

# JUSTICE IS DONE 2

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**INVESTIGATION PAPER**

P.P. ( ) v

No: (MAC/DAC/JAC/PS/CI/DI)

**CASE CONCLUDED**

Address: .....

Offence: .....

Section: .....

Chapter: .....

FM / FH / FS	Date	Time	Court

Date and Time of Report: .....

Division / NPC: .....

Place of Offence: .....

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Foo Siang Luen

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This book is dedicated to the late  
**Assistant Superintendent of Police Richard Lim Beng Gee**  
and **Station Inspector Mohamed Fahmi Aris**  
who gave the best years of their lives to the  
Singapore Police Force.

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The stories in this book are based on actual events, and were written based on the case files provided by the Criminal Investigation Department of the Singapore Police Force (SPF) and news media reports. The dialogue in the stories has been recreated and should not be taken as a transcription of the actual dialogue. The views stated by characters depicted within do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the Investigation Officers or the SPF. Some names and identifying details have been changed or anonymised to protect the privacy of the people involved.



**JUSTICE** 2  
**IS DONE**

## Preface

*Justice Is Done 2* was written in the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has upended the world in unimaginable ways. Overnight, many countries went into lockdown in a bid to stem the spread of the virus. Normal life came to a standstill while the death toll soared.

This enormous loss is a reminder that every life that has been cut short is precious. And this is what motivates our Police officers in their relentless drive to seek justice for victims of violent crime.

How did *Justice Is Done 2* come about? Shortly after the first volume was published in 2005, a friend asked if there would be a sequel. I replied that this was always possible given the dark side of human nature. My words proved prophetic and *Justice Is Done 2* is now a reality. Like the first volume, this book comprises solved murder cases, many of which had looked like lost causes initially.

Seventeen years have elapsed since the first volume—and it shows. While the cell phone hardly featured in *Justice Is Done*, it is ever-present in this book, with the Police often leveraging phone-based technology for leads.

Undoubtedly, technology will play an even bigger role in crime-fighting in the future, as the Police Camera system, drones, robots and new forensics capabilities come on-board. But hardware is nothing without the heart, just as Artificial Intelligence is nothing without human intelligence. We will always need investigators who are astute, tenacious and have an appreciation for the complexity of human relationships.

## PREFACE

Like the first volume of *Justice Is Done*, this book explores how investigators solved some of the most intractable murder cases of our time. But as much as the book highlights their efforts, it also honours the unsung heroes—crime scene specialists and forensic scientists—who toil behind the scenes to put the cuffs on the perpetrators. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes the combined effort of all our officers to prevent, deter and detect crime.

Since crime never takes a day off (even in these extraordinary times), will there be a third volume of *Justice Is Done*? I am not sure. But I am certain that our investigators will continue to embody the values that have made Singapore one of the safest cities in the world, as well as be driven to see that justice is done for all victims of violent crime.

Chapter 1

# Nine Days is Nothing

**There is always a sense of foreboding when someone calls “999” to report a bad smell from a housing unit.** This uneasy feeling is shared by complainants and responders alike. For the complainants, there is an unspoken wish that it is nothing more than a case of rotten eggs or a dead rat. The responders too hope for the best but brace themselves for the worst. The worst would usually be an elderly person having died a lonely death in his or her home. But sometimes, it could turn out worse. Sometimes, it could be a case of murder most foul.

**22 SEPTEMBER 2005, 1.10 PM,  
BLOCK 79, 11TH FLOOR, INDUS ROAD**

Teresa and her neighbour Maimoon were in a quandary. They had been tolerating the smell for a week now, but today they could not take it anymore. For a week, they had done nothing about the smell in the hope that it might somehow go away. Sooner or later, the neighbour would have to discard those rotten eggs, for that was what it smelt like, initially at least. But the neighbour, Jason, had not been seen for at least a week, and the stench had grown fouler and more sinister. “I don’t think it’s rotten eggs anymore,” said Maimoon. “Yes, it smells much worse than that,” agreed Teresa, shooting her a look of concern. Teresa and Maimoon were private types. Neither was particularly fond of engaging the authorities, but today, they agreed that it was the right thing to do.

**22 SEPTEMBER 2005, 1.30 PM,  
POLICE OFFICERS ARRIVE**

Sergeant (Sgt) Lenon Li and Corporal (Cpl) Raymond Ang of Tanglin Division were first on the scene. The corridor on the 11th floor was dim, but the officers were led more by smell than sight to the flat of “Jason” with its gate open but door shut. A couple of unanswered knocks later, Sgt Lenon attempted to open the door but found it locked. He had to call in the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) to force open the door. When it finally yielded, the sight of the heavily decomposed corpse lying face-up in the living room would have seared the soul of anyone who saw it. Sickly rivers of green fluids were oozing from virtually every part of the bloated body, which was crawling with maggots. His face was a black, gooey mess, and a pool of blood had dried into a brown crust around him. He was clad in shorts and a T-shirt, and a square piece of table mat was resting on his abdomen. There were signs that a fierce fight had taken place with items strewn all over the floor. This was clearly a case of unnatural death. Sgt Lenon had earlier called in the SCDF. He was now calling in the Special Investigation Section (SIS) of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

**22 SEPTEMBER 2005, 3.40 PM,  
SIS OFFICERS ARRIVE**

Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Steven Wee was an experienced investigator, but even he was taken aback by the state of the body. From his experience, the victim must have been dead for quite some time, and from an investigative point of view, that was bad news. It is a well-known fact that evidence degrades over time, making the identification of perpetrators and even the victim difficult or impossible. Still, it was not a lost cause. The absence of any signs of a break-in suggested an invited entry. The victim must have known the murderer. Secondly, ASP Steven found the table mat atop the victim’s

## NINE DAYS IS NOTHING

chest to be a telling piece of evidence, almost like a gesture of apology, which suggested a close relationship between the two individuals.



*ASP Steven Wee found the table mat (foreground) over the victim's chest a telling piece of evidence.*

### **22 SEPTEMBER 2005, 3.50 PM, THE NEIGHBOURS TALK**

Far from being idle gossipers, neighbours Maimoon and Teresa proved to be a valuable source of information for the Police. They told Police officers that a lone man named Jason had lived in the flat, and quite often, young men would visit him, sometimes late into the night. Maimoon also recalled that Jason had told her that he consulted a doctor at Block 77 Indus Road about an itch on his leg over a week ago. But it was Maimoon's father, Malek, who provided the most significant lead. Said Malek, "I normally sleep on a sofa at the staircase landing because

it's windy. About a week ago, at night, I saw a Chinese man leaving Jason's flat and locking the door behind him. He was carrying a bag. He looked young, maybe in his 20s, tall and skinny, but I couldn't see his face because his long hair was covering it." The last part was a bit of a dampener, but Jason's neighbours had provided the Police with enough to work on.

**22 SEPTEMBER 2005, 4.10 PM,  
ASP STEVEN BRIEFS HIS TEAM**

"Okay guys, it looks like we have our work cut out. The pathologist isn't here yet but looking at the body, I'll bet my last dollar that the victim's been dead for quite a while. That means the killer is many jumps ahead of us. We have to work fast. Our top priority is to establish the identity of the victim. From what the neighbours told us, he's 'Jason', but we have to be sure. His neighbour said that he visited a clinic at Block 77 recently, so we'll need to check on that. If he's really Jason, we'll also need answers to a second question. Since this is a Housing and Development Board (HDB) rental flat, there must be two registered tenants. If he's Jason, who and where is the other tenant?"

**22 SEPTEMBER 2005, 4.40 PM,  
PATHOLOGIST BRIEFS ASP STEVEN**

Dr Lai Siang Hui found multiple stab wounds on the front and back of the victim. There were also defensive wounds on the dead man's hands. The pathologist said that a knife was the most likely weapon used but a search of the flat and its vicinity, including the rubbish chutes, yielded nothing. Adding to the difficulty was Dr Lai's estimation that the man had been dead for a period of three to ten days.

But the news was not all bad. By 6.30 pm, ASP Daniel Wong reported that checks with the HDB had revealed the one-room flat tenants to be Jason Ho Kien Leong and Gan Thiam Weng, who was



presently staying at Ang Mo Kio. ASP Daniel's team rushed off to interview Mr Gan at his home but found that he could account for his movements over the last two weeks. In fact, Mr Gan, Jason's former colleague, said that he never stayed with him at all and only assisted in his application as HDB rules required two tenants for a rental flat. Meanwhile, Inspector (Insp) Razali Razak called from Indus Clinic to confirm that the patient Jason Ho Kien Leong, 37, was indeed staying at Block 79 Indus Road. His date of birth was also identical to that shown on the HDB's records, further confirming his identity.

**22 SEPTEMBER 2005, 8.40 PM-9.40 PM,  
CID**

Once the Police confirmed Jason's identity and secured a photo of him, they hit the ground running. Checks with telcos showed that Jason was the owner of two handphones, numbers XXXX1128 and XXXX6105, and both were still being used. From the records, the Police established that only one number XXXX9700 surfaced on Jason's handphone XXXX1128 over the past few days—on 14, 15, 16 and 17 September 2005. Based on Dr Lai's estimation that Jason had been dead for three to ten days, the Police deduced that the subscriber of XXXX9700 had been in constant touch with either Jason or whoever took Jason's phones after he died. Either way, it was time to pay the subscriber a visit.

**22 SEPTEMBER 2005, 10.10 PM,  
TIONG POH ROAD**

Liz Sie stood bleary-eyed before the lawmen. In the dim lighting of her Tiong Poh Road flat, she looked even more clueless.

**ASP Steven** We're investigating a case of murder. Our records show that you called the victim's handphone XXXX1128 on 14, 15, 16 and 17 September.

NINE DAYS IS NOTHING

**Liz** I don't know what you're talking about. There must be some mistake. I didn't even know that this telephone number existed.

**ASP Steven** No mistake. Our records show that you're the subscriber of handphone XXXX9700, and this line has been in contact with the victim's number.

**Liz** You'll have to ask Jiang Yanye then. He's a friend of my boyfriend. I'm the subscriber of XXXX9700 only in name. I applied for him because he can't get a line as he's a work permit holder.

**ASP Steven** Where can I find him?

**Liz** He works in the kitchen at Hotel Serene. They call him Tim.

**22 SEPTEMBER 2005, 10.40 PM,  
HOTEL SERENE**

Tim Jiang was busy washing dishes in a kitchen at Hotel Serene when unexpected visitors called on him. After telling Tim why they were there, ASP Steven showed him Jason Ho's photo.

**ASP Steven** Do you know this person?

**Tim** No. I've never seen him in my life.

**ASP Steven** Our investigations show that you were communicating with him on 14, 15, 16 and 17 September.

**Tim** Can't be! I don't even know him.

NINE DAYS IS NOTHING

**ASP Daniel** Do you have a handphone with the number XXXX9700?

**Tim** Yes.

**ASP Steven** We know you've been talking to handphone XXXX1128.

**Tim** I was talking to my friend, Alex.

**ASP Daniel** Is this his real name or nickname?

**Tim** I don't know. I've only known him for a few months.

**ASP Steven** Look, this is your handphone, and this is the message from him: "One UOB Visa Card, two ATM cards, two identity cards, one safe. Try to sell I/C and draw some \$ from ATM cards. Use UOB card asap to buy things. Then we sell and share \$. Try to open safe and see what's inside." Explain!

**Tim** He was only asking me to help him.

**ASP Steven** It's nice to be helpful, but this smells like stolen goods to me. Where are the items now?

**Tim** In my flat.

**22 SEPTEMBER 2005, 11.25 PM,  
MONARCHY APARTMENTS**

Tim, a reluctant host to his Police guests, stood at one corner of his rental unit in Monarchy Apartments, Mandalay Road. He watched

sulkily as ASP Steven's team recovered a black travel bag containing a locked portable safe and a stack of cards that included Jason Ho's identity card. At the end of the search, his "guests" put Tim under arrest and brought him together with the items back to CID.

**23 SEPTEMBER 2005, 1.30 AM,  
CID**

It was 1.30 am and ASP Steven had been on the case for 10 hours. If he was tired, he did not show it. Waving Jason's Identity Card (I/C) in front of the 26-year-old Chinese national, he put on his sternest "fight" face.

**ASP Steven** So you've never seen this guy in your life? Ring a bell now? You're in a lot of trouble, young man. And not just for retaining stolen goods. We're talking about murder. Someone killed this guy, and his I/C coincidentally fell into your lap. Where does that leave you?

**Tim** Alex just asked me to sell his I/C, that's all. I don't even know who the guy is. How can I kill him? I swear I have nothing to do with his death.

**ASP Steven** No need to swear. Just tell me everything you know about Alex.

**Tim** Sometime in early June 2005, I met and befriended Alex at a pub at Telok Ayer Street. We kept in touch after that. On 14 September, just after midnight, Alex sent me an SMS saying that he had a UOB credit card and asked if I was able to use it within a day. I agreed to take a look at the card, and we met at 3.15 am at a nearby coffee shop. He asked

me to use it to buy some expensive items to sell. We'd share the money from the sale. I took the UOB card together with other cards. The next day, 15 September, he told me he also had a safe with him, and we carried it back to my place. He wanted me to crack open the safe and see what's inside. The next day, 16 September, he called to say he was going to Johor Bahru (JB) and reminded me to open the safe. On 17 September, he called again to ask if I could open it. I told him I couldn't and asked him to remove the safe from my flat. But he didn't come and didn't contact me anymore.

**ASP Steven** Do you know where he is now?

**Tim** JB, I suppose. That's what he told me. But as I said just now, he doesn't contact me anymore.

**ASP Steven** Does he have any other name?

**Tim** Er... Ah Liang. Yes, I remember his name is also Ah Liang.

**ASP Steven** Describe him.

**Tim** He's tall, a bit skinny, with long hair.

**ASP Steven** Anything else about Alex that you can remember?

**Tim** No. I've told you everything.

**ASP Steven** Think hard, young man. You're in enough trouble already. The only way to help yourself is to cooperate with us. Tell us everything you know.

**Tim** Yes... I remember something now. Sometime in June, at about 1 am, Alex and I were at Telok Ayer Street when we were spot-checked by the Police. We showed them our I/Cs, and after that, they left us alone.

**ASP Steven** Now you're thinking!

**23 SEPTEMBER 2005, 2 AM,  
CID**

Just 10 minutes after ASP Steven made the call to Central Division's Operations Room to search for Alex Lim Ah Liang and Tim Jiang Yanye, it was revealed that both men had been spot-checked by the Police at Telok Ayer Street on 6 June 2005 at 1.54 am. Along with the details came the photo of Lim, which Tim confirmed to be Alex. This was the breakthrough the team was looking for. They now knew how the suspect looked. Also, the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) proved to be just as efficient. Within minutes of the good news, ICA informed the Police that Lim Ah Liang alias Alex had left Singapore via Woodlands Checkpoint on 16 September at 8.22 am. Tim was telling the truth after all. Once again, Lim had stolen a march on the Police.

**23 SEPTEMBER 2005, 2.15 AM,  
CID**

In the small hours of 23 September, amid the quiet of CID's conference room, ASP Steven gathered his men for a quick huddle.

**ASP Steven** Lim Ah Liang has left Singapore, but we won't stop our investigations just because he fled. We know that he contacted Tim with Jason's handphone XXXX1128, but what about the other phone?

**Insp Razali** Our checks on Jason's other phone, XXXX6105, found this number XXXX0262 constantly popping up after 16 September. The subscriber is Lee Yoke Chye, a 39-year-old Malaysian who's working in Singapore. ICA records show that he's been travelling in and out of Malaysia through Woodlands Checkpoint since 16 September.

**ASP Steven** But he's a Malaysian.

**Insp Razali** Yes, but he didn't have such travel patterns before the 16th. And 16 September was the day Alex left Singapore.

**ASP Steven** Do we know his workplace?

**Insp Razali** Yes, he's working as a carpenter at a project site at Joan Road, near Upper Thomson.

**ASP Steven** Good. Invite Mr Lee to the CID first thing in the morning.

**23 SEPTEMBER 2005, 9.45 AM,  
CID**

As Lee Yoke Chye fidgeted nervously in the interview room, his mind went back to the moment when three SIS officers escorted him from his worksite. That was barely 40 minutes ago. Before that, he had never seen the inside of a Police car. "What did I do to deserve this honour?" he mused.

**ASP Steven** We're investigating a murder, Mr Lee. The victim is Mr Jason Ho Kien Leong.

NINE DAYS IS NOTHING

**Lee** Murder?! No, no, I don't know anyone by that name.

**ASP Steven** Do you know anyone called Lim Ah Liang, also known as Alex?

**Lee** Er... yes, he's a friend of mine. Is he in some sort of trouble?

**ASP Steven** That depends. Do you know where he is?

**Lee** He's in JB.

**ASP Steven** I see. We know you've been crossing Woodlands Checkpoint every day since 16 September. You went over to visit him?

**Lee** Yes. I went over to give him food and money.

**ASP Steven** Then you'd better tell us all you know about him. We want to question him about the death of Mr Jason Ho.

**Lee** On 15 September, at about 10 pm, I was with Alex at Toa Payoh Central when he told me he didn't want to go home because he quarrelled with his mother. He said he wanted to go to JB to look for a friend. When I called him the next day, 16 September at noon, he was already in JB, but his friend couldn't find him accommodation. I wanted to help him, so I went to JB after work and checked him into Meldrum Hotel. I paid for a night's stay using my Malaysian I/C as he said it wasn't convenient to use his Singapore I/C. I checked out at 5.30 am the



NINE DAYS IS NOTHING

next day, 17 September, and returned to Singapore to work. That evening, I crossed back to JB and this time, he handed me two handphones, which I sold for RM250. With the money, we checked into the cheaper Fortuna Hotel, again using my I/C. On 21 September, I got my half-month pay, and we switched back to Meldrum Hotel. I continued the routine of leaving for Singapore in the morning and returning to JB in the evening until today, when the Police visited my worksite.

**ASP Steven** When you were with him, did he tell you that he'd killed someone?

**Lee** No, no, never. If I'd known, I wouldn't have associated with him.

**ASP Steven** So he's expecting you this evening as usual?

**Lee** Yes, he asked me to confirm our meeting place later.

**ASP Steven** And he's still at Meldrum?

**Lee** Should be. We booked the room for five nights.

There was no time to lose. The Police immediately obtained a Warrant of Arrest to be executed outside of Singapore and contacted their Malaysian counterparts to seek their cooperation. This was in accordance with a longstanding reciprocal arrangement between Singapore and Malaysia to mutually recognise and execute Warrants of Arrests within their respective jurisdictions.

**23 SEPTEMBER 2005, 4.30 PM,  
JOHOR BAHRU**

Soon after ASP Steven and his men met the Malaysian police in JB, both teams set off for Meldrum Hotel at Jalan Siu Nam. As Lee Yoke Chye had given them the exact location of the room, the officers swooped in with clockwork precision. “Open up, Ah Liang! Police!” The loud rapping of the door must have shaken Lim to the core. There were sounds of panicked scurrying inside the room, followed by several seconds of ominous silence, before the knob clicked and the door opened as reluctantly as its cornered occupant. As the Police laid eyes on their slippery quarry for the first time, Lim, long hair dyed blond, stared back with the look of a deer caught in the headlights.

**23 SEPTEMBER 2005, 6.30 PM,  
CONFESSION AT CID**

Within two hours, Lim, 28, was back in Singapore and in a place he least wanted to be—a CID lock-up. He knew when he was licked. Looking downbeat and resigned, he readily confessed to killing Jason Ho on 13 September after a heated argument.

Lim said he got to know Jason when the latter advertised himself on Teletext to make new friends. In late March, he started working as a freelance masseur for Jason’s massage business. Jason would arrange massage services between Lim and male clients and Lim would pay him a commission for all client referrals. Then one day, he started asking for higher commissions. This greatly annoyed Lim who felt that he was doing all the work while Jason was simply collecting money. Frustrated, he finally stopped working for Jason. That was in June, but as he could not find another job, he texted Jason sometime in the second week of September to renegotiate the terms. But Jason would not budge.

## NINE DAYS IS NOTHING

At Lim's suggestion, the two met at Jason's flat on 13 September at 6 pm for a face-to-face discussion. They spoke in the bedroom area, but the discussion soon grew heated. Despite his repeated denials, Jason accused Lim of stealing his business by working for another agent. In the middle of the row, Jason darted into the kitchen and emerged with a knife. He demanded that Lim confess to his "infidelity". A violent struggle ensued during which Lim managed to seize the knife and stab Jason in the back. The struggle eventually spilled into the living room where Lim, having gained the upper hand, repeatedly stabbed Jason in the chest.



*Jason Ho's sleeping area bore bloody testimony to the chaos and ferocity of a discussion gone wrong.*

When Jason tried to run towards the front door, Lim chased after him and plunged the knife into his back several times more. A desperate Jason tried to take refuge in the kitchen, but Lim grabbed his shirt from behind. As Jason tried frantically to free himself, both men lost

## NINE DAYS IS NOTHING

their balance and fell to the floor. Lim was first to stand up, but Jason grabbed his legs. Enraged, Lim picked up a metal frame lying nearby and battered Jason feverishly on the head until he became motionless.



*The black metal frame that finally ended Jason Ho's brutal fight with Alex Lim Ah Liang.*

Shortly after, Lim took Jason's two handphones as he was afraid there might be records of their SMS exchanges. After washing his injured right finger and changing into fresh clothing from Jason's cupboard, Lim threw the knife and his bloodstained clothes down the rubbish chute. He then took Jason's wallet containing \$10, his I/C, an ATM card, and several credit and debit cards. He also removed Jason's portable electronic safe.

As he was leaving, Lim said he saw the wounds on Jason's chest and felt guilty, so he used a table mat to cover his chest. It was past midnight when he finally left, locking the door with Jason's key and leaving the gate open.

## NINE DAYS IS NOTHING

Over the next few days, Lim said he used Jason's handphone to contact Tim Jiang to get him to sell Jason's I/C and to use his credit card to buy some items to sell. He also asked him to crack open Jason's safe. Meanwhile, he thought it was safer to hide in JB, so he left Singapore on 16 September. While he was there, he used Jason's other phone to contact his friend Lee Yoke Chye for help as he was short of cash. Lee booked him into a hotel and visited him every day until his arrest by the Police.

## SENTENCE



*Alex Lim Ah Liang disappeared quickly from the murder scene and made a swift exit from Singapore three days later.*

For Lim, the wheels of justice turned swiftly. On 24 September 2005, a day after his arrest, he was charged in court for murder. However, a psychiatric report from the Institute of Mental Health said he suffered from Dysthymia, a chronic disorder characterised by depression that could cause him to react impulsively at the time of the killing. While he was not of unsound mind and knew what he did was wrong, he qualified for a defence of diminished responsibility in accordance

with Exception 7 under Section 300 of the Penal Code (Chapter 224). The Prosecution thus proceeded on the amended charge of culpable homicide not amounting to murder, to which he pleaded guilty on 17 January 2007. He was sentenced to life imprisonment. His appeal against the sentence was dismissed in August 2007 by the Court of Appeal.

## **EPILOGUE**

Alex Lim Ah Liang left the Police with a mountain to climb when he disappeared quickly from the murder scene and made an equally swift exit from Singapore three days later. When the Police finally found Jason Ho's body, nine days had passed. The odds were heavily stacked against them. The evidence had degraded and the trail had grown cold. In football terms, the murderer had taken a 9-0 lead over the Police. But it was only half-time. Lim could never have imagined how the second half turned out—how the Police not only clawed back a 9-0 deficit but scored a stunning winner by nailing him across the Causeway. The successful conclusion of the case marked the end of an intense 26 hours during which ASP Steven Wee and his team were constantly on their feet and on the move. On the other hand, Lim was ensconced in the safe harbour of Johor Bahru and secure in the knowledge of his nine-day lead over the Police. He had a right to feel safe. But someone should have told him that, to the single-minded officers of the SIS, nine days is nothing.

## Chapter 2

# Deadly Rendezvous

**“I’ll kill you with my bare hands!” is a common expression people use to indicate extreme fury.** But since most only mean it figuratively, its bark is usually worse than its bite. Not many of us expect to depart this world with our necks wrung, but it does happen—sometimes. Because sometimes, people lose their heads (forgive the pun) and literally throttle others with their hands. For one unfortunate victim, at least, that stifling moment came on a muggy September night in 2008 in Geylang, a place known for its vibrant, colourful nightlife.

