

PARANORMAL SINGAPORE
VOLUME 1

Welcome to my world, dear friends.

As I sit in the black corner of the *kopitiam*, looking out into your world, I hunger to invite you to join me.

Do you feel my eyes watching you from the deepest shadows of day, and from the hollow darkness of the ghostly night? Do you sense me sitting on that empty stool beside you, the one that draws your darting eye? And, yes, that flickering sliver of blackness that slides through the half-light among the tables and chairs and sends a shiver down your spine, it is I.

For those who dare, I invite you into my black world. Sit at my table and we'll share a *kopi* and a tale or two.

Then we'll play a little game.

But beware—if you lose, you will be doomed to stay with me in the shadows of the *kopitiam* forever.

Happy reading!

Andrew Lim

BOOKS IN THIS SERIES

Paranormal Singapore
Volume 1

Paranormal Singapore
Volume 2

**PARANORMAL
SINGAPORE**

TALES FROM THE KOPPTIAM

VOLUME 1

Andrew Lim



monsoonbooks

Published in 2008
by Monsoon Books Pte Ltd
52 Telok Blangah Road
#03-05 Telok Blangah House
Singapore 098829
www.monsoonbooks.com.sg

ISBN: 978-981-05-9686-6

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Printed in Singapore

12 11 10 09 08

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

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Pradeep's garden

‘One down, two to go,’ Pradeep crooned, knowing full well there were a lot more than two to go. But two sounded better than lots. Pradeep wasn't very good at numbers because they made his head spin, so he didn't worry about them very much.

The branch-logging shears snipped merrily as he carried on singing his made-up song. The shears were razor sharp.

Years ago his grandfather had taught him how to sharpen the curved blades using a special stone. Now there wasn't a branch on the whole farm that he couldn't snip his way through in an instant.

‘One down and 'leventy million to go,’ he sang as he moved on to the next one. Pradeep had already cut off three without even realising it. It was so much fun, and no effort at all because the shears could cut through anything. He was proud of just how sharp he could make them. Grandpa would have been proud too but he was asleep. He had been asleep for a long time.

Happily, Pradeep worked on, snip, snip, snipping and chanting as he went. It was so easy. Even his grandfather would have been amazed at just how fast he could go when he wanted to. Snip,

snip, snip went the big shears. It was as if he were snipping off twigs.

Then suddenly Pradeep was at the end of the row. ‘Oh!’ he said, disappointed that he had finished so quickly. For a moment he was angry with himself for having gone so fast because he liked snipping. He stood there uncertainly under the trees, the long-handled shears hanging loosely in his hands as he wondered what to do next.

‘Plant the cuttings, Pradeep!’ the voice in his head urged. It was his grandfather’s voice.

‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘I’ll plant the cuttings. That’s what I’ll do next.’

Pradeep needed something big to put all the cuttings into. He pondered for a moment. He’d never taken so many before and he needed something really big. Then he remembered the green plastic bucket. It was sitting by the back door. Carefully he placed the shears on the ground next to a basket of freshly picked mangos and a half-empty pitcher of orange juice. It had been full to the brim when he had put it there.

Pradeep went to collect the bucket. He returned shortly and, starting at the beginning of one row, began to pick up the scattered cuttings. There were so many of them. He was careful not to miss any. ‘Waste not, want not,’ came his grandmother’s sharp voice. For a moment Pradeep stopped and looked around, then he smiled. Grandma was asleep in the house just like Grandpa,

Mummy and Daddy. The voice was in his head.

When he had finished picking up the cuttings, Pradeep stood still for a moment and listened to the noises all around him. Birds were squabbling and singing in the trees, and he could hear the distant sound of the traffic on the road. It was so peaceful, so quiet. There was no sound from the nasty, noisy children at the school nearby.

Pradeep looked down at the bucket. It was filled almost to the brim. He smiled happily. It would be a big crop.

‘You’d better be good when you grow up or I’ll cut you off again,’ he said loudly, looking down at his cuttings. He picked one up and examined it closely. ‘You’ll grow up nice for Pradeep, won’t you?’ he said as he turned it in his hand. It was delicate and pink with a deep red tip at one end. Pradeep nodded and dropped the cutting back into the bucket. ‘Grow into a nice friend for Pradeep,’ he said softly as he turned towards the garden.

