

The body of a woman is found in a Singapore nature park. Nobody has reported her missing. Nobody knows who she is. The only clue to her identity is a series of tiny numbers etched into her dental implants.

In Kuala Lumpur, a married man is arrested for the murder of his mistress. The police are adamant that he is her killer. However, forensic evidence tells a different story altogether.

The Bali bombing investigation was essentially a giant murder case: one with 202 victims and three crime scenes. But outstanding investigative work by forensic scientists helped to identify the bombers and bring them to trial.

This casebook of 16 fascinating true stories from Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Indonesia by award-winning Australian true crime writer Liz Porter shows how forensic science is used to catch killers, solve mysteries and exonerate falsely accused suspects.

“The forensic science and medical evidence in *Crime Scene Asia* is fascinating in itself, as are the accounts of the police investigations. But what sets it apart is seeing how that evidence is used in court by the prosecution and then challenged, or alternative forensic evidence is introduced by the defence. The reader hears from the experts, but also experiences the lawyers facing each other on a tightrope trading blows... Compelling reading.”

Stephen Cordner
Professor of Forensic Pathology
Monash University, Australia

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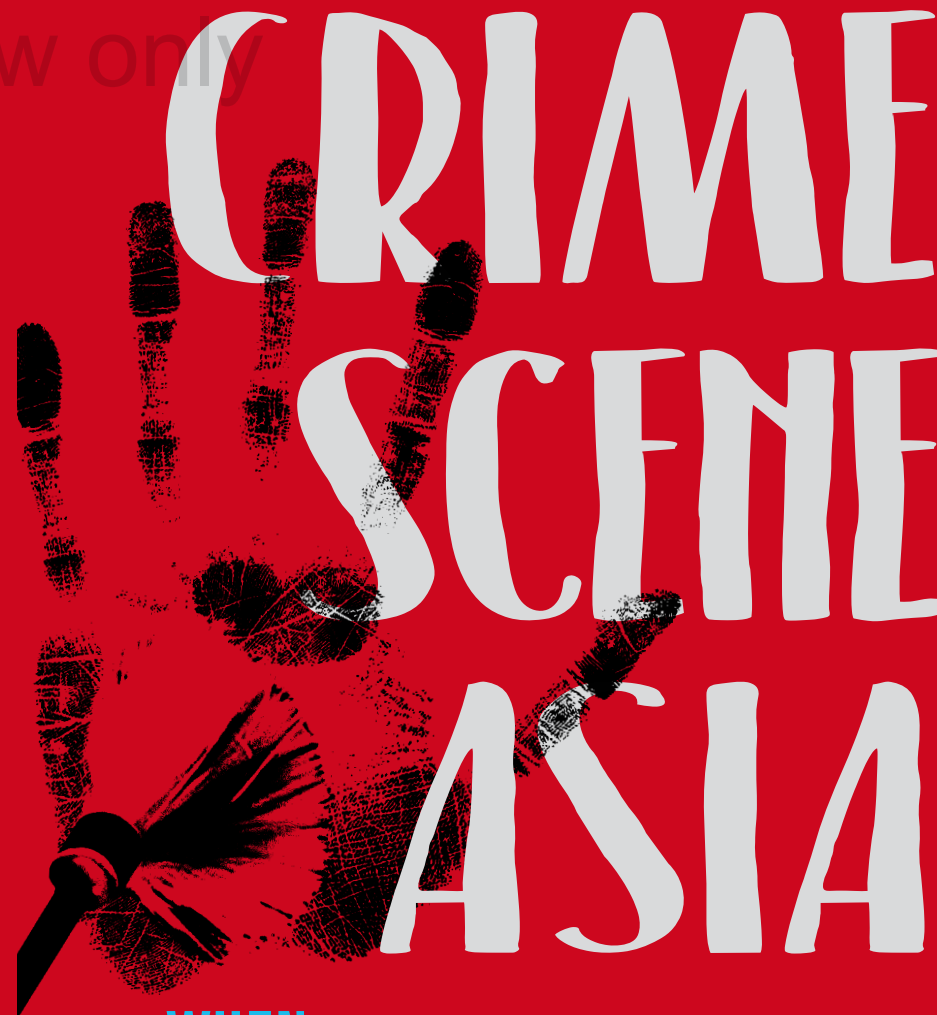


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CRIME SCENE ASIA

Liz Porter



**WHEN
FORENSIC EVIDENCE
BECOMES THE
SILENT WITNESS**

Liz Porter Award-winning Crime Journalist

For Review only

PRAISE FOR *CRIME SCENE ASIA*

A fascinating book. This is an easy to read compendium of some of the most interesting and important criminal cases in Asia and Australia over the last decades, revealing the difficulties, successes and trials and tribulations associated with complex forensic science and medical evidence in the court room.

– *Forensic pathologist Johan Duflou
Clinical Professor at the Sydney Medical School
of the University of Sydney, Australia*

An irresistible read. Gripping tales of the relentless pursuit of truth through forensic science, no matter the odds.

– *Dr Raquel del Rosario-Fortun
Professor at the University of the Philippines-College
of Medicine, the Philippines*

Liz Porter takes great pains in understanding complex scientific evidence and presents it with such clarity. It is a well-researched and presented book of criminal cases, which is fascinating to read.

– *Dato' V Sithambaram
Eminent criminal lawyer, Malaysia*

An absolutely fascinating read: Liz Porter has a journalist's eye for detail and a storyteller's ear for narrative. Put them together and we have a superbly told series of tragic (and sometimes tragicomic) true stories leaving the reader stunned by the way ordinary lives can drift into extraordinary drama.

