

MACADAMIA NUTS TO YOU

A KIMO KANAPAĀKA -
RUSSELL QUANT
MYSTERY STORY



NEIL S. PLAKCY
WITH
ANTHONY BIDULKA

"She was Miss Saskatchewan the year she graduated from high school," Russell Quant said. "Second runner-up to Miss Canada. He was an all-province running back."

"*Romeo and Juliet* of the Canadian prairie," I said.

Quant smiled and nodded. "Except in our version of the play, instead of ending up dead, Romeo dumps Juliet and moves to Hawai'i."

"Now why didn't ol' Bill Shakespeare think of that?"

"Too cheery."

"I knew there had to be a reason why you were back here in Honolulu," I said. I met Quant, a Saskatchewan-based private eye, at the Honolulu airport a year or so ago, when he was waiting for a flight home and tackled a runaway suspect for me. He was a good-looking guy, blondish and a bit stocky, with green eyes and long, blond lashes. I could see he was the kind of guy who loved good food, but also knew he had to exercise to maintain his figure.

Since then, we had emailed a few times. He was a former cop whose investigations took him around the world, while I was stuck within the limits of Honolulu District One. I was a little taller than he was, a little slimmer, with black hair to his blond, and the epicanthic fold to my eyes that I inherited from the Japanese side of my multi-cultural family. Russell liked to say that all he got from his Ukrainian/Irish ancestors was the love of too much good food and drink.

We were both gay men in macho professions, though, and that had solidified a bond between us. When he called to say he was in town, and wanted to buy me dinner at Alan Wong's restaurant, I didn't think it was a date. Russell had a sweetheart, as I did. Instead, I had the feeling he needed a favor.

We met at the restaurant, an unimpressive second-floor space that belied how good the food was, and over a bottle of wine we caught up on his life and mine. As long as Russell—or his client—was paying, I was going to have a great meal. I

ordered Da Bag-- steamed clams with *kalua* pig and shiitake mushrooms, served in a big foil bag that looked like old-fashioned Jiffy Pop. I opened the foil and a cloud of steam rushed out, smelling like salt water and rich spice. I inhaled deeply. Russell leaned in to steal a sniff of his own. I took my time savoring each bite, digging the clams out of their shells, mingling them with the shreds of beef and the savory mushrooms.

Russell's appetizer was a quesadilla made with Chinese barbequed pork and mozzarella cheese, which he attacked with hearty gusto.

"Here's the deal, Kimo," he said, as the waiter took away our dirty plates. "Susan—that's my client—used her pageant scholarships to go to secretarial school, and then went to work for an oil and gas company. Frank got a job selling cars. After a couple of years, Frank left her for Honolulu. A year ago, she lost contact with him."

I sipped my wine as he continued his story. I'd have preferred a beer, but he was paying and he seemed to know his way around a wine list.

"She's engaged now," he continued. "She wants a divorce, but didn't have an address to serve the papers. So she hired me."

"She must have a damn good secretarial job, to pay you to come all the way out here."

"Her fiancé is her boss at the oil company, and he's the one paying the bills. He's one of the richest men in Saskatoon."

I snorted. "Is that a big club?"

"Don't knock it 'til you try it, my friend," he said with a good natured chuckle. "Saskatoon is a surprisingly cosmopolitan city; the Paris of the Prairies they call it."

"Who's 'they'?" I shot back. "You and your mama?"

"At least our ancestors didn't run around wearing grass."

"Better than gopher pelts."

Only the waiter delivering our entrees brought the volleys to an end. As he

served, we eyed each other as adversaries, but the smirks on our faces told the true story.

I looked down at my macadamia nut-coconut crusted lamb chops and Quant's sautéed shrimp and clams with penne pasta. "They serve this kind of food there?" I asked, forking some lamb to my mouth, where my taste buds were delighted.

"You'd be surprised."

"Huh."

We dug into the food, not talking for a while. I didn't get to eat at four-star restaurants like Alan Wong's very often, and I figured that I owed Russell Quant big time. "Let's start from the beginning," I said, taking a break from the amazing food. "How'd you get this case?"

"Susan Shapko came to my office last week," he said. "I did some investigation for her fiancé's company last year. He was happy with my work, and knew I'd been to Hawai'i before."

