



“I can’t wait for all you horror fans to
get your hands on this treasure.”

—Suffian Hakim, bestselling author of *The Keepers of Stories*
and *Harris bin Potter and the Stoned Philosopher*

A Mosque in the Jungle

Classic
Ghost Stories by
Othman Wok

Edited by
Ng Yi-Sheng

القائمة
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17.4.2017
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“One should not forget Encik Othman Wok as a journalist and author... someone well-known for his fascinating ghost stories to share, indeed not without deeper meaning to life.”

—**ZAINUL ABIDIN RASHEED**, former Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and former editor of *Berita Harian* and *The Sunday Times*

“Haunting plots, memorable casts of characters and classic, even surprising, twists. These stories are reminiscent of the ones we might have told or been told about secluded corners in our schools, the old, abandoned buildings in our urbanising midst, and the forested areas that seem so dooming and untouchable at night. Reading them while home alone makes every scratch sound like the scuttering of thousands of invisible rats and that random tap or bump the knockings of a murdered woman from within bricked-up spaces in our walls.”

—**NURALIAH NORASID**, award-winning author of *The Gatekeeper*

“I can’t think of a better person to introduce Othman Wok’s macabre tales to a new generation than Ng Yi-Sheng, a passionate, erudite scholar of local literature and culture. His insights take Othman Wok’s tales to a whole new level. I can’t wait for all you horror fans—new and old—to get your hands on this treasure.”

—**SUFFIAN HAKIM**, bestselling author of *The Keepers of Stories* and *Harris bin Potter and the Stoned Philosopher*

“This collection of stories brought me on a nostalgic trip down memory lane, to a Singapore of yesteryear. It is evocative of an era in Singapore’s history which does not exist anymore.”

—**GLEN GOEI**, theatre director and filmmaker (*Revenge of the Pontianak*)

“Singapore in the fifties and sixties was different. Hantu kubur, jembalang tanah, langsyar, hantu galah, hantu raya, hantu laut, orang bunian, pontianak, orang minyak, saka and hantu tetek were very much alive in the minds of Malays. In this context, Encik Othman Wok penned his stories.”

—**YATIMAN YUSOF**, former Senior Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts

“Make no mistake, these aren’t tales for children. There’s the battering and violent dismemberment of animals and women, and with them, swift retribution upon their perpetrators; ghosts of women and little girls in cemeteries; haunted houses with their victims screaming for justice; murderous husbands getting their comeuppance; and the karmic fates of greedy treasure hunters. Yet there are also the tender recollections of ghosts reaching out to loved ones to say goodbye, of unrequited love and of unfinished business. They temper the gut-clenching horror just as dawn quenches the night. These tragically realistic depictions of the monsters among us transcend time, space and culture, but the context and settings make these tales ours—stories and myths from our history. A must-read for those hungry for a slice of local horror, a fascinating glimpse into the past, and a nostalgic return to a Singapore and Malaya peppered with ghosts.”

—**CHRISTINA SNG**, Stoker Award-winning author of
A Collection of Nightmares

“Classic spooky tales that will keep you turning the page.”

—**TUNKU HALIM**, bestselling author of *Scream to the Shadows*

“For someone who is deathly interested in what quickens the Malayan pulse, I am horrified to discover footsteps before mine. Othman Wok’s stories blast a heartstopping trail through our Malayan history, squelching through mangrove swamps, tearing up forgotten Javanese ports and taking a parang to the undergrowth that conceals what we truly dread.”

—**KELVIN TONG**, film director of *The Maid*

“Othman Wok is definitely one of the most compelling horror story writers in Singapore. I find his book thrilling and terrifying.”

—**DJ KC CHAMPION**, presenter and producer of
Malam Seram: The Horror Talk Show

A Mosque in the Jungle

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Classic
Ghost Stories by
Othman Wok

Edited by
Ng Yi-Sheng

with translations from the Malay by
MM Basalamah and Tan Poay Lim


EPIGRAM

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Introduction by Ng Yi-Sheng

Upon my desk, there lies a well-thumbed copy of Othman Wok's *Malayan Horror: Macabre Tales of Singapore and Malaysia in the 50's*. The uncanny cover art returns my gaze—a pair of massive, soulful eyes rising out of the darkness, obscured by the attap-roofed kampung huts of yore. Against the back, below the fresh-faced photo of the author at age twenty-four, the original price tag is still affixed: \$11.90 from the Wordshop. And inside, on the title page, hovering above the windmill logo of the Heinemann Asia series, there's an autograph in black ink: *Othman Wok, 27.12.2011*.

I only met Pak Othman briefly. I had been assigned to write a children's newspaper article about Singapore's first president, Yusof Ishak, and I'd decided to approach one of his surviving colleagues for some personal recollections, and—why not?—seize the opportunity to get a classic work of Singaporean literature signed by the author. I met him at his office in The Concourse on Beach Road and did the interview over cups of English tea. Afterwards, when I brought up his literary career, he seemed embarrassed—as if it was a shameful deed he'd committed as a younger man, now come back to haunt him.

I found myself frustrated at how little he cared for his writerly fame. Yet this was understandable: he'd had an incredibly illustrious life beyond the world of fiction, after

all. He'd been a World War II survivor, a journalist, a student abroad in London, a young PAP politician fighting for independence, a diplomat, a director and board member of numerous organisations (including the Singapore Tourism Board and the Sentosa Development Corporation), a father of four, a grandfather of five, and a great-grandfather of two.

Nevertheless, throughout the 2010s, I found myself returning to his work again and again, explaining to all who would listen how rich and fascinatingly unique his stories were. By this time, a new wave of readers and writers had arisen, championing Singaporean fantasy, sci-fi and horror, including Sandi Tan's *The Black Isle*, Nuraliah Norasid's *The Gatekeeper*, Neon Yang's Tensorate series, Rachel Heng's *Suicide Club* and Suffian Hakim's *The Minorities*. I began playing the role of amateur literary historian, reminding people that these more recent works weren't just imitations of Western trends—they were a continuation of a local literary tradition that had been alive since the 1950s, when Pak Othman first began writing.

Pak Othman passed away in 2017 at the grand old age of ninety-two. *The Karyawan*, a magazine published by the Association of Muslim Professionals, commissioned me to write an obituary, focusing on his literary legacy.¹ I also began communicating with his daughter and compiler, Lily Othman, urging her to bring his stories back into print. This was how I ended up being asked to edit this volume—a role that honestly should've gone to a specialist in Malay literature, who'd have been able to provide new, dynamic

translations of the texts. I can't do that, alas. What I can do, however, is help a new generation of readers understand why his stories are vital and important. They're not just creepy, nail-biting, spine-chillers—they're genuine classics.