– *Nury Vittachi,
Author and Chairman, Asia-Pacific Writers and
Translators Association, Hong Kong*

For Review only

PRAISE FOR LIZ PORTER'S EARLIER BOOKS

Written On The Skin: an Australian forensic casebook

Each of her stories reads like good crime fiction ... a compulsive read.
– *The Sydney Morning Herald*

Highly addictive reading for any fan of forensics or CSI.
– *Kathryn Fox, bestselling author of Without Consent*

A delightful and entertaining writer.
– *Weekend Australian*

Cold Case Files: past crimes solved by new forensic science

... Edgar Allan Poe would have applauded the recent Sisters-in-Crime Davitt Award for True Crime being awarded to Melbourne writer Liz Porter for her brilliant *Cold Case Files*. ... He introduced the notion of ratiocination – the exercise of reason – in the process of analysing clues. And Porter investigates many as she sets the advances of forensic science technology, so recognisable from TV crime shows, into an investigative context.

– *Weekend Australian*

Liz Porter writes grippingly, though soberly, and with a scrupulous attention to scientific detail.

– *The Age*

They read like scripts for a CSI show or an episode of *Dexter* but what makes the mysteries in *Cold Case Files* by Liz Porter so chilling are that they come from real life police files. The TV shows are sexed up to entertain or titillate viewers; *Cold Case Files* is not, and it's all the more gripping because of it.

– *Townsville Bulletin (Australia)*

Advances in forensic science have afforded modern criminal investigators some remarkable opportunities. Long-time journalist Liz Porter takes a detailed look at how forensics have solved a series of Australian murders which originally either baffled police or led them to imprison the wrong person. True crime fans, this is for you.

– *Queensland U On Sunday (Brisbane, Australia)*



CRIME SCENE ASIA

For Review only

CRIME SCENE ASIA

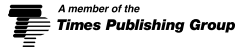
WHEN
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Liz Porter

For Review only

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For my darling daughter Alice.

In memory of my late mother, biochemist Rose Porter (1916–2005).
How I wish she were still here to talk to about life, books and science.

And for my good friend Herbert, who read so many versions of the openings of the stories in this book and always remained enthusiastic and encouraging.

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FOREWORD

It was a book that led me to the world of forensic medicine: *Dead Men Tell Tales*, a 1968 Pan paperback by Jurgen Thorwald. A book in the true crime genre, it left me starry-eyed about the power of forensic science and medicine to catch murderers: a riveting read for a sheltered schoolboy. When I have been back to it, I can recall my excitement; but, predictably, it reads now like a pale impression of reality.

Fast forward almost 50 years to the gripping cases in this collection and to Liz Porter's extensive research and wonderfully engaging style. The way she handles their many aspects, some of which are nicely nuanced, demonstrates respect for how sophisticated consumers of contemporary forensic fare have become. Her cases each have their own special mix of suspects, crime scenes, police, lawyers, judges, scientists, doctors, psychologists and psychiatrists; these interact in their own way to finally result in a verdict. The vagaries, the uncertainties along the way are on brilliant display here too – but ultimately all is distilled to one of two formal outcomes: guilty, or not; and, on a number of occasions, both.

Examination of the scene is a crucial component of the evaluation of virtually all serious crime. It is only by re-creating what happens at the scene that the court can come to conclusions about the actions of the accused. Such conclusions might be arrived at via corroboration of the evidence of other witnesses (as well as the

accused), inferences drawn simply from the evidence and nothing else, and in murder cases, these include inferences about the state of mind and intentions of the accused. The terrible Singapore case of the missing eight-year-old girl captures all of this, and additionally captures the tension of the high stakes associated with a capital case. The accused, after being convicted despite having a low IQ and possibly mental illness (and therefore arguably not responsible for his actions) was sentenced to death. The sentence was upheld 2:1 on appeal, and carried out.

The forensic science and medical evidence in *Crime Scene Asia* is fascinating in itself, as are the accounts of the police investigations. But what sets this book apart is seeing how that evidence is used in court by the prosecution and then challenged, or alternative forensic evidence introduced by the defence. The reader hears from the experts, but also experiences the lawyers, facing each other on a tightrope trading blows, where a wrong step or a change of stance can – and does – send them crashing to oblivion below. This type of writing, setting the expert evidence in the advocates' framework, is new and is possible because Liz Porter, on the evidence of *Crime Scene Asia*, has a collection of gifts which not all authors in the genre may have acquired: background investigative, forensic and legal knowledge, insight and research and writing skill.

The Asian setting for the cases is obviously a distinctive feature of the book. The cases from Singapore, for example, involve trials by judge alone. Ultimately, juries are a crucial protection for citizens, and generally they are dispensed with as an efficiency measure. Trials are easier and cheaper without them, although the results, in my view and supported by examples in this book, are not necessarily more reliable. In addition, a number of Asian countries have capital punishment. I have been forever grateful not

to work in such a jurisdiction. The possibility of execution in a number of the cases in this book adds a further stressful dimension to the accounts which many readers will not be familiar with. But there are also examples of wonderful and heart-warming results from some non-criminal case applications of forensic DNA, and others – for example, an extraordinary parentage testing case from the Philippines – producing real insights into the way people live.