**4 SEPTEMBER 2008, 11.50 AM,  
DIAMOND HOTEL, LORONG 18, GEYLANG**

The voice over the phone could not have sounded more jittery, and for good reason. Its owner, Jacqueline Ong, had just discovered a ghastly murder in one of the rooms of the hotel where she worked. “Hello, Police? There’s a dead body all wrapped up here under the bed. Can the Police do something about it?”

They certainly did. Within 15 minutes, Senior Staff Sergeant (SSSgt) Joginder Singh from Geylang Neighbourhood Police Centre was ushered into a hotel room in Diamond Hotel by shaken staff who pointed to a bed in the room. SSSgt Joginder saw some bloodstains on the floor near the bed but none on the bed itself. “Underneath... look underneath”, volunteered a housekeeper to the officer. With help from his partner Special Constabulary/Sergeant (SC/Sgt) Mohammed Hafiz, SSSgt Joginder removed the mattress and shone a torch beneath the bed frame. There was a body all right, but there was nothing “wrapped up” about it. Faced down, it was stark naked.



**4 SEPTEMBER 2008, 1.25 PM,  
SIS OFFICERS ARRIVE**

When Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Ang Leong Peng of the Special Investigation Section (SIS) entered the room, his first question was, “Where’s the body?” Not an unreasonable question considering that none was in plain sight. SSSgt Joginder explained that the body was in the hollow space of the divan bed<sup>1</sup>, and it would have to be lifted and placed on its side to be examined. Once this was done, ASP Ang saw the outline of a young female body beneath the synthetic fabric, which had been partially ripped open to accommodate it. Lying face down, her features were not clearly visible, but ASP Ang could see that her body, grotesquely contorted to fit the hollow of the divan bed, was already showing signs of decomposition. He decided to wait for the pathologist’s arrival before removing the body.



*The mattress of the divan bed was removed for investigators to examine the body tucked between the divan base and bed frame.*

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<sup>1</sup> A divan bed comprises two parts—a specially designed divan base surrounded by fabric and a mattress. The space between the divan base and the bed frame supporting the mattress is usually left empty.

Meanwhile, he instructed Station Inspector (SI) Chris Lee and SI Erulandy Guruthevan to check the guest register and closed-circuit television (CCTV) footage at the reception counter while the rest of the team led by Inspector (Insp) Alvin Phua searched the room. After that, he asked to see Steve and Gary, the housekeepers who had made the shocking discovery.

**4 SEPTEMBER 2008, 1.45 PM,  
RECEPTION COUNTER**

Despite the presence of the Police, the receptionist Madam Ong looked decidedly out-of-sorts. With or without the Police, she felt uncomfortable sharing the space with a dead body. But that did not stop her from volunteering a blow-by-blow account of how she got to know about the gruesome find, how she saw blood under the bed, and how she used a broomstick to poke at a dark shadow that turned out to be the dead body, until SI Chris Lee gently cut her short. “The register, can we see it please?”

**SI Chris** After this “Mr Samy”, I don’t see any more registrations for the room. Does this mean that he was the last person to use the room?

**Mdm Ong** Yes, he checked in early this morning at 2.30 am (4 September), and left at around 11 am.

**SI Guru** Please show us the CCTV footage for today.

**Mdm Ong** **(Pointing at the footage)**  
That’s him checking in. The time stamp says “2.30 am” (4 September).

**SI Chris** **(Pointing at the guest register)**  
Is this his work permit number?

**Mdm Ong** Yes. We accept both passports and work permits for registration.

#### **4 SEPTEMBER 2008, 1.53 PM, ASP ANG INTERVIEWS**

In his typically assured manner, ASP Ang calmed the nerves of the two housekeepers with a gentle smile and a simple request: "Tell me what happened."

Gary recounted how heavy the bed felt when he tried to move it. "I wanted to sweep the floor under the bed, but it wouldn't budge. Steve had to give me a hand. When it finally moved, I took a peek below and was shocked to see bloodstains. I told Steve to lift the bed slightly and grabbed a plastic bin to support one side of the bed. When I ducked underneath, I could see the bare buttock of a human."

"We rushed down to tell Jacqueline. She came up with a broomstick to poke the body and, after that, went all pale," Steve chimed in.

Thanks to the meticulous work by their divisional colleagues, SI Chris and SI Guru were able to report that the last guest to occupy the same room was a Mr Samy Gopinath (registered as "Mr Samy") who was spotted on the CCTV checking in with a lady at 2.30 am early today (4 September).

Based on his work permit number, the Police contacted the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), which was able to provide Mr Samy's particulars within minutes. ASP Ang nodded appreciatively at MOM's quick work as he scanned the information: "Construction worker for Netters Renovation Pte Ltd at Jalan Kayu". There was no guarantee that the last guest to have checked into the room had anything to do with the crime, but he was certainly a "person of interest". "Bring Mr Samy in for a little chat", ASP Ang told SIs Guru and Chris.

**4 SEPTEMBER 2008, 4.20 PM,  
DIAMOND HOTEL**

The SIS officers combing the room knew all about finding a needle in a haystack. Given the small size of the room, the victim's belongings should have been instantly visible if they were around. But were they? For a long time, it did not appear to be so until SSSgt Joginder, who had joined the search, let out a jubilant shout. "Look here, below the bathtub. There's an opening!"

SIS officers, including ASP Ang, rushed to the bathroom and saw an opening near the base of the bathtub. Stuffed inside were a pair of jeans, a purple blouse, underclothing and a black handbag containing the stub of a prepaid SIM card and a passport. As ASP Ang flicked open the passport, he saw the photograph of a young lady born on 8 January 1987 in Sri Lanka—Thayagarajah Radika Devi. Now the victim had a name.



*The opening at the base of the bathtub that held the secrets to the victim's identity.*



**Insp Alvin** Strange. We didn't find any handphone among her belongings.

**ASP Ang** She definitely had one. The stub of the SIM card in her handbag had the handphone number XXXX4306 on it.

**Insp Alvin** If it's hers, there's a high chance her handphone is now with the killer.

**ASP Ang** I hope he uses it too. That'll lead us to him.

#### **4 SEPTEMBER 2008, 4.45 PM, HOTEL ROOM, DR PAUL ASSESSES**

There had been encouraging progress so far—the victim had been identified, a “person of interest” was assisting with the investigation, the person wearing the beige cap would be next (once he had been identified), and the Police's data search would soon uncover vital information about the deceased's phone. Pathologist Dr George Paul's expert opinion would help to join the dots.

**ASP Ang** Dr Paul, can I have your assessment?

**Dr Paul** There's some blood in the mouth and nose. Her tongue is slightly protruding, and there are some bruises in the neck region. These injuries suggest considerable force had been exerted on the neck. I can confirm with certainty only after conducting the post-mortem.

**ASP Ang** Any defensive injuries?

**Dr Paul** Apart from the neck injuries, I don't see any other injuries to suggest a violent struggle.

## DEADLY RENDEZVOUS

**ASP Ang** Is her abdomen swollen from decomposition?

**Dr Paul** The body isn't significantly decomposed, yet only the stomach is swollen. We have to see at post-mortem what's causing the distension.

**ASP Ang** How long has she been dead?

**Dr Paul** The body is getting discoloured. The outer skin is starting to loosen from decay, and discoloured veins are popping up under the skin. I'd say she's been dead for at least a day, or a bit more, say day and a half.

**ASP Ang** At least a day?! Not this morning or late last night?

**Dr Paul** Definitely not.

### **4 SEPTEMBER 2008, 7 PM**

ASP Ang phoned SI Guru as soon as Dr Paul left. What he said took only a minute, but it came as an immense relief to a certain Mr Samy, shifting nervously in his seat on his first visit to the CID. In essence, this was what ASP Ang said: "Guru, release the poor guy. It's not him. I've just spoken to Dr Paul. He said the girl's been dead for at least 24 hours before she was found. Samy checked into the room at 2.30 am early today (4 September). The body was found by hotel staff at 11.30 am today (4 September). That's just nine hours apart. So, it can't be him. And you know what? That means when he went into the room, the body was already stuffed under the bed."

### **4 SEPTEMBER 2008, 8.27 PM, CID**

Returning to the CID after attending the autopsy, ASP Ang and

## DEADLY RENDEZVOUS

his team braced themselves for the painstaking task of call tracing. After the post-mortem examination, Dr Paul had confirmed that the cause of death was due to manual strangulation. As for the abdominal distension, he said it was because she was seven months pregnant. Based on call records provided by the telco, the Police were able to confirm that Devi's Nokia phone (number XXXX4306 as shown on the stub of the prepaid SIM card in her handbag) was still being used.

Going through the call records of Devi's handphone, ASP Ang's team worked backwards from 4 September to shortlist the telephone numbers that popped up most frequently. These numbers were further narrowed down. The sieving process went on and on until only one number seemed to tick all boxes.

**ASP Ang** Look at handphone number XXXX6014. It appeared twice on Devi's handphone (XXXX4306) on 2 September, at 7 pm and 10 pm.

**SI Chris** Yes, these two calls were the last she received before she checked into the room at 11.58 pm (2 September). That means the caller was the last person to contact her alive.

**SI Guru** Not only that, my checks on XXXX6014's call record showed that a long-distance call was made to the number 04-XXXXXXXX in Andhra Pradesh, India, at 5 pm on 1 September 2008.

**Insp Alvin** And my checks on the call record of Devi's handphone (XXXX4306) showed that her phone was also used to call the same Andhra Pradesh number (04-XXXXXXXX) at 4.50 pm on 3 September 2008, after she died.



## DEADLY RENDEZVOUS

**ASP Ang** That can only mean one thing. The owner of handphone XXXX6014 and whoever was using Devi's phone after she died is likely to be the same person. Is the owner of handphone XXXX6014 the guy with the beige-coloured cap?

**SI Guru** Yes, he's the one. He was with Devi when she checked in at 11.58 pm on 2 September.

**ASP Ang** Do we have his particulars?

**SI Chris** Yes, we have his photo and particulars from his work permit. He's Madhuri Jaya Chandra Reddy, 20, from Andhra Pradesh, India, and works for Trans-Pacific Cleaners as a general worker. He stays in a dormitory at Ama Keng Road.

### **5 SEPTEMBER 2008, 5.30 AM, DORMITORY IN AMA KENG**

Even though it was 5 am the next day, and the officers had been working without a break since noon the day before, they lost no time in rushing to the dormitory. Once there, they told the security officer the purpose of their visit and showed him Reddy's photo. As the dormitory housed about 3,000 foreign workers, ASP Ang wanted to know Reddy's block and room number in order to facilitate operations. Unfortunately, the security officer, Ah Teck, did not have the information.

**Ah Teck** I'm sorry, Sir. Only the manager has such details, and he's not here.

**ASP Ang** When will he come in?

## DEADLY RENDEZVOUS

**Ah Teck** He'll be in at 9 am, but the earliest batch of workers leaves at 6 am.

**ASP Ang** Is there any way you can disable Reddy's pass so that he can't leave the dorm?

**Ah Teck** Yes, if you have his work permit number, I can deactivate his pass. All our access passes are based on work permit numbers.

**ASP Ang** Great! His work permit number is XXXX59217. Listen, I need your help on another matter. After you've deactivated his pass, stay in your office and observe the exit. When you see anyone having problems with his pass, approach him. If it's Reddy, ask him to wait at your office, then call me immediately.

### **5 SEPTEMBER 2008, 9.25 AM, CAR PARK OUTSIDE SECURITY OFFICE**

From his car parked just outside the security office, ASP Ang waited for the call that never seemed to come. Until 9.25 am. The message was short and simple, but it was the one he had been waiting for.

### **5 SEPTEMBER 2008, 9.30 AM, INSIDE THE SECURITY OFFICE**

After making his call, Ah Teck returned to his office to find Reddy looking restive and fidgety. Cap in hand, his body language betrayed a degree of tension not normally associated with a malfunctioning pass. "Relax lah brother, probably just a virus. The IT chaps are working on it."

## DEADLY RENDEZVOUS

But Reddy was in no mood to relax. "I need to leave now. I must tell my boss I am not working anymore. I need to return to India."

"Small matter, lah. No need to go to him. He'll come to you. In fact, he's here now," said Ah Teck, as Reddy looked up and saw "the boss" he never knew.

**ASP Ang** Are you Madhuri Jaya Chandra Reddy?

**Reddy** Yes.

**ASP Ang** We're investigating a case of murder. Is this your cap?

**Reddy** Yes.

**ASP Ang** Empty your pockets... Does this phone belong to you?

**Reddy** No.

**ASP Ang** Where did you get it from?

**Reddy** Geylang.

**ASP Ang** From whom?

**Reddy** Geylang prostitute.

**ASP Ang** Name?

**Reddy** Devi.

By now, the security manager had provided the Police with the location of Reddy's living quarters. A thorough search yielded two gold chains, two gold rings, two gold bangles and the black T-shirt and pants he wore on 2 September, as captured by the CCTV recording. Faced with such incriminating evidence, Reddy broke down and confessed.

**5 SEPTEMBER 2008, 3.48 PM,  
CID, REDDY CONFESSES**

Reddy told the investigators that he was a 20-year-old worker from Andhra Pradesh who arrived in Singapore on 28 November 2007. He was employed as a general worker by Trans-Pacific Cleaners. One night in mid-August 2008, when he woke up to go to the toilet, he noticed a missed call from an unknown number on his handphone (XXXX6014). When he returned the call, a female voice came on. She introduced herself as Devi and asked if Reddy was going to Geylang. From the flirtatious way she talked, Reddy knew she was a prostitute. He told her that he was sleeping and could not go. But over the next couple of weeks, he called her off and on. She told him that she charged \$50 an hour for sex and asked him to call her if he was interested.

On 2 September 2008 at 7 pm, Reddy called Devi from his dorm to say that he would be going to Geylang later. She asked him to go to Lorong 18 and call her once he arrived. At 10 pm, both Reddy and Devi shared their respective locations over the phone. About 10 minutes later, Reddy spotted a lady in a red T-shirt and jeans in front of Diamond Hotel in Lorong 18. He approached her and confirmed that she was Devi. However, she asked Reddy to wait a while as she wanted to eat her dinner. He waited by the roadside till 11.45 pm. When she returned, she told him that he had to pay \$150 for sex in addition to \$40 for room rental of four hours. After some bargaining, Devi agreed to pay the \$40 room charge instead.

## DEADLY RENDEZVOUS

At the hotel, Devi used her passport to register for the room. This was around midnight. They had two sessions of sex but when Reddy asked for a third session at 2 am, she demanded more money. This angered Reddy who felt that she should service him until 4 am since he had booked her for four hours. This led to a flaming row, with Devi threatening to call her agent to beat him up. But as Reddy snatched her handphone away, Devi moved angrily towards him. On seeing this, Reddy grabbed her neck with his right hand and squeezed it tightly. He released her only after one or two minutes, when he saw her eyes closing and her tongue protruding from her mouth. When he placed a finger to her nose, he realised that she was not breathing.

Reddy then tried to hide Devi's body by pushing her under the bed. But it could still be seen as the bed was not lying flat on the floor. He lifted the bed and noticed a layer of fabric covering the base. When he slashed open the fabric and found an empty space between the bed top and the base, he pushed her into the space after removing her gold chain and two gold rings. Now the body could not be seen, and the bed was resting flat on the floor.

After that, Reddy left the hotel by the spiral staircase and roamed the streets for about 10 minutes. When he returned to the room, he discovered Devi's belongings in the bathroom. He looked for a place to hide them and found an opening at the base of the bathtub. After removing two gold bangles and a gold chain from her bag, he pushed it inside the hollow, followed by her T-shirt and jeans. However, he kept her handphone. To avoid suspicion since he was seen checking into the room with a girl, Reddy decided to bring another girl back to the hotel. He managed to get an Indian prostitute for \$50 and extended his stay by another hour. They had sex in the same room and left the hotel together at 4.20 am. He walked around the area until daybreak before returning to his dormitory, where he kept the gold items in his bag and went to sleep. Later that day (3 September), at about 4.50 pm, he used Devi's phone to call his home at Andhra Pradesh.

## DEADLY RENDEZVOUS

The next day (4 September), Reddy said he went to Lorong 18 at about 7 pm and saw several Police cars near Diamond Hotel. He thought Devi's body must have been discovered by the hotel staff. He left Geylang at 10 pm and returned to his dormitory. At 8.40 am on 5 September, he was about to leave the dormitory when he realised that his access pass was faulty. The guard asked him to wait at the security office while he looked into the problem. However, at about 9 am, Police officers had gone to his workplace and arrested him.

## SENTENCE



*"I'll kill you with  
my bare hands!"  
Madhuri Jaya  
Chandra Reddy  
turned a figure of  
speech into deadly  
reality.*

On 11 January 2010, about a year and four months after Reddy's arrest for the killing of Thayagarajah Radika Devi, he pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of culpable homicide not amounting to murder. In mitigation, Reddy's lawyer Low Cheong Yeow argued that he was "neither the initiator nor aggressor" in the altercation, which arose from a dispute over another round of sex. He claimed that Devi had tried to assault Reddy by moving towards him with clenched fists. But Deputy Public Prosecutor (DPP) Gillian Koh-Tan argued that

Reddy had grossly overreacted and had other recourse compared to the “defenceless woman” who was seven months pregnant. Noting that Devi did not even have the chance to dial her handphone or put up a struggle, the DPP argued that by snatching away her phone, Reddy had neutralised any danger to him and could easily have left the hotel. By his action, he had taken two lives as the baby boy died in the mother’s womb as a result. Judicial Commissioner Steven Chong agreed with the Prosecution that the killing was “far disproportionate” to the threat Reddy faced. On 14 January 2010, he sentenced Reddy to 17 years’ jail and 12 strokes of the cane.

### **EPILOGUE**

The Police won kudos for solving the case within 22 hours of the discovery of Devi’s body. ASP Ang Leong Peng’s team doggedly pursued every lead that they uncovered, such as her passport and SIM card stub. Madhuri Jaya Chandra Reddy never knew what hit him. He had done a reasonable job at covering his tracks and had no idea how the law caught up with him. When the Police homed in on him, the unsuspecting killer was so shell-shocked that he surrendered meekly and confessed to his crime. As for Geylang, business fell significantly in the aftermath of the killing, though it was debatable whether this was due to an attack of conscience or a knee-jerk reaction on the part of its customers. But human nature would not be denied, and before the month was out, a local tabloid was happy to report that business had rebounded impressively. At least until (touch wood) the next murder.

## Chapter 3

# A Kick in the Teeth



**Over the decades, humanity's humble set of teeth has been used to identify victims and answer questions of historical interest.** Among the most famous was the rumour that Adolf Hitler did not die in 1945 but went on to live out a cosy existence in South America. This myth received a well-deserved kick in the teeth in 2017 when a team of French pathologists was given access to Hitler's jawbone and teeth in the Russian State Archive and found them to be a perfect match to X-rays taken in 1944. Afterwards, a member of the team triumphantly declared, "Adolf Hitler definitely died in 1945. He did not flee to Argentina in a submarine, he is not in a hidden base in Antarctica or on the dark side of the moon".

Yet in 2008, nine years before that high-profile confirmation and half a world away, teeth had already made their mark in a local murder case. The case stood out for the dental identification of the badly decomposed victim, and teeth's place in forensic science as the black box of identification, when all else had failed.

## **MORNING HAS BROKEN**

Like Cat Stevens' famous song of the same name, the morning that broke over Bukit Batok Nature Park on 20 October 2008 was something to savour. The soft sunshine, peeking through the trees, enveloped joggers in its balmy embrace. But amid the ferny freshness of the morning, the rancid smell of death was not far away and the wafting stench halted a jogger in his tracks along Lorong Sesuai, a small road leading into the park from Upper Bukit Timah Road. As Mr Samuel Lye, 57, looked for the source of the offensive smell, he was joined

## A KICK IN THE TEETH

by others in the search, which ended 30 minutes later with a finger nervously pointing to the bottom of a slope.

“Police! There’s a dead body here. Lorong Sesuai, near Bukit Batok Nature Park. It’s very decomposed and foul-smelling. It’s at the bottom of a slope, and the slope is very steep.”

### **20 OCTOBER 2008, 8.35 AM, LORONG SESUAI, POLICE OFFICERS ARRIVE**



*Tyre tracks and signs of damage to a tree were red flags for foul play.*

Having been warned of the steep slope, first responders from Bukit Batok Neighbourhood Police Centre found an alternative route to reach the body. Lying by its side in damp undergrowth amid thick vegetation, the female corpse was clad in a beige-coloured polo T-shirt and black pants, with no footwear. A silver ring adorned a finger on her right hand, a silver chain hung around her neck and a Seiko

watch was strapped to her left wrist. The head and upper limbs were badly decomposed. Although there were no visible signs of injury, the officers decided to call in the Special Investigation Section (SIS).

The reason? Tyre marks near a tree directly above the slope and signs of damage to its bark indicated that a vehicle might have collided against the tree. Fragments resembling the signal light covers of a car were also found on the grass verge near the tree. Signs of violent force so close to a dead body are red flags for foul play, and the Police were taking no chances.

## **20 OCTOBER 2008, 9.45 AM, SIS OFFICERS INVESTIGATE**

Monday, 20 October, was the start of a working week, and Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Kelvin Kwok was hard at work in the office. The “office” that morning was a 3-metre-deep ravine at Lorong Sesuai, where he and his men pored over the gruesome remains of the victim which was severely decomposed and had missing teeth on both her upper and lower jaws. Also missing were her identification papers and personal effects such as her handphone, handbag and shoes.

The arrival of pathologist Dr Paul Chui provided the investigators with deeper insights:

**Dr Chui** Confirmed female, age 35 to 45. Looks like she’s been dead for quite a while. From the state of decomposition, I’d say at least 4 to 5 days. Head and upper limbs are highly decomposed, and there is slight decomposition at the left chest area.

**ASP Kelvin** What’s the likely cause of death, Doc?

**Dr Chui** Most likely a heavy blow to the left side of the head.

**ASP Kelvin** Any way to identify her?

**Dr Chui** Since her fingers are badly decomposed, I don't think we can lift any fingerprints, but she still has several teeth left. That'll be our best bet.

**20 OCTOBER 2008, 10 AM,  
TREE ATOP THE RAVINE**

Senior Station Inspector (SSI) Zainal Abidin and Station Inspector (SI) Theng Kum Sheng had just finished examining the tyre marks in front of the tree when ASP Kelvin walked up to them.

**ASP Kelvin** Guys, what have you got?

**SSI Zainal** Plenty. The two parallel tyre tracks are 5.2 metres and 2.9 metres long. They are about 1.3 metres apart and end about 50 cm from the tree trunk.

**ASP Kelvin** Only 1.3 metres apart? That indicates a small car.

**SSI Zainal** Yes, most likely. The damage to the bark is located at the lower portion of the tree trunk. Just 40.5 cm to 45.5 cm above the ground.

**ASP Kelvin** That just about confirms its small size.

**SI Theng** We also found small strips of black, plastic-like fragments sticking to the damaged area, and some yellow paint fragments on other parts of the tree.

**ASP Kelvin (Pointing to the ground)**  
Yes, and these orange plastic fragments could be from the housing of a car signal light, while those black plastic fragments might be part of

## A KICK IN THE TEETH

the number plate. It looks like somewhere out there's a small vehicle with several missing pieces connected to either the victim or the killer.



*Plastic fragments thought to be part of the housing of a car signal light were embedded in the tree.*

### **21 OCTOBER 2008, 9.35 AM, HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY (HSA)**

The next day at the HSA mortuary, Dr Paul Chui pointed ASP Kelvin to a depressed fracture on the left side of the deceased's head. "That's the cause of death—a severe head injury," he said. But that was not his only observation. "The deceased had a fair amount of dental work done. She had several teeth implants, crowning, bridging and root canal treatment. So, you have a good chance of identifying her through a dentist—unless she had them done overseas."

## A KICK IN THE TEETH

The fact that the victim had spent many hours on the dentist's chair enthused ASP Kelvin. If she had the dental work done locally, one of Singapore's 1,000-odd dentists should be able to recognise his or her handiwork and unlock the secret to her identity.



*The deceased's many hours on the dentist's chair led the Police to visit numerous dental clinics island-wide and was key to unlocking her identity.*

### **22 OCTOBER 2008, 11.15 AM, MEETING ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR PATRICK TSENG**

On Dr Chui's recommendation, ASP Kelvin, SSI Zainal and SI Theng met Associate Professor (AP) Patrick Tseng Seng Kwong (previously Singapore's Chief Dental Officer), whose advice was as simple as it was sound. "Take an X-ray of the entire set of teeth and identify the type of implants used. Once the type of implants has been identified, approach the supplier and ask for the list of clinics or hospitals where the implants have been distributed. You can then check with the dentists in these clinics if the deceased was their patient based on the X-ray taken."

