" She paused, as though surprised, "not guilty."

The courtroom erupted.

The great, Samoan bulk of Drew Tulafono was waiting when Pancho led his happily dazed client out of the elevator and into the first floor rotunda. Pancho's green eyes sparkled, his cowboy boots almost springing across the stone tile floor.

"You done good on this one, Mr. PI." Pancho clapped Drew on the shoulder.

Drew snorted in pleasure. "We done good, you mean." He gave Pancho a hug, such a big man that even the six-foot Pancho nearly disappeared. "Lucky tie, boss." Drew flipped the end of Pancho's royal blue tie with its rows of tiny images of Lady Liberty, and Pancho laughed.

As the men turned to cross the quiet rotunda toward the courthouse doors where the noise of voices was already building, a movement caught Pancho's eye.

Dr. Padma Dasari, the Medical Examiner, was wearing a tight skirt that showed off her long, nut-brown legs; her black hair, stylish and short, showed off her elegant neck. She seemed to be in a hurry, on her way to the parking garage. She had a cell phone to her ear, but her huge, dark eyes met Pancho's and locked as they neared each other, so that he almost missed her mouth forming the word, 'congratulations.'

He smiled and nodded, then she was gone.

Ten minutes later, Pancho pulled off his linen sport coat and slung it over his shoulder in the glaring white heat that beat off the Honolulu pavement. The last of the reporters and spectators had scattered, while in the distance his client's limousine turned the corner off Punchbowl Street and disappeared, carrying him away from Ka'ahumanu Hale and back into the heart of Waikiki.

Pancho shook his head, the rush of adrenaline still pounding in his temples.

"There goes one happy *kanaka*." Drew's eyes followed the limousine.

"The *tutu wahine* tourists got their King of Aloha back."

"Eh brah, no make fun of da grandmothers." Drew was mock solemn.

Pancho laughed. A souped-up Mazda drove by with the bass so loud he felt it in his body, and the ends of his hair lifted against his collar in the gentle trade wind.

"Pancho! Hold up." Harry Chang, short and squat, lugged his heavy trial briefcase down the courthouse steps.

"Too much time at your desk lately, Harry?"

"Shoots, Pancho, have some respect for your poor victim." Harry put down his briefcase and held out his hand, breathing heavily. "You screwed me again, man."

Pancho smiled and shook his hand. "No, Harry. Justice prevailed."

Harry chuckled. "Gag me."

He turned to shake Drew's hand, and Pancho slapped him congenially on the back.

Harry picked up his briefcase and they walked together down Queen Street. Pancho loosened his tie and swung his brown leather briefcase. It always struck him how ordinary the real world was after the tension and high stakes of the courtroom. How could anyone walk the sidewalks, sit at traffic lights, window-shop, while blocks away inside the cool, impersonal concrete of the Circuit Court Building life and death were being decided?

"Man, you took a big risk in there today when you went after Detective Green." Harry stretched his legs to keep up with Pancho's long stride. "Judge Wong was pissed."

"Why didn't you object? I expected you to jump out of your chair."

Harry snorted. "I was trying to outsmart you, give you enough rope to hang yourself. I figured two more minutes and I'd object, and you'd have made ass in front of the jury."

Drew laughed out loud. "Instead, Pancho made Green fold like a cheap lanai chair, and suddenly Pancho was a genius, yeah?"

"Lucky son-of-a-bitch, you mean." Harry wiped the sweat from his forehead and turned to Pancho. "I got to hand it to you. You take big risks, but I'll be waiting for the day one of those risks blows up right in your pretty *haole* mug."

Pancho looked away. The late afternoon traffic on Queen Street was picking up, but even so, when a blue Toyota honked at a bus, heads turned, the locals surprised to hear such a thing in Hawai'i. The low afternoon sun reflected off a window of the bus, momentarily blinding Pancho, and a coconut palm frond banged against the trunk of the tree with a hollow sound.

He did take too many risks, he knew it, and one of these days one was going bite him on the *okole*. But he also remembered the exquisite pounding of his heart as Judge Wong leaned over the bench and handed the verdict to the clerk of the court.

"Hey Drew," Pancho forced himself to laugh. "Harry thinks I have a pretty mug!"

As Pancho and Drew walked into Pancho's reception area, his secretary, Susan, looked up expectantly from her typing. Drew glanced back to make sure no one had followed them in, then hooted and pumped his fist. Susan laughed, a deep, throaty, smoker's laugh.

"You know you now work for the most famous attorney in Honolulu," said Drew. "I don't know how you'll be able to live with him."

"Don't be a dick, Drew," Pancho said good-naturedly,

Drew and Susan both laughed, then Susan turned to Pancho, and in a quiet and respectful tone, said, "Congratulations, boss man."

Pancho smiled and thanked her and headed into his office. Susan watched him briefly as he walked away, a fleeting look of concern on her well-lined face. Drew pulled up a chair to Susan's desk and began to regale her with highlights, most of which she already knew, but to which she dutifully listened. She knew this was Drew's first homicide acquittal, and she let him savor the moment.

Pancho plopped heavily into his desk chair, the adrenaline high already starting to deflate. He stared through his reflection in the glass window and watched a jumbo jet take off from Honolulu International Airport. It lumbered slowly down the reef runway before becoming a graceful airborne creature, taking sunburned tourists home to their realities. Ordinarily the view soothed and distracted him, but sometimes

it had an unsettling effect, as if the tranquility of it was trying to tell him that he was being eaten alive by the law. That's how he suddenly felt.

Pancho sighed, swiveled away from the window, and stared at the files on his desk. He didn't feel like working. Why should he? He had literally just saved a man's life. The sun was beating in through the window, but Pancho couldn't bring himself to push the button that would lower the blinds. He looked out again at Aloha Tower, the deep blue of the harbor, and the aquamarine sky. He felt unsettled and at loose ends, maybe even a little melancholy. Two commercial fishing boats were heading out of the harbor. He could see a huge container ship out at sea, heading to the harbor, Hawaii's lifeline to consumer goods.