Othman Wok was born in Telok Blangah, Singapore, on 8 October 1924. He grew up steeped in Malay tradition: his family told him stories of his Orang Laut great-great-grandfather, killed by a tiger in Singapore before the arrival of Stamford Raffles. When Othman caught malaria at the age of five, he was diagnosed as being “kena sampuk” and was treated using rituals by a visiting dukun.²

At the same time, his father, a teacher and principal at Radin Mas Primary School, insisted on giving him a modern education. This meant that he studied the English language among teachers and students of many races, even developing a taste for mystery novels while at Raffles Institution. Perhaps it was this blend of cultural influences that shaped him as an early creator of horror stories. His former schoolmate, Latiff Arman, fondly remembers how he loved scaring his friends with ghostly tales as a teenager.

Such youthful idylls, however, were cut short by the real-life traumas of the Japanese Occupation. During this period, he worked as a fisherman, then as an assistant in a Japanese anti-plague laboratory. (Decades later, he would discover that this lab had in fact been a centre for biological

warfare.) In 1946, he joined the Malay newspaper *Utusan Melayu*, first working as a clerk, then as a roving reporter. He thrived at his new job, mainly working the crime beat but occasionally venturing into the depths of jungles to cover the RAF troops' capture of Communists. This ultimately won him a scholarship to study journalism in London in 1949. Mind you, he wasn't one hundred per cent married to his work—his colleague Said Zahari recalls how he was rather adept at slipping out during office hours to amuse himself in the city.³

His big break came in 1952. This was thanks to Yusof Ishak, the founder and Editor-in-Chief of *Utusan Melayu*, and the future president of Singapore. He commissioned Othman to write a weekly series of horror stories for the new Sunday edition of the newspaper, *Utusan Zaman*. “Malays just love stories like these,” Othman recalled in an interview with *The New Paper*. “Sure enough, the circulation almost tripled.”⁴ He would spend the next four years spinning these tales for both *Utusan Zaman* and the entertainment magazine *Mastika*, making him a household name in Singapore and the Malay peninsula—even before he joined the People's Action Party in 1954.

Why were these horror stories so popular in the fifties? Part of the answer lies in the fact that this was a time of a Malay cultural renaissance—the arts were flourishing in pretty much every field, with practitioners furiously creating work that engaged with post-war modernity and burgeoning nationalism. We see this in the rise of ronggeng, joget and

keroncong in music; the artworks of Persekutuan Pelukis Melayu (the Society of Malay Artists); the literary works of ASAS '50 (the Writers' Movement 1950); the shift from traditional bangsawan theatre to radio dramas and the films of the Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions and Cathay-Keris—including many beloved horror movies, such as BN Rao's *Pontianak* and L. Krishan's *Sumpah Orang Minyak*.⁵

But why horror specifically? My personal theory is that the genre represents a return of the repressed—a resurgence of old, purposefully forgotten memories. Like many traditions of world literature, the classical Malay canon abounds with uncanny and mystical episodes. Consider how Badang receives his powers of superhuman strength from a hantu air, or water spirit, in *Sulalatus Salatin*,⁶ or how the maiden Bidasari is cursed to waver between life and death each night in her tomb in *Syair Bidasari*. The coming of British colonialism, however, dispelled the old magic of the past. This is most poignantly expressed in Abdullah Abdul Kadir's 1849 autobiography *Hikayat Abdullah*, often hailed as the first great work of modern Malay literature. Here, the glories of Singapore's precolonial kingdom are reduced to mere ghosts that haunt the royal hill of Bukit Larangan—spirits easily exorcised when William Farquhar fires a cannon from the summit and orders the forest to be cleared.⁷

Malay intellectuals thus began to favour realism in their writing.⁸ Many of them viewed ghost stories as shameful artefacts of a less civilised age, best to be abandoned as the community progressed into the future.⁹ Abdullah

emphatically reminded his readers that “all these beliefs are groundless and nothing more than sheer deceit.”¹⁰ By the time of the post-war era, this ideology had become even more ingrained. Keris Mas, a prominent member of ASAS '50, stated that the agenda of the group was to critique “societal backwardness...those whose consciousness have been frozen by the influence of feudalism and myths, and superstition that has been enmeshed with religion.”¹¹

Othman's horror writing stems from a diametrically opposed impulse: the desire of the Malay public to celebrate their heritage, without censorship of its spookier, non-rational face. We see the triumph of tradition over modernity in stories such as the tantalisingly suspenseful “The Golden Lantern”, which begins when a family of brothers ruins the folk medicine practice of Pawang Kassim, telling their neighbours to use Western treatments instead. The sorcerer inflicts a deadly curse on them—notably, the first sign of its effects involve the malfunctioning of a scientific innovation, the electric light bulb. We see such a victory again in “The Skulls of Kuala Banat”, when Pawang Mat Yassin uses his spells to save the British administrator Martin Haliday from the spirits of a failed European colony; and again in “A Mosque in the Jungle”, where a young soldier, hunting down Communists in the rainforest, is forced to reconsider his scientifically-informed scepticism: “In the age of the atomic bomb and the hydrogen bomb, how could ghosts exist?”

But Othman was by no means a diehard traditionalist. Some of his tales contain no supernatural elements at all, as

in the case of “The Mad Artist”, a tale of gruesome murder and clinical insanity, possibly inspired by his work as a crime reporter. Furthermore, when the spirits do appear, they are not ritual manifestations of age-old stories—notably, they are never identified by their age-old names, such as “pontianak”, “pocong” or “buaya putih”. Often, they’re not even of Malay origin: witness the spirit in the Chinese cemetery in “Among the Gravestones”, the Balinese cat in “Si Hitam’s Curse” or the drenched, unspeakable horror of “The Old House”. Nor are the wise old bomohs always effective when they cast their spells. Mysteries are just as often solved by the rational thinking of modern men and women, such as the spirited maidservant Kak Jah in “The Sound in the Wall” or the investigative headmaster Cikgu Abas in “Dollah Returns”.

In fact, many stories are refreshingly urban and cosmopolitan even to readers today. Look at “The Anklets”, in which the forensic specialist Dr Hamid encounters the disembodied feet of a murdered Indian woman; “Visitor from the Coffin”, where a studio photographer (also named Hamid) takes pictures of a Chinese towkay’s ghost. “The Guardian” is particularly noteworthy: narrated by the London-trained curatorial assistant Abdullah, it describes how members of a British archaeological expedition are hunted down by a mummified Dayak warrior—a tale almost certainly inspired by Howard Carter’s ill-fated raid of Tutankhamun’s tomb in Egypt and Universal Pictures’ 1932 film *The Mummy*.