I nodded. "She try to find her ex by herself before she called you?"

"Yeah. Called his mother, a couple of mutual friends. No luck. She's got a big wedding scheduled for three months, so she needs that divorce."

"And the fiancé?" I asked. "How's he feel about this?"

"His name is Tom Kovalevsky. They all went to high school together-- Frank, Susan, and Tom. I got the feeling Tom was just waiting for his chance with Susan."

"All these names are what? Polish? Russian?"

"Close. Ukrainian."

"I'm assuming you've been looking," I said. "You can't find this guy?"

He shook his head. "I followed every lead I had. Went to the last place he lived, the last place he worked. No dice. You know, kept to himself, didn't talk about what he did outside of work, that kind of thing."

"And that brings you to me."

Handsome smile. "What can you do to help?"

How could I resist? "What info have you got?"

He pulled a piece of paper out of a leather satchel he had with him. "This is everything I have."

I scanned the sheet. There wasn't much, but somehow Frank Shapko had a US social security number. The leads Quant had followed were marked off, but I thought I might try them myself. It was the least I could do, considering I was about to hit him up for my favorite dessert, the "coconut," *haupia* sorbet in a chocolate shell, embellished with tropical fruits and passion fruit sauce. He went for the chocolate sampler.

After some more idle conversation, and a promise to talk again as soon as I had anything to say, he paid the bill and gave me his cell number, and a picture of Frank Shapko taken just before he left Canada. He was chunkier than Quant, with the same sandy blonde hair. Shapko had a jutting chin, though, and a nose that looked like it had been broken and poorly reset.

We shook hands while we waited for the valet to bring my Jeep and his rental. It was a hot, humid night, and traffic on South King Street pulsed past us. The only indication that we weren't in any city on the mainland was the piped-in slack key guitar music, and the single palm tree across from us, swaying in the light breeze.

"I'm glad we had dinner," he said as we warmly clasped hands. "Whether you can help me out or not."

"I'll do what I can."

I was busy with a case for most of the next day, but just before clocking out I did some quick searching. No John Does at the morgue matched Shapko's description, but I got a hit when I searched criminal records. Shapko had been picked up three months before for a class C felony, possession of one pound or more of marijuana. The case had been dropped, though, and the address on the record

was the same one Quant had tried.

I wrapped up for the day and called Russell Quant. "Want to take a ride?"

"Smooth talker. How can I resist an invitation like that?"

I picked him up at his hotel in Waikiki about an hour later, and we drove out to Pearl City, where Frank Shapko had been living. "I'm telling you, I went out there yesterday and nobody knew the guy," Quant said.

"No offense, Russell, but you're a *haole*," I said.

He narrowed his eyes and glared at me, unsure what I meant and not liking the sound of it.

I held up my hands in a defensive gesture and explained. "You're a white guy. Driving a rental car."

"So?"

"So there's no incentive for anyone to talk to you," I said. "I may be able to find something out you couldn't."

He shrugged and looked out the window. "Go your best."

To me, the highway was ordinary, but I guess if you come from someplace in the middle of Canada palm trees against a background of mountains are pretty spectacular. And they probably didn't have those splashes of wild purple bougainvillea either. We passed through a brief shower near the Aloha Bowl stadium, then turned into sunshine as we reached the Moanalua Road exit.

I was driving slowly, looking for the address Quant had visited the day before. A tourist in a convertible seemed like he was tailgating me, but as we pulled up to the apartment building he finally passed and zoomed ahead.

I could tell just from looking at the place where Frank Shapko had been living that it was a hangout for drug users. It was a two-story building, probably a former motel, and most of the parking spaces were full with beat-up Nissan Sentras and Honda Accords, though it was the middle of a Thursday afternoon. A few of the doors

were open, and I heard some Hawaiian music beating out of one. "Hawai'ian reggae," I said, as we got out of my Jeep. I sniffed the air. "Smell that?"

"Smells the same back in Saskatoon," Quant said.

We followed our noses to an open door on the first floor. I knocked and said, "Howzit, brah?" to the young Hawai'ian guy sitting on the bed just inside.

He just looked at me. "You know where Frank Shapko stay, brah?" I asked. "*Haole* guy, blond, Canadian?"

