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**SEASONS OF  
DARKNESS**

by

**Wilfred Hamilton-Shimmen**

*A Story of Singapore*

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*This is a work of fiction and except for figures  
and events in historical context to enable  
the reader to place times and settings, all  
characters and incidents described within are  
wholly imaginary and do not refer to any  
person, living or dead, and no offence is meant.  
Any similarities in the description of  
characters, or the use of names, is purely  
coincidental.*



To my wife  
Limei

Without whose moral support and understanding this book  
would never have seen the light of day.

### **In Memory:**

Miss Marguerite L. Looker, Matron,  
"Melrose", The Children's Aid Society

Mrs Coral de Cruz

Mr Gerald (Gerry) E. de Cruz

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K'Alijah Shirle D. Gordon  
Who came into my life just in time

William C. Poole

Former First Secretary

Embassy of the United States of America, Singapore

Who told me I had a book "...worth publishing..."

Vedagiri T. Sambandan

Former S.E.A. Correspondent

"The Hindhu" Madras, India

Who read the MS with me, questioned, pointed out the unnecessary, and encouraged.

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Associate Professor

Dept of English Language & Literature

National University of Singapore, and

Former Singapore High Commissioner to Malaysia,

who in 1986 informed me my MS was "...brimful of interesting material..."

## *Prologue*

Captain George William Siddon, 32, an English master mariner, sailed into the British colonial port of Singapore in *the Malays*, from Bangkok, Siam, in 1890, in soaring spirits as he looked forward with great expectation to taking command of his very first ship. The *pukka sahib* seafarer had recently signed off his British-registered, international-class vessel up north in the Siamese kingdom, to become master of the *Wilhemina*, a Chinese-owned, steam-driven cargo-boat which plied the pirate-infested Singapore to Batavia, (in the then Dutch East Indies), spice-run. A Geordie from Tynemouth, Northumberland, he had long been impatient to take on his very first command since 1888 when he had passed his Master's Certificate in England but had never been successful in being appointed a master of one of his Scottish company's ships. He had been serving as first mate ever since while waiting for one of the skippers in the company to either leave or die, to make way for him. And he had been done with waiting. It was a godsend to have run into the British recruiting agent at Bangkok who had explained to Captain Siddon that wealthy Chinese in **the Malays** who had been brought to the region by the British themselves when they had first begun colonising the Malay peninsula and Singapore, and who had since become wealthy ship-owners, were desperate to employ qualified English master mariners to command their vessels as only British sea-captains were permitted to command regional trading vessels in British waters which carried cannon on board as protection against the Malay pirates of the *Riau Archipelago*. Sailing to South East Asia had finally given Captain George Siddon the opportunity to become master of a British-registered, Chinese-owned ship.

The job of shipping spices from the Dutch East Indies, (*Indonesia*), to Singapore Island was dangerous but the rewards offered by the local Chinese who needed English captains to sail their British-registered craft in regional waters because of a colonial policy which forbade native subjects being in command of potentially dangerous weapons, (to the British, that is), were lucrative. The emerald waters between the two ports, one British, the other Dutch, held many rewards for the adventurous but death, always on the threshold, could come swift and terrible. Between Singapore and Batavia lay the "Old Johor" sultanate in the **Riau Archipelago**, a maze of tropical jungle-clad islands inhabited by fierce Bugis who had regained control of them from the Dutch in 1805, after their defeat by Dutch invaders in 1784, and who resented the coming of the White Man — Dutch and English and before that the Spanish and the Portuguese. Together with their own subjects, the *Malay Sea Gypsies* or *Orang Laut*, (Malay: "Sea People"), the two sea-faring tribes of **the Malays** had been free to roaming their own seas at will, controlling their maritime domain — until the arrival of the White Man. And the island peoples used their many islands to remain unseen by the prying telescopes of the European sea captains, until the 'cumbersome' smoke-belching craft of the *Orang Puteh*, (Malay: White People), sailed right past the hidden 'pirates' and into their laps. The Malay 'pirates' (a term given them by the European colonisers), would drive the hated White foreigners from their shores where once the Malay had held sway over *everything* — because by Malay customary law anything that passed over Malay waters belonged to him — until the arrival of the White usurpers who had taken over everything as if it had been their god-given right.

And before a European sea captain could even realize what was about to happen, two or three cockleshell-sized canoes — *praus* — the Malays called them, would attack his ship from several directions all at once, swarm on deck and overpower and slay everyone in sight. Except any young women should they be aboard. The females would fetch good prices in the white slave markets of the region, after the cut-throats had had their own way with them first. The besieged ship would be ransacked of all cargo, equipment and cannon. There practically was no resistance put up by any ship's motely crew which usually was made up of a rag-tag group of 'adventurers' comprising the indifferent and those who did not believe in dying for *any* cause — until it was too late. Death would come in the form of a wild-looking, angry *Melayu* 'pirate' with hatred in his heart.

Stories were rife along waterside bars and the shipping offices in **the Malays** about men and ships lost to the adept, fierce, marauding 'pirates' of the 'Old Johor' *Riau-Lingga Sultanate* who appeared disdainful of the

White colonials who traded and sailed their waters. For while the **orang puteh** were safe in the sanctuary of ports like Singapore and Batavia, in the open waters of the **Riau** they were fair game and easy pickings.

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 had given Singapore's languishing maritime trade a fillip. More ships now sailed the new short route to and from Europe, their holds laden with the rich spice cargoes of the Dutch East Indies, which were highly prized. Singapore, a port and trading entrepot since 1819 with the coming of **Stamford Raffles**, whose first foreign settlers even *before* Raffles had been the Chinese invited to the **Riau-Lingga Sultanate** by the sultanate's ruler several centuries previously, had grown at such a pace that more and more workers were required, and these now came directly from China, shipped in by White colonial 'adventurers', instead of from the 'Old Johor' kingdom at **Riau**. The original Chinese settlers, before Raffles, had been the descendants of those who had first arrived in the **Malays** several centuries previously as coolies, and some on **Riau** had followed *Daeng Abdul Rahman, Temenggong Sri Maharaja of 'Old Johor'* upon his appointment before 1819, as chieftain of the tiny island, (Singapore), at the end of the Malay peninsula, (Malaya), by the *Yang di-Pertuan Muda*, the temporary Bugis ruler of 'Old Johor' at **Riau**. **These** Chinese, in the main, were planters of gambier and the other cash crops of the time. The 'new' Chinese immigrants since the coming of Raffles, were all males and began arriving from China from 1819 onward. They were part of an ever-growing army of jobless, poverty-stricken peasants plucked from their native Swatow, Amoy and Canton in southern China, who accepted the bullying and blandishments of the European labour-brokers — glad to be free men and not serfs of a Manchurian overlord in their land of birth — to sail across to whichever foreign capital in the world sought the ideal combination in a human workhorse — strong, cheap, uncomplaining and disciplined. Singapore, already settled by Chinese who had come several hundred years before 1819, in that year transformed into the British centre for the distribution of China-born, (sinkeh), indentured servants, the "chinamen" distinctive from the other Asians of the region by their subservient pig-tails, (toh-chang), and faded-blue rough-cotton work-clothes, throughout the British and Dutch territories, in the era of both those nations' colonisation of the **Malays**.

These 'new' arrivals became, with time, the most powerful modernising force in the region, dominating commercial life wherever they settled — Singapore, Malaya, (now Malaysia), Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand. Energetic and resourceful the 'overseas' Chinese, as they became known to their own compatriots in China, became an asset to their respective countries of adoption. They formed the last of the migratory waves of settlers

who have poured into the 'southseas' over the centuries.

They also brought with them their ancestral and parochial loyalties. From Kwantung, Kwangsi, Fukien, and Hainan Island. Together with their secret societies, which already had been flourishing in the Malays before the 1700s, an acute awareness of their *chineseness* — a chauvinistic pride in feeling superior over all the *barbarians*, both White and Asian. Their main interest lay in making money and remitting sums back to improvised relatives in China. Their clannishness and commercial gifts to the 'right' person made them unpopular with the indigenous peoples of the countries they had been brought to by the White colonials, as the Sinos prospered in the era of European colonisation and the locals, who were the subject peoples, subsisted at the low level allowed them by their respective White masters.

But from 1819 Singapore, now predominantly Chinese, immediately succeeded the 'Old Johor' sultanate at **Riau-Lingga** as the commercial capital of **Nanyang**, (Chinese: the "south seas"). Commerce-oriented, they were quick to grasp the fundamentals of doing business with Occidentals, and filled any need in the commercial structure of the region that would appear to be lacking. Some, employed on Singapore, through hard work, penny-pinching thrift and shrewdness, went into the lucrative spice trade, an activity that some of their own countrymen, before their time, had been in long before the coming of the European colonialists. Though now the preoccupation was in ferrying the prized spice crops from the Dutch East Indies, via Singapore to Europe or on to the Far East.

Unique to Singapore and Malaya, after the two territories' colonisation by the British, came the Indian of the British-held subcontinent in the early 1800s, sent over because the British Raj found it cheaper and convenient to use a Tamil, Malayalee or Sikh to undertake the tasks necessary to his own well-being. The Indians arrived as soldiers, storekeepers, clerks, cooks, attendants, labourers, and sometimes even as teachers and doctors.

Captain George Siddon was one of the many English sea captains attracted to sail regional vessels in local waters, and forego their international careers, by the handsome wages and other incentives offered by the wealthy Chinese shipping owners. European master mariners, especially Englishmen, were much sought after to undertake the hazardous spice-run between British Singapore and Dutch Batavia.

Within a year of arriving in Singapore Siddon had salted away sufficient money to purchase a magnificent bungalow set in a sprawling garden at Newton, the well-to-do district in those days. He'd become used to being addressed as *tuan* (Malay: sir), and to having his own retinue of servants — cook, houseboy, gardener, amah and carriage-driver. He lived the life

of the hard-working, contented colonial, stern in his dealings with servants and sailors, cordial with equals and superiors.

The company which employed him, *Ho Maritime Trade*, had offices close to the wharves in Tanjong Pagar, where the harbour lay. He had little to do with the actual owners of the company, dealing mainly with an Englishman, Peter Courtney, who had come to the British colony years ago and had made it his home.

On his various trips to Batavia in his first year Captain George struck up a friendship with a Dutch plantation owner at the Dutch Club. It was a favourite haunt of Europeans in the port. Alford Idenburg who seemed to spend all his evenings at the club would occasionally invite Siddon back to his home in the Dutch colony whenever there was an 'occasion', such as a birthday or anniversary within his family. It appeared to the English sea captain that Idenburg jumped at any opportunity to have a party.

One of the Dutchman's children, Edith, then sixteen, was particular winsome in the captain's eyes. Singularly attractive, she had the tallness of her Dutch father and the delicate features of her mother who was colonial Dutch on her own mother's side and Holland-born on her father's side. Idenburg had hinted at various times at the club that his daughter would need to find a husband in Holland if she would not choose from among the Dutch young men in Batavia.

But Siddon had plans of his own for the beautiful Dutch young woman. She would make the ideal mistress of his home in Singapore which needed the touch of a good woman's hand. And Edith, spoiled colonial that she was, would definitely need all the fine trappings he had craftily laid on in his home in Singapore, that first day when he had clapped eyes on her for the first time. He had decided to make her his wife and bided his time until the first opportunity presented itself.

His golden opportunity came at the close of the nineteenth century when the *Wilhelmina* was at anchor in Batavia on New Year's Eve, 1899, and Idenburg invited his friend home to welcome in the new year and new century. Whenever George had been to the Idenburg abode in the past he had always remembered to bring along gifts for his friend's family, with special presents for the Dutchman's wife and daughter. Idenburgh had noticed that night that his friend's traditionally-brought offerings were unusually expensive-looking, and that Siddon had also included an excellent bottle, which really wasn't necessary as the plantation-owner prided himself on maintaining a well-stocked and choice cellar. He immediately realised that the captain had deliberately chosen that evening to spring a surprise, confident that if it proved upsetting he would be forgiven. Idenburg smiled inwardly, flattered that his daughter had caught the eye of

one of the new breed of colonial adventurer who seemed to be popping up just about everywhere in the colonies. But he would not make it easy for his friend. Siddon had to realise the kind of family he was hoping to marry into.

Siddon observed the proprieties of the times, chose his moment and begged a private word with his host. Idenburgh got straight to the point — he feared that his friend was too old for his daughter, Edith. The Dutchman feared that Captain George might have a wife tucked away in England. There had been many instances of newly-arrived colonials marrying innocent girls born in the colonies, who later discovered that their marriages had been bigamous because their men were already married to living spouses in their home countries. Without a moment's hesitation, with all the candour and sincerity he could project in his features, Siddon reassured his friend that he was still unmarried, and it was only due to time spent in command of men and ships that had given him the demeanour of appearing older than his years. He said he was thirty-six, (in actual fact he was forty-one!). The Dutchman appeared to accept his friend's word and commented that should there be no objection from his wife and daughter, Siddon would be welcome as his daughter's suitor.

George Siddon was pleased with himself. He knew that Edith had eyes only for him. A typical European brat of the colonies, with servants at her beck and call and all the pimple-faced swains of Batavia at her feet, she was disdainful of every suitor except the dashing English captain. He was her father's friend and equal. A man of the world. And she was putty in his hands. Edith's eyes glowed in pleasure on hearing her father's announcement of Siddon's profession of love for her and proposal of marriage.

The nuptials were held in the Presbyterian Church in Singapore that year, and the reception afterward was a gala event attended by some of the big-wigs of Singapore Colony. The children began arriving a year later, with twins, two boys, who died soon after birth. Albertha came in 1902, followed by William and Henry two years later, who were also twins. Henry died. Then came Johnny, Ruby, and finally Cecil who was the youngest. In between sea-journeys and fathering children the captain became thoroughly immersed in his career and left his wife to raise the family and run the household. His trips to Batavia become prolonged as he began calling at other ports in the Dutch East Indies. But whenever he was home Edith, spoiled by her years as a pampered child, found herself unable to cope and would harangue her husband, the captain, about her problems. For Captain George it was a situation beyond his comprehension. His ship ran like clockwork but his family life was turmoil. He found himself dreading the prospect of returning home everytime his ship was back in port in Singapore because he knew his wife would torment him with her troubles. In



desperation he wrote his recently-widowed elder sister, Emma Jane, in England and begged her to come to Singapore and help run his household. He knew that Emma Jane's late husband, John Addison, had been a Church of England pastor at Woolwich and his one dream, when he had been alive, was to establish a boarding school for young Christian girls on one of the colonies. He held out such an opportunity for his elder sister. Emma, already fifty, wrote back saying she would come, if only to fulfil her late husband's last desire. She arrived in Singapore in 1906.

The two Siddon women hated each other on sight. Edith Siddon, the captain's wife, was a pampered wealthy woman leading the spoiled, selfish life of a bored colonial dedicated to satisfying any and all of her whims. She found the straight-laced and austere attitude of her English sister-in-law, Emma Jane, boring, and thoroughly disliked the idea of the older woman taking over her household, and who also had the ear of her husband, George. Emma Jane Addison, the Englishwoman, despaired at her own disability in getting on with her young sister-in-law whose colonial ways were completely foreign to her own English way-of-life. Within days of her arrival she discovered that Edith was an alcoholic and that it was her brother George, who was to blame. She discovered that each time the *Wilhelmina* docked at Singapore George and Edith would hold court at a hastily-thrown party on the sprawling lawns of their home in Newton, where, Emma noted, Edith would match her husband drink for drink.

As time passed it dawned on Emma Jane that she would be given no chance to have a say in the actual running of her brother's house, and hastened her plans to set up her girls' school. She found an ideal site on a small rise which had been renamed Mount Sophia after Stamford Raffles' second wife, Lady Sophia Raffles. Previously the hillock had been known as *Bukit Seligi*, after the piratical proto-Malay tribe which had settled there long before Singapore's modern founding. Emma Jane Addison commissioned a two-storey bungalow to be built almost to the top of the main slope. The premises seemed all the more suitable when she realised that she shared the same perimeter fence as the official residence of the colony's governor. She fled the Siddon household immediately the building of her school was complete. She named it the *Church of England, Zion, Methodist School, (CEZMS)*, to which female offspring of the Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians and Jews living in the colony would be taught the ideal virtues and graces of European gentle breeding as well as obtain an education. She turned her back on the Siddons except George her brother.

In 1921, in his sixtythird year, the captain began developing a persistent, dry wracking cough which seemed to drain him every time he went into a coughing-seizure. He'd stopped sailing by then and stayed home in his

opulent surroundings, the result of his shrewed business dealings sailing the **Malay seas**. Each day would find him seated on his verandah smoking, forever guzzling a drink. But the coughing grew worse and in October of that year Captain George Siddon died at his home of tuberculosis of the lungs. It was a dreaded disease of those days and he was buried on the same day of his demise to prevent infection spreading to his immediate family or the servants. They were in the tropics.

The family solicitor, Alan Grimberg, together with the late captain's elder sister, Mrs Emma Jane Addison, arrived at the Siddon mansion in Newton for the reading of his last will and testimony. It proved a rude, unexpected and wicked shock for his widow, Edith. Emma Jane and Grimberg the family solicitor would administer the captain's wealth and properties. The administrators, as executors of Siddon's estate, would provide a fixed monthly income for the running of the Siddon household to enable the family to continue to live in the fashion it was used to during George Siddon's life. All this would be available to the family so long as Edith and her children lived under the captain's roof. Aunt Emma Jane would live with the Siddon family in the mansion and be in complete charge. It was George's way of thanking his elder sister for seeing him through school and maritime training at South Shields in Tynemouth, after their father, John, had died when George had been a mere lad of twelve.

Edith Siddon, George's widow, stunned, cursed aloud at what to her was her late husband's treachery to his family. He had harmed his wife and children from his grave. It was a final dirty trick as far as she was concerned. Her offspring, still too young and not fully comprehending all that was transpiring between the adults gathered in their late father's home, could sense somehow that something horrible was about to descend on all of them in their immediate family.

Fully realising that she was in complete charge, Emma Jane moved in without further ado. On her first day at the Siddon household she instructed everyone, from mother to the youngest Siddon child that henceforth she was only to be addressed as 'Mrs Addison'. Even the family servants were told that their pretty young 'mem' had been displaced and the older Englishwoman was the mistress from that day. Daily quarrels between the two women grew steadily worse and came to a head when the family liquor-supply, Edith's one solace, was cut altogether from the monthly budget.

Being a woman in her prime and still very attractive at forty-one, Edith found no dearth of admirers. Peter Courtney, an Englishman out of her late husband's shipping company, which had hired the captain to sail their ships in **the Malays**, proposed. Feeling desperate and humiliated beyond endurance by the vast insult wracked on her life by her late husband, as well

as the stringent conditions imposed on her life-style by her vengeful sister-in-law Emma Jane, she accepted Courtney's proposal of marriage and fled the Siddon abode, leaving behind her children with their English aunt, 'Mrs Addison'.

She never saw her offspring again. Some twelve years later in 1934, at the relative young age of fifty-four she would die of chronic hepatitis, a death brought on by excessive drinking. Nor would her children learn of her demise until a year later, by chance. But their sorrow, when they finally came to learn of it, had been just as great, as though her demise had occurred just minutes of their getting to know of it. They had dearly loved their beloved, beautiful, spoiled mother.

Meanwhile with Edith's departure from Newton, Aunt Emma Jane saw her opportunity to 'mould' her nephews and nieces into persons of 'good character'. Each child was allotted a specific daily task to perform before he or she could sit down to breakfast. Then it was to school, college or employment. Each child was expected to fend for itself as well and not expect any servant of the house to tend to him or her. Eventually all the servants were dismissed. Bertha and Ruby, the two Siddon girls, were enrolled at Emma Jane's school at Mount Sophia. William and Johnny would serve apprenticeships at the Albert Docks at Tanjong Pagar, in engineering, and so would Cecil when he got older. In the meantime he attended the St Joseph's Institution, Christian Brothers' school at Bras Basah Road.

Each child, as it grew older and could fend for itself, quickly departed the Siddon house and, with time, the mansion at Newton was lived in solely by 'Mrs Addison'. In 1924 'Bertha married an English clerk she had met in her office and he took her back, with him, to England. Only her brothers and sister, Ruby, attended the wedding. 'Mrs Addison' though uninvited, had been aware of the marriage as whatever happened among the White colonial population in Singapore became known, quickly enough, among the rest of the community.

Twelve years later the Ford Motor Company began trading in rented premises in Enggor Street and William Siddon obtained a position as a trainee mechanic. He married a year later to a Chinese girl and moved north to Penang on the Malay peninsula, to a job in the harbour there. Johnny Siddon lived the life of the care-free bachelor, enjoying his work as an apprentice, and later as a shore-based marine engineer. He kept well clear of Emma Jane Addison. Cecil the youngest, concentrated on qualifying for his ship's engineer's certificate while still living with 'Mrs Addison'. Ruby the other daughter in the Siddon family died of her father's same disease in 1930.

At the age of eighty-two in April 1932, Emma Jane Addison died of arterio sclerosis, a hardening of the arteries brought about by too much rich living. Cecil Siddon, a young man of twenty-five, spoke to his brother Johnny about seeing to their late father's estate and their inheritance. Johnny wouldn't be bothered.

"We grew up without her help, I don't want her money now," he said. "Don't be silly, it's not her money, its ours, she just collared it when pa died, we must get it back," countered Cecil.

He wrote to his eldest brother William in Penang who advised him to locate Alan Grimberg, the family lawyer. William had made a life for himself in Penang and doubted whether 'Mrs Addison' had bothered about her nephews and nieces.

Grimberg, when Cecil finally located him, enlightened the young man, to his dismay, that the Newton property and everything in it belonged legally to the late Emma Jane Addison. That in fact her own English relatives were arriving from Tynemouth, England, to settle her affairs. Cecil remarked that he would like to meet his English cousins but received no word from Grimberg. The lawyer had also failed to mention that Emma Jane had died intestate and that all her affairs needed sorting out.

A nephew and niece, children of Annie Eliza, the younger sister of the late George Siddon and the late Emma Jane Addison, arrived by boat from London several months later to finalise their late aunt's estate. The Siddon mansion at Newton was sold together with everything it. Grimberg was instructed by the nephew and niece to locate suitable parties who might be interested to take over the school since it seemed self-supporting. The two young people from Tynemouth were totally uninterested. Unable to be sold the school eventually became dormant until after World War Two, when it was re-established and renamed St. Margaret's School. Emma Jane Addison, the school's original founder, whenever the institution's origins are ever brought up, if at all, is sometimes remembered as the eccentric with a weird sense of humour for naming her institution the way she did before it was renamed after the war.

Cecil Siddon always felt that he and his family had been cheated of what was legally and hereditarily theirs, by right, through the bigotry and malice of one woman for another — aided and abetted by a conniving lawyer.

It would be many years, when he was into his middle age that Cecil would realise that he had been swindled of his rightful inheritance by blood-relatives from across the sea who had not even want to meet him nor acknowledge him as kin.

In 1923 because of growing antagonism between Japan on one side,

and Great Britain, the United States of America, France and Italy on the other, it was decided by the British Committee of Imperial Defence meeting at London that a Far Eastern base be developed at Singapore because of its strategic location and importance. There had been expectation that there could be a war in the near future. This had its origins in the 1921-22 Washington Conference agreed to by the previously-described countries, which restricted the number of capital ships in the navies of the contracting powers. Old capital ships were to be scrapped and building programmes for new ones abandoned. Great Britain and the United States were each allowed 525000 tons of capital ships and Japan 315,000 tons. Aircraft carriers were limited in the same ratio of 5:5:3, Great Britain and the United States having 135,000 tons each, and Japan 81,000 tons. The agreement expired in 1936. After the Washington Conference Japan regarded both the British and American navies as potential enemies.