AP Patrick did not stop there. “Go and see Dr Loh Fun Chee at Gleneagles Hospital. He has carried out many implants on patients in Singapore and may be able to help you further.”

**22 OCTOBER 2008, 4.30 PM,  
MEETING DR LOH FUN CHEE**

Dr Loh was a generous man. Even though he confirmed that the deceased was not his patient, he shared how an implant could help identify the deceased.

**Dr Loh** Gentlemen, take a close look at this implant. You see that little smiley face? This is a trademark. This is how dentists distinguish an implant from a real tooth. Each implant is stamped with a serial number so small you need a microscope to see it.

**ASP Kelvin** What does this serial number indicate?

**Dr Loh** It indicates its batch, the period the implant was imported. Once we have the number, we can check with the supplier about which clinics have received the implants from this batch.

**SSI Zainal** And by doing so we can narrow down the list of clinics and dentists who did the implant for the deceased?

**Dr Loh** Precisely. From what I see, this implant looks like a Straumann.

**SI Theng** Do we have a local distributor for Straumann products?

**Dr Loh** Yes, Straumann's local distributor is Fondaco at Kaki Bukit.

Like AP Patrick, Dr Loh did not stop there. "I suggest you check with Dr Henry Ho at National University Hospital (NUH) to confirm that the implant is a Straumann. He uses Straumann regularly."

**22 OCTOBER 2008, 10 PM,  
NUH, MEETING DR HENRY HO**

It took regular Straumann user Dr Henry Ho less than a minute to confirm that the implant on the deceased's X-ray was a Straumann. Unfortunately, it took him even less time to confirm that the deceased was not his patient.

**23 OCTOBER 2008, 9.26 AM,  
FONDACO**

Now that the implant was confirmed as a Straumann, ASP Kelvin and his team visited Fondaco, the local distributor of Straumann dental products. They received good cooperation from the staff but also a piece of bad news. Just as Dr Loh had pointed out, there was a serial number on every implant. Unfortunately, it was embedded on the inner side, which meant that the implant tooth had to be extracted and sent to its principal supplier in Switzerland to retrieve the serial number.

That was simply not good enough for ASP Kelvin. "Please ask the supplier in Switzerland if there's another way to get the serial number. This is a murder investigation and we can't wait that long," he said politely but firmly.



**24 OCTOBER 2008, 10.23 AM,  
FINALLY A BREAKTHROUGH**

ASP Kelvin's forceful words registered. The next morning, a Fondaco staff brought him some good news: "Every time a dentist orders a Straumann implant, they'll also order an abutment, which is a screw to hold down the implant. There's a serial number on the screw indicating which batch it belongs to. Give us the number and we'll be able to check with Switzerland when it was imported and which clinics we were likely to have distributed it to."

This was great news. The deceased's upper implant was partially chipped off, exposing the abutment—with the serial number XXXX on it! Fondaco relayed the number just as quickly to its principal in Switzerland, who confirmed that the deceased's abutment belonged to a batch which was imported into Singapore between January and June 2007.

**24 OCTOBER 2008, 3.10 PM,  
SUCCESS AT LAST**

By narrowing the window down to the first six months of 2007, the search for the deceased's dentist was reduced to just over 10 clinics. But it was still a painfully tedious process. The Police, with the help of each clinic's dentist, had to check the deceased's X-ray against hundreds of post-operation X-rays. It was no fun for both the Police and the dentists. But it went on and on. Until 3.10 pm, when dentist Dr Leslie Boey put a toothy smile on the tired faces of the investigators at his clinic in Sims Drive by declaring, "Gentlemen, I think we have a match!"

**Dr Leslie (Matching the deceased's X-ray with the photo on his monitor)**

Look here, gentlemen. Crowning in the primor left

## A KICK IN THE TEETH

tooth... root canal treatment in the same tooth... and a metal filling in the neighbouring tooth. Yes, this is definitely my work.

**ASP Kelvin** Super! You have the patient's name?

**Dr Leslie** Her name is Choo Xue Ying. I remember when she first came to see me, she had severe toothache. Three teeth had to be extracted and she requested dental implants.

**ASP Kelvin** And her personal particulars?

**Dr Leslie** She's 46 years old. She's a property agent with PropNex Realty. Handphone number XXXX1109.

**ASP Kelvin** Address?

**Dr Leslie** Blk 54 Sims Drive #XX-XXXX.

**ASP Kelvin** Sims Drive? That's just a stone's throw away from here. No wonder she came to you, Doc. Zainal, tell the others to hold the search, then get over to her house and talk to the family. Theng, check with the telcos for her phone call records. Her phone is missing but someone may still be using it. I'm going to PropNex now.

### **24 OCTOBER 2008, 4.23 PM, REVELATIONS AT PROP NEX**

At the PropNex office, it dawned on ASP Kelvin why no one had reported Choo Xue Ying missing for such a long time. Also known as "Jennifer", she was one of the hundreds of property agents in

the company's books, and a solo operator at that. In fact, she had not set foot in the office for several months. As he pored through her PropNex application form, his eyes were drawn to a particular piece of information—"Vehicle driven: Chery QQ car, 800cc, 5-door hatchback, yellow colour, SGM XXXXM". Tellingly yellow and small, could this be the car that rammed into the tree at Lorong Sesuai? An Alert Order was issued to all Police Land Divisions and immigration checkpoints to look out for a yellow Chery QQ, vehicle number SGMXXXXM. "The pieces are slowly coming together," he thought, "first her name and occupation, then her address and handphone, and now her car number."

At this point, his phone rang. He could not help repeating SSI Zainal's words over the line: "Vacant... neighbours said the family moved... don't know where they shifted to. I see. All right, Zainal, wait a while, let me see if she updated her particulars at PropNex. Yes, there's a new address here. Blk 33, Eunost Crescent #XX-XXXX. I'll see you there in half an hour."

## **24 OCTOBER 2008, 5.15 PM, MEETING THE FLATMATE**

Choo Xue Ying's house wasn't vacant this time. The knock on the door was answered by Mr Harry Chew, Choo's 82-year-old flatmate, who confirmed that she had not been back since 16 October. Mr Chew said Choo was his ex-neighbour who found him his present studio flat at Eunost. "Most agents charge 2% commission, but Xue Ying only took 1%. She was a good person. One day, she showed up at my flat with a single trolley, saying that she had nowhere to go after a big quarrel with her family. I took her in and she'd been with me since."

It was now obvious that Choo's lone wolf style and bad blood with her family were the reasons why no one responded to the Police's appeal for information over the past week. But ASP Kelvin was

here for a more important reason. Although they had identified her through her dental records, it was important to back that up with a DNA match. “Seize her hairbrush, toothbrush and mug. We’ll need them for DNA verification,” he ordered.

**24 OCTOBER 2008, 6.23 PM,  
CAR FOUND AT JALAN KUBOR**

What a difference a day makes. Just 24 hours ago, the investigation was going nowhere. But once the Police had uncovered the identity of the deceased, events unfolded rapidly. They found her residence and place of work, which led to information such as the make and number of her vehicle. As Police patrolled the island in search of the car, ASP Kelvin’s men checked the Self-Automated Machine system and found, to their surprise, that the vehicle had been booked for a parking offence at Jalan Kubor, near Sungei Road, just the day before. After confirming the parking offence with the Urban Redevelopment Authority, the Police headed for Jalan Kubor, the site of a heavy vehicle parking lot. And there it was, looking like a buggie among a sea of juggernauts, the little yellow Chery QQ, SGMXXXXM!



*The little yellow Chery QQ was found among a sea of heavy vehicles in a parking lot.*

**25 OCTOBER 2008, 10.35 AM,  
HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY (HSA)**

The next day at HSA, the car underwent microscopic examination. The damaged parts were mainly at the front side of the car, at and around the three front right lamps and the right edge of the licence plate. The damage measured about 36 cm to 77 cm above the ground—consistent with the location of the yellow paint fragments and black plastic strips adhering to the tree trunk at Lorong Sesuai. Soil and woody materials were found on the damaged areas of the car, and most tellingly, the width of the car was about 1.4 metres, just 10 cm off the measured distance between the parallel tyre tracks at the crime scene.

If the external damage to the car indicated a connection to the crime, its interior just about confirmed it. There were bloodstains on the steering wheel, the driver's door, the front passenger's door and the roof padding above the front passenger's seat. These stains suggested that the victim had either been attacked in the car or just before she got into it.



*The interior of the car yielded further evidence of violence with tests showing traces of blood on the steering wheel and the driver's door, among other areas.*

**26 OCTOBER 2008, 9.15 AM,  
CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION DEPARTMENT (CID)**

Two early phone calls from HSA made ASP Kelvin's day. The first confirmed that the DNA collected from Choo's toothbrush, hairbrush and mug matched her bone marrow, while the second also confirmed that the DNA of the bloodstains found in the car was hers. The victim was now officially Choo Xue Ying. Two hours later, SI Theng reported that, based on the call records supplied by the telco, Choo's handphone XXXX1109 was still in use.

**SI Theng** The call records showed that someone has been using Choo's phone even after 16 October, the day Dr Chui estimated her death to have occurred. That's not all. Since then, frequent calls were made from her phone to three numbers. One of them was made to a prepaid SIM card belonging to someone called Intan (tel. XXXX1781). We screened her particulars and found that she's an overstayer from Indonesia. We can't find her yet, but we're in touch with the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) on this.

**ASP Kelvin** And the other two?

**SI Theng** One number belongs to a woman called Hamidah binte Abdullah (tel. XXXX2086). The other belongs to someone named Mat bin Jaber (tel. XXXX9854). And this is the interesting part. From Hamidah's call records, we found frequent calls made from her phone to Mat from 17 October to 20 October.

**ASP Kelvin** I can understand the calls from Choo's phone to the three persons. Whoever is holding her phone very likely knows all three. But what's the connection between Hamidah and Mat?

**SI Theng** I guess there's only one way to find out.

**26 OCTOBER 2008, 2.25 PM,  
CID**

Hamidah, 48, a cleaner at Aljunied MRT Station, was still fuming when she turned up at SIS. "This guy Rosli made friends with me and promised me a cleaning job with his company. We met at a coffee shop in Sims Avenue to discuss the offer. When I asked him when I can start work, he said very confidently, 'soon, very soon.' Soon, your head! The idiot said he needed to call his boss but forgot to bring his phone. He borrowed my phone and left the table. I saw him talking and then he walk, walk, walk and walked away with my phone!"

"Do you know someone called Mat?" ASP Kelvin enquired.

Back came the reply, "Mat, who?"

**ASP Kelvin** The picture's clearer now. At first, this "Rosli" guy used Choo's handphone to call Intan, Hamidah and Mat. But once he got hold of Hamidah's phone, he used her phone to contact Mat, which explains the frequency of calls from Hamidah's phone to Mat from 17 October to 20 October.

**SI Theng** Time to call up Mat.

**27 OCTOBER 2008, 1.30 PM,  
CID**

Mat was no less upset when he showed up. Understandably so for someone who had been cheated of over \$10,000 by a friend. “We ran into each other recently and Rosli suggested that we go into business. On 17 October, I met him and his girlfriend at Marine Parade Food Centre to discuss a coffee shop venture. He claimed he’d inherited a few million dollars from his father recently. However, there was a small problem. Although he had the money, he couldn’t withdraw it because he didn’t have a bank book. He showed me a blank cheque and asked me to write my name and \$500,000 on it and bank it into my account. He guaranteed that it was okay because his lawyer had already signed on it. I remember it was an OCBC cheque bearing the name Choo Xue Ying. He asked me for \$1,400 to pay the bills for the new venture. Three days later, he asked for another \$10,000. I gave him the money because he promised to repay me once the bank cleared the cheque. Instead, I received a call from POSB telling me that the \$500,000 cheque banked into my account had been rejected because the signature was different from the authorised one.”

### **ROSLI BIN YASSIN, EX-INMATE AND CAREER CRIMINAL**

Mat was not just Rosli’s friend but his ex-prison mate. Knowing the exact period that the two men had been in jail together meant that the Police could assemble a book of mugshots of former inmates to show Mat for him to pick out Rosli. Immigration officials also provided a photograph of Intan. Mat had told the Police that Rosli had a girlfriend and the frequency of calls to her number suggested that it was Intan. Mat quickly found Rosli among the mugshots. He was Rosli Bin Yassin, 48, who had chalked up 19 convictions over 17 years, and Intan was indeed his girlfriend. Later, Hamidah also identified Rosli as the man who stole her phone.



**29-30 OCTOBER 2008,  
SENTOSA**

With the suspects identified, it seemed a matter of time before the chokehold tightened around their necks. That appeared imminent on 29 October when ASP Kelvin received information that Rosli and Intan had been sighted at Sentosa. Confident of a quick arrest, the Police headed for the island. But they reckoned without the elusiveness of the fugitive couple. Over the next two days, despite two dozen men combing the island, Rosli and Intan remained out of sight and their names did not turn up on the registers of any of the hotels and resorts. It would have been easier to spot Elvis.

**31 OCTOBER 2008,  
SILOSO BEACH RESORT, SENTOSA**

ASP Kelvin was forced to re-strategise. The fact that checks had shown no records of Rosli or Intan could only mean one thing—they were not using their real names. He went with his instinct that since the couple had made Sentosa their hiding place, they would probably have been around for quite a while. “Look for any guests who’ve stayed for more than three days, and instead of just mentioning their names, show their photos too,” he told his troops.

So the lawmen regrouped and launched another massive door-knocking exercise. It went on and on until a receptionist at Siloso Beach Resort told ASP Kelvin that “a group of tourists from Papua New Guinea has been here since 20 October”.

**ASP Kelvin** Are they still around?

**Receptionist** Yes and no.

**ASP Kelvin** Sorry?

**Receptionist** The tourists from Papua New Guinea have just checked out but a Malay couple with them has extended their stay in the same room.

**ASP Kelvin (Showing her the photos)**  
Is this the couple?

**Receptionist** Yes, that's them. But they've gone out.

A flurry of phone calls later, ASP Kelvin's team converged at Siloso Beach Resort. They did not have to wait for long. From their lookout points, they saw the couple taking the lift to their room. They waited for five minutes. Then they swooped. A knock on the door for "housekeeping" was answered by an unsuspecting Rosli who was instantly knocked back into the room by four burly officers. He put up a struggle, but Intan gave up with barely a whimper.

## **INTAN CONFESSES**

When Rosli and Intan were arrested, it was for cheating offences against Mat and Hamidah. While the DNA of bloodstains in the car was confirmed to be Choo's, there was no forensic evidence to tie Rosli or Intan to her body or car. But that soon changed. Under questioning, Intan confessed that she helped Rosli to cheat Mat. Asked what she knew about the dead woman, she said Rosli first introduced her to Choo on 14 October at Geylang East Community Library, telling her they were going into business together.

She and Rosli met Choo again on 16 October, also at the library. At 2 pm, Rosli told Intan that he was leaving with Choo to discuss some business. Intan was to wait for him at the library. At about 4 pm, Rosli called and asked her to meet him at a coffee shop at Sungei Road. When she reached the coffee shop, Rosli was already there. He was soaked to the skin from the rain and there was mud on his T-shirt, pants and

shoes. Intan noticed that he had a laptop and a lady's handbag with him. She said he later sold the laptop for \$300 and transferred the bag's contents, including a cheque book and several credit cards, into his pocket.

The next day (17 October), Rosli gave Intan a blank OCBC cheque and told her to sign it in the toilet to avoid being seen. After that, they met Mat at Marine Parade Food Centre. Rosli took out the OCBC cheque to convince Mat that he had gotten into wealth. He used it to talk Mat into lending him \$1,400. On 20 October, Mat lent him another \$10,000, with the money to be paid back when Rosli's cheque cleared. Intan said that was their last contact with Mat as the next day, they went into hiding at Sentosa.

## **ROSLI CONFESSES**

Rosli Bin Yassin was tough but not as tough as the CCTV at Geylang East Community Library. After watching the tape which showed him leaving the library with Choo Xue Ying at 2 pm on 16 October, the seams of his poorly-stitched facade came apart. Faced with such incontrovertible evidence, his confession was as comprehensive as it was inevitable.

Rosli told the Police that he and Choo enjoyed a good working relationship. In fact, they were about to start a business venture in property. On 16 October, he met Choo at the library to discuss the two apartments that she had advertised for sale in the papers that day. His job was to get buyers for Choo. At 2 pm, they left to view the apartments.

However, on their way there, they had an argument over money that Choo allegedly owed him. As the quarrel grew more heated, Rosli told her to stop driving as it was dangerous. It was also raining. Since they were near Bukit Batok Nature Park, Choo stopped her car at Lorong

Sesuai. But the row did not subside and ended with Rosli punching Choo's head and face many times. Both of them then alighted from the car, with Choo threatening to call the Police. On hearing this, Rosli snatched her handphone and rained more blows on Choo's head until she collapsed and became motionless. Rosli then carried her to the bottom of the slope and placed her among the undergrowth.

After that, he tried to drive away in Choo's car, but in his hurry, he collided into a tree. He reversed the car and drove to Jalan Kubor where he abandoned it at the heavy vehicle parking lot there. Before leaving the car, he took Choo's laptop, handbag and handphone with him.

The next day (17 October), he used Choo's handphone to call Mat to get him to participate in a coffee shop venture. It was a scam to cheat Mat of his money. When they met, Rosli used one of Choo's cheques to convince Mat that he had come into wealth and got him to hand over more than \$10,000 over the next two days. With the money, he and Intan went into hiding at Sentosa. As they could not afford to use their real names, he made friends with two tourists from Papua New Guinea and told them that he would pay for their stay here if they let him register a room under their names. On 31 October, the two tourists checked out with their group, but Rosli and Intan were still able to extend their stay under their assumed names—until the Police arrested them a few hours later.

On 13 November 2008, Rosli was charged with murder under Section 302 of the Penal Code, Chapter 224.

## **TRIAL**

On 26 October 2010, slightly over two years after Rosli killed Choo Xue Ying, his murder trial opened with the Prosecution telling the court that his girlfriend Intan would testify that Rosli confessed to her

## A KICK IN THE TEETH

that he had killed Choo. But the trial lasted only two days before it was adjourned when Rosli's lawyers asked for the charge to be reduced. On 12 September 2011, Rosli pleaded guilty to the reduced charge of culpable homicide. This lesser charge carries a maximum sentence of 20 years' jail as the offence covers killings that result from a fight and are not premeditated. It also applies when an accused has "diminished responsibility" due to substantially impaired mental faculties.

On 11 May 2012, Rosli was sentenced to 12 years of preventive detention<sup>1</sup> by Justice Woo Bih Li. The Prosecution appealed on the grounds that "he is a menace to society who should be taken out of circulation for the longest time possible under the law to protect the public". The three-judge Court of Appeal agreed and, on 17 January 2013, upped his sentence to 20 years of preventive detention, citing his high risk of reoffending.



*Rosli bin Yassin,  
the career criminal  
who ended up a  
murderer.*

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<sup>1</sup> Preventive detention is a regime for recalcitrant offenders lasting from seven to 20 years. They must serve the full sentence with no reduction for good behaviour.

## EPILOGUE

The Choo Xue Ying murder case was unique for the fact that uncovering her identity was probably harder than tracing her killer. The Police had to first overcome the hurdle of finding out who she was before finding out who killed her. It took them four days of working closely with the pathologist, visiting numerous dental clinics and going through hundreds of dental X-rays to finally establish Choo's identity. When that happened, things fell into place and the trail led inexorably to serial criminal Rosli bin Yassin. The case also stood out for the pivotal role played by teeth, whose outer layer (tooth enamel) is harder than any other substance in the human body. This was why Choo's teeth remained long after her body had decayed. Choo Xue Ying was a loner. In life, she had few friends. In death, however, she found an ally in her set of teeth, which led the Police to her killer 11 days after her body was found.

Chapter 4

# By the Light of the Silvery Moon

**There is something fascinating and enduring about the moon.** It is feted in East Asian societies during the Mid-Autumn Festival (also known as Lantern Festival). On this day—the 15th day of the 8th Lunar month—when the moon is at its fullest and brightest, moon-viewing enthusiasts gather to sip tea and nibble on mooncakes. But for one family in Singapore, the festival would always bring back memories of anguish and irreplaceable loss, of a life taken prematurely and violently from their midst. For them, 22 September 2010 would always be the day when Death came like a thief in the night and made off with the person they dearly loved.

**22 SEPTEMBER 2010, 10.35 PM,  
MANDAI TEKONG PARK, WOODLANDS**

Despite the cool night, Mr Ng Kak Joo was feeling hot and bothered. “How on earth can anyone disappear for so long over such a short distance?” he grumbled.

Like many lantern-toting residents in Woodlands, Mr Ng’s family, together with three nephews, had gathered at Mandai Tekong Park to celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival. But halfway through, his sister-in-law requested for the children to go home and his wife, Madam Hoe Hong Lin, had volunteered to walk them to the traffic junction at nearby Woodlands Drive 50. So nearby that even an old woman would have made it back in half the time, thought Mr Ng. But annoyance soon turned to anxiety when he called his sister-in-law and was told that the children had long since returned. More worryingly, his calls to his wife’s handphone went unanswered. A minute later, his 10-year-old son, who had gone to look for his mother in the direction of the



traffic junction, returned to say that his path was blocked by a police cordon, and a body covered by a sheet was lying on the ground.

Fighting a rising sense of panic, Mr Ng approached the cordon. He told the officer that his wife was missing and asked whether the body under the sheet was male or female. "Female", came the reply. After he had described his wife's appearance and provided her handphone number, the officer excused himself. As he was doing so, Mr Ng noticed that he was dialling a number. From a distance, he saw to his horror that an object resembling a handphone was ringing next to the covered body.

### **23 SEPTEMBER 2010, 12.15 AM, SIS OFFICERS ARRIVE**

When Senior Station Inspector (SSI) Ravindra Subramaniam of the Special Investigation Section (SIS) arrived just past midnight on 23 September, he was met by officers from Woodlands Neighbourhood Police Centre. They told him how a "Mr Tong" had called the Police at 10.53 pm about a woman being "stabbed at Mandai Tekong Park"; how they had arrived in time to hear the ambulance medic pronounce the victim dead; and how an inconsolable Mr Ng Kak Joo had identified her as his 32-year-old wife, Madam Hoe Hong Lin. But more importantly, they had kept back a group of boys at the nearby basketball court who might be able to help with the investigation.

As SSI Ravindra approached Madam Hoe's body, he noticed how dimly lit the pavement leading towards Block 895C was. One would be hard pressed to give a passable description of the assailant from such a distance. As he lifted the sheet, he noticed that a large pool of blood had collected around her body, and her orange T-shirt and black shorts were heavily stained with blood. She was wearing a silver chain, an amulet, a gold ring and earrings. There was an iPhone near her. Drops of blood formed a trail along the grass-fringed pavement, and on the grass patch lay a broken blade and a plastic knife sheath.



*The broken blade left behind by the assailant during his frantic dash from the murder scene.*

## **23 SEPTEMBER 2010, 12.42 AM, SSI RAVINDRA INTERVIEWS**

A distraught Mr Ng tearfully related how his wife walked her two nephews to the traffic lights barely two hours ago and “never came back”. “She had no enemies... only friends... Who would want to do this?” he pleaded, as SSI Ravindra listened patiently. Satisfied with the consistency of his account, he offered Mr Ng his condolences before turning to the boys.

Mr Tong Kim Seng, 20, who called the Police earlier, had recovered from his shock to give his account of the incident. Said Mr Tong: “At about 8 pm, I went to the basketball court to meet my friends. We sat at the fitness station directly behind the court. On the other side of the court was the park with many people carrying lanterns. At 10 pm, the lights at the basketball court automatically went off, and the place was quite dark. At 10.30 pm, we were preparing to leave when we heard an ‘Aahh...’ cry at the other end of the court. It was dark, but my friend said he saw someone collapsing to the ground, so we decided to check. As I got closer, I saw a woman lying on the pavement with blood

pouring from her chest. She was gasping for breath. I immediately called the Police while my friends tried to keep her awake by talking to her, but she didn't respond."

Another boy, Ronald, who had caught a glimpse of a fleeing figure, added: "From a distance, I saw a man running along the pavement near Block 895C. He looked thin and had short hair. He was wearing a black T-shirt and dark coloured pants. But it was dark, and he ran very fast, so I couldn't tell his race, age or physical features."

