

TRIPLE 9 SLEUTHS

DANGEROUS CONSPIRACY



MARANNA CHAN

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DANGEROUS CONSPIRACY



MARANNA CHAN



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Published in Singapore by Epigram Books.
www.epigrambooks.sg

Cover design by Lydia Wong
Cover illustration by Ray Toh
Edited by Dan Koh

National Library Board Singapore
Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Chan, Maranna, 1973-

Dangerous conspiracy / Maranna Chan.
– Singapore : Epigram Books, 2014.

pages cm. – (Triple nine sleuths)

ISBN : 978-981-07-8032-6 (paperback)
ISBN : 978-981-07-8033-3 (ebook)

1. Criminal investigation – Juvenile fiction.
2. Conspiracy – Juvenile fiction.
I. Title. II. Series: Triple nine sleuths.

PZ7

S823 -- dc23 OCN868193851

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 1

For Jessica Alejandro
Since you like poems...

*There was a chapter rarely visited
Memories of returned manuscripts and rejections
Only a folder in my D drive reflected
Years of forgotten aspirations*

*Then, like a sunbeam
Hope shone through
Unexpectedly, unreal, like a dream
Unreal it was for me, not you*

*You elucidated how to succeed
Reminded me of a lost chapter
Encouraged me to dust off what's been buried
And persevere to become a writer*

*Now I'm published, finally breaking ground
Looking back at this journey anew
It was more than a lost chapter I've found
I've found a wonderful friend in you*

MERYL STEIN

PENTE: THE ISOLATED CYNIC

*Her explorations into dark and disturbing subjects
added fuel to her anxieties about the world and herself.*

She was eccentric and kept to her own thoughts.

*She used her knowledge to unsettle others,
stirring up debates and hostility.*

*She was fascinated by power
and was suspicious of those who
had power over her.*

She paid for her sins.

CHAPTER 1

“HEY, STACY,” COLTON Lam greeted his close friend as he answered the door.

“What’s wrong with your voice? It’s hoarse,” Stacy Rodriguez said. She noticed Colton was eye to eye with her now. It looked like he was going through a growth spurt.

“I don’t know. It’s not sore or anything. I think it’s cracking,” Colton said.

“Is your sister home?” Stacy asked.

“She’s locked herself in her room as usual,” Colton said. “It’s all because of that book you bought for her.” As soon as their Secondary 1 final examinations had ended, Corey had begun talking about wanting to get a how-to book on creating a smartphone app. But it was too expensive, so she had been looking for a second-hand copy endlessly, until Stacy couldn’t take it and went to buy the book for Corey. Though Corey was grateful, she felt that Stacy had spent her money unnecessarily. Stacy had to listen to a daylong lecture

from Corey about budgeting, how to save money and which bank offered the best interest rate. It drove her crazy.

“Corey!” Stacy called as she knocked at Corey’s bedroom door. Corey had shut herself up in her room all week and Stacy was getting bored. It was the holidays! They had been the best of friends their whole lives, but now Corey wouldn’t do anything except stay in her room. She was becoming weirder and weirder.

“Open up!” Stacy yelled.

The door finally opened. “What’s up?” Corey asked.

“Apparently nothing!” Stacy complained. “You’ve been cooped up in your room all week! What’s going on? I’m taking back the book I gave you.”

“I’m creating an app,” Corey finally confessed.

“That’s what’s been keeping you in here all week?” Stacy asked.

“It’ll probably take a month to finish it,” Corey said.

“What? A month?” Stacy asked. “Then what’s going to happen to me?”

“You still have Colton,” Corey suggested. Colton grunted.

“Look, I won a cruise trip for four! I want you and Colton to come with Nana and I. You’re not locking

yourself in your room throughout our holidays. I’m so regretting buying you that book,” Stacy said, pointing to the well-thumbed present she had given Corey.

“You won a cruise trip?” Corey asked incredulously. “How?”

