

7.
THE TAXI DRIVER FROM HELL

*“The why of murder always fascinates me so much more than
the how.”*

– Ann Rule, American crime writer

It was raining hard, and the windows of the car were all fogged up. The car was parked in a secluded area near Shing Mun River in Sha Tin.

There was a couple sitting in the back seat. He was in his twenties and she was 17. They sat there chatting politely without so much as touching each others' clothing. They could easily be mistaken for a young couple dating for the first time and having yet to break the ice. The young man asked her questions, and she politely answered them. She seemed eager to please. During a long pause in the conversation he asked: “I shut the engine off and the air-con is not on, are you hot?” She shook her head.

Being hot was the least of her problems. The car was a taxi and the man sitting next to her was the taxi driver and a stranger. He picked her up earlier on in Tsim Sha Tsui. She directed him

to drive to a housing estate in Fo Tan, but after driving through the Lion Rock Tunnel, he turned his taxi into a wooded area near Shing Mun River. After he stopped the car, he abruptly entered the back seat area and to her horror forcibly handcuffed her to the front seat. He then sat down next to her and started a conversation. A few hours later, he strangled her.

She would be his fourth victim.

Every major city in the world has a serial killer among its citizens, and Hong Kong is no exception. We had our counterpart of Jack the Ripper, the Boston Strangler, Ted Bundy, John Wayne Gacy, and Jeffrey Dahmer.

Hong Kong's monster was named Lam Kor-wan, a taxi driver from hell.

During 1982 and 1983, he strangled four women, all passengers in the taxi he drove.

Every woman he killed was later dismembered with surgical precision. He also had post-mortem sex with one of them, and dissected and pickled a breast and the vagina from another.

Lam spent his formative years in Malaysia. Nothing was particularly noteworthy about his childhood, except that his father was ill-tempered and dished out corporal punishment on a frequent basis. The beatings stopped when the family relocated to Hong Kong. By then Lam was already in his early teens. Their family flat was located in grotty To Kwa Wan where property prices were among the lowest in the city.

He had been a loner all his life. In school, he had no friends and was shy and withdrawn in the company of girls. After graduating

from secondary school, he tried different jobs, but none worked out. He settled for a career as a taxi driver because he was not a people person, and it was not in his nature to conform to the rules and regulations attached to most other jobs. Being a taxi driver meant relative freedom and no human contact except the minimum required in dealing with passengers. He took the night shift because he also preferred having minimal contact with his own family – his hours at home were the exact opposite to theirs.

To his family, his only interests in life were photography and the electronic chess set he had carried with him everywhere he went since he was a boy. Unbeknown to them, his real obsession was pornography. His interest in photography was an offshoot of pornography. In the tiny bedroom he shared with his younger brother, when no one was around, he used his expensive photographic equipment to choreograph his own version of pornography by producing life-size replicas of naked women in provocative poses from pornographic magazines he subscribed to from overseas. He stored them under his bed in securely locked boxes.

No one was allowed to touch his stuff. His brother tried it once, and Lam went berserk. It was during that incident that his family caught a scary glimpse of his violent streak.

To put his interest in photography into a more revealing and disquieting focus: when he bought a Polaroid camera, he didn't use it to take pictures of scenic sights or family gatherings. Instead, he hung around public toilets, taking snaps of women with their

pants down by reaching under the cubicle with his Polaroid camera. He gave up after a while because on a few occasions he messed with the wrong women. They came out screaming and kicking, even with their pants down, as soon as the flashlight went off. Besides, the quality of the photos was so poor it was not worth the effort and risk involved.

Lam was eager to find out everything about the female body. He had never had a girlfriend, or any woman for that matter. He knew where all the red-light districts were, and could easily have paid for sex if he really wanted it. It wouldn't have been difficult in this town, especially for a night-shift taxi driver. All taxi drivers knew to drive around Tsim Sha Tsui (TST) looking for a fare after midnight and TST was where the flesh trade flourished. Lam had his share of driving coquettish young women in sexy clothes back to their domiciles all over Hong Kong in the wee hours of early mornings. Some would be too intoxicated to make it out of the taxi and Lam had to help them, and had also helped himself to groping them.