Despite the sketchy description, the Police went door-to-door, asking sleepy-eyed residents if they had seen anyone remotely matching that description or behaving suspiciously. A look-out message was also sent to all Police divisions and taxi companies to be on the alert for suspicious characters fitting the description. Meanwhile, scores of officers scoured the area for closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras, hoping to find the assailant's image in the footage.

### **23 SEPTEMBER 2010, 3.15 AM, PATHOLOGIST DR WEE KENG POH ARRIVES**

**SSI Ravindra** What's your take on this, Doc?

**Dr Wee** The body's cold, but the limbs are still flaccid. Rigor mortis hasn't set in yet. The estimated time of death is consistent with witnesses' accounts of the stabbing incident about four hours ago.

**SSI Ravindra** Cause of death?

**Dr Wee** This is only preliminary, but it could well be the stab wound on the left side of the chest, where the heart is. There's also a deep stab wound on the back, plus several wounds on her arms which look like defensive injuries.

**SSI Ravindra** Weapon used?

**Dr Wee** Something with a sharp cutting edge, like a knife.

**23 SEPTEMBER 2010, 4.20 AM,  
CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION DEPARTMENT (CID)**

It was close to dawn when SSI Ravindra returned to Police Cantonment Complex. He was tired but his mind was racing. In the quiet of his office, he reflected on the happenings of the past hours. The victim was a lady who, as far as he could ascertain, did not know the assailant. The killing also did not bear the indicators of a robbery since nothing was taken from the victim, not even her iPhone. He felt a distinct unease as he cast his mind back to three unsolved cases of knife attacks over the last nine months.

Case No. 1: On 29 January 2010, between 10.30 pm and 10.57 pm, a 31-year-old woman was stabbed in the back and chest by a man at the void deck of Block 171 Yishun Avenue 7 near the lift lobby.

Case No. 2: On 2 February 2010, between 11 am and 11.21 am, a 23-year-old female jogger was slashed on her hands and face by a man along Khatib Bongsu Park Connector at Yishun Avenue 6.

Case No. 3: On 26 May 2010, between 8.30 am and 8.36 am, a 25-year-old woman was stabbed in the back by a man at the void deck of Block 588B at Montreal Drive, Sembawang, near the lift lobby.

And now this! Was this Case No. 4 committed by the same person? There were some striking similarities. All were victims of knife attacks, and all were women. The only difference was the outcome. The first three victims survived, but the fourth did not. If this was the work of the same man, tonight's attack would have been the first death of his stabbing spree. SSI Ravindra felt a deep chill as he contemplated the prospect of a random attacker who would stop at nothing.

## **23-29 SEPTEMBER 2010, THE FIRST WEEK OF INVESTIGATIONS**

### **Pounding the streets and pounding on doors**

As Singaporeans awoke to news of the dastardly crime committed by the light of the silvery moon, the search for the killer fanned out. The officers did not know it then, but over the next three weeks, they would be involved in one of the most mammoth operations in the annals of the Singapore Police Force. From Ground Zero—Mandai Tekong Park—they fanned out to neighbouring blocks, across streets, avenues and precincts until the whole of Woodlands was combed. Officers from the land divisions also helped with the legwork. They pounded the streets and pounded on doors, looking for any shred of information that might lead them to the killer they could only describe as “thin, short-haired, wearing a black T-shirt and dark pants”.

### **Interviewing the victim’s colleagues and friends**

As Police boots pounded the streets in search of information about the suspect, SIS officers knocked on the doors of Madam Hoe’s colleagues and friends in search of information about the victim. Her supervisor at Mills Mia Pte Ltd, where she worked as an administrative assistant, gave her top marks for work attitude and EQ. Her friends, many of whom were ex-colleagues who had kept in touch, described her as “helpful”, “friendly”, “mild-tempered”, and “impossible to have enemies”. As far as they knew, she did not have financial or marital problems. As the days wore on, the absence of any plausible motive for Madam Hoe’s murder appeared to vindicate SSI Ravindra’s gut feel that it was a senseless, random attack.

### **Interviewing the three survivors**

In the absence of obvious leads, SSI Ravindra decided to review the three unsolved knife attacks at Yishun and Sembawang based on

the hypothesis that they were linked to the Woodlands attack. He had sound reasons for his assumption. All the victims were young, petite, long-haired and Chinese. More importantly, the modus operandi of the attacker was strikingly similar. In all three cases, he had either stabbed or tried to stab the victims in the back before attacking them from the front, which was consistent with Madam Hoe's injuries. He decided to interview the three victims personally.

Arranging to meet the survivors was one thing, but getting them to recall their ordeal was quite another. Since they had already been interviewed by the Police, they were not keen to share their experiences again. But in the end, all three survivors met SSI Ravindra and provided him with important information. Through them, the Police managed to establish a pattern in the attacks, which seemed planned and deliberate rather than sudden and frenzied. For instance, before she was attacked, victim No. 1 saw the assailant walk past her several times in what could be an act of target surveillance. The victims also noted that the assailant maintained a stoic silence throughout the attacks. SSI Ravindra emerged from the interviews further convinced that all four attacks were the work of the same person.

### **Follow-up from the interviews**

Although the interviews did not produce dramatic breakthroughs, they provided further avenues for investigation. When one of the victims revealed that she had been a healthcare worker at Tan Tock Seng Hospital, it sent investigators scouring through the records of patients she had served during her stint there. It was a long shot, but the Police were determined to push on.

But after the Police had established a link in the four cases, they expanded their CCTV checks to buses and trains travelling between Yishun, Sembawang and Woodlands—from Yishun to Sembawang and back; Yishun to Woodlands and back; Sembawang to Yishun and back; Sembawang to Woodlands and back; Woodlands to Yishun

and back; and Woodlands to Sembawang and back. At the same time, they were also working with Transit Link to sieve out passengers starting and ending their journeys between Yishun, Sembawang and Woodlands in the hope that the perpetrator might be a resident in one of these areas. It was mind-boggling and exhausting work.

### **30 SEPTEMBER–6 OCTOBER 2010, NO BREAKTHROUGH IN SIGHT**

As September passed into October, the continued absence of a breakthrough was ominous. Police resources were stretched, but there was no question of easing up because the stakes were extremely high. For each day that the culprit eluded the law, the chances of another attack went up in tandem. This was something the Police could ill-afford, not just in terms of lives lost but also the incalculable blow to the community that it would cause.

It would not be entirely true to say that there was no progress. Based on descriptions given by the surviving victims, the Police were able to put together a photofit of a slim, boyish-looking, Chinese man in his early 20s with “short hair, slightly longish face, small, sleepy eyes, and a little mole on his face”. Compared with the earlier sketchy descriptions of the suspect, this was a quantum leap, but it was not a breakthrough.

Another lead that failed to live up to its early promise was the broken blade. With the Rhino brand etched on the 12-cm blade, a quick arrest looked on the cards. What could be more straightforward than finding the shop that sold Rhino brand knives and identifying the person who bought one? And when the wholesaler told Police that only one shop in Singapore sells Rhino brand knives, hopes of an early breakthrough soared. But it was not to be.

SSI Choy Ah Kiong, who went to the shop at Block 801, Ang Mo Kio, called SSI Ravindra soon after speaking to the boss.

**SSI Choy** Ravi, we're at Jenn Sin General Store in Ang Mo Kio. The boss just confirmed that they sell Rhino brand knives.

**SSI Ravindra** Great! Can he remember selling the knives to anyone recently?

**SSI Choy** He went through three months of receipts and couldn't find any.

**SSI Ravindra** Strange. The blade looks new, and this is the only store that sells the brand in Singapore.

**SSI Choy** Maybe the guy stole the knife.

**SSI Ravindra** Tell you what. Check the store's CCTV and see if you can spot any shoplifter.

**SSI Choy** I've checked the footage. There was nothing there, and you know why? Boss said the CCTV hasn't been working for a long time!

## **7-14 OCTOBER 2010, THE MARATHON CONTINUES**

As investigations entered the third week, the hunt for the predator was turning into a marathon. Although his first two strikes at Yishun took place within days of each other, it was a good four months before he struck again at Sembawang and another four months before this latest fatal attack at Woodlands. If this was any guide, the Police were up against a scheming predator who was prepared to bide his time—time that the Police did not have.



## SSI Ravindra's final card

As October approached its mid-point, there was no good news to report. So far, checks on CCTVs had not come up with anything significant. Nor had Transit Link's checks of commuters living in Yishun, Sembawang and Woodlands thrown up any "persons of interest". Visits to the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) and psychiatric departments of hospitals also failed to raise any red flags. Even reviewing girlfriend-battering cases on the off-chance that the perpetrator might be a woman-hater venting his frustration over a failed relationship yielded nothing.

But SSI Ravindra still had one long shot. As he cast his mind back to the day when he rushed the broken blade and the plastic knife sheath to the Health Sciences Authority (HSA), he recalled how he had impressed upon the Director of the DNA Database Laboratory, Mrs Tan Wai Fun, the urgency of the case. And as promised, at 3 pm that same day, Mrs Tan had called him with the results—"Our DNA profiling showed that the bloodstains on the blade belong to the deceased, not her attacker. However, we found unknown DNA on the knife sheath. It's male and Chinese. We checked it against the DNA database<sup>1</sup> but it didn't match anyone there."

That was three long weeks ago, and given the tentative outcome of the DNA tests, SSI Ravindra had not entertained much hope that it would play any further part in the case. But with investigations leading him down blind alleys and dead ends, the unknown DNA on the knife sheath looked increasingly like his only card left. But it would remain a futile card unless a suspect could be found to match his DNA with the one on the sheath.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Police's DNA database resides at HSA.*

**14 OCTOBER 2010, 7 AM,  
CID**

One of the most climactic scenes in the Jackie Chan movie *Police Story* was a shopping mall showdown where Jackie took a death-defying three-floor plunge down a string of lights. Thankfully, such reel-life bravado was seldom, if ever, required in real-life Police work. In fact, it is often the meticulous and non-descript backend work that allows the Police their best moments.

Such a moment came when SSI Ravindra received his first phone call of the day from SSI Choy Ah Kiong.

**SSI Choy** I just received information on a highly possible suspect. He's a national serviceman at Tuas Naval Base, and guess what? He's staying at Block 852, Woodlands Street 83 #XX-XXX! Just 500 metres from Mandai Tekong Park, the site of the murder.

**14 OCTOBER 2010, 12.15 PM  
TUAS NAVAL BASE**

"Soh Wee Kian! You have visitors from the Police!"

The military policeman's voice sounded shrill and metallic in the quiet of the detention barracks. "AWOL<sup>2</sup> king" Soh Wee Kian was a familiar face at the barracks for his serial absences from Tuas Naval Base, but he had few visitors, let alone Police visitors.

When SIS officers asked to interview Soh Wee Kian, the Navy said he was at the Tuas Naval Base's detention barracks awaiting court martial for multiple AWOLs. The Navy also gave them a copy of Soh's

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<sup>2</sup> *AWOL stands for Absent Without Official Leave. In the armed forces, it means leaving one's post without the permission of a superior officer.*

AWOL records. When the investigators noticed that the Woodlands murder (22 September) fell within Soh's latest AWOL window of 16 to 29 September 2010, they were confident that he might be their man. But if they thought he would lie, deny and deflect like most cornered murderers, they were in for a surprise.

**SSI Ravindra** Do you know why we're here?

**Soh WK** Yes, I know.

**SSI Ravindra** So why are we here?

**Soh WK** The dead woman in Woodlands.

**SSI Ravindra** Did you do it?

**Soh WK** Yes, I did.

**SSI Ravindra** You want to tell us about it?

**Soh WK** Yes, I'd like to.

Over the next hour, SIS officers listened in astonishment to what must be one of the most unvarnished recounts of a crime by a killer. Soh Wee Kian made no attempt at sanitising the facts or falsifying the details. His clinical detailing of his actions was as chilling as they came. Without prompting, he admitted to the Yishun and Sembawang knifings but mostly, he focused on his crimes in Woodlands.

In a matter-of-fact manner, Soh told the Police that he had been following girls since Primary Five. He would imagine touching their breasts and kissing them. He would also imagine them being stabbed. But it was only this year that he started stabbing them.

The first time was a night in late January near Yishun Street 11. He saw a Chinese girl sitting at a void deck and followed her when she got up to enter the lift. As he did so, he tried to fight off thoughts of stabbing her. But when the lift door opened, he could not hold back anymore. He took out his Swiss knife and stabbed her in the back. As she fell, he slashed her chest a few times before fleeing.

A few days later, in early February, Soh returned to Yishun. After passing several HDB blocks, he reached a park connector where a Chinese girl was jogging along the pavement. He was attracted by her singlet and shorts. As she jogged past him, he suddenly felt a strong urge to stab her. He took the knife from his pocket and tried to stab her in the back. However, he missed, and both of them fell to the ground. As she turned to face him, he slashed her hands and face several times.

His third attack came in May. That morning, he took a bus from Woodlands to Sembawang where he followed several girls at the void decks, all the while feeling the urge to kiss, fondle and stab them in the back. At 8.30 am, a Chinese girl exited from a lift, and as he neared her, Soh plunged the knife into her back. But as the girl fell to the ground, she managed to use her handbag to protect her face and chest from the thrusts of his knife. Soh then turned around and ran.

The fourth knifing incident happened on Mid-Autumn Festival, 22 September. Soh left his house at about 2 pm with a knife he had stolen from a store in Ang Mo Kio. The knife had a plastic sheath covering the blade. He brought along the knife to feel the thrill of its blade as well as a plastic glove to wipe his fingerprints off the knife. He wore a black jacket over his T-shirt and Navy-issued work pants.

After leaving home, Soh loitered around the vicinity of Woodlands near his home. He started trailing several attractive girls but only for a short distance. Between 3 pm and 5 pm, it rained, and Soh took shelter

at a nearby block. When the rain subsided, he left the block and walked to Woodlands North Plaza but did not trail anyone. He then walked to HDB blocks numbering 500 onwards, from where he crossed the road to blocks numbering 800 onwards.



*Arrow shows the tray from which the assailant claimed he stole the knife at Jenn Sin General Store in Ang Mo Kio.*

It was getting dark when Soh reached the blocks near Mandai Tekong Park. While there, he followed four ladies separately, all the time fantasising about stabbing them in the back and touching their breasts. But he gave up when they entered the lift. Just then, he spotted several people playing with lanterns and candles and realised that it was Mid-Autumn Festival.

At about 10.40 pm, at the void deck of Block 895C, he saw a Chinese lady walking alone towards Mandai Tekong Park. He was attracted by her back view and the iPhone she was holding. He thought of snatching it, but just then, a Malay lady came into view, walking in the

same direction as the Chinese lady. Soh decided to follow both ladies, but just before reaching the pavement leading to the park, the Malay lady turned into an HDB block. This left Soh trailing only the Chinese lady along the pavement. As she neared the basketball court, Soh took out his knife and threw the plastic sheath aside. Then in one single motion, he covered her mouth with one hand and plunged the knife into her back with his other hand.



*A sample of the knife used by the accused to kill Hoe Hong Lin. The blade measured 12 centimetres.*

As the lady fell to the ground screaming, Soh pulled out the knife and stabbed her several more times, including once in the chest, before fleeing. As he was running off, he broke the knife's blade with his left hand as he was angry with himself for stabbing her. On the way home, he threw the knife handle into a drain after wiping it with his T-shirt to remove any possible fingerprints. Once he reached home, he removed his T-shirt and used it to wrap the plastic glove which had blood on it. He then put the T-shirt in a plastic bag and dumped it into the rubbish chute.

## SENTENCE



*Soh Wee Kian eluded the Police for three weeks before a surprise tip-off led the Police to him.*

With Soh Wee Kian's confession, the process of matching his DNA with the DNA on the knife sheath was almost anti-climactic. The result—a virtual 100% match!

On 16 October 2010, two days after his arrest, Soh appeared in State Court 26 for the murder of Hoe Hong Lin under Section 302 of the Penal Code, Chapter 224. He was also charged with the attempted murder of three women by inflicting grievous injuries with a knife on 29 January at Yishun Avenue 7, 2 February at Yishun Avenue 6 and 26 May 2010 at Montreal Drive, Sembawang.

On 20 August 2013, Soh pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of culpable homicide not amounting to murder by fatally stabbing Madam Hoe Hong Lin and a charge for grievously hurting Ms How Poh Ling with a knife in Montreal Drive, Sembawang. IMH psychiatrist Jerome Goh had highlighted that Soh's offences were an escalation of his behaviour of surreptitiously following women and fantasising

about what he wanted to do to them since Primary Five. “There was a sexual motive to his offending, and he had described the acts of stabbings to have a quality of *meili* (glamour and charm)”, said the psychiatric report, which added that he had an adjustment disorder with depressed mood around the time of the offences.

On 23 August 2013, 2 years and 11 months after he killed Madam Hoe, Soh was sentenced to life imprisonment on both counts, with the sentences running concurrently. Two other charges of slashing Ms Ooi Li Li and Ms Lam Hui Lin in January and February 2010 in Yishun were taken into consideration. Noting Dr Goh’s view that he was likely to “represent a serious danger to the public for an indeterminate period of time”, Justice Choo Han Teck told an emotionless Soh that “for the sake of the public and your own good, a lengthy period of imprisonment is most appropriate”.

## EPILOGUE

The apprehension of Soh Wee Kian after three weeks of round-the-clock investigations and enquiries brought relief to many. For the Police, those weeks had been a test of physical and mental endurance. The randomness of the attacks meant that no one was safe. It was imperative for the Police to pre-empt the next attack, but against an unknown predator, it was always going to be an uphill task. Nonetheless, by putting the heat on the suspect through their relentless investigations, the Police helped to ensure three incident-free weeks before the long-awaited break came. This was critical.

For the public, it had been unusual and unnerving to be living in the shadow of a deranged killer in a country like Singapore. Soh’s arrest and sentencing also brought a measure of closure for Madam Hoe’s family. Said her brother, Nicholas: “In the past, we only knew brief details about what happened that night. Now we know more. We feel bad about hearing the details, but it’s better than being in the dark.”



## Chapter 5

# Serigala!

**“Honour among thieves” makes a good soundbite, but it is not a maxim believed by many.** People tend to see the underworld as a cesspool of duplicity and deceit, devoid of the principles that normal beings take for granted. And rightly so. But even thieves, cheats and robbers live by certain unwritten rules that impose a degree of restraint on their behaviour. “No violence unless absolutely necessary” is probably one. It follows that unless provoked or defied, a weapon’s role in any crime is only to threaten, not harm.

In May 2010, however, a spate of robberies over seven hours shattered all civilised norms and left even the underworld in shock. From the late hours of 29 May to the early hours of 30 May, within a two-kilometre (km) wide zone around the Kallang area, four men were attacked with a *parang* wielded with such insane fury that one died while the others suffered slashes to the head, back, arms, hands and fingers. Like wolves, the culprits hunted in packs and took down their prey without the merest warning. That the attacks were wholly unprovoked and gave the victims no chance to surrender added to their viciousness. Even by the cynical standards of the underworld, this was a new low. Clearly, a line had been crossed.

**30 MAY 2010, 7.34 AM,  
RIVERINE BY THE PARK CONDOMINIUM**

Security officers Adesh Raman and Aanya were 30 minutes from finishing their shift at the uncompleted Riverine by the Park condominium at 398 Kallang Road when a man half-stumbled up to their security post. “Man dead at grass field” was all he could utter between panting breaths. Alarmed, Aanya followed him to the adjacent

field. A minute later, she scrambled back to the security post, and all she could utter was, “Adesh, call the Police!”

**30 MAY 2010, 8.15 AM,  
SPECIAL INVESTIGATION SECTION (SIS) OFFICERS ARRIVE**

Senior Station Inspector (SSI) Noorma’at Sawab was an 11-year SIS veteran, but he had never seen anything like this. The deceased, an Indian man, lay on the field, drenched in blood. He had slash wounds to his forehead, neck, torso, elbows and palms. Two pieces of the scalp, the size of 50-cent coins, dangled from his skull. With four fingers chopped off at the middle palm, his severed hand was strewn a metre from his body on the blood-stained grass. His grey T-shirt was soaked with blood, and his black pouch, unzipped and empty, lay on the well-kept grass. Incredibly, he still had his shoes on.

**30 MAY 2010, 8.30 AM,  
THE SEARCH FOR CLUES**

By 8.30 am, barely an hour into the gruesome discovery, the area near Kallang Riverside Park was swarming with investigators. As they combed through the open field—the size of four football fields—for clues, those working and living around the field said they had not noticed anything amiss. The body, lying at a spot near Kallang MRT Station and an Electronic Road Pricing (ERP) gantry, was just 100 metres from a construction site, but the workers living there said they had not heard any shouts for help. As SSI Noorma’at watched the body being taken away, a chill ran down his spine. Whoever did this must be stopped—and stopped quickly—or more would die.

**30 MAY 2010, 10.15 AM,  
CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION DEPARTMENT (CID)**

In a major criminal investigation such as this, teamwork was the order of the day. Although SSI Noorma’at was the lead detective in the

case, he could not do it alone. His main task was to secure the evidence and keep an eye on the big picture while his fellow officers provided him with the inputs he needed to make sense of the evidence. The “others” would most certainly include his SIS colleagues, the Forensic Management Branch of the CID and the Health Sciences Authority (HSA). This time though, it was officers from Bedok Division who provided him with the first significant piece of information, which he now shared with colleagues Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Jason Lim, ASP Daniel Wong, and Inspector (Insp) Ray Ang.

**SSI Noorma’at** Look at this report from Bedok Division. Fresh from the oven. Four robberies-cum-attacks between last night and early this morning—and all within the Sims Avenue-Kallang area:

### **FIRST ATTACK**

Around 11.45 pm on 29 May at Block 44, Sims Drive, 24-year-old Sandeep Singh, a construction worker, was suddenly attacked by a group of men. He had deep slash wounds to his forehead, left hand and the left side of his body. He lost his wallet containing \$100, a Nokia handphone and his work permit.

### **SECOND ATTACK**

Around midnight on 30 May, under the tracks of Kallang MRT Station, 19-year-old national serviceman Ang Jun Heng was ambushed by a group of men and badly slashed. He suffered multiple wounds to the head and a deep gash to the neck, while his left palm was nearly chopped off. He lost his Sony Ericsson handphone and his wallet containing \$70, an ATM card and a military identity card. A passer-by found him only at 7 am this morning.

### THIRD ATTACK

Around 12.05 am on 30 May, on a path near Kallang MRT Station, 39-year-old Egan Karuppaiah, a pipefitter, was set upon by several men and slashed repeatedly. Both of his arms were nearly hacked off. He lost his handphone and his wallet containing \$200, an EZ-link card and his work permit.

**ASP Jason** I bet the same gang committed the fatal fourth attack. The location was also near Kallang MRT, and although the body was discovered at 7.30 am, the attack could have taken place much earlier. Probably just after the third attack on Egan Karuppaiah.

**ASP Daniel** Agreed. Based on the timing of the incidents, it would appear that after slashing Sandeep Singh at Sims Drive, the gang walked towards Kallang MRT, where they robbed and slashed the other victims along the way.

**Insp Ray** Rob and slash? More like slash and rob. No warning given. All the victims were slashed before they could say a word. From the looks of their wounds, the weapon could be a long knife, possibly a *parang*.

**SSI Noorma'at** That's not all. There's this portion that mentioned two other attacks a day earlier, on 28 May. The first took place at about 10 pm, on 28 May. Some men kicked and punched Raja Jana Kazi, a 20-year-old Bangladeshi cleaner, before slashing him at the foot of an overhead bridge near Block 41 at Sims Drive. He lost his Nokia phone and his wallet

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but managed to escape despite his injuries. Half an hour later, at 10.30 pm, on 28 May, 47-year-old construction worker Wang Jiusheng was also attacked and robbed by a gang in an open field along Sims Place near Lorong 19, Geylang. He was hit with a rock, kicked, punched and slashed on the left thumb and index finger. But he also managed to escape, losing only his phone and \$300.

**ASP Jason** There's a 24-hour gap between these two attacks and the subsequent four attacks, but the modus operandi is the same. In all the incidents, the victims were heavily outnumbered. Yet, the gang assaulted and slashed them without mercy or warning. Violence was the culprits' first resort. My guess is that the same gang was behind all six cases. The 24 hours separating these two incidents from the other four was just "rest and recreation" time for the gang to enjoy the fruits of their labour before they returned to their crimes.