In 1931 Japan occupied Manchuria, and in 1937 she began her war in China, slaying, ravaging and destroying. The naval base at the north of Singapore was almost established in 1938 when Cecil Siddon, now qualified as a ship's engineer was employed there. He met a Eurasian girl, Luci Mansvelt, who had come from Malacca to work as a nurse at the Kandang Kerbau Maternity Hospital. She seemed to have something in common with his mother, because of her Dutch surname, which he found appealing though he knew her 'Dutchness' had been watered down over many years of intermarriage between Dutch and Portuguese Eurasians, descendants of the previous occupiers of the once-great sea-town on the Malay peninsula. He married her the following year in the Portuguese Mission Roman Catholic Church in Queen Street in Singapore.

Early in 1940 she bore his first child, a boy. Cecil rushed in great excitement to his wife's side at the Kandang Kerbau Hospital and picked up his slumbering infant. As he cradled his first-born the baby awakened and opened his eyes. With a start Siddon looked at his son. It seemed that the sharp blue eyes of the late Captain George William Siddon stared right back.

The following would be the story of Thomas Siddon, one of the descendants of Captain George William Siddon who first arrived in Singapore in 1890...

## Pell Mell Into The 20th Century

### Chapter One

Thomas Siddon, scion of a colonial Englishman, was born in the British Crown Colony of Singapore during the Easter season of March 1940, amidst the trappings and grandeur of what was then considered the epitome in colonial living. His world was the typical colonial English one, of sedate living, elegant homes and a retinue of servants to cater to his whims, and take on the boring drudgery of life that the White in the East didn't care for. A black-trousered Cantonese 'baby-amah' specially cared for him, ensuring that he was well looked-after, fed at the proper times, bathed, taken for walks in the cool evenings, and that nothing would 'happen' to cause him any discomfort or upset. Another Chinese amah looked after the *tuan* and *mem*, (Malay: 'sir' and 'madam'), and a Malay driver, garbed in the uniform of a sailor drove the *tuan* about wherever he wanted to go. The sailor-driver was provided by the administrators of the British Naval Base at Seletar, where Cecil Siddon, Thomas' father, worked as a middle-rung civilian engineer.

In other words young Siddon was born to the good life, pampered as if he had come from a long line of upper-crust English gentry. But this wasn't really so, because through his Dutch-Portuguese-Malay mother, Luci Mansvelt, young Thomas Siddon had a *connection* with the **Malay World** that spanned more than 400 years. His mother, who was born in Malacca, which was part of the British Colony of the Straits Settlements, said it was a good sign that her son had come during Easter as it commemorated the resurrection of Christ. It was significant in her eyes

because she was a staunch Roman Catholic and had been brought up in the Catholic part of the old Malay seatown, which really was Muslim.

But what made dusky-skinned Luci Siddon especially proud was that her baby had been born as fair as any European, had dark-brown wavy hair and deep-piercing blue-eyes, just like his grandfather, her husband had told her.

Luci had departed her hometown on the Malay peninsula to make a life for herself in Singapore because jobs were not only scarce in Malacca but those that were available were of the kind she considered 'not attractive enough'. After getting her standard eight school-leaving certificate, which was considered quite an accomplishment in those days, especially for girls who normally attended school for a few years and then were 'bonded' to their families' kitchens to learn the fundamentals of keeping a man happy through his stomach, she was in no mind to knuckle down and set up house with *anyone*. She had spent the greater part of her life growing up in the Portuguese Mission convent in Bandar Hilir, after both her parents had died, one after the other, while she was still in school, and she was glad she did not get the usual family pressure, every Malacca-Portuguese girl always received when she was of the 'traditional marriageable age', to settle down and get married, like all good Malacca-Portuguese girls should, from her aunts and uncles. Luci had decided Singapore was the place for an educated young woman to carve a niche for herself. It beckoned, and in 1938 at the age of 24, she packed her bags and headed for the island at the end of the Malay peninsula. What Luci had done was not unique as it had already become 'traditional' for Malacca-Portuguese young men to seek greener pastures at British-controlled Singapore, which encouraged them to work in the colonial administration there. What was *unusual* was that she was a single woman doing it on her own.

Singapore, Luci had felt, held better promise for her as it was an established, booming port which offered her the potential of not only finding suitable employment but in meeting the 'right sort' of young man that the nuns in the convent at Malacca had taught the girls they should look for, who might, one day, become her husband. She had been brought up a God-fearing Catholic and accepted that eventually she would marry and raise a family but she preferred finding her husband in Singapore, because the island was world-famous and a lot more modern than Malacca, and a man from Singapore would be a different kettle of fish compared to the young men from her old hometown. Singapore was the place as far as she was concerned.

What she and a great majority of the various communities who then considered Malacca their home were probably not aware of was that Malacca was already famous in Malay legend and history when Singapore had already degenerated into a fishing village after her sacking by the **Majapahit**, (*Mojopahit*), Empire of Java, circa 1300, the powerful Hindu dynasty that once was the centre of the Malay World. The last ruler of Singapore, *Parameswara*, a Hindu Malay, had usurped the throne after he had murdered his host, Tamagi, the legitimate chief of Singapore, who had given him sanctuary from his own father-in-law. The Singapore chief had given refuge to Parameswara, a Javanese nobleman who had married the daughter of one of the kingdoms of the Majapahit which had come into being after the split of the former great Hindu empire, after Parameswara had agreed to be a vassal of his father-in-law and pay him tribute, which he had failed to do, whereupon his father-in-law had driven him from his kingdom. Parameswara fled to Singapore along with his wife and children, and was given sanctuary by Tamagi but after eight days Parameswara murdered his host and made himself ruler. Joined by three thousand followers from Palembang, Parameswara reigned for five years, pillaging passing ships with his fleet of Javanese followers and the 'Cellates', a tribe of proto-Malay sea-gypsies. But Tamagi was the brother of the king of Patani who sent his army and navy to avenge the death of his brother. To escape the Siamese around 1396 Parameswara fled Singapore up the Malay peninsula first toward Pagoh, and then later to the site which he would call Malacca, with his followers, the Javanese and the 'Cellates'. Parameswara and his men having become rich by piracy, preying on passing ships that sailed past Malacca, discovered that it was more profitable to attract merchants to the new town, levying a tax on every passing ship, and gave up being a pirate. He converted to Islam and took the name **Iskandar Shah**, (1403-1424), and during his reign began steps to transform Malacca into a great metropolis. He initiated relations with China, and sought and obtained protection from the Chinese Emperor against the Siamese who had always been intent on reeking vengeance on Iskandar Shah for his murder of Tamagi. A mission was sent to China in 1405 which received from the Chinese emperor a commission and a seal appointing Parameswara King of Malacca. In the year 1408 the Imperial Envoy, Cheng Ho, who was a Muslim and an eunuch, brought an order from the Chinese emperor giving Iskandar Shah a silver seal, a cap, a girdle and a long robe, and raised the village to a city after which the land was called the 'Kingdom of Malacca'. Parameswara died in 1424. His son who called himself Sri Maharajah Muhammed Shah, (1424-1444), ascended the throne. The Sri Maharajah



had many wives and many heirs. The son he chose to ascend the throne after him was murdered, and another heir was chosen. He became the first Malay ruler to take a Muslim title — Muzaffar Shah, Sultan of Malacca. Islam became the state religion during his reign and the centre of Muslim influence in the region. In 1445 the Siamese finally attacked Malacca and a fierce battle was fought near Muar. The Siamese were defeated. Another eleven years would pass before the Siamese returned. In 1456 news was received that a strong Siamese fleet had been sighted sailing toward Malacca. The Bendahara, (the next in line after the sultan), Tun Perak, moved his army quickly to Batu Pahat and by night led them into the mangrove swamps by the seashore facing the Straits of Malacca and ordered his soldiers to tie torches to the mangrove trees and light them. Soon hundreds of lights could be seen flickering in the darkness. The Siamese in their ships seeing the lights and thinking that a great fleet was sailing toward them, turned and fled southward in dismay. Tun Perak and his small fleet gave chase as far as Singapore Island before turning back, and Malacca was saved. In 1458 Muzaffar Shah died and his son, Mansur Shah became sultan. His reign, for some 18 years, was the most glorious in Malayan history. Merchants from all parts of the then known world would call at Malacca — from Java, Siam, Burma, China, India and even Egypt. It was said that as many as 84 languages were spoken in her bazaars. Mansur Shah married a Chinese princess — Hong Lim Poh — from the Chinese Court in China, and this marriage marks one of the stories of how the Baba-Nonya Chinese-Malay community of Malacca evolved. No less than five hundred Chinese damsels of great beauty accompanied the princess as attendants, and these women eventually married Malay noblemen and royalty, and even converted to Islam. And this is another of the several tales of how the *Malacca Baba-Nonya* community originated. Malacca is also regarded by some as the cradle of two important aspects of the Malay race, insofar as peninsula Malaysia is concerned — that of her traditions and culture, and the introduction of Islam which was brought in by Indian, Persian and Arabian traders who, by the 1400s virtually controlled the trade routes across the Indian Ocean.

Malacca is also linked to the legend of the fabled **Golden Kheronese**, the wondrous sultanate of wealth, pleasure and art of yore to which the vessels of China, India, Arabia and Africa called at regularly to do business and pay homage to her illustrious sultans. It was an entrepot of trade, and also became a melting-pot of peoples as well as a haven of peace. The Portugese conquered it in 1511 and the Dutch seized it from them in 1641. The Sultanate of Malacca became the Sultanate of Johore when Sultan

Mahmud Shah, the last sultan of Malacca, after his defeat by the Portuguese, established a new capital for his kingdom, which included Sumatra, the Riau-Lingga Archipelago, most of the states of the Malay peninsula, (including what today is known as Johore), Singapore and Patani, (southern Thailand today), on the Johor River in Malaya. By this period however, China had ceased to play any part in the fortunes of the Malays as with the first appearance of the Europeans in this region, so too did the Portuguese and Spanish appear at Old Cathay and begin to make demands of her emperor, who found his hands full dealing with them.

Before her fall to the Portuguese in 1511, Malacca was already the greatest emporium that existed in the East. Her trade flowed from and to ports in the most extensive geographical areas, from Venice and Alexandria beyond the Red Sea, across the Persian Gulf to Cathay and Cipangu, (Japan), to the most easterly regions of the vast land mass of Eurasia. Her trade tentacles reached the north-west coast of Africa, both coasts of the Indian subcontinent, Ceylon, Burma, and south toward Sumatra, Java and the fabulous Spice Islands. By 1504 Malacca had grown too important to escape Portugal's attention. And Lisbon's maritime activities in other parts of the world, conveyed to Malacca by her agents acting on her behalf in the markets of Europe, especially Venice, began to worry her sultan. The Portuguese were already active in the Arabian Sea, Ormuz, Goa, Muscat and the mouth of the Gulf of Aden. And by 1504 there was already much detailed information on Malacca in both Lisbon and Madrid. In Lisbon among the several sources of information were two persons, one a Jew called Gaspar da Gama who had lived in India and other parts of South Asia for many years, and the other a Venetian named Bonojuto de Albano who had lived some 20 years in South Asia and had married a Malacca-Malay woman by whom he had two sons. Both Gaspar da Gama and de Albano furnished valuable information to the Portuguese monarch. Madrid had an eye on Malacca as well, and both the monarches of Portugal and Spain were doubtful on which side of the line of demarcation of the Treaty of Tordesillas, (the Europeans had already 'divided up' the world on their own!), lay! In 1506 strong rumours that Spain was preparing a fleet to reach Malacca by way of the Pacific Ocean induced the King of Portugal to instruct his viceroy in India, Francisco de Almedia, to search for a route to Malacca. In 1508 a fleet of four galleons left Lisbon for Malacca, arriving there in 1509. It was planned as a goodwill mission to sign a treaty of friendship. The treaty was signed but owing to the intrigues of the other foreign traders present at the Malacca Court the treaty failed and a hostile situation was created. Twenty Portuguese sailors were left behind in Malacca

as hostages. The Portuguese commander, Diogo Lopes de Sequeira left with a warning that another Portuguese fleet would come to rescue the prisoners, and to avenge them should peace and friendship not be restored. Two years later the great Portuguese explorer and conqueror, Alfonso de Albuquerque, arrived off Malacca in 1511 with a fleet of eighteen ships bearing 800 Portuguese fighting men and 300 Malabaris from South India. The Portuguese attacked and Malacca finally fell. Although the power and prestige of the Malacca Sultanate had received a heavy blow in 1511, it was kept smouldering outside Malacca, which had become Portuguese, by the indomitable will of Sultan Mahmud Shah, the last sultan of Malacca. Ousted though he was, he never stopped waging war against his conquerors through naval battles and skirmishes, and subversive activities. But in vain. Portuguese naval supremacy and weaponry was too strong. Although defeated, Mahmud Shah's last years, up to his death in 1529, were years of heroism. He left two sons. One went to Perak as its sultan and the other to become sultan of his father's re-named sultanate, which was called 'Johor'. His father had chosen a site on the Johor River in 1511 to build his new capital and had named his new town 'Johor', after the river on which it was built. And continued his father's fight with the Portuguese.

The term "Johor" in fact refers to two different states which existed at different times — an ancient one, ("Old Johor", from 1511 to 1819), and a modern one which began after the setting up of the British Station on Singapore Island. After "Old Johor" was established it was moved 20 times between 1511 and 1682, generally because of Portuguese and Achenese, (a peoples from Sumatra who desired to 'inherit' the former glory of Malacca after its demise by the Portuguese), attacks or because of the installation of a new ruler. From 1513 to 1526 it was at Bentan, (Riau), from 1526 to 1618 it was at various sites on the Johor River. In 1618 it was moved to Lingga, and then to Tembelan. From 1637 to 1673 it was located at various sites on the Johor River once more. It was again at Riau from 1673 to 1685 and back on the Johor River from 1688 to 1700. From 1722 to 1819 it was at Riau. In 1819 when the *temenggong* agreed to the British, through Stamford Raffles, setting up a trading station on Singapore, he broke off with the ruler of "Old Johor".

Malacca's Portuguese history opened a new chapter for the sea-town as she began to play an even bigger role in world trading affairs. Trade still continued intensively with Java, Sumatra, the Spice Islands, China, Japan, India, Africa and Europe but where once her goods went to Venice, it now went to Lisbon, making Portugal the greatest trading centre in Europe, and fulfilling the prophesy that: "Whoever holds Malacca

has his hands on the throat of Venice." The consolidation of the Portuguese at Malacca was done with typical Iberian panache. Malacca's conqueror, Albuquerque, within a few months of his departure from the new Portuguese possession had almost completed a magnificent castle put up by the hard work of the Portuguese soldiers and the *hamba raja*, (the former sultan's slaves). The citadel was named **A Famosa**, (the Famous), and was located at the foot of St Paul's Hill. Its shape was quadrilateral, at each corner there was a tower, and one of the four was the keep. At a later date a massive wall made of stones and mortar was erected right round the hill and the name A Famosa was extended to the whole fortress, which was defended by powerful cannon. Twenty-four times Malacca was attacked by forces from the Sultanate of Johor or by the Aceh, and as early as 1606 by the Dutch but she always resisted until she fell to a combined force of the Dutch, and Johor Malays, in 1641. But before this Malacca had resembled a European town, with the steeples of many churches, monasteries and chapels, and become the stopover for thousands of missionaries who from there spread Christianity to Siam, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, Sumatra, Java and the other islands of the Malays. The eventual loss of the Portuguese monopoly of the Eastern trade and Malacca was triggered by the union of the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal in 1580, by marriage. King Philip II of Spain in that year ordered the seizure of Dutch ships in Spanish waters. Thus deprived of their sources for obtaining spices and other goods from the East, from the Portuguese and Spanish, the Dutch went about getting them at their source. Obtaining valuable information from a report published by a young Dutchman called Johannes Huighem van Linschosten, who had spent five years, from 1583 to 1589 in India, the Dutch began to wage war on Portuguese overseas settlements and trading stations. In 1599 English merchants were expelled from Lisbon and at the end of 1600 the English formed the English East India Company. And the Portuguese had to contend with two East India companies — the Dutch and the English. In 1599 the Dutch appeared in Aceh, and since she had been continuously at war with Portuguese Malacca, Aceh welcomed the Dutch. At the same time a Portuguese fleet encountered two English ships under the command of a Benjamin Wood, who withdrew to Kedah. With the presence of the two hostile and powerful forces Portuguese Malacca knew a confrontation was but a matter of little time. In 1600 the Dutchman Paul van Caarden called at Aceh, whose sultan became a close friend. In 1602 an English fleet of five vessels, commanded by Captain James Lancaster, anchored at Aceh with a letter from Queen Elizabeth I, and a treaty with the sultan was signed. From Aceh the English sailed along the Straits of Malacca where they captured a Portuguese ship.

This was the first journey of the English East India Company in the Straits of Malacca. In 1605 the Dutch ousted the Portugese from the principal Spice Islands. In 1619 the Dutch established their headquarters in Batavia, Java. In view of the situation the Portugese made extensive preparations for the defence of Malacca. In 1606 Malacca was besieged by the Dutch for the first time with a fleet of eleven ships and six smaller vessels. The Dutch commander, Matelief, succeeded in landing 700 men at Tanjung Kling, north of Malacca-town, and at Ujung Pasir, to the south-east. After some violent fighting Matelief lifted the siege on receiving news that a Portugese fleet was approaching. The Dutch fleet met the Portugese force off Cape Rachado, with each side losing two ships. (And they may still be lying where they sank!). After some time the two opposing fleets drew apart, with the Dutch heading toward Johor and the Portugese returning to Malacca. In 1609, the Portugese built a fort in Muar, (whose site, to this day, has never been located). From 1606 till the fall of Malacca to the Dutch in 1641, the Dutch systematically tried to weaken the Portugese position. In 1640 a decision was reached in Batavia to take Malacca "...either by treaty or by the sword..." And in June 1640 Malacca was besieged by a Dutch fleet of 12 large ships and six smaller vessels. The following month the Sultanate of Johor sent forty ships and 1,500 men. The combined Dutch and Johor force numbered 3,000 men. The final, fatal attack on Portugese Malacca began on 11th January 1641, after seven months of desperate and continuous fighting. Malacca fell to the Dutch at 10 o'clock of the morning of 14th January 1641. For nearly two centuries and a half Malacca had lived days of glory, both during the Malay Sultanate era and under Portugese rule. But with the fall of Malacca to the Dutch another epoch began. Forty years after the beginning of the Dutch colonisation of Malacca the population of the town had dwindled to fifteen thousand, and after one hundred years to a mere five thousand. The Dutch had monopolised the Malacca trade but made Batavia in Java the entrepot of their East Indies possessions. Malacca never regained her glory and importance. In 1797 when the British temporarily occupied Malacca, (while the Dutch still remained and continued to administer it under British supervision), during the French Revolution in Europe and Holland was under the occupation of the army of Napoleon, her A Fomosa fortress had remained intact but in 1807, the British Governor of Penang, Robert Farquhar, ordered the fort destroyed to avoid the expense of its upkeep and to prevent it falling into the hands of a potential enemy. In September 1818 the British handed back Malacca to the Dutch, according to the Treaty of Vienna. The Dutch occupied it for six more years until 1824 when the Treaty of London, that year, ceded Malacca back to the British.

British Malacca then became to be regarded as "...an abode of peace, a 'sleepy hallow', a quaint, dreamy, Dutch-looking town...where it is always afternoon...and where one can enjoy good fruits and the fellowship and hospitality of the descendants of the Portugese and Dutch.

But apart from its importance in Malay history, Malacca is also the birthplace of three separate mixed-communities, all of whom boast part-Malay lineage — the *Malacca-Chitty*, the *Baba-Nonya*, and the *Malacca-Portuguese*.

The *Malacca-Chitty* is a Malay-Indian mixed community, also native-born, (Malay: *peranakan*), to Malacca. Of the three mixed-race communities who regard it as their birth-place, the *Malacca-Chitty* is most likely the oldest of the three because Malacca was originally Hindu, and there was much intercourse with India, and when the Portugese first called at Malacca in 1509, before their conquest in 1511, there already was an established Malacca-Chitty community. This Malay-Indian mixed-race wears Malay dress, has adopted Malay customs and language, and evolved an Indian cuisine which is a blend of Malay and Indian. They are Hindu.

The *Baba-Nonya*, (*Nonya* is a derivative of the Portugese word: "nona", which has passed into the Malay language), are a Chinese-Malay community whose male antecedents, centuries ago, first married the slaves of the Malays, and later when the mixed Chinese-slave offspring were successful in business, intermarried with the Malays as well to evolve a distinct Sino society which adopted and intermixed several Malay customs with their Chinese ones, blended Malay cuisine, using hot chillies and spices with Chinese recipes, spoke Malay instead of Chinese, which they had forgotten, chewed betel-nut and wore Malay dress. Some *Baba-Nonyas* claim descent from the original Chinese ladies of the Chinese court who accompanied Princess Hong Lim Poh when she came from China to marry Sultan Shah of Malacca in the middle of the 15th Century. The *Baba-Nonyas* are mainly Buddhist.

The *Malacca-Portuguese* is a polyglot — Malay, Portugese, Dutch, British, Swedish, French, German, Chinese, Baba-Nonya, Chitty and Indian. They speak Malay as well as a Portugese-Malay patois, while the women wear Malay dress and chew betel-nut. This community has developed an admixture cuisine comprising a blend of Malay, Portugese, Nonya, Chinese, Indian, and even African cooking traits, most of which were brought in by the original Portugese colonisers from their various colonies. They are Roman Catholic. The British colonial government in 1931 established a "Portugese Settlement" in Malacca to keep the poorest members of the community together, share their own way of life and keep

their identity. They probably would have been better off if they had continued to live with the other communities of the old Malay seatown. The ethnic origin of the settlers, their patois, a 16th Century Portuguese dialect intermixed with Malay, (which has survived several centuries, and similar versions are also found in the former Portuguese colonies of Ceylon, Cochin, other coastal parts of India and even Curacao in the Caribbean, is an interesting phenomenon), and their religious festivals give them an identity of their own. A visitor strolling through the streets of the Settlement in Malacca, which has Portuguese names, or by part-taking of a meal in one of the several restaurants there, may experience a strange, nostalgic, pleasant feeling — the Latin atmosphere of a Mediterranean seaside village, evoked by the music played or sung by its inhabitants and the decor of a Lisbon *casa de fados*, a restaurant or cafe in Portugal in which are sung the plaintive Portuguese songs called *fados*.

The *Malacca-Portuguese*, descendants of the original Portuguese conquerors of the Malay sea-town who took it from Sultan Mahmud Shah in 1511, have never regarded themselves as a mixed-race as a result of an ancient Portuguese decree. King Manoel of Portugal in the same year of Malacca's fall to them, had sent out his explorers to found new colonies in Christ's and his own name, and decreed that should Portuguese men and women intermarry with the native peoples of the lands that they colonised, and so long as those the Portuguese married, and the offspring of such unions embraced Roman Catholicism, all would be regarded as full-blooded Portuguese. And that is why the descendants of the Portuguese colonisers of Malacca call themselves Malacca-Portuguese.

In the one hundred and thirty years, (1511 - 1641), of Portuguese colonisation of Malacca, the Portuguese, even though they first took Malay, and then later Baba-Nonya-Chinese, Malacca-Chitty or Siamese brides, never made friends in the **Malay World**, and were feared and hated by the Malays of the region. Their descendants though proud of their Iberian heritage, today identify themselves as Malaysians of Portuguese descent.

Luci's ancestors, the Mansvelts, first arrived in the Malay World from Holland in 1641 as part of the eager Dutch army of merchant adventurers who had come to colonise their new prized possessions in the East Indies, (Indonesia today). In 1645 great, great, great, grandfather Joachim Mansvelt had departed Batavia in Java, already a flourishing Dutch colony, to establish a branch of the family business, which was crafting jewellery. In Malacca, the new Dutch colony seized from the Portuguese that year. Subsequent generations of Mansvelts, as with other Dutch mixed-bloods of part Malay descent, who were born either in Malacca or Java, intermarried

with the Malacca-Portuguese and, despite consistent Dutch attempts at eradicating the hated papal religion, which at one stage was forbidden by the Dutch, and the religion went underground in Malacca, the Roman Catholic faith survived. Even the Masveldts, as well as other Dutch mixed-blood colonials, were converted to the faith which was the powerful 'cement' binding this European-Malay mixed race.