“I bought some jelly beans and sent in the bags,” Stacy explained. She had seen the contest in 7-Eleven at Serangoon’s nex mall and took a picture of it to show Corey. She knew Corey wouldn’t agree to go if she knew the truth. “I need your details. Like your passport number and its expiry date.”

“What’s there to do on a cruise?” Corey asked, looking at the picture and trying to make out the small and blurred fine print.

“Eat,” Colton suggested, already thinking of the smorgasbord of food on board.

“We could swim in the pool till our muscles get all toned, sunbathe till our skin glow. At night, we could go to the deck and gaze at the gazillion stars till our eyes dazzle,” Stacy added. “There’s karaoke, a movie theatre and live shows. They have shops and everything! You name it, they have it. It’s a four-night cruise, with two ports of call at Phuket and Langkawi.”

“What’s the cruise ship’s name?” Corey asked, ready to check the Internet on her laptop for the details. Stacy and Colton entered her room.

“*Royale Victoria*, I think,” Stacy replied. As Corey looked at the cruise’s website, Stacy knew that Corey was in.

“Is there Wi-Fi?” Colton asked.

“There’s Wi-Fi but you’ll have to pay for it,” Corey said.

“I’ll pay for it. No problemo,” Stacy said.

“Using the money you inherited?” Corey asked. While searching through her missing mother’s belongings a few months ago, Stacy had discovered a bankbook with \$100,000 to her name.

“Yes.” Stacy’s eyes gleamed.

“Have you asked your nana about it?” Corey asked.

“To ask or not to ask?” Stacy sighed. “That’s the question.”

“Ask!” Colton said.

“What if she confiscates it?” Stacy said.

“Confiscate?” Corey asked.

“She’ll lock up all the money in some investment thing and then when everything goes south, I’d have lost all my money,” Stacy said.

“You have such an imagination,” Corey said.

“Well, she’ll lock up the money somewhere, I’m sure,” Stacy said.

“You’re probably right. Which adult in their right mind would allow a 13-year-old to hold \$100,000?” Corey reasoned.

“Well, actually it’s now \$105,000,” Stacy explained, “I went to the bank and drew out some money to see if it was real and when they updated the bankbook, there was another \$5000 in accumulated interest over 10 years!”

“Have you ever wondered who opened that account for you and put in all that money?” Corey asked.

“It must have been my father. Samuel Oei mentioned that my father ran away with a sum of money. This \$100,000 could have been it,” Stacy speculated.

“He should have put it in a trust fund for you till you turned 21. Now, the money will be quickly squandered off,” Corey said.

“Hello? He was running away with the money. This trust fund thing would be the last thing on his mind,” Colton said.

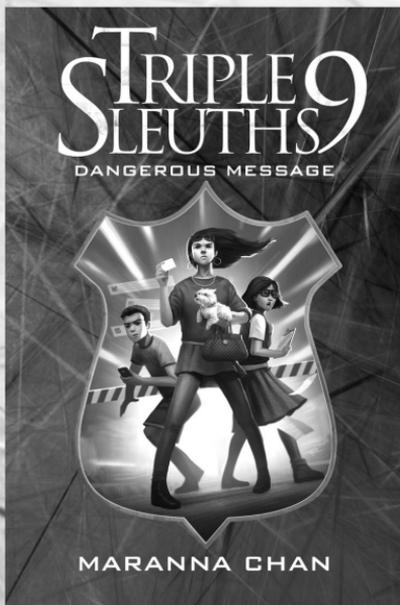
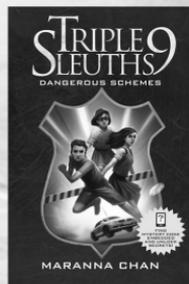
“Anyway, I’m not going to squander it all away,”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maranna Chan is a full-time writer with a background in education, having taught children of various ages, ranging from preschoolers to secondary school students. Maranna enjoys studying human behaviour and figuring out the personality types of those around her. A wife, and a mother to a young child and two hamsters, Maranna loves staying up late to watch back-to-back episodes of her favourite criminal investigation television series. That, she justifies, is for research.

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