One of the great things about *Crime Scene Asia* is that Liz Porter is not painting a simple, two-dimensional utopian picture of perfectly precise justice. The Innocence Project is clear evidence that criminal trials (in the United States at least) can be flawed without those responsible for the process being aware: wrong executions and wrong convictions haunt American (and almost certainly other countries') death rows and prisons. She has examples of flawed forensics leading to wrong convictions, and to convictions where real doubt exists but which still stand. Being associated with such a case (or, God forbid, such cases) is the stuff of nightmares for most of the players in the courtroom drama: judge, barristers, expert witnesses and, yes, usually police. There are also, however, clear cases of corruption, incompetence and poor performance, the criminal trial anywhere being a human enterprise.

Without giving the game away there are cases in the pages which follow beautifully showing:

- Forensic evidence clearly corroborating otherwise purely circumstantial evidence
- The complexities of autopsy and forensic science evidence being tied to the mental state of the accused
- That technically perfect DNA analysis, identifying accused individuals who have left biological material at crime scenes, can be easily misinterpreted and used to wrongly convict them

For Review only

- That technically perfect chemical evidence of explosive material on the hands of an accused can have an innocent explanation
- The potential for an over reliance on confession evidence to result in injustice
- The importance of prosecution expert witnesses agreeing to reasonable propositions put to them by the defence to avoid injustice
- Independent courts and judges throwing out clearly wrong prosecutions, making wrong convictions, and making good judgements too
- That what objectively is an accident could be a murder depending solely on one's interpretation of the surrounding circumstances
- And many other striking examples of crime scene and forensics operating in investigations and trials.

Crime Scene Asia sets a new benchmark in criminal investigative, forensic science and forensic medicine story-telling. The cases are each dramatic in their own way, and thus make compelling reading. For those who are interested in the issues, the detail allows the reader to identify them and think them through. *Crime Scene Asia* thus also works at deeper levels. Quite simply, Liz Porter is to be congratulated – she has written a winner.

Stephen Cordner

Professor of Forensic Pathology
Monash University, Australia

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I was sitting in a café in Sydney, transfixed, as former Hong Kong-based barrister Peter Lavac told me the story of a former client, a truck driver called Chan, who, in 1997, managed to get himself enmeshed in what appeared to be a plot to blow up Hong Kong Island's stone-walled Stanley Prison. The key plotters, Lavac was telling me, were two of the former British colony's most notorious gangsters. One was a guy called Big Spender, nicknamed for the lavish lifestyle he funded with his armed robberies and kidnappings.

Lavac's client, Chan, was only a minor player in this criminal big league. But he was in serious trouble nevertheless. Police had raided the rural hideout that Big Spender had set up to store his explosives: a load big enough to flatten a whole block in Hong Kong's Central Business District. Chan's story was that he had only been a delivery boy. Specifically, he said he had been hired to deliver a truckload of empty barrels.

Chan had just finished dropping off these barrels when police swooped. He was arrested and the results of forensic testing of his hands and clothing suggested that he had had closer contact with the explosives than a mere delivery boy should have had. So the Hong Kong police were treating him as a dangerous terrorist.

Lavac was telling me this story because its hero, in the end, turned out to be a forensic scientist. And when I had been working on my two previous books, cases where the forensic scientist is the hero were always the ones I was looking for.

But was I actually writing a book? By the time I met Peter Lavac, I wasn't sure.

I had lined up my chat with Lavac some months earlier. At the time I had certainly been trying to work on a book: one with the working title, *Asia – forensic science casebook*.

I had come up with the book idea in Singapore, when I was there for the 2014 conference of the Asia-Pacific Writers and Translators Association and had been on a panel talking about crime writing. I had been reading a collection of local crime fiction called *Singapore Noir* and noted that there was also a *KL Noir* and a *Hong Kong Noir* in the series. But there seemed to be a dearth of local true crime. One bookshop I visited had a floor-to-ceiling wall of shelves devoted to books on “feng shui”. Its true crime section had three sparse shelves and nothing much local. But I did find a local prosecutor's memoir (published by Marshall Cavendish, whom I soon identified as the local publisher with an interest in true crime-related topics).

At the APWT session on crime writing, I floated the idea of doing a local forensic science casebook – and received an enthusiastic response.

I had two more days left in Singapore so I did a quick Google, came up with a staff list for Singapore's national forensic sciences agency, the Health Sciences Authority (HSA), and fired off an email.

I was gratified to get a prompt reply and an invitation to come in for a chat. Later that day I spent a delightful hour and a half with a forensic scientist whom I won't name because I don't want to embarrass him. Suffice to say that I walked out on to Outram Road with a notebook full of case ideas and books to read.

When I arrived home to Melbourne I contacted Marshall Cavendish about my idea. The publishers liked it – and I had a deal.

I then began work on the new book in much the same way I had started my previous two forensic science books, *Written On*

The Skin: an Australian forensic casebook and *Cold Case Files: past crimes solved by new forensic science*. That is, I contacted a long list of scientists. Sometimes I had cases in mind that they had been involved in and that I wanted to include. Or I wanted to ask them if they had a particular case where (a) the back story was interesting and (b) the forensic science work involved had been both dramatic and effective, in that it had either solved a mystery, won police a conviction or helped a defence lawyer exonerate a falsely accused client.

This process had worked very well for my two previous books. Both police and scientists were always willing to talk to me, and happy to participate in the whole book development process. They checked the copy that I sent them for accuracy and even took a last look at the page proofs before the book was printed.