While all this was transpiring in **the Malays**, the British who were already established in Bengal, India, through their own East India Company, and had not yet had reason to be in conflict with the Dutch who had usurped the Portuguese in **the Malays**, and were tolerated, had been venturing into the Malay Seas as private businessmen since 1740, carrying on a "country trade", (which usually meant the undertaking of illegal or 'shady' dealings), supplying whatever was most in demand by interested groups within the various Malay sultanates. The British dealt mainly in opium, which was most sought after by the Chinese in "Old Johor", the Bugis, Siamese, Arabs and Indians. These merchant-adventurers were the forerunners of British expansion in the **Malay World**, who also brought with them the knowledge of making armaments — gunpowder and bullets. They also gathered intelligence which was passed on to the East India Company at Bengal.

Malacca and Java, both Dutch colonies at that time, became British temporarily in 1795 as a result of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe but were returned to Dutch rule in 1801, re-occupied in 1807, and restored to the Dutch in 1818. But by this time British presence in **the Malays** had begun in earnest, and the British East India Company located at Bengal, India, felt there wasn't a need to carry on the trade with the "Old Johor" Empire, then located at Riau, as British ports had already been established at Penang, and Bencoolen in Sumatra.

Thomas Stamford Raffles, the man credited with founding modern Singapore, was given sanction in 1818 by the British East India Company at Bengal to scout for an ideal site for the setting up of a British Station at the southern end of the Malay peninsula, (Malaya), to guarantee safety for British vessels that would be passing through the Straits of Malacca. Even though they had a port at Acheen in northern Sumatra, and Penang had already been established, the Dutch were about to re-occupy Malacca and there was need for effective measures against piratical forays by Riau Bugis and *Orang Laut* pirates on British ships.

Raffles had first arrived in **the Malays** at Penang, from Bengal, in 1805 where he served as Assistant Secretary. He quickly learned the Malay language and was soon recognized as an expert on Malay affairs. In 1811



he accompanied Lord Minto, the Governor-General of India, during the British invasion of Java and, when Minto left, he was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Java. In 1816, after the British withdrew from Java, he returned to England where he was knighted and returned to Sumatra to become Lieutenant-Governor of Benkulen in 1817. Through his in-depth study of the Malay language and culture, having been in the **Malay World** for almost 15 years, Raffles had heard of the once glorious and splendid city of 'Simhapura', (Singapore), literally meaning 'Lion City' in Sanskrit, and was aware of its location at the southern extreme of the Malay peninsula. The island was already well known to travellers in 'the Malays' from about the 1500s because even if Singapore had become a vassal of the "Old Johor" Sultanate, she had existed as a well-known State from about the 1290s, when she had been known as one of the three kingdoms within the Hindu *Sri Vijaya Empire*, which exacted tolls on passing ships through its waterway with Pulau Batam. Hinduism and Buddhism came to the **Malay World** in the first three centuries A.D. The most powerful of the early kingdoms was Srividjaya which was based in Sumatra but controlled part of the Malay peninsula and west Java from the late seventh century. The magnificent Buddhist monument at Borobudur in Java is a legacy of the eighth-century kingdom of **Kalinga**. Singapore was also a known entrepot to Chinese mariners from about the 13th Century. European colonisers and explorers in 'the Malays' in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries knew it as the ancient capital of a Malay kingdom that had been sacked and laid waste by the powerful Javanese *Majapahit State* around 1370. The mighty **Majapahit or Mojopahit Hindu Dynasty** had dominated the entire archipelago of islands of the **Malay World**, and this included what is known today as Indonesia, Malaysia, and parts of the Philippines. The **Majapahit Dynasty** was so strong it even forced trade relations first with Siam and later, with China. Bringing China to her knees happened around 1292, during the reign of the Mongol Emperor Kublai Khan. The Mongol, who had conquered old Cathay, had first set his sights on Japan and sent his invading army across the sea toward the Land of the Rising Sun. The Japanese saw the invading Chinese coming and were fearful, because of Kublai Khan's reputation as a successful soldier, and prayed for deliverance from their gods. A divine wind, (a typhoon), or 'kamikaze' arose and caught the invaders in Japan's Kakata Bay and almost annihilated the entire Chinese force, thus preventing an invasion of Japan. Soon after this the blood-thirsty Kublai Khan sent an expeditionary force of three hundred thousand troops, borne on a fleet of a thousand ships, which landed on the north-east coast of Java, with the objective of battle

and plunder. The aim of the Chinese was the rich treasures that the **Majapahit** had within their capital, but due to the cunning and shrewdness of the Javanese, after a see-saw battle the Javanese drove the Mongols and their conscripted Chinese soldiers off their island in defeat. The war with China and Kublai Khan resulted in the Javanese enslaving their Mongolian and Chinese vanquished, thus bringing the Chinese into the 'southseas' for the first time. From about this time the Chinese began arriving in 'the Malays' in large numbers, to work as coolies, and this period marks the beginning of the era of the 'Overseas Chinese' in the Malay Seas. The **Majapahit** was finally over-run by Muslim forces in the 16th Century, slightly before the arrival of the Dutch on the scene. Even during as 'late' a period as Raffles' time in Java and Benkulen, some 500 years after her sacking by the **Majapahit Hindu Dynasty**, the ruins and ramparts of the once-splendid city that was the Hindu Simhapura, (Singapore), were still visible to passing seafarers to and from the Straits of Malacca. In the 18th Century Singapore had become a part of the "Old Johor" Empire and its chieftain was regarded as a noble of the court, which was the capital at Tanjong Pinang on Bentan Island. In the 19th Century Singapore's chief was *Daeng Abdul Rahman, Temenggong Sri Maharaja of "Old Johor"* an official of the Sultan, and the island's inhabitants were mainly proto-Malay sea-gypsy 'pirates' who swore allegiance to the Bugis-controlled sultanate.

The proto-Malay inhabitants on Singapore who were regarded by Europeans in the region as 'pirates', did not see themselves in that light. Before the coming of the White Man and other foreign traders to "the Malays", the sea-peoples of "the Malays" had always regarded their waters and whatever that sailed over them as a hereditary-feudal possession, and their seizing and plundering of ships a perfectly legitimate pursuit, and so long as their chieftain, (the *temenggong*), held a valid title from the Sultan, their 'occupation' was a legal naval operation. The Singapore *temenggong's* domain, granted by the *Yang Di-Pertuan Muda*, the 'head' of "Old Johor", included Singapore, Bulang, a number of smaller islands in the Riau Archipelago, and a portion of the tip of Malaya.

When Stamford Raffles arrived at Penang from Bengal in 1818, after receiving his instructions from the British East India Company, the Dutch were already established at the "Old Johor" Sultanate on Riau, and were compelling its pro-tem ruler, the *Yang Di-Pertuan Muda*, to repudiate a previous agreement between him and the British. And Raffles realised that he had to get vital Singapore as a British Station before the Dutch got wind of his plans.

From 1818 onwards the Dutch would control Malacca as well as the entrance to the Malacca Straits, from Riau, and Britain had to establish an alternative settlement that would enable the British easy access into the Straits of Malacca. For this purpose William Farquar, Raffles' second-in-command, had drawn up a Treaty of Commercial Alliance with a *Raja Ja'afar* at Riau, just bare months before the Dutch arrived back on Riau.

Raffles knew that *Sultan Mahmud Shah*, (not the **Mahmud Shah** who had lost Malacca to the Portugese in 1511!), the legitimate sovereign of "Old Johor", had been dead since 1812 and had no sons by his royal wives to succeed him. Two male offspring by Bugis commoners: **Hussein**, the elder, who was closely connected by marriage to the Bugis, *Temenggong Daeng Abdul Rahman*, the chieftain of Singapore, and the younger half-brother, **Abd'r Rahman**, were vying for the throne but the royal widow, *Tengku Putri Hamidah*, was refusing to hand over the regalia of office as *Raja Ja'afar*, a court official, supported by the occupying Dutch, had appointed **Abd'r Rahman** as sultan against her wishes and while **Hussein**, the elder half-brother, was away from court due to his marriage to the daughter of the Bendahara of Pahang.

Stamford Raffles first drew up an agreement with the Singapore chieftain, *Temenggong Daeng Abdul Rahman*, to allow the British to set up a station on Singapore Island in exchange for British protection for him and his family against the Dutch and his own king, and an annual pension of 3000 Spanish dollars, (which was the accepted currency of the region then), which permitted the British East India Company to begin trading.

The founder of modern Singapore next made plans to formally approach 'Sultan' **Abd'r Rahman**, the more-favoured among the Bugis faction in "Old Johor" and who was religiously-inclined, to set his royal seal of approval to the document, when he suddenly realised that the 'Sultan's' Dutch masters would refute any such action. So he secretly sent for **Hussein**, who he and Colonel Farquar had befriended in Malacca when the British were in temporary control of the sea-town from 1795, and who had been displaced by the Dutch on the 'Old Johor' throne, in favour of his younger half-brother **Abd'r Rahman**, to sail from Lingga where he had returned after his wedding, to Singapore where Raffles proclaimed him the **Sultan of Singapore** in February 1819, by prior arrangement.

On that same day an agreement was reached between the British East India Company, and the **British-installed** sultan, (the *Yang Di-Pertuan Silat, Hussein*), and *Temenggong Daeng Abdul Rahman*, the island-chieftain of Singapore, whereby the Tamils and Bengalis, including a Tamil teacher who had accompanied Raffles' ship and would work for the British

in Singapore after it came under British administration, would be under the control of the Company, and the Chinese gambier planters already on Singapore, who had been brought to the island, from Riau in 1819 by *Temenggong Daeng Abdul Rahman*, and were the descendants of the original 10,000 Chinese coolies settled on Bentan Island in the Riau Archipelago since 1784, the *Sea Gypsies*, and the *Orang Benua*, (the Land Malays), would be under the control of the newly-installed sultan. It was further provided that the revenues of Singapore, whatever the amount, would be divided equally between the British East India Company and **Sultan Hussein**. The Singapore Sultan then set his seal of approval to the original agreement between his uncle, the *temenggong* and Raffles earlier that year in January, in exchange for British protection from the Dutch and his half-brother **Abd'r Rahman**, and an annual pension of 5,000 Spanish dollars. Both royals, (the Sultan and his uncle, the *temenggong*), were also bound to aid and assist "...the honourable East India Company against all enemies..." Singapore was on its way into a new and different era, with Britain becoming a dominant power in that part of the **Malay World**.

*Temenggong Daeng Abdul Rahman* was recognised as the "...Ruler of Singapore, who governed the country of Singapore in his own name and in the name of *Sree Sultan Hussein Mahumud Shah* ..." The port was to be under the authority of the British and all persons belonging to the British Factory were under the protection of the British. The question of authority was stated very ambiguously. The *temenggong* was the **ruler of Singapore**, while **Sultan Hussein** was but a legal necessity. But the dubious legality of **Sultan Hussein's title** was the only basis of the British East India Company's claim to Singapore. Raffles was also fearful that both Malay princes might still go over to the Dutch. In his *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* (First published 1902), by Charles B. Buckley, Buckley gives copies of letters from the *temenggong* and the sultan to the Yang Di-Pertuan Muda, Raja Ja'afar, claiming that Raffles had forced them, against their will, to allow the settlement on Singapore.

In fact in reality there was no territorial cessation giving a legal right of legislation and the only law which could have existed was the **Malay code** which considered the Malay chief to be the proprietor of the land.

To the *temenggong* and *Sultan Hussein*, Singapore was their own entrepot, and in their eyes simply a slight adaptation of the typical Malay port. But Stamford Raffles saw things from a different point-of-view. Singapore Station was his own creation, and he successfully annulled all the rights and privileges of the two Malay princes by an August 1823 treaty. A treaty which gave each royal a monthly sum of money in exchange for all

the land within the island of Singapore and all the islands immediately adjacent, which would be at the entire disposal of the British Colonial Government on Singapore. By this move the Malay princes lost all legitimate claims to status and political power in Singapore.

In occupying Singapore the British founded a new entrepot right on the doorstep of Riau, which was to rival and outstrip it. Their installation of *Tengku Long*, (which was another name of Hussein's), as **sultan** was their first step toward active involvement in Malay politics.

Under British administration which made Singapore a part of Stamford Raffles' Residency of Fort Marlborough, (Bencoolen), in Sumatra, she took over the functions that Riau once performed. The new British colony became the centre of Indian opium traffic, and it drew native and Chinese trade, including the sale of gambier. It also contributed to Malacca's further decline as there was no need for another entrepot in the Straits of Malacca. With the new entrepot of Singapore in British hands, the fragmented "Old Johor" Sultanate was destroyed. The European powers in control, both British and Dutch, became the primary sources of legitimacy in the Malay political system. For *Sultan Hussein of Singapore* and *Temenggong Abdul Rahman*, and their families, their survival would come to depend, almost exclusively on the goodwill and tolerance of the British Colonial Government at Singapore.

With the severing of ties with Riau, with the coming of the British, the temenggong, *Daeng Abdul Rahman*, who had, in fact been ousted by the Dutch from Riau, and his nephew, the British-installed *Sultan Hussein*, began a series of disputes with Raffles and another Resident after Farquar, called Crawford, between 1819 and 1823, to collect revenues they thought was their natural right to collect, being princes of the former "Old Johor" Court at Riau. But with their signing of the 1823 treaty, which deprived them of political power, they also forfeited any opportunity to return to Riau as they had sided with the British instead of with the Dutch.

Stamford Raffles, unable to guide the fortunes of Singapore by this time, following the signing of the 1823 agreement between the British and Malay princes, returned to England and never came back to Singapore. Though he was instrumental in obtaining vital Singapore, (to the British, that is), as a British base, in actual fact Raffles was the Lieutenant-Governor of Benkulen in Sumatra and left the administration of Singapore to his second-in-command, Lt.-Col. William Farquhar who had been the Governor of Malacca from 1803 to 1819. After being involved in signing the various treaties with Hussein and his uncle, the *temenggong*, Raffles returned to Benkulen and did not return to Singapore until October 1822, by which time

the settlement at Singapore had become well established under the governance of Farquhar. After Raffles had departed the Malay World for good, the Settlement was taken over by the Resident John Crawford, who negotiated a new treaty with the Malay princes on 3rd August 1824 where the princes were forced to make full cession of Singapore and the adjacent islands to the British East India Company in exchange for cash settlements. They were allowed to maintain their respective establishments at Singapore under British jurisdiction: the Sultan at Kampong Glam and the Temenggong at Telok Blangah. They were also committed to suppress piracy.

The *temenggong* had failed to have the best of both worlds — to continue to exercise his power as a Malay chief while, at the same time, govern the port of Singapore under the protection of the British. Sixteen months after he had signed away Singapore he died in 1825.

The mistake of *Temenggong Abdul Rahman* and *Sultan Hussein* was their seeing Singapore as a new base for the "Old Johor" Empire in 1819, because the first two decades of the 19th Century had seen that empire severed in two by the British and the Dutch.

While all of this was happening on Singapore, the Dutch on Riau were furious with the British involvement in the "Old Johor" Sultanate throne dispute as they felt that they had a prior 'right' to decide who would rule among the Malays there, since the Dutch had been on Riau first. They claimed that Raffles' intervention, by installing Hussein infringed their own treaty rights.

The issue of Singapore was finally concluded in the long-drawn-out negotiations between Britain and Holland in the 17th March 1824 Treaty of London which sought to consolidate Anglo-Dutch friendship in Europe by settling all the points of dispute in the East. Malacca was given back to the British and the Dutch promised not to make treaties with the Malay states in the Malay peninsula. The British in return promised to forego any treaties with the Sumatran states, and withdrew from Benkulen. With Dutch recognition of the British settlement at Singapore, the English were no longer dependent on the tenuous arrangements they had made with the Malay chiefs.

The Treaty had far-reaching consequences for the **Malay World**. It partitioned the "Old Johor" Empire which had included Singapore, its outlying islands, Johore on the tip of the Malay peninsula, and the rest of Malaya from the Riau Archipelago, Java, Sumatra, and the remainder of the **Malay World**. It also helped increase the divisions of authority within the crumbling Malay empires of old. The Treaty of London also cut off Malaya from Sumatra where it had derived its language, religion, political, cultural

and social traditions, and also destroyed a link which had stretched back through centuries.

Within Singapore, the two Malay princes who had been responsible for the island becoming a British island, had vied with each other for leadership among Singapore's Malays. Hussein had lacked the necessary acumen to profit from his elevation to sultan and had no standing in the Malay World who knew that the British had merely created him sultan to "legalise" their acquisition of Singapore. But when Hussein's uncle, the *temenggong*, died in 1825, Hussein avoided naming the successor to the **temenggong-position** as he didn't want to usurp the *prerogative* of the Sultan of Lingga, to whom he and his uncle's families owed their lineage.

While everything was still in a state of flux, with the death of *Temenggong Daeng Abdul Rahman*, **Tengku Yahya**, one of Sultan Hussein's sons, together with his own followers encroached on Dutch territory in the Karimons to mine for tin and was driven out in 1827. From that time Sultan Hussein, who shared in his son's debacle, declined in stature among the Malays of Singapore and was forced to flee to Malacca in 1834 and died there in disgrace, on 5th September the following year, and is buried in the Tranquerah Mosque there. As a result of this there was no Sultan of Singapore until 1855 when the late Sultan's son, **Tengku Ali**, obtained title to his father's properties on Singapore and, under British supervision, signed a treaty with **Temenggong Ibrahim**, the son of the late *Temenggong Daeng Abdul Rahman*, which gave Ali the title **Sultan of Johor**, a fixed pension and authority over Muar in Johore but at the price of acknowledging that *Temenggong Ibrahim*, who had been installed as *temenggong* only in 1841, sixteen years after the death of own his father, was the actual ruler of Johore. But fate was to deal the late Sultan Hussein's family another cruel blow. Despite **Tengku Ali** obtaining title to the land owned by his late father, a dispute arose among **Sultan Hussein's** relatives over who actually owned the estate, and a British Colonial Court of Appeal in 1897 ruled that no one could claim to be the successor to the late **Sultan**, and that the land would return to the state. The **Sultan Hussein Ordinance** was then enacted in 1904 to provide the late **Sultan Hussein's** descendants income from the estate according to a specified formula but the family had lost title to the ownership of the sultan's estate and properties.

When *Sultan Ali* died in 1877 his descendants were passed over and in 1885 the title **Sultan of Johor**, (now meaning the land at the southern tip of the Malay peninsula), was given to **Abu Bakar** of Johore, the son of *Temenggong Ibrahim* who had died in 1862.

The state that *Abu Bakar* inherited as his domain was largely the creation of his father, *Temenggong Ibrahim*, who, in 1825 when his own father, *Temenggong Daeng Abdul Rahman*, had died, was left without title or estate. But in the tradition of hundreds of Malay rajas before him, as a disinherited prince, claimed his estate by conquest by allying himself with Governor Bonham of Singapore in 1836 against the 'pirates' still prevailing in Singapore waters. On the basis of this he gained power and received recognition from his brother chiefs at Riau and on the Peninsula, as well as the Europeans, and finally received his title in 1841. He began to build the modern new state of Johore after this.

*Temenggong Abu Bakar* was twenty-eight when his father died, and in addition to being fluent and literate in English and Malay, had already spent several years looking after family affairs and running the newly-established government in Johore. On 1st January 1866 he changed the name of his port and station at the southern-most end of his state, from *Tanjong Putri* to *Johor Bahru* to reflect that **this** Johore was a *different* Johore to that of his forefathers. In that same year he planned a visit to England, and realising that the title of *temenggong* was unknown in Europe, on 18th April 1868 sent an emissary to the *Yamtuan Muda* on Riau, (which still was the spiritual centre of the Malay World), to inquire whether he could assume "sovereign power", an euphemism for a royal title. This was granted and with the concurrence of the Governor of the Straits Settlements and the Sultan of Lingga, *Abu Bakar* assumed the title of *maharaja*, a ranking familiar to Europe as that of the highest-ranking Indian princes from India, on 30th June 1868. During the first decade of his rule he became the single-most important Malay political figure of the 19th Century.

It would be another seventeen years before he would assume the title "**Sultan of Johore**", the modern state at the end of the Malay peninsula, when he received the honour and decoration from Britain's Queen Victoria in 1885.

The Crown Colony of the Straits Settlements came into being on 1st April 1867 and consisted of Singapore, Penang, (with Province Wellesley which the British obtained from the Sultan of Kedah in 1800), Malacca, and Labuan which was ceded to Great Britain by the Sultan of Brunei in 1846. Penang, originally known as 'Prince of Wales Island' was obtained by the British East India Company from the Sultan of Kedah in 1786, Sungei Ujong, (one of the states of Negri Sembilan, the nine states,) Selangor and Perak came under British protection but did not lose their sovereignty in 1874, (the Dindings and Pankor Island were ceded to the British in 1826 for the suppression of piracy). The other Malay States came under British



protection but without losing their sovereignty, in the following years: Pahang (1888), Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah and Perlis, (1909), and Johore, (1914).

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Luci Mansvelt had been twenty-four, and a nurse at the Singapore General Hospital in Sepoy Lines, (this district name, once given to that part of the island which used to billet Indian soldiers in the colonising British Army of Raffles' day, and another one alongside it called the Coolie Lines, which used to have quarters for the Chinese coolies working at the wharfs in Tanjong Pagar, no longer exist), in 1938, not long after her arrival from Malacca and getting a job as a nurse, when she first met her husband-to-be, Cecil Siddon, at the home of a Chinese colleague. Siddon had called on the brother of the nurse working in the same ward as Luci, and both of them had been mutually drawn to each other. Cecil liked her dark, attractive looks and appealing sweet nature, while she found him jovial as well as serious about things. She fell in love with his blue eyes and light-brown wavy hair. He had told her that his late mother was Dutch and had come originally from Batavia in the Dutch East Indies, while his father had been an English sea-captain. Luci's own father had been a goldsmith whose family fortunes had declined, though she didn't say anything of this to the handsome Englishman. By the time she had completed her studies at the Catholic Convent at Bandar Hilir, some three miles from the **Portugese Settlement**, both her parents had passed away and she had decided to change her luck by coming to Singapore to begin a new life.

When Cecil and Luci decided that they would wed, she, a devout Malacca-Portuguese Catholic, insisted that her fiance, an Anglican, be re-baptised, and he enrolled at a catechism class run by the parish priest at the St Joseph's Portuguese Mission Catholic Church in Queen Street.

After the wedding and Thomas their first-born had arrived, the family lived in Siddon's well-appointed married quarters in the British Naval Base at Seletar, (a district in the north of Singapore, named after the proto-Malay tribe that had resided there when Raffles first arrived on Singapore Island). Siddon's sumptuous colonial home, a virtual mansion, was on a slight rise within the base, and looked down onto the wharfs below. The house was a raised bungalow set in a wide lawn, and the interior was tastefully furnished in keeping with his status as a British colonial marine-engineer working for the British Royal Navy, with separate quarters for his servants and gardener. Siddon's immediate neighbours, on either side, were an engineer like him, who was from England, and an English naval officer.

From where they lived Siddon could easily have taken the convenient short-cut to the dockside below by squeezing through a gap in the perimeter-fence separating the living quarters of the personnel from the actual wharfs below, where he worked. But he would never have considered such a thing. Instead he'd pedal his base-provided bicycle a mile-and-a-half to the dockside main gate. Because it kept him trim, he said, and, anyway, going through the fence was unauthorised, he had patiently explained to his wife when she had tried pointing out to him the 'easy' way of getting to work.

As he grew older Thomas grew to understand that his father preferred his privacy and disliked his mother being too friendly with the wives of their next-door neighbours.

"Whites consider Asians, and that includes Eurasians, their subject people — it doesn't matter that you're married to an Englishman — they'll still look down their noses at you," he'd warn.