Pancho ran a hand through his longish brown hair. He had nothing to be sad about. He was on top of the world, his trial skills in huge demand. After today's victory, he'd be able to pick and choose his clients. He'd finally put his divorce behind him and had recently begun dating. The thought of Paula Mizuno made him smile. They were rapidly becoming serious.

He turned from the window as the door opened, and Susan walked in with a cup of coffee. She was in her early sixties and her skin had begun to show the effects of too much Hawaiian sun and too many years of smoking. The effect worked to create an appearance at odds with the real woman. Clients, mostly criminals, were intimidated by this older, hard-looking woman who talked with a rasp and who could swear with the best of them. But Pancho knew that Susan was a caring and passionate woman, which is why he'd stolen her away from the communal office group she worked for when he'd first started his own practice. Now she was secretary, confidant, and surrogate mother. She put the cup down in front of Pancho.

"You looked like you need this," Susan said softly.

He nodded his thanks. She turned to leave, but then hesitated and turned back to him. "You all right? You just won the biggest case of your life, but you look . . . I don't know, sad, almost."

Pancho looked at her and gave her a wan smile. Only Susan would have picked up on his subtle mood.

"I'm okay," he said. "Just a little out of sorts. Probably just my usual post-trial blues, kicking in early. Everything okay with you?"

Susan laughed. Her light blue eyes sparkled in her brown and wrinkled face. "You think you can avoid telling me what's wrong by asking about me? Like I don't know all your tricks?"

Pancho had to laugh with her. "We've been together too long. You know what I'm going to say or do before I do." He met her gaze and they shared a brief moment of tenderness before she looked away and began to move toward the door.

She said over her shoulder, "Yeah, well, if you need to talk about anything, just holler. I've got to get back to my gossip. I think we're to the part where Drew is just about to crack the case."

Pancho's smile faded as he watched Susan walk away. He realized what was making him melancholy. He had given his life over to the law. He lost his wife, Ellen, because she hadn't wanted to watch the law consume him. She was a producer at one of the local television networks and worked regular hours. She would leave her office and go home to fix dinner with a promise from Pancho that he would be home soon, only to go to bed alone, the dinner still on the table.

Pancho wasn't cheating on her; he always called or texted to explain that he had to finish a memorandum of law or draft a new motion or make notes on a new theory of defense. There was always another crisis, another client, another reason to work. Ellen wanted a life beyond the law and Pancho hadn't been able to give it to her. Now he was falling hard for Paula, and he was scared that he would drive her away as well.

Pancho reached over and turned on his iPod. The soothing sounds of Stanley Turrentine's saxophone filled the office. He opened the bottom drawer of his desk and pulled out a bottle of Patron Silver and a squat, cut crystal glass. He lifted the bottle to pour himself a shot. Then he paused for a second, reached down, and pulled out a second glass. Drew would want a celebratory shot once he was through gossiping with Susan.

He poured himself a healthy shot of the tequila and took a sip. The gentle burn and the earthy taste felt good and Pancho leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and let the alcohol and the saxophone work their magic.

Chapter Three

Homicide Detective Frank Nishimoto was at a family picnic at Queen's Beach when his phone buzzed to indicate he had a text message. 'Call office.'

"Dammit," Frank mumbled. He called in. A murder in Portlock. No ID of the victim yet, but a ritzy house. No suspects in custody.

Frank disconnected and went to tell his wife, Mary, to enjoy the rest of the day and have one of the kids drive her home. The 'kids' were all grown, but they were a tightly knit family and had regular outings. Frank enjoyed seeing his three children and his five grandchildren. He saw them all too rarely. It was not unusual for his days off to be interrupted: he was a senior member of the Honolulu homicide squad.

Within minutes, Frank was driving his department subsidized Ford Malibu around Diamond Head and onto Kahala Avenue, past multi-million dollar oceanfront homes. He circumnavigated Waialae Golf Course and entered Kalaniana'ole Highway, which took him along the ocean all the way out to Hawai'i Kai. Homes lined the highway, offering only occasional glimpses of the inviting ocean to the right.

Frank turned right off Kalaniana'ole and proceeded into the wealthy area known as Portlock. The oceanfront homes here, with their spectacular views looking toward Diamond Head, were multi-million dollar properties. He pulled into a narrow lane between two houses that were on land long ago subdivided from a main estate. There was a tall oleander hedge on the left and an old, wood panel fence on the right. As he neared the water, he turned left into a driveway of what was a beautifully landscaped estate. He parked under the shade of a large monkey pod tree in the center of the circular driveway.

The house was two stories, wood frame, in the style of an old missionary home. It had large, koa wood entrance doors, leading into an Italian tiled entrance hall. Beyond the entrance hall was an expansive living room, with plush white carpeting. The ocean-side wall of the living room was all glass and glass sliding doors, which opened onto a large lanai, deck, and pool. Beyond the pool was a lawn, then a small stretch of sandy beach fronting Moanalua Bay. In the distance was the backside of Diamond Head, which, in the stark afternoon light, was a surreal silhouette.

It was, to Frank, an awesome sight. As he stood in the entrance hall and took it all in, he'd almost forgotten why he was there. Then he saw a patrolman he vaguely recognized pick something up off a side table on the lanai. Frank took off toward the man.

"Hey! What are you doing there? What'd you just pick up?"

The officer turned, a surprised look on his face. He held up a book of matches. "Just a book of matches," he said, "Nothing important." He tossed them back down on the table.

Frank took a deep breath, trying to control his anger. "You're at a murder scene, Officer—" he paused, reading the nametag, "Lee. Everything's important." Frank saw that most of the activity was out by the pool. He spoke to Officer Lee again. "What're you doing here anyway?"

