



a
true
story

Bankrupt and desperate for money, a brilliant psychopath planned the perfect crime. Sunny Ang selected his victim with care. Jenny was a young divorced bar girl with little schooling, flattered that an educated, charming man should notice her. He seduced her and promised marriage. He also insured Jenny's life for a million dollars; the sum would go to his mother if she died an accidental death. Then he plotted murder: first, an unsuccessful car accident, then the fatal scuba diving trip off the dangerous waters of Sisters' Islands. Jenny went down and never came up. Only a cut flipper was found.

Without a body, the Prosecution had no medical evidence and no witnesses to claim unnatural death. How did the law finally catch up with Sunny Ang?

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TRUE CRIME CLASSICS

ALEX JOSEY

THE 'PERFECT' MURDER

THE 'PERFECT' MURDER THE TRIAL OF SUNNY ANG




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ALEX JOSEY

Author of Lee Kuan Yew: The Crucial Years

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INTRODUCTION

THIS IS A TRUE STORY OF A YOUNG MAN WHO PLANNED WHAT HE THOUGHT WAS THE PERFECT CRIME.

He might have succeeded had not his impatience to collect the insurance on the girl he murdered arouse the suspicions of the police. Highly intelligent, he realised this might happen: he did not care. He believed this was a risk he could well afford to take. Having carried out a faultless murder, in effect he challenged the state prosecutor to a deadly battle of wits. That was his fatal mistake.

—Alex Josey

Pulau Dua or the Sisters Islands

Pulau Dua are two little islands separated by a straits about 700 feet apart. The straits vary in depth between 30–35 feet.

“The islands are about four miles from Jardine Steps in Singapore Harbour and they are among the southernmost islands of the Southern Islands, beyond which stretches the open seas, with Indonesia in the distance ... The waters are extremely hazardous. They are dangerous because of the remarkable eddies and swirls which occur there, and the speed of the current around the islands varies with the speed of the tides from half a knot to some four knots.”

—Crown Counsel

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VERDICT

“Members of the jury, have you agreed upon your verdict?”

“Yes.”

“What is your verdict?”

“Guilty.”

“Is that unanimous or by a majority?”

“It is unanimous.”

Justice Buttrose addressed the young man in the dock, “Ang, the jury have by a unanimous verdict found you guilty of this crime of murder, and I accordingly convict you.” The judge turned to Counsel. “Do either of you wish to address me?”

“No, my Lord.”

Justice Buttrose said, “Ang you have been convicted by the unanimous verdict of the jury of a terrible crime. You killed this young girl Jenny, whose only fault apparently was that she had the misfortune to fall in love with you, and to give you everything she possessed: her all. You killed her for personal gain. It is a crime cunningly contrived to give the appearance of an accident, and it was carried out with consummate coolness and nerve. At long last the time has come for you to pay the penalty for your dreadful deed.”

Ang showed no emotion. The faint smile, which had been on his thin lips through most of the 13 day trial, was still there as the judge sentenced him to death. Outside the courtroom, his law student sister, Juliet Ang, broke down and cried.

August 1963 was a month of intense political activity in the tropical island state of Singapore. Strong feelings had also been aroused by the discovery, by workmen digging foundations, of human bones, further proof of Japanese military atrocities during WWII. Most of Singapore’s population of some two million are of Chinese origin and they had suffered considerably during the Japanese occupation. Politically, Singapore (lying at the foot of the Malay Peninsula, an island where most of the equatorial swamps and jungle had turned into modern roads, industrial sites and commercial centres) was fast moving into complete independence through merger with Malaya and the creation of Malaysia. This experiment in multiracialism regrettably failed when Singapore was separated from Malaysia two years later.

In August 1963, the local newspapers were full of the sensational case in England involving Christine Keeler and a British Cabinet Minister. In Moscow, leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union drank champagne after signing the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Sir Alec Home, the British Prime Minister, said that the world had become a safer place.

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In Washington, President Kennedy's two-day-old son died in hospital. Monks in Vietnam burnt themselves to death. In Britain, the Great Train Robbery of more than £2.5 million thrilled the world. In Kuala Lumpur, capital of Malaysia, a member of parliament accused the minister of education, Abdul Rahim bin Haji Talib, of corruption. "Say that outside," demanded the minister. Obliging, the member did. The minister took him to court, and lost.

Lord Nuffield died, and ended an era. There was a drought in Singapore, where 71 secret society gangsters were charged with murder during a riot at an open prison on a nearby isle, Pulau Senang, the previous month. Eighteen were later hanged.