Even when I was researching my first book, *Written On The Skin*, my approaches were welcomed. The scientists and police I interviewed were mainly from the state of Victoria where I live, and many of them had probably read the articles I had written as a reporter for the Melbourne paper, *The Sunday Age*. So I suppose I was a known quantity.

By the time I got to my second book, the process went even more smoothly. I emailed scientists and police from around Australia, the UK, and the US (where I contacted an officer from the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives out of the blue to ask about a case in which its ballistics database had tracked a gun used in a drive-by shooting). None of them had ever heard of me. But I would send details of my first book, assure them of my *bona fides* and my respect for accuracy and promise that they would get to check the copy. And off we would go.

I assumed that this new Asian casebook would proceed in the same fashion.

But by mid 2015, everything (except the publishing deal) had started to fall apart. The HSA scientist told me he would love to help but his boss didn't think it was a good idea. A Singaporean scientist in private practice, whom I had thought would help me, backed out.

I had also emailed Hong Kong government scientists but received no response. A Thailand-based forensic pathologist, Dr Porntip Rojanasunan, was friendly but difficult to contact. In any event, I found that most of her cases did not really fit my criterion for inclusion as they didn't have (from my viewpoint) a satisfactory denouement in court.

Meanwhile, I talked to various forensic science contacts in Melbourne, who emailed their Asian-based colleagues. Most of the time, I received polite initial replies from these scientists but silence usually fell once I started making enquiries about specific cases.

Another contact I had pinned some hope on was UK-based forensic scientist Sheila Hamilton. She had been a government forensic scientist in Hong Kong and hadn't seemed shy about talking to the media. She also seemed to have worked on lots of interesting cases. We emailed a little and then I finally arranged to talk to her on the phone.

That's when she gave me the bad news. She did not want to be in my new book as she was thinking of writing her own. Yet she did not shut me down completely. We had talked about an interesting case involving forensic traces of explosive and she had mentioned the name of the barrister on that case, a Peter Lavac. She told me that he would probably be happy to talk to me about it.

Perhaps he would, I remember thinking. But that was one case. I had also had a friendly response from former Australian Federal Police scientist David Royds. I knew that his role in the successful forensic investigation into the 2002 Bali terrorist bombings had

been particularly dramatic. I was also aware that he would be able to give me a thorough rundown of both the Indonesian and the Australian sides of the operation. This was going to be handy because the Indonesian scientists on my list had also not replied to my emails.

I had two cases. I needed 16. It was definitely time to officially lay this book idea to rest.

But barrister Peter Lavac proved so easy to find. He was no longer working in Hong Kong. In fact he was working in Sydney, and I was going to be there for a conference for my one-day-a-week job as media officer for a Melbourne-based legal research organisation.

So I arranged to meet him. I told him about my apparently doomed plans for the book and that I was about to call the publisher and abandon it. But he was willing to have a chat about the case anyway.

We spoke for about an hour and I taped about thirty minutes of our chat.

I certainly didn't change my mind about the book that night.

But in subsequent weeks I found my thoughts returning to Chan and The Big Spender. It was such a good story, and I really wanted to be able to tell it. So I listened to the tape and had a go at drafting a story outline. Meanwhile I considered the literal meaning of "forensic": "to do with a court". I reminded myself that lawyers, as well as scientists, could be good sources of cases decided by forensic scientific evidence.

I realised I could still write the book. I would just do it by talking to lawyers instead of scientists. So, once again, I began looking for cases. But this time, on my own. I searched the database of Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*, Malaysia's *New Straits Times* and Singapore's *The Straits Times*. After all, few cases with interesting forensic evidence escape the notice of newspaper court reporters. I

also searched worldlii.org, the world database of court judgements and information.

With the Singapore cases, one criminal lawyer's name kept coming up: Subhas Anandan. When I first started thinking about this book, he was still alive. Sadly he died in January 2015, but his colleague and nephew Sunil Sudheesan was still in practice.

I emailed Sunil, asking for information and telling him I was heading for Singapore. He replied with an invitation to lunch and, later, a vast e-bundle of documents. He also told me about a case where the evidence of Australian forensic pathologist Professor Johan Dufrou had saved one of his clients from the hangman's noose. Dufrou had also been an expert witness in the trials of Ram Tiwary, a Singaporean jailed for murder in Sydney and later acquitted – and whose case, my publishers suggested, might be an interesting one for me to look at.

Over at the Singapore Police Force Public Affairs Department, the Head of the Media Production and Liaison Unit, Superintendent Jimmy Law, was also very helpful. He pointed me in the direction of two cases (“Death in Bukit Batok Nature Park” and “The CCTV Camera's Eye Sees All”) where the forensic science work had been so dramatically successful that the police had made Crimewatch TV episodes about them and put them on YouTube.

In Malaysia, I had the help of eminent criminal lawyer Dato' V Sithambaram (“Unknown Male One”) while HK criminal lawyer Gary Plowman, SC, gave me a lot of time, explaining the background of a case in which a man was charged with murder after his car exploded, killing his wife (“Murder or Accident?”). Gary also put me on to Hong Kong's Judge Audrey Campbell-Moffat, SC, of the Court of First Instance of the High Court, who was kind enough to talk me through the forensic evidence in a case she prosecuted (“The Body in the Couch”).

In the meantime I kept reading *ForensicAsia*, the newsletter of the Asian Forensic Sciences Network. Occasionally it featured case reports from scientists whose work I needed to describe. But the group's organisers had also ignored my emails. One of the Philippines-based scientists whose work was published in it, Dr Maria Corazon de Ungria, responded to my message to her via Twitter. So did her colleague, forensic pathologist Dr Raquel del Rosario-Fortun, who replied to my email. Three cases came out of those conversations: “A Surprise Paternity Test Result”, “Solving a Giant Genealogical Puzzle” and “The Marivic Genosa Case”.