"I was the responding officer. I got a call to investigate possible gunshots, so I—"

"Go out to the front of the house, then call Bill Hampton and ask him to get over here. When you're done, go back to the office and write your report."

"But—"

Frank ignored him and walked out toward the pool, looking around. A cream-colored chaise lounge sat next to a small matching side table on the flagstone deck. There were rust-colored stains on the chaise, which Frank assumed was blood. A rifle leaned against the table.

On the table was a bowl of potato chips, which were splattered with tiny drops. Next to the bowl was a short glass with a small amount of clear liquid in it. There was a pink droplet on the side of the glass and on the table was a small water spot. A black iPhone lay on the deck. Frank bent down and looked at it closely. It was smeared with grease. Then he saw the two arms lying on the deck near the chaise, about three feet apart. Both arms were bare, hairy, and oiled with suntan lotion. There was something strange about one of the hands. Frank moved closer to get a better look. There were potato chips stuck to the hand. *What the hell?*

He looked around and saw a police photographer taking pictures at the pool. He took a few steps and saw that a head was lying on the bottom of the pool. A torso without arms was eerily bobbing, like it was standing up, in the shallow end.

He recognized Sergeant Russell Cabrillo, pointing out something to one of the photographers. Frank walked over to him. "What's up, Russ?"

They walked back toward the living room, almost instinctively moving away from the death as they talked. Cabrillo referred to his notebook from time to time as he filled Frank in.

"The house belongs to Maynard Laws," Cabrillo paused to look at Frank. Frank's face was impassive.

"Know who he is?"

"Yeah, that investment counselor. One of my aunties has money invested with him. Is that Laws in the pool?"

"Don't know yet. Doc should be here any minute. She was testifying at Circuit Court on a case, but I took the liberty of asking her to come out as soon as she's *pau*." In Hawai'i it was unusual for the Medical Examiner to attend to the scene of a murder, but Frank nodded his approval.

"As soon as the photographers are done," Cabrillo continued, "we'll have the pieces pulled out of the pool. None of my guys are crazy about climbing into the pool to pull the guy out."

"Don't blame them. Let me talk to Doc about how she wants it handled." Frank knew that Dr. Padma Dasari, the coroner, wouldn't want anything damaged by using a hook or the pool net. That could destroy critical evidence.

"Tell the photographers to hurry. I'm sure she doesn't want the body parts under water for longer than necessary."

Cabrillo hurried away to speed up the photographers. He was back in a few moments.

"We should be able to recognize Laws when the head comes out, if that's him. I know what he looks like and so do some of the other guys.

"The forensic team is already at work, dusting for prints. There are a few sets of tire tracks on the driveway, and we got pictures. A plaster mold wouldn't work, too gravelly. I doubt that'll help us any.

"A neighbor called in to say she'd heard a shot." Cabrillo looked at his notebook to check the time.

"A shot?" asked Frank.

Cabrillo nodded, then continued with his recital of information.

"It was at 2:24 p.m. The neighbor was Mrs. Peterson."

"Get someone over to take her statement," said Frank.

"Already being done."

"Okay, go on"

"No one else seems to have been home. No maids, no family. Officer Lee was the first on the scene. He'd been interviewing some burglary victims in the area and got here at 2:55. I got here immediately thereafter, at 2:57. We sealed the area and had homicide call you. I let the photographers and the other forensic guys in, since I knew you'd approve. You got here

at 3:33." They both looked up and nodded to Dr. Dasari as she strode directly to the scene of the murder.

Frank turned back to Cabrillo. "Have the forensic men be sure to get fiber samples from the living room rug. Unless the killer came around the side, he'd have had to pass through the living room to get out here." He paused, thinking. "Also, have them check the entry tile for footprints. If the killer took his shoes off, he may have left a print. That marble tile should be perfect for leaving prints."

Cabrillo looked up from his notebook and chuckled. "You think the killer was polite enough to remove his shoes before walking into the living room?" Frank glared at him until Cabrillo nodded and made a note.

"What's up with that rifle by the pool?" asked Frank. "It doesn't look real to me."

Cabrillo nodded his agreement. "It's just an air rifle."

Frank pondered that for a moment, but then moved on. "Don't forget to check to make sure they bag the glass and the iPhone out there. We'll want to check on any incoming or outgoing calls today." He glanced around. "Has anyone noted any signs of forced entry?"

"Nope," Cabrillo answered. "The front door was unlocked. Anyone could've gained access from the beach, and there's only a waist high fence with an unlocked gate at the side of the house."

Frank went over and talked to Doc for a few minutes before meandering back toward the lanai, waiting for the team to pull the body parts from the pool. The lanai furniture looked expensive. The chairs all had plush cushions. Next to one chair was a small koa wood side table, on which he noticed the book of matches. He bent over to read the embossed letters on the glossy white front. "*La Cannelle, 53 quai des Grands-Augustins, Paris*". Frank called out to Sergeant Cabrillo.

"Put those matches in a bag. And make a note that Officer Lee's prints are probably on the cover. The idiot picked it up. Assuming the body is Laws, make a note to check to see if he or his wife had been to Paris recently."

Frank still had matches from his trip to Greece five years ago, but he didn't leave them around for people to use; they were treated more as souvenirs. These matches had been on the lanai table, not thirty feet from the scene of a murder. He made a mental note to talk to Lee's supervisor.

Just then, Frank heard Detective Bill Hampton's booming voice.

"What a pleasant spot for a murder. Howzit Frank, what've we got?" Bill walked past Frank and continued out to the pool.

"Holy shit! What the—"

Despite everything, Frank had to smile. He hadn't seen Bill speechless many times. Bill stood still, looking around but saying nothing for several minutes before he came back to Frank.

"Jesus Frank, we've been on the force a long time, but have you ever seen anything like this?"

