



Tan Mui Choo



Adrian Lim



Hoe Kah Hong

UNHOLY TRINITY

Singapore's most bizarre murder case drew to a close on 25 November 1988 when Adrian Lim, his wife Tan Mui Choo and mistress Hoe Kah Hong were hanged at Changi Prison. After two children were found dead within a fortnight in 1981, the Toa Payoh 'ritual' killings proved shocking for the revelations about self-styled spirit medium Adrian Lim's greed, depravity and cruelty.

The confidence trickster persuaded numerous women that he possessed supernatural powers, and they paid him with money, valuables and sex. He tortured his victims with primitive electric shock treatments that left one man dead. He beat, slapped and kicked his women to make them fear and obey him as he acted out his every lustful perversion. He turned his wife into a prostitute and stripper. He made his mistress lure the children to their deaths. Sentencing all three to hang, the trial judges said of Adrian Lim: "We are revulsed by his abominable and depraved conduct."

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REPENTANCE ON DEATH ROW

An exclusive interview with the nun
who counselled Adrian Lim's wife and mistress



"I think it is
my luck. I am
a ladies' man."

THE ADRIAN LIM 'RITUAL' CHILD KILLINGS

UNHOLY TRINITY

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For Review only



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'RITUAL' CHILD KILLINGS

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD: A TRAGIC CAUTIONARY TALE 5

KEY PLAYERS IN THE TRIAL 11

Two murders and a trail of blood 17

Adrian's story: Uncle Willie changed my life 26

Tan Mui Choo: Life with Adrian 41

Hoe Kah Hong: Electric shock torture and tragedy 54

Awaiting trial 65

Prosecution: "They intended to kill" 69

Inspector Simon Suppiah: More confessions 75

Christina Chong: A "holy wife" weeps 107

Doctors supplied thousands of pills 117

Adrian in the witness stand: "I am a ladies' man" 129

Tan Mui Choo: "I lived in fear of Adrian" 173

Hoe Kah Hong: "Adrian's just a cockroach now" 200

Were they mentally ill, or weren't they? 214

The verdict 232

Repentance on death row 240

AUTHOR'S NOTE 247

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 248

FOREWORD

A TRAGIC CAUTIONARY TALE

Thirty-five years have passed since two children were found dead within a fortnight in Singapore's Toa Payoh housing estate in early 1981. Agnes Ng Siew Heok was just nine years old, Ghazali Marzuki was ten. Their killers were arrested the day Ghazali's body was found, though nobody could imagine that day what police investigators were about to discover. Singapore has had some sensational murder cases but none has come close in terms of the bizarre revelations that emerged through the course of investigations into the so-called "ritual killings" and the trial of Adrian Lim, his wife Catherine Tan Mui Choo and mistress Hoe Kah Hong. Adrian Lim will be hard to beat as Singapore's most cruel, perverse charlatan and heartless killer. The case shone a light on a surprising reality of Singapore – that you do not have to scratch deep beneath the shiny surface of this clean, modern city state to discover age-old superstitions alive and thriving.

When Adrian Lim decided to pursue his interest in the occult and learn the practices of spirit mediums and

traditional witchdoctors called *bomohs*, he landed in a goldmine that paid off handsomely. He found no shortage of desperate, naive and gullible people ready to place their faith in a self-styled guru chanting before an altar in his living room and ringing a bell. He called them his “devotees”, and they parted with more than their money, jewellery and other valuables when they turned to him for help. He persuaded numerous teenage girls and young women that they would find everlasting happiness, good health, perpetual beauty and power over the men in their lives if they took off their clothes and had sex with him. Tan Mui Choo and Hoe Kah Hong were only two of those he tricked. The others included underaged students, bar waitresses and housewives, as well as well-off women complaining of headaches or insomnia, or wanting help to deal with sickness, unhappiness, wavering boyfriends and unfaithful husbands. If he lusted after a physically attractive young woman, he recommended repeat treatments of his altar rituals and regular sex with him. Some became his “holy wives” who stayed at his flat for extended periods; one “holy wife” became a prostitute at his urging and gave him thousands of dollars of her earnings.