None of this, however, earned Othman much respect

among the Malay literati of 1950s Singapore, many of whom were his own colleagues at *Utusan Melayu*. Though he had been appointed as Deputy Editor by 1957, he was remembered as “basically a straight newsman...not known for writing opinion pieces or making thought-provoking or political commentary.” His fellow reporter, and future Malaysian literary giant, Abdul Samad Ismail, scornfully dismissed his forays into fiction, saying, “As a writer, he’s remembered most for his ghost stories.”¹²

It’s therefore sweetly ironic that these ghost stories have stood the test of time, thrilling and delighting thousands of readers since they first appeared in *Utusan Zaman*. As it turned out, Malay society needed both schools of writing: realists like Keris Mas, Usman Awang and Abdul Samad Ismail, who pushed for social reforms; and creators of fantasy and horror like Nora Abdullah and Othman Wok, who inspired pride in pre-modern Malay culture by granting it the dignity of mass circulation in print.

Othman Wok’s political career is well-documented, so there’s no need to go over it in detail. In 1963, he was elected as Member of Parliament for Pasir Panjang and appointed as Singapore’s first Minister for Social Affairs—a job that required him to resign from his *Utusan Melayu* position.¹³ As a prominent Malay politician in the Chinese-dominated PAP, he became a scapegoat for racial supremacists who

branded him a “Malay traitor”—he was actually caught in the midst of the 1964 racial riots, and survived by hiding in the old Kallang Airport terminal building. After Separation in 1965, he continued in his role of Cabinet Minister, briefly also serving as Minister for Culture for three years, and enacting policies to promote sports, improve social services and manage Muslim affairs. In 1977, he became Ambassador to Indonesia—not an easy job, considering that this was barely over a decade after Konfrontasi. (In his biography, he complained that his ambassadorial residence in Jakarta was haunted. This was hardly the worst of his mishaps: in 1978, he missed a fatal crash in Suharto’s personal helicopter, simply because he had overslept after watching a late-night World Cup match.) Finally, in 1981, he retired from politics, though he would continue to conduct “fireside chats” for new PAP MPs well into the 2000s.

From 1981 to 1987, he made a return to the world of literature, authoring a new horror fiction column for *Mingguan Malaysia*, another Sunday newspaper under *Utusan Melayu*, which was now based in Kuala Lumpur and named *Utusan Malaysia*. Many of the tales here were reprints of his old stories from the fifties, charmingly accompanied by an illustration of a grinning, cowed skeleton. But there were new tales too: generally shorter in length and less polished than his earlier compositions, yet still fascinating in their own right.

Some are inspired by the author’s time in Indonesia, such as “Witri’s Vengeance”, “Sweet Suriati” and “Monster

Catch”. Others reflect on the massive transformations of Singapore and Malaysia after independence. In the Kafkaesque “Hidir’s Trial”, a Raffles City construction worker attending Singapore’s National Celebrations in 1984 is mysteriously spirited away to the Supreme Court of the 1930s. In “Mermaid’s Tears”, the aged Rosdi weeps for the memory of Norcahaya, a woman he met in the 1940s, when they used to bicycle down Jalan Sultan Ismail in KL, then almost free from traffic. There are also clear continuities of themes from his earlier body of work. Normala, the protagonist of “Tengku Ripin’s Wife”, exemplifies his valorisation of modern Malay professionals over rural gurus—she’s a widowed but unvanquished restaurateur, so strong-minded that she exorcises a jealous ghost just by shouting down a phone line. Motifs of sea travel, earlier seen in “The Guardian” and “The Skulls of Kuala Banat”, return in “The Mystery of the SS *Juita*”—perhaps an homage to the author’s maritime heritage as a descendant of the Orang Laut.

However, all these stories would have remained unknown to English-speaking readers had it not been for the initiative of Othman’s third daughter, Lily Othman. In the late 1980s, she was making a living as a hotel sales rep and travel writer, exploring off-the-beaten-track corners of Southeast Asia. But she’d noticed the new trend of ghost stories in the Singapore English-language publishing world, with successes such as Catherine Lim’s *They Do Return* and Goh Sin Tub’s *The Ghost Lover of Emerald Hill*.¹⁴ She’d always known about

her father's stories—older friends had even told her how they used to stay up all night for new issues of *Mastika*, just to read these scary tales in the darkness. She realised it was the perfect time to introduce her father's writing to a new audience.

This task wasn't easy. Othman himself only agreed to the idea after some persuasion, telling his daughter she could go ahead as long as she did all the legwork herself. She had to go up to KL to cajole Datuk Khalid Haji Abdullah, Chairman of Utusan Melayu (Malaysia) Berhad, into releasing the rights to these tales. She then had to ransack the archives—back then, stored in a dark warehouse, with piles and piles of newspapers stacked to the ceiling—and, with the help of an office boy and a pair of flashlights, track down copies of *Utusan Zaman* from the mid-1950s. Obtaining the relevant issues of *Mustika* was much less difficult, as these had been catalogued at Malaysia's Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (Institute of Language and Literature).

Then came the task of transcription. All the tales had been printed in Jawi, the old Arabic-based script for Malay. Othman's former press room colleague Hj. Hussin Amid painstakingly converted these texts into Rumi, or Romanised script, after which the text was edited by Suratman Markasan—a superstar of the Malay literary world, and Lily's former junior college Malay teacher! MM Basalamah then translated the results into English,¹⁵ while Lily then deployed Jacob Ang Kok Liang and Guek Eng, her old friends from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, to create appropriately

hair-raising illustrations for the book's interior and exterior.

The book was finally published by Heinemann Asia in 1991. The title, *Malayan Horror: Macabre Tales of Singapore and Malaysia in the 50's*, reflected Lily's selection of tales: she wanted to showcase pieces that captured a time before Singapore and Malaysia were divided into two nations. And just as she'd expected, readers on both sides of the Causeway loved the book—it went through five reprints and sold fifteen thousand copies. These tales had an allure that no other horror anthologies of the nineties could boast of: they were doubly nostalgic, recording both the antique modernity of the 1950s as well as the more ancient spiritual lore of the region. In addition, they shared a Malay perspective on the world to a multiracial public—this at a time when very few ethnically Malay authors were publishing books in English.