Frank had been thinking the same thing. There'd been lots of gruesome scenes, a lot of cases with more blood and guts. There had even been a few dismembered body cases, but for sheer bizarre terror, he had never seen anything quite like this. The eyes staring up from the bottom of the pool; the eerie way the torso seemed to be standing up in the water; the hand with potato chips on it.

"Can't say I have. It's pretty bizarre. But to top it off, I think we might also find that the victim's been shot." Frank filled Bill in on the details he'd been given by Cabrillo.

"Well, I guess if you're going to murder someone, it pays to make sure you got the job done." Bill's famous black humor was coming back.

"How're we going to get him out of the pool?" Bill asked.

"I already talked to Doc about that. I don't want our guys going into bloody water and Doc doesn't want the body to stay in the pool for as long as it would take to drain it. Besides, once the water level got low, the body would start banging around in the pool, so we're trying to get the torso pushed over to the side of the pool as delicately as possible so we can pull it out. They're using the pool net to nudge the head over to where we can get it. Doc doesn't want any more trauma to the body than we can help."

Bill nodded his agreement. "Has someone already taken water samples?"

"Done," said Frank.

They surveyed the scene as two officers worked under the watchful eyes of Dr. Padma Dasari to get the body out. Frank couldn't help letting his gaze linger on 'Doc.' Even at a gruesome murder scene she was drop-dead gorgeous. Her stylish, short cropped hair accented her high cheekbones and her long, elegant neck. Her dark black eyes set off her nut brown skin. Over her blouse, she wore a navy blue, lightweight jacket with 'Coroner' printed in white letters across the back. Somehow, it looked stylish on her. When the head was finally lifted out of the water and placed on a plastic body bag, Frank and Bill walked over. It appeared to be swollen, and the eyes bulged in a horrifyingly vacant stare.

"It's Maynard Laws all right," said Cabrillo, who had come up behind Frank and Bill.

"Yeah, I recognize him too," said Bill. "His picture's been all over the tube and the papers."

"Even so, we've got to get an official identification. The guy was married, wasn't he?"

"Yes, sir" said Cabrillo. "To a local gal, if I remember correctly."

"Bill, get one of your men to locate Mrs. Laws. I'm going to check around the house, see if there's a study or desk somewhere with personal papers. Maybe there's some other family.

"Doc, anything on whether Laws was shot?" She'd been bent over the torso and looked up as Frank spoke to her.

She spoke with a slight accent, which had a rhythmic cadence. "Looks like it. Probably a .38 to the abdomen. I doubt it was a fatal shot, but give me time to do my autopsy." She bent back over the body.

"Now what the hell? Why would someone shoot a guy, not kill him with the gun, then whack off his head and arms?" asked Frank.

"I suppose the killer could've chopped off the head and arms first, then shot him, but that makes even less sense," Bill said.

Bill continued to mumble to himself while Frank went off in search of personal papers. Frank didn't understand any of this. The victim was shot, then mutilated, presumably while he was still alive. The head and the torso were then thrown into the pool, although, he supposed, they could have fallen in at the time of the dismemberment. Doc or the forensic guys should be able to tell whether or not the body had made impact with the deck before going into the pool.

Frank toured the house. By and large it was tastefully furnished, although some pieces of art or furniture were strangely out of place. Frank figured Laws had used an interior decorator, then, thinking they had good taste, had supplemented the designer's work with pieces of their own. Money and taste don't necessarily go hand in hand.

He found a room that looked like it was a personal study. It was small, compared to the rest of the rooms, and contained a beautiful Japanese cherry wood desk, a matching cherry wood bureau, an easy chair made of soft leather, and wall-to-wall bookshelves on two walls. There were no personal pictures. Frank found that unusual, but not necessarily strange.

He opened the center drawer on the desk. Several Mont Blanc pens and some beige stationary with 'Mr. and Mrs. Maynard Laws' embossed in gold across the top were neatly placed in the drawer. That was all.

Frank opened the right hand top drawer. He saw an appointment book. He took it out and leafed to Friday, August 23. He saw a notation, '*Iwalani to H.K.*'

"H.K.," Frank mumbled to himself. "Hawai'i Kai? Hale Koa Hotel? Or someone's name?" He didn't see any other entries that leapt out. Naturally, everyone whose name was in the book would be checked. He placed the book on top of the desk and kept looking.

He found a checkbook in the second drawer down on the right. He stared at the figures he found, amazed by their size. Tarn's Caterers, \$15,320. Neimen Marcus, \$12,533.20. Honolulu Mortgage, \$25,699. A twenty-five thousand dollar a month mortgage? "Yikes."

Then, again mumbling out loud, "What's this?" He read the entry: 'Akamai Travel. 8/20, \$4,737.'

Maybe H.K. was Hong Kong, mused Frank. He'd have someone call Akamai Travel.

In the third drawer down, Frank found a ledger book. It was filled with names and figures. *Investors?* He'd look at it later. He saw nothing else of import, but decided that he'd get Mrs. Laws' consent to a more thorough search.

He took the appointments book, check-register, and ledger to the lanai with him and wrote out a receipt for the items he was taking. They were necessary to the immediate investigation of finding family and/or suspects and he therefore had a legal right to remove them from the house.

The body parts had finally been removed. The house had been photographed, and prints had been lifted from everywhere and everything capable of rendering a good print.

Frank ordered the house sealed and posted an officer to stay at the premises in the event Mrs. Laws or someone else showed up. He took another look at the blood stained deck. Then he lifted his eyes to the magnificence of the view beyond. The ocean sparkled. Diamond Head was a beckoning silhouette to this tourist mecca.

He'd have to remember to call Auntie Leona tonight to ask her how much she'd invested with Laws. He then went to the front yard to deal with the growing number of reporters. When he appeared, the reporters began shouting questions at him, some aggressively pushing their colleagues to the side, anxious to get something in time for the six o'clock news, only a half hour away.