Many of Adrian Lim’s antics would be laughable if not for his extreme cruelty towards so many of his victims. Under the cover of being in a so-called trance, he acted out his depravity and subjected the women in his life to harsh physical abuse – beating, slapping and kicking them, pulling their hair and hitting their heads against the wall. Many were tortured with primitive and painful electric shock treatments he devised

himself. During one such session, Benson Loh Ngak Hua, a young man married to Hoe Kah Hong, was electrocuted.

Adrian Lim’s clients were persuaded of his powers when they saw him going into a trance before an array of statues and pictures of gods at his altar, professing devotion to a Thai sex god, an Indonesian Old Master and the Hindu goddess Kali. To convince a potential victim of his supernatural powers, he relied on a trick that never failed to leave people astonished and in awe of his abilities. Before a client’s arrival he would insert blackened needles into an egg carefully. Then, during the ritual before his altar, he would chant and rub the egg over the person’s body before breaking it open to reveal the needles. Everyone he duped this way was horrified by the sight, and he would claim dramatically that the needles were the evil he had removed magically from their bodies.

Adrian Lim’s worst crimes of all were the senseless child killings that led to his arrest and that of Tan Mui Choo and Hoe Kah Hong. The unprecedented mix of murder, perverse sex, the occult and outright trickery proved unique in sparking widespread public interest in this case through most of the 1980s – from the day the unholy trinity were arrested in 1981, through their trial and the appeals of the two women, until the morning all three were hanged at Changi Prison in November 1988. Their court appearances drew hundreds of curious people who swarmed the surroundings of the Subordinate Court Complex and the Supreme Court building and waited for hours just for a glimpse of the three murderers.

This book gives a straightforward account of events following the arrest of Adrian Lim, Tan Mui Choo and Hoe Kah Hong. I relied mainly on the evidence produced at the High Court trial in 1983, including the long statements given to the police by the trio. I am grateful to the Registrar of the Supreme Court for providing access to the voluminous court records of the trial. Additional details are from the extensive newspaper reports of the two murders and the trial, especially in *The Straits Times*. The courtroom revelations needed little embellishment, because Adrian Lim, Tan Mui Choo and Hoe Kah Hong described all that happened in such graphic detail.

The Toa Payoh “ritual killings” of 1981 provided a larger-than-life warning to those too ready to seek supernatural shortcuts to dealing with the unhappy side of life. This book sounds a warning to those who despair over sickness, misery or relationships that sour and are prepared to seek a quick-fix solution from so-called miracle men claiming supernatural powers and rituals or potions that work. Adrian Lim was not the first self-styled healer to get into trouble with the law – and he was not the last. These days, Internet users go online to find help of exactly the sort Adrian Lim offered, and it appears readily available on websites that come complete with testimonials from satisfied customers. Sadly, some things never change.

Cruelty behind closed doors

Domestic violence is a theme that runs through the case of killer Adrian Lim. Behind closed doors, he was most cruel to the people closest to him. His wife and mistress were beaten repeatedly and tortured, and he exercised such total control over them that he made his wife become a prostitute and nightclub stripper, and got his mistress to bring him the child victims they murdered.

Too often, the perpetrators of domestic violence go unchecked because family members, neighbours and even some in positions of authority believe that when a man beats his wife or girlfriend, it is a private matter. I have been associated for some years now with Pave, Singapore’s lead agency working with domestic violence and trying to change attitudes by spreading the message that violence has no place in any relationship, before or after marriage. Pave helps women and children who are victims or witnesses to domestic violence, and counsels men who are perpetrators of that violence. All the author’s royalties from the 2016 edition of *Unholy Trinity* will go to Pave. To learn more about the agency and the work it does, please visit www.pave.org.sg

Alan John

January 2016

KEY PLAYERS IN THE TRIAL

The Murderers

The killers were arrested on 7 February 1981, hours after a second child was found dead within a fortnight near Adrian Lim's flat in Block 12, Lorong 7, Toa Payoh.