**ASP Daniel** But Raja Jana and Wang Jiusheng got off relatively lightly. Their slash wounds were nowhere as life-threatening as those of the victims after them. Seems like the gang got carried away, and the violence escalated with every attack until the final, fatal one.

## **30 MAY 2010, DEAD MAN IDENTIFIED**

As the team was discussing the case, things were moving swiftly on other fronts.

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The search for clues paid off as a photocopy of the dead man's work permit was found in a plastic bag strewn on the field. He was 41-year-old construction worker Shanmuganathan Dillidurai, employed by Sing Han Construction Pte Ltd.

Also found was a blood-stained Nokia handphone that showed an outgoing call at 12.03 am on 30 May. Police traced the call to a Mr Muthu Krishnan, who confirmed that Shanmuganathan was his colleague and he had received a missed call from him just past midnight. He was asked to go to the CID to help with the investigation.

In addition, an autopsy by Dr Paul Chui found that Shanmuganathan died of multiple injuries, among them a sliced and fractured skull, a gaping wound to the throat, a slash wound to the neck cutting his jugular vein, a severed left hand, a chopped-off palm and a back wound so deep that the shoulder blade had cracked.

Based on the modus operandi, the timing and proximity of the incidents, there was a high possibility that it was the work of the same gang.

### **30 MAY 2010, 3 PM, POLICE OPERATION AT CITY PLAZA**

At 3 pm, less than eight hours after Shanmuganathan's body was found, officers from the SIS and Bedok Division mounted an operation at City Plaza. In all, 92 persons around the vicinity had their particulars, DNA profiles and photos voluntarily documented. The operation served the dual purpose of identifying possible suspects and sending a message to the robbers against committing further crimes. Simultaneously, officers conducted enquiries at second-hand handphone shops in an effort to recover the victims' handphones.

**31 MAY 2010,  
24-HOUR ISLAND-WIDE SWEEP**

The City Plaza operation was the precursor to an even bigger sweep the next day—an island-wide manhunt involving 100 officers led by the SIS and Bedok Division, and backed by CID's Specialised Crime Division, Central Division and the Special Operations Command. This time round, the dragnet was far more targeted as information received had helped the Police identify certain suspects at various locations, including Syed Alwi Road and Geylang. In all, the Police detained 12 Sarawakian suspects from whom they were able to narrow down to three after further questioning. They were:

NO.	NAME	AGE	OCCUPATION
S1	Micheal Garing	22	Cleaner
S2	Sylvester Beragok	26	Cleaner
S3	Shahman Milak	21	General worker

After the trio were further questioned, Micheal (S1) buckled under pressure and admitted his involvement in Shanmuganathan's death. In the process, he also implicated four others in the spate of violent robberies. They were:

NO.	NAME	AGE	OCCUPATION
S4	Hairee Landak	19	Cleaner
S5	Tony Imba	32	Cleaner
S6	Donny Meluda	19	Cleaner
S7	Peter Usit Musa	22	General worker



**1 JUNE 2010, 9.30 PM,  
WOODLANDS CHECKPOINT**

Before Micheal first pinpointed Hairee Landak (S4), Tony Imba (S5), Donny Meluda (S6), and Peter Usit Musa (S7) as his other accomplices, they were just names to the Police. Barely 24 hours later, two of the names became detained suspects. When the Police received information that three of them had left Singapore via Woodlands Checkpoint, the Police asked the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) to look out for them should they return. So when ICA officer Siti Radhiyah screened the two passports and saw the monitor flash “Wanted by Police”, she activated a button to alert the operations room. A minute later, five Police officers escorted Hairee Landak (S4) and Peter Usit Musa (S7) to the Charge Office before placing them in temporary lockup. However, Donny Meluda (S6), the third suspect who had left for Malaysia, was not with them.

**2 JUNE 2010, 8.15 PM,  
GOLDEN MILE HAWKER CENTRE**

By 2 June, four days after Shanmuganathan’s body was found, the Police had detained five of the seven suspects identified. That number rose to six when Tony Imba (S5) was literally caught napping at 8.15 pm inside a switch room at the Golden Mile Hawker Centre – what he had thought to be a safe place to cool his heels after several days on the run.

**3 JUNE 2010, 9 AM,  
TENANTS QUIZZED AT CID**

With only Donny Meluda (S6) eluding the dragnet, the “cast” was almost complete. It was now the job of SSI Noorma’at, together with ASP Jason, ASP Daniel and Insp Ray, to reconstruct the sequence of events and make sense of what happened. The first step was to interview fellow tenants and friends of the suspects. From the scores

of interviews conducted, two were particularly significant.

### **Account by tenant Aaron Lingah**

Aaron, a cleaner, told the Police that he lived at a hostel in Syed Alwi Road. Although Micheal Garing (S1) did not live there, he and his friends liked to visit the hostel to drink and chit-chat. On Saturday, 29 May, he returned from work at about 10 pm and went to bed. Sometime after midnight (30 May), he heard noises in his room. When he opened his eyes, he saw Micheal and his friends, Tony (S5), Hairee (S4) and Donny (S6). He noticed that there was blood on the pants of Micheal, Tony and Hairee. Micheal was holding a *parang* whose blade was covered with a cardboard sheath wrapped by masking tape. When he asked why there was blood on their clothes, Micheal held out the *parang* and said it managed to “eat” someone again. Aaron took this to mean that the group had used it on someone that day. Micheal said that he had used the *parang* to hack an Indian man at Kallang who tried to fight back. After that, Aaron said that the four of them took out their wallets to count the money they had gotten from the robbery.

### **Account by tenant Rosli Latip**

Rosli told the Police that he shared a room with Aaron, and both of them worked at the zoo. On Saturday, 29 May, he returned with Aaron from work at 10 pm and went to bed. Just after midnight (30 May), he heard voices in his room and recognised them to be Tony (S5) and Hairee’s (S4). They were talking about how they had robbed someone, but Rosli did not pay much attention to it and soon drifted back to sleep. When he woke up at 7 am, Tony and Hairee were still drinking and talking. Later, Micheal (S1) came and told him to buy some beer. When he returned, they started drinking and Micheal recalled how he had attacked an Indian man the previous night. He said the man refused to hand over his belongings and put up a fight with them. He recounted how Hairee and Tony assaulted the Indian man while Donny (S6) hit him with a tap handle. When the man tried to fight

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back, Micheal said he used a *parang* to slash him many times. Rosli also remembered seeing blood on the shirts and pants of Micheal, Hairee and Tony.

### **3 JUNE 2010, 9.15 AM, 39A SYED ALWI ROAD**

At about the same time that the interviews were being conducted, there was an unexpected discovery inside a hostel at 39A Syed Alwi Road. This unnamed hostel had enjoyed fleeting fame as the place where Micheal Garing (S1), Sylvester Beragok (S2) and Shahman Milak (S3) were found on 31 May. As one of its tenants, Nur Dayang, lifted his mattress to beat off the dust, a long *parang*, wrapped in a cardboard sheath, fell out. Someone had hidden it under his mattress. Though shocked, Nur made an instant connection between the *parang* and the slash-and-rob cases for which the three men were being investigated. He knew what he had to do.



*The hostel room at Syed Alwi Road where Micheal Garing hid the parang that “managed to ‘eat’ someone”.*

**3 JUNE 2010, 11.30 AM,  
TESTS AT HSA**

The discovery of the *parang* gave the Police an unexpected fillip. This was the smoking gun the Police were looking for. They rushed it to HSA for tests hoping that the outcome would match at least one of the suspects’ DNA profiles. With adrenaline pumping, HSA staff went into overdrive and came up with the result in all of 24 hours—a perfect match to Micheal’s (S1) DNA was found on the *parang*!

**JUNE 2010,  
PIECING THE PUZZLE TOGETHER**

It was not exactly a cast of thousands. Still, it was no mean feat trying to determine who among the Sarawakian suspects (including the absent Donny Meluda (S6)) was involved in which case. It took SSI Noorma’at and his colleagues the whole of June, scores more interviews and countless cross-referencing to establish each suspect’s role. When it was finally completed, the “cast members” of the six attacks read:

REPORTED CASES	SUSPECTS INVOLVED							
	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8*
Attack on Raja Kana Kazi at 10 pm on 28 May 2010	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Attack on Wang Jiusheng at 10.30 pm on 28 May 2010	•	•		•	•	•	•	•

\*Landa Sulai (S8). This 8th suspect was arrested on 9 June 2010.

REPORTED CASES	SUSPECTS INVOLVED							
	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8*
Attack on Sandeep Singh at 11.45 pm on 29 May 2010	•			•	•	•		
Attack on Ang Jun Heng at midnight on 30 May 2010	•			•	•	•		
Attack on Egan Karuppaiah at 12.05 am on 30 May 2010	•			•	•	•		
Attack on Shanmuganathan Dillidurai between 12.13 am–7.30 am on 30 May 2010	•			•	•	•		

## SWIFT JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS OF THE 28 MAY ROBBERIES

For “lucky victims” Raja Kana Kazi and Wang Jiusheng, who escaped with relatively light injuries, justice came swiftly. On 1 October 2010, about four months after Raja was attacked and robbed, Shahman Milak (S3) was sentenced to two years’ jail and six strokes of the cane for attempted robbery. Shahman said that he went along with the gang to rob but did not participate in the robbery as he was on the handphone with his girlfriend when it happened. When he saw Raja Kana run away, he too fled and returned to his hostel. His story was corroborated by other members of the gang. Another four months later, on 27 January 2011 in Court 25 of the State Courts, Sylvester

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Beragok (S2) and Landa Sulai (S8) pleaded guilty to robbing Raja Kana and Wang and were sentenced to six years' jail and 12 strokes of the cane. On the same day in Court 9, Peter Usit Musa (S7), who pleaded guilty to robbing both men, also received the same punishment.

### WORKINGS OF A RUTHLESS GANG

With punishment quickly meted out to the minor players of the 28 May robberies, attention returned to Micheal Garing (S1), Tony Imba (S5), Hairee Landak (S4) and the still at-large Donny Meluda (S6) for their involvement in the more serious 29–30 May incidents. During their investigations, SSI Noorma'at and his colleagues made an interesting finding which enabled them to better understand the dynamics of the gang.

The gang had no formal hierarchy, but it had two exceptionally strong and ruthless personalities in Tony Imba (S5) and Micheal Garing (S1). Tony was the leader of the pack while Micheal was the group's hatchet man or, more appropriately, "*parang* man". Tony, who called himself *Serigala* ("wolf" in Malay) because he was immensely proud of his ferocious streak, often bragged about his violent exploits during drinking bouts. As the old man of the group at 32, he figured he had the guile and gravitas to lead his young pack. And like a wolf tracking its prey from downwind using its sense of smell, the self-styled *Serigala* had the knack for sensing a vulnerable victim even from afar. Sylvester, Hairee, Landa and Peter Usit unanimously identified Tony as the one who would pick the target and lead the attack, with a shout of "*Serigala!*".

But Tony never armed himself with a lethal weapon. The only one who did was Micheal Garing. He started off "gently" by applying "light taps" with his *parang* on Raja Kana Kazi and Wang Jiusheng. But as his savagery surged maniacally with every swing of the blade, he grew more blood-thirsty, inflicting horrific slashes on Sandeep

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Singh, Ang Jun Heng, Egan Karuppaiah and finally and fatally, Shanmuganathan Dillidurai. Even Tony could not control the loose cannon.



*Micheal Garing (S1)—His unprovoked and savage slashings of robbery victims shocked even the underworld.*



*Tony Imba (S5)—Nicknamed “wolf” for his ferocity, he was the unofficial leader of the pack.*

## RECONSTRUCTION OF THE 29–30 MAY ROBBERIES

Understanding the gang’s dynamics helped the Police to get into the minds of its members, which was useful in deciding how much weight to give to an individual’s account of events. It showed them who had more to gain or lose, who was the pathological liar and whose account one could reasonably believe in the face of objective evidence.

From the patchwork of interviews, confessions and forensic evidence, the Police managed to knit together an account of the 29–30 May robberies that was as accurate as it could be under the circumstances:

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On 29 May at 7.30 pm, Tony Imba, Micheal Garing, Hairee Landak and Donny Meluda were drinking Ayer Masin (a type of Chinese wine) at their friend Shahman Milak's hostel at Lorong 12, Geylang. They were celebrating Gawai Dayak, a Thanksgiving Day of the Dayak community marking a bountiful harvest. At 10 pm, they ran out of drinks and Tony and Micheal suggested that they rob to buy more drinks. Hairee and Donny agreed to follow, but Shahman was asleep by then.

The four left the hostel and walked along Sims Drive looking for potential victims when they saw Sandeep Singh sitting on a rocking horse at a playground at the foot of Block 44, Sims Drive. Without warning, Tony hit him on the head with a brick to signal the attack. As Sandeep tried to protect himself with his hands from the raining blows, he felt a sharp pain on the back of his head, followed by more sharp pains in his left hand and left ear. He kept saying: "What is my mistake? What did I do wrong?" By the time he staggered to the lift lobby of a block of flats after the attack stopped, he was bleeding badly from slashes to his head and left hand.

After taking Sandeep's handphone and wallet, the gang headed towards Kallang MRT where they spotted Ang Jun Heng walking alone under the MRT track. Tony gave Ang a flying kick from behind, causing him to fall and drop the paper bag in his hand. When Ang got up, Hairee and Donny punched and kicked him. Micheal then slashed him several times with his *parang*. As Ang collapsed, Micheal continued to slash him, while Hairee and Tony went through the items scattered from the paper bag. After they found Ang's handphone and wallet, the gang headed towards Kallang MRT Station, leaving him on the grass field behind Manjusri Secondary School. 10 minutes after attacking Ang, the gang spotted Egan Karuppaiah on the footpath along the Kallang River near Kallang MRT Station. As they blocked his path, Tony grabbed his shirt and pushed him backwards until he hit some bushes. He punched Egan's left eye while Donny hit him with the tap handle he had brought along. Once the flurry ended,



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Micheal swung his *parang* at him. When Egan finally managed to stand up, his hands were bleeding profusely. He staggered to the MRT Station to seek help.

After making off with Egan's handphone and wallet, the group decided to return to the Syed Alwi Road hostel, where their friends Aaron and Rosli stayed. Along the way, they saw Shanmuganathan Dillidurai riding his bicycle on a footpath along Kallang Road near Riverine by the Park Condominium. Tony initiated the attack by knocking Shanmuganathan off his bicycle down a slope onto an open field. He got up and tried to run, but Tony pulled his shirt and punched him in the back as Hairee and Donny joined the assault. At this moment, Micheal swung his *parang* at Shanmuganathan, slashing him on the head, neck, hand, upper body and back. After he collapsed, the gang took his wallet and fled.



*The victim, Shanmuganathan Dillidurai, tried to flee by running up the slope but he was pulled down by Tony Imba and assaulted.*

## SERIGALA!



*A paper cutter (left) was among the items strewn around the body of Shanmuganathan. He was a hardworking man who collected cardboards to sell after work.*



*Shanmuganathan's waist pouch, unzipped and empty, on the grass patch.*

When the four reached the hostel at Syed Alwi Road, they totted up their takings for the night and came up with \$400 and three handphones.

## **TRIAL**

The trial of Micheal Garing and Tony Imba, who were accused of murdering Indian national Shanmuganathan Dillidurai as well as robbing and assaulting three other victims, took place in the High Court in October 2013. Earlier, in January 2013, Hairee Landak, the third accused in this gang of four, was sentenced to 33 years' jail and 24 strokes of the cane after admitting to armed robbery with grievous hurt. The last accused, Donny Meluda, remained at large.

During the trial, Micheal and Tony came face to face with their victims for the first time and saw the scars of their assaults. Sandeep Singh had ugly scars on his arms and back and wore a platinum plate to protect his injured skull. Egan Karuppaiah, whose severed palm was recovered at the scene and reattached to his hand in a lengthy operation, said he could not move some of his fingers. Ang Jun Heng lost four fingers and suffered a deep neck wound that was only millimetres from fatally damaging his spinal cord. Not that such details would impress Micheal and Tony, who were more concerned with whitewashing their role in Shanmuganathan's death. Indeed, the watching public was treated to a classic display of scapegoating, as both men passed the poisoned chalice back and forth in a desperate bid to escape the hangman's noose.

### **Micheal**

"I swung the *parang* at the Indian man only three times. Once above his head to scare him, once to the left arm, and once to his back. The Indian man was trying to get up from a sitting position. I wanted to leave, but Tony snatched the *parang* from me and slashed him. I was

already walking away by then. After I crossed the road, Tony came up to me and gave me back the *parang*. He asked me to keep it in the house (hostel).”

## Tony

“I punched the Indian man once in the back and he fell. My three friends came and attacked him. Micheal slashed his head many times while Hairee and Donny kicked him. I shouted at Micheal—‘Enough, enough. Our intention is to rob him, not kill him!’ but Micheal didn’t listen. He kept slashing him, and the other two kept kicking him. I turned around and walked away as I didn’t want to see Micheal continue slashing him. A little later, the three of them joined me.”

## SENTENCE

On 20 April 2015, Justice Choo Han Teck sentenced Micheal Garing to death for the murder of Shanmuganathan Dillidurai. Justice Choo found that Micheal not just wielded the *parang* and slashed Shanmuganathan. He was also the one who used the *parang* on the three other victims—Sandeep Singh, Egan Karuppaiah and Ang Jun Heng—in the seven-hour orgy of terror. While the earlier attacks did not form the subject of the murder charge that Micheal was facing, Justice Choo said it was material in his finding that Micheal warranted the death sentence, unlike Tony’s. Justice Choo elaborated on his findings: “The facts concerning the three other victims cannot be ignored. The assault on each of them was as violent as the one that killed the last victim... The weapon was wielded by only one man—Micheal Garing.”

Justice Choo noted that even though it was Tony Imba who had knocked Mr Shanmuganathan Dillidurai off his bicycle and held him whilst Micheal Garing began his assault, “The fatal wounds were not inflicted by Tony Imba, and there is no evidence to show that he

ever wielded the weapon to cause deadly injuries.” However, Justice Choo dismissed Tony Imba’s claim at the trial that he did not intend to join in the attack with the *parang* and only agreed to rob. “Having seen three victims lying in their own blood, it lies ill in his mouth to say that he did not know that Shanmuganathan would be slashed.” Accordingly, he sentenced Tony Imba to life imprisonment and 24 strokes of the cane.

## **APPEAL**

On 5 September 2016, the Court of Appeal heard arguments from both Micheal and Tony’s lawyers. Mr Amarick Gill was arguing against the Prosecution’s appeal to sentence his client, Tony Imba, to death. He said Justice Choo Han Teck was correct that Tony did not deserve the death penalty as he was only a “starter” of the attacks. Since he never wielded the *parang*, Tony’s culpability was therefore significantly less than Micheal’s. On the other hand, Mr Ramesh Tiwary argued that his client, Micheal Garing, did not inflict all the fatal injuries. He maintained that it was Tony who took the *parang* from Micheal and went back to the deceased, who was lying on the grass patch. But Public Prosecutor Anandan Bala told the court that the Prosecution was satisfied with the eyewitness account of Hairee Landak who never mentioned that Tony took the *parang* and went back to where the deceased laid.

On 27 February 2017, the apex court threw out the two appeals and upheld Justice Choo’s decisions. Judge of Appeal Chao Hick Tin, delivering the three-man court’s decision, said: “We are satisfied that the death penalty is warranted for Micheal, given his savage use of the *parang* on the deceased.” The court was of the view that the discrepancies in Hairee Landak’s evidence raised by Mr Tiwary did not cast doubt at the core of his evidence, which is that Micheal Garing alone wielded the *parang*.

## **DONNY ARRESTED AND SENTENCED**

A month before the Court of Appeal rejected the two appeals, Donny Meluda's life on the run had come to an end. On 14 January 2017, Donny, who now went by the name of Abdul Rahman Abdullah, was arrested by the Malaysian Police at Sibu Airport, Sarawak, and sent to Singapore on 18 January to face justice. There, the Prosecution asked for a jail sentence of at least 33 years, plus caning, as he was a key part of the group and had evaded justice for seven years. Lawyer Siva Krishnasamy, however, argued that Donny had turned over a new leaf and had "led a religious and transformed life" since, including joining a missionary group to preach in West Malaysia. Asking for a jail term of less than 32 years, the lawyer shared that when Donny was confronted with graphic photos of the crime scene, his remorse was "borne out by the expression of shock on his face". On 19 November 2018, Donny received the same punishment as his partner-in-crime, Hairee Landak—33 years' jail and 24 strokes of the cane.

## **EPILOGUE**

The Prosecution was not exaggerating when they said that the Sarawakian gangsters had in the span of a night, "committed one of the most violent robberies in recent memory". Some would call it a gross understatement. Shanmuganathan Dillidurai was a hard-working man from India who supplemented his income as a construction worker by collecting cardboard boxes at night. He did not have anything to do with the riff-raff whose path he had the misfortune to cross that fateful night. Nor did Sandeep Singh, Egan Karuppaiah and Ang Jun Heng.

Ang was a young man serving his national service after graduating from Raffles Institution, where he was the captain of the canoeing team. But the assault left him with an amputated left hand (save for a thumb) and a gash in the neck that came within a millimetre of damaging his

## SERIGALA!

spinal cord. For days, his life hung by a thread. But that thread turned into a cord of steel when he made an astonishing recovery.

Just a year after his ordeal, he completed his Naval Diving Unit's basic diving course that included circuit training activities such as push-ups and pull-ups—while wearing a hook-like device. He was a commerce major at the University of Virginia, USA, when Micheal Garing and Tony Imba were sentenced to death and life imprisonment respectively in 2015. Asked by the press for his thoughts, he said: "I have never borne any grudge against my assailants. All I felt was regret; I regret that one of the victims lost his life, widowing his wife and orphaning his children; I regret that the other victims could no longer use their hands and do the work they came here to do; I regret that the assailants made a mistake and must now pay a heavy price for it." For a crime beyond all human decency, Ang Jun Heng's heartfelt magnanimity was the finest possible closure there could be.

## Chapter 6

# Missing



**In the Police's files on missing persons, there is the famous case of the McDonald's boys, so named because of the fast-food chain's offer of a whopping \$100,000 reward for information on the case.** It was their way of supporting the already massive efforts to find two Primary 6 students who disappeared on the afternoon of 14 May 1986. Their disappearance triggered extensive Police action involving days of searching the estates around their school, countless missing person posters distributed island-wide and over 100 persons interviewed. When the missing boys were reportedly sighted on Pulau Ubin three months later on 27 August 1986, 100 officers were dispatched to scour the offshore island, to no avail. The next year, the Police took their search to Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, but until today, the boys' whereabouts remain a mystery.

Whenever a missing persons report is lodged, the Police will screen for the missing person in their databases, check with institutions and hospitals and disseminate their information to officers on the ground to keep a lookout. On 28 May 2011, the same process was carried out for one Celine Ng Swee Peng after a missing person report was filed by her close friend. But as days grew into weeks with no sign of her, the Police began to take a deeper interest in her. The silence, far too long and way too deafening for the Police's liking, just did not smell right.

**28 MAY 2011, 9.54 PM,  
WEST COAST NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICE POST**

The West Coast Neighbourhood Police Post at Block 728 Clementi West Street 2 was having a quiet night when Ang Soo Hoon stepped

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in to file a missing person report on her close friend Celine Ng, who was a property agent. With her were Celine's mother and brother. After noting Celine's full name, age, occupation, home address and physical description, duty officer Corporal (Cpl) Muhammad Nazri Parjali proceeded to interview Ang Soo Hoon on the circumstances surrounding Celine's disappearance.

**Cpl Muhammad Nazri** You said you're Celine's close friend. How long have you known her, Miss Ang?

**ASH** Just call me ASH, the first letters of my name. I've known Celine for 16 years, and we're staying together.

**Cpl Muhammad Nazri** You stay with her? So although your registered address is Clementi Avenue 2, you're actually living with Celine in West Bay Condominium at West Coast Crescent?

**ASH** That's right. I've been living with her for eight months.

**Cpl Muhammad Nazri** You told me she's a property agent with CBRE. Are you a property agent too?

**ASH** No, I'm a derivatives dealer with United Overseas Bank.

**Cpl Muhammad Nazri** You said you woke up two days ago (26 May) at about 10 am and found her missing. Can you elaborate on this?

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**ASH** 26 May was her 36th birthday. The night before, at about 10 pm, Celine, three friends and I went to the Lantern Bar at Fullerton Bay Hotel for drinks. After midnight, the cake arrived, and all of us wished her Happy Birthday. After cutting the cake, we decided to adjourn to Celine's condo for more drinks. We played card games and drank until 3.30 am before our friends left.