In the end I had enough material for a proper casebook, with 16 cases spread across Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Indonesia.

The book that resulted, *Crime Scene Asia: when forensic evidence becomes the silent witness*, is like my two earlier forensic science books, in that it's a casebook of real-life examples of the way forensic science is used to solve crimes, convict criminals and exonerate the falsely accused.

And, as with those previous books, I couldn't have done it without huge assistance from a dozen other people. The lawyers I mentioned above helped me by talking to me and then checking what I had written and making corrections and additions. In this respect I am also particularly grateful to scientists David Royds, Professor Johan Dufrou, Dr Raquel del Rosario-Fortun and Dr Maria Corazon de Ungria, as well as to Melbourne forensic pathologist Dr Byron Collins and an anonymous Australian police scientist (who knows who she is). Sydney criminal lawyers Tim Game, SC, and David Dalton, SC, were also kind enough to read my draft of the Ram Tiwary case and make comments that were a great help to me.

For Review only

I would like to thank my publisher Melvin Neo, and Violet Phoon who helped edit my book. Both have been an absolute delight to work with. And I am enormously indebted to Professor Stephen Cordner, Professor of Forensic Pathology (International), at Monash University and Head of International Programmes, Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine for doing me the honour of reading my manuscript and writing its Foreword.

Liz Porter

Melbourne, Australia
November 2017

THE CASES

HONG KONG

Case Nine THE BODY IN THE COUCH

Retired Salvation Army major Janet Gilson was on one of her regular visits to her Hong Kong-based niece, Julia Fareed, when she disappeared. When her body was found in a couch at Julia's flat, suspicion fell on Julia's estranged husband Ahmed. He denied any involvement. But the forensic evidence had its own story to tell.

Julia Fareed met her husband Ahmed in 2003 when they were both working in the same hotel on the idyllic tropical paradise of the Maldives: a chain of 1192 coral islands in the Indian Ocean. They married in Hong Kong in 2007 and their daughter Jasmine was born in March 2008.

In Hong Kong, the couple found another idyllic place to live, settling down on Lamma Island. Just 3 km off the south-west coast of Hong Kong, Lamma was – and still is – famous for its unspoiled rural beauty, its beaches, its excellent seafood restaurants and its population of endangered species: Romer's tree frogs, green turtles and porpoises. An attractive destination for expatriates and bohemians, the island also boasted rents that were (then) far below the usual astronomic mainland China or Hong Kong Island rates. And it was only a 40-minute ferry ride away from Julia's job on Hong Kong Island: a journey that a *New York Times* travel piece described as “one of the most delightful commuter runs in the world”.

Julia Fareed's married life on Lamma was less idyllic. Her husband's ongoing drug use became a continuing source of conflict. In 2009 he was convicted of possessing dangerous drugs. The following year he was jailed for two months after being found guilty of “criminal intimidation”.

By 2011 the couple had separated. Julia and Jasmine moved to a small two-bedroom ground floor flat in Yung Shue Wan, and Julia began divorce proceedings. Although they had agreed on a schedule for Ahmed to have access to their three-year-old daughter, Jasmine, Ahmed's aggressive behaviour prompted his ex-wife to go to court to get a “non-molestation” order, preventing him from entering her home.

In March 2011 Julia was happily awaiting the pleasant diversion of a visit from her UK-based Aunt Janet.

More of a mother figure to Julia than an aunt, Janet Gilson was a retired Salvation Army major who lived in the UK town of Leigh-on-Sea in Essex and had made regular trips to Hong Kong in previous years. In fact this trip was her fifth in as many years. As usual, she would be staying at Julia's flat. The place had no guestroom but Julia was happy to sleep on the living room couch, so she could give her aunt her bedroom.

Janet Gilson arrived on March 5. But Julia had the chance to enjoy only the first week of her stay before the ongoing difficulties with her ex began, once again, to blight her happiness.

A row with her ex

Hostilities flared on Sunday March 13 when Ahmed failed to return Jasmine home by 5.30 pm, and Julia had to go looking for him. After she finally tracked him down at a local restaurant and retrieved their daughter, he came round to her flat – a breach of the “non-molestation” order. Claiming that he had Jasmine's

water bottle and hat, he insisted that she let him in.

When she refused, he started banging on the door, swearing at her and threatening to cause her “big trouble”. She called the police, who promptly arrested him. The next morning, Monday March 14, the couple were back in the Family Court where the judge told Ahmed off and ordered him to return to court in a week’s time.

The only positive aspect of this dispiriting situation was that they had at least been able to reach one agreement. Ahmed was unemployed and unhappily dependent on his wife for money. With their final divorce only weeks away, he had agreed that he had no future prospects in Hong Kong and would be best off returning to the Maldives. Julia would be paying his fare.

That night Julia arranged for Jasmine to stay at her maid/babysitter Karen’s place. The day’s events had been exhausting. She wanted to sleep in her child’s bed and enjoy a better night’s rest than she had been getting on the sofa.

The next day, Tuesday March 15, 2011, she left home at 7 am as usual, catching the 7.20 am ferry to Hong Kong Island where she worked for a local hedge fund.

Her morning was plagued with interruptions, all of them related to Ahmed.