ADRIAN LIM: The 39-year-old was a married man who became interested in the supernatural and started practising as a spirit medium, attracting clients with various personal problems. He revealed to investigators the numerous tricks he used to demonstrate his supernatural powers and lure a steady stream of women into bed.

CATHERINE TAN MUI CHOO: Adrian Lim's 26-year-old second wife met him when she was 18 and moved into his Toa Payoh flat while his first wife and two children were still living there. He persuaded Mui Choo to become a prostitute and a nightclub stripper. She assisted at his altar rituals.

HOE KAH HONG: Adrian Lim's 25-year-old mistress was a married factory worker brought to him by her mother for treatment and she ended up becoming his "holy wife". She spent 45 days in a mental hospital after her husband Benson Loh Ngak Hua was electrocuted in Adrian's flat. Under Adrian's influence, she lured children to the flat.

The Victims

AGNES NG SIEW HEOK: The nine-year-old girl was at the Roman Catholic Church of the Risen Christ in Toa Payoh on 24 January 1981 when Hoe Kah Hong tricked her into going to Adrian Lim's flat. Her dead body was found stuffed in a bag left at Block 11, Lorong 7, Toa Payoh, early the next morning.

GHAZALI MARZUKI: The 10-year-old boy was spending the Chinese New Year holidays at his grandmother's Clementi flat when Hoe Kah Hong tricked him into accompanying her to Adrian Lim's flat on 6 February 1981. He was found dead outside Blocks 10 and 11, Lorong 7, Toa Payoh, the next morning.

BENSON LOH NGAK HUA ("AH HUA"): The 25-year-old jobless man died undergoing Adrian Lim's electric shock treatment on 7 January 1980. His wife, Hoe Kah Hong, told the inquest he was killed by a faulty fan, but the coroner recorded an open verdict, indicating that the circumstances of his death were unclear. After their arrests for the child

killings, Adrian Lim and Tan Mui Choo were also charged with murdering Ah Hua.

CHRISTINA CHONG KIM HEW: She was an 18-year-old Malaysian student who became Adrian Lim's lover before he persuaded her to become a dance hostess and prostitute. From 1979 to 1981 she sent him almost \$120,000 of her earnings, besides other gifts. Adrian returned \$50,000 after his arrest and another \$70,000 after the trial.

LUCY LAU: The young beautician went to Adrian Lim's flat to sell Tan Mui Choo beauty care products and cosmetics. Adrian claimed she became his "holy wife" and they had sex regularly. He was enraged when she accused him of rape in late 1980. The two children were killed soon after his arrest for rape.

The Investigators

INSPECTOR RICHARD PEREIRA: After Ghazali Marzuki's body was found, the detective followed a trail of blood to Adrian Lim's flat and met the killer who calmly let him inside. He recorded Adrian's 54-page statement that revealed bizarre tales of the occult, sex, violence and murder.

INSPECTOR SANMUGAM SUPPIAH: Better known as Simon Suppiah, he was overall in charge of the investigations into the child killings. He recorded statements from Tan Mui Choo and Hoe Kah Hong, who described graphic

details of incest, unnatural sex, strange rituals, electric shock treatments and death in Adrian Lim's flat.

The Lawyers

GLENN KNIGHT, Deputy Public Prosecutor: He set out to prove that Adrian Lim, Tan Mui Choo and Hoe Kah Hong knew what they were doing when they killed Agnes and Ghazali. He was assisted by DPP Roy Neighbour. In his book *The Prosecutor* (Marshall Cavendish, 2012), Mr Knight said he ended up handling the Adrian Lim case when nobody at the Attorney-General's Chambers wanted to touch it because of the apparently ritualistic nature of the murders.

HOWARD CASHIN, counsel for Adrian Lim: He hoped to persuade the Court that Adrian was mentally sick with manic depressive illness and therefore not fully responsible for his actions. He was assisted by Mr Choo Han Teck. Mr Cashin, one of the most senior lawyers at the time, was assigned to represent Adrian and was paid by the government.