Soon afterwards, in 1993, the tales of *Malayan Horror* were republished in their original Malay form under the title *Cerita-cerita Seram*. Lily managed to sell twenty-five hundred copies within a week at that year's Malaysian Book Fair. Then in 1998, the publishing rights went to the Singapore-based company Horizon Books, who re-released a new English edition in 2004. Othman's works from the eighties were soon picked up as well.¹⁶ In 1995, some were published in their original Malay by Heinemann Asia under the title *Kisah-kisah Seram & Misteri*. In 2002, they were translated into English by Tan Poay Lim¹⁷ and published by Horizon Books as *Tales of Horror and Mystery: More Macabre Tales from Singapore, Malaya and Indonesia*. A new edition was released in 2006

titled *The Disused Well and Other Tales of Horror and Mystery*. The same year saw the release of a further collection of newly translated tales, *Unseen Occupants and Other Chilling Tales*.¹⁸

Lily had hoped to capitalise further on her father's stardom. At one point, she proposed that he lead ghost tours of Sentosa at night, with special effects to replicate the effects of haunting—an idea that he flatly refused. She also urged him to write more fiction, to which he had a standard response: “Wait lah.” He remained active in business even in his late eighties, and was still going to the office three or four days a week until 2014. However, he did mull over ideas for a great Singaporean novel. “Perhaps I’ll try a novel set in Singapore spanning a few generations,” he stated in his biography. “I haven’t quite figured out the plot. Whatever it is, I hope when I’m not so busy, I’ll have the time to sit down and write books.”¹⁹

Sadly, the time for further writing never came. On 17 April 2017, he passed away at Singapore General Hospital. His state-assisted funeral was held the very next day, in accordance with religious custom. In the midst of a raging thunderstorm, his body was placed on a gun carriage, covered with the state flag and borne from Sultan Mosque to Choa Chu Kang Muslim Cemetery.

This book is a tribute to his legacy. I’ve picked a title from one of his stories—*A Mosque in the Jungle*—that depicts the balance between civilisation and the wild dark unknown

in his writings, all in a proudly Malay and tropical context. While previous volumes have highlighted the scare factor of his tales, I’ve tried to choose works that showcase the best of the author’s storytelling skills: his manipulation of tension, his vivid descriptions, the originality and worldliness of his vision. Never mind the disdain of ASAS ’50—I’d like to invite today’s readers to regard these ghost stories as literature.

Drawing from *Malayan Horror*, *The Disused Well* and *Unseen Occupants*, I’ve created a sequence that suggests a progression through time and space, from 1950s Malaya to 1970s Indonesia to 1980s Malaysia and Singapore, with a final, uncannily autobiographical-sounding flashback to 1950s London in “Her Dead Husband Hasn’t Left Home”. I’ve also tried to highlight the recurring themes of his fiction: the clash between modernity and ancient spirituality, the resurgence of suppressed history, and ill-fated romance. I’ve also regretfully omitted stories which have intriguing concepts, but are unsatisfactorily executed, such as “The Spirit of Balwan Singh”, featuring a Sikh ghost in 1820s Singapore; and “The Old Lady’s Hairpin”, about an old Chinese woman with bound feet haunting Toa Payoh MRT station, which only opened in 1987.

Epigram Books has decided to hew to the original translations, and I’ve made only minimal edits for the sake of clarity and aesthetics, always with reference to the original Malay.²⁰ However, my hope is that this publication will prompt others in the future to delve deeper into Singaporean, Malaysian and Malayan literary history. Many of Othman’s

stories remain untranslated and untranscribed: a weekly quota from 1952 to 1956 would suggest that he published around two hundred fictions with *Utusan Zaman*, of which only twenty were included in *Malayan Horror*.²¹ Perhaps soon, these old newspapers will be digitised; new software may be used to search their contents and convert their Jawi into Rumi; new readers may then enjoy forgotten gems of his writing. Perhaps the same may be done for the numerous other writers in diverse languages who remain forgotten, but whose voices might deliver much-needed wisdom for our twenty-first-century world.

I'm writing this introduction in the midst of Singapore's Covid-19 lockdown, euphemistically called the Circuit Breaker by our government. It's a time of great fear and confusion, when deadly, invisible monsters lurk among us, proven by science beyond all doubt. Working on Othman Wok's horror fiction has provided a refuge of sorts: an escape from the news of plague and governmental failure across the globe; an affirmation of the enduring power of myth and the spirit.

Such is the value of art and literature. Although Othman may have downplayed his role as a storyteller, his stories matter. Politicians build nations; writers build imaginations. How wonderful that this man did both, and that his tales were beloved by generation after generation—Baby Boomers and their parents in the fifties, Gen X-ers and Millennials from the eighties to the 2000s, and now hopefully Gen Z-ers and Gen-Alphas in the 2020s.

So please, enjoy these stories. May they terrify and charm you. In their darkness, may you find light.

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- 1 My introductory essay borrows heavily from my previous article: Ng Yi-Sheng, "Othman Wok: The Man and His Literary Legacy", *The Karyawan* 12, no. 3 (18 July 2017): 36-38. Further amended after input from Lily Othman in 2020.
 - 2 The bulk of this biographical information is drawn from this memoir: Othman Wok, *Never in My Wildest Dreams* (Singapore: Raffles, 2000).
 - 3 Said Zahari, *Dark Clouds at Dawn: A Political Memoir* (Petaling Jaya: Insan, 2001): 43.
 - 4 Gloria Chandy, "Once an MP, now he's a 'JC'", *The New Paper*. 23 April 2000.
 - 5 Might Othman's stories have influenced the Malay horror film craze? This is a possibility: Lily Othman recalls that her father "rubbed shoulders with the P. Ramlees of this world", and the first such films came out in 1957, well after he had gained fame as a horror writer. However, there is no clear, direct connection between the two.