During much of August 1963, Singapore was preparing for Malaysia Day, the last day of the month when the creation of Malaysia would be celebrated. Indonesia, just across the waters, was already objecting, and Tunku Abdul Rahman, Malaya's prime minister, had flown to Manila to talk to President Sukarno and President Macapagal. Agreement was reached that the United Nations be asked to satisfy themselves (which they did) that the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak in fact wanted to become part of Malaysia. At these talks Sukarno described Tunku as 'a great statesman' and Macapagal 'a great leader of Asia'. For his part, the Tunku was prepared to admit that Sukarno and Macapagal were both 'dynamic leaders who have fought colonialism and imperialism'. Within days, the agreement collapsed. After abandoning the United Nations, Sukarno spent much of the following three years trying to smash Malaysia.

On Sunday, 25 August 1963, 100,000 people assembled on the grassy padang in front of Singapore's City Hall, next to the courts, to demand that Japan pay S\$50 million as a gesture of atonement for their war atrocities to civilians during the occupation. During that month, feelings were running high and political tension was apparent. Communist elements were trying to exploit every issue they thought could be distorted to embarrass the government: they did all they could to frighten, confuse and threaten the people over Singapore's impending merger with Malaysia.

Against this excited and troubled background, a news item in *The Straits Times* headed 'Barmaid out diving with boyfriend disappears' aroused no more than casual interest. Nobody knew then that nearly two years later, this Tuesday afternoon swimming tragedy was to form the substance of one of the most remarkable murder trials ever heard. *The Straits Times* report, obtained from the police, read as follows:

A barmaid, Cheok Cheng Kid, 22, went skin-diving with her boyfriend off Pulau Dua at 2:30PM yesterday. Three hours later she vanished in the sea. Until late today Marine Police launches were searching the sea off the island but found no trace of Cheok's body. Cheok had hired a motor sampan with Sunny Ang, 24, part-time

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law student, at Jardine Steps yesterday afternoon. About 3PM they reached Pulau Dua near St John's Island. They fitted on their goggles, mouthpiece, flippers and compressed air cylinders and dived from the sampan in turns in search of coral. After several dives they took off their gear and rested for a little while. They then decided to start diving again. While Mr Ang was fitting on his gear, Cheok plunged into the water. Mr Ang found a break in his breathing apparatus and asked the boatman to help him repair it. When he failed to repair the leak he signalled Cheok to surface. He tugged at her lifeline several times until it snapped before he gave up and rushed to nearby St John's Island to report to the Marine Police. The police, helped by five islanders, rushed to the scene and dived several times in search of Cheok, but found no traces of her. Cheok lived at Tanglin Halt and worked in a bar in North Bridge Road. Mr Ang told the police that he had been going steady with her for the past six months. Their favourite hobby was skin-diving and they had gone to Pulau Dua several times before.

Neither the police, nor *The Straits Times*, were then to know that this report was inaccurate in several instances. 'They' did not fit on their goggles. Only Cheok fitted on diving gear. 'They' did not dive from the sampan in turns. Only Cheok dived. And she dived twice. She was never

seen again. Ang did not get even his feet wet that day. He did not dive in search of her when Cheok did not surface (though one of the Malays who did was 62 years old). Cheok no longer worked as a barmaid. Ang had not been going steady with her for six months. He had only known her three months. They had never before been skin-diving together at Pulau Dua, a notoriously dangerous area for swimmers. Not until the trial was the importance of these discrepancies revealed. According to the Prosecution, this was the story of 'the accident', which Ang had carefully concocted and thought would be believed. It might have been, and Ang might today be a free man, had he not been greedy.

When Ang first made his report, the police did not know that three hours before Jenny Cheok got in the sampan which took her to her death, Ang had reinsured her life for five days (the previous 14-day policy having expired the previous day), for \$150,000. When Jenny, a penniless barmaid, made her fatal dive, she was covered by nearly half a million dollars worth of insurance, all of which Jenny had willed to Ang's mother. Ang had, in fact, tried to get \$900,000 worth of cover, but failed. Within 24 hours of Jenny's disappearance, Ang was claiming the half-million dollars from three different insurance companies. The letters were identical: Jenny had met with a tragic accident while scuba-diving off one of the islands south of Singapore at about 5PM on 27 August 1963. The letters went on: She is presumed to have either drowned or been attacked by a shark. Her body is yet to be found.

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In due course, the police were to find evidence indicating that Ang, in July, had been thinking about involving Jenny in an aeroplane 'accident'. Formerly a member of the Singapore Flying Club, Ang held a pilot's licence in 1961. He made inquiries about flying risks, saying that Jenny intended to join the club as a student pilot (he said she was the owner of a poultry farm), and also about personal accident risks. Jenny was eventually insured for \$200,000 and Ang paid the premiums and collected the policies. That same day, Sunny Ang went to another insurance company and made inquiries which ended up a few days later in Jenny being insured for another \$150,000. He paid the premium. Three weeks before she disappeared in the sea off Pulau Dua, Ang took Jenny to an old and reputable firm of lawyers so that she could make her will. Jenny left everything, her entire estate, which was worthless, and her expectations of nearly half a million dollars once she was dead, to Madam Yeo Bee Neo, whom she had never met. Madam Yeo Bee Neo is Sunny Ang's mother.

