

SURVEILLANCE

**Copyright © 2007 John Ling
www.johnling.net**

1

The woman in the hotel room upstairs was going to be raped.

Maya watched the scene play out on the four monitors in front of her. Each covered a different angle. The feeds were live and accompanied by sound.

Whimpering, shaking, the woman backed up against a wall, its wood creaking. “*Tolong. Jangan.*” Please. Don’t.

But her attacker only moved closer, boxing her in. At least ten kilos overweight, he stared at the woman through owlsh glasses.

Maya bit her lip, trying not to cringe.

The evening sun had heated up her room and her blouse was stuck to her skin. The air smelled of *kretek* and *arrack*—cheap cigarettes and cheap liquor; the stink of past occupants. But Maya was so absorbed, she barely noticed any of that.

With her were two members of her cell.

The first was Omar, lean and angular. He operated the hidden cameras with a console, panning and tilting and zooming where needed.

The second was Kumaran, heavysset with a narrow moustache. He received the feeds on his laptop, working to condense them into a single, seamless recording.

Right now, the woman was screaming.

The man had grabbed her by her shoulders, pulling at the straps of her tank top. When she tried to break free, he slammed her against the wall.

Once.

Twice.

Until she fell.

Then he dragged her by the arm towards the bed.

The woman was so small, she didn't stand a chance.

Maya took a breath, puffed her cheeks, and exhaled. Her throat felt like a screw being tightened. She had seen enough. Averting her eyes, she looked at Omar, then Kumaran, before making for the door.

"I will be downstairs," Maya said. "Send the footage to my phone."

2

Maya made her way into the lobby, walking past the hotel's sad-eyed, ancient-faced proprietor. He sat behind the reception, hunched over a Chinese newspaper, with a table fan oscillating beside him.

Maya took a look and figured he was reading the *Oriental Daily News*, a left-wing publication well-known for its conspiracy theories.

The headline on the page was about a government minister threatening to soak the *keris*—the traditional Malay dagger—in Chinese blood.

Same old shit, Maya thought. The politics of race and fear.

She stepped out of the hotel's entrance and into the open-air parking lot, the ground sandy and unpaved. The main streets were close by and the traffic was thunderous. The dust and the exhaust made her nose twitch.

Maya paused and scanned her surroundings, trying to pick out anything that didn't belong, anything that might pose a threat. But the only thing she saw was a flock of crows feasting on rubbish from an overflowing dumpster. They cawed and flapped their wings, as if warning her to stay away.

Fair enough.

Maya walked towards a Proton on the far end of the lot, approaching it from the rear. She opened the passenger's side door and got in.

Chen, the third member of her cell, was on the driver's side. Broad-shouldered but small-jawed, he rested his hands on the steering wheel.

"Is he coming down?" Chen asked.

"Not yet," Maya said. "Let's wait a while."

She pulled out her phone and held it, her fingers flexing.

The man they had under surveillance was Thean See Xien, a familiar face with a familiar routine in this part of town. He usually swung by on Mondays and Fridays, just after five o'clock, looking to have some fun before going home.

Because Thean was a judge, he knew the consequences of rape. But that didn't stop him from being thrilled by it. So he paid prostitutes to indulge in his fantasy. And he paid well. Usually twice the going rate. Sometimes triple.

Maya's phone chimed and vibrated.

She raised it, opening a file from Kumaran.

It was a snippet of Thean thrusting into the woman, the bed beneath them squeaking. The editing was first-rate, offering close-ups and wide-shots, from the top, from the left, from the right.

Chen craned his neck. "Looks good."

Maya said nothing, clicking off the file, her stomach feeling acidic.

They continued to wait.

Then she received a text message from Omar.

Maya read it. "The subject is on his way. Get ready."

Chen slid his key into the ignition.

Soon enough, Thean emerged from the hotel with his hair slick and combed back. He had obviously taken a shower. Ambling towards his Toyota, he unlocked it and got in without so much as a look around.

He started his engine.

When he pulled out of the parking lot, they followed him.