In contrast to her husband Luci was mild-mannered and trusting. She was surprised at her husband's warnings and attitudes. Surely his own kind would accept her since she was his wife, she thought. But Cecil was insistent and she did not fraternise with her English neighbours overly, to avoid an argument with her husband. She often wondered why Cecil said the English on the base might find her disposition and outlook alien, and turn unfriendly, never realising that in a colonial Singapore the English "masters" looked down on all Asians and part-Whites.

The darkly-attractive Luci had given up her nursing job after her marriage, and was content to live the life of an English colonial's wife — with servants, including a black-trousered Cantonese 'baby-amah' for her new-born son, a cook, a gardener, and a driver for their car. Malacca was a fast-receding existence in her mind. In her new life in Singapore, (and she was awfully pleased that she had made to decision to leave her hometown and try her 'luck' in Singapore), the old Portuguese-Dutch colony, with its dimly-lit streets, bullock carts, water-available-only-from wells, and easy-going ways — seemed a strange "other-world".

Knowing *Malacca Portuguese-Patois*, Malay, a little Hokkein, (a Chinese dialect spoken in Malacca), and the English spoken by the locals, she found the pukka accents of the Englishwomen on the base quite confusing at first, and had to concentrate to catch what was being said to her. She found that the locals speaking English to her, pronounced English clearer to her ears, whereas the Englishwomen's use of their own regional colloquialisms just went past her head. Her English friends, however, realised this and would converse with Luci without any 'slang'.

Thomas' eyes turned grey-brown from blue when he was eighteen

months old. The family in the meanwhile had moved out of the Naval Base to a single-storied house in Owen Road, in Singapore Town as it used to be called in the prewar colonial days, as distinct from the rest of the 'backward' island. The new house was huge, with a front garden and a large compound at back, where a watchman, a 'jaga', as he is even now called, and a 'kebun' (Malay for 'gardener'), together with their respective families, lived. The landlord was Chinese and only appeared once a month to collect rent and pay the two Indian workers, the servants, who were under his employ rather than the tenant because this enabled the Chinese to charge a lot more than he would normally be able to. The Siddon family lived upstairs in a self-contained flat only accessible from the front through a stout door. The lower area of the ground-floor beneath their flat was in fact the living quarters of the household servants.

Cecil had explained to Luci, his wife, that he preferred to move out of the base as he could take advantage of a large housing allowance paid by the base administrators. There was less nuisance from mosquitoes as well. He hadn't let on to his wife that he and the other civilian engineers had been instructed to move into alternative accommodations outside the base as their quarters were required to billet naval personnel. The British Navy were increasing their presence on the island as the British Government in London was anticipating possible 'problems' from Japan, in the future. World War Two had been raging in Europe since 3rd September 1939 but in far-off Singapore Island the event had not yet touched anyone's life as what was happening in Europe seemed too far away.

Luci was glad to be back in Singapore Town, anyway, because her friends, especially the nurses at the Kandang Kerbau Maternity Hospital, which was close to where they were now living in Owen Road, and her sister Joanna, and brother-in-law, Harry Lopez, a dresser from Malacca, could visit regularly. At the Naval Base at Seletar her relatives and friends had found it troublesome to try to see her because of the stringent pass regulations for all civilian visitors to the place, and no one was permitted to stay overnight.

The talk in the air all over Singapore Island, at this time, was that Japan would probably be joining Germany in her world-war. Germany would conquer Europe while Japan would handle South-east Asia. The 'Land of the Rising Sun' had already occupied Taiwan, then known by its Portuguese colonial name of Formosa, in 1895, and had changed the name of her capital, Taipeh, to Taihoku, and in 1941 had already established the 'Taihoku Army Research Section' whose responsibility was the task of collecting all conceivable data connected with tropical warfare, the organization of

corps, equipment, campaign direction, management and treatment of weapons, sanitation, supply, administration of occupied territory, and military strategy, tactics, and geography of Malaya, (including Singapore), the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies and Burma. They had occupied the whole Korean peninsula in 1910 and Manchuria in 1931, and had begun waging an all-out murderous conflict with China since 1932. The feeling among the Japanese that it was necessary to prepare seriously for war against the United States and Britain developed after what the Japanese considered was economic pressure being exerted against her by the Americans following upon the movement of Japanese forces into French Indochina on 28th July 1941 after France had capitulated to Hitler's Germany in 1940. This resulted in the freezing of Japanese funds and the property of Japanese residents in the US, the annulment of the Commercial Treaty between the United States and Japan, and the prohibition of exports of petroleum and scrap iron to Japan from the Dutch East Indies.

Though war with the US and Britain could be avoided the Japanese felt, and even though the two White powers terminated their anti-Japanese economic measures, the lack of liquid fuel to run their war machines and oil the wheels of industry would be fatal to Japan. In 1941 the Nippon Army and Navy had in storage approximately 1,170,000 kilolitres of aviation petrol, (about 240 million gallons), and about 4,400,000 kilolitres of ordinary petrol, (about 970 million gallons). Raw materials such as iron ore and aluminium, could only be obtained from the countries of South-east Asia, and even though war was declared between them and the two White powers, the loss of Japanese shipping from the enemy's bombs would be considered small in proportion to the saving of the Japanese economy. The Japanese agreed that they would rather fight than sit down and die of starvation. They decided that the forthcoming battle would begin to the south from Japan, meaning French Indochina, British Burma and Malaya (which included Singapore), the Dutch East Indies, as well as all the territories south of the East Indies. It was agreed that war would commence on Meiji Setsu, (3rd November, the anniversary of the birthday of the Meiji emperor, whose reign began in 1867), and the Japanese would capture Manila by New Year's, Singapore by Kigensetsu, (anniversary of the coronation of Japan's first emperor, 11th February, 600 B.C.), Java on Army Commemoration Day, (10th March), and Rangoon on the emperor's birthday, (19th April). A report on this was prepared by the Japanese War Office and submitted to the Imperial Presence, (Emperor Hirohito), on 6th September 1940, the 14th year of Showa, the era of Emperor Hirohito's reign. Transportation of troops over long distances had to be undertaken; at the end of the sea-voyage

the men had to be disembarked on open beaches in the face of enemy-fire, and then the troops had to move through dense jungle in sweltering heat, repair destroyed bridges, smash the resistance of an inflexible foe, and finally capture an impregnable fortress — Singapore. The Japanese began planning for their war with a vengeance.

Whenever Cecil came across his Luci and her Asian friends dwelling on the subject of a conflict in Asia, the possible role of Japan, and whether Singapore would be included, he would angrily interrupt and warn everyone to cease the 'foolish talk'.

"You're not supposed to discuss such things among yourselves, especially in front of Whites, (like himself), don't take advantage of me, just because I'm married to Luci," he'd burst out.

No one among the British ever believed the island-gossip that Japan would invade Singapore Island. The place was a citadel, especially with the establishment of the Naval Base up north, the heavy artillery placed in strategic locations on the shores facing the sea to the south, the mounted gun-turrets in pill-boxes all over the coast, especially to the south, and the outer fortified islands like *Blakang Mati*, (Malay: "Death from Behind", a legacy of Singapore's pirate past, more than a century ago). Anyway who would dare attempt a seaward attack?

Who could ever dream that in a bare short months into the future they would all sweep into a new terrifying existence in a baptism of fire. Their leisurely-paced Victorian world of mid-day tiffins with music, and afternoon teas, disintegrating completely, throwing them pell-mell into the twentieth century!

Asian and European alike would endure terror, brutality, rape, oppression, torture and starvation under brute Japanese occupation of Singapore and Malaya, from 1942 to 1945, the likes of which has never been encountered in Asia before this century.

Malaya and Singapore, (which were then linked as one colony by the British), together with the rest of South-east Asia would plunge headlong into war. Hong Kong, Manila, Singapore, Rangoon, Batavia, Surabaya, Kuching, Balikpapan, Kendari and Rabaul would fall with amazing speed and ease as Japanese forces occupied country after country, island after island, subduing fortress after fortress as Tokyo's Navy, Army and Air Force performed brilliantly.

The coastal defences of colonial outposts, relics of a more leisurely martial era, would be pulverised in air attacks within half-an-hour of aerial bombardment. The richest colonial empires in the world would fall within weeks, from the commencement of World War Two in Asia.

From December 1941 to May 1942 the moment of decisive assault would be chosen unerringly to give the Japanese Air Force in each theatre of war certain air superiority. Singapore, described by the British as the **Gibraltar of the East**, declared impregnable to invasion from the sea, would fall to a back-door thrust from the landward side up north, which had never been anticipated and was not met by any sort of thought-out effective defensive plan because the British had never imagined that the Japanese had even known that all their cannon pointed south from Singapore and that there was no defence for north Singapore or the Johore Straits!

A new era of total warfare would begin as hordes of Nippon soldiers dressed in lightweight mottled-green uniforms, rubber-shoes, carrying small bags of rice and dried fish for sustenance, and armed with light, high-velocity rifles, poured down from French Indochina and Siam, (Thailand), through tangled jungle and foulest swamp.

Through their own 'research department' in Taiwan, their ownership of tin mines and rubber estates in South-east Asia before the war, the Japs had detailed knowledge of the region. And from China they would slowly but relentlessly push further southward toward their objective — complete ownership and domination of the vast wealth of French Indochina, British Burma, Malaya, (including Singapore) and Borneo, and the Dutch East Indies. These countries had vast raw material resources, then under the control of White colonialists, and which the Japanese badly needed to feed their own industries.

Prior to actual war hostilities commencing on Singapore, Cecil Siddon had for several weeks before been spending less and less time at home as all his working hours and more, were devoted to crucial top-secret work at the naval base at Seletar. Unknown to Luci, his wife, he had been recruited by the British Royal Navy to ferret information from the locals, especially those who seemed sympathetic to the Japanese businessmen inadvertently trapped on the island, when their country had suddenly started becoming belligerent, and who the British authorities were keeping an eye on. Cecil's superiors felt that since he was born on the island, and spoke some Malay, he stood a good chance of picking up valuable gossip.

From their own intelligence sources the British did have some inkling that the Japanese were planning *something* but for the life of them, somehow, just did not believe that it would be designs on Singapore Island. As far as they were concerned *everyone* believed that Singapore was their 'Gibraltar of the East'. Nevertheless they still staged mass civil defence drills and exercises with specific groups, going over with those who turned up for these demonstrations, mainly bored Colonials, Eurasians and

English-educated Straits-born, and Baba-Nonya Chinese civil servants who had to turn up anyway, the rudiments of first aid and basic safety from bomb-explosions and incendiary devices, and falling masonry and timber. The colonial administration as well as the British armed forces were extremely reluctant to train and arm the locals, especially the Chinese, Malays and Indians, though they did accept Eurasians into the local volunteer corps. The Malays who were in uniform, usually joined the island's police force but the bulk of them came from Malacca. As far as the British were concerned they were suspicious of the Asians, as within these communities there were too many 'loyalties' tugging at their emotions. The *sinkeh*, (China-born), alien-Chinese were split into several 'camps'— some were still loyal followers of the deposed child-emperor, others supported the Kuomintang or the Communist faction within the Kuomintang, and some were non-committal, one way or the other. They had come to the 'south seas' and Singapore to seek their fortune and would return to the motherland one day. The British were well aware of the China-born alien-Chinese attitude of those days because they had set up a Chinese Protectorate to which these Chinese had recourse, in case of 'difficulties' with the British Administration on Singapore. Though it seemed that the main preoccupation of the Chinese Protectorate, in those days, was the rescuing of Chinese baby girls from a life of eventual prostitution because their financially-strapped families just could not afford to feed them, and would either sell or give their daughters away to any takers. Quite a few South Indian families, many with daughters of their own, stepped in to adopt these unwanted Chinese baby girls and brought them up as Indians. Among the Malays there was the radical, independence-minded, pro-Japanese group called the Kesatuan Melayu Muda, (Association of Malay Youth), which wanted the British out of Malaya, (including Singapore), and the colonial government was worried about those Indians who were sympathetic to the 'Independence League' set up by Subhas Chandra Bose in India, whose sole aim was independence for India from British rule. The British reluctance to arm or train the Chinese, Malays and Indians was based on the emotional 'pulls' each of the island's Asian communities had in their respective mother-countries as well, and their loyalty was suspect. The administrators knew from their own records that every single one of the Chinese, Malay and Indian locals, or whose parents or grandparents had left their respective mother-countries to make good in Singapore, better than when at home, had only come to Singapore with that purpose in mind—to make money and return home. The Eurasians appeared as the only community whose feelings to the British and Singapore were not suspect and who the British felt they could rely on. This was a sentiment

based purely on racial lines — the Eurasian had White blood in his veins. Some were first-generation and were considered almost all-White, while there were those who were several generations removed, but everyone within the community could be relied on to defend “their” island-home and the British colony. And the administrators found that their sentiments were proved right as the Eurasians practically rushed to sign up and join the volunteer defence forces. But despite this, two months before the outbreak of war in Europe on 3rd September 1939 the British began recruiting volunteers from the various communities from all over Malaya, (including Singapore), to train them for defence against a possible Japanese invasion. The volunteers either joined the Air Raid Precaution, Medical Auxiliary Service, Fire-Fighting Squad, Observer Squad or Special Constabulary. Some 8,000 civilians enrolled for the volunteer service of Malaya, of which 2,000 formed the Singapore battalion of the Straits Settlements Volunteer Corps. Later, after the Jap invasion, the combat guerilla strength in Malaya and Singapore, made up primarily of Malayan Communist Party members, a majority being alien-Chinese, came to 5,000. J.D. Dailey of the Malayan Police Special Force, at the last minute on 25th December 1941, raised a defence force, called Dalforce, again comprising alien-Chinese in the main who had responded because their government in Chungking had called on them to aid the British. In the beginning of the war they were almost annihilated but later they inflicted heavy losses on the enemy at Bukit Timah and Jurong. Poorly-armed and untrained, they fought as virtual suicide-squads. During the closing stages of the war two Malay resistance groups were absorbed into Force 136, the British underground intelligence force fighting behind enemy lines. Cecil’s brother-in-law, Harry Lopez, begged Cecil and Luci to flee with him and his wife, Joanna, Luci’s sister, to Malacca where it would be safe for all of them. Harry erroneously thought. But the Englishman refused outright. If the worse were to happen, his duty was to stay and help defend Singapore, which was British, and his home as well, and, anyway, leaving the island at such a time he considered an act of cowardice and betrayal. Harry and Joanna returned to Malacca with sinking hearts. They felt that the Siddons were crazy to remain with the Japanese threat in the air.

After their in-laws had departed, Cecil took his wife tenderly in his arms and told her that should anything unforeseen happen, (he restrained her from asking any questions), she was to await word which would be brought to her about his whereabouts. It would either come from him direct, or from the British Admiralty at the Naval Base.

“Wait ten days before making enquiries, I should be home before that



time or else someone will bring word. Don't question me too much, I really don't know all the answers. There's talk of war and I'm just getting you prepared for the unexpected — if there's a sign of trouble stay by the wireless, and look after Thomas. For god's sake don't panic."

The Englishman had taught his wife the responsibility of being married to a White man. Luci stemmed the torrent of questions threatening to gush from her mouth, and nodded silently. It was a time to be serious.

Japan had been planning for war in the Far East as far back as the first quarter of this century. She had already crossed swords once with tzarist-Russia in 1905, and come out victorious, and she was not at all cowed to take on the then prevailing world powers, all White, in any battlefield. Apart from her ambitions to dominate East and South-east Asia, and the South Pacific in order to tap the resources of those territories for her hungry factories which gave employment to her densely-populated islands, she would not accept the then world outlook that the Caucasian-majority should control the world, as they did then because, as an Asian peoples they had defeated White Russia and had proven that Asians could learn the White man's technology and beat him at his own game.

Her initial worry was having to share north and east Asia with the Soviet Union, who had already demonstrated that she too had an interest in China and the other countries of north Asia. Japan had no illusions about Soviet strength. When she was Imperial Russia, she and Japan had been rivals since the previous century, and Japan was intent that she would not be distracted from her objectives by having to worry about Russia. And the Soviet Union felt the same way toward Japan. Conditions in north and east Asia then were favourable for the country which was ready and prepared to seize the initiative, Japan felt. A situation had to be created that would allow her freedom to carry out her plans without possible Soviet Russian interference.

But she would concentrate on China first as China had been in a state of turmoil since the end of the previous century. The Manchu Ching Dynasty under its empress dowager was facing conflict from several directions — the restless population which had always regarded Manchu rule as one by foreigners, the imperial court giving way to White foreigners into the kingdom, the subsequent demands of the European and American entrepreneurs seeking more concessions from the throne, the independent-minded, powerful warlords, the northern governors, and the ambitious Japanese and Russians.

The short-lived Boxer Rebellion of 1898 was put down by European cannon-power. The death of the empress dowager in 1908 and her choice of three-year-old Ching Pu-yi as emperor in her place created the conditions

that made her unstable and ripe for internal conflict, which an outside power like Japan read as an encouraging sign to plan her domination. On 10th October 1911 Chinese troops in Wu'chang mutinied, which led to the abdication of Ching Pu-yi as emperor on 30th October, ending three centuries of Manchu rule, and the establishment of the Republic of China under a Marshal Yuan Shih-kai as China's first president on 14th February 1912. The 'Summer Revolution' of 1913 was suppressed by Yuan who had begun to see himself as emperor of China. But he died three months later. There was trouble as well from the northern governors, and a group working for the re-establishment of the Ching Dynasty. In 1924 a new political party called the Kuomintang, (National People's Party), was formed in Canton under Dr Sun Yat-sen. Two young men — Chiang Kai-sek and Mao Tse-tung, both friends who would marry sisters — were each drawn to it. Chiang joined the Kuomintang while Mao joined the Communist faction within the Kuomintang. In the meantime in Malaya, (including Singapore), the British had banned the Kuomintang, and the Communist faction within it in 1931 after the confession of a Frenchman called Serge Le Franc who had been arrested by the Singapore Special Branch, that same year, for holding a false passport and who claimed to represent a firm of steel product manufactures in France. Le Franc, whose real name was Joseph Ducroux had aroused the suspicions of the police in Singapore because of his associations with suspected members of the Nanyang Communist Party, which had developed out of the formation in 1924 of the "Nanyang (Chinese: 'southseas'), General Labour Union, which had been inspired by the Communist faction of the Kuomintang.

In the midst of all this Japan seized the opportunity to occupy Manchuria in 1931 on the 'excuse' that she was only protecting her colony — the Korean Peninsula — which she had invaded and colonised in 1910 — from what she saw as a threat from the Soviet Union. After engulfing Manchuria she began to consolidate her position. Since the beginning of the First World War she had occupied some islands in the Pacific and she now stationed more troops there.

From 1932 she proceeded to browbeat China and then to overrun her main seaports and seaboard, (with as much hinterland as possible). In order to make her occupation of Manchuria, (which she had renamed Manchukuo), appear benign, she appointed the ousted Chinese emperor, Ching Pu-yi, a Manchurian, as head of state of Manchuria on 18th September 1931. She ceremoniously enthroned him as puppet-emperor in 1934. In 1937 Japan declared war on China, anticipating an easy victory. But to her astonishment and dismay, because she had anticipated an easy victory, the

Chinese people of varied political hues and loyalties, banded together, rose up and defended their country to a man. Britain declared itself neutral. The invasion was a traumatic experience for the ethnic Chinese in Malaya, (including Singapore), whose strong feelings of patriotism for the motherland had been nurtured through education in Chinese schools. They protested to the colonial government in Singapore and Malaya against Japan's aggression, and the British authorities allowed them to collect funds through officially-recognised channels for a fund named China Relief but on condition that there would be no boycott of Japanese goods, (as Britain had declared itself neutral), and no anti-Japanese agitation in the Chinese schools, which proved very unpopular. The Malayan Communist Party, which already was Chinese-dominated, organised picket-corps under the auspices of their newly-created 'Overseas Chinese Students Anti-enemy Backing-up Society' to boycott Japanese products, and, as a result several of the MCP's leaders were arrested and detained.

In November 1936 Japan signed "The Anti-Comintern Pact" with Germany, with Italy following a year later in November, as well. The contracting powers undertook not to enter into treaties with Russia except by mutual agreement.

This was in reply to the Soviet-Russian-inspired Comintern Pact, (Communist International), which sought to deprive the White Imperial Powers of their sources of wealth and raw materials from their respective colonies, and the 1928 Chinese Communists setting up the South Seas Communist Party which was the forerunner of the Malayan Communist Party, which was formed in 1930, and owed its allegiance to China.

In 1938 Japan published her "New Order" Concept, of what was euphemistically called the "Co-prosperity Sphere", which was to extend beyond Japan, Manchuria and China to as far as Siam, Burma, Malaya, (including Singapore), and the Dutch East Indies, and south as far as New Caledonia in the South Pacific. The basic principle of the movement was that 'Asians should not fight Asians'.

The real strategy behind the movement had one primary purpose — the emancipation of Japan from economic dependence of Great Britain and the United States of America in accordance with her policy of the "Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere". The objectives behind the policy had the mutual support of Germany and Italy, the co-signatories to the Anti-Comintern Pact, who had also agreed to the mutual support of one another against aggression from any quarter, and joint action to prevent the spread of Communism.

In April 1939, Matsuoka, the Japanese foreign minister, had a meeting

with Adolf Hitler in Berlin about an attack on Singapore, and war with the USA. On 27th May an announcement was made that Japan's 500 warships and 4,000 naval aircraft were ready to fight in self-defence or against economic threats to her existence. Germany began her war in Europe, against Poland at 4.40 a.m. on 1st September 1939. This would lead to full-scale war between it and the then Great Powers in the world.

On 27th September 1939 Japan, Germany and Italy signed a 10-year pact in Berlin, which recognised the "New Order" concept as proposed by Japan, and pledged themselves to war in common against any intervening powers.

In July 1940 the Vichy Government of France, (which had already surrendered to Germany on 22nd June, after signing an Armistice), was induced to allow Japan use of French naval and airbases in French Indochina, on the pretext that there would be an invasion of Japan by Great Britain. On 26th July a Japanese military mission arrived in Saigon, and Jap troops began landing in force at Saigon two days later, occupying bases right up to the frontier with Siam.

With conditions favourable to her, Japan seized the opportunity and blocked the supply route to China via Hong Kong, preventing the beleaguered Chinese receiving replenishment of her fast-depleting resources. The only effective alternative route open to the Chinese, at the time, was the newly-constructed British-controlled Burma Road. But Japan got Britain to yield to pressure at the League of Nations, and got the Burma Road closed for three months on 17th July 1940. On 28th July Japan arrested several Britons in Tokyo on trumped-up charges of spying, following this move on 1st August with her declaration of her "New Order" policy in Greater East Asia, which also included China and the Dutch East Indies.

The USA immediately placed an embargo on high-grade aviation fuel, a partial embargo on scrap-metal, and the US Navy kept a powerful fleet in the Pacific. The US had previously criticized Britain about the closing of the Burma Road, and as far back as 1932, via the League of Nations, had informed the Governments of China and Japan that she would not recognise the aggression which resulted in the establishment of the State of Manchukuo, (Manchuria), and the puppet-regime installed by Japan in Peiping, (Beijing). It was also during this occasion that Japan left the League, after the Council's condemnation, and in the following year actively began developing her war plans against the colonial-controlled countries of South-east Asia and the South Pacific.

Ever mindful of Soviet Russia to the north of her, Japan signed a Neutrality Pact with Soviet Russia on 13th April 1941. Germany had signed a similar pact two years earlier. Both were moves of expediency as Russia

lay on the flank of both and neither could engage in war with other nations, with that flank under threat. Japan's pact with Russia was as much a signal for war as was Germany's.

After the successful blockade of the China coast by July 1941, Japanese forces were installed in the naval bases of Saigon and Camranh Bay, and eight aerodromes in South Indochina. Before August that year there were over 40,000 Japanese troops in the French colony. Japan, in fact, had prepared seriously for war with Great Britain and the United States after the 1920-21 Washington Conference which had sought to limit the shipping tonnage of the navies of the contracting powers, and after economic sanctions were exerted by the two Powers, following the movement of Japanese forces into French Indochina.

