

TRIPLE 9 SLEUTHS

DANGEROUS DESPAIR



MARANNA CHAN

PRAISE FOR THE TRIPLE NINE SLEUTHS SERIES

“The books are full of excitement. Triple Nine Sleuths is the best detective series I have ever read. I can’t wait for the next book!”—Michelle, 11

“The books are thrilling and the characters are hilarious. I think everyone should read them.”
—Regina, 13

“I couldn’t take my eyes off the book. The author describes the action so well that when I read the part about the murder case, I could really imagine the scene playing in my head. If anyone is looking for a good local mystery series, I would definitely recommend the Triple Nine Sleuths series.”
—Anna, 11

“I got so inspired reading the series that I want to be an author when I grow up, just like Maranna Chan.”—Andrea, 10

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DANGEROUS REVELATIONS

TRIPLE 9 SLEUTHS

DANGEROUS DESPAIR



MARANNA CHAN



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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters,
places, and incidents either are the product of
the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.
Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead,
events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

For Mom

JACOB SEAH

TRIA: THE NARCISSIST

He was only concerned about his image

and he coveted the success others had.

He was arrogant, condescending, boastful

and believed he had to be the best by any means.

He was devious, deceptive and put on

false faces to gain whatever he wanted.

He lied and cheated on his spouse without remorse.

He paid for his sins.

CHAPTER 1

THE SCHOOL BELL rang, marking the end of the school day. Corey and Stacy were walking out through the school gate together. It was another brilliant sunny day. Corey closed her eyes, relishing the breeze that brushed across her face. Corey loved the breeze. It was one of the nice things about living in an island city, she thought.

“Hey, Corey, you want to do the Maths homework together?” Stacy asked as she flicked her long wavy hair back. Stacy Rodriguez was a Eurasian with a tan that gave away the fact that she loved being outdoors. To Stacy, Corey was not only her best friend but also the smartest kid in Yuan Hwa Secondary School. Cordelia Lam had been the top scorer in the previous year’s Primary School Leaving Examination—the important exam that all Primary Six students in Singapore took—but she was a painfully shy girl. Stacy was the only person in school Corey talked to besides her brother, Colton Lam.

“Er...not really. You know I do my homework much faster without you babbling on about how cute Ryan is,”

Corey said and laughed, revealing pearly whites clamped with braces.

“No talking about Ryan today, just maths. I promise,” Stacy said. “I need some help. Maybe you could teach me how you get the answers?”

“I think you just want the answers off me,” Corey sighed.

“If that would be easier than teaching me, then that’s fine too,” Stacy replied, grinning at Corey. There were perks to having a smart friend.

“I know all your tricks. Why do you study only when there’s a test or exam coming up? It’s really the harder way to get through school. If you just do all your homework consistently, you’ll already know the material by the time the exams come,” Corey explained.

“I didn’t understand today’s Maths lesson,” Stacy said, “so I can’t do the homework. Miss Wu explained how ‘a’ was equal to one, right? But then in another sum, ‘a’ was equal to three! I’m totally confused! She spent 15 minutes proving it was equal to one and then she tells us it’s equal to three?”

“You must have been dreaming in class,” Corey said.

Stacy couldn’t deny that. She had been dreaming

up smart retorts she could impress Ryan with, if he spoke to her again. “Okay, just help me this once more. Please?” Stacy pleaded.

“Okay, I guess.” Corey gave in. The girls walked towards the recently upgraded blocks of flats, which had been painted gaudy cobalt blue and chartreuse. Corey lived in Block 822, which was a ten-minute walk from school. Stacy lived in the next block, Block 819. The girls had lived in the same neighbourhood and had played together at the same playground for 10 years.

“Hey!” The girls heard Colton’s voice from behind them. Colton had seen his sister and Stacy walking ahead and had run to catch up with them. “Shall we do the Maths homework together? I couldn’t understand Miss Wu’s mumbo jumbo,” he said, sounding breathless. Stacy gave Corey an ‘I told you so’ look.

Because Colton and Corey were born in the same year—Colton in January and Corey in December—they were in the same year in school. The siblings didn’t look alike. Colton had angular features like their father and Corey had rounder features like their mother.

“Fine. But I’m not letting you copy my work,” Corey said.

“Who said anything about copying?” Colton said defensively.

“Stacy did,” Corey said.

“I did not!” Stacy retorted. “‘Copy’ is such a horrible word. I said ‘help’.”

“Any reply from Paula yet?” Colton asked Stacy. Stacy wanted to find out more about her mother, Cybil Rodriguez, who had died when Stacy was three years old. Colton had suggested Stacy create a Facebook account in her mother’s name and see if anyone would add her as a friend. Last week, she had received a curious message from a certain Paula De Souza.

“Who?” Stacy asked, wondering who in school was called Paula.

“Paula De Souza, the person who sent a message saying ‘I thought you were murdered’ to your mom’s Facebook account,” Colton said.