Chapter Four

The tall, dignified Eurasian woman had been standing in one place next to her luggage cart for a full three minutes. Iwalani Laws looked around in cold fury for her chauffeur. There were uniformed men with signs outside customs at the cavernous Hong Kong airport, but none bearing her name. She stood next to her luggage cart with two large Vuitton bags and her carry-on, perfectly still in the cacophonous noise, while people pushed past her purposefully, everyone speaking, everyone apparently certain where they were going.

Iwalani was part Chinese, which gave her eyes an exotic look, part Hawaiian, which gave her skin a beautiful light brown sheen, and part *haole*, which took the edge off and seemed to soften the clash of characteristics. She wore a white Chanel two-piece suit with one strand of perfect white pearls. A five-carat diamond wedding band adorned her hand. Her long black hair was pinned up with black lacquer Chinese combs. Her usually sensuous lips were pursed in growing agitation.

As she waited, her dignity began to dissemble, and her usual practiced mask of haughtiness showed the first signs of fear. She was just moving toward a sign for hired cars when a short Chinese man in livery rushed towards her, sweating profusely and breathing heavily, his black suit rumpled, a sign in his hands with her name on it.

She let out a deep breath, her cold eyes glittering.

Forty-five minutes later, spike heels clicked on the highly polished marble floor of the ornate lobby of the Hong Kong Mandarin Oriental Hotel. The smell of the harbor, one block away, and the sounds of the bustling city-central faded as the bellmen fussed over her baggage, speaking to her in rapid fire Cantonese, assuming she was Chinese. Iwalani ignored them,

her elegant height rigid, the odor of vodka from the limousine's bar on her breath. She paused at the greeting of an obsequious assistant manager who knew who she was and who spoke to her in perfect English, and allowed herself a self-satisfied smile.

Chapter Five

Two mornings later Pancho was in full post-trial malaise as he rode the elevator to his office. He'd taken a day off after his big verdict to relax and do some surfing, but now it was back to the daily grind. He couldn't have felt less motivated. He instinctively looked around the elevator to see if there was anyone he knew. A mousy looking woman in the elevator reminded him of Maynard Laws' secretary, Elie Watson, who'd been all over the news since the murder. Laws' office was a few floors above Pancho's and when he saw her picture on television and in the papers he realized that he'd seen her in the elevator a number of times. In fact, Pancho was pretty sure that the last time he'd seen her was on the day of Laws' murder. It was when he and Drew were coming from court. She'd been in the elevator, tucked into a corner as she had been every time he saw her. Although she always struck Pancho as being timid and purposely plain, on that day she looked different. She seemed tired, angry, or sad, or, he reflected, maybe all three. He wondered if she'd already known about the murder.

Pancho walked into his office and saw Drew sitting on the edge of Susan's desk. Drew was holding the *Star-Advertiser*. They both looked up as Pancho entered.

"Hey, boss man, we were just getting up to date on that Maynard Laws' murder." Drew shook his head in wonder. "Some weird stuff." He handed the paper to Pancho, who tucked it under his arm.

"Anything important going on?" He asked Susan, who was already handing him several pink, 'while you were out', slips.

She shook her head. Several strands of gray hair had fallen out of her haphazardly pinned bun. "Not really. Lots of congratulations. The Chang

hearing's been continued until Thursday. Shorty Gomez is in trouble again and wants to hire you." The derision in her throaty, smoker's voice was obvious. "The usual stuff."

Pancho continued on to his office, tossed the pink slips on the desk and then sat down and opened the paper. His victory for the 'King of Aloha' had been the headline the day before, but since then, it had all been Maynard Laws. New revelations about Laws' business had been coming to light on an almost hourly basis, and it appeared that the mousey secretary was involved up to her ears.

The press had been having a field day with the secretary, Elie Watson. She'd had an affair with Laws, according to 'reliable sources.' She refused to speak to the press on the advice of her attorney, William Chambers, who Pancho knew to be one of the young up-and-comers.

She was also, it was pointed out time and time again, the only living person who'd been close enough to Laws at the office to have extensive knowledge of the way Laws had operated. So far, however, neither she nor the police were revealing much, which simply added fuel to the speculation.

Pancho read today's article.

Laws' Partners All From Mainland

By Les Toguchi
Star-Advertiser staff reporter

The Star-Advertiser has learned that Maynard Laws' partners in the firm of Burling, Woodward, Taniguchi & Laws are all mainland residents who have had no active participation in Laws' business. According to reliable sources, one 'partner,' Alvin Burling, 75, is a retired railroad engineer who lives in Sun City, Arizona, a retirement community. When contacted by this reporter, Burling refused comment, referring all questions to his wife, Gertie, who would only say that "Al done nothing wrong."

The Woodward in the firm name is one Willard G. Woodward, 67, of Cheyenne, Wyoming. Woodward is a retired sanitation worker for the City of Cheyenne. Woodward was unavailable for comment.

It is the same story for the other members of the firm name. It is uncertain how much these people were paid by Laws for the use of their names, which all happen to be surnames of prominent *kamaainas*, local families. Detective Frank Nishimoto refused comment on details, but did confirm to this reporter that all of the partners except for Laws were mainland residents who had no known connection with the actual operation of the firm. Nishimoto also stressed that there is no evidence that any of the prominent *kamaaina* families were in any way involved in Laws' firm.

Laws, who had been touted as a genius investment coun-

selor, was murdered on August 23, while lounging by the pool at his luxurious Portlock estate. No arrests have been made and little is known about the progress of the investigation.

The books and records of Laws' business were seized shortly after the murder, and according to this reporter's sources, it is now clear that Laws' investment counseling firm was a complete fraud. It was yet another Ponzi scheme, similar, although smaller in scope, to the Bernie Madoff fraud in New York. Criminal charges are being considered against various individuals, including Laws' executive secretary, Elie Watson, by state and federal agencies, also according to informed sources.