**Cpl Muhammad Nazri** What are the names of your friends?

**ASH** Barbara, Suzanne and Pauline.

**Cpl Muhammad Nazri** What happened after they left?

**ASH** I saw them off at the car park, and when I returned, Celine was still drinking. She looked preoccupied. I went to my room, and suddenly I heard some loud music from the hall. When I got out of the room, I saw Celine trying to make a call. I heard her saying agitatedly, "She's not picking up!" before throwing the phone at the sliding door. She picked it up and started messaging. When I asked who she was messaging, she said "Genevieve." When I asked why she was angry, she said, "Genevieve is still going out with Iris." She also said she wanted to go overseas to relax. When I offered to join her, she said she wanted to be alone.

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**Cpl Muhammad Nazri** Genevieve and Iris are her close friends?

**ASH** Only Genevieve. Celine had a relationship with Genevieve, but they broke off some time back.

**Cpl Muhammad Nazri** After her outburst over Genevieve, did Celine return to her room?

**ASH** I don't know. I returned to my room first as I was feeling sleepy.

**Cpl Muhammad Nazri** When you found her missing the next morning, what was the first thing you did?

**ASH** I went to look for her passport since she said she wanted to go overseas. It wasn't there. Her wallet, overnight bag and favourite beige shorts were also gone, so I thought she must have left.

**Cpl Muhammad Nazri** Did you try calling her?

**ASH** Yes, I called her immediately. There was a ringtone, but no one answered. When I tried again, there was an engaged tone. I tried a few more times, but it was the same engaged tone.

**Cpl Muhammad Nazri** And then?

**ASH** I contacted Celine's mother to check if she'd prepared the noodles for Celine's birthday. I was supposed to collect it.

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**Cpl Muhammad Nazri** Why? Celine wasn't at home.

**ASH** At first, I wanted to tell her not to cook the noodles. But she'd already cooked them, and I didn't want to tell her that I had no idea where Celine was. So I collected the noodles and simply said Celine wasn't home when I woke up. Both of us tried to contact her subsequently, but her handphone was switched off. When I still didn't hear from Celine yesterday (27 May), I got a bit worried and called Barbara. She said last year, Celine also did the same thing and went to Bintan alone. She advised me to wait one more day.

**Cpl Muhammad Nazri** When did you inform Celine's family about her disappearance?

**ASH** Today. I told them that Celine had been uncontactable for the past three days. We were worried. It was the first time Celine didn't inform her mother that she was going abroad, so we decided to make a police report.

**Cpl Muhammad Nazri** Does she have any record of psychiatric treatment?

**ASH** No.

**Cpl Muhammad Nazri** Any signs of depression or suicidal tendencies?

**ASH** None at all.

## **Follow-up action**

As with all cases of missing persons, the Police checked with the hospital, immigration, prison and even mortuary authorities. Celine was also put on the *Police Gazette* to trace her whereabouts. Cpl Muhammad Nazri tried calling Celine himself, but her handphone was switched off, just as ASH said. His checks with the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) revealed that she had not left the country.

## **JUNE 2011**

As May stretched into June, all efforts to trace the missing property agent had drawn a blank. As much as it was inconceivable for a street-smart lady of 36 to have disappeared so completely, that was precisely what the facts suggested. Not only had Celine left without a word, she had compounded her absence by severing all communication with her family. No phone call, no SMS, not even a message via a third-party, something her mother found puzzling, as that was not her usual behaviour.

The top brass of Clementi Division was just as intrigued. A team of investigators was assigned to probe into the case. Its members included Inspector (Insp) Ng Chee Chye, Insp Edmund Goh, Staff Sergeant (SSgt) Normizam bin Osman and SSgt Gunaseelan.

## **15-20 JUNE 2011, CLEMENTI POLICE DIVISION**

From 15 to 20 June 2011, the investigating team called up ASH, Genevieve and the three friends, Barbara, Suzanne and Pauline, for interviews.

## ASH

**Insp Ng** Do you have anything to add to the statement given to the Police in your missing person report of 28 May 2011?

**ASH** No.

**Insp Ng** In your statement, you said you'd known Celine for 16 years. Do you have any business dealings with her during that time?

**ASH** Yes. We opened a cafe called Cups & Mugs in 2009 with Barbara. My start-up payment was \$10,000, and I had a 20% share in the business. Both Celine and Barbara had a 40% share each, and each of them put in \$20,000. But we were too busy to manage the business, so we sold it last year and got back our money.

## Genevieve

**Insp Ng** How are you related to Celine?

**Genevieve** I was Celine's close friend for four years.

**Insp Ng** Our investigations show that Celine sent you an SMS in the early hours of 26 May. Can you elaborate?

**Genevieve** It was her birthday, and she asked me why I didn't wish her.

**Insp Ng** Did you respond?

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**Genevieve** Yes. I replied with just two words, “Happy Birthday.”

**Insp Ng** Did she tell you she was going somewhere?

**Genevieve** No. She called me at about 4 am, but I was sleeping, so I didn’t answer the call. I was overseas then, from 22 May to 28 May.

**Insp Ng** When was the last time you met her?

**Genevieve** More than a year ago.

**Insp Ng** Were there issues between the two of you?

**Genevieve** She’s a very emotional person. She gave me a lot of stress. I cannot take it. I’m a very focused person.

**Insp Ng** In our investigations, it was found that you know a lady called Iris. Who is she?

**Genevieve** Iris is my friend. She’s also known to Celine.

**Insp Ng** Are you close to Iris?

**Genevieve** We’re good friends.

**Insp Ng** Our investigations found that you had a relationship with Celine. What do you have to say?

**Genevieve** Yes. We were very close once. I treated her as a good companion. But we haven’t spoken to each other since May last year.



## Barbara

**Insp Edmund** How long have you known Celine?

**Barbara** About 10 years now. I consider myself quite close to her. We meet at least once a month.

**Insp Edmund** Besides yourself, who else is close to Celine?

**Barbara** She had a girlfriend called Genevieve until two years ago. I think they broke up, but I never probed into it, so I don't know much about them.

**Insp Edmund** Did ASH ask for your advice about filing a police report?

**Barbara** Yes. On 27 May, she asked if she should file a police report about Celine. I said she should wait for one more day in case Celine turns up.

**Insp Edmund** Did Celine display any suicidal tendencies?

**Barbara** No, I don't think she'd do anything like that.

**Insp Edmund** Any money problems as far as you know?

**Barbara** As far as I know, she's doing well. She told me that a client from China bought a Sentosa Cove property from her, and she expected some cash to come in around September. I assumed she meant her sales commission.

**Suzanne**

**SSgt Gunaseelan** How long have you known Celine?

**Suzanne** About two to three years. I got to know her through Barbara. They are very close.

**SSgt Gunaseelan** Are you close to Celine?

**Suzanne** No, we only meet in a group.

**SSgt Gunaseelan** How would you describe Celine's behaviour on 26 May?

**Suzanne** Like most birthday girls—happy and talkative.

**SSgt Gunaseelan** No sign of moodiness?

**Suzanne** No.

**Pauline**

**SSgt Nornizam** How did you get to know Celine?

**Pauline** I got to know her two to three years ago at an outing through a mutual friend.

**SSgt Nornizam** Do you have any business dealings with her?

**Pauline** No.

**SSgt Nornizam** At Fullerton and later at her house, did she mention any problems to anyone?

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**Pauline** No.

**SSgt Nornizam** Did she mention any relationship problems to you?

**Pauline** No. We're not close.

**SSgt Nornizam** How was her demeanour that night?

**Pauline** Normal. I didn't notice anything strange about her demeanour.

**SSgt Nornizam** Any suicidal signs?

**Pauline** No. She has everything going for her and is passionate about her job.

**21 JUNE 2011,  
CLEMENTI DIVISION**

When the investigators met the next day, they agreed that the circumstances were suspicious but differed on the reasons behind Celine's disappearance.

**Insp Ng** She's been missing for nearly a month now. From what her friends said, it's clear that Celine isn't the suicidal type. We can't be 100% sure, but at this point, it's reasonable to rule out suicide.

**SSgt Nornizam** Other possibilities include an accident or murder.

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**Insp Edmund** Don't be so quick to pronounce her dead. She might have been kidnapped or in hiding because she doesn't want to be found.

**SSgt Gunaseelan** But why the radio silence if she's alive? Her friends said she looked normal, even cheerful that night. Only ASH said she looked preoccupied after the three friends left. But that doesn't mean you have to vanish into thin air. Besides, Celine's mother said she never goes overseas without telling her. So why the exception this time?

**SSgt Nornizam** And if she's kidnapped, where's the ransom note?

**Insp Ng** I agree that the circumstances look suspicious. But our guys are doubling up their efforts on this case. Let's wait for a few more days and see what happens.

### **28 JUNE 2011, 11.25 AM CLEMENTI DIVISION**

What happened after "a few more days" could be summed up in one word—nothing. The silence persisted. Exactly a month after ASH reported Celine missing, the Police was confronted with the near certainty that something untoward had happened to her.

**Insp Ng** That just about seals it. ICA said she didn't leave Singapore. But it's difficult for anyone to be in a small place like Singapore and not be found.

## MISSING

**Insp Edmund** We've checked every hospital, prison and institution in the country. Her friends had publicised her case in *The New Paper*, and if anyone saw her, they would have come forward with the information. But so far, no one has. We'll have to assume that she's dead and her body has been hidden.

**SSgt Gunaseelan** You have my vote. The condo's closed-circuit television (CCTV) didn't show her walking out, and the security guards said she wasn't the driver or passenger in any of the cars leaving that day. That means she must have been hidden in a car and driven out by someone, and that someone has to be from inside the condo.

**Insp Ng** That's a fair point, but let's find the body first. If I were a killer, I'd be looking for a deserted or forested place to hide her. But Singapore is a small, urban place. Not many deserted, forested places left.

**SSgt Nornizam** There's some thick vegetation near West Bay condo. West Coast Park, Kent Ridge Park and Clementi Woods Park may not sound like wild jungles, but they can still hide a corpse if you do it properly. We could start there. But if I were a killer, I wouldn't choose a place so close to home.

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**Insp Edmund** Beggars can't be choosers if they're desperate. Besides, the most unlikely place is sometimes the safest place. Anyway, it's just a start. We can always expand the search if we find nothing.

### **28 JUNE 2011, 4.45 PM, GURKHA TRACKERS ACTIVATED**

With the proposal for a search approved, the tracker platoon in the Gurkha Contingent was activated and received their briefing from Insp Ng Chee Chye. With twilight looming, the search was scheduled for the next day.

### **29 JUNE-5 JULY 2011, SEARCH AND RECOVERY**

Over two days from 29 June, Gurkha trackers combed the woods near the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Kent Ridge Park but found nothing. On the afternoon of 5 July, they began to comb West Coast Park, but as there was not much vegetation to cover, it ended quickly, at 4 pm. As there was still time, the trackers decided to move to Clementi Woods. Like West Coast Park, the search was not particularly demanding, until they reached the fence line at Clementi Woods Condominium and Varsity Park Condominium, where the slope was steeper and the undergrowth thicker. As they followed the fence line out to the footpath along Clementi Road towards the Ayer Rajah Expressway, the trackers noticed signs of disturbance to the knee-high grass on their left, as though someone had walked through the grass. After following the trail for 10 minutes, they reached a spot where the grass gave way to trees, with low overhanging branches, on a ground awash with leaves. There, under thick bushes and covered by dried leaves and branches, lay a skeleton that was instantly recognisable as human.

## MISSING



*This footpath along Clementi Road led to an isolated spot where Celine's body lay hidden for 41 days.*

### **5 JULY 2011, 6.40 PM, SIS OFFICERS ARRIVE**

It took only 40 minutes for officers from the Special Investigation Section (SIS) to arrive at the scene, which was a mere 10 metres from Clementi Road just opposite the NUS School of Architecture. More significantly, it was a mere 400 metres from West Bay Condominium. Insp Ng Chee Chye met SIS Station Inspector (SI) Mohamed Fahmi Aris and, after some discussion, they decided to erect floodlights to aid the recovery operation, given the gathering darkness.

## Post-mortem

Unfortunately, the post-mortem process offered few fresh leads. Due to severe decomposition of the body, even the formidable Dr George Paul could not ascertain the cause of death at the post-mortem examination. Samples of the deceased's bone marrow were rushed to the Health Sciences Authority (HSA) for DNA profiling, but when even this failed owing to the severe decomposition, the forensic team had to resort to the black box of identification—the teeth.

On 11 July, three days after a forensic dentist extracted a molar tooth from the deceased, the DNA test finally turned up a profile.

### **11 JULY 2011, 7 PM, CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION DEPARTMENT (CID)**

As the deceased had not yet been identified, the SIS could not formally take over the case. But that did not stop them from assigning a team to look into it. Its members—Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Jason Lim, ASP Jessica Ang and SI Mohamed Fahmi Aris—spent hours studying the case, and many more debating it. On 11 July 2011, six days after the body's discovery, they were at it again.

**ASP Jason** According to the investigation papers, the three friends said they left Celine's condo together at 4 am. After that, they didn't have any contact with her again. It would be a stretch to think that one or all of them somehow returned to harm her while ASH was asleep.

**ASP Jessica** Yes, and even if they did, how would they get her out of the house? They'd need a car, but the CCTV didn't show their car coming back after it left. I'm inclined to rule them out.



**SI Mohamed Fahmi** I agree. It's too far-fetched. Besides, they were just friends. Celine didn't have a relationship with any of them. She only had a relationship with Genevieve but that ended two years ago. Besides, Genevieve was overseas when Celine disappeared.

**ASP Jessica** That leaves only...

**ASP Jason** ASH! She was the closest to Celine. They lived together, which offered plenty of opportunities for relationship and conflict. She was also the last to see her. She said she went to bed and woke up the next day to find her gone. If I want to distance myself from someone's disappearance, especially when I'm the only other person around, sleep would be my best excuse because I don't have to account for anything if I'm asleep.

**SI Mohamed Fahmi** As for Celine wanting to go overseas, we only have ASH's word for it. The others didn't hear it. And don't forget Celine's car was shown on CCTV entering and exiting the condo several times after her disappearance. ASH said Celine let her use the car, and that meant she had the means of disposal.

Just then, the discussion was cut short by the ringing of ASP Jason's handphone. The conversation lasted only 30 seconds, but when he was done, there was a determined look on his face. "Ok guys, it's officially ours now. They couldn't ascertain the cause of death, but it's Celine Ng all right. Forensics just confirmed that the DNA profile of the molar tooth matched her DNA profile lifted from her comb."

**12 JULY 2011, 12.20 AM,  
MELTDOWN**

With Celine Ng's identity confirmed, the SIS finally had the chance to put their suspicions to the test. A surprised ASH was brought to the CID for some questioning. She held out for 40 minutes, but when ASP Jason exited the room and left her with ASP Jessica at 1 am, the dam broke.

**12 JULY 2011, 1.20 AM,  
CONFESSION**

It took 20 minutes for ASH to regain her composure. But when she did, her account of events on that fateful day was as riveting in its telling as it was in substance.

She told the Police that she and Celine had a brief intimate relationship in 2010 when they shared a place in Balestier Road. They continued to live together when Celine shifted to West Bay Condominium. On the night of 25 May, she accompanied Celine, Barbara, Suzanne and Pauline to the Lantern Bar at Fullerton Bay Hotel to celebrate Celine's 36th birthday. After cutting the cake and singing the birthday song at the stroke of midnight on 26 May, they returned to Celine's home for more drinks. The three friends left at about 3.30 am. After seeing them off, ASH returned to find Celine at the balcony looking rather moody. ASH went to her room but was soon startled by the sound of loud music outside. She recognised the song as "Chuan Qi" which Celine would play whenever she was upset. She stepped out of her room and saw Celine about to throw a wine glass from the balcony. She managed to stop her. Celine then tried to make a call on her iPhone but when nobody answered, she flung the phone at the sliding door. She then picked it up and started texting. When ASH asked what the problem was, she replied that Genevieve was still seeing Iris. ASH advised her to move on since her relationship with Genevieve had long since ended.

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Celine was quiet for a while but suddenly asked if ASH would help her to die. When ASH said she did not know how to do it, Celine grabbed a dumbbell and swung it at her own head. ASH managed to stop her and the two struggled until they were in front of Celine's room. ASH pushed her into the room and onto the bed. At this point, Celine told ASH to smother her with her pillow. ASH did as told but after a while, Celine pushed the pillow aside and called her "useless" for failing to kill her.

The derogative word stung ASH who lost control of herself. She wrapped her right arm around Celine's neck and used her other hand to tighten the armlock. They were in a prone position on the bed and she released her chokehold on Celine only after she felt tired. When ASH checked on Celine, she was motionless and unresponsive. Neither was she breathing.



*A reenactment of how the accused tightened her armlock around the victim's neck.*

## MISSING



*The bed on which Celine Ng died on her 36th birthday.*

ASH sat beside Celine's lifeless body on the bed trying to figure out what to do. At 10 am, she decided to telephone Celine's mother to say that Celine was not around when she woke up. To reinforce her lie, she dumped Celine's passport, beige shorts, overnight bag and wallet down the rubbish chute to make it look like she had gone on a short trip.

ASH then tried to remove Celine's body from the house. At first, she tried lifting her but found her too heavy. She then took a trolley from Celine's car but realised that people could see the body on the trolley. So, she decided to hide her in a cardboard box first. But Celine's legs were sticking out, and when she tried to tuck them in, the box tore. Finally, she decided to transport the body in a wheelchair as that would attract less attention. She went to the National University Hospital (NUH) and bought a wheelchair using Celine's cash instead of her own cards, as she did not want the purchase to be traced.

## MISSING

Back from NUH, ASH tried to transfer Celine's body from the bed to the wheelchair. But she fumbled and both of them landed on the floor. After resting for a while, she tried to heave Celine up by slotting her fingers into the belt loops of the dead woman's pants. Finally, Celine was on the wheelchair.

At 3 am the next day (27 May) and under the cover of darkness, ASH pushed the wheelchair to Celine's car, which was parked near the swimming pool. After several failed attempts, she managed to get the body onto the back seat. She used Celine's jacket to cover the body before driving off. She went to the West Coast area, the East Coast area and Changi in search of a suitable dumping place. When she got to Changi, it was daylight and she was worried about being seen. She then returned to East Coast where she fell asleep in a carpark. She woke up at 10 am and started driving around aimlessly, ending up at Tanah Merah and Sentosa before returning to East Coast Park. Feeling tired, she drove back to West Bay Condominium to rest before setting out again to East Coast Park, then to Sentosa Cove and back again to East Coast Park.

She drove up and down East Coast Park until it was late at night. As she still could not find a suitable place to dump the body, she left. By the time she exited at Clementi Road along the East Coast Parkway, it was past midnight on 28 May. Along Clementi Road, just past a mosque (Masjid Tentera Diraja), she saw a forested area. She stepped out of her car and walked along the pavement until she spotted a bush-lined slope. After that, she opened the car door and put the trolley next to it. When she tried to pull Celine's body onto the trolley, she lost her grip and the body fell onto the pavement. But she managed to drag it to a nearby tree where she lifted it onto the trolley. When she reached the spot where she wanted to dump the body, she pulled Celine from the trolley and dragged her down the slope until she reached a wall of plants. She placed the body close to the wall and took some branches and leaves to cover her.

## MISSING

ASH walked back along the same trail to the car. Later that day, she donated the wheelchair to an old folk's home in Balestier Road. That night, she accompanied Celine's mother to make a missing persons report at the West Coast Neighbourhood Police Post.

## SENTENCE

On 16 July 2015, ASH admitted in court to killing Celine Ng and was convicted of culpable homicide not amounting to murder. In his submission, Deputy Public Prosecutor David Khoo pressed for 13 years' jail, as ASH "had proceeded to weave an elaborate web of lies to cover up the offence". He added that ASH confessed to the killing only one and a half months later when Celine's skeletal remains were discovered. As a result of the long delay, whatever objective evidence which could shed light on the case was no longer available by the time she confessed. He urged the court to view this as an aggravating factor in sentencing ASH.

Lawyer Sunil Sudheesan argued for a sentence of around 10 years, citing testimonials from ASH's colleagues and friends to show that her actions were a radical departure from her usual "non-violent and meek" nature. Justice Tay Yong Kwang sentenced ASH to 12-and-a-half years' jail after convicting her of culpable homicide, misappropriating S\$1,000 from Celine (for payment of the wheelchair), and giving a false account of her disappearance.

## EPILOGUE

Ang Soo Hoon aka ASH was no hardened criminal. She did not even appear in Police records for minor offences. But sometime between 4 am and 9.50 am on 26 May 2011 (according to the charge sheet), something inside her snapped. She killed her ex-lover and best friend over an offensive remark she could have easily swallowed or ignored. It was a crime of passion committed in a moment of madness.

## MISSING

It should never have happened, but when it did, the irreversibility of the act—"you can't un-kill a person!"—hit her. To save herself, ASH went through an elaborate charade of lying and cheating to throw the family and the Police off the scent. But she reckoned without the investigative nous of the Police, whose instincts told them that things were not what they seemed. They probed into the possibility that something untoward could have happened to Celine. By weighing the facts and eliminating false leads, the Police cracked a murder case that could have been classified as an unsolved missing persons case with time.

Chapter 7

# Game of Death



**6 Rowell Road was an unnamed hostel located just behind Desker Road, which was once a red-light district.** In recent decades, however, Desker Road lost much of its lustre. Now known more for its cheap accommodation, the road was named after Andre Filipe Desker, a Eurasian of Portuguese descent who operated a butchery in the area in the 1860s. But 150 years later, in the wee hours of 11 June 2014, blood would again be spilt at 6 Rowell Road.

**11 JUNE 2014, 6.15 PM,  
JUNCTION OF SYED ALWI ROAD  
AND KING GEORGE'S AVENUE**

Mr Harry Wee was a helpful man. When he saw three men struggling to lift a luggage bag from a fallen trolley, he decided to give them a hand. But as he approached the men, he saw their eyes widen in horror. There was blood on their hands as they dropped the trolley like a hot brick. As the two younger men took to their heels in panic, the remaining person, an elderly rag-and-bone man, was left rooted to the spot, too stunned to move. Lying on the ground was the luggage bag, blood dripping from the retractable handle. Spooked, Mr Wee dialed "999".

**11 JUNE 2014, 6.29 PM,  
POLICE OFFICERS ARRIVE**

It took just 15 minutes for Sergeant (Sgt) Khidir Putra and Corporal (Cpl) Tarandeep Singh from the Rochor Neighbourhood Police Centre to arrive. By then, a small crowd had formed around the bag and their

anxious faces told the officers that the situation was serious. After Mr Wee had recounted his frightful experience, Cpl Tarandeep went to speak to the rag-and-bone man sitting forlornly on the pavement. Identifying himself as Tan Teow Kee, 81, he could only say that he found the Swiss Polo luggage bag lying on the pavement and thought it would fetch a good price. Meanwhile, Sgt Khidir peered into the slightly unzipped bag and saw a dark shape within. As he opened the bag, he could feel the anticipation of the crowd behind him, but it was what he saw inside that made his hair rise from the back of his neck. Sticking out of a black trash bag was a man's head, its eyes frozen in a deathly stare.

**11 JUNE 2014, 7 PM,  
SPECIAL INVESTIGATION SECTION (SIS) OFFICERS  
MOVING IN**

When Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Roy Lim of the SIS arrived at the scene, he was briefed by Sgt Khidir, who had also kept Mr Wee and Mr Tan behind to be interviewed. What they told DSP Roy squared with their earlier accounts to the officers. But even as he listened, DSP Roy's eyes were taking in every detail of the crime scene—a brown luggage bag lying on its side, a fallen trolley beside it, some blood stains on the pavement, a white Nissan Cefiro parked near the spot where the bag lay and, further down the road, several trash bags and pieces of clothing on the grass verge.

Shortly after, the grisly contents of the luggage bag were laid out on a plastic sheet—a man's head and its bloody torso cut off at the upper thighs, plus several lumps of bloody flesh. He was clad in a green, long-sleeved shirt with no identification documents. DSP Roy ordered photographs of the dead man's face taken and that his fingerprint impressions be sent to the Fingerprint Examination Team of the Forensics Division for follow-up tests.