J.B. JEYARETNAM, counsel for Tan Mui Choo: He hoped the judges would agree that she had a mental illness, reactive depressive psychosis, and therefore not fully responsible for her actions. He was engaged to represent Mui Choo, who had money of her own. Adrian also agreed to give her \$10,000 from the cash found at their flat for her legal fees.

NATHAN ISAAC, counsel for Hoe Kah Hong: His case was that she had a history of the mental illness schizophrenia and was suffering from it at the time of the child killings. He was assigned to defend Kah Hong.

The Trial Judges

JUSTICE T.S. SINNATHURAY: After a long career in the Singapore legal service, he was made a Supreme Court Judge in 1978. He was the lead judge at the trial and would frequently question witnesses himself. In his book *The Prosecutor*, Mr Knight said of Justice Sinnathuray: "He was an exciting judge to appear before. He had a very good mind but you could never be sure about how he would deal with the case. With most judges you could anticipate their train of thought, but with Justice Sinnathuray you couldn't. That was the challenging and exciting part of appearing before him."

JUSTICE F.A. CHUA: He was appointed a judge in 1957, making him the longest-serving member of the Supreme Court Bench in 1983 when the Adrian Lim case was heard.

CHAPTER 1

TWO MURDERS AND A TRAIL OF BLOOD

The police had no leads after nine-year-old Agnes Ng Siew Heok was found dead in Toa Payoh in January 1981. Two weeks later, they were called to the scene of a second child killing, when 10-year-old Ghazali Marzuki's body was found. This time, bloodstains led detectives to Adrian Lim's flat.

For days now, Richard Pereira had thought of little else but Agnes Ng Siew Heok. There was little he wanted more than to find the killer who had murdered the nine-year-old and stuffed her body into a bag. Inspector Pereira, a detective with the Criminal Investigation Department's Special Investigation Section, had been asleep at home when he received the call, at about 3.30 a.m. that Sunday, informing him that a girl had been found dead in Toa Payoh. Intensive investigations followed as police combed the Toa Payoh area for anything at all that might get them on the killer's track.

But they drew a blank. There were no clues and no tip-off from anyone who might have seen something suspicious.

Agnes was found dead less than 24 hours after she disappeared. On Saturday, 24 January 1981, Agnes and her older sister Pauline, 13, left their flat in Block 233, Lorong 8, Toa Payoh, for their weekly religious classes at the Roman Catholic Church of the Risen Christ in the town centre. Agnes, a Primary Three pupil of Holy Innocents' Chinese Girls' School in Punggol Road, was the youngest of nine children. Her father was a Public Utilities Board wireman and her mother, a housewife. The girls arrived in church shortly before Agnes' class at 2 p.m. Pauline's class would end later, so Agnes was supposed to wait for her. But at 5 p.m., when Pauline was ready to go home, Agnes was nowhere to be found. She telephoned home and frantic family members began searching for the girl. When that failed, they reported to the Toa Payoh Police Station that Agnes was missing.

The little girl's body was found hours later, stuffed in a bag left outside a lift in Block 11, less than a kilometre from the church. The post-mortem showed death by asphyxia – something had been pressed against her face until she died. There were no injuries to suggest that Agnes had put up a fight. There were indications of sodomy and attempted vaginal penetration.

Parishioners attending Sunday services at the Church of the Risen Christ were stunned to learn about the child's death. Some who knew Agnes remembered her as a quiet, pleasant girl. Others recalled her bright, cheerful ways. Agnes'

father told a newspaper reporter: "She was an obedient child and always listened to her elders." Pauline said: "I'm sure my sister knew her killer. She would never follow strangers or even talk to them."

In the days that followed, police officers and detectives questioned more than 250 people in Toa Payoh, especially those living near Block 11 and the church. They were hoping for just one clue which could lead them to Agnes' killer, but it eluded them. Then, on Saturday, 7 February, Ghazali Marzuki, a 10-year-old schoolboy, was found dead only metres from the spot where Agnes' body had been discovered. His bruised, bloodstained body lay sprawled under a tree between Blocks 10 and 11, Lorong 7, Toa Payoh. The post-mortem showed death by drowning and, like Agnes, Ghazali also appeared to have been suffocated. There was no sign of sexual assault but there were three burn marks on the boy's back and a puncture on his arm. Blood and tissue samples revealed the presence of a tranquilliser usually prescribed to adults who have trouble sleeping.