He wanted to see and touch the female body, but the problem was that he didn't want any female to see and touch his. He hated his own body. In the porn magazines he slobbered over, all the men had well-toned muscular bodies and their phalluses were enormous compared to what he was born with. He was certain that women would laugh at him when they saw him in the nude.

He committed his first murder in the early morning of the 3rd of February, 1982. It wasn't a snap decision or a crime of

passion, it was unquestionably a premeditated crime. He already had under his bed an electric saw and a roll of plastic sheets – unlikely household items for a Hong Kong flat-dweller.

His first victim was a 22-year-old veteran of the sex industry. A few months before, she had graduated from being one of the girls to become the manager of a nightclub in TST. In her line of work, when a customer bought you a drink, you had no choice but to give face and drink it. She had given face to too many customers that night, and she was very inebriated. It wasn't her first time getting drunk at three o'clock in the morning, and she took pride in always being able to find her way home.

It was raining, and taxis were hard to come by when it rained. Lam was able to cherry-pick his customers and he chose this young woman staggering out of a nightclub. When she reeled into Lam's taxi, she was slurring her destination before she passed out cold in the back seat.

She sobered up briefly when the taxi drove through Mong Kok. She thought of an old colleague of hers who had recently opened a bar in nearby Boundary Street and she considered having a few more drinks there. She yelled at Lam to change course and destination. When the taxi reached Boundary Street, she realized she was too drunk to have any more alcohol, so she changed her mind again and ordered Lam to drive to Sham Shui Po where she lived, before she passed out.

Lam became quite annoyed with this woman, whom he considered "useless to society" to start with. He took a deep breath and thought: "She is such a bad girl I should have no

qualms in getting rid of her for the good of society.” Even a serial killer needs some kind of rationalization for his first murder.

Instead of going to Sham Shui Po he drove the car along Boundary Street, turned left on Waterloo Road, and found a quiet spot near a small park in Kowloon Tong. At that hour, one could run around naked in Kowloon Tong without being noticed. He had in the trunk a pair of handcuffs, a knife, and a piece of electric cord about four feet long. The handcuffs and knife wouldn't be necessary. He took the electric cord, went into the back seat and found the young woman sleeping on her side. He slipped the cord around her neck, turned her facing down, and pressed his right knee into her shoulder blades for leverage. He pulled on the cord with all his might.

There was not much resistance from the woman. Her arms flinched a little, and she made a muted guttural noise. He counted to a hundred, and loosened the electric cord, but changed his mind, tightened the cord again, and counted to another hundred. It was his first time after all; he wanted to make sure he had done the job right.

When he turned the lifeless body of the young woman face up, he noticed the bulging, congested eyes and red-and-purple blotches all over her face and neck above the strangulation mark. The pressure around her neck had pushed her tongue forward and its tip was seen protruding through her parted lips. He pushed the lifeless body face down onto the floor in the back seat.

He put the electric cord away and glanced at his watch which showed the time close to four o'clock. He had another hour to

kill before his usual time to go home. He gathered the woman's belongings, including a light jacket, some cheap jewelry, and her purse. There was only HK\$200 in the purse and he took it. He threw all her stuff into a garbage bin around the corner.

When he drove home to To Kwa Wan and parked his taxi in its usual spot, it was almost five o'clock in the morning. He went over to take a look at the entrance and foyer of his building, and as expected, there was no people traffic and the security guard was sleeping soundly in his makeshift bed in a dark corner.

He carried the body of the young woman over his shoulder and went into the elevator without making a sound. He entered his flat quietly and hid the body underneath the sofa in the living room. Weeks before, he had hidden himself in the same spot and he knew for sure there was enough room for a body, and the body would be well concealed.

He lay down in his bed but didn't bother with sleep. There was a lot of work ahead and he was too excited with anticipation.

His parents and his younger brother were all gone by 8.30am but he waited until nine to spring into action. He first took out his camera and loaded it with a new roll of film. He then covered the floor and the furniture of his small bedroom with thin, broad plastic sheets, held in place by masking tape. He plugged in the electric saw, and when he switched it on, it made a loud whirring noise as expected of a powerful tool that was engineered to cut through any object in its way.

He brought out the body of the young woman and placed it on the plastic sheet on the floor. He took all her clothes off, and