It is not known whether charges will be pursued against the silent, mainland partners.

Pancho put the paper down and sipped his coffee. He wondered how the investigation was going. Frank Nishimoto was as good a homicide detective as there was, but a case like this with so many angry investors, had too many people with motives to commit murder. Pancho knew from the press that Laws had been dismembered. *That should certainly narrow the list of suspects*, he thought. Even investors who'd lost their life savings wouldn't go so far as to cut off the head and arms. Instinctively, he began thinking about possible defenses, but after a couple of minutes, he shook his head. *I sure wouldn't want to try to defend someone who was capable of that kind of brutality*, he thought.

He rolled up his sleeves and dove into the stack of files on his desk, intent on finishing early and taking Paula out to a fine dinner.

Chapter Six

It was not until the next morning, three days after the murder, when Central Intelligence Agency's Operations Division Chief for the Pacific, Oliver Wilson, heard about Laws' murder. He sat at his desk in his Langley, VA office and gripped the phone tightly as he listened to his agent in Honolulu, Donald Duerden, with a healthy mix of astonishment, anger and alarm.

"Murdered? By whom? Anyone in custody?"

"They don't know who did it; or at least they aren't saying they know," said Duerden. "I'm just letting you know we're fine. There's nothing to connect us to Laws."

Wilson closed his eyes and willed the growing pain in his head to hold off a while longer. "We just ran a fifteen million dollar deal through this guy. Are you positive there's nothing to connect us to him?"

"I'm sure, but just to be one hundred percent positive, I searched his office as soon as I heard about the murder. There wasn't anything obviously incriminating, but I pulled out some records just to be sure. We're completely in the clear," said Duerden. "Nothing to worry about at all, Ollie."

Wilson grunted and hung up. He wished he could trust Duerden, but as far as he was concerned, Duerden was a rogue, a cowboy, who flaunted the rules and cut corners. Duerden had been one of the agents in charge of hiring local militia to help protect the U.S. Mission in Benghazi – militia that failed to show up when the assault on the compound started. Wilson suspected Duerden had screwed the pooch over there, but Benghazi wasn't in Wilson's scope of operations so there was little he could say or

do about his suspicions. Then, much to Wilson's chagrin, Duerden ended up in a cushy job in Honolulu, which was in Wilson's scope of operations.

The whole Honolulu operation had sounded shaky to Wilson from the beginning. Not the use of a private citizen to launder money for the Agency, that was done all the time, but the way Duerden had rushed into things bothered Wilson. This dead guy, Laws, and his business, hadn't been properly vetted, but when he'd expressed his concerns to Deputy Director of Operations Randolph Fuller, he was overruled. For some reason Wilson didn't understand, Fuller was enamored of Duerden, who could do no wrong in Fuller's eyes. It was Fuller who had arranged for Duerden to be transferred to Honolulu. Now, just weeks after they'd run fifteen million dollars through one of Laws' corporations to fund a group of African rebels who promised to rid their country of Al Qaeda once they took over, Laws was dead and Wilson knew the authorities would be scrutinizing everything Laws had been involved in.

He stared at the new black phone that had been installed after he cracked the last one in anger, the last time he'd talked to Duerden, and willed himself to relax.

The clock on the wall said it was 3:15 p.m. He was supposed to take his wife to Lee Hing Seafood House for dinner that night, and had planned on leaving early. He pulled out the file on the Honolulu operation from his bottom file drawer and began to make detailed notes of the call with Duerden. At 3:40, he reread what he'd written and began to make notes as to his suggested course of action. Not only did they need to make sure the Agency would not be implicated in the Laws' business, and especially in the murder, they needed to replace Laws as soon as possible. There was a huge deal in Sudan they needed to finalize.

Wilson wrote non-stop for another twenty minutes. When he was done, he closed the manila file and looked at the clock. He let out a breath and rubbed his eyes. He was debating whether he should call Fuller or go downstairs and see him in person. He didn't want to do either. The two men seemed to be in perpetual conflict; their personalities were polar opposites. Wilson was strategic, structured and practical. He'd spent twenty years in the field as an operative. Fuller, the superior, was political, lackadaisical, and soft – except when it came to protecting his own career, when he could become ruthless and hard.

At 4:10, after searching the Internet and reading the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* stories on the Laws murder, Oliver Wilson rose from his desk and began the dreaded trek to DDO Randolph Fuller's office.

Chapter Seven

Detectives Frank Nishimoto and Bill Hampton were tired and cranky, having spent few hours home with their families since the murder. To make matters worse, on two occasions Frank had to take time away from the investigation to testify in court. He hated testifying.

It didn't help that the cooling trade winds were still missing. The barely discernible wind was southerly, light, and the days were warm and muggy. Frank wiped the sweat from his forehead and prayed silently for the return of the trades. The air-conditioning was out in the building that housed the Honolulu Police Department on Beretania Street. Bill brought in a portable Sanyo fan, but it was kept on low to prevent the reams of accumulating paperwork from blowing all over the office.

The payment to the travel agent that Frank found in the check register had led to a trace of Iwalani Laws at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Hong Kong. Frank and Bill marveled at the apparent ignorance of Mrs. Laws when it came to Laws' business and business associates. As far as she knew and was concerned, or at least so she claimed, he was a successful investment counselor. She'd never met Messrs. Burling, Woodward or Taniguchi and had never heard Laws speak of them.

The only person at Laws' office whom she had met was the executive secretary, Elie Watson. Bill told Frank that he detected a bit of coolness when Iwalani Laws talked about Elie, but she said nothing to lead them to believe that Elie was in any way suspect.

Iwalani Laws claimed to be unaware of any money problems and unaware of anyone who would have wanted to see Laws dead. She apparently lived in blissful ignorance of what was beginning to look like one of the biggest con jobs in the history of Hawai'i.