- 6 *Sulalatus Salatin* (*The Genealogy of Kings*) has often been called *Sejarah Melayu* or *The Malay Annals* in English. Malay scholars have determined that this title is a British colonial invention, and the general preference is now to call it *Sulalatus Salatin*.
- 7 Abdullah bin Kadir, *The Hikayat Abdullah* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1969).
- 8 Not all intellectuals took such a route. In 1937, the Pahang-based author Ishak Haji Muhammad published *Putera Gunung Tahan* (*The Prince of Mount Tahan*), a deliciously subversive anti-colonial fantasy novella inspired by local myths.
- 9 This may have been in part a reaction to the British ethnographic fascination with the Malay spirit world. Colonial writers often wrote about hantu and bomohs, as in the case of John Turnbull Thomson's *Glimpses into Life in Malayan Lands*, Frank Swettenham's *Malay Sketches*, Walter Skeat's *Malay Magic*, and CBC's "Jungle Nights", a monthly series of Malay ghost stories printed in *The Straits Times* from 1912 to 1913.
- 10 Abdullah bin Kadir, 118.
- 11 Keris Mas, *30 Tahun Sekitar Sastera* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1979): 131.
- 12 *Never in My Wildest Dreams*. 82.
- 13 This may not have stopped him from writing. According to his daughter, Othman continued to publish new stories in *Utusan Melayu* and *Berita Harian* in the 1960s and 1970s, on an irregular basis. I have been unable to gain independent confirmation of this.
- 14 Russell Lee's popular series, *True Singapore Ghost Stories*, only started in 1989, well after Lily had begun her project of recovering her father's stories.
- 15 Previously, Tuminah Sapawi was credited as a co-translator. This is not altogether justified: according to Lily, Tuminah translated one story, but her version was not ultimately used.
- 16 The dating of tales from Othman's later publications is in fact uncertain. Most clearly date from the 1980s, but Lily Othman notes that some were composed in the 1950s but left out of *Malayan Horror*; one of them, "The Spirit of Balwan Singh" from *The Disused Well*, makes reference to a news article from 15 August 1992, supposedly after Othman had ceased to write for *Mingguan Malaysia*.
- 17 Confusingly, Tan Poay Lim now claims he only translated one of the stories. Is he misremembering the past, or does someone else deserve the credit for this task?
- 18 Surprisingly, the Malay originals of the stories in this collection were never published in book form. Lily Othman's archive includes a file containing twenty of these tales, with an introduction by Othman Wok dated c. 2005. This suggests that he fully intended to publish these at one point in his life.
- 19 *Beyond My Wildest Dreams*. 230.
- 20 The tales in English occasionally contain details and sentences that are missing from the Malay originals. I have, by and large, chosen not to remove these. It is probable that the author was fully aware of these additions and gave them his blessing, believing they were to the benefit of English-language readers.

- 21 In Lily Othman's archive, I've found two additional stories that were transcribed into Romanised Malay but never anthologised: "Hantu Longgok" and "Bunyi Siulan Dari Rumah Buruk". The second of these was even translated, with the title "The Sounds of the Whistle from the Ugly House".

A Mosque in the Jungle

I never believed in ghosts. I had never seen one, however fleetingly, in all my twenty-nine years of life. I considered all those who believe in ghosts, or love telling ghost stories, fools. In the age of the atomic bomb and the hydrogen bomb, how could ghosts exist?

There were friends of mine who really believed all those ghost tales, and could tell you some weird things too. They say that if a person happened to be somewhere he never was before, he must pay obeisance and say “Tabik” to the guardian spirits before doing anything. Likewise, if a person was going to, say, bathe in some deserted, remote pool or river. If these rites were not adhered to, he would incur the wrath of the guardian spirits and they would possess and do horrible things to him. What nonsense!

No one was a greater believer in the supernatural, and no one loved talking about it more, than Dol. He said that if a person should lose his way in a jungle, the jungle spirit would help and lead this person to its home, which was a mosque. But it would only help the good: those who said, “Tabik, datuk nenek. Your grandchild seeks permission to pass.”

Well, we had been in the jungle since morning, the twelve of us from the 9th Jungle Company. We had spent the whole day there and we were lost. *Where's that spirit who's supposed to help us? Where's that mosque...that place of refuge?* All we met at nightfall was a band of communist terrorists. An almost hour-long battle ensued which split our group. When it was all over, I had no idea where Dol and the others were, including Sergeant Junid.

Night had come. I was all alone now, walking aimlessly about, stumbling here and there in such darkness that one could not see the back of one's hand. I dared not shout for help for fear of attracting wild animals and those terrorists. As I groped my way through the blackness, I kept running against thorns, bumping into branches and tree trunks, and falling over exposed roots. Around me, it was so quiet that even the little creatures one normally hears at night were silent.

I looked up occasionally and saw a star or two twinkling in the sky through gaps in the thick canopy above. I sat down and rested my aching back against the base of a big tree. Soon fear began creeping in. Every so often, I could hear twigs breaking, as if some large animal had stepped on them. Other times, there were dragging sounds like something was creeping and crawling along. Having once seen a nearly five-yard-long python, I shuddered to think how it would feel to have a snake like that coiled around me and crushing me in the darkness.

I resumed my aimless, stumbling, staggering progress through the black jungle. And then suddenly there came a smell that had no business being there, so far removed from

civilisation. It was the smell of burning incense...and it was getting stronger and stronger, as if someone were burning it right beside me.

That reminded me of something else Dol used to say. The smell of incense could not mean anything but...

I saw the flickering light of a torch in the pitch darkness. Who could it be? Someone lost? Terrorists? Cautiously, I gripped my STEN gun and held it ready.

The torch came towards me swinging left and right. When it was about twenty yards away, I saw for the first time that the bearer was an old man, hunched, grey-haired, in robes and white cap: a typical pious Muslim. He waved the torch about, apparently giving me the signal to approach him. I moved forward, but had hardly taken ten steps when I plunged waist-deep in water. Only with the light from the torch was I able to see that I had fallen into a swamp.

The commotion I made brought many pairs of green, blinking eyes rushing towards me. *Crocodiles! I've got to get out of here!*

The old man kept swinging his torch. Behind him, I could make out a mosque dimly lit by a single lamp. The man came even closer and under the light from his torch I could see a bund like those commonly found in paddy fields. *My escape route!* I made a dash for it. The green eyes in the water followed me, but as it was high ground there was nothing they could do.

"Are you lost, son?" asked the old man, smiling, but ignoring the hand I proffered to shake his. "It was fortunate I saw you, otherwise you would have foundered in this crocodile-infested swamp."

I silently wondered who this old fellow could be, living in the middle of the jungle. *Perhaps there is a village here.*

“Wash up,” he said as his hand gestured towards a pool, apparently meant for ablutions, beside the mosque. “Then come up.”

The man stepped into the mosque, where I could see someone reciting the Quran; others were in the midst of worship and others still said prayers for the departed. Their voices came drumming into my ears.

The water of the pool was terribly cold, but so refreshing.

Having cleansed myself, I entered the mosque. The old man came up to me. “We are poor people here. The mosque doesn’t have a proper place for you to spend the night. But if you please, I could take you where I usually sleep. I will sleep with the others down here.”

The old man, still a stranger, took me out to a corner of the building, and there stood a huge tree, its trunk four times a man’s outstretched arms in circumference. One of its enormous branches had been levelled on top and turned into a bunk of sorts. “Sleep here and do not worry about me,” said the man softly.