He shrugged. I pulled out my badge and showed him. "Nice pipe you got there, brah," I said, pointing to a big plastic bong on the floor. "Shame for me to have to take it away from you, pull you in for possession, when I all I want is to know about Shapko."

"He stay up the mountains, brah," the guy said. He shrugged. "You know the farmer's market in Kailua?"

"Thursday nights?"

"Yeah, brah. He come down wid a guy sells honey, do his business, then ride back up wid his guy."

"Thanks, brah," I said.

Turning away with Russell Quant, I said, "See, that's how we do it island style."

He shook his head. "Should have just taken you to dinner as soon as I got here."

"Well, you'll know better for next time." I looked at my watch. "Market gears up around five. We've got just enough time to make it there before it gets too busy." We drove up the Pali Highway in the light drizzle, with the headlights on and the wipers going, and all the flaps rolled down. Not exactly the picture of Hawai'i we like to show visitors. I noticed Quant was swallowing a lot. "Altitude changes bothering you?" I asked. I pulled a pack of gum from the glove compartment. "Chew this. It'll

help.”

“We must be climbing pretty high,” he said.

I shrugged. “We go through a tunnel in the mountains,” I said. “When we come out you get a good view of the Windward Coast.” It was only late afternoon, but the low cloud cover made it seem like night was coming on fast. We made it into downtown Kailua by four-thirty and parked in the garage behind the Long’s. Farmers were already setting up their tables and merchandise, and we found the honey man, a skinny dark-haired *haole* with a mustache that drooped down at the ends.

“Hey, brah, howzit,” I said, showing him my badge. “You know this guy?”

Quant showed him the picture of Frank Shapko. The honey guy looked from Quant to me. “I just give him a ride, brah. Nothing more.”

“That’s OK,” I said. “You know where he is now?”

He nodded to the right. “He stay down the block,” he said. “By the shopping center with the taco stand.”

Quant and I thanked him, then walked past a clutch of teenagers in front of the Macy’s and stopped at the corner. They’d been talking about something as we approached, but shut up as we passed, all eyes watching us. One of them was a kid who came to the gay teen group I mentored in Waikiki, though he avoided catching my eye, and I did the same.

A chunky guy with a deep tan and blond dreadlocks lounged against the front window of the taco stand, talking to a slump-shouldered teenager with torn jeans hanging down his butt. “That your man?” I asked Quant.

“Looks like it.” I hung back while Quant approached. The teen took something from Shapko and scurried away, and Quant started talking.

That’s when I heard the first gunshot.

“Russell! Get down!” I yelled, as I hit the pavement myself, dropping behind a parked car. There were four shots in all, and the air was still ringing with the sound

when I looked up, my Glock in my hand.

Quant was on the ground beside a big SUV; he'd been smart enough to figure out which direction the shots were coming from, and take cover. About a block away, Frank Shapko was racing like he was going for another of those high school touchdowns he was famous for.

One of the bullets had shattered the taco shop's front window, but the others had hit parked cars, without much damage. Quant and I both waited before we moved, then worked our way toward each other, keeping sheltered by cars in the lot. As we met up by a green pickup, I heard an approaching siren.

I used my cell to call in to the Kailua City Police Station to let them know I was on the scene, and when the cruiser pulled up I spoke to the officer, leaving Quant in the background. I explained what I knew, gave him my card, and left him helping the taco store manager call an emergency glass service.

"I didn't even get a chance to introduce myself to him before the shooting start," Quant said. "What was that all about? You think Shapko had somebody watching? They thought I was a cop?"

I shook my head. "I saw the way the shots followed Shapko," I said. "They weren't shooting at you, brah. They were shooting at him."

"At Shapko?"

"That's the way it looked to me. We need to rethink our approach. Come on, there's a good Italian restaurant across the street."

It wasn't Alan Wong's, but it would do. "Can I see a wine list?" Quant asked the waiter. He asked the waiter for a 2005 Mazzei Badiola from Tuscany. "You'll like it," Quant said to me, as the waiter left us to look over the menu.

I ordered the artichoke pepperonata, marinated artichoke hearts and roasted peppers, then chicken piccata as my entrée. Quant had the fried calamari and the shrimp scampi. "Can you find out if Shapko's in the middle of some drug problem?"