Ang apparently abandoned the aeroplane accident idea after getting his girlfriend interested in scuba-diving. This followed his unsuccessful night time attempt to kill her in a motor accident. Ang was a skilled driver. He competed in the 1961 Singapore Grand Prix and had put up a credible performance. On 13 August, he drove Jenny 300 miles to Kuala Lumpur, on the way, Jenny was told, to the Cameron Highlands for a holiday which was to last between a week and a fortnight. Halfway to Kuala Lumpur they stopped

for breakfast, which gave both of them a stomachache. They decided to stay in Kuala Lumpur for a couple of days to recover before going on. During the night, or at least some time before the following morning, they apparently abandoned their plans for a holiday, and decided to return to Singapore. But first Sunny Ang went out and bought a 14-day accident policy for Jenny and himself. His was for \$30,000. Hers was for \$100,000. He paid the premium.

Ang at his trial said Jenny insisted upon him taking out the policy because of his reckless driving on the way up. Only two people knew the truth about what happened on the way back that night. Ang's story was that on turning a right hand corner on a dark road, he had seen a dog lying on the road. He sounded his horn and braked simultaneously. He said he braked very hard. Jenny's head struck the windscreen and frosted it. Ang said he veered to the left and hit the earth embankment on the side of the road, the same side of the car where Jenny was sitting.

Jenny had a swelling on her forehead, bruises on the body, and a cut on her lower lip. The car was very badly damaged, mostly on the passenger's side, and had to be towed away. Ang told the judge he was probably doing 50 MPH when he crashed into the earth wall. They returned the rest of the way to Singapore by train. They arrived at 7AM in the morning. Ang sent her home by taxi and gave her a dollar to see a doctor. At his trial, Ang denied Cheok was naïve. He agreed she was simple. He also agreed that no doctor in Singapore would treat a patient for a dollar. He told the court that he loved Jenny and planned to marry her.

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Ang may have planned to kill her the day he met her in the Odeon Bar, one evening at the end of May, or beginning of July 1963. He may have gone to the bar where she worked, deliberately searching for a suitable victim. He was a bankrupt and needed money urgently. There is no evidence to substantiate this theory, but it is likely because less than three weeks after Ang had met Jenny, he attempted to take out an accident policy on her life worth \$200,000.

Suspicious aroused, the insurance company sent an investigator. Jenny told the insurance man who called upon her that she knew nothing about an insurance policy but she remembers Ang giving her a paper to sign. In view of this, the insurance company decided not to go on with the policy. Ang promptly tried another company which also refused. The managing director, after conversation with the other company, came to the conclusion that the application was suspicious and fraudulent. Ang waited a few days before going to the third company. He told this company that Jenny was the proprietress of a chicken farm. With them, he insured Jenny's life for \$150,000.

Ten months after Jenny's disappearance, Ang was still trying to get the money. He knew the police were making inquiries, but in desperation, telephoned the insurance company. He told them that if they were willing to give him two-thirds of the claim, he would be prepared to sign an affidavit admitting that Jenny had never owned a poultry farm. The company man on the telephone asked Ang where Jenny was. Ang replied, briefly, "At the bottom of the sea!"

With Jenny still alive after the road accident, Ang hurried with his preparations to murder her with the diving accident. Ang had to hurry: all the policies were short term and he could not afford to keep renewing them. Time was fast running out and the days counted. On the morning of 27 August, he renewed one of Jenny's insurances which had expired the previous day, for a further five days, and then took her out to sea, to her death. Part of the equipment Jenny wore when she dived to her doom was a flipper with a heelstrap partly severed by a sharp knife.

More than 16 months elapsed before the police charged Ang with murder. He was arrested on 21 December 1964. He appeared before a magistrate the following day. On the charge sheet, Cheok was described as Jenny Cheok Cheng Kid, aged 22, a divorcee and mother of two. No plea was entered. Ang was remanded in custody.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alex Josey (1910–1986) was a British journalist, political writer and commentator, and biographer, best known for his biographies on Singapore's former Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew. He wrote over twenty political novels and many political articles on Singapore and Malaysia for various Singapore and international newspapers and journals. He was the first foreign correspondent to be kicked out of Singapore (then part of Malaysia) by the Malaysian government in July 1965, but returned to Singapore after its independence from Malaysia and became Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's Press Secretary for ten years. He died in 1986 in Singapore, aged 76.