I climbed up to my bunk. Uncomfortable that I should be sleeping while others were still praying and reciting the holy book, I sat cross-legged and observed them, deeply engrossed in their devotions. They looked just like everybody else, nothing odd. I decided I should ask the old man the next day where we were and what they called the village.

Half an hour later, having finished reciting the Quran and

praying, the men left the mosque one by one, presumably heading for home.

The old man came back to see me. “Please try not to move about too much when you sleep, because one or two crocodiles from the swamp usually come up the banks when the mosque is deserted,” he advised. Then, seeing that I was now lying down and ready to sleep, he snuffed out the lamp, plunging the mosque into darkness.

Exhausted from the trudging that day, I fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

I was awakened by the burning stabs of sunlight on my face. At first, I could not remember where I was, but gradually everything that happened the night before came back to me. I got up with such a start that I almost fell. I realised then that I had been sleeping on nothing more than the bough of a tree in the middle of a vast swamp. Thankfully, I had not thrashed about while I slept, or I would surely have turned into dinner for the five or six crocodiles that had lain in wait all night below.

Then I looked around me. Where was the mosque? Where was that old man who had helped me last night? I simply had no answer. I found myself perched in a tree in the middle of nowhere. No village, no mosque, just one big, wild swamp around me. Nor could I figure out how I’d made it across, for the bund that had brought me to safety last night was nowhere to be seen.

I was still trying to unravel the puzzle when I heard excited voices in the distance. Soon, who else appeared but Dol and

the other guys in my company. They had just reached the far edge of the swamp.

“Hey, there you are! What are you doing up that tree? How did you even get up there?” Dol shouted.

“Would you please help me down first?” I shouted back. “I’ll tell you all about it.”

Dol and the others did all they could to find a way to get to my perch, but failed. There was no bund or dike, no bridge of any sort they could cross to reach me. Finally, Sergeant Junid decided they would build a raft with some large bamboo found on the banks. It took them two hours to complete it, and that was how I managed to set foot once again on solid ground.

As I told them my story, I studied their faces one by one. It was clear to me that not one of them believed it. Even Dol, that faithful believer in the supernatural, gave me an incredulous smile. It was not long before I burst out in exasperation, “Well, if you guys really must know, I got up that tree in the middle of a swamp by stepping over the backs of all those crocodiles!”

The Sound in the Wall

Everyone used to wonder why Adnan had not got married. Forty years old, and he still had shown no desire for someone to share his life. He was a good man, always reliable and upright. He had a good job and he was well-regarded by the folks of the village where he lived. His civil, courteous manners never failed to win hearts, and it was no wonder he became a sort of yardstick of good conduct there. Mothers, for one, were fond of citing his example to their misbehaving kids, saying things like, “Why can’t you be like Adnan? Look at him. What a nice, good man he is.” They never stopped praising him.

It was also no wonder that Adnan had more than a few admirers among the women and even young girls in the village. To the more mature ladies, he was Mr Right, the perfect dream husband. To the young girls, he was simply wonderful. “Never mind his age!”

One particular young lady who was crazy about him was Kak Jah, his own maidservant. Kak Jah had been working for Adnan for five years, long before he moved into the village, and long enough for her to become completely besotted with the man. Rumour had it that she had tried all sorts of ways

to win him, with no results, at least not as far as she could read in his eyes. Not that Kak Jah was wanting in any way. She was only twenty-eight, still young, and quite attractive to start with. And she knew how to enhance her good looks by always being well-groomed and well-dressed. As his maidservant, she took good care of his household. Always at the door by eight in the morning, she would prepare his breakfast, cook his lunch, clean and dust the place, and prepare his dinner before leaving for home at five. In the years she'd served him, she had been beyond reproach.

Adnan himself was a newcomer to the village. He had moved there only recently, when he bought the ancient house up the hill. It was a medium-sized, concrete building, the only one of the type in a neighbourhood of traditional wooden Malay houses. It sat on a fairly large piece of land, boasting a lovely garden with a winding driveway hedged on each side by rows of hibiscus. It was in rather bad shape when he bought it but, with some repairs and a new coat of paint, it was now as good as new.

He was a clerk in a legal firm on Malacca Street in Singapore, and a hard worker. He was ever-ready to bring home unfinished work, to toil over it till late at night, in order to get it ready by the next morning. That was how he first heard the strange sounds of knocking on his wall.

It happened one evening about two months after he moved in. He was working, as usual, on his files in the study which the previous owner used to treat as storeroom. There were just gentle knocks at first, so he simply ignored them and carried

on working. But when they kept getting louder and louder, he began to take notice. He put down his pen and listened intently to determine where they were coming from. The source seemed to be within the room itself, but what could be making such a noise? As far as he knew, there was no one else around. As he kept listening, the sounds seemed to shift to the main door. He got up and went out to open the door, but no one was there either. There was only the humming of the wind through the casuarinas in the courtyard.

He closed the door and went back to his room to finish his work. Moments later, the knocks came again, softly. *It could be the branches of the trees rapping against the windows*, he told himself. The knocks went on. *Or perhaps it's those village urchins trying to scare me.*

Stealthily, he got up and tiptoed to the main door. He swung it open in a flash, but no one was there. He closed the door and returned to the study, perturbed, grumbling to himself. *Who could be knocking in the dead of night like this?* As he stood in the middle of the room, Adnan listened again. When he could not hear the knocks any more, he sat down. But the moment he picked up his pen and began to write, they started again. They seemed to echo softly, as if coming from the bottom of a canyon.

He rose and this time listened really hard. And at last it became clear. The knocks were not at the front door but inside the concrete wall separating the study and the kitchen! But how could that be, unless there were a ghost, and Adnan did not believe in such things. If there wasn't anyone at the front

door, and there certainly wasn't anyone in the house, surely there could not be anyone inside the wall, he told himself. *Not alive!*

Then the knocks stopped. Adnan could not hear them any longer, even when he pressed his ear against the wall for a few seconds. Everything was silent. All he heard was the pounding in his chest and the rising and falling of his breath. He returned to his desk, collected his papers, switched off the light, and hastened to another room to continue his work.

In the stillness of the night, as Adnan continued working, the only sound in the air was the muted gliding of his pen. Then, abruptly, he stopped writing. He threw down the pen, as if suddenly it were something repulsive to him. He stared goggle-eyed at the piece of paper he had been working on. He could not believe what he had just written there. Everything was in order until the phrase, "...it is evident therefore that the accused did commit..." And then, inexplicably, appeared words that left him completely flummoxed. He had written them with his own hand—he must have, who else could have done it?—but they simply had nothing to do with the rest of what he was writing! He read them out: "...please remove a brick from the wall so that I may be free. I am Mariam binti Mohamad, wife of Mohamad bin Jaafar. I swear that on 17 May 1933, my husband gave me a poisoned cup of coffee, and then..." Adnan leapt up in shock, sending the chair crashing on the floor behind him. What on earth could have made him write something like that out of the blue? Aghast, he dashed out for the comfort of his bedroom, his nerves frayed. He could

not find sleep that night.