Frank thought that Iwalani Laws was a beautiful woman, but in a hard, cosmetic kind of way. She seemed to hold herself in control at all times. Was she stoic or cold? Iwalani's reaction to the news of her husband's death was hard for the detectives to gauge. She'd been told over the phone, while she was still in Hong Kong, so by the time they met her on her arrival at Honolulu International Airport, she'd had many hours to come to grips with the fact that her husband had been murdered. Despite the daily revelations of potential fraud, the gossip about his secretary, and the growing possibility that she was now penniless, she held herself with an almost regal bearing that deflected pity before it could be proffered.

Iwalani accepted the condolences of Frank and Bill with a nod. She asked few questions, but cooperated in answering those posed to her. She spoke in a soft, but clipped and precise, voice that gave the interrogator the impression that this was all an inconvenience, which she had deigned to tolerate. Luckily, for her, she did not have to identify the body. Had she been forced to do so, Frank wondered how long it would have taken the facade to crumble. One of the attorneys in the law firm that represented Laws, one floor below, handled the identification formality.

Bill had to smile to himself whenever he thought of the young, officious attorney, Wally Jenkins, presenting himself for the identification procedure. The kid was obviously still wet behind the ears, but acted as if he were lead counsel to some corporate giant. He'd not yet realized that the man he worked for was a major swindler. When he was shown the head of Maynard Laws, the kid puked all over the spotless floor of the morgue.

For now, Frank and Bill were accepting Iwalani Laws at face value. She did, after all, have an airtight alibi. She was in Hong Kong when the murder occurred. There was no life insurance, at least that they had been able to find. Although Mrs. Laws thought she and her husband were wealthy, if she'd had him killed for the money she would have been a fool not to make sure how much money there was beforehand. Frank and Bill both concluded that nothing pointed to Mrs. Laws as a suspect.

There were, however, plenty of suspects. All told, according to the ledger that Frank found in Laws' desk at home, there appeared to be over five hundred investors from whom Laws had taken substantial money. The investments ranged from a few thousand dollars to close to a million dollars. The long and arduous process of tracking down and interviewing each investor had been going on for several days and the preliminary reports were disturbing.

None of the investors had seen any return of either principal or profit in months. Many of the investors had begun making inquiries of Laws' office. They'd adeptly been put off either by Laws himself, or Elie Watson. None of the investors had ever seen or met any of the other partners in Laws' firm.

Frank was bent over his desk studying a list he had made of the five biggest investors with Laws based on the notations in the ledger.

1. Reggie Bellows - deposits totaling \$780,000. \$300,000 profits reinvested.

2. Charles Makuakane - various deposits totaling \$1,110,000. [No profits noted].

3. Hideki Kirimitsu - various deposits totaling \$606,000, plus reinvestment of profits.

4. Walter Heffler - \$700,000. [No profits noted].

5. Joseph Cabrera - \$610,000, [No profits noted].

These five individuals, none of whom Frank had ever heard of, must have known or had begun to suspect that they'd each lost a substantial amount of money with Laws. This made them prime suspects.

The ledger Frank found at Laws' house on the day of the murder appeared to be an informal and personal accounting of only the major investors. It listed the investments made by each. For some, such as Reggie Bellows, it also had notations as to "profit reinvested." For Bellows, it was three hundred thousand dollars. Other investors, such as Mr. Makuakane, who had invested over a million, there was no notation as to how much, if any, profits had been paid or reinvested. There was a column for "projected % return" with numbers that varied wildly for each entry. Frank and Bill theorized that these numbers were bogus numbers that Laws would try to sell to each of the investors as to how he expected their portfolio to perform.

Next to Reggie Bellows' name, for instance, it noted "25%???". Frank thought Laws might have been wondering if he would be able to sell this Bellows fellow on the idea that he would see a twenty-five percent return. Judging from the so-called 'profits' that Bellows had already reinvested, Frank figured that Laws took him to be pretty gullible. Most revealing to Frank was the notation at the last entry, which read "get profit statement to RB: will reinvest." RB, Reggie Bellows, could apparently be counted on to reinvest the profits he had made and, Frank speculated, it was therefore

safe for Laws to declare that Bellows had made more gains because Laws would not have to produce the money. The ledger was undated, so Frank had no idea as to when the entries were made, or even if they were still relevant.

Frank had consulted with his cousin, a CPA, for some off-the-record input on the ledger. The CPA was shocked at what he'd seen. He agreed with Frank's suspicions: this ledger appeared to be a private working ledger just for Laws. He must have used it to play with the numbers and make notes as to how he might be able to manipulate these big investors. Frank, therefore, obtained a warrant to seize all of the records at Laws' office. Bill and he had taken some perverse pleasure at presenting Jenkins, the attorney, with the warrant. The kid had gone white in the face.

The police sealed the office and began boxing and carting out the files and documents. Because of potential federal violations, Frank had been obliged to inform the FBI of the raid, and had agreed to make all of the material available to the Bureau.

Frank again wiped his forehead.

"Let's get a full background check on these five investors. I want the works, state and national. See if the feds will cooperate."

"You know, Frank, a ten thousand loss to some poor bugga is every bit as heavy a hit as a few hundred grand loss to someone else. Lots of times it's even harder."

"I know. We're gonna have to check out every friggin' person on the investor list, but we have to start somewhere don't we?" The irritation in Frank's voice highlighted his fatigue and frustration.

"Okay, okay, don't bite my damn head off. Jeez."

"Sorry, pards," said Frank. "It's the heat. We're both getting cranky. The press is on our *okole* for a break and we don't have squat. We've gotta take some shots in the dark and hope something turns up."

"You're right. It makes sense to start with the biggest and work our way down. I'll get someone on it. You think we ought to interview these guys now?"