It was predetermined by the Japanese Imperial Command that military operations would begin on 8th December 1941. On early morning of 4th December 1941 a convoy of 20 ships, with Lt-General Tomoyuki Yamashita in command, conveying units of the Japanese Imperial Army, set out from Samah Harbour in Jap-held Hainan Island, off China, and headed toward Camranh Bay in French Indochina, passing the bay on 5th and 6th December, without incident. On 7th December, shortly after noon, a radio message to the convoy from the Japanese Navy informed it that the navy had brought down a Royal Australian Air Force reconnaissance plane flying in formation, which had also sighted the Jap convoy but had been shot down before it could send out an alert. Despite feeling apprehensive the Jap convoy was able to remain hidden due to the thick fog prevailing because of the north-east monsoon season, which had already begun, and which period the Japanese High Command had specifically chosen to launch their opening offensive.

Some might say that the 'hand of fate' could have played a decisive role in Japan's 'brilliant' capture of Malaya and Singapore! The British in fact had prior intelligence that Tokyo was planning an invasion of Malaya, (and Singapore), and had instituted an operation, code-named "Matador", a pre-emptive strike to forestall the planned Japanese invasion, which would have gone into operation on 5th December 1941, and London had given approval for "Matador" to commence on that same day as well. The British, Australian and Indian troops, mostly 32 battalions, under Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, Commander-in-Chief, Far East, would place themselves at designated places on the seashore of northern Malaya, facing the South China Sea, on both sides of the Kra Isthmus, including Songkhla in southern Thailand, before the enemy could occupy them. But, tragically, this never came about because Sir Robert, who had been informed by the British Prime

Minister,(later Sir), Winston Churchill on 5th November 1941 that he would be replaced,was too preoccupied by what he saw as his personal humiliation,and dithered,forestalling the decision to act resolutely.Another thing which most likely affected his judgement, at the time, was probably the British Chiefs of Staff injunction that it was Britain's policy to avoid war with Japan as long as was possible.There was also the matter of Siam's neutrality which the British Cabinet desired not to violate until Japan had made her first move.With her resources strained to the limit in the war with Germany,in Europe,and safeguarding her Arabian colonies,she could not inadvertently forfeit US aid,and go to war with Japan alone.On 7th December there had been a reported sighting of a Japanese convoy of ships headed toward Siam and Malaya,radioed by an RAAF reconnaissance plane,and that several British aircraft had been shot down but these reports never reached Sir Robert until after 9 pm.Even after receiving the urgent news,Sir Robert refrained from launching "Matador" because he reasoned that although subsequent counter-action might forestall a Japanese landing,it was too late if the enemy had already landed on the isthmus.Any preemptive action had to be implemented at least 24 hours before any anticipated Japanese landing. When Sir Robert finally did finally tell Lieutenant-General A.E.Percival at 10 pm on 7th December, the Japanese convoy had already begun its planned invasion of British Malaya,and Malaya's and Singapore's respective fates were sealed.

On the morning of 7th December, after passing Cape Cambodia, the Nippon ships turned south-west and headed toward Patani in Siam. Fourteen ships conveying the main invasion force dropped anchor at 2am on 8th December, facing Singora beach. Boats, tightly-packed with armed men and equipment, were lowered into the water and headed to the shore, arriving at the beach at 4 am.

Prior to the departure of Yamashita's convoy, on the evening of 2nd December 1941 an order was issued to the troops to proceed southward, as planned. It was tempered,however,with the instruction that, depending on the results of American-Japanese negotiations then being conducted in Washington,the order to begin war might have to be suspended.

The Order read: No:1 Order to 25th Army

1. It is predetermined that military operations begin on 8th December 1941.
2. 25th Army is to co-operate with the Navy for commencement of military operations for the occupation of Malaya,(including Singapore).
3. 25th Army Commander will begin military operations

based on previous orders.

However if Japanese-American negotiations are concluded by the above fixed date the military attacking operations will be suspended.

4. If, however, no such instruction is received,(to suspend military operations), you are to carry out everything as planned — attack!

The United States' attitude toward Japan's growing belligerence, especially after her aggression in China and French Indochina, had become increasingly hostile, and Tokyo, in the meanwhile, vainly tried to make out that her activities in Manchuria and Korea had been because she was trying to protect her colony of Korea against possible Russian intrusion. On 6th November 1941, the former Japanese Ambassador to Belgium and Germany, Mr Kuruu, flew to Washington to assist his compatriot, Admiral Nomura, the Japanese Ambassador to the US, in talks with the American State Department on points of issue between their respective two countries. The talks dragged on, with the Japanese side refusing categorically to withdraw all its military, naval and air forces from China and Indochina. The Japanese duo called again at the US State Department on 5th December, by this time the Japanese fleet had been out at sea, in both directions — southward toward Malaya, and westward to Pearl harbour in the Pacific, for nine days. On 6th December, in a last attempt to avert a breakdown in the talks, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt telegraphed a personal appeal to Emperor Hirohito in Tokyo "...for the sake of humanity — to restore traditional amity and prevent further death and destruction in the world..." But it was already too late. Japanese aircraft and warships were but a short distance from Pearl Harbour, and their army was waiting to land at Kota Bahru in Kelantan, Malaya. In the early hours of the following morning, (local times), of 7th December, there began a simultaneous Japanese attack on the key installations at Kota Bahru, Pearl Harbour, Hong Kong, and the rest of South-east Asia and the South Pacific, that shook the world.

In Washington that day, (7th December), the Japanese Ambassador had asked for an appointment with the US State Department at 1pm. A postponement was requested for 1.45 pm, and the Japanese duo arrived at the appointment venue at 2.05 pm, and were received twenty minutes later. The simultaneous Japanese attacks on the British and American bases had already taken place, just an hour before, (Washington time), and the US knew this when they received Kuruu and Nomura, who handed the State Department a document "...crowded with infamous falsehoods and distortions..."

as the US representative at the meeting, with some pungency pointed out to them. The Japanese then left the State Department building, were given their passports, and returned to Japan after completing a mission of deception which has few parallels in diplomatic history.

The Japanese had flung down their gauntlet with an almighty bang! They had attacked Kota Bahru, Pearl Harbour, the Philippines, Guam, Hong Kong, and Wake island, in that order, and within a period of seven hours. Since Pearl Harbour lies to the east of the International Dateline, the attack there occurred on the morning of the 7th December, local time, whereas the attacks on the other places occurred on the morning of 8th December, local times. The landing at Kota Bahru was made one hour and twenty minutes before the air attack on Pearl Harbour.

In the meantime, while all of this was transpiring in the United States, the Jap convoy which had set sail from Hainan Island on 4th December had already reached its objective and was able to land in Siam by the evening of 7th December, under the very nose of the British airforce on Kota Bahru, and Aloha Star in Kedah. Under cover of darkness and the north-east monsoon, it had successfully sailed westward and arrived within the territorial waters of Siam and Malaya. About midnight three vessels of the Ando Detachment, (42nd Infantry Regiment), which had diverged westward, arrived in the waters off Patani. The fourteen ships carrying the main force dropped anchor at 2am, (local time) on 8th December in a line facing Singora beach. The order to breach the Siamese defence was given — three flashing red lights. And the enemy soldiers in boarding craft and motor boats sped toward Singora beach in a line which soon broke because of the high waves. Daylight was approaching and the town's citizens were fast asleep, with no inkling as to what was about to fall on their heads. The Japanese invasion force had landed on Singora without a shot being fired! The invaders discovered to their utter amazement that the Siamese defence consisted of a firing trench facing seaward, along the coast, and which had been constructed as a matter of course, and completely empty! The Jap surprise had been completely successful. As prearranged an advance party made its way to the offices of the Japanese consulate at Singora where it met with Consul Katsuno who drove the party to the Singora police station. As the Japanese began alighting from the consul's car, shots rang out from the police station. It became obvious that the Siamese police were defending themselves against what they had realised was a Japanese invasion. By about this time the main Japanese force had arrived at the



scene. The Japs called out to the policemen not to continue the action but were ignored, whereupon General Yamashita gave the order to smash the resistance. It had been originally planned by the Japanese to slip ashore at Singora, don Siamese uniforms so as to pass safely in Siam and get to the Siam-Malaya border undetected. But this had now become impossible. Siamese resistance was kept up until noon when Jap artillery was brought up, and presently a white flag waved on the Thai side, and a voice called out: "...At the command of our Premier Pibul the resistance of the Thai Army is suspended for the time being..." Shortly after a Thai Army messenger reported to General Yamashita and began negotiations to assist the Japanese in their invasion plans of Malaya.

An advance party comprising three medium tanks in the lead, followed by one light armoured unit, two squadrons of mechanised cavalry, and a field gun —advanced toward the frontier to meet a reported large British mechanised force comprising Bren-gun carriers and motor transport, which had been spotted by Jap aircraft at noon that day. The two forces met as night fell, and near midnight, near Ban Sadao Village in Siam, the battle between British and Japanese began. After about an hour of exchanging fire the British side began retreating to the south, leaving behind a blood-stained armoured car and a side-car.

The Japanese immediately set up their Army Headquarters in some attap huts among the coconut trees, near the beach, with General Yamashita in command. The invasion force then prepared to move south to meet their compatriots landing at Kota Bahru.

At midnight of 7th and 8th December the three beachcraft transporting the invading Japanese anchored off the shore facing Kota Bahru, the northern gate of the British Colony of Malaya. It was the capital town of Kelantan, and the base of operations for the British Royal Air Force, which had a fully-equipped aerodrome lying approximately a mile and a half from the coast. It was protected by a triple line of pillboxes and wire entanglements between it and the beach. Topographically the town lies in a moat formed by the arms of the Kelantan River, which here flows in several estuaries into the sea. In strength the position was second only to the fortified positions of Mersing and Singapore. The beach was heavily mined as well. It was defended by the British 8th Brigade, 9th Indian Division. The Takumi Detachment detailed to capture it comprised the 56th Infantry Regiment, one battery of mountain guns, two quickfiring guns, one battery of anti-aircraft guns, one company of engineers, one section of signallers, one section of medical and sanitation personnel, and one field hospital. Altogether a total of 5,300 men

The Jap signal to commence landing was the commencement of its naval bombardment of the coast as the beachcraft began ferrying in the enemy ashore. The British pillboxes, which were well-prepared, reacted violently with heavy fire, pinning the Jap soldiers, half-in and half-out of the water. Before long RAF aircraft in formations of twos and threes began attacking the beachcraft, which soon became enveloped in flames and smoke from exploding bombs and from shells fired from shore batteries. Two Jap ships, the Awagisan Maru and the Ayatosan Maru, caught fire after direct hits. The officers and men aboard the Jap ships retaliated, bringing down seven British aircraft. Finally when the fire on board their vessels became unbearable, the enemy was forced to jump ship and swim toward shore, keeping afloat with life-jackets. Groups of British aircraft poured fire on the Japanese but, nevertheless, by degrees the total body of Japanese soldiers got ashore to form a line, digging deep into the sand as British retaliatory-fire kept them pinned down. Daylight had arrived and the enemy could see that they were almost looking into the barrels of the defending British Army. Both sides were so close, each could throw hand-grenades at each other with devastating effect! Using their steel helmets the Japanese gradually dug their way forward inch by inch until eventually, they had reached the barbed-wire entanglements. As their wire-cutters got to work, the enemy soon discovered that they had arrived at the British minefields as thunderous reports, and flying sand, and the body-parts of their men flew into the air! But moving over the corpses of their own men the wire-cutters continued, with the men following, piling up the bodies behind them, and creeping forward like moles. The British defenders in the pillboxes rained fire on the creeping enemy. But suddenly one of the Jap soldiers reached a pillbox and managed to throw in a hand-grenade. In the ensuing explosion the enemy rushed the British defenders' positions as hand-grenades flew and bayonets flashed. Amid the sound of war-cries and calls of distress the British front line was captured.

Across the river was the second line. The enemy did not seem to know the depth of the water and approached it with caution. Those who still had on their life-jackets charged in straightaway, managed to make their way across and engaged the British in hand-to-hand combat. It was over in twenty minutes. The second line was now held firmly by the enemy. Reorganizing his troops after the landing, the commander of the Takamuchi Detachment, at sunset, prepared for a night attack against the British aerodrome. Sudden heavy rainfall stopped the fighting for a while but by eight o'clock that evening one corner of the aerodrome had been attacked,

and the whole aerodrome captured by midnight. The town of Kota Bahru was captured by 2 pm of 9th December. This was followed by the capture of Tanah Merah aerodrome on the 13th, and Kuala Kulai aerodrome on the 19th, which completed the destruction of the British military and air base of the northern gateway of Malaya.

On 10th December the "Prince of Wales" and the "Repulse", which had put out to sea on the night of the 8th with the intention of dispersing the Japanese invasion flotilla, were sunk by torpedo-bombers off Kuantan. Heavy fighting was reported in Kedah.

The Japanese Ando Detachment of the 5th Division, (42nd Infantry Regiment), had, in the meantime, landed approximately at the same time as the landing at Singora, at Patani, a small market town on the Siamese coast between Singora, and Kota Bahru, Malaya. The detachment landed at a point near the road which led into the upper Perak valley. The men, chest-deep in water and mud, had to fight their way ashore against tremendous resistance from the Thai Army. On early dawn of the 8th December the men of this detachment finally managed to drive a wedge in the Siamese side and overcame them. The transport ships landing the Jap troops at Patani were then ordered to withdraw to Singora during the daytime to take advantage of the air protection afforded by Jap fighter aircraft. The objective of the Ando Detachment was to capture the Perak River bridges at the first opportunity. There were two bridges, one a roadway and the other a railway. Approaching the frontier town of Betong the enemy engaged with a group of Indian soldiers who were put to flight after some twenty minutes. The Ando Detachment crept through the jungle and finally moved toward a bridge at Kuala Kangsar. After they had captured Alor Star the detachment reached Taiping where they met strong resistance from the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders but they promised their commander they would overcome them. In the early morning of 22nd December they charged into Kuala Kangsar and viewed the ruins of the bridge, their objective, with anger and disappointment. The British had successfully destroyed the bridges and thus delayed the enemy's forward thrust. They moved on further to Blanja to find the pontoon bridge holed over and the mooring ropes cut.

The day after the capture of Alor Star, the Japanese Army headquarters moved into the town. It was barely four days since the Jap troops had left them at Singora. Re-organising their invasion plans, the staff officers drew up a five-point course of action:

1. The main strength of the Japanese Imperial Guards Division and the 5th Division would rapidly push forward to the Perak River line

while a section of the 5th Division would seize Penang. Preparations for the seizure of Kuala Lumpur, the Malayan capital, would be next.

2. The Takumi Detachment would as rapidly as possible capture Kuantan, moving overland, and after putting all aerodromes in working order, which had been sabotaged by the withdrawing British, would move towards Gemas or Kuala Lumpur. If the situation so required the detachment would be reinforced by two additional infantry battalions from the 18th Division landing at Kuantan.

3. Headquarters and remaining units of the 18th Division would be landed in the neighbourhood of Mersing to cut off the retreat of the British.

4. To the south of Kuala Lumpur the Imperial Guards Division, the 5th Division and the Takumachi Detachment would attack the main British forces retiring from the north toward Johore, and isolate them from Singapore.

The Japanese next drew up the date of their anticipated arrival at Johore Bahru...

1. Crossing of Perak River, approximately 15th December 1941.

2. Occupation of Kuala Lumpur, 14th or 15th January 1942.

3. Arrival at Johore Bahru 31st January 1942.

4. Occupation of Singapore, 11th February, the anniversary of the coronation of the Emperor Jimmu, (600 B.C.).

This forecast almost hit the mark. Kuala Lumpur was occupied a little earlier, and the capture of Singapore was four days behind the date estimated.

Just prior to Japan invading Malaya, and by this action declaring war on Great Britain, the Japanese High Command had decided that Japan would make a 'bloodless' advance on Bangkok, and then persuade the Siamese Government to join the Japanese-side. A Japanese force had advanced, as far as it possibly could into southern Indochina before dawn of 8th December 1941, and was ready to cross into Siam at the same time as the landing on Singora beach. They broke through the frontier without encountering any resistance, and by noon of 9th December had arrived a few kilometres from Bangkok. On 11th December 1941 Thailand and Japan reached an agreement on a 10-year Japanese-Siamese Treaty, and on completion of the necessary formalities, it was formally signed and publicly announced. In essence it was an alliance between the two nations who agreed to help each other by every kind of political, military and economic means, and that both sides agreed to respect the sovereignty and independence of the other.

Final alignment of the Great Powers, following the Jap attack on Pearl

Harbour and Kota Bahru, quickly took shape. On 8th December British Prime Minister Winston Churchill announced to a special meeting of British parliament that as he had pledged his word in November that year, that should the United States of America be involved in a war with Japan the British declaration would follow at once. He had spoken with US President Roosevelt the previous evening to arrange the timing of their respective declarations of war. But since British territory in Malaya and the Japanese High Command had declared that a State of war existed with Great Britain and the United States, the British Cabinet had authorized an immediate declaration of war. Mr Roosevelt addressed US Congress on the same day and asked it to declare a State of War existed since the previous day. Three days later Germany and Italy declared war on the United States of America.

In the meanwhile the Japanese invaders were busy with their thrust into Malaya. The enemy was well aware that the defence of Malaya was in a bad way. At the foot of the 400-mile Malay peninsula lay the island of Singapore which had been turned into a naval base, at a cost of 60 million pounds sterling, and to be the core of the British strategic defence of the far east. It was agreed that there were only three gateways into the east of the peninsula: one at Kota Bahru from where a railway but no road ran into the interior, Kuantan which had poor roads, and Endau-Mersing which had one good main road. On the west the main road and railway from Singapore to the north ran clear up this side of the peninsula.

Lieutenant-General A.E. Percival was General Officer Commanding from mid-May 1941 onwards. He had at his disposal the 3rd Indian Corps, consisting of the 9th Indian Division in the eastern area and the 11th Indian Division in the west, and in addition the 8th Australian Division of two strong brigades, and the 12th Indian Brigade as a mobile reserve, the Federated Malay States Volunteer Force, the Johore Military Force, the Johore Military Volunteer Force, and the considerable garrison of the Singapore Fortress.

Instead of the 566 first-line aircraft asked for by the Air Officer Commanding, Far East, there were only 141 which were operationally serviceable. Of these the fighter quota was 43 Buffalos, slow, and with poor manoeuvrability. The core of the naval force had been composed of the "Prince of Wales" and the "Repulse", which had been sunk on the 10th.

While Japan meticulously prepared her steps for war in Asia, and amidst warning signals ringing round the globe, Singapore blithely carried on as if there was nothing adverse in the way the Land of the Rising Sun was methodically occupying Chinese ports, moving into French Indochina and

building air-strips, and moving their forces right up to the Indochina-Siam frontier. Newspapers on the British Colony still ran advertisements for elegant dining at top-class hotels, as well as the latest films at the cinema. The streets were brightly lit in the evenings as its citizens went about dining, going to the cinema or whatever else they normally did by way of relaxation. The British and the other Whites patronized the 'in-places' like the Raffles Hotel, where they usually went, to which the locals were barred. Despite all the warning signs no one among the British ever believed that Japan would declare war on her because, as far as the British were concerned, Japanese were Asian and Asians were inferior to Whites.

War came to the island on 8th December 1941, after the Jap landing at Kota Bahru in Kelantan, Malaya, when air-raid sirens went off in the early hours and Jap dive-bombers and Zero fighters began unloading their deadly missiles and strafing the streets and houses. When the sirens went off many were under the impression that it was just another civil defence drill, and an Englishwoman even called the police, to complain that the organisers of the drill were overdoing it. On the following morning the population shockingly found out that the sirens had been on for real and that 60 persons had been killed, with some 133 injured.

Japanese nationals who had been 'trapped' inadvertently on Singapore were rounded up and brought to the immigration detention centre, labelled, numbered and transferred to an 'unknown destination'.

It was only then that many remembered the previous day's news report that Japan had already declared war on Great Britain and the United States. But the general mood was still one of confidence, and disbelief that war would come to Singapore. Life still continued as much as usual in Singapore, as if there was no imminent invasion of the island by the approaching Japanese up north. Elegant dining, and dancing, were still being advertised and attended by the Whites. No one it seemed, was aware that the approaching conflagration was just 300 miles away!

The White civilian population still firmly refused to believe that it was all happening and continued to live, like they always did, attending the daily tea dances at the Raffles Hotel, and going to the cinema.

But when the Japanese finally came cycling down the Malay peninsula, Singapore started to come apart. But even then when the bombs began falling there was no one to sound the alarm at first, and the street lights remained on because no one could locate the keys to the master switch that would turn them off. A last-minute attempt to build defences was delayed for 10 days over a dispute about coolies' wages! The secretary of the prestigious golf club on Thomson Road refused to allow guns to be mounted

on the links until he had consulted with his committee. In Malaya British troops retreated from positions the Japanese weren't even attacking, disobeyed orders to counter-attack, and failed to follow-up advantages obtained by rare ambushes.

But as each new day brought news of still more Japanese successes down the Malay peninsula, the mood of the authorities and the population finally began to transform, especially after 16th December when rumour had it that many Europeans and the military garrison had begun embarking on scores of small ships and heading south. On the previous day evacuation plans for the people living in the coastal areas of the island were published in all the press. Instructions included routes for the evacuation sites, food and bedding that had to be brought by each person or family, and arrangements for domestic pets and livestock. Even though the Japanese successes were played down by the press there was growing awareness that the enemy was steadily approaching. A different kind of advertising now began appearing in the newspapers. This time it was for the sale of portable stoves and material for the protection of windows against bomb-blast. The Government began announcements for the requisitioning of property, controls of the sale of specific food as well as the consumption of certain foodstuffs, and paper was to be hoarded. But despite all this the English language papers still carried announcements that Britain continued to think that Singapore would never be taken. Compulsory registration of all men between the ages of 20 and 30 was started, and an official statement explained that this was to enable the Government to ascertain how best the services of each man could be best utilised.

Most of Christian Singapore celebrated Christmas Day quietly, (in those days only the Whites, Eurasians and the Christian Asians celebrated Christmas), and feverish work and preparation replaced festivity and gaiety. Sugar, rice, wheat flour, salt, condensed milk and butter came under official control, and could not be sold to the public or used in coffeeshops serving drinks, except with special approval. Those caught flouting the law were liable to imprisonment and heavy fines. Several hotels had their usual Christmas dinners but most of Singapore either spent Christmas quietly at home or on sentry duty.

Japanese aircraft began bombing Singapore again on 29th December. The civilian population seemed better prepared this time and filed into the shelters in an orderly manner. On 31st December 1941, (New Year's Eve), Singapore was brought under martial law. There was no New Year holiday. Government departments remained open as did many firms and department stores.

On 2nd January 1942 Kampar in Perak fell to the Japanese. The people of Singapore were finally beginning to realise that the war would soon be arriving on their island. The Japanese invasion of Malaya had reached its fifth week, and on 4th January there were press reminders on the need to store emergency supplies and being prepared for the disruption of water and electricity. Pamphlets on what to do when Jap parachutists were spotted, and other war tips, were also being distributed. On 7th January the Straits Times reported about the "worthless Japanese paper money" that was being circulated in the northern parts of Malaya where the Japanese had already won control. On 8th January all government and aided schools below standard six were suspended until further notice.

On 10th January an order was issued that all travellers out of Singapore had to have either a security registration identity card, a passport or any other travel document with the necessary endorsements. Without those endorsements no one was allowed to leave Singapore or even have a travel ticket sold to him for a destination outside Malaya. There was a timely reminder about a possible ruse by enemy agents in Singapore to try to get their hands on such documentation by posing as the military or the police.

Kuala Lumpur, the capital of the Federated Malay States, and Port Swettenham fell to the Japanese on 11th January but this report only appeared in the press two days later. Ten Japanese planes are shot down over Singapore on 13th January in a sortie involving 125 aircraft. By 16th January the Japs are only 100 miles from Singapore and the Singapore public are advised of a possible cut in food supplies. They are urged to observe two meatless days a week, as the introduction of meat rationing is being considered.