Quant asked. "Somebody who wants to shoot at him to resolve it?"

"My old partner, Akoni, works in Vice," I said. "I'll talk to him tomorrow, see if Shapko's come across his radar."

I thought back to earlier that day, when we'd heard from the stoner that Frank Shapko would be at the farmer's market, and remembered that tourist convertible that had been tailgating me. Had we been followed? Was someone else looking for Shapko, too? Someone who wanted more than his signature on a divorce petition?

I told Quant about the tourist convertible. "The other possibility is that someone's using you to find Shapko," I said. "You notice anyone following you when you were making your rounds?"

Quant thought about that. He was a handsome guy, I reflected, as he did. Too bad we were both in relationships; I would have welcomed the chance to see what he was packing under that conservative striped shirt and khaki pants. But I was in love, and reining in those randy impulses, and I assumed he was, too.

"Now that I think about it," Quant said. "I stopped at a Starbucks this afternoon to pick up an iced coffee, and I didn't want to bother putting the top down on the convertible. I left my briefcase on the front seat while I ran inside, figuring I'd only be gone a couple of minutes. When I got back, the case was still there—but I had the funniest feeling that somebody had turned it sideways while I was inside."

He shrugged. "At the time, I just thought I was imaging things. But all the same, I opened it up and checked my notes. Everything was there—though I hadn't found anything out."

"I'll talk to Akoni tomorrow," I said. "And then I think we should go see our stoner friend again."

I dropped Quant at his hotel and drove the few blocks to my apartment. As I was climbing the stairs, my cell phone rang. It was my boyfriend, Mike Riccardi, a

fire inspector. "I'm just getting home," I said, walking into my apartment.

"Out late," Mike said. "Big case?"

"More like a favor to a friend," I said. "The guy I had dinner with last night."

While I stripped down I told him about my day, and he told me about his. We had dated for a while, then broken up, then started dating again. It looked like the things that had driven us apart the first time were getting better, or at least we were getting a better handle on them.

The next morning, I cleared some time with my lieutenant, based on the shooting the night before, and met Quant back at Shapko's apartment building in Pearl City. The stoner's door was closed, and I knocked hard.

No answer.

I knocked again. A twenty-something Hawai'ian girl in a sports bra and pajama pants came out of the apartment next door. "You looking for Mikey?" she asked.

"Howzit," I said. "Yeah. He sleep late?"

"He *wen maki*," she said. "Yesterday."

Quant looked baffled. "He died?" I asked the girl. "How?"

"Somebody shot him," she said. She yawned. "I gotta get ready for school." She went back inside and closed her door.

Quant went to his hotel to make some phone calls, and I returned to headquarters. I spoke to the detective out of district 3 who had pulled the case. He assumed it was a drug deal gone bad, but didn't have any evidence to back that up.

Then I went downstairs to the Scientific Investigation Section and checked with Billy Kim, a skinny Korean ballistics tech I know. He pulled up the case for me, but he didn't have any bullets from the shooting in Kailua to compare it to.

While I was down there I hunted up Akoni. He's a big, beefy Hawai'ian who favors XXL aloha shirts. He was on the phone, but when he finished he said, "Hey,

brah, howzit? Don't get you down here in Vice that often."

"Got a question about a dooper named Frank Shapko," I said. "Name ring a bell?"

He shrugged, and turned to his computer. "Let me make a call," he said after he'd surfed through a few screens. I thumbed through a pamphlet on drug eradication while he talked to a couple of people, finally scribbling some directions down on a piece of paper, which he pushed across to me.

"Best I can do," he said. "You go up the Kam and veer off on this side road. My snitch says there's an old trailer up there, and your friend Shapko might be staying there. Supposed to be a *pakalolo* farm somewhere nearby but we haven't found it yet."

"Thanks, brah," I said.

I called the taco shop, and got lucky. The manager told me that the bullet that shattered the window had lodged in the menu board, and he hadn't pried it out yet. I drove out there, yanked the bullet and brought it to Billy in an evidence bag.

"Ballistics matches," I told Quant, when I called him later. "Whoever killed Mikey also shot at Frank Shapko. I've got an address where we can look for Shapko. Maybe he can give us a lead on who killed Mikey while you're getting him to sign his divorce papers."