The teacher and her class had come to the garden that morning after Pradeep had gone to the school. He’d invited them to come and pick mangos. Pradeep had given them the orange juice with the special stuff in it. It was the same stuff he’d put in Grandpa’s tea when he’d scolded him: the powder Grandpa used to put the birds and rats to sleep.

The children now lying under the trees used to yell at Pradeep as well. Now everyone who had yelled and not been nice to him was asleep. The pretty teacher had been kind. She hadn’t yelled at

him, but she had drunk some of the orange juice so now she was asleep as well.

Lifting his heavy bucket with both hands, Pradeep started towards the garden behind the house. He would put the fingers in the ground, and soon they would grow more boys and girls, but these boys and girls would be nice boys and girls who would become his friends. And the nice teacher, she would be there. He would like her for his grown-up friend. Whistling happily, Pradeep opened the gate and walked into the garden where Grandpa used to help his little plants grow into big ones.

There, sticking out from the rich soil, were Grandpa's fingers, all ten of them because Pradeep knew that thumbs were really fingers too. And next to Grandpa's fingers were Grandma's, then Mummy's and Daddy's, and the lady next door and . . .

Head of the class

'Children, pay attention, please,' Miss Margaret Stephenson, teacher and spinster, tapped her ruler on the edge of her desk. On the blackboard behind her she had written several verses of poetry and today's lesson was about to start.

Miss Stephenson had been a teacher for most of her seventy years. First it had been in her homeland where she had taught at a girls-only school in Somerset for fifteen years. Then she'd answered an advertisement in *The Daily Telegraph* for an English teacher to join the staff of a very distinguished girls-only school in Singapore.

Miss Stephenson had had absolutely no problem in acquiring the position. She had no dependants. Both her parents were dead, she was an only child and, of course, there was no man in her life—or ever would be. Miss Stephenson didn't like men very much, and the thought that one might someday actually attempt to press his attentions on her rendered her almost to the point of hysterics. No—no man would ever sully her virtue.

When she'd first arrived, Singapore had been very much to Miss Stephenson's liking. Despite the sticky heat, she'd adapted quickly and enjoyed the rather relaxed pace. Yes, men had paid

her attention, many men, and some had seemed quite eager to spend time in her company. However Miss Stephenson had made it clear that she was not interested.

For thirty years she had taught the girls of Singapore. She hadn't just taught English but also manners and deportment. She'd also always encouraged high moral standards in all her students.

Eventually, when she was sixty-five years old, the school had asked Miss Stephenson to retire. They'd decided that she was a little out of touch with the new generation of young ladies and her behaviour was becoming a little erratic.

There had been a number of incidences.

Miss Stephenson had naturally objected to both their judgement and to her enforced retirement, but she had had no choice but to accept it.

The first few days of her enforced retirement had been long and quite frustrating. Then one day, quite out of the blue, she had come up with a solution: she would establish her own small private school for young ladies.

Luckily Miss Stephenson had earned a good salary from her teaching position, and with her material needs being few she had managed to save a large amount of money. She had also been left a considerable sum through her parents' estate—money she had invested wisely.

She'd sold her small apartment in Bishan and purchased a house in Pasir Ris. The house had used almost all of her available

funds, but she was pleased. There was room for her, room for a dormitory that could accommodate twelve young ladies and room for a large classroom.

'Miss Stephenson's Private Boarding School for Christian Ladies' soon opened for business.

Unfortunately things got off to a very slow start. The very thought that she had to advertise her new establishment had passed Miss Stephenson by, and at the end of the first term she'd had absolutely no students whatsoever.

The first day of the second term, she'd stood at the front of her classroom and gazed at the twelve empty desks, as she had done every morning of the previous term. No smiling faces had beamed back at her but she was used to that.

Throughout her career there had been few smiling faces in her classroom, but she had long since forgotten that. In fact, Miss Stephenson had been rather a severe teacher, and the faces that had stared back at her had often been close to tears and full of extreme trepidation.

There and then she'd promised herself that soon all her children would smile adoringly back at her.

Later that day, as she'd read *The Straits Times*, she'd seen something that had made her smile. It had been the answer to her prayers. Soon, she thought, she would have pupils in abundance.