In the meantime Australia, Britain's ally, started getting worried about Singapore but Britain continued to reassure Australia about the state of preparedness of Singapore. But in fact the British prime minister, Winston Churchill, had actually given it up for lost. On 14th January he was reported to have stated in public that the vital need in the defence of Singapore was to prolong the defence of Singapore right up to the last vital minute, and that he hoped that every inch of ground on Singapore would be defended, every scrap of material or defences were to be blown sky-high to prevent their capture by the enemy, and there would be no question of surrender until after protracted fighting among the ruins of Singapore city.

Singapore suffered its worst air blitz since the war began, on 20th January. Two waves of Jap bombers flying over residential districts dropped their loads of destruction, killing some 1,000 people. By 21st January the Jap sorties over Singapore had become so heavy, it appeared



that the skies were filled with Nippon aircraft. The Japanese 9th Division has already reached the outskirts of Kluang aerodrome. The 27th Australian Brigade retreated to Yong Peng in Johore State on 23rd January. On 26th-27th January the Japanese landed a battalion at Endau. Singapore experienced her worst number of air raids, up till then, when enemy planes flew over the island nine times, four during daylight and five after dusk of 29th January. Curfew became enforced between 9 pm and 5 am, every day, from 30th January. On 31st January the enemy was barely 20 miles from Singapore, at Kulai, while people living in southern Johore desperately made their way across the Causeway. On that same day British forces blew it up. At half-past three of that same afternoon the leading troops of the Japanese charged into Johore Bahru. Since landing in southern Siam fifty-five days previously, they had made an overland dash of over 400 miles and fought 95 large and small engagements to be at the Causeway overlooking the straits that separated them from Singapore. To the Japs waiting at JB, looking on at Singapore, it seemed that the British stronghold which had dominated Asia, as far as the Japs were concerned, for over a century, lay before their eyes, as if pawing the ground in her last moments.

The fight for Singapore was on. She appeared undaunted to their war-weary eyes, flaunting her impregnability, confident that the Seletar Naval Base protected her left flank and that British fighter aircraft were flying overhead, continuously patrolling the Johore Straits against possible air raids.

The thoughts of the officers and men of the Japanese Army must surely have been on the developments that had led them, that day, to be able to gaze down across the Straits on Singapore Island — Britain's impregnable fortress. In 1923, two years after the Washington Conference restructuring the number of capital ships that would be owned by the contracting powers, and which had solved the 'problem' of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Great Britain had commenced strengthening the defences of Singapore. The Washington Agreement had restricted the expansion of everyone's navies but permitted Britain to continue the fortification of the island. In 1938 with the completion of the large floating dock, which had been towed all the way from Britain, and the King George VI graving dock, Singapore had become a first-class, modern fortress ranking with Pearl Harbour, Gibraltar and Malta. With the outbreak of their, (the Japs), war on China, (the 'China Incident'), in 1937, the policies of Great Britain and Japan became sharply pitted against each other, and Britain established her Far Eastern Army Headquarters in Singapore, recruited and trained a local volunteer force, consolidated her defences with Australian and Indian soldiers, and with the

aid of the United States reinforced her military preparations. The island was naturally easy to defend. Facing the sea a battery of 15-inch guns dominated the eastern mouth of the Johore Straits and protected the military installations at Changi. Some of the world's largest guns of their type directed their awe-inspiring muzzles toward the South China Sea, in the south, and the military aerodromes at Tengah, Kallang, Seletar and Sembawang were good bases of operation of the large airforce, and in the Seletar Naval Base two great docks could easily take in fifty thousand-ton battleships. It was this great fortress that Great Britain had boasted could never be captured by attack from the sea. But it had one Achilles Heel — its back-door! And now the invading force had used that back-door and was gazing down hungrily from the heights of the Sultan of Johore's Palace, (Istana Hijau), on Bukit Serene.

The prewar Japanese estimate of the British defences and strength of Malaya, (including Singapore), was that the British had from five to six brigades of regular troops and two brigades of volunteers. Later after their invasion had succeeded, after examination and questioning of British prisoners-of-war taken up to the end of 1942, this was revised. British troops were then believed to compose of: (a) No 3 Army Corps, (9th & 11th Divisions); (b) 8th Australian Division, (two brigades and 2/4th Machine-gun Battalions); (c) 53rd & 54th Anglo-Indian brigades, (annihilated); (d) 18th British Division, (54th & 55th Brigades); (e) reinforcements of one brigade of fresh troops from India, and (f) approximately two brigades of Malay, Eurasian/Baba-Chinese and Straits-born Chinese volunteers. This gave a grand total of approximately two divisions with an actual fighting strength of about 30,000 men, (the actual, real fighting strength of British and Allied forces was twice the Japanese estimate).

From their intelligence-gathering the enemy knew the British would resist strongly but owing to the fact that there was a tremendous number of non-combatants in Singapore, it was unlikely that the British would resist to the last man. With the addition of refugees from the Malayan mainland, the population was estimated to slightly exceed one million. There were sufficient rations for the army for one to two years but there wasn't sufficient to feed the population of over one million for any length of time, which was a grave defence risk. There were also no adequate rear defences, everything faced the sea to the south and it would be relatively easy to neutralize the field-guns. The key defence of Singapore would be the Causeway, and the last line of defence would be Bukit Timah, (the hill). Loss of the reservoirs would be fatal as the main water-supply pipeline from Johore crossed the Causeway and the reservoirs on Singapore were storage reservoirs only, and there would not be enough water in them for one million people for more

than one or two days. The current of the Johore Straits flows fairly swiftly, and the enemy had decided that it was feasible to use collapsible motor boats to ferry their assault troops across, even though there would be British gun-boats and sporadic attacks from the few remaining British fighter aircraft.

The Japanese only saw the wearied British and their Allies, exhausted and demoralised after their retreat from the Malayan mainland, seeking refuge in Singapore Fortress. And the Singapore the invading force had only seen in their dreams, now lay before them as they gazed down from the heights of the sultan's palace.

Without giving the British time for respite, to re-organize and recover their morale, Lieutenant-General Yamashita issued the order for an immediate assault on Singapore.

The Konoe Division had been ordered to attack the eastern end of the island, and early on the evening of 7th February 1942, 20 collapsible motor boats, each capable of holding eight men, were borne on the shoulders of the Japanese invaders, under cover of the dense jungle, then growing right up to the water's edge on the Johor-side, and launched. Surprisingly the high-pitched whine of the boats' engines were not heard by the British on Singapore. Each of the collapsible boats crossed the Straits three times, conveying a total of four hundred officers and men to Pulau Ubin. Several British shells were fired after a time but to the Japanese the resistance seemed surprisingly light.

On the morning of 8th February all 36 field-guns of the Konoe Division, 12 infantry guns and four heavy guns, concentrated heavy firing onto Changi Base. Retaliation from the Singapore-end seemed thin-spread to the Japanese, until noon, when the return-fire became intense, but little damage was caused to the enemy on Ubin, except for the rubber trees growing on the island. But Pulau Ubin, according to the Japanese strategy had worked like a dream! She was the effective distraction that drew British attention to her while the main Jap force concentrated on other, vital places.

On 8th February the hidden Jap artillery across the Straits began a barrage, aiming shells on both sides of the Causeway, which gave the main invading forces the opportunity to shore-up the broken-gap in the Causeway, caused by the retreating British, and to charge full-tilt at the defending British 3rd Army Corps, (9th, 11th & 18th Divisions), waiting at the opposite end of the land-bridge. West of the Causeway was being defended by troops of the 8th Australian Division. Singapore's artificial-link to Malaya since the 1930s was a suspension-bridge at the Johore-end of the Causeway. When the last detachments of Australian battalions had crossed the Causeway

on 31st January, the suspension-bridge had been demolished by charges, and the island's link with the Malay mainland severed. Oblivious of British long-range artillery-fire, Japanese engineers had worked on the gap created by the retreating British, and repaired it.

At exactly 11 pm of 8th February the 5th and 18th Jap Divisions began crossing the Straits in fifty small motor boats and a hundred collapsible launches, while their artillery opened fire on the British pillboxes, trenches and barbed-wire entanglements on the Singapore-side. Four hundred and forty Japanese guns then swung into action as their field guns fired two hundred rounds per gun during the night, and their heavy guns one hundred rounds.

Troops of both divisions, roughly four thousand men, clambered aboard three hundred boats about midnight of the 8th, and began crossing. On reaching the Singapore-shore they splashed into the shallows, forcing themselves through the mud, tangled mangrove roots and barbed-wire entanglements, and rushed the British trenches and pillboxes. The British and Allied soldiers had found themselves pinned down, prior to the sudden arrival of the enemy on top of them, because the heavy artillery barrage from the Johore-end had forced them to keep their heads down until it was too late. The invading force was able to get in among some 2,500 men of two Australian battalions, causing heavy casualties before the defenders were forced to retreat in pandemonium. The red-hot flashes of firing and counter-firing, and the booms of the artillery seemed to rock the whole island.

At ten minutes past midnight of 9th February, (evening of the 8th), the Japanese 5th and 18th Divisions fired blue flames into the air to signify that the landing on Singapore by the two divisions had been accomplished as planned. By dawn of the 9th, as the sun began peeping through the pall of black smoke, the whole of the infantry of the 5th and 18th Divisions, and part of the artillery, had landed as well. The enemy troops began sweeping away remnants of the British Allied forces before beginning their attack on Tengah aerodrome. As the British-held positions fell to the invaders, the Rising Sun flag was hoisted over them as a signal to the Jap artillery in Johore to lengthen their range and penetrate deeper into British-held Singapore. At sunset of the 9th, after the Konoe Imperial Guards Division reported that they had forced a passage across the Straits in the sector, (the eastern part of the island), Army Commander, Lt-Gen. T. Yamashita and most of his staff officers crossed the Straits on a raft to the 5th Division sector. The British artillery still continued to shell the Johore Straits heavily but by this time the invaders had already crossed over into Singapore completely. And by early dawn even the firing by the British had stopped.

The eerie silence that immediately prevailed seemed in extraordinary contrast to the recently-concluded tumult of the past few hours, and the yells of pain on both side, from their injured.

As General Yamashita climbed over a low cliff on the British-side he was met by a group of White prisoners-of-war being guarded by the general's men. The POWs stared at him curiously. To Yamashita the prisoners were the first tangible sign that the Japanese invasion of Singapore had been a success.

The Japanese Army Command Post was set up near to the Tengah aerodrome on 10th February, and was connected by telephone and submarine-cable with the Jap Command Post at the Imperial Palace on Bukit Serene in Johore. The main strength of the Japanese Army was still on the Johore-side, directing the tanks, heavy guns and ammunition across the Causeway, which had been temporarily-repaired by Japanese engineers during the height of the invasion. The front lines of the 5th and 18th Divisions had taken over Tengah aerodrome, and had moved on to the western side, preparing for an assault on Bukit Timah. (the hill.)

On 10th February in London, Mr Churchill sent his last orders to Singapore Fortress. All thoughts of saving troops or sparing the civilian population were to be suppressed.

"The battle must be fought to the bitter end at all costs...the honour of the British Empire and the British Army is at stake..."

The advance commenced at dusk of the 10th, and throughout the night of the 10th-11th, the battlezone was one of pure tumult. The 5th Division, with full strength, attacked on the north side of the Chua Chu Kang Road, and the 18th Division similarly in full strength, on the south side, with the crest of Bukit Timah heights the objective. That evening, (10th), and throughout the night fierce gunfire was exchanged by both sides, not only at Bukit Timah but all over Singapore where the British and Allied forces continued to counter the Jap-offensive.

With the approach of dawn of the 11th a message was received at Japanese headquarters at Tengah aerodrome, from the 5th and the 18th Divisions that Bukit Timah had been taken. The supremely-confident invaders, now reinforced by their comrades from across the Causeway, pressed back the line of defenders massing at a point west of the main road leading to the Chinese village of Bukit Panjang. The enemy brought in their tanks that evening as they steadily pushed the Allied forces down Bukit Timah Road, and two battalions of the British 18th Division, near the Bukit Timah Racecourse began a counter-attack against the tanks but they were powerless.

Lt-Gen T.Yamashita instructed that a note advising the British to capitulate be air-dropped behind British lines. The note advised the British to surrender and if they were ready to do so to fly the Japanese flag, which accompanied the note, from the top of the Cathay Building in Singapore Town. The Note further read:

The Japanese Commander to the British Commander.

In a spirit of chivalry we have the honour of advising your surrender. Your Army, founded on the traditional spirit of Great Britain, is defending Singapore, which is completely isolated, and raising the fame of Great Britain by the utmost exertions and heroic fighting. I disclose my respect from my innermost feelings. Nevertheless the war situation is already determined and in the meantime the surrender of Singapore is imminent. From now on resistance is futile and merely increases the danger to the million civilian inhabitants without good reason, exposing them to infliction of pain by fire and sword. Furthermore we do not feel you will increase the fame of the British Army by further resistance. From first to last our counsel is that Your Excellency will cease to think of meaningless resistance and from now on, yielding to our advice, promptly and immediately will suspend the action extending over the whole British battlefield. It is expected that you will take measures to despatch an Army messenger as stated below. If on the contrary you continue resistance as previously, it will be difficult to bear with patience from a humanitarian point of view, and inevitably we must continue an intense attack against Singapore. Ending this advice we show respect towards Your Excellency.

1. The Army messenger's route of advance shall be by the Bukit Timah road. (sic).

2. The Army messenger, hoisting a white flag as well as the British flag, will be escorted by a number of soldiers as a protection.

(Signed) Japan's Army Commander,

Lieutenant-General Tomoyuki Yamashita.

There was no immediate response from the British-side.

After passing the night within the sound of gunfire a group of staff officers from Japanese Army headquarters drove on to the main Bukit Timah Road toward Tengah, when suddenly there was a sudden shellburst and everyone in the vehicle was thrown out of the car as it spun out of control, landing on its side in a ditch. The Japs immediately realised that the fifteen- and sixteen-inch fortress guns located in the Pasir Panjang direction had been swung round 180 degrees to fire landward instead of out to sea.

At noon British bombardment increased significantly, and a large force of British soldiers was sighted swinging up Bukit Timah, their flanks

covered by their own armoured cars. It was a British counter-attack which concluded in both sides engaging in hand-to-hand combat, with the Allied forces finally being wiped out after being overwhelmed by sheer numbers!

The Japanese 5th Division began attacking the reservoirs at dawn of 12th February in huge troop concentrations, backed by fighter aircraft strafing the British lines. Co-operating with the 5th was the Nippon Tank Division, and the heavy guns as soon as they were brought across the Causeway, bringing with them the entire Japanese Army who had been waiting at Johore for the signal to complete the invasion of Singapore. Japanese shells and bombs rained down on the streets and buildings of the town, killing numerous civilians kept indoors because of a curfew imposed by the British administrators since 1st December 1941. That day, the 12th, as the success of the Japanese invasion became a nightmare reality staring them in the face, it was decided to form a perimeter of Australian and Indian units near Reformatory Road, to make a final stand. The defenders consisted of units of the British 18th Division, Indian troops and non-combat troops of the Australian Army. Over five thousand Allied troops repelled unending and furious enemy dive-bomb attacks but, gradually, the Allied force grew smaller and weaker.

On the morning of 15th February the Japanese 18th Division decided to attack the Keppel Barracks. Accessing the British position, it was agreed that the attack would commence at 2 pm. After an approximate seven days of fighting, since the invasion of Singapore had begun, the enemy was anxious, as their ammunition was running low. They had barely a hundred rounds per gun left for their field guns, and even less for their heavy guns. With the fast dwindling supply of ammunition the enemy knew it would soon be almost impossible to keep down the British fire by counter-battery operations. The only standby was their 40-centimetre, (16-inch), mortars. These were placed in the trenches in the frontline and fired at the Keppel Barracks at a rate of one round very ten minutes.

To the Japanese the British appeared to be resting, and the enemy decided to begin an assault on their lines with the intention of engaging them in hand-to-hand combat. But as the Japs rose out of their trenches and began the dash toward the British lines, Brit guns directed an intense barrage onto the scrambling enemy. Japanese arms, legs and heads began flying in all directions. The Allied bombardment continued unabated and only eased around 4 pm.

The Japanese 18th Division began an attack along Pasir Panjang Ridge, west of the town, on 13th February, intent on reaching vital British ammunition dumps, their intelligence told them would be there, and which

the whole invasion force badly needed. The 1st Battalion of the British Army's Malay Regiment, comprising about 30 men and led by Lieutenant Adnan Saidi, was put in charge of defending the vital stores which was located at 31-K, Pepys Road, the headquarters of the Malay Regiment, on Bukit Chandu, (Malay: "Opium Hill", which was so named because of an opium-processing operation that used to be at the foot of the hill.). Lt Adnan breathed a sigh of relief when he saw what he thought was a contingent of Sikh soldiers from the British-Indian Army coming to meet his battalion. But there was something wrong about the familiar-looking turbans. Then he realised it immediately! The group headed in his direction uphill along Pepys Road was marching in a four-formation, not in the regular threes of the British Army! They had to be Jap soldiers in disguise, and they were a larger force as well. Heavily outnumbered the Malay Regiment held off the Japs until the whole platoon was annihilated, except Lt. Adnan. He was strung up a cherry-tree in a gunny-sack and bayoneted repeatedly until death but he cheated his tormentors by not making the slightest sound! What made the Japanese soldiers extra vengeful against the Malay Regiment and Lt. Adnan was that even as the Malays were about to be over-run by the Japs, they successfully blew up the ammunition dumps sky-high, depriving the enemy of the badly-needed supplies.

The battle at the Bukit Timah sector on 15th February raged just as violently as in other parts of the island. The Jap front line there had only been able to advance to the southern end of the reservoir, due to the heavy British shellfire. But the town was hemmed in. Dumps of petrol, ammunition, and food, were being demolished by Jap artillery and air-attacks, and the fifth-column sabotage of the outlawed, (by the British), Indian Defence League of Subhas Chandra Bose.

The reservoirs were already in enemy hands. Hospitals, as well as the whole island had been without drinking water for over twenty-four hours. Civilian casualties had grown beyond adequate control, and there was no labour to remove the rotting corpses, and the stench, from ruined, bombed-out buildings.

Lt-Gen. T. Yamashita, commander of the invading force, tightened his strangle-hold on Singapore, blasting the town with incessant artillery-fire and air-assault. The end was in sight.

At that morning's routine daily, morning conference of Allied Commanders held in the Command Bunker, deep underground on Fort Canning Hill, chaired by Lt-Gen. Percival, which had been called daily ever since the start of the Jap invasion, it was unanimously agreed that further resistance was useless, and that Singapore's defending force would surrender.



A large Japanese flag, which had been handed over by the Japs on 11th February, was flown from the top of the Cathay Building in Singapore Town, to signal the enemy that the British would stop further fighting in accordance with previous Japanese demands, when the enemy had airdropped a message from Lt-Gen Yamashita.

At half-past three that afternoon there suddenly appeared a white flag on the British front-line, near Bukit Timah. Then a Major Wylde, an English staff officer came out from behind the British lines, bearing the flag of truce. This was immediately reported to the Japanese Army Headquarters on Bukit Timah. The Japs sent down their Staff Officer Sugita to deliver the Japanese truce documents which had been prepared in anticipation of the British capitulation. Major Wylde returned to Singapore Town with them, for Lt-Gen Percival to consider.

The motor car with the Union Jack and the white flag, stopped in front of the Ford Motor Car Factory north of the then three-pronged Bukit Timah Road. The British Commander, Lt-Gen Percival, accompanied by Brigadier Torrens, Brigadier Newbigging, (Deputy Adjutant-General), and Major Wylde, were led to the surrender-interview room in the Ford factory by Staff Officer Sugita. General Yamashita, who was approximately five minutes behind, entered, followed by his staff officers, exchanged handshakes with the British officers, and took his seat. General Yamashita indicated a document to General Percival, written in English, and said:

"I wish you to answer these questions very briefly." General Percival nodded.

"Does the British Army surrender unconditionally?"

"Yes."

"Are there any Japanese prisoners-of-war?"

"Not even one man."

"Are there any Japanese men held prisoner?"

"All Japanese civilian prisoners have been sent to India. The guarantee of their position is being entrusted to the Government of that country."

"Do you agree to this document unconditionally?"

"Please wait until tomorrow morning for the answer."

"Then, in that case, up till tomorrow morning we will continue the attack. Is that all right, or do you consent immediately to unconditional surrender?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, there will be a cessation of hostilities from 10 pm Japan time, (8.30 pm Singapore time). The British Army, using a thousand men as a police force, will please maintain order. In case of any violation of these terms a full-scale attack on Singapore will immediately commence."

"I wish to receive a guarantee of the safety of the lives of the English and Australians who remain in the city."

"You may be sure of that. Please rest assured. I shall positively guarantee it."

"This evening, as there will be great confusion in the city, if by any chance the Japanese Army should make a triumphal entry into the fortress, it will be impossible to guarantee that unforeseen happenings will not occur. Please wait until tomorrow," requested General Percival.

"Yes, that will be so," agreed General Yamashita.

Lt-Gen Percival, early on the evening of Sunday 15th February, had capitulated. All fighting on Singapore Island ceased at 8.30 pm, and Singapore, the Lion City, was renamed *Syonan* (Japanese: "Light of the South"), and the island's time was converted to standard Japanese time, which was one and a half hours ahead of local time. The legend of Yamashita, the "Tiger-General of Malaya", was born. Only Japanese correspondents and cameramen were around to record the British officers signing the surrender document, agreeing that their troops would help to maintain order until the enemy's occupation of Singapore was completed, and that they would not attempt to escape from Singapore and for which the Japanese allowed them to remain free for a while.

In this way the curtain dropped on the Japanese campaign for the occupation of Singapore. After General Percival had departed, the remaining Japanese, mainly staff officers and General Yamashita, went through their customary rites and ceremonies for their victory. A telegram was despatched to Imperial headquarters in Tokyo as well as to the whole Japanese military, officially reporting the Japanese victory and the gains in prisoners-of-war and equipment.

On the following morning, (16th February), several Japanese staff officers in a car which flew a large-sized Japanese flag, passed shell-craters, burnt-out cars and trucks and bombed-out buildings, and headed into the city. They found a whirlpool of chaos. The first thing that struck the occupying enemy was the waves of men in khaki uniform, many still carrying their rifles, walking about, nibbling bread. Groups of soldiers were squatting on the road smoking, talking and shouting. But, strangely enough, there seemed to be no sign of hostility in any of their faces. Rather there was a look of resignation. What the victorious enemy noticed were the looted buildings, which had housed the departmental stores and offices, and the Chinese, Indian Eurasian and Malay citizens still in a frenzied hurry, carting away whatever they could lay their hands on. All over the city there seemed to be groups of people, plundering, guarding their booty and beginning bloody quarrels with other groups. It became very obvious to the Japanese

that they would have to get the whole of Singapore under control as quickly as possible.

On 17th February the Japanese Bukit Timah headquarters was transferred to the Raffles Institution in Bras Basah Road. During the invasion it had been used as a hospital, and on the shell-pierced walls recent bloodstains still remained, though the sick and wounded soldiers who had been kept there had since been moved elsewhere. The whole Japanese Army, worn, battlestained and ragged, since the campaign, would have to be cleaned up and smartened. And they got down to work on it immediately. A telegram had also been received from Tokyo that there had been paper-lantern processions throughout the length and breadth of Japan. On receiving the telegram General Yamashita immediately replied by wire: "The battle is no more than a prelude. The Army in Singapore will not hold a celebration. Instead of a triumphal entry ceremony, a ceremonial commemoration service for the dead will be solemnized on 20th February, and immediately after we will begin operations in Sumatra."

Accordingly on 20th February 1942, at ten o'clock in the morning, officers, non-commissioned officers and men selected to represent every division and every unit, assembled in the grounds of Raffles Institution where an altar had been erected, and General Yamashita began the ceremony to the three thousand, five hundred Japanese dead in the invasion of Singapore. The ceremony had been planned by the Japanese so that only representatives of Army units, carrying boxes containing the ashes of their dead would pass through the city in solemn silence as a warning to the people. It was the first step in the Japanese plan for the administration of occupied Singapore.