## GAME OF DEATH



*The luggage bag and trolley lying near the pavement along Syed Alwi Road.*



*Trash bags and pieces of clothing were found on the grass verge several metres from the luggage bag.*

**11 JUNE 2014, 7.45 PM,  
DSP ROY BRIEFS HIS TEAM**

“Okay guys, what we have is the upper torso of a male with legs sawn off at the upper thighs. We don’t know who he is or where his legs are. There are a few things we must do immediately. No. 1, check every shop that sells luggage bags, trolleys, saws and trash bags in the area. We can’t do much if the killer or killers made use of old stuff, but if, they made a fresh purchase, we might get a lead there. No. 2, get in touch with the owner of the Nissan Cefiro. There’s no CCTV at the spot where the bag was found, so the car’s dashboard camera is our best hope. No. 3, get hold of all the street cameras in the area. Someone lugged the bag to the spot where it was found. If we’re lucky, the street cameras might pick the person out.”

**11 JUNE 2014, 8.15 PM,  
MUSTAFA CENTRE**

As Mustafa Centre is the biggest shopping mall in Little India, it was the most logical place to start the investigation. In the cluttered confines of the giant store, DSP Roy asked Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Jonathan Tang to go to the luggage department while he checked out the hardware section. He could hardly believe his luck when the reply to his very first question (“Did anyone buy an electric saw today?”) was “Yes, this morning.” The supervisor, Mr Sivanathan, even took him through the CCTV footage and at the time-stamp of 9.27 am (11 June), pointed to a customer who was “a bearded man looking like a Pakistani” (in the supervisor’s words) and holding an electric saw. Asked why he remembered the incident so well, Mr Sivanathan said the man wanted him to demonstrate how the saw worked, but he told him that he had to pay first, which he did.

DSP Roy immediately alerted ASP Jonathan to look out for “a bearded Pakistani-looking man” in the CCTV footage at the luggage department. Minutes later, his phone rang. “Bingo! Caught him at 9.43 am buying a brown luggage bag under the Swiss Polo brand!” said ASP Jonathan. “Good job, Jonathan. Looks like the same man was buying both the saw and bag from Mustafa this morning.”

As the two investigators left Mustafa Centre with copies of the footage, there was more good news from the ground. The first came from ASP Tan Boon Kok who said the owner of a hardware store, Ken Leng Siong Pte Ltd at Rowell Road, remembered selling a bow saw to two South Asian men in the late morning. The receipt, which the customers did not bother to take, showed the time of purchase to be 11.19 am. The second call was from Inspector (Insp) Ray Ang. He said that the owner of Cheah Hin Heng Trading Company, a shop selling plastic products at Rowell Road, also remembered two South Asian men buying trash bags at about 11.30 am even though his shop did

not issue receipts, and like Ken Leng Siong, also did not have a CCTV system. Insp Ray added that the trash bags resembled the ones holding the body parts.

Finally, Insp Mahathir Mohamad reported that the owner of the Nissan Cefiro, Mr Lee Cheong Poh, had parked his car at 1.15 pm and activated the dashboard camera at the same time. A review of the recording showed that when the camera was activated at 1.15 pm, the bag was already there. Since the suspect bought the luggage bag from Mustafa Centre at 9.43 am, this gave the Police a specific time frame to work with.

**11 JUNE 2014, 9.20 PM,  
PATHOLOGIST ASSESSES**

Professor Gilbert Lau's assessment brought added cheer to DSP Roy and his men. The well-regarded pathologist estimated death to have occurred about 17–24 hours ago, which meant that the trail was still warm. More significantly, the skin margins of the stumps of both severed thighs appeared jagged in some areas, suggesting that a saw might have been used. A vital clue!

**12 JUNE 2014, 3.48 AM,  
CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION DEPARTMENT (CID)**

As the city slept, the lights at the CID burnt bright and its occupants were buzzing with excitement. And for good reason. Although the street cameras did not cover every inch of the neighbourhood, they were still able to pick out the two men at different locations and times on the previous day.

**DSP Roy (Pointing at the screen)**

It's 11 June (yesterday), 9.57 am. Look, the bearded guy is walking along Rowell Road with the bag and electric saw from Mustafa!

**ASP Jonathan** That's him again, this time with another man, leaving Ken Leng Siong hardware shop whose owner told our guys two South Asian men bought a bow saw at 11.19 am.

**DSP Roy** He bought an electric saw from Mustafa at 9.57 am and then a manual saw from Ken Leng Siong almost two hours later. My guess is the electric saw wasn't doing so well, the blade is short... difficult to cut through.

**Insp Mahathir** Yes, the blade of the bow saw is much longer. Also makes less noise. Look, there they are again! Leaving Cheah Hin Heng at 11.36 am with the trash bags.

**ASP Jonathan** That's them again, this time pulling a bag at the junction of Verdun Road and Syed Alwi Road near Mustafa. This bag is black in colour, not the one we saw earlier. It's 11.55 am. So after buying the bag from Mustafa at 9.27 am, the suspect must have found it unsuitable and went back with his accomplice to buy another one.

**DSP Roy** This shot from the camera at the junction of Rowell Road and Kampong Kapor Road showed the accomplice pulling the black luggage bag. It's 12.42 pm. Remember the Nissan's dashcam? When it started recording at 1.15 pm, the brown bag with the legless body was already on the pavement. Between 12.42 pm and 1.15 pm is a window of only 30 minutes. I bet these two were on their way to dispose of the body during this period. Since the brown bag contained the head and torso, there's a good chance the legs are in the black bag. We don't

## GAME OF DEATH

know how the body ended up on the pavement. We also don't know where the black bag is now. Only they know. Guys, it's 4 am now, mobilise the teams to search all hostels for the suspects at daybreak!



*Caught in the act: CCTV footage showed the killers lugging the black bag to their hostel. They bought it because they could not fit the legs into the first bag.*

**12 JUNE 2014, 2.35 PM,  
6 ROWELL ROAD**

DSP Roy was as good as his word. At daybreak, officers went to every hostel in the neighbourhood to ask about the two men who had been captured on the camera footage. At 2.35 pm and after much disappointment, the officers hit pay dirt.



GAME OF DEATH

**DSP Roy** Good afternoon sir, can I speak to the manager of this lodging house?

**Manager** I'm the manager. Anything I can do for you?

**DSP Roy** Yes, I'm DSP Roy Lim of the CID and this is ASP Jonathan. We're investigating a murder.

**Manager** Huh, murder?!

**ASP Jonathan** **(Pointing at his handphone)**  
Seen these two men?

**Manager** Yes! They're my tenants. The bearded man is Rasheed Muhammad and the younger one is Ramzan Rizwan.

**ASP Jonathan** And this man?

**Manager** Oh, God! He's the victim? How horrible! He's Muhammad Noor. He's also my tenant. He shares a room with Rasheed. They're all from Pakistan.

**DSP Roy** Where are the two now?

**Manager** Rasheed and Ramzan aren't in their rooms.

**DSP Roy** Jonathan, contact the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) for the particulars of the three men. Also, ask our guys to come to 6 Rowell Road immediately. We need to lay an ambush.

**12 JUNE 2014, 2.50 PM-3 PM,  
ARRESTS AT 6 ROWELL ROAD**

In the apprehension of suspects, SIS officers often have to endure lengthy stakeouts or face violent resistance. They hope it does not come to that, of course, but even the most optimistic officer would be hard put to predict the events of the next 30 minutes. At 2.50 pm, as DSP Roy was assigning his men their lookout points, Ramzan Rizwan wandered into the lodging house with the casualness of a Sunday stroller. A wink from the manager confirmed his identity and before he knew it, the Police were all over him. Resistance was futile. Rasheed Muhammad proved equally obliging. Barely 10 minutes after Ramzan's arrest, the bearded one drifted in like a wisp of cloud into the waiting arms of the law. Another 10 minutes later, he was leading the Police to his room where a Homelite brand electric saw and a stack of black trash bags were found under his bed. The two men were immediately arrested and had their DNA samples sent for forensic examination.

**12 JUNE 2014, 4.10 PM,  
CID**

DSP Roy was a skilled interviewer and it did not take long for Ramzan to talk. Ramzan told the officer that Rasheed and Muhammad Noor used to play a card game called *Mang Patta* (Give Me This Card). On 9 June, Ramzan decided to join them but luck was not on his side and he ended up losing \$1,100 to Noor. He later pleaded with Noor to return his money but Noor refused. So the next day at about 7 pm, he tried to recoup his losses by gambling with Noor and Rasheed again. It was a disaster. Both he and Rasheed lost heavily to Noor. He suspected Noor of cheating but had no proof. So halfway through the game, he again pleaded with Noor to return his money but was rebuffed. At this point, Rasheed suddenly reached across Noor's body and smothered him with a shirt. Rasheed told him to hold the shirt over Noor's mouth while he took out a *nara* (drawstring) from his Punjabi pants to strangle him. Alarmed at Rasheed's action, he promptly threw the shirt away

and ran out of the room without taking any money. He said Noor was alive and shouting when he left.

Fixing Ramzan an icy stare, DSP Roy gave him a “You think I’m born yesterday?” look. With an officer watching over Ramzan, the DSP left his room and knocked on the door opposite. ASP Jonathan emerged. “You finished with Rasheed’s statement?” ASP Jonathan replied with a skeptical look. “Just about... if you could call it a statement. More like a fairy tale to me. He said he was sleeping on the upper deck of the bed when he heard muffled sounds from Noor’s deck below. When he turned on the lights, he saw Ramzan pressing his shirt against Noor’s mouth and nose. He shouted at Ramzan but was kicked in the stomach and fell right out of the room. As soon as he fell out, Ramzan shut the door and locked it from inside. But before he got kicked out, he swore Noor was still alive and struggling.”

“Same with Ramzan. They’re both lying through their teeth to save their skins. Both claimed Noor was alive the last time they saw him. The implication is clear—it’s the other guy who killed him. We’ve got the bag with the head and torso. We must now find the bag with the legs. The CCTV showed Ramzan pulling the black bag. So let’s leave Rasheed alone for the time being and concentrate on Ramzan. Come with me, Jonathan.”

**12 JUNE 2014, 5.20 PM,  
CID**

Ramzan couldn’t take it anymore. He had tried his best to hold out but this was beyond his limit. The past hour had been torturous. Not because of the relentless questioning but because he had no good answers to some very good questions that the Police were asking.

**DSP Roy** You said you didn’t take any money. How come we found \$3,318 in your possession when we arrested you? Where did the money come from?

**ASP Jonathan** You said Noor was shouting for help. How come no one heard any commotion?

**DSP Roy** If Noor was still alive when you left, how come you didn't alert anyone or the Police to save him?

**ASP Jonathan (Pointing at his handphone)**  
Look here, this screen grab shows you pulling a black bag at 12.42 pm yesterday. What's inside the bag? Where is it now?

"How come this, how come that". Ramzan had just about enough. Only a full confession would put an end to the torture. "All right, all right, I'll tell you everything", he muttered wearily.

## **12 JUNE 2014, 6.15 PM, CID, RAMZAN CONFESSES**

A sombre-looking Ramzan told the investigators that he came to Singapore from Karachi to sell tissue paper. His earnings were good. On 10 June, at about 7 pm, he and Rasheed were playing cards with Noor. He had lost more than \$1,000 to Noor the previous day and was desperate to win his money back. But this time, it turned out worse. Both he and Rasheed lost all their money. They were convinced that Noor was cheating, but they had no proof. At 9 pm, Rasheed came to his room and asked him to meet outside the hostel. Once outside, Rasheed told him that he planned to finish Noor off and get back their money. All that was needed was for Ramzan to press a towel or shirt over Noor's mouth and he would do the rest. They decided to do it at 2 am when everyone was asleep.

At 2 am on 11 June, Ramzan went to Rasheed's room and found Noor chatting with Rasheed. With Noor's back facing him, Ramzan pressed a shirt against his face. At this point, Rasheed jumped at Noor and started strangling him with a drawstring from his pants.

As Noor fell to the floor, Rasheed continued to strangle him with the drawstring until he became motionless. After that, Rasheed removed Noor's money from his pocket and told Ramzan to tidy up the place so that it did not look like a struggle had taken place. As they carried Noor's body to his bed, Rasheed said he would cut up the body, put it in a bag and dump it at the nearby Jalan Kubor Cemetery. He added that he would buy the saw and bag in the morning.

Ramzan said he returned to his room but could not sleep. At 9 am, he went out to buy breakfast for his aunts who shared a room with him. As he was buying breakfast, he received a call from Rasheed who told him that he had already bought a saw and a bag from Mustafa Centre. Rasheed asked him to come to his room to help with the disposal of the body as soon as his aunts left for work. When Ramzan showed up, Rasheed complained that the blade of the electric saw was too short and was not cutting well. He needed a bigger manual saw. So they went to buy a bow saw from a nearby hardware store and also some trash bags from another store.

When they returned to Rasheed's room, Ramzan got cold feet. He could not bring himself to cut up the body. But he promised to help with the disposal. Rasheed told him to act as a lookout outside the room while he finished the job inside. After a while, the door opened and Rasheed asked him to come in. By then the upper torso was already in the trash bag. But there was another problem—the luggage bag was not big enough to accommodate the legs. So they left for Mustafa again and this time Ramzan bought a black bag. As soon as they returned, they put the trash bag with the legs into the new suitcase. After cleaning the room, they carried the brown bag to the ground floor. It took the two of them to carry it down as it was heavy with the torso. After that, Ramzan went back for the black bag containing the legs. Rasheed set out with the brown bag, followed by Ramzan with the black one.

From the hostel, they walked along Rowell Road and turned right at the junction between Rowell Road and Jalan Besar. As Ramzan

was walking, he noticed that Rasheed was falling further and further behind. At some point, he received a call from Rasheed who said he needed to rest as the bag was very heavy. He asked Ramzan to proceed on his own, dump the bag and return to help him. When Ramzan reached the cemetery, he saw a low wall and decided to simply lean the bag against the wall.

On his way back, Ramzan found Rasheed at Syed Alwi Road. As he took over to pull the bag, one of the wheels came off. Both men decided to carry the bag on their shoulders but as they were lifting it, they saw blood dripping out. Rasheed was so spooked that he walked away quickly. Ramzan also panicked and left the bag on the ground. They reached a bus stop and boarded the first bus that came as they wanted to get away fast. They got down at an unfamiliar place and took a taxi back to Mustafa Centre from where they walked to their hostel.

**12 JUNE 2014, 7.40 PM,  
JALAN KUBOR CEMETERY**

Ramzan's disclosure of where he dumped the legs triggered instant Police action. As dusk settled over Singapore's oldest Muslim cemetery off Victoria Street, Ramzan led DSP Roy and his men into its grounds. Amid the cluttered headstones, he pointed to a low wall at the far end. And there it was! Leaning serenely on the worn grey wall and looking at odds with its surroundings, a spanking new trolley bag just off the shelf.

DSP Roy opened the bag and found three trash bags inside. The first contained a pair of green pants, a purple drawstring and a bow saw with an orange handle. The other two trash bags yielded grimmer findings—two human legs sawn off at the hip in early stages of decomposition.

**12 JUNE 2014, 8.50 PM,  
A PERFECT MATCH**

It doesn't rain but it pours. On the way back to CID, DSP Roy received more good news that he was happy to share with everyone in the police van. "Forensics just called. They've got a perfect match of their fingerprints on the trash bags and the suitcase. They've also found traces of blood in Rasheed's room. Apparently, the place was cleaned up with liquid bleach, which explains why the room looked so spotless when we first saw it. Guess what? When the forensic guys sprayed Luminol on the floor and darkened the room, the whole place glowed<sup>1</sup>."

**12 JUNE 2014, 10.07 PM,  
RASHEED CHANGES HIS STATEMENT**

The recovery of the missing legs had a dramatic effect on Rasheed. Confronted with the final piece of the jigsaw, Rasheed changed his earlier statement, where he claimed that he was sleeping when Ramzan came charging into the room to smother Noor with a shirt. Instead of insisting that he was kicked in the stomach and fell out of the room, he now admitted his part in the murder. Rasheed said he was from Lahore and Noor was his childhood friend. He was also a neighbour of Ramzan's family. The three of them had come to Singapore to sell tissue paper. On 10 June at about 7 pm, he and Ramzan were playing cards with Noor. Although he lost initially, by the time the game ended, he had made a small profit of \$200-\$300. Ramzan was the big loser. Besides losing \$1,000 to Noor the previous day, he lost another \$1,000 this time. At 9 pm, Ramzan came to his room and asked to meet outside the hostel. As they stood near the entrance, Ramzan revealed his plan to kill Noor and take his money. Rasheed claimed he wanted no part

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<sup>1</sup> *Luminol is used to find traces of blood, even if someone has cleaned or removed it. The iron in blood catalyses the luminescence. If there is blood, Luminol will emit a blue glow that can be seen in a darkened room. The glow only lasts about 30 seconds but the effect can be documented with a long-exposure photograph.*

in the plan as he had made a tiny profit from the game. But Ramzan threatened to harm his family if he did not help him. As Ramzan was a drug addict and a dangerous man, Rasheed reluctantly went along with the plan to kill Noor.

At 2 am on 11 June when everyone was asleep, Ramzan stole into Rasheed's room and smothered Noor with a shirt as Rasheed was distracting him with small talk. On seeing this, Rasheed took out a drawstring and moved towards Noor. But Noor struggled violently and fell face-up on the floor, with Ramzan still smothering him with the shirt until he became motionless. After that, Ramzan removed Noor's money from his pocket. He told Rasheed to tidy up the place so it did not look like a struggle had taken place. They carried Noor's body to his bed. Ramzan suggested that they cut up the body, put the parts in a luggage bag and dump it at the Jalan Kubor Cemetery. He told Rasheed to buy a saw and a bag in the morning.

At 9 am, Rasheed went to Mustafa Centre and bought an electric saw and a luggage bag. After that, Rasheed called Ramzan and asked him to come to his room once his aunts had left for work. Rasheed then returned to his room and started sawing Noor's body. But the blade was too short and not sharp enough. When Ramzan came to his room later, Rasheed told him he needed a manual saw with a longer blade. They eventually bought a bow saw from a nearby hardware store and also some trash bags from another store.

When they returned to Rasheed's room, they took turns sawing the body and packing various parts into the trash bags. It was only afterwards that they realised there was not enough room for Noor's legs. So they returned to Mustafa Centre and bought a black trolley bag. As soon as they returned, they stuffed the legs into the new bag. After cleaning the room with liquid bleach, they carried the two suitcases down. Rasheed said he pulled the one with the torso while Ramzan pulled the one with the legs.



From the hostel, they walked along Rowell Road and turned right at the junction between Rowell Road and Jalan Besar. But the weight of the torso was slowing Rasheed down. So he asked Ramzan to go to the cemetery first while he rested. Rasheed also asked Ramzan to come back to help him after dumping the legs.

About 20 minutes later, Ramzan returned but as soon as he started pulling the suitcase, one of the wheels came off. When they tried lifting the suitcase over their shoulders, they saw blood dripping out. Rasheed freaked out and walked off quickly. Ramzan also panicked and left the suitcase on the ground. As soon as they reached a bus stop, they took the first bus that came as they wanted to get away fast. They alighted at an unfamiliar place and took a taxi back to Mustafa Centre from where they walked to their hostel.

ASP Jonathan listened intently to Rasheed's account and was convinced that he was trying to play down his part in the episode. If he were to be believed, Rasheed, at 43, acted under duress and was hopelessly manipulated by a young man of 25. No matter. At the very least he had admitted to colluding with Ramzan to murder Noor—which was a lot closer to reality than the fairy tale he spun about being kicked in the stomach and out of the room.

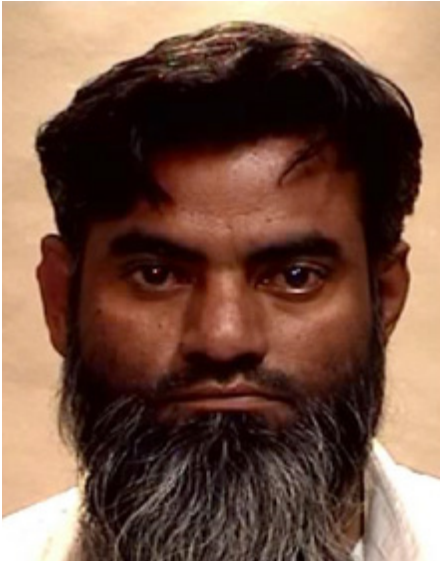
## **TRIAL**

The trial of Rasheed Muhammad and Ramzan Rizwan for the murder of 59-year-old Muhammad Noor began at the High Court on 8 November 2016. As they had asserted in their Police statements, each man accused the other of being the ringleader and portrayed himself as the reluctant accomplice. But in the judgement according to Justice Choo Han Teck, they were equally culpable in forming the intention to kill Muhammad Noor. He did not believe Rasheed's claim that he was threatened and frightened into helping Rizwan. Rasheed was the senior by 18 years, so it was less likely for Rizwan to lead under the

## GAME OF DEATH

circumstances. The Judge also found that Rasheed was the leader “by the manner and appearance of both men in court, particularly when they were being cross-examined”. The threat of harming his family, he said, was also not credible as Rasheed’s family was in Pakistan and therefore not easily reachable by Ramzan.

Justice Choo was equally skeptical about Ramzan’s testimony that they were just trying to scare Noor. He found the money in Ramzan and Rasheed’s possession telling. Said the judge, “It seems clear that robbery was the motive to kill, as the money found on both accused persons shows. If there had been no intention to kill, it is unlikely that they took Muhammad Noor’s money on an afterthought.” He found that Rasheed and Ramzan had acted in concert before, during and after the murder and sentenced them to death on 17 February 2017.



*Tissue sellers-turned-murderers: Pakistanis Rasheed Muhammad and Ramzan Rizwan paid for the killing of compatriot Muhammad Noor with their lives.*

## EPILOGUE

Ramzan Rizwan, Rasheed Muhammad and Muhammad Noor left their families in Pakistan to pursue their Singapore dream. They had heard how easy it was to make a living in Singapore. All you needed to do was park yourself near a mall or a market to sell tissues to the generous and the charitable. Which was precisely what they did. The hours might be long but the rewards were considerable, averaging \$150-\$200 a day.

If they had stuck to their trade and confined themselves to being high-flying tissue sellers, things might have turned out differently. But fate dealt them a cruel hand. Like the same birth date that all three men curiously shared—1 January—there was a touch of destiny in the game of cards that ripped their lives apart. In a game of no winners, Muhammad Noor paid with his life in the early hours of 11 June 2014 and, three years later, his murderers paid with theirs at the gallows.

Chapter 8

# Murder in the Temple

**The term “god-fearing” refers to the sense of respect and awe that we have for a higher being whom we believe to be all-wise, all-seeing and all-powerful.** Because of this, places of worship are seldom scenes of crime. Not many dare to steal from the gods and risk the wrath of divine retribution. However, there are the exceptional few whose toxic greed drives them not only to steal, but also to wreak violence in the house of God.

**14 FEBRUARY 2016, 6.55 AM,  
CHOA CHU KANG COMBINED TEMPLE**

Eng Choon, a helper with Chin Long Kong, one of the five constituent temples in Choa Chu Kang Combined Temple at Teck Whye Lane, was a punctual man. Every morning, he would walk from his house at Choa Chu Kang Central to open the doors of the temple at 6.55 am sharp. So even though it was a Sunday, he was his usual punctual self, and 14 February felt like any other workday. But the sight that greeted him was anything but that.

Lying on the cold, hard floor was fellow temple helper Tan Poh Huat, with blood pooling around his head like a crimson pillow. There was more blood on the floor, at the open space where he normally slept. Beside him was the safari bed on which he was supposed to be sleeping, with his bolster, pillow, slippers and dentures strewn near the bed. Horrified, Eng Choon fled the bloody scene to inform his colleague Kwek Hock, who almost gagged on his breakfast but still had enough wits to call the Police.

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*Frontal view of Choa Chu Kang Combined Temple where murder most foul was committed.*



*The open space beside Chin Long Kong Temple where Tan Poh Huat's battered body was found.*

**14 FEBRUARY 2016, 7.09 AM,  
FIRST RESPONDERS ARRIVE**

“Dead at 7.09 am”, declared the ambulance medic, but as seasoned investigators knew, Tan Poh Huat had been dead for far longer. Wearing grey bermudas but shirtless, he faced skywards. When officers from Choa Chu Kang Neighbourhood Police Centre arrived at the scene, there was so much blood that they had difficulty spotting any open wounds or bruising on his body. But it was impossible to miss the upturned chairs, the blood splatters on the walls and the trail of shoe prints leading to the rear gate where bloody smudges told their own tale of a hasty exit by an intruder. No two ways about it, this was a job for the Special Investigation Section (SIS)!