Phone calls and texts from Ahmed

His first call had come when she was still on the ferry. He wanted Karen to collect a suitcase of Julia’s from him. Supposedly this was part of his preparations to pack up his stuff, leave Hong Kong and return to the Maldives.

Julia was at her desk by nine. But there was more to-ing and fro-ing by text. Ahmed hadn’t turned up for the meeting with Karen. Then he asked her to re-schedule it. Shortly after 11.30 am,

she received a text message from her Aunt Janet. The message was entirely innocuous.

“Went to Sok Kwu Wan,” it read. “Going to have some food here and then will take the ferry to Aberdeen. I will tell you when I come back later. Love, Jane.” Sok Kwu Wan was a village, a couple of kilometres away from Julia’s home.

The text arrived at exactly 11.37 am on Tuesday March 15, 2011. Later Julia would recognise that moment as the point at which her life changed forever.

At the time, however, she had simply read the text and got back to work. As a personal assistant, she always had plenty to do. Certainly she had enough time to note that it was a bit strange to be receiving a text from her beloved aunt, who was not a texter. Like many retired 64-year-olds from sleepy British seaside villages, Janet Gilson had a mobile phone but used it like an old-fashioned landline: just for phone calls. The text was also signed “Jane” rather than Janet.

But Julia wasn’t a worrier by nature and she was too busy at work to let her mind start wandering. After all, this was her aunt’s fifth trip to Hong Kong and she knew her way around. If she’d had time to think about it, Julia might have wondered if her aunt had got talking to someone – a friendly woman at an adjacent restaurant table perhaps. Maybe that person had taught her how to text, in between chatting about the delights of the seafood restaurants of Aberdeen.

She didn’t think any more about the mysterious text until she got home and found that her aunt was still out.

Had something happened to her aunt?

It was then that she started to worry that something could be seriously wrong. For a start, her aunt wasn’t answering her phone.

More perplexing was the fact that she seemed to have left the house in a terrible hurry. Her room was in a mess and she had left the bathroom water heater on.

Janet Gilson's handbag and its contents, including keys to the premises, a wallet and her passport were missing, as expected if she had headed off for a day of sightseeing. But she hadn't taken her glasses, or the shoes she usually wore when out and about. She had also put clothing out on the bed, presumably to wear after taking a shower. The garments were still lying there.

Something had caused her to leave the house in a mad rush. But what?

Julia continued to try her aunt over the next few hours. She waited until 10.30 pm, in order to check that she was not on the last ferry from Aberdeen, which docked at that time. Then she went to the local police post and reported Janet Gilson missing.

The police responded quickly.

On Wednesday morning an extensive search was launched. Police took a quick look around the house. Then 20 police officers with tracker dogs scoured the area between the village of Yung Shue Wan and nearby Sok Kwu Wan, where the text supposedly sent by Janet said she'd gone.

There was no sign of Janet Gilson. The following day, another 20 police and 20 Civil Aid officers joined the search. Meanwhile Julia posted photos of her aunt around the island and went from shop to shop trying to find someone who might have seen her.

Julia felt more distraught with each passing day. But she had to pretend to behave normally for her daughter's benefit.

Red stains on the floor

On Saturday morning, when she was lifting her daughter on to the sofa she noticed some red stains on the floor tiles. They hadn't been

there on the Monday night when she'd been sleeping on the sofa. She also noticed an unpleasant smell in the house – a sickly odour that refused to budge even when she opened all the windows.

Once again she called the police.

Requesting Julia to remain outside, senior inspector Chung Shing Keung immediately ordered his men to lift the sofa. A long cut had been made into the black material undercover of its yellow foam base, creating a cavity. In it they found Janet Gilson's body. It was obvious that she had met a violent and undoubtedly painful death.

There were no signs of a forced entry into the apartment. Mrs Gilson had either let her killer in because she knew him – or the killer had used a key. Julia's spare keys had gone missing. Who would have both the opportunity and motive to steal them? There was also only one person to whom Janet would have opened the door.

That individual was, of course, Ahmed Fareed. According to his daughter's maid/babysitter, he had been rifling through drawers at his ex-wife's house some ten days earlier.

Ahmed arrested

Late on that Saturday afternoon, Ahmed was on a ferry travelling from Lamma to Central when a police motor launch came alongside, ordering it to stop. Police then boarded the ferry and arrested him. He was later charged with the murder of Janet Gilson.

Ahmed Fareed's jury trial began in Hong Kong's Court of First Instance in June 2013.

Forensic evidence was crucial to the prosecution case against Ahmed. And plenty of it appeared to link him to both the scene and the victim's body.

Yet he pleaded not guilty. Perhaps he was emboldened to do so because there was no evidence of him having any motive or reason for killing Janet Gilson.

Why would Ahmed kill Janet Gilson?

While he might have been understood to have a motive for killing his wife, he had no reason to kill her aunt. The woman didn't even live in Hong Kong and had expressed no intentions to stay on longer than her arranged visit.

So why did he kill her? Reflecting on this case, its prosecutor Ms Audrey Campbell-Moffat, SC, now a Judge of the Court of First Instance of the High Court, still believes that he did not enter the apartment with the intention of murdering his ex-wife's aunt.

It was – and still is – her view that he most probably arrived planning to steal something he could then sell to buy drugs. And somehow Janet Gilson got in his way.

“He was an inept murderer. He was a drug addict. He came around that morning, thinking that Janet was not there, thinking he was going to nick something.”

The prosecution, of course, was under no obligation to prove that Ahmed had a motive.