“Oh, that Paula! I’m still waiting for a reply. Asking her who she was might not have been such a great idea,” Stacy said. “She’s probably thinking, ‘What? You don’t remember me? You’ve got amnesia or something?’ or ‘What have you done with the real Cybil Rodriguez?’” Corey and Colton were amused by Stacy’s dramatic ways.

They heard the bell of the ice cream man who knew exactly what time most students would head home and took that opportunity to park his vehicle just outside the school premises. Under his rainbow-coloured umbrella, he scooped up ice cream from a stainless steel tub that had been attached to his motorcycle like a sidecar.

“Ice cream! You guys want any?” Stacy said and started chanting, “I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream!”

“I’m lactose intolerant. I’ll pass,” Colton said. Though it was nearly two o’clock and he was hungry, Colton didn’t want to spoil his appetite for the lunch that Grandma would have prepared.

“I’ll get one too.” Corey thought maybe an ice cream would relieve some of her hunger. She had only had a red bean bun for lunch as she couldn’t bear to eat any meat recently. Thinking of eating meat made her feel sick.

“I’ll walk home first to have lunch. I’ll meet you both back home.” Colton waved and walked off. The girls were going to take forever to get home!

Colton looked at Stacy’s block from a distance and suddenly stopped in his tracks. It happened so fast, he couldn’t believe his eyes! He heard a loud thud as the

body hit the ground. Filled with trepidation, he felt himself breaking out in a cold sweat. Should he take a look? Would the person need help? He wanted to go closer but his legs were shaking. Could anyone survive that fall? What if the person was dead? He decided to call the police. As he called Serangoon Neighbourhood Police Centre, he noticed that his palms were sweaty. Corporal Faris, a young police officer who worked there, answered the call. Colton recognised his voice. The corporal was his friend.

“Hello, Corporal Faris. I just saw somebody fall out of a window in Block 819.” Colton’s voice cracked. He looked up again. “I think the person fell from the eighth floor. There’s only one flat with its window grilles open wide,” Colton reported, and then he saw a hand pull back a curtain! “Hey! There’s someone there!” Colton gasped.

“We’re on our way,” Corporal Faris said, and hung up.

Colton put his hand over his eyebrows to shield his eyes from the glare of the sunlight so he could see more clearly. There was definitely someone in the flat on the eighth floor but he could only see a faint silhouette. In the blink of an eye, the silhouette disappeared. Colton

started running towards the block. His curiosity was piqued; he needed to see who was in the flat. Why hadn’t the person stopped the tragedy from happening? Could it be a murder? He ran towards the block without turning to look at the body. He remembered his father coming home one day with his face looking green because he had gone to take a look at an accident scene. Pa had felt sick for the whole week and had said he regretted doing that.

Colton took the lift up to the eighth floor. The lift stank of urine and its walls were vandalised with the phrase ‘O\$P\$’ scrawled in black marker pen ink—‘owe money, pay money’, an ominous warning from loan sharks to debtors who were late in paying them back. The block was completely made up of one-room flats. The dark corridor was poorly lit with flickering fluorescent tubes. There were about 30 homes on each side of the corridor. Colton saw a nurse knocking on the door of the flat that the person had fallen from.

“Auntie Lee!” The nurse was still knocking, calling out for someone to open up. She stopped knocking and looked at Colton with a quizzical expression. “Are you looking for Auntie Lee too?” she asked.

“Someone fell from this flat. I came to see if there was anyone inside,” Colton explained. Colton looked at the nurse. She was the most exquisite thing he had ever seen.

“What do you mean ‘fell from this flat?’” the nurse asked, her eyes widening. Colton felt he could drown himself in those eyes. The nurse resembled Ku Hye-sun, Grandma’s favourite Korean actress.

“Someone fell to her death from this flat,” Colton tried to explain more clearly, gesturing as best as he could.

“Are you sure she fell from here?” the nurse asked. She started knocking on the door again. But no one answered.

“Yes!” Colton said.

“Oh dear! This is terrible!” the nurse gasped. “I should have been with her earlier. I’m late for my visit.”

Colton could see the nurse was truly upset. She was in her twenties and looked pretty in her white uniform. She had large expressive eyes and the way she bit her lip anxiously made her look like a damsel in distress, Colton thought. There was a sweet and gentle way about her. Colton could see how the elderly would take to her. The nurse took out her mobile phone. “I’ve got to call the police,” she said.

“I’ve done that already. They are on their way,” Colton said. “Maybe you should stay and talk to the police since you knew Auntie Lee,” he suggested.

Corporal Faris and his colleague Sergeant Rani arrived at the scene, carrying with them a crowbar and a lock cutter. “You said you saw somebody in the flat?” Corporal Faris asked Colton, who was still looking at the pretty nurse.

“Yes, the person could still be inside the flat,” Colton insisted.

“But I’ve been knocking and knocking on the door. No one’s answering,” the nurse said.