"No. What I'd like to do is get some manpower to put a tail on each of them for a day or two, see what their activities are. While that's happening, we can get the background checks and know who we're dealing with. I don't want someone to cut and run; that is, if they haven't already."

"What about the phone?" asked Frank.

Bill removed a paperweight and rooted around on his desk, sorting through papers. "Laws' cell phone showed five calls out in the three hours before the murder. Two were to the same number, which was answered the second time and resulted in a three minute conversation, and the other three were all to a different number. There was also an uncompleted call to a number starting with nine, which could be 911 or any of the thousands of phones that begin with number nine." Bill paused and looked at his notes

again. "The two calls were to a phone registered to a Sandy Foreman. The other three calls were to a blocked number. We're working on that."

"Do we know anything about this Foreman?" Frank asked.

Bill shrugged and gave a half grin. "Not much yet, but from what I've learned he's some two-bit pimp and drug dealer who works mostly out of the Hotel Street area. Not sure what business he'd have with Laws, unless Laws was into skanky ho's."

Frank nodded. Nothing about this case would surprise him at this point. "Keep me posted. What about the air rifle? What do we know about that?"

Bill chuckled. "Apparently our boy Laws liked to go down to the ocean and shoot things, little *a'ama* crabs mostly. We talked to the neighbor who called in the shot. She didn't hide the fact that she despised Laws. She thought he was, and I quote, 'a fat, arrogant pig'. She routinely called the cops about hearing gunshots at Laws' house."

"What took Lee so long to get there? He was just a few blocks away."

"I asked him," said Bill. "He looked kind of sheepish when I confronted him, but he said he'd responded to so many supposed gunshots at the Laws' residence that he assumed it was just the neighbor calling in about the air gun again."

Frank shook his head in disgust. "He needs to be reprimanded, Bill. That fool may've blown the whole investigation by making an assumption and not responding in time. If Laws had been shot, then hacked up, that would've taken some time. Lee might've gotten there while the murderer was still there."

Bill nodded in agreement. "No shit. Think what McMartin could do with that tidbit if he turns out to be the defense attorney on this case."

Frank rolled his eyes. "Yeah. He took Billy Green apart piece by piece on cross a few weeks ago in that negligent homicide case. I would've bet the farm against him getting a defense verdict on that one."

"You know, when McMartin first showed up on felony cases I thought, 'what's up with this guy?' Long hair, cowboy boots, jeans, and a name that sounded like a Mexican-Irish restaurant. But I gotta say, he turned out to be the real deal, the bane of our existence." He gathered his notes and stood to leave. "I'll go check on the tails."

As Bill left, Frank looked around at the boxes piled up against every wall in the office. This was going to be a long, slow process unless they got a break.

Frank turned his attention to the autopsy report from Dr. Dasari. Laws had been shot with a .38 caliber handgun in the abdomen. It was not a fatal shot and Doc's opinion was that Laws would probably have retained consciousness after the shooting, at least for a while. The killer had then amputated the head and both arms, not necessarily in that order, with a sharp, thick-bladed sword or machete, most likely a machete. According

to Dr. Dasari, this was not an easy task, and it tended to rule out a woman, at least as a sole perpetrator.

Although there was evidence of some hacking, especially on the neck, Doc noted that whoever had performed the dismemberment would seem to have had some knowledge of anatomy and/or some special combat training.

Death would have been caused either by the complete severance of the spinal cord at the base of the skull or by massive blood loss, depending on what was amputated first. There was bruising on the head at the posterior occipital region, which led her to opine that the head had struck the deck before rolling into, or being thrown into the pool.

Frank closed his eyes and tried to get the picture of the grotesquely swollen eyes out of his mind. He could see them, magnified by the water, staring up from the pool. The heat in his office and the mental image of the corpse were combining to produce a slight nausea, but he forced himself to read on.

The right upper extremity had bruises on it at or about the forearm area, where the killer had apparently held on to the arm, presumably to stop the body from falling over after the decapitation. There were no other significant abrasions on the arms. Frank summoned up a grotesque image of the murderer holding hands with a headless torso.

The arms had apparently been left where they fell or had been placed where they were found immediately after amputation. The potato chips stuck to the left hand were a result of chips having stuck to suntan lotion. The stomach contents showed that Laws had been eating potato chips just prior to his death. His blood alcohol was .14, drunk but probably not out of it. Time of death was placed between 1:00 p.m. and 2:45 p.m.

Frank checked his notes again. The neighbor had called in the shot at 2:24 p.m. and the first officer was on the scene by 2:55 p.m. *Damn that Lee*, mused Frank. If the neighbor was telling the truth about calling a few minutes after hearing the shot, and if the dismemberment occurred after the shot, that meant the killer had to work pretty damn fast to cut off the head and both arms.

'Shoots, it takes me longer than that just to carve a damn turkey,' thought Frank.

He put down the autopsy report and cover letter from Dr. Dasari, which set forth opinions, which she did not feel comfortable including in the official report. Frank knew that over the course of the investigation he would read and reread the autopsy, the statements, and the forensic reports to see what otherwise trivial pieces of information had suddenly become important in light of some new evidence.

He looked at the forensic report. The importance of the information from the labs would not show itself until later. There were numerous fingerprints in the house, but other than Laws, his wife, and that idiot, Lee,

none that had so far been identified. No one expected to find the killer's fingerprints anyway. Ten-year-old children knew from television that criminals wore gloves. This was clearly a case of premeditated murder. One doesn't go calling on someone for purely social reasons carrying a gun and a machete.

They had fiber samples, but so far, nothing to match them to. The only bare footprints on the entry tile matched the footprint taken of Laws. The glass from the poolside table had only Laws' fingerprints on it. The matchbook from Paris held only Lee's prints. Someday, Frank hoped, all this evidence would come together. He hoped it was sooner rather than later.

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