It just had to prove that he was Janet Gilson's killer. And Ahmed may well have thought he had a fighting chance of escaping that charge. After all, there were no witnesses to his arrival at or departure from the crime scene. And there were certainly no witnesses to the crime itself.

Ahmed appeared to have worked very hard to establish an alibi for the morning that the murder took place. He had been very busy during those few hours: dropping off his ex-wife's suitcase to the babysitter and making phone calls from the public phone at the Green Cottage, a restaurant in Yung Shue Wan village's Main Street. It seemed that he was trying hard to be seen in public by lots of people.

Unfortunately for him, the only witnesses who were willing to testify to the court spoke of seeing him before 7 am.

The 9 am meeting with the maid

Meanwhile, his fixing of a 9 am meeting with the maid – and his failure to show up – may actually have worked against him. Instead of being an alibi for his defence, it begged to be interpreted as his way of ensuring that Karen would not arrive at his ex-wife's house at a time when he intended to be there. It is very possible that he may only have been trying to arrange a time to be alone at the flat so he could burgle it. It made him look as if he were planning something.

Ahmed Fareed told the court that he had actually spoken to Karen in the street outside the Green Cottage at around 9.15 am on the morning of March 15. Karen contradicted this, testifying that she had been in the street at that time – and that she had not seen him.

Despite all Ahmed's efforts, police were easily able to narrow down the time of the deadly assault. It had to have taken place after 7 am, when Julia would have left home to make her way to the ferry. Most probably it had taken place after 7.43 (when he had called Julia from the Green Cottage restaurant to arrange for Karen to meet him at Tai Peng village at 8.45) and before 10 am, when Karen arrived at Julia's flat. By then Janet Gilson's body had probably been in its hiding place in the couch for at least an hour.

It was clear that it was Ahmed Fareed who had sent the text from Julia's phone at 11.37 am: an act that the presiding judge, Michael Stuart-Moore, highlighted as evidence of his cold and calculating nature.

“The defendant locked both doors when he left the house after killing Janet,” the judge told the court as he sentenced Ahmed. “And later, using Janet's mobile phone, (it must have been) the defendant who sent a text to Julia to set a false trail, making out that Janet had gone to Aberdeen. In fact, of course, she was dead. These were the acts of a calm and very calculating killer and I have

no doubt whatsoever when the mood takes this defendant that he is highly dangerous.”

Information from the victim's body

The body of the unfortunate victim, of course, provided the police with plenty of information.

Police forensic pathologist Dr Lai Sai Chak inspected Janet Gilson's body at the murder scene, noting that the dead woman, clad in pyjamas and a dressing gown, had a rope ligature around her neck. Part of that rope had also been used to tie her hands in front of her. Meanwhile a towel had been stuffed deep into her mouth, well behind the teeth, gagging her.

Later, when the forensic expert performed an autopsy, he noted the bloodstained fluid covering her face, and the fractures to her nose and three of her ribs. Blood had flowed out of the dead woman's nose as a result of the suffocation caused by a rag being stuffed into her mouth.

One of her ribs was fractured in two places: the result, he suggested, of a blow with the force of a karate kick. The cause of death, he concluded, was the lack of oxygen supply caused by the obstructions to her nose, mouth and neck, with the blockage to the blood supply through her neck possibly hastening her death. The condition of Janet Gilson's body, the scientist told the jury, suggested that she had been dead for between three and five days.

The prosecution's key evidence against Ahmed Fareed was a textbook example of Locard's "exchange theory": the basic principle of forensic science, first set out by French police scientist Edmond Locard in his 1931 book *Traité de criminalistique: Les empreintes et les traces dans l'enquete criminelle* that "every contact leaves a trace".

The forensic evidence against Ahmed

Audrey Campbell-Moffat, SC, outlined the forensic evidence against Ahmed in her opening address. The prosecutor's argument was a compelling story told in fibres and bloodstains. Fibres and bloodstains on Ahmed's clothing had come from his alleged victim, while fibres found on her had come from him, her alleged assailant.

Slowly and methodically, the barrister detailed the forensic findings. Twenty-seven fibres found on Janet Gilson's body and clothing matched fibres from Ahmed's clothing (26 matched his jacket and one matched his shirt).

Meanwhile five fibres found on Ahmed matched the fibres of the dead woman's purple dressing gown. The prosecution also relied on the fact that nine fragments of material found on various items of Ahmed's clothing matched the yellow spongy foam padding found inside the sofa.

The defence's answer

The defence had theoretical arguments to explain how the various fibres could have found their way on to both Ahmed and the victim in an innocent way. In the first place, Ahmed had helped move the couch into the apartment when his ex-wife moved in. So the fibres could have migrated to his clothing on that occasion. He had been cuddling his little daughter, who had been held by Janet Gilson when she had been wearing that purple dressing gown. So the purple fibres could have landed on his clothing via a process that forensic crime scene officers call "secondary transfer". The same process, in theory, could have transferred fibres from his clothing on to the victim.

But the defence lawyer had no adequate answer to the bloodstains on a jacket belonging to Ahmed. This jacket was the crucial piece of evidence against him and the only story Ahmed could come up with to explain its stains was preposterously unbelievable.

Supposedly he had walked in the rain on the afternoon of the day that Janet Gilson died. After arriving at the home of a friend, where he was going to stay that night, he had changed out of his wet clothing. He had then left his jacket, shirt, jeans, a sweater and a belt on an outside table to dry. Of course he didn't know how Janet Gilson's blood got on to his jacket. But, as his lawyer told the court, he had left property out on a public table in an area where anyone could have gone to it and put the blood on it "in some mischievous way".