We drove up the Kam Highway toward the North Shore, keeping an eye out for the local road Akoni's contact had given us. It turned out to be little more than a dirt track, which led up into a heavily forested area. We came to a stream, with only a narrow foot bridge across it. The ground was torn up, indicating that cars had stopped and turned around there.

"You have a weapons permit, back there in Saska-whatchit?" I asked.

"You betya, Kimo Kanapa-whosits," Quant said. "I just don't use it all that often. You sure I need one?"

I handed him my personal weapon, a Glock 9 mm that was pretty similar to the one the Honolulu PD had issued me. "There's supposed to be a *pakalolo* plantation around here somewhere," I said. "We've got to assume these guys are armed. Let's be as safe as we can."

I pulled out my HPD-issued Glock, and we both checked the guns before we got out of the Jeep. Then we walked down to the stream, crept across the footbridge, and climbed the narrow track. Instead of *pakalolo*, we found ourselves in the middle of a macadamia nut plantation, clusters of green nuts at the end of long stems. The leaves were narrow and glossy, reflecting bits of sunshine.

After about a quarter of a mile, the woods cleared out in front of a ramshackle house trailer, rusted in parts. I wondered how it had gotten so far from the road.

Quant saw Shapko before I did. "Frank Shapko!" he called. "Russell Quant. I'm a private eye from Saskatoon. I'm not here to arrest you. I just need your signature on some divorce papers for Susan."

Quant and I both trained our guns on Shapko, who looked unarmed. "Susan?" he asked. "She sent you all this way?"

"You're a little hard to get hold of," Quant said.

"Who's she marrying?" Frank said, and we holstered the guns and walked over to him.

Quant pulled out the paperwork for Shapko. "Tom Kovalevsky," he said.

"No shit? Little nerd? I used to push him around when we were in high school." He crossed his arms. "You know what? I'm not signing. Susan's too good for him."

Quant tossed me his paperwork, and then pushed Frank Shapko up against the wall of the rusty trailer, one arm across Frank's neck. "You don't get to choose who she marries after you, asswipe," Quant said. "Sign the fucking papers."

He nodded to me, and I stepped up with the paperwork and a pen. While Quant kept him immobilized, Frank signed in all the right places. Only then did Quant release him.

"You talk your funny talk and shoot off your guns," Quant said to me with a wink, "This is the way we do it in Saskatchewan."

Shapko stood in front of his trailer, massaging his neck. "You know a dooper named Mikey?" I asked. "Lives in the building where you used to?"

"Yeah, I know Mikey. He's a good guy."

"He's dead."

"No shit?"

"None whatsoever. You got any ideas who might have killed him?"

Shapko shrugged. "Nope. He didn't deal, he didn't piss anybody off. Just smoked his dope, worked at his crappy job, and played his video games."

Quant and I began walking back through the woods to my Jeep. "You got your paperwork signed, but we still don't know who killed Mikey," I said. "Or who shot at you and Frank in front of the taco stand."

"I might have an idea," Quant said. He flipped open his cell phone and punched in a number. By the time we got back to the Jeep, he'd finished his call. "You know a hotel called the Kuhio Grande Resort in Kahala?"

"Yeah. Fancy place."

"I was thinking about what Frank said, how he pushed around Tom Kovalevsky when they were in high school," he said. We climbed into the Jeep and I started reversing back down the narrow trail, my hand on the seat back and my head turned to the rear.

Russell Quant looked out the front windshield. "I called Kovalevsky's office and spoke to his secretary. She told me he was at the Kuhio Grande, villa 348."

"You didn't know he was in Honolulu, did you?"

"Nope," he said. "And I don't like clients who use me."

"Don't blame you," I said, as we reached a place where I could turn around.

"You want to come with me?"

"Wouldn't miss it."

About a half-hour later, I pulled into the self-parking area at the Kuhio Grande. Quant and I walked through the grounds, checking villa numbers, until we found the right one. I went up to the door and knocked. "Mr. Kovalevsky?" I asked. "Honolulu Police."

I heard voices, someone moving around in the villa, but no one came to the door. "Mr. Kovalevsky?" I said again, louder, and banged harder on the door.