Now in year three, Miss Stephenson's Private Boarding School for Christian Ladies had twelve attentive students at their desks, just as they had been since the day Miss Stephenson had dreamt up her brilliant idea.

'Now, children, I want you to recite after me the words of William Shakespeare from *King Henry VIII*.' She turned towards the blackboard and pointed her ruler to the words written there. 'And, when I am forgotten, as I shall be, And sleep in dull cold marble . . .' Her voice droned on as she recited the words but there was no other sound. Not one single voice joined her. Nonetheless Miss Stephenson read on, and when she'd finished she turned to her class and beamed. She laid down her ruler and clapped her hands.

'Well done, class, well done. That was lovely. As a reward you can all go outside and play for an hour. Go now!'

Miss Stephenson clapped her hands again, but the faces at the desks didn't move. She didn't seem to notice, and instead walked out of the classroom and went to the kitchen to make herself a cup of tea.

'They are lovely girls, and they are having fun,' she said, hearing the voices of excited children in her head as she stood at the window staring out into the tiny, deserted back yard.

With a cup of tea in her hands, Miss Stephenson walked through the dining room, its long table set with thirteen place settings, and carried on into the dormitory. She gazed lovingly at

the twelve beds, each one containing a sleeping child—a sleeping headless child.

Miss Stephenson turned and went back into the classroom. There, propped on each desk, sat the head of a young girl. Eyes stared blankly to the front of the classroom.

At night, when it was time for the girls to sleep, she would gather the heads and tenderly carry them to the dormitory to reunite them with their bodies. In the morning, before she woke the girls for breakfast, she would return the heads to the classroom, ready for the day's lessons.

Miss Stephenson sat at her desk and drank her tea, oblivious to the heads and their blank stares.

The children are playing in the garden, she thought. Later, they will have their dinner, go to the bathroom then bed and tomorrow, bright and early, they will say their prayers, have breakfast and class will begin again.

Up until that point, the police investigators had not solved the island mystery that was now almost three years old: the mystery surrounding the theft of twelve embalmed bodies. It had been in all the papers. Students from an exclusive girls-only school had died when their bus veered off Benjamin Sheares Bridge. When the police retrieved the bodies, they'd acted quickly to embalm them to give parents, many of whom lived overseas, enough time to fly to Singapore.

However, one night the bodies had been stolen from the morgue and never seen again.

Miss Stephenson finished her tea and went back to the kitchen. She rinsed her cup, put it on the counter then paused, staring at the big freezer that sat in the corner of the room.

‘I must do something about them,’ she muttered, walking to the freezer door and opening it. Inside were two men. She thought that perhaps they were from Java. They had been the men who Miss Stephenson had hired to steal the bodies from the morgue. They’d delivered the girls, disposed of the van then come back for the rest of the money she’d owed them. Miss Stephenson, however, had not been about to waste any more money on them—she had a school to run. She had made the men lime juice laced with rat poison. At first it had been difficult for her to stuff them into the freezer, but she had managed in the end.

‘Now, girls, time for supper. Wash up and come to the table,’ Miss Stephenson called as she let the freezer lid fall shut. Sometimes, just sometimes, she realised exactly what she was doing but fortunately, she concluded, those moments were becoming fewer and fewer, and that suited her admirably. Soon she would have those moments no more.

‘Quickly, girls, supper is getting cold.’

Little boy bad

We moved into our apartment on a Saturday. There were just three of us but we didn’t realise that there was already someone else living there.

My name is Lim Poh Choo. I am a widow. My husband died in a fire aboard the ship he worked on as an engineer. I have two children, Su Lin and Ming Xiang. Not long ago we shifted to a smaller apartment in an HDB estate in Bedok because we could no longer afford to live in the bigger one we had in Tampines.

The children were excited by the move, as children often are. Our new apartment had four bedrooms. It wasn’t too old and I thought we’d been lucky to get it, especially for such a low rent.

When we first moved in, I wondered about the fourth bedroom. It was a dull room and strangely cold, despite the fact that the walls were painted white and there was a window. However, the paint on the ceiling seemed darker. I thought that perhaps white paint had been thinly painted over a darker colour.

‘Just a bad paint job,’ I’d concluded. I decided that, because the other bedrooms were larger and brighter, this could be used as storage for the moment. I had plenty of other things to do, so I moved all our boxes and surplus furniture in there. I decided I’d