The blood spatter expert's testimony

The jury listened to this explanation. They also heard from forensic chemist and blood spatter expert Dr Ho Siu Hong. He told them that the three bloodstains on the chest of the jacket were an "impact pattern", reflecting the projection of blood caused by the impact of a direct blow on a live human body. After DNA profiling the blood of both victim and accused, he had examined the bloodstains on the clothing of the accused and concluded that there was only a one in 324 quintillion probability that they came from a donor other than the deceased.

The jury was convinced, returning a unanimous guilty verdict. Justice Michael Stuart Moore then handed down a life sentence.

"There was no doubt whatsoever that you killed Janet Gilson," he told the court. "Her blood on your shirt and jumper and trousers and jacket speaks louder than any words ever will that it was you who killed her. There were many other forensic clues as well in the form of fibres that were transferred from your clothes on to her body and from her clothes, her nightclothes, on to your clothing. She was still wearing her nightwear when she was killed.

"The evidence of your guilt is overwhelming. You have committed the ultimate crime and you did so in a fashion so

terrible, that words failed to describe the true horror of what she had to go through and of what you did."

Apparently undeterred, Ahmed applied for leave to appeal against his conviction, representing himself although he had been granted legal aid and assigned a lawyer.

His application cited a raft of failings by both the judge and his own lawyers, whom he slammed as incompetent. He was particularly annoyed that they had failed to call their own forensic witnesses. (In fact his lawyers had commissioned independent forensic reports from the well-respected UK-based former Hong Kong scientist Dr Sheilah Hamilton and from the DNA expert Dr Terence Lau. They had not been called to give evidence because they could not fault the prosecution experts' reports.) Ahmed Fareed complained that one juror did not understand English. He also claimed that the judge erred in refusing to allow the jury to watch a video in which he was shown eating at the Man Kee Restaurant at 6:30 am on the day of the murder.

But three judges of the Court of Appeal declined to grant him leave to appeal.

A case that stayed with its prosecutor

Five years after this trial, Justice Campbell-Moffat recalls it in extraordinary detail. In particular she remembers the frustration of not being able to get the forensic pathologist to commit to a precise explanation of how the victim died: so she could give the jury an exact and compelling narrative of her death.

There was nylon rope around the woman's neck, there was a rag stuffed in her mouth, and there was damage to her face (possibly caused by the frame of the sofa). And the victim suffocated. But how, exactly?

For Review only

“Something caused the death,” the former prosecutor recalls. “Not the rope on its own. Not the damage to her nose on its own. It was to do with the rag in her mouth. But the rope also told a story about what was happening. It didn’t look like an attempt to kill. It looked like the product of an attempt to subdue her.

“Maybe there was panic. Maybe she passed out or even suffocated. Maybe she was still alive when she went under the sofa. It could have been a mix of all three.

“But what was happening in her lungs caused blood to spatter on to her pyjamas – and on to him.”

Fortunately the blood spatter expert, Dr Ho Siu Hong, was very good at explaining to her – and then to the jury – what had then happened.

Justice Campbell-Moffat also still finds herself wondering whether Ahmed might have had help. At the time she remembers noting his skinny frame and wondering whether he would have had the strength to put his victim into the sofa without assistance.

She certainly remains mystified by the fact that Mrs Gilson’s body remained undiscovered for so long.

“There were blood spatters on the tiles and on the Ikea cushions on the couch. A maid that was doing her job would have seen them. That was odd.”

And then there was the fact of a decomposing body in an apartment where the air-conditioning would not have been on all the time.

This was not an aspect of the case that she wanted to dwell on in court, with the victim’s niece present every day of the trial.

“Sometimes it is overly cruel to go into those details.”

HONG KONG

Case Ten MURDER OR ACCIDENT?

The marriage of Hong Kong mechanic Chan Sai-kit and his wife Gloria Mak Wai-ngor, both aged 40, had been rocky. But they were still together. One night Chan was working on his car and asked his wife to help him by trying to start it. There was a sudden explosion and a fire, in which she died. Chan was later arrested and tried for murder. But was this catastrophic event an accident? The answer, the jury was told, was in the forensic evidence.

Just for a moment, put yourself in the shoes of a man who has just found out that his wife had secretly recorded all their worst marital arguments.

Imagine that these bitter exchanges took place several years ago, when things were pretty bad between the two of you. Some ugly things were said – mostly by you. Your wife certainly goaded you, it’s true. But you always took the bait. You even admitted to an affair which you hadn’t actually had – just to annoy her. That’s how toxic your relationship was at the time.

Then, imagine that the transcript of those recordings is going to be read out in front of other people. Embarrassing enough?

It gets worse. Those other people are sitting in a courtroom. They are members of a jury. And they are eventually going to have to come to a verdict. On you.

For Review only

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Liz Porter is an Australian writer best known for her prize-winning books about “the real CSI” – the way forensic science is used to solve crime.

Crime Scene Asia: when forensic evidence becomes the silent witness is her latest book. Her first book, *Written on the Skin: an Australian forensic casebook*, was joint winner of the 2007 Ned Kelly award for the best true crime book. Porter also won the Australian Sisters in Crime’s 2012 Davitt Award (best true crime category) for her book, *Cold Case Files: past crimes solved by new forensic science*.

She is an open water swimmer and a member of a pop music choir.