A Primary Four pupil of Henry Park Primary School, Ghazali was the youngest of three sons of a taxi driver and a housewife. On 4 February, he left the family's Holland Close flat to spend the long Chinese New Year weekend at his grandmother's home in Clementi. On the afternoon of 6 February, Ghazali and two of his cousins were at a playground near their grandmother's block when a woman, dressed in blue and wearing sunglasses, approached them and asked if one of them would help her fetch something from a

friend's house. One of Ghazali's cousins told the police: "She then asked Ghazali to accompany her, and he agreed. She led Ghazali by the hand and walked away with him." The boy got into a taxi with the woman and that was the last time he was seen alive. After his body was found, his distraught father told a reporter: "He was always obliging people and was a good, honest boy."

Many of the detectives who had been investigating Agnes' murder found themselves back in Toa Payoh early that Saturday morning, faced with a second child killing. Inspector Pereira was at his office in CID headquarters when the news reached him. He was at the scene within 25 minutes, just before Inspector Simon Suppiah, who was overall in charge of investigating the two murders, arrived. They found the body of a boy, dressed in shorts and T-shirt, lying face-up on the ground.

The two inspectors and their officers began searching the area and this time, they found a lead quickly. They spotted the first bloodstain between Blocks 10 and 11, then a second near a staircase at Block 12. Going up the stairs, they found a third bloodstain, then a fourth and a fifth. At the fifth level, Inspector Pereira and a police officer broke away from the others who continued up the stairs. The pair walked past flats along the corridor until they reached another staircase, and went up. At the landing between the fifth and sixth floors, Inspector Pereira found a bloodstain. He spotted another on the steps leading to the seventh level, but none beyond that.

He decided to check the flats on the seventh level. He stopped at the very first flat, 467F, and gazed at it for a while. There was a crucifix on the door and above the door hung a small oval mirror and a knife blade. A portly Chinese man standing along the corridor approached the detective and said he was the owner of the flat. Recalling the first time he set eyes on Adrian Lim, Inspector Pereira would later say in court: "I identified myself as a police officer and asked him his name. He told me that he was Adrian Lim and that he and his wife, Tan Mui Choo, were going to the Toa Payoh Police Station. He also told me that he had a girlfriend named Hoe Kah Hong, who was residing in Clementi but was also residing with him at the flat. I then asked him whether I could search the flat. He said that I could."

Adrian let Inspector Pereira into the three-room Housing Board flat. It had a rectangular living room with two bedrooms leading off on one side and, at the far end of the room, a passageway leading to the kitchen, bathroom and lavatory. The living room was a mess. The sofa and small tables were cluttered with newspapers, a cassette player, cassette tapes, books, the telephone directory, pillows, a torchlight, adhesive plaster, a pair of nail clippers, note pads and several plastic shopping bags. On the floral-patterned carpet were some thin mattresses and pillows and a blue plastic-topped table. At the far end of the living room, two crucifixes and a framed picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus hung on the wall. There was an altar with several idols and photographs of various deities, and some of the photographs

appeared to be smeared with blood. There was also a blood-smeared idol and a large Indonesian puppet whose moveable hands held a knife.

Inspector Pereira was struck by the eclectic mix of Hindu and Taoist idols alongside Catholic religious items and a statue of the Buddha. He thought it all very strange, but said nothing as he went into the kitchen. “I found what appeared to be a bloodstain in the kitchen area. I asked Adrian what it was. He told me it was red candle wax. But from my experience I was satisfied that it was a bloodstain,” he recalled. The bloodstain, and Adrian’s claim that it was candle wax, told the inspector this might well have been where Ghazali had been killed. He asked the officer with him to get Inspector Suppiah and the rest of the police party. It was now about 9.30 a.m.