Next morning, as she prepared breakfast, Kak Jah found Adnan not quite himself. Something seemed to be troubling him. She said nothing, but all sorts of ideas began crossing her mind. She wondered if he was beginning to feel uncomfortable being alone with her. Could it mean he was beginning to like her, fall for her? *Goodness!* she thought. *At last!*

But Adnan simply left some cash for the marketing as usual, and went off to work. He hardly said anything to her.

Alone at home attending to her chores, Kak Jah could not help wondering about her employer and his strange mood that morning. She kept telling herself he must be falling for her. She told herself that she must try to look even more attractive and take even better care of him, so that she would remain in his heart.

And when, on his return from work that afternoon, the man came straight to the kitchen to look for her, Kak Jah really thought the moment she had been dreaming of had finally come.

"Cik Jah, would you join me in the living room, please? There's something I'd like to tell you," he told her. Her heart in her mouth, Kak Jah stopped all work and followed Adnan to the living room. Her face was flushed with embarrassment and the excitement building up inside her made her feel like she was going to explode. *Could this be it? Is he going to pour out his feelings towards me? What am I going to say?*

"Please have a seat, Cik Jah. It's not nice to let you stand, especially since I'm going to take some time saying what I have

to say,” said Adnan, gesturing her to the seat. “I’m not sure what you think of me. I bet that, by the time I finish this story, you’ll think I’m crazy.”

“Oh, why would I think of you that way?” replied Kak Jah. Adnan began relating the spooky experience he’d had the previous night. And as the story unfolded, the coy smile on Kak Jah’s face gradually gave way to a look of disappointment. Her eyes were fixed blankly on the floor below. Adnan’s voice grew indistinct to her as her mind wandered. She sighed silently, for it was clear now that her expectations had been way off the mark.

“So what do you think I should do, Cik Jah?” asked Adnan once he finished the story.

“I’m not sure I can help you, Encik Adnan. You were probably just hearing things. Maybe you’ve been working too hard and the pressure is beginning to affect your health. Perhaps you need a rest. Take a day or two off. That might do the trick.”

Adnan fell silent for a moment before replying, “Thank you, Cik Jah.”

That evening, Kak Jah went home feeling blue. All the dreams she had just had that morning were now shattered. She felt like never going to work again. She felt she could never face that man again. But then, as she thought over it, she realised she had no one to blame but herself. She had let her fantasies overwhelm her, and let herself dream about the man when he simply had no feelings for her.

Back in the house that evening, Adnan did not feel like

doing his work as usual. After dinner, he changed and went out, taking a bus to Geylang Serai, where he hailed a trishaw to Queen’s Theatre. By the time he arrived there, however, he was no longer sure he wanted to sit through a movie and, instead, ended up in the popular coffee shop next door, where he ordered a cup of tea and sat down to watch people pass by.

His thoughts were still filled with the extraordinary events of the previous night, when he suddenly felt someone tapping his shoulder and heard a familiar voice greeting him.

“Adnan, how are you? What are you doing here all by yourself?” Adnan turned around to find Ahmad standing behind him. A good friend, Ahmad also happened to be the man who had arranged the purchase of his house.

“Oh, it’s you, Mat. Have a seat. Haven’t seen you for quite a while. How are you? Care for some tea?” Adnan extended his hand.

Adnan ordered a cup of tea for his guest, and the two friends had a good chat about old times. Inevitably, the discussion drifted to the house he had bought with Ahmad’s help.

“How’s your new place?” asked Ahmad.

“Oh, great.”

“That’s good to hear. You know, various people have lived there before you, and all of them complained of strange noises. I don’t know. Maybe there is something about the place. But you don’t seem to have any problems there, do you? Anyway, what did they expect, huh? It’s an old house. Of course it creaks in all sorts of places.”

“Right,” replied Adnan, unwilling to say more.

“You know the previous owner? He’s now living in Penang. When he was here, he didn’t care about the house. He moved out and simply left it vacant for a whole year. He thought his wife might like to live there again, but she didn’t. Finally, he let the place out, and tenants came and went. None of them stayed there long. That’s why I’m glad to hear you’re comfortable there. If there’s anything not to your satisfaction, please call me. I’d be happy to help.”

When Ahmad left him later, Adnan felt there were even more clouds in his mind than before.

He did not reach home till it was almost midnight. He went straight to his study to get some stationery, and proceeded to write a letter to his brother to tell him about the happenings in the house and to seek his advice. He wrote at length, beginning from the purchase of the house until he heard those knockings the previous night.

At two in the morning, Adnan was still writing. Suddenly, in the midst of a sentence, he found himself staring at his own hand as it wrote “...and then he carried me and threw me into a hole in the wall of the storeroom, which he then cemented up. That is where I’ve been buried. I suspected all along that he had another woman, and I was right. But I never imagined he would do this to me. Now I cannot escape from this hole. Please, free me. I must find him, wherever he may be.”

Once again, Adnan’s instinctive response was to fling the pen onto the desk. “Ya Allah! What *is* this! Why am writing these words?” he shouted. His thoughts were a tangled mess. His body shivered with terror. The hair on the back of his

neck stood on end. He tore up everything he had written and rushed to the bedroom to lie down. He was really, really scared this time.

But even as he lay in bed, he once again heard a persistent knocking at the wall. He even thought he heard a raspy female voice pleading with him to remove a brick from the wall so that she could be free. It kept him awake all through the night.

Next morning, Kak Jah was shocked to find Adnan looking haggard, as though he had been sick for years. He did not say much and Kak Jah did not feel like asking too many questions either. After breakfast, he told her he was going out but not to the office, and that he would be home early that day.

Adnan went to see Ahmad. He had finally made up his mind to tell his friend about his frightening experiences. He had to find out if he knew anything about what might have happened there. Perhaps Ahmad could help him.

For several long minutes after he heard Adnan’s story, Ahmad sat back silently in his chair. Then he got up, went to his room, and returned with a file in his hands. “You might like to read these. You know, you could have told me about it last night when I asked you if there was anything wrong. There’s no point keeping this thing from me.” Adnan opened the file and read a newspaper cutting clipped inside.