“Are you a relative?” Corporal Faris asked the nurse.

“I’m Nurse Anna from St Mark’s Eldercare, which is on the ground floor of this block. I was scheduled for a house visit with Auntie Lee but I was late. I have been knocking on the door but there has been no answer,” she replied in a weak voice. Corporal Faris wrote down what Nurse Anna said.

“Can I see some identification, please?” Corporal Faris asked. Nurse Anna handed him her identity card and Corporal Faris took down her particulars.

“You work at the eldercare centre downstairs?”

"Yes," Nurse Anna confirmed.

"We'll call you if we need a statement. Thank you." Corporal Faris returned Nurse Anna her identity card.

"Yes. I had better get back downstairs," she said, and she left the police to do their job.

Corporal Faris turned to Colton and said, "I may need to write up a report on what you've witnessed. Can you wait downstairs, please?" Colton complied. He took the lift back downstairs and saw that the crime scene had been cordoned off and the body covered up with a wide dark blue tent. There were two other policemen fending off the nosy neighbours standing around. Stacy and Corey were there. They were eating ice cream!

"How can you eat with a dead body around?" Colton remarked.

"What dead body? All we see is a tent," Stacy replied.

"I saw the person fall," Colton told them.

"Gross!" Stacy said. "Was there a lot of blood and... brain matter splattering? Urgh!"

"I didn't look at the body," Colton confessed, feeling sick at the image Stacy had painted. "I didn't want to spoil my appetite before lunch."

"Wise," Corey said, and felt she couldn't give her ice

cream another lick. She looked at Stacy, who was still voraciously licking her ice cream before it melted. She seemed unperturbed by what had just happened.

"I saw someone in the flat. Maybe the victim could have been pushed out of the window," Colton continued.

"Are you sure?" Stacy couldn't believe Colton.

"You're saying it's a...murder?" Corey asked.

"It could be. Or else why didn't the person stop the victim from falling out of the window? Corporal Faris and Sergeant Rani are up there now, looking for the perpetrator," Colton said.

Corporal Faris came back downstairs after 15 minutes and asked Colton what he had seen. Colton took him back to the exact spot in which he had stood, 30 metres away from the block.

"There was nobody in the flat when Sergeant Rani and I broke in. Did all three of you see somebody in the flat?" Corporal Faris asked.

"No," Stacy replied. "We didn't see anything. We were buying ice cream."

"I was the only one who saw a hand pulling the curtain back, and a silhouette," Colton said. "But I didn't see the person's face."

“We’ll look into it,” Corporal Faris said to Colton. “I’m sorry you had to see that. I hope it doesn’t give you nightmares. Thanks for calling us.” He ruffled Colton’s hair. Corporal Faris and Sergeant Rani turned back to the crime scene.

“Well, I guess we’ll just have to leave it to the police,” Stacy said, walking towards the Lam residence with Corey and Colton.

“But I kind of get the feeling what you said about what you saw...” Corey said to Colton.

Colton completed the sentence, “...fell on stony ground.”

CHAPTER 2

COREY AND COLTON lived on the second floor of Block 822, in a corner four-room flat with their parents and their grandma. The flat’s walls were painted in a cheery yellow. The teak furniture and pictures on the walls were collected from overseas trips. They made the flat homely, like a little cottage house.

“Hi, Grandma!” Corey and Colton greeted their grandmother, who was engrossed in a Korean television drama. She was a plump old lady with regularly permed short grey hair. Snowy ran to Colton and lifted his front paws onto Colton’s legs. Snowy was a white terrier puppy and in Colton’s opinion, the cutest dog in the world. Colton picked up his dog and cuddled him.

“Hello, Auntie,” Stacy greeted Grandma too.

Grandma looked at the clock. Corey explained, “We are a little late because someone fell from the eighth floor of Stacy’s block and we went to take a look.”

“You saw a dead body?” Grandma was concerned.

“No, we didn’t see anything. The police covered it with

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MARANNA CHAN has spent much of her life in children's education. She has been a director for a Montessori school and a trainer in phonics and speech and drama. She has also worked as a course developer for English enrichment programmes for secondary school students. But her greatest passion is entertaining and sharing her imagination with children through her stories. In her free time, Maranna stays up late watching back-to-back episodes of crime investigation television series. The *Triple Nine Sleuths* series is her debut writing effort. You can visit her websites at tripleninesleuths.wordpress.com and facebook.com/TripleNineSleuths.

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DANGEROUS ISLAND

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"If Alfred Hitchcock's Three Investigators were reincarnated as Singaporeans, they'd be the Triple Nine Sleuths."—*The Sunday Times*



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No one believes Colton when he suspects foul play after witnessing an elderly woman fall to her death from her high-rise flat. The police classify it as suicide, but Colton knows the truth. Corey and Stacy rally to help him investigate and the Triple Nine Sleuths must race against time as danger is beginning to strike closer and closer to home.

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