



## Excerpt from *Birth of the Black Orchids*

I'm told you have to show up for your office's grand opening, like you have show up for your wedding. So I did, even though it was a perfect day to drive the Jag until the road ran out.

Hurricane season had made its shame-faced exit. The three cold days of Central Texas winter lurked in the future, typical for the third week of December. In five hours I could be cruising with the top down along the Gulf of Mexico, tasting the salty breeze, just being myself, not JD Thompson, Attorney at Law, Esquire, or any other suffix, carefree as long as I didn't think about my eternal loan payments.

Not gonna happen. Instead, I stood in front of a massive red brick Victorian mansion in Christmas apparel, negotiated down to a green dress shirt and red tie, with my feet planted as though braced for an attack.

The house gave me a sense of doom I couldn't explain, though I didn't know about the murder yet. Maybe it was the two turrets bulging out on either side like menacing guard stations. Downstairs they held offices. Upstairs, bedrooms.

Or maybe it was the thought of scraping rent and bills from legal clients in a town with a population of 7,200.

Having cast the die, I lined up with my partners behind our new bronze sign, which listed Black Orchid Enterprises, the name of our firm, followed by the principals and our specialties: G. Dianne Cortez, CPA, CFE; Dr. John Ky Ly, DVM, Veterinary Acupuncture, practice limited to cats; and JD Thompson, Attorney at Law & Mediator.

Another line assured people that both Spanish and Vietnamese were spoken here. Many Beauchamp (pronounced Beecham) residents might use the first, but the last person to need the second, Johnny's grandfather, died several years ago. Johnny



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wanted to include “detective,” but Dianne suggested that we consider the sign’s cost and advertise only the embryonic businesses, not the imaginary ones.

Not that Johnny’s an imaginary detective. In sophomore year, Dianne collected her friends and rented a ramshackle house, thereafter known as Casa Cortez, just off campus. She included Johnny and me for the illusion of safety. I can loom menacingly, and Johnny has a black belt in martial arts.

He also notices more than most people, and soon he was the specialist in finding lost objects, a constant problem in a house of ten or so residents and their constant stream of friends and lovers. When his reputation spread, the neighborhood turned to him to find lost objects, pets, and children. He lowered the crime rate of the area just with his constant questions and searches—criminals learned to practice their craft a few blocks over, beyond the range of Sherlock of Becker Street.

He expanded his skills to finding evidence in the accusations that plague college students. He even solved a murder, something no one wants to repeat, except maybe him. But he doesn’t have an investigator’s license, and that matters to Dianne. She’s also the one that said we needed an umbrella organization for our three divergent specialties. She knows these things. Mostly we take her word.



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