The Japanese 5th Division under the command of Major-General Kawamura were given charge of maintaining law and order in Singapore city. All officers and men, other than those of the guard detachment were forbidden entry into the city, except on official business, on which they had to carry army passes. Sightseeing parties under the leadership of unit commanders were taken on scheduled tours, the men comprising such parties having been previously severely cautioned against any breach of regulations. It was however not easy to prevent abuse by any one party of men, as and when the inclination hit them to take advantage of a situation, even though they had been warned that the penalty was death if they were ever caught red-handed.

Despite the severe warnings of the Japanese High Command looting, murder, pillage and rape began all over the island for several days as Japanese troops, flushed with victory, 'celebrated' their triumph. Aiding

and abetting the wholesale plunder, and the sexual abuse of women, were the Indian Independence League supporters of the Japanese conqueror, and local thugs who saw an opportunity to settle old scores, and to loot. Things got so out of hand the Japanese High Command finally imposed a twenty-four-hour curfew, with law-breakers, especially those caught in the act, including the Japs themselves, being beheaded on the spot, their heads jabbed on poles and displayed at main roads as a deterrent. But what really brought 'law-and-order to the island was the dreaded *Kempeitai*, the Japanese military and secret police whom even their own forces were fearful of. Their main 'preoccupation' was counter-intelligence espionage but they were also entrusted with maintaining discipline — in the army and the streets of Singapore! The kempeitai were distinguished from the other Japanese units by their red-lettered brassards and samurai swords. And were prompt in meting out summary punishment irrespective of whether it was their own nationals or the island-population. Quick-witted islanders who may have inadvertently fallen-foul of a Japanese lout, only had to utter 'kempeitai', and this would invariably stop the criminal bully in his tracks and defer him from further criminal intent. Many a local lass who had her wits about her, managed to escape a 'fate worse than death' by mouthing the dreaded word: 'kempeitai'.

A **Syonan Memorial** called *Chureito*, in the form of a wooden obelisk for Japanese soldiers who had perished in the fight for Singapore, and a shed-like shrine for the ashes of their war-dead, as well as a smaller wooden cross for the Allied dead, in the rear, was built by Australian prisoners-of-war, and unveiled by General Yamashita on 10th September 1942 to commemorate this fiercest battle for Singapore.

For General Percival capitulation meant having to undergo three years as a prisoner-of-war who was rather well-treated by his captors. He was allowed to receive letters, and write home once a month. He was sent to Japan eventually, and on arrival at his prisoner-of-war camp there was even allowed to have Red Cross parcels. At his new camp in Japan he was allotted a room to himself, use of a library, a radio and a gramophone, and could even play ping-pong, (table tennis). When he was moved to Manchuria he was given warm clothing, and kept in a centrally-heated barracks. He returned to England at war's end, and died in 1966, neither promoted nor his reputation redeemed.

Back in Britain the nation was stunned. Everyone, including Mr Winston Churchill had come to believe their own official propaganda that Singapore had been a fortress capable of withstanding an attack for several months until aid could be despatched from Britain. Mr Churchill was furious and

blamed the Australians. Major-General Gordon Bennett, the Australian Commander, struck back. He had managed to escape Singapore before her fall, and sent an official report on the Malayan campaign to London where he outlined the wholesale desertions by Australian troops, and criticised the British military leadership. Mr Churchill was especially embarrassed about the capture of the British 18th Division which were literally marched off their troopships, straight into Changi Gaol! The loss of Singapore was the most costly and humiliating defeat in the history of the British Empire. It signalled the decline of Britain as a world power. With Singapore's fall White supremacy in the East ended.

The Chinese population on Singapore, the majority of whom were alien-Chinese nationals who had come to the island to make their fortunes before returning home to mother-China, as well as the local-born, on the day of the British Colony's fall, had been expecting to celebrate their lunar new year, (which fell on 15th February 1942), and which began their Year of the Horse, according to the Chinese horoscope, together with the rest of the island's diverse communities — the Malay, Indian, Eurasian and European — could only look forward to the horror of Japanese occupation of their island-home, begun in the dying weeks of the previous Year of the Snake, and which would stretch over three years as darkness descended upon Singapore in the wake of Nippon barbarism.

During the last days before the fall of the island many a young couple, especially the Chinese, frantically got married, sometimes in the middle of a street and with a simple oath-taking in front of worried parents. Everyone had heard of the Japanese raping women whenever they over-ran a place, whether it was in China or mainland Malaya, and these parents prayed that if their young daughters were already married women the brutal enemy-soldier would not cast his lustful eyes on them.

Immediately after the fall of Singapore, while White military personnel were imprisoned at Changi Gaol, the Indian prisoners-of-war who had fought alongside the British as part of the Allied Forces, were assembled at Farrer's Park, a green 'lung' just off the "Little India" quarter of the island, in the Serangoon Road district, immediately in front of the Kandang Kerbau Maternity Hospital. Every kind of pressure, both moral and physical, was exerted to coerce them to switch loyalties and join-up with the Indian Independence League established by Subhas Chandra Bose to 'liberate' India from British colonial rule.

Those Indians who refused to go over to Subhas Chandra Bose, in the early days of the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, were used as live targets for rifle practice by the Japs. A white disc was affixed over the heart

of each hapless victim as a marker, and after each 'target practice' session a bayonet thrust from an enemy soldier ensured no victim survived. The corpses were then shoved into rough ditches the victims had been forced to dig before they had become 'living targets'. Later in 1943, Indian prisoners-of-war who still refused to join up with the INA were shipped to POW camps in different parts of Japanese-held territory in South-east Asia and the Pacific.

The Indian National Army, (INA), was the fighting arm of the rebel 'Independence League' whose aim was to 'liberate' India from colonialism. On 4th July 1943 the Japanese Domei Agency announced that a conference of the league had been opened in Singapore, with Indian delegates from Japan, Manchukuo, (Manchuria), Hong Kong, Indochina, Burma, Malaya, (including Singapore), and other territories, and elected Bose as president. Subhas Chandra Bose, a former president of Indian Congress, was regarded as a revolutionary patriot, promoting violence, as opposed to Mahatma Ghandi's 'passive resistance' to gain Indian independence from British colonial rule, and had been detained. But he had managed to escape, fled to Axis territory in Germany, via Afghanistan, before reaching Japan by submarine, from where he got to Singapore.

On 8th July 1943 the Indian Independence League announced the formation of an 'Indian National Army', (INA), to fight against the 'oppressors of India', and on 9th July 1943 Bose assumed the title of 'Nethaji', (Führer). On 21st October 1943 the Domei Agency reported that a 'Provisional Government of Free India' had been formed at Singapore, with Bose as its political and military head. Bose, in the name of the League, called on the Indians in Singapore to donate their gold and jewellery to his cause, and large earthen jars were set up in various parts of "Little India" where they could make their donations. Word had it that as many as twenty jars were filled to the brim with the jewellery of the Indians who heeded Bose's call, but, somehow, some of the jars went missing during the war.

Singapore's fall had given the 'Land of the Rising Sun' her first major victory in her whole campaign, and the British Empire was confronted with its blackest day since Dunkirk. It was the biggest military disaster that had ever overtaken British arms since World War Two began in Europe on 3rd September 1939.

Much later, when the war turned in favour of the Allies and Japan had surrendered, the "Tiger-General of Malaya", Yamashita, standing trial for war crimes in the Philippines, admitted that the conquest of Singapore had been based on pure bluff. He had taken the 'island-fortress' with about thirty thousand troops, even though the British and Allied forces outnumbered his three to one!

Life Magazine later published the text of a secret speech that Mr Winston Churchill, the British prime minister, delivered to Britain's House of Commons on 23rd April 1942: "...that Singapore, with a force of 100,000 had surrendered to 30,000 Japanese..."

On capitulation different parts of the island were allocated to the various formations under Yamashita's command. When the various units were in position a general order was issued for residents to assemble in concentration areas for screening.

All that had seemed stable and as sure as the rising and setting of the sun, law-and-order, a stable colonial English society, imperial power, had vanished without a trace. The trappings of colonial power, the plumed topees, the smart, crisp, white uniforms, fashionable clothes — all the trappings of Rock-of-Gibraltar stability — simply vanished without trace, as if they had never ever existed. The people of Singapore saw their once-proud colonial masters marching ignominiously to Changi Gaol. Japanese brutality had taken over.

Terrified civilians had to report to specific districts according to ethnic group, the horror and terror of the previous twenty-four hours, the closing-phase of the Japanese invasion, visible on their faces. Husbands and sons had been slaughtered by triumphant enemy troops. Women, in the main, had been spared, but many, from European to Asian, had undergone repeated rape in front of loved ones, and approving Jap officers.

Eurasians were ordered to assemble at the Padang, (the large green in front of City Hall), bringing with them documentary proof, by way of relevant birth and marriage certificates, of their White and Asian blood, in order to qualify for the *Alien's Badge*, a small piece of paper which had Japanese characters and the relevant stamps, ('chops'), of the Jap High Command and *Kempeitai* Intelligence and Secret Police, attesting that they were indeed of White and Asian blood. The island's acknowledged Eurasians were amazed to 'discover' the "other Eurasians" in their midst who had lived among them in the colony for decades during peace-time, passing off as pure-White and contributing to *their* subjugation! No one felt sorry for those individuals hoping to escape their inevitable fate, which was immediate internment with the Whites who had not managed to escape the island before the fall, and had been classified as enemy aliens by the Japanese. The darker-skinned, second-and-third-generation Eurasians, though classified as enemy aliens, were allowed to be free but with the exception of wearing the Alien's Badge at all times, when they were in public, and which always singled them out for special attention by Jap guards at road-blocks and sudden-inspections. Many of these Eurasians, together with the

Chinese, Malay and Indian women who had married Whites before the war, were later interned together with their mixed-race children.

Selected wholesale slaughter of the Chinese population began almost immediately, on pretext of curbing known anti-Japanese sympathisers, government employees and supporters of the Chinese government of China. Aiding the enemy were their own colonial nationals from their colony of Formosa, who were ethnic-Chinese, and who acted as interrogators and interpreters. Notices were put up at street corners, and enemy soldiers with loud-hailers informed the population that Chinese males between the ages of 18 and 50 had to present themselves at specific areas for 'inspection'. This was the start of the "*Sook Ching*" operation in which anti-Japanese elements among the Chinese population, especially those from China who still carried Chinese passports and maintained ties with the Chinese mainland were singled out. The Japs were also on the lookout for tattooed insignia which depicted leanings toward both the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party.

On 16th February 1942 the Tanjong Pagar Police Station, near the harbour, was seized by a detachment of the Kempetei, (Jap secret police). The Chinese living in the area were assembled in three concentration points: Tiong Bahru, the junction of Cantonment and Neil Roads, just outside Chinatown, and the Harbour Board Coolie Lines, (this district name, instituted since Raffles' days has been dropped since independence). Large groups of Chinese males were driven away each day to the Tanjong Pagar wharfs for beheading. Motor launches, packed with Chinese civilians, put out from the Jardines Steps daily, and when the boats were a mile from *Blakang Mati*, ('Death from Behind' Island — a relic of Singapore's pirate past; today the island is renamed *Sentosa*, meaning 'peace'), the hapless souls were pushed overboard and shot by the accompanying Jap guards. Between 17th and 24th February 1942 more than 700 male Chinese were taken by lorry in batches of thirty for screening, to check for tattoos on their bodies which could have been the insignia of the Kuomintang Party or the Communists of China. All were beheaded.

Another massacre involved about fifty innocent Chinese villagers living in their village called Kampong Amber. They were taken on 23rd February 1942 to a beach near Amber Road, past the Chinese Swimming Club, and killed by rifle shots and sword-thrusts. On the same day Chinese residents in the Geylang district, who had assembled at the Telok Kurau English School were taken to the seven-and-a-half milestone in Siglap-East Coast Road junction, and shot.



In the Jalan Besar area, between 18th and 20th February 1942, Chinese civilians living there were assembled at the Victoria School. All males were taken to east coast Singapore, near the Mata Ikan, (Malay: "Fish Eye"), Village, and shot. Another batch of Chinese civilians at Changi Village was killed at the Tanah Merah Marsh. The next area 'mopped-up' was the Fort Canning area.

The Chinese massacres on Singapore were a vengeful Jap measure against the Chinese residents of Singapore who had dared take up the British Cause. When the Nippon invasion of Manchuria and China had first begun, Chinese living in Singapore, the majority of whom were in fact Chinese nationals from the mainland, had decided to contribute funds to a 'China Fund' to help their motherland raise the necessary funds to purchase arms, weapons and food against the Japs. These Chinese had also decided to co-operate with the British in their battle against the Japanese because their government at Chungking had sent word to their countrymen in Malaya and Singapore to stage an 'anti-Japanese movement in co-operation with Great Britain'. (This move, the Chinese support for the British, was a surprising turn of events as the Chinese on the island had long been at loggerheads with the British Colonial Administration for what the alien-Chinese had perceived as 'imperialist discrimination' against them).

The massacre of the Chinese by the Japanese wasn't the only instance of mass-murder. At the Alexandra Hospital in Alexandra Road, then a British military hospital, Jap troops on 15th February, (the day of the invasion of Singapore), went through the first floor of the Alexandra and bayonated every person they found lying in a hospital-bed. Entering the operation theatre they stabbed the patient receiving attention, the anaesthetist and the surgeon. From there they went to the second floor and other parts of the hospital, removed patients and bayonated them. Nurses on all floors were ravished on the spot and killed immediately.

Australian soldiers and nurses preparing to surrender at the St Patrick's School grounds on East Coast Road in Siglap, expecting honourable treatment by the victor, and suspecting nothing amiss, put down their weapons to await the arrival of the Japanese. The Australian soldiers were roughly herded into roped-off enclosures in the sun while the nurses were taken away raped, and slaughtered.

For Thomas Siddon and his mother the falling bombs and the wailing sirens everyday, ever since Cecil had failed to return home from work since 4th February, never seemed to stop. The air was perpetually filled with dull thuds hammering into their brains as ground battery in the distance relayed defiance against Japan's zooming Zeroes and whistling bombs. And while

the drone of overhead aircraft which preceded the whistling high-pitched shrieks that rent the air before a bomb explosion, became familiar, the young boy sorely missed his father's comforting presence.

Thomas and his mother could overhear the shouts and bits of information bandied about by their Indian servants, the families of the watchman and gardener below, though mother and son kept to themselves, as Cecil Siddon had instructed them to do. Pedestrians on the road outside had been killed just in front of the house from falling bombs, and houses had disappeared in heaps of rubble. But Luci and Thomas stayed put when they should have left the flat each time the air-raid sirens went off. When the guns grew silent mother and son would wait impatiently for Siddon's return. It had not yet dawned on Luci that the British had surrendered, and that their island-home had been transformed into Jap-held territory.

After 16th February, when Cecil still did not put in an appearance, Luci began to give in to feelings of hysteria. She would switch on the wireless, spinning the tuning-knob, frantically trying to locate an English language broadcast, *anything*, but all she received were messages in Japanese and Malay telling the population that it had been liberated from British rule.

She then realised that the war had been lost, and feared for her husband. The food in their store-room was dwindling, even though they still had several sacks of rice, some provisions like canned-sardines and cornbeef, *chin-cha-lok* (preserved shrimp delicacy from Malacca which her sister had given her before the war began), and soy-sauce, with which to make meals for Thomas, her son, and herself.

On the morning of 20th February a Japanese-accented voice hailed the Siddon home from the street in front of the house. Fearfully Luci peered from behind the drawn curtains covering her front window and saw a light military transport parked in front of the house by the front-gate. Seated in the front, next to the Japanese soldier driving the vehicle, to her surprise she recognised Suzuki-san, her husband Cecil's, peace-time Japanese barber, garbed in the uniform of a Nippon army officer. He was grasping a sword with both hands on the hilt as the weapon stood upright between his knees. There were ferocious-looking, fully-armed Japanese soldiers in the back. Before the Jap-invasion, during peace-time, Suzuki had been a pleasant, courteous small-time businessman, grateful for the custom of Englishmen like her husband. Now he looked stern and very fierce. He barked out her name this time, and then rattled-off a string of Japanese. One of the soldiers at the back acknowledged him with something that sounded to Luci like a high-pitched shriek, clambered from the vehicle, picked up a loose stone from the road and flung it at the house, hitting one of the upstairs

windows. Luci realised that the house's servants were deathly silent. They were probably cowering fearfully under their beds in their rooms, thought the young Eurasian woman.

Plucking up her courage, as she knew her husband would have wanted her to do, she pushed open the curtains and called out patronizingly:

"Of, hello Mr Suzuki, what is it?"

"Not Mr Suzuki, Colonel Suzuki! Open door! I want to talk!"

Dropping the curtain Luci Siddon went downstairs with Thomas, her baby in her arms, to let in the Japanese officer, who had seemed so stern and angry. Suitably forewarned, she anticipated the worse and breathed a silent prayer for help from the Virgin Mary. Opening the door she found Suzuki already in the grounds, waiting impatiently to be let in. She smiled wanly. The Jap barged through the door without waiting for an invitation, and slammed it shut after him. Then his manner transformed. Here was Suzuki-san of old, polite, smiling, her husband's Japanese barber. To her he positively looked friendly.

"Excuse please, it is now war, I cannot show special favour in front of men Mrs Si-don. I come to see how you are, can I be of assistance?"

Relieved, Luci asked after Cecil, her husband, who had not been home since 4th February, and craftily told the Jap that she only had a single small bag of rice left to feed herself and child. She inquired whether she could purchase any more, praying hard, all the while that the Jap would not ask to see her stock and discover that in fact she was well-plenished. Instead the Jap complimented her on having rice, and didn't hide the astonishment in his voice.

"You are lucky, there is a shortage of rice now. I see your husband eats rice, that's good. I will try to send some, and ask about Si-sil, your husband," he said with a warm smile, opened the front-door and departed, closing the door after him.

Luci thought hard about the Jap's use of her husband's Christian name. She wasn't so scatterbrained that she had failed to notice his referring to Cecil by his first name. In peace-time Suzuki had always addressed her husband as "Mr Si-don", and the Siddon couple had always been under the impression that that was all he knew about them. They had obviously been very wrong.

Three days later a truck with Japanese soldiers drew up in front of the house, and a soldier got down and deposited two small bags of rice and a packet of salted fish outside the Siddon front-door. That evening Suzuki arrived to confirm their delivery, and to reassure Luci that Cecil was safe at the Naval Base. The Jap told her that her husband worried about his family's

safety and had asked him to look in on them. Causally Suzuki invited her to write a brief note to her husband, telling him that they were safe, and that he, Suzuki, would take the note to him, as a 'favour'.

Puzzled by the enemy officer's astounding invitation but grateful to learn that her husband was at least still alive, she quickly scribbled a quick note, telling Cecil not to worry about her and Thomas, and handed it to the colonel, who hurriedly departed.

Twenty-four hours later, disheveled, clothes dirtied with mud and blood, and barefoot, Cecil Siddon limped through the front gate, opened his front-door with his key, yelled for his wife, demanded to be fed as he went straight to the shower. Thank goodness the water was running again! Thomas, his son, thought it strange that his father wasn't whistling under the shower, as was his wont.

After he had eaten ravenously of rice and salted-fish, Siddon related all that had transpired since his departure for work ten days earlier, before the Japanese invasion had commenced. He and some of the other English engineers, and the local fitters and hands, had been working on a ship on 14th February when word came that Jap forces were massing in Johore Bahru, and would attack at any moment. He and the other English civilians, and the servicemen, were incredulous that the enemy had even considered attacking when the Causeway had already been severed, and the Allied forces positioned along the entire Singapore coastline, facing Johore, armed to the teeth, were ready to retaliate.

But the pot-shots across the water from the Japanese-end became a crescendo of flying bullets, and which were followed by heavy artillery blasting the Singapore-shore with heavy shells. Cecil was helping to man a heavy gun when a direct hit sank the floating-dock, as wave after wave of Jap Zero-fighters zoomed over the dockside spraying everything with their deadly wing-cannon. Together with other defenders he fell back, first toward the Causeway, down Bukit Timah Road, into Chu Chu Kang Road and the Tengah aerodrome. He finally joined up with the main British force making a stand at Bukit Panjang, just outside the Chinese village. The defenders were all holed up in *belukar*, (Malay: secondary undergrowth and jungle), when word came that the British were going to surrender. His crestfallen and exhausted party gave up to a Jap group on the evening of 15th February.

Cecil left out the details of their being beaten and kicked by their Jap victors, as he didn't want his wife to fret. The Englishmen were also not fed for three days before they were given rice-gruel which had bits of tapioca and dried prawns. To the almost-starving Britons the food tasted heavenly, their Jap guards were highly-amused that Whites could enjoy a 'pig's meal'.

The enemy's intelligence of their prisoners was in-depth. They knew who were the civilians, and quickly separated them from the military prisoners-of-war. They began on the 'civies', threatening them with torture and death to get them to agree to repair the mass of bombed-out vessels choking-up the dockyard at the Naval Base but discovered that each engineer who had worked at the place just couldn't care less, thinking that his particular family had perished during the invasion from the falling bombs. *There was nothing to live for, as far as these men were concerned.* It suddenly dawned on the Japs that they had to rekindle a desire to live among their prized-prisoners, otherwise the experienced engineers among them wouldn't be of any use, and the docks would be uncleared of destroyed and damaged vessels.

Luci immediately realised Suzuki's motive in getting her to write her letter to Cecil! All the prisoners, including her husband, overjoyed to learn that their families were safe and sound, agreed to work for the enemy to clear the clogged-up Naval Base docks. Anyway it had either been that or imprisonment at Changi Gaol. Since Suzuki had acted as his referee, Siddon had been allowed to return home but had to remain indoors at all times, especially during curfew-hours. There was an especially-strong warning attached — no attempt at escape "...otherwise you and your family will be executed..." His wife would be permitted to market for two hours each morning but she would also have to remain indoors after that, and sport the *Alien's Badge*, at all times, like all the other Eurasians on the island. Cecil had brought her Alien's Badge with him. On his agreeing to work for the enemy, after he and the other Europeans had given their word that they would not try to escape, they were put on a transport to Yio Chū Kang Road, where the kempeitai escort handed each their documents with the Japanese writing on them, and told them to hike the rest of the way to their respective homes. Each European had also been given his wife's badge, as well as his own *Enemy's Alien's Badge*, which denoted him as an enemy, and which he had to sport on the front of his shirt at all times, to remain safe from Jap inspections and to get through road-blocks. Siddon had hiked the more than fifteen miles from Yio Choo Kang Road to Owen Road, utilising his Japanese document to get past the enemy's road-blocks.

After relating his story Siddon made an inventory of their food supply. He went up to his wife, grasped her tightly by the arms, pinning them to her sides, and looked deep into her eyes.

"You were brave to have hoodwinked that Suzuki about our rice situation, it's as valuable as gold now because there's a tremendous shortage. No one is accepting Straits Settlements dollars. No matter how hard it gets you must

never admit to anyone that we have this supply. If you do the Nips will come to get us. From now on just refer to it as 'it', got it?" he said with a wry smile at his unintentional pun.

Early the following morning at 6 am, Syonan time, (which was 4.30 am of the former Singapore time), Siddon was downstairs, just inside his doorway, and waited for the Jap military transport which would soon be arriving to pick him up. He surrendered the family wireless set as he had been instructed to do when he had been released the previous day.

For the duration that her husband was away at the Naval Base, Luci and Thomas lived on rice and 'chin-cha-lok', (the Malacca delicacy of preserved shrimp), rice with salted fish, or with tinned corned beef. The child never complained and his mother was thankful for that. She remained indoors, not acknowledging any calls from the street, and kept her front-door locked and bolted.