It swung open. A slim, blonde woman in a pink blouse and white tennis skirt stood there. The man next to her, dark-haired and about the same height, had a gun to her head.

"Mrs. Shapko," Quant said. "Mr. Kovalevsky."

"I missed Frank," Kovalevsky said. "But at this range, I guarantee you I won't miss hitting his lousy bitch."

"Tom!" Susan Shapko said. "What's going on?"

"I swore if I ever had the chance, I'd kill your bastard husband," Kovalevsky said. "But then he disappeared. I thought you knew where he was. But you turned out to be as stupid as he was."

"You mean... you don't love me?"

"I just wanted you to lead me to Frank," Kovalevsky said.

She twisted around. "You used me! You bastard." She reached up and pounded on his gun arm with her fist, and then kneed him in the balls. He must have already had the safety off, and Susan's reaction caused his finger to slip on the trigger.

By then, though, the gun was pointed at his own chest, rather than at hers,

so when it went off his mouth dropped open, and a red splatter bloomed on his brand-new aloha shirt.

Susan Shapko reeled away from him in horror as his blood spattered her pretty pink blouse, and he stumbled to the ground.

I went for the gun, and Quant went for the client. By the time we had both under control, a hotel security guard appeared in response to the sound of the gunshot. Tom Kovalevsky was gasping for breath; it looked like the bullet had entered his heart. Within a minute or two of hitting the ground he was dead.

My partner, Ray Donne, showed up and took witness statements from Quant and Susan, while I handled the medical examiner and the hotel manager, who wasn't happy that there had been a shootout at one of his prime villas. I didn't even notice Quant and Susan leaving.

It was going to take a day for the autopsy, and then another to match Frank's gun to the bullet that had killed Mikey and the one I'd pulled from the taco shop's menu board. But I arranged to run Russell Quant and Susan Shapko back to the airport the next morning to catch their flight back to Saska-whatchit.

Quant was alone in front of the hotel when I pulled up. "Where's your client?" I asked, as he loaded his suitcase into the back of the Jeep.

"She's staying here for a while," he said. "I rode her out to Frank's trailer yesterday. They were pretty happy to see each other."

"You going to get paid for all this?" I asked. "What with your client dead and all?"

"Fortunately my contract is with the company," he said, "not with Kovalevsky himself. I think they'll be happy to pay up to make sure this escapade doesn't make the news."

I had to get back to the station, so I only had time for a quick hug as I dropped him off. "Take care, brah," I said. I handed him a box of chocolate-covered

macadamia nuts. "A little souvenir of your island visit."

He laughed and unzipped the top of his carry-on bag. Inside I could see a stack of boxes, the same brand I'd bought him. "A little thank you to Tom Kovalevsky's secretary," he said. "And some motivation for her to push through my invoice."

A few weeks later, I got a Fed Ex package from Saskatoon. A gift certificate, dinner for two at Alan Wong's. I recommended Da Bag and the macadamia-crusteD lamb chops to Mike.



Neil Plakcy is the author of four mystery novels featuring Honolulu homicide detective Kimo Kanapa'aka: *Mahu*, *Mahu Surfer*, *Mahu Fire* and *Mahu Vice* as well as the romance novels *GayLife.com* and *Three Wrong Turns in the Desert*.

He is the editor of the erotica anthologies *Hard Hats* and *Surfer Boys*, and is the co-editor, with Sharon Sakson, of *Paws and Reflect: A Special Bond Between Man and Dog* (Alyson, 2006).

Kimo stories have been featured in *Fast Balls*, *Cowboys*, *Hot Cops*, *Island Boys*, and *Surfer Boys*, as well as in *By The Chimney With Care*, a holiday anthology from Wolfmont Press. Other stories are available at Amazon.com. An anthology of erotic and mystery stories called *Mahu Men* is forthcoming.

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Anthony Bidulka has written six novels about Saskatchewan private eye Russell Quant: *Amuse Bouche*, *Flight of Aquavit*, *Tapas on the Ramblas*, *Stain of the Berry*, *Sundowner Ubuntu*, and *Aloha, Candy Hearts*, in which Kimo and Russell meet for the first time. The food-related title of this story is a tribute to Anthony's titles.

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