Singapore, 31 May — Local police say they still cannot shed any light on the whereabouts of Madam Mariam binti Mohamad, reported missing two weeks ago. The wife of timber merchant, Mr Mohamad bin Jaafar, she was reportedly last seen by a train passenger at the Singapore Railway Station,

although this could not be confirmed. In fact, railway personnel interviewed say they believe it is a case of mistaken identity. The real Madam Mariam remains untraced to date. Anyone with any information that might assist police in their investigations is requested to see...

Adnan stared at Ahmad. "Is this Mohamad the former owner of the house? The one you told me about last night? Now living in Penang?"

"Right. His wife disappeared under inexplicable circumstances and has never been found since. He was supposedly reunited with her about a year later, but it wasn't her. Just someone who closely resembled her."

Adnan left Ahmad later and was still confused. He reached home to find lunch already on the table, but he did not feel like eating. Instead, he sat in the study pondering what Ahmad had told him, until Kak Jah popped in to remind him the food was getting cold.

"Are you still troubled by those noises? Like I said, it's probably just your imagination. But can I suggest something? Perhaps it would help if someone else besides you could hear these noises too. If you don't mind, I'd like to stay around a little longer today."

The suggestion took Adnan by surprise. He could not believe that this attractive maidservant of his would spend the night alone with him just to restore his peace of mind. But before he could reply, Kak Jah continued: "Don't worry. I don't mean to spend the night here. I just want to stay around a little longer than usual. In any case, my nephew Omar will

be here to keep us company. I'm expecting him at six."

That evening after dinner, Adnan, Kak Jah and her nephew Omar adjourned to the study to see if they could hear the knocks. They did not have to wait long.

"Cik Jah, Omar, do you hear that?" asked Adnan, drawing their attention when the knocks began. This time, they sounded gentle and unhurried.

Kak Jah and Omar nodded their heads to confirm that they too heard the knockings. They stared at the wall where the sounds appeared to be coming from. It was clear to everyone now—Adnan had not been imagining things.

"Get some tools," Kak Jah suggested all of a sudden.

"What? Whatever for?" asked Adnan.

"Let's break down this wall and see what's behind it. That's the only way we'll ever get to the bottom of this," she said confidently.

Soon, the three were busy hammering away at that part of the wall where they heard the knocking. No sooner had they begun when they noticed the knocks had stopped. Finally, with a lot of effort, they managed to remove a brick, and instantly a blast of cold air rushed out, briefly surrounding them. It took everyone by surprise.

"You're welcome," Adnan said, out of the blue.

"Beg your pardon?" asked Kak Jah, staring uncomprehendingly at him.

"I said, you're welcome."

"Did I say something?" The quizzical look was still on her face.

"You said thank you, right?" asked Adnan, his face now

mirroring Kak Jah's look.

"No. Did I?"

"But I thought I heard you... I thought I heard someone, a woman saying..."

"What did she say?" asked Kak Jah.

"She said thank you!"

The three of them spent a few moments staring at each other.

Resuming work, they widened the hole they had just made. Brick by brick, they broke down the wall until it revealed its long-held secret—a human skeleton with long hair still on its head and a full set of teeth still in its jaws, covered by a woman's clothes.

Adnan immediately instructed Omar to call the police while he and Kak Jah stood guard over their macabre find. He was quite shaken, but Kak Jah looked surprisingly cool and collected. There was no sign of fear in her voice when she remarked with a coy smile, "Well, I'm sure you can have your peace of mind, now that this thing is over. No more noises to trouble you in the middle of the night. But that's the thing, you see. You've been working too hard. You must take good care of yourself. This time, we happened to be around to help you. But who'll look after you if you fall ill the next time?"

Adnan listened to her with his mouth agape. He felt a fluttering in his stomach and the blood rushing from his face. Kak Jah had never spoken to him like that before. The tone, and the sentiments they revealed, were like a bombshell to him. And they knocked enough sense into him to make him take proper notice for the first time.

A month after the incident, a swarm of guests descended upon Adnan's house to help him celebrate the end of his bachelor days. The bride was, of course, his maidservant of five years. Three days after the wedding, the happy newlyweds were in the kitchen, Kak Jah preparing breakfast and Adnan browsing through the morning papers. "Listen to this, Jah. *Penang — Local police are investigating the grisly murder last night of a well-known local timber merchant, Mohamad bin Jaafar, who was found strangled at home. Police are still hunting for the killer, believed to be a woman with long fingernails.*"

"What a weird story," Adnan continued, as he folded the paper up.

"Well, all kinds of weird stories make this world, dear. Remember that woman?" said Kak Jah, smiling.

"Right. Poor woman. My goodness! Ten long years imprisoned within that wall."

Same here, thought Kak Jah. *Five long years in the cold, knocking at the door to your heart, getting no response. You didn't notice a thing, did you? Work was all you thought about. Thank God you heard at last.* And thus it seemed, when Adnan had demolished that wall in his study that fateful night, he set free not one, but two long-suffering souls.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Othman Wok was Singapore's first Minister for Social Affairs, serving from October 1963 to June 1977. He was also Singapore's ambassador to Indonesia and served on the boards of the Singapore Tourism Board and Sentosa Development Corporation. For his political, economic and social contributions to the nation-building of Singapore, he was awarded the Order of Nila Utama (2nd Class) in 1983 by President Devan Nair.

After retiring from politics in 1981, Othman was able to devote more time to writing, and became a regular writer of horror tales for a Malaysian weekend newspaper, *Mingguan Malaysia*. He published his biography, *Never in My Wildest Dreams*, in 2000, a project he agreed to in 1994 at the suggestion of his daughter, Lily. Othman also began compiling the short stories that he had written for various newspapers and magazines over the decades. Some of his short story collections include *Malayan Horror: Macabre Tales from Singapore and Malaysia in the 50's* (1991), *Kisah-kisah Seram dan Misteri* (1995) and *Unseen Occupants and Other Chilling Tales* (2006).

Othman passed away on 17 April 2017 at the age of ninety-two.

“A must-read for those hungry for a slice of local horror.”

—Christina Sng, Stoker Award-winning author
of *A Collection of Nightmares*

Years before his political career took off, Othman Wok pioneered the writing of ghost stories and horror fiction in Singapore and Malaysia. *A Mosque in the Jungle* assembles two dozen of his best classic ghost stories. Curated by Singapore Literature Prize-winning author Ng Yi-Sheng, this book provides a fascinating overview of Othman’s fiction, and a window into the work of someone the *Malay Mail* described as a “literary genius.”

“Classic spooky tales that will keep you turning the page.”

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