Adrian did not stop Inspector Pereira from looking around the flat. A young woman arrived and when the inspector asked who she was, the woman handed him her identity card without saying a word. This was Hoe Kah Hong, Adrian’s girlfriend, and she had come to tell Adrian that Tan Mui Choo was waiting for him at the bottom of the block. The inspector asked Kah Hong to get Mui Choo, and she left to do so. When Mui Choo arrived, the inspector asked her name and she too gave him her identity card. He recalled: “She did not speak at all. She just remained silent.” She was unsmiling and appeared ill at ease.

Soon the flat was filled with policemen and detectives but Adrian, Mui Choo and Kah Hong appeared unperturbed.

Inspector Pereira flipped through a telephone directory and found a slip of paper with the name “Ng Siew Heok” written on it and some numbers. On a note pad next to the directory, in neat handwriting, he found: “Ghazali bin Marzuki, 10”, a Holland Close address and a telephone number. The inspector learnt soon afterwards that the dead boy was Ghazali.

The bedroom at the front of the flat had a double bed, a single bed, a dressing table, a wardrobe and an easy chair. The second room also had a double bed, a dressing table and a wardrobe. Posters of the rock group Led Zeppelin hung on the wall. On the floor, a small altar placed on a sheet of cellophane held a religious statue, an oil lamp, an incense pot, a bowl with two eggs, and bottles filled with various fluids. There were bloodstains on the cellophane and on the headboard of the bed.

Inspector Suppiah was soon directing his men to photograph the altar, living room, bedrooms, bathroom and kitchen. Adrian remained in a bedroom with the two women, but then went up to Inspector Pereira to say he wished to explain something. He said Ghazali’s name, address and phone number were written down when the boy came to the flat with a bleeding nose. Adrian said he treated the boy’s nose, gave him \$5 and the boy left. Adrian appeared calm all along, not at all bothered that several policemen were searching every corner of his flat. But his mood changed abruptly when officers from the Toa Payoh Police Station mentioned a rape charge. Now Adrian became angry and

raised his voice. Kah Hong, who had been quiet all this time, became aggressive. She gesticulated and began to shout at the policemen.

Inspector Suppiah ordered his men to remove various items from the flat. These included bloodstained photographs of idols and the bloodstained Indonesian puppet idol. He also found a pair of bloodstained slippers near the television set. A handbag on the sofa contained a pair of lady's sunglasses. The police took that away, as well as the slip of paper with Agnes' name, the pad with Ghazali's name, and a plastic bag containing an electrical plug and wires. At 11.25 a.m., Inspector Suppiah told his men to take Adrian, Mui Choo and Kah Hong to CID headquarters. The flat was locked and a guard posted outside. Shortly after noon, the trio were in custody at the Special Investigation Section of the CID and the detectives prepared themselves for a long day of questioning their suspects.

By this time, word was fast spreading in Singapore that the two children found dead in Toa Payoh might have been victims of bizarre rituals involving human sacrifice, and that both had been mesmerised before being lured to their deaths. In Block 12, stunned neighbours now told of strange sounds they had heard from Adrian's flat. They recalled chanting, the ringing of bells and the sound of people jumping around. One resident said: "Suddenly after midnight we would be awakened by the chanting of mantras, just like you hear in temples. Then we would hear people jumping on the floor." Another said: "A few months ago, there were prayers and

chanting in the flat. We reported to the area office of the Housing Board in Toa Payoh. The chanting stopped for a while and then started again."

But not even the most imaginative neighbourhood gossip could have guessed what tales of horror were unfolding at CID headquarters as Inspector Pereira and Inspector Suppiah got down to questioning Adrian, Mui Choo and Kah Hong.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan John was born in Kuala Lumpur in 1953 and attended St John's Institution and the University of Malaya before starting as a reporter at *The New Straits Times* in 1976. He moved to Singapore in 1980 and was a copyeditor at the paper's news desk when the Toa Payoh child murders happened in 1981. He spent 35 years at *The Straits Times*, heading various sections before becoming deputy editor, the position he held when he left in 2015. All the author's royalties from the 1989 edition of *Unholy Trinity* went to the Samaritans of Singapore. All royalties from the 2016 edition will go to Pave, Singapore's lead agency working with victims and perpetrators of family violence.