**14 FEBRUARY 2016, 8.37 AM,  
SIS OFFICERS ARRIVE**

When Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Zhang Yiwen of the SIS arrived, she was briefed by Sergeant (Sgt) Mukhsin bin Mohamad Mukhlis and Special Constabulary Corporal (SC/Cpl) Muhammad Ismail bin Ghazali, the first officers at the scene. While they could not find the murder weapon, they provided useful information about the dead man from interviews with his temple colleagues.

Tan Poh Huat was 53 years old and used to be a medium at Chin Long Kong before quitting two years ago due to poor health. Since then, he had been doing odd jobs at the temple, and since he was divorced with no place to stay, he was allowed to sleep at the open space beside Chin Long Kong.

After thanking the two officers, ASP Zhang turned to her colleagues, ASP Jonathan Tang and Senior Station Inspector (SSI) Mazlan bin Shariff with a grim look on her face. “Big job, guys. Since no one saw the crime, our only witness is the closed-circuit television (CCTV). Obviously, we must look at the CCTVs in the temple. But there are

also the Police Cameras (PolCams) at the Housing and Development Board (HDB) blocks and the CCTVs in the nearby shops. Hopefully, we can pick out someone there. Whatever it is, there's a ton of footage to watch."

"In that case, let me volunteer myself before I'm volunteered", quipped ASP Jonathan.

"Thanks, Jonathan, that being the case, I think Mazlan just volunteered himself for ground enquires", replied ASP Zhang with a smile.

#### **14 FEBRUARY 2016, 12 PM, DR GEORGE PAUL ARRIVES**

As in so many of such cases, experienced pathologist Dr George Paul was there to lend his expert views.

**ASP Zhang** Doc, what's your preliminary assessment on this?

**Dr Paul** Body relatively cool to the touch, and stiff. There are some external wounds and quite a lot of blood around.

**ASP Zhang** Any idea what object could have caused the wounds?

**Dr Paul** I don't see any weapon marks or any injuries that can give a clue as to the type of weapon used. The body is caked with blood. We'll have to clean it up and examine it further during the post-mortem.



**14 FEBRUARY 2016, 12.10 PM,  
“THE MAN IN BLACK”**

Around the time that ASP Zhang was speaking to Dr Paul, ASP Jonathan and ASP Ravindra Subramaniam were poring over the CCTV footage with the help of Eng Choon, now fully recovered from his ordeal.

**Eng Choon** We have six CCTV cameras in our temple. This one is at the corridor. It will capture anyone who walks along... Wait, goodness, look there! The temple is closed, but there's someone inside!

**ASP Jonathan** It's from 2.30 am this morning (14 February). The guy's in a black top, black pants, black shoes, wears a cap, gloves and a surgical mask. I don't think he's here to pray.

**ASP Ravindra** He's walking very slowly and carefully, like he doesn't want to make any noise. He's holding an object in his hand. Looks like a hammer.

**Eng Choon** The intruder is now at the storage area. Poh Huat normally sleeps beside the storage area.

**ASP Jonathan** Look, Ravi! There are some shadows moving at the edge! Like some figures scuffling in the background.

**ASP Ravindra** Yes, but it's stopped now.

**ASP Jonathan** Let's see what happens next.

## MURDER IN THE TEMPLE

**ASP Ravindra** Six minutes and still nothing... Wait, hang on... The guy's back! He's holding a handphone near his face.

**ASP Jonathan** I think he's just trying to shield his face. If he's talking, his handphone screen wouldn't have lit up.

**ASP Ravindra** He's walking towards the rear gate with the hammer... Climbing over the gate now.

**ASP Jonathan** Yes, over the top and out of sight. It's 3.10 am.



*CCTV footage showed the intruder climbing over the rear gate and disappearing into the night.*

**14 FEBRUARY 2016, 1.24 PM,  
CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION DEPARTMENT (CID)**

The order went out—"Check all PolCams in the neighbouring

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blocks and CCTVs in the nearby shops!" For the mammoth operation, the SIS was out in force canvassing 30-odd residential blocks, each with two PolCams in the void deck and two in the lift lobby. In all, they viewed footage from 120 surveillance cameras, excluding those in the shops.

Back in CID, ASP Zhang hunkered down with fellow investigators to review the temple's footage. But before that, SSI Mazlan had a vital piece of information for the team.

**SSI Mazlan** One of the temple helpers, Chin Kiat, told me he saw a man behaving suspiciously last night. At about 10.35 pm, as he was cleaning the statues of the deities in the temple, this guy appeared from nowhere and bumped right into him. He got a shock because all devotees were supposed to have left by then. He was also making prayer offerings to the hell gods at the back, which was strange, because according to Chin Kiat, people normally pray to the benign gods in front. He went from altar to altar and left after a while.

**ASP Zhang** Can Chin Kiat describe him?

**SSI Mazlan** Yes. Chinese, in his 40s, balding. Wearing a red T-shirt and black pants. Had a haversack with him.

**ASP Zhang** Since Chin Kiat saw him at about 10.35 pm, let's look at the CCTV footage from 10.25 pm onwards. Might be able to catch him.

**ASP Jonathan** Okay, the time stamp says "10.29 pm, 13 February"... Hey, there's our man!

## MURDER IN THE TEMPLE

- ASP Zhang** Fits the description all right. Chinese, 40-ish, not much hair. Crossing Teck Whye Avenue and walking straight to the temple, like he knows his way around. My guess is he's either a Teck Whye resident or has lived there previously.
- ASP Jonathan** Seems to know the temple quite well too, walking straight to the hell gods just like Chin Kiat said. But you can see he's only going through the motions.
- SSI Mazlan** Right. Entered the temple at about 10.30 pm and left at 10.42 pm. You don't spend 12 minutes going through the motions unless you're looking out for something.
- ASP Zhang** Fair point. I'd say there's a link between this man in red and the masked intruder in black.
- ASP Jonathan** This guy doesn't have much hair. The masked intruder wore a cap, so it's hard to tell. But both are about the same size and wore black pants and black shoes. Everything's the same except for the T-shirt. But swap his red T-shirt for a black top, and he'll look exactly like the masked man.
- ASP Zhang** The masked man was the only person loitering in the temple at that time, and the CCTV showed him leaving with a hammer-like object. That makes him our Number One suspect.
- ASP Jonathan** Our PolCam at Block 4 caught him walking towards the HDB blocks. Unfortunately, only his side profile was captured.

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**ASP Zhang** Doesn't matter. It may only be his side profile, but we already have some idea of his physical size and gait from the temple's footage. We can still tell if someone resembles him.

**SSI Mazlan** Not forgetting that we already know how the man in red looks from the temple videos. He may have been in a red T-shirt earlier on, but if it's him, we'll know even if he's dressed in blue, black or purple.

### **15 FEBRUARY 2016, 10.15 AM, POST-MORTEM RESULTS**

The day shone bright and sunny. Not the kind of day to be spending in a mortuary. But ASP Zhang was in one, and she wasn't complaining.

**ASP Zhang** Interesting findings, Doc?

**Dr Paul** Very. The deceased was hit multiple times all over the body. There's a round punched-in fracture of the left temple of the skull but no internal bleeding or bruising of the brain within.

**ASP Zhang** So what did he die of?

**Dr Paul** He died of a crushed larynx or voice box.

**ASP Zhang** A crushed voice box?

**Dr Paul** Yes, from the number of lacerations on his scalp, and the round punched-in bone of the temple injury pressing the brain, you'd have expected him to die of head injuries. But no, it was from a

## MURDER IN THE TEMPLE

crushed voice box. Death was caused by extensive upper neck injuries which resulted in crush injuries to the larynx.

**ASP Zhang** What about these saucer-shaped wounds on his left temple? And the round bruise in the skin over the punched-in fracture?

**Dr Paul** It seems like a circular object struck him on the head. Look closely. Each of these saucer-shaped wounds has an imprint of five concentric circles, with a width of 0.2 cm. None of them are fatal by themselves, including this perfect round injury over the punched-in bone, with its unique pattern. They are what I'd call "soft injuries". They could be caused by a hammer-like round object, together with "something" over it, which seemed to have lessened the impact of the blows, so that the skin was only bruised, not torn. Find the person who used it, and this peculiar weapon, and you have the killer.

As ASP Zhang mulled over Dr Paul's words on her way out, her phone rang. The caller ID read SSI Mazlan, and within seconds his voice came on. "Yiwen, the guys just pulled an all-nighter with the CCTV footage. They have something to show you."

**15 FEBRUARY 2016, 3.16 PM,  
CID**

ASP Zhang greeted her tired troops with an appreciative smile as she settled down to view the CCTV recordings of the housing blocks and shops over the past two days (13–14 February). Before starting, ASP Jonathan explained that the officers had whittled down 48 hours of recordings to the few minutes where the suspect appeared.

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**ASP Jonathan** These CCTV snippets showed our man in red at various places in the Teck Whye vicinity after leaving the temple at 10.42 pm last night (13 February). He was seen lingering at void decks and walking in and out of shops. Then our PolCams captured him going up Block 6 Teck Whye Avenue, opposite the temple, for two minutes. My guess is he went to the upper floors to check if anyone was still at the temple grounds. Next, he was seen at 1.24 am, early this morning (14 February), in a coffee shop at Block 145, Teck Whye Lane. He left the coffee shop at 2.14 am and was not seen on our PolCams again.

**ASP Zhang** Interesting. After he left at 2.14 am and disappeared from our PolCams, the masked intruder appeared on the temple's CCTV. A bit too coincidental, isn't it? When one shows up, the other is nowhere to be seen. Like Superman and Clark Kent, I'll say they're one and the same.

**ASP Jonathan** Now for the hard part—finding him.

**ASP Zhang** Let's take another look at the footage. We may find something.

**ASP Jonathan** Roll it, Mazlan.

**ASP Zhang (Pointing at the monitor)**  
Wait, hold it there! This picture of him in the coffee shop. There's a heart logo on his red T-shirt. Can you zoom in?

**ASP Jonathan** There's a heart logo and some words.

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**SSI Mazlan** Yes, I've seen the heart logo and the words "Hair for Hope". Hair for Hope is an annual event organised by the Children's Cancer Foundation (CCF) to raise funds and awareness for childhood cancer. They do a donation drive every year and give out a different coloured T-shirt each time.

**ASP Jonathan** Okay, my Google search shows they gave out a red T-shirt in 2015.

**ASP Zhang** Brilliant! Mazlan, get in touch with CCF and ask for records of donors or participants from the 2015 donation drive and then cross-check them with males that fit the suspect's description.

### **16-18 FEBRUARY 2016, CHECKS AT CCF**

Over the next three days, SSI Mazlan and his team had their hands full, sorting through the forest of names in CCF's 2015 donation drive. To narrow down the search, they looked for Chinese male participants who were:

- Aged 30 to 40;
- Residing at Teck Whye or nearby areas;
- Similar in build to the man in red; and
- Had very little hair.

But it was still a monumental task. On the third day, ASP Zhang's phone rang. It was Mazlan. "Good news, Yiwen, we've pared it down to just four Chinese males, all in their 40s, all living in Teck Whye, and all roughly the same build as the suspect from the event photos taken of them. But only one qualifies. He is Loh Suan Lit, aged 47, living in Jalan Teck Whye, and the only one with very little hair."



**19 FEBRUARY 2016,  
CID, “BRING HIM IN!”**

The order went out to bring Loh Suan Lit in, but things did not go according to script. Investigations showed that he had not only shifted residence from Teck Whye to Marsiling but, even worse, had left Singapore via Woodlands Checkpoint in the early morning of 19 February. But ASP Zhang was unfazed. “We’ll get the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) to alert us the moment he comes back. Before that, we must be sure he’s the man we’re looking for. Mazlan, go through the CCTV footage at Woodlands Checkpoint and confirm that this Loh Suan Lit is the man in red that we saw inside the temple on 13 February.”

The confirmation came swift and sure. Within half an hour, to be precise. “Yiwen, I’ve just finished viewing the footage. Confirmed! Loh Suan Lit is our man in red. He’s not in a red T-shirt anymore, but he’s wearing similar black pants, and the patterns on his haversack are the same as that of the guy in the temple. His physical appearance and build are also similar. And here’s the clincher—he has very little hair.”

**ASP Zhang** Great! Now we can place a notice in the *Police Gazette* against him.

**SSI Mazlan** And what do we do after that?

**ASP Zhang** We wait. He may have flown the coop for now. But he’ll fly back.

**24 FEBRUARY 2016, 5.20 PM,  
“WINGS CLIPPED”**

When Loh Suan Lit “flew back” six days later, he had his wings painfully clipped. The ICA officer who saw Loh’s name on the “wanted

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list" lost no time in alerting the Police officers on duty. They detained him and called the SIS. When SIS officers arrived at Woodlands Checkpoint, they were ushered into a room where a flustered-looking Loh sat perspiring despite the air-conditioning. With minimal fuss, they relieved him of his belongings—his haversack, handphone, wristwatch, shoes, et cetera—and sent them for DNA analysis.

### **27 FEBRUARY 2016, 1.20 PM, OUTCOME OF DNA ANALYSIS**

Three days later, DNA analysis pointed the finger of guilt at Loh. The results showed Tan Poh Huat's DNA and blood on the interior and exterior of Loh's haversack, handphone and, most significantly, underneath the strap of his watch. This proved conclusively that Loh was at the crime scene as he had to be within striking distance for Tan's blood to reach the underside of his watch strap.

### **28 FEBRUARY 2016, 3.36 PM, CID**

If Loh Suan Lit had appeared unhappy at Woodlands Checkpoint, he looked downright miserable at Police Cantonment Complex. Four days of brooding over his fate in a CID lockup had taken its toll. When ASP Zhang ordered him to be brought to the interview room, he seemed almost grateful.

#### **ASP Zhang (Pointing)**

Look at these photos of you entering the Choa Chu Kang Combined Temple. What have you got to say?

**Loh** I'm not saying anything.

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**ASP Zhang** Even if you keep quiet, it's no use. We sent your belongings for forensic analysis, and guess what? The results showed the deceased's DNA and blood on the interior and exterior of your bag, handphone and underneath the strap of your watch.

**Loh** I didn't mean to kill Poh Huat. I just wanted to steal money because I was broke.

**ASP Zhang** You know the deceased?

**Loh** Yes, I got to know him when we were playing mahjong. I didn't know he was in the temple that night.

**ASP Zhang** Tell me what happened on the night of 13 February.

**Loh** I took a bus from my house at Marsiling to the temple. It was quite late at night. I've been to the temple, so I knew there were donation boxes and gold chains on the deities. I wanted to steal because I was jobless and broke.

**ASP Zhang** What happened after you alighted from the bus?

**Loh** I entered the temple and went to the hell gods at the back because the donation boxes and gold chains were somewhere there. I thought it was safe to steal. But suddenly I bumped into someone. It was a temple helper, and both of us got a shock. Fortunately, he didn't say anything, and I left.

**ASP Zhang** What did you do after you left?

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**Loh** I took some “15 pills” (the sedative midazolam). I started taking them some years back. If I don’t take them, I feel very anxious and frustrated. But after taking them, I suffer from memory loss.

**ASP Zhang** What happened after you took the pills that night?

**Loh** I must have taken a lot of pills because I can’t remember.

**ASP Zhang** CCTV footage showed you lingering at void decks, entering shops and going up a block opposite the temple. You were also seen at a coffee shop drinking coffee and watching football on TV.

**Loh** I don’t remember any of these things. I also don’t remember how I broke into the temple later. Everything was very hazy because of the pills. But I remember trying to break the door knobs inside the temple. I didn’t succeed, so I decided to leave. Just then, I heard someone shout, “Oi!” I panicked and hit out with the hammer I was holding. I closed my eyes and kept hitting until I felt only thin air. When I opened my eyes, the person was on the floor, and I was just above him. I was very frightened. I quickly climbed over the gate and ran off.

**ASP Zhang** Where did you go after that?

**Loh** I can’t remember how I got home. But the next thing I knew, I was at home, wearing shorts and home clothes. When I searched my haversack for

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cigarettes later, I found the hammer, screwdriver, chisel and some other small items. I threw them into the rubbish bin downstairs.



*Scratch marks revealed Loh's amateurish attempts at gaining entry into the rooms where the donation boxes were located.*

**ASP Zhang** Did you try to find out who you hit at the temple?

**Loh** I read later from the papers that it was Poh Huat.

**ASP Zhang** You left for Malaysia on 19 February. Why?

**Loh** I went to Muar to borrow money from my uncle for my mother's cancer operation. But my uncle had no money, and since I also lost my wallet, I decided to return to Singapore. I arrived at Woodlands Checkpoint on 24 February and was arrested by the Police.

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**ASP Zhang** When you entered the temple at 10.30 pm on 13 February, you were wearing a red T-shirt. Where did you get it from?

**Loh** When I was working as a cleaner at National University Hospital last year, I signed up for a charity event, and they gave me the T-shirt as a souvenir.

**ASP Zhang** Where did you get your housebreaking tools?

**Loh** I bought them at a hardware shop in Marsiling where I lived.

**ASP Zhang** Bring us there.

### **28 FEBRUARY 2016, 6 PM, STEELY HARDWARE SHOP**

At Steely hardware shop at Marsiling Lane, Loh pointed to the tools he bought for the temple job, amongst them a hammer, a screwdriver and a chisel. But something else was bugging the investigators.

### **29 FEBRUARY 2016, 10.12 AM, CID**

The next day at the CID, ASP Zhang spoke the minds of everyone when she said: “Dr Paul said the weapon could be a hammer-like object and what Loh Suan Lit showed us today ticked one box. But how do we explain the saucer-shaped wounds and the concentric patterned wound on Poh Huat’s left temple? Dr Paul called them ‘soft injuries’ which could be caused by, in his own words, ‘a hammer-like object, together with something that softened the blow’. But what is this ‘something’?”

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*The murderer's break-in tools. But what was that "something" that caused the saucer-shaped wounds?*

Loh's poor recollection of details did not help. Further interrogation over the next few days proved fruitless. He could offer nothing more. This left ASP Zhang and her team in a quandary. They had done the hard part. They had caught the killer and secured irrefutable DNA evidence against him, but they could not find the answer to this knotty riddle staring them in the face.

### **3 MARCH 2016, 1.45 PM, BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD**

Faced with the proverbial blind alley, the team returned to the basics of reviewing previous CCTV footage. It was excruciatingly tedious, but it was important that they did not miss anything. And they didn't! After hours of going through the footage, the team picked out Loh walking into what looked like a hardware shop at Teck Whye. The time—10.50 pm, 13 February.

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**ASP Zhang** This was just after he left the temple at 10.42 pm. Strange. Since he'd already purchased his break-in tools from the Marsiling hardware shop, why did he go into another hardware shop at Teck Whye? Unless...

**ASP Jonathan** Unless he wanted to buy something else.

**SSI Mazlan** But he didn't approach the cashier.

**ASP Jonathan** Let's just say he wanted to "borrow" something from the shop.

**ASP Zhang** Ok, rewind and watch his movements again. There he is... Heading for the rack on the left... Lingers for a while... And walks off.

**SSI Mazlan** He stood very close to the rack. I think he pinched something from the tray there. Can't see what it was, but it looked small.

**ASP Zhang** Ok, Mazlan, get down to the shop and zero in on that tray. It could just be that "something" that we are looking for.

### **3 MARCH 2016, 4.23 PM, CID, "ASK DR PAUL"**

ASP Zhang nursed the rubber stopper between her fingers with the gentleness of a doting mum. She did not show surprise when SSI Mazlan showed her the stopper from the shop, and she was not showing it now. It was like she half-expected it.



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**ASP Zhang** You were right, Mazlan. Loh did pinch something small from the tray. This rubber stopper must be the smallest item in the shop.

**SSI Mazlan** Just about. It's the type you put on the metal legs of chairs to prevent them from scratching the floor.

**ASP Jonathan** He didn't take it to protect the floors, that's for sure.

**ASP Zhang** More to protect himself. He probably took it to muffle the sound of him hammering at door knobs in the dead of night.

**ASP Jonathan** I think it was a last-minute decision, otherwise he would have bought it together with his tools at Marsiling.

**ASP Zhang** Look at these concentric circles on the stopper. If you're thinking what I'm thinking, there's one way to be sure. Ask Dr Paul.

### **3 MARCH 2016, 6.20 PM, "YOU'RE GETTING THERE"**

It had been a long day, and Dr Paul was glad to be finally leaving the office. He didn't get very far. The familiar voices of ASPs Zhang and Jonathan down the corridor told him that his day was about to get a little longer.

**ASP Zhang** Sorry for the late, late visit, Doc, but we have something important to show you. Take a look at this.

**Dr Paul** A rubber stopper?

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**ASP Zhang** Remember the saucer-shaped wounds on the dead man's left temple? You told me at the post-mortem that they might have been caused by a circular object.

**Dr Paul** Yes... And this is a circular object...

**ASP Zhang** You also said that each saucer-shaped wound had the imprint of five concentric circles on it.

**Dr Paul** Yes, five concentric circles... Like the ones on this stopper.

**ASP Zhang** And that each circle has a width of 0.2 cm.

**Dr Paul** (measuring the width)

Yes, 0.2 cm... Just like the width of the circles on this stopper. Well, you're getting there.

**ASP Zhang** Getting there?

**Dr Paul** Yes, this rubber stopper may answer some questions about the saucer-shaped wounds. But don't forget that there are other wounds of different shapes and sizes too. Some of these are triangular in appearance while others bear a J-shaped imprint.

**ASP Zhang** Does it mean that I'm wrong about the rubber stopper?

**Dr Paul** Not at all. It's an undeniable fact that the shape and dimensions of this rubber stopper conform to the saucer-shaped and the round wounds in the temple region. I'd say there's a possibility, even a

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high chance, that you're right. But we can't dismiss those triangular-shaped wounds and J-shaped injuries even though they might have been caused by the same weapon striking the victim from different angles during the frenzied assault. So from a professional point of view, I'm unable to say with absolute certainty that a hammer capped by such a stopper was indeed used in the attack.

**ASP Zhang** Fair enough. Well, thanks anyway, Doc. I guess half a loaf is better than none.

## SENTENCE



*Loh Suan Lit thought he had found the perfect route to easy money when he came across the donation boxes in the temple.*

Loh's day of reckoning arrived on 15 January 2018 in the High Court after he had pleaded guilty to one charge of culpable homicide and one unrelated charge of burgling a stall at Beauty World Food Centre. In sentencing him to 14 years' jail and six strokes of the cane (inclusive of two years for burglary), Justice Chua Lee Ming accepted the defence's argument that Loh's attack was not premeditated.

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Lawyer Sunil Sudheesan had argued that Loh was frightened by Tan Poh Huat's shout and subsequent attempt to stop him from getting away. The "haphazard" nature of the victim's injuries, he maintained, proved that it was a "panicked attack", while the \$2,868 found intact on the victim's body showed that Loh attacked Tan so that he could flee, and not so he could continue with his plan to steal. Nonetheless, Justice Chua agreed with the Prosecution that Loh's action was "brutal and vicious", as shown by the 93 injuries on Tan that included fractures to his skull, jaw and nose, and a ruptured eyeball. And although Loh had claimed that he could not clearly recall the killing due to his consumption of the "15 pills" before the incident, an Institute of Mental Health report said his judgement was "not significantly impaired to the extent that he did not know what he was doing was wrong".

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Loh Suan Lit, down on his luck and low on cash, thought he had found the perfect route to easy money when he came across the donation boxes in the temple. What could be easier? Get in, get the money and get out. After all, this was Choa Chu Kang Combined Temple, not Fort Knox. But when he was surprised by the light-sleeping temple helper, Tan Poh Huat, things went rapidly downhill. He killed someone, he left empty-handed and he had the SIS on his tail. The Police knew they had a tough task ahead. The suspect had camouflaged himself, the CCTV images were dark and blurry, and there were over 2,500 hours of surveillance footage to review. But the SIS officers' thoroughness eventually paid off—not just in apprehending the killer but also in finding out what caused the saucer-shaped wounds on the deceased. These "soft injuries" piqued the professional pride of the officers who would not rest until they got to the bottom of the mystery. Although they did not receive the unqualified endorsement of Dr Paul, their sense of mission in going the extra mile was as exemplary as their unwavering resolve to deliver justice to the dead.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Foo Siang Luen is a researcher with the Digital Readiness and Learning Division of the Ministry of Communications and Information. He reads and writes in his spare time. Justice Is Done 2 is his second book.