One evening she heard the familiar sounds of the house's Indian servants downstairs. The front door rattled and she recognised the Sikh watchman's voice, and sometimes the Pakistani's, calling to her: "Missy, missy", but some instinct prevented her ever acknowledging them. That same evening around nine, when the curfew was on, she heard a tremendous rattling of her front-door, heavy banging and drunken shouts.

"Hey Luci, c'mon open the door, we know you're in. We jus' wan' to talk man, see how you are — c'mon, open the door, give us a drink, man."

Luci Siddon remained silent, praying that the drunken men, her servants would go away, and return to their respective families in their quarters at the back of the house. She was completely shocked that they had dared to address her, the way that they did. They were her servants, and had a job because she and her husband had required servants. They had no right to behave like complete louts. And they were outside their own quarters, and the Japs were strict. If they were caught outdoors they would be beheaded. After a long while Luci heard them move away, and one of their wives chiding her man. And his surly response.

When Cecil Siddon returned home the second time, the fifteen-year-old son of the Pakistani gardener told him, in English, that he was not allowed to enter the compound of the house as it was war-time and the Chinese landlord would not be returning. As the child spoke his mother harshly called out to him in her tongue and the child spun on his heels and disappeared. The Englishman, though astonished at the unseemingly behaviour, was too weary to immediately bother about what the child had just said. But he had taken note of the boy's demeanour as he had unlocked his front door and stepped into his home. He had been perturbed to see the

Indians, his servants, staring at him with mouths agape, as if they could not believe their eyes that he was still alive and stepping through his own doorway.

Cecil was famished and Luci fed him the evening meal that she had just prepared for herself and her boy. He finished the lot. Cecil had only been given a light meal a day for the past seven days, and, to him, his wife's cooking was heavenly. Thomas looked with admiration at his father wolfing down their meal, and, while his mother began preparing their dinner again he went up to his father and hugged him. The Englishman gathered his young two-year-old son in his arms, tears welling in his eyes. Oh God, why has this war come on us, he thought. But pulling himself together he set his boy down and went in for his badly-needed shower.

Afterward he casually inquired about the weird behaviour of the servants, and whether Luci had had any bother with them. The Englishman's mind harked back to the 'welcoming reception' downstairs when he had first arrived that evening. His wife then poured out her terror and fear, the knocks on the front-door, the rattling of the bolts, and the calls of the male servants.

The engineer had already made up his mind about what had transpired during his absence. He'd caught the look of fear on the Indian servant-women's faces. He told Luci he was going downstairs, since the island-wide curfew had not yet begun, to inquire into the unwarranted attention of the servant menfolk. There was still fifty-five minutes left to the curfew, time enough to make his inquiries. Luci didn't object, and she didn't want to. She also knew that she could not stop her strong-willed husband questioning their employees.

The Pakistani gardener's wife saw him striding toward her and fled into her quarters, shutting the door after her. Her fifteen-year-old son spoke from behind the locked door.

"My mother know nothing, my father not home. Ask the Bengali house." The Pakistani boy had referred to the Sikh watchman as a Bengali. This misnomer, started by the Chinese when they first came into contact with the Indians, since Raffles' days, because they couldn't differentiate between the various Indians, has stuck.

Siddon strode to the Sikh's quarters and demanded from the man's wife, before she could shut her door, the whereabouts of her husband.

"Please sahib," she pleaded plaintively in the ingratiating tone most Asians in those days used when speaking with Whites in the colony, "my husband no home, you go."

The actions of the two Indian women had confirmed Siddon's worst

suspicious regarding the two male servants motives toward his wife. Blind murderous rage welled in his breast as he strode to the front of the house to await the arrival of the two men-servants. He knew where the Sikh was. He would be at the nearby Colonial Government-run toddy shop, drinking his vile brew before returning home to screw his own woman. Barter trading had returned to the island since the Occupation and the collapse of the Straits-dollar monetary system, and he knew that Gulam would have been trading the milk from his one cow for rice and eggs. The Englishman waited for them just inside the grounds of the house but out-of-sight of the main road so that he could see them before they would spot him.

He saw the Pakistani first, pedalling furiously on his bike, the empty bottles in bag, slung over the cross-bar, making a rattling noise. It was pretty obvious that he was anxious to get indoors before curfew began. As he slowed to a halt by the front gate of the house, Cecil Siddon stepped out of the shadows. The look on the dark man's face, on catching sight of the Englishman, was one of disbelief and instant caution. Siddon could sense that the Pakistani had 'sussed' the reason for his being there.

"Good evening sahib."

"Gulam you're your mother's stinking chu'ne," said the Englishman in a steely voice, savouring the visible shock on the Pakistani's face at his use of the Punjabi abusive word.

"Please sahib, we had a few drinks, Ranjit gave me the idea. Oh God please have mercy!" he wailed in utter panic.

Crack! Cecil's fist caught the Sikh full in the face, sending him flying backwards. Siddon leapt forward onto the fallen man, prised open his legs, where he lay, squatted down between them, preventing them from being closed, and repeatedly thrust his fist into the man's genitals until Gulam's shrieks became whimpers. Then the Englishman stood up. Funnily enough there was no sound from the direction of the servants' quarters.

"See if you can fuck your wife with that."

There was fifteen minutes left to curfew commencing and Ranjit the watchman would be reeling home drunk at any moment. He was heard before he was even seen. Ranjit's voice preceded him as he yelled a Hindi tune called "Mera bul-bul" at the top of his lungs. Siddon recognised it as a popular melody among the Indian dock-workers at the Naval Base, who, he was informed, sung it because a slight change in intonation gave the words a bawdy connotation, and which the men enjoyed to sing when their women were passing by. Ranjit spied Cecil standing in the shadows.

"Hey Cecil you dare to show your face outside? English are finished man, now is our time, the Nips and the INA."



The watchman was referring to the Indian National Army of the Indian Independence League led by Subhas Chandra Bose, which was in the early stages of being formed.

"You English are buggered," there was a sneer in his voice. The Englishman took mental note of the servant's use of his Christian name. Before the fall of Singapore the Sikh used to address him as 'Mr Siddon sahib', and would never dare look him in the face. Now he wasn't just being disrespectful, he was being downright rude.

As Ranjit drew nearer he peered into the depths of the gloom surrounding Cecil Siddon, trying to make out the face of the Englishman so that he could judge what was playing in the man's mind. A sixth sense pulled him up short as his right hand instinctively gripped his baton, the badge of his office as a watchman for the Siddon house, tucked snugly in his waistband. For Siddon all the pent-up fury and frustration of the past thirty-odd hours of being made to feel inferior by a victor who had delighted in belittling him and his kind, and disgust at his watchman's lowly character, gave him instantaneous reaction to Ranjit's sly move to get in the first blow. A boxing champion since a youth, who had even won the lightweight boxing championship in Johor, as a bachelor, Siddon's low-swinging upper-cut was aimed at the man's groin and it smacked home, doubling Ranjit up. As the Sikh groaningly bent down, a knee to the face sent him sprawling but before he could keel over Siddon had caught him by the front of his shirt and thrust his own head into Ranjit's face, over and over again until the only sound between the two men was the dull thud of the Englishman's head butting the soggy mess of the watchman's now-distorted features. The engineer finally stopped and released his grip of Ranjit, to let him sink to the ground.

"This is just the beginning. So long as you continue to live here, I'll thrash you everytime I'm back, get out before I kill you," the Englishman said in a quiet, deadly voice as he turned on his heels and strode back to his flat.

The clock in his hallway showed that it was just past nine o'clock. The curfew was in full swing. Luci, putting Thomas to bed had heard the grunts and the smacks of blows, and seeing her husband's flushed face, it was no revelation to guess what had happened downstairs. Swiftly checking her husband's face and arms for bruises, he was amazingly unmarked but for Ranjit's blood caking on his hair and shirt and the welts on his knuckles. "Those swine won't be troubling you after this, nevertheless keep the front-door bolted always, and stay indoors whilst I'm away, unless you really have to shop in the morning," he commanded tenderly.

Her husband's warning reminded the young Eurasian woman of her own

twenty-four-hour curfew the Japs had imposed on her as a condition for her husband being allowed to return home for a few days at a time, in between his work stints at the naval base, and the tremendous danger he would now be in for attacking a local and being outdoors during the curfew. She knew Cecil was a virtual prisoner in his own home and had to remain in-doors round-the-clock, and he had been outside despite his curfew orders. It could mean death if it were ever reported to the Japs, and she was worried that the house's servants would do just that to get even.

The following morning while it was still dark, Cecil waited downstairs and made his way to the Japanese transport when he heard the vehicle pull up. As he strode to the vehicle he overheard sounds coming from the servants' quarters but ignored them. After making the distasteful, mandatory bow to the kempeitai guard at back, he clambered aboard. No word was passed between him and the other Whites in the truck, because talking was prohibited.

"Ohi-yo go-zai-mas", (Japanese: Good Morning), honourable Japanese colleague," Ranjit's voice called out from within the compound of the house, "I want to report criminal o-fence."

The kempeitai guard looked irritably in the direction of the voice, in the morning darkness. The bare outline of a man could be discerned. There would be delay in the morning's routine, he knew it, and he didn't like his schedule being disrupted.

"Ba'k'ash-neh! Come, what you say!" he demanded of Ranjit.

The Sikh could now be seen fully in the glow of the truck's tail-light. It was getting light and everyone in the truck stared at the man's blackened eyes puffed into slits, his nose almost flattened, the welts and discoloured bruising covering every conceivable area of his face. He dragged himself painfully to where the Jap escort was seated in the corner of the truck.

"That English bastard," pointing at Siddon, "attacked me last night when I caught him breaking curfew," he hissed through puffed lips.

The other Britons in the vehicle looked at their countryman with pity. An Indian, one of the 'newly-liberated', was shopping him to the Japs, probably because Cecil had failed to bribe the black bastard. The Nip escort stared in disbelief at the Sikh's face. Could one man inflict so much on another without showing anything of the fight on himself?

"What he do? He throw stone? How you face big, he attack from back?" asked the Japanese incredulously.

The guard was curious now. The Sikh watchman's face was badly disfigured yet the White showed no trace of the obvious exchange of blows both men must have traded when they had their altercation. During the time

Ranjit was talking Cecil had stared ahead, not looking at the man. Mistaking Siddon's silence and the guard's open curiosity as a sign that the tale he was about to embark on, would be believed, Ranjit launched into a yarn that he embellished as he went along.

"I saw this swine walking on the road here after nine o'clock last night. I stop him and instruct him to go back indoors. He call me black bastard, say I work for Japanese masters. I tell him I will report to Japanese kempeitai. As I open this gate here, he kick me until I faint.

"Ah-so ingeris, you bads fello — you break karfew-neh?"

Siddon didn't acknowledge the guard's question, continuing to stare straight ahead as his mind raced, searching for a way out of his predicament. He should have anticipated the Sikh bastard's low trick to screw him with the Japs! Then he had a brainwave.

"You only one hurt?"

Ranjit ignored the question as he continued to look at the guard, hoping for the desired-for reaction — the summary execution of the White bastard on-the-spot. In the meanwhile since there had been no signal from the guard to the driver, he and the front escort, another kempeitai soldier, came from behind to see what was delaying their comrade. The two newcomers had caught the last exchange of words between their prisoner and Ranjit.

"You speak now, you only baggarro he fight?" the front escort quizzed Ranjit, who made his second mistake that evening.

"Yes, only me," said Ranjit, hoping that the Japs would not learn of Gulam, which would have made everything difficult, especially since he had said he had been alone when he had caught Siddon walking outdoors.

"What about the Pakistani arse-hole I also clobbered last night, you great hairy ape," Siddon said tersely as he then turned round and looked directly at the Sikh. All the Japs realised at once that the morning's incident might turn 'interesting'. They were pleased, bored as they were, transporting enemy personnel to different destinations just because their officers had told them to.

"What about Gulam, you swine, what about Gulam?" There was panic in the watchman's eyes now as he heard Siddon's question. He swiftly shot a look at the first guard, waiting, praying for a sign that his ruse to get Siddon executed, had worked.

"I am supporter of INA, Indian National Army — we're brothers under the skin. Don't listen to that White dog. I caught him breaking curfew. He should be shot."

"You INA?" the Jap guard asked incredulously, jabbing with his forefinger suddenly at Ranjit's baton which he, by habit, had tucked into his waistband

the moment he had left his quarters, "you cannot fight one inggeris mans!" Sensing the antagonism of the guard, Siddon drove home his point.

"Why don't you get Gulam and lets see if he'll back your story, or are you afraid that you'll be caught lying?" demanded Siddon. The three enemy soldiers now broke into their own lingo, discussing the merits of the situation. Abruptly the driver strode to the front gate of the house and called out:

"Guram! Guram!"

"Don't worry master, I will call him for you," yelled Ranjit. The whole cursed thing had gotten out of hand and he had to cue the Pakistani gardener before any of the Japs had a chance to interrogate him! It was light now and everyone could see the bent figure painfully approaching from within the house's compound. The first guard, in the meantime had jumped down from the truck and placed a restraining hand on Ranjit as Gulam dragged himself through the gate.

Everyone, Cecil included, stared in amazement at the Pakistani's battered face. The other Englishmen in the Japanese transport were now heard, openly admiring the handiwork of their comrade.

"Cor, look at that shiner! Good show Ces!" Suddenly the first Japanese guard turned nasty toward Ranjit.

"You tell true story or I cut off head!" he ordered, as he placed his hand on the Sikh's left shoulder.

The plan to get the Englishman executed by the Japs that morning had all gone awry. Instead he was now being threatened! Ranjit's face had turned a sickening grey under his tan. He tried to twist free of the Jap's grip of his shoulder but found the soldier's hold unrelenting. Gulam, in the meantime, realising that he too could soon be in a similar tight-spot as his colleague, decided that the truth might just be his saving grace from possible trouble.

"It was his fault," he blurted out, pointing a finger at Ranjit, "he wanted to 'disturb' the boss's wife when he didn't come back after the bombing began. When the boss came back his wife told him and he hammered us."

The Japs now knew what really had transpired the night before. Their immediate reaction to the truth both horrified and amazed their White prisoners. Everyone on the occupied island had heard the stories of the merciless barbarism of the victorious enemy forces — raping and butchering defenceless women that they had come across after a battle — and they had instinctively felt that despite 'right' being on the side of their comrade, the Nips would side with the two Indians, especially after they had claimed to be Japanese allies through being members of the Indian National Army. To

their utter disbelief and incomprehension they witnessed the front escort grab hold of Ranjit, bend him forward, and with a smooth sweep of the sword from his side, decapitate him. Gulam quickly followed the same fate as his comrade from the guard seated at the back! After cleaning their shining samurai-blades, and their boots, on the lifeless corpses of the still-twitching bodies of the two unwitting victims of their atrocity, the two Japs proceeded to first kick their severed heads into the ditch closeby, and then shoved their bodies in as well, with their boot. They then coolly clambered aboard their vehicle and drove away. Their English prisoners were numbed into silence. Even when they arrived at the Naval Base no one uttered a word. The Japs didn't tolerate chit-chat during work, which was from eight in the morning, till eight in the evening. Everyone would discuss the day's event later among themselves when they were all back in their sleeping quarters. They would all be there, anyway, for the next seven days.

Upstairs in the darkened Siddon household, the toddler Thomas Siddon slumbered peacefully in his cot while his terrified mother trembled in terror as she witnessed the events unfolding in the front of the house, through a chink in the front-window curtain, overlooking the main gate. She had never witnessed death being meted out in her life before.

At the Naval Base the well-wishes and enthusiasm of his friends for the way he had conducted himself that morning did much for Cecil Siddon that night. But he still feared for his wife and child, and would have sacrificed anything just to receive even the slightest hint as to their welfare. But nothing was forthcoming from the Japs. It seemed as if there had been no 'incident'.

Unknown to him, and in fact to many on Singapore then, that such incidents as the one that morning, in which a hapless victim was beheaded on the spot, was commonplace. The Japanese meted out 'justice' to all and sundry who, in their eyes, warranted 'due punishment'. Such incidents *were not reported* to any higher authority because a written record would then have to be filed, and which wasn't favoured. Recorded 'punishment' could cast a slur on the inflictor, and was to be avoided at all cost. **Corrective measures** which dealt with offences on-the-spot didn't mar the serene appearance of things. In this way the *unpleasant occurrence did not happen*, and the Japanese Army was not affected. Since all 'corrective measures' were *unofficial* there was little to restrict their severity, nor was there fear of being reprimanded for carrying out an extreme 'correction'.

Siddon spent the next seven days on tenterhooks, expecting, at any moment, to be summoned to the Japanese commandant's office to give an explanation of the circumstances leading to the beheading of his two Indian

servants. But he was left alone. All the civilian part-time detainees,(for that was what they all were then), agreed it was typical of the yellow-skinned bastards — never consistent in their attitude or actions — so you never knew whether you were in their good books or in shit,at any time.

As island life gradually returned to 'normal' under the Japanese Occupation,more and more locals joined the captive British prisoners as employees of the enemy-controlled Naval Base. The Imperial Japanese Army even began issuing its own war currency — *banana-notes* the Brits called them, as on one side of every note a full comb of bananas was depicted.The locals were paid daily in the 'war-money' which, in the first week of its issue was treated on par with the pre-war Straits Settlements dollars,issued from Britain. But rumours were rife in Singapore,and before long it became known that each Japanese battalion owned its own printing machine,and a commander could order any amount of *banana notes* to be printed up for anything he wanted to purchase.Within hours of the fact becoming known the Japanese-issued "Occupation-dollars" became valueless but the enemy still insisted on paying for everything with it as well as receive change in the same "coin".

The price of everything sky-rocketed. A glass of water,normally free in a coffeshop,except unless one wanted some ice with it,and it used to cost a quarter-cent then,rose to ten cents,then to fifty dollars,'Japanese-money'! No one knew just how to evaluate the worth of his goods or services. The *new masters*, of Singapore, for that was what they were, would inquire after the price of something,and even though the Singapore purveyor had automatically lowered his price fifty percent, out of fear,the Japanese soldier making the purchase would reduce the asking-price by a further seventy-five percent before paying in *banana-notes*.

Singapore's economy fell to pieces and the age-old tradition of barter-trading had returned among the population,behind the enemy's back. Rice,the staple commodity,which had almost completely disappeared, became the most valuable asset barterable for just about anything.

The propaganda about the Japanese soldier stressed his scrupulous honesty. He never stole nor took advantage of his being the conqueror to cheat the local people.*But everyone knew different*. He was the victor and took whatever caught his fancy.Mothers cut their female children's hair and kept their faces unwashed and grubby-looking,praying all the while their pretty young daughters never attracted the unwanted,cursed attention of the hated Japanese barbarians.Many a mother sacrificed her own body and life,allowing a Jap soldier his pleasure of her,praying that he would decide to kill her afterward.Better her own death than her girl's body defiled and

violated,if the vile animal ever got wind that her daughter was hidden away,and would go looking for her.

Men lost their manhood. A husband could sometimes return home after spending the whole day,on an empty stomach, looking for work to feed his starving family,and discover a naked Jap soldier having his pleasure of his beloved wife,while the vile enemy's comrades sat around awaiting their turn.All the poor wretch of a man could do was hope that he hadn't been seen or heard,steal away in shame,frightened right down to his toes,and pray that he would not return home later to find his beloved wife murdered. Many a hapless woman,finding herself in such a situation would hope with all her might that her ordeal would be over long before her man returned home,so that he would not have to face the 'torment' of her being defiled.Many women caught in such a predicament had preferred to remain silent,rather than tell their husband because it would not have done anything for their lives except to bring on more sorrow.

*You should treat the Japanese as your friends, they have liberated you from the accursed White race and taught them that Asians are the masters.*

When the transport brought Siddon home from duty after the deaths of the two Indian servants,Ranjit and Gulam,a week ago,he spied their rotting heads impaled on poles stuck in the ground in front of the house,on the main road outside.He anxiously looked at the gate,half expecting to still see their corpses lying in the ditch.Thank God there was nothing.

The yard seemed awfully empty and he hurriedly unlocked his front door,slamming it shut hard,after him,and sped upstairs almost in a panic,yelling out for Luci and Thomas as he went up.

"Daddy, mummy's lying down,she's tired."

He caught his son in his arms,kissing him as Luci,looking drowsy,came to greet her husband. Thank goodness,by God's grace his family was still safe.Good willing they would continue to be so,despite the almost daily reports of rampage by roving bands of renegade Nips,and lawless Asiatics,both gangsters and the INA Indians who saw opportunities in the breakdown of law to settle old scores and take whatever attracted their attention.

Luci appeared normal on the surface but he wondered whether she was really bearing up under the strain of remaining indoors all the time.He inquired after the bodies of the servants and she told him that the dead men's families had taken away the bodies but that the Japs would not allow the heads to be removed from the poles outside.Ranjit's widow had moved out while the Pakistani family had since become exceedingly quiet,that

sometimes she felt that she was on her own in the place. No Japs had come except to impale the two heads on the poles on the same day of the 'incident'. She had made sure that Thomas had not witnessed this.

Cecil again reminded his wife to maintain a low profile during his absence. They now had two hazards to worry about — unwanted Jap attention, and retaliation from the bereaved families of the servants. But the Siddons needn't have worried about the late servants' families. Completely demoralised by the sudden and unexpected demise of their menfolk, they feared the English family, their former employers, and were confused that the Japanese had chosen to side with the English engineer instead of with their own menfolk.

Luci was always glad when her husband was back from the Naval Base because it gave her opportunity to visit the nearby Tek-kah Pasar, a market at the junction of Serangoon and Bukit Timah Roads, where she could barter a kati of rice from their hoard at home, for fish or vegetables. Sometimes even some fatty-pork or an old chicken fit only for making soup. Thomas remained behind with his father as he was White-looking, and she didn't want the Chinese, Indian or Malay vendors jacking-up the price or demand more for the exchange. She was delighted when her husband showed her his wage of banana-notes and small bag of rice he received from the base administrators for the work he did at the base. By war-time standards they were well-off, and with clever manipulation of their resources she would be able to obtain vital nourishment for her family. But she had to be careful not to barter too much rice, too frequently, otherwise the market-vendors would grow suspicious, and jealously lodge a report with the Japs. Use of the practically useless banana-notes to purchase unvital odds and ends would also demonstrate to the hawkers in the market that her husband was drawing a wage from the Japs, and they would not dare to overcharge or cheat for fear that her husband might make a complaint against them.

Cecil was fearful whenever she left for the market as the roads were still unsafe, especially for a lone woman. But he was powerless, being under strict orders to remain in-doors at home, each time he was back from the base. He was glad that she would be back within two hours because that was all the time she was given by the enemy to do her marketing. It was a tremendous relief to him each time he had to return to the Naval Base because he knew that Luci would remain indoors. He tried not to dwell on what he would do if she never returned from market. As a precaution Luci did what every woman on Singapore did — wear her hair short and unkempt, and donned loose and ill-fitting clothes to hide her figure, and wore no make-up. Each time she went out to market Cecil would watch her depart with a heavy



heart,keep his fingers crossed and pray for her safe return.

The next time Siddon returned to duty at the Base an Eurasian,Scully,a mechanic,had joined their particular unit.Another European,a Dutchman named Ahern,also an engineer,had been Cecil's only work-mate for the past two months,since the fall of Singapore,and the two Whites had supervised the local work-force.Both engineers realised that they would not be able to talk as openly as before until they knew the lay of the land as far as the newcomer was concerned.Scully the Eurasian seemed gregarious,and overly so,and immediately set Cecil and Ahern on their guard. The man's work was acceptable but he seemed perpetually in conversation with their Japanese overseer,which was strange as the Japs didn't encourage unnecessary patter during work-times. The two Whites finally decided that the Eurasian was a plant,and kept well clear of him unless it was to delegate a responsibility in the work.

Idle talk had become a deadly two-edged sword where casual remarks about the enemy had been taken out-of-context by anyone wishing to curry-favour with the Japs,and reported to the kempeitai,Japanese secret police,whom everyone,including the Japanese themselves,were fearful of. The rumour was that if anyone were picked up for questioning by the kempeitai,he or she would never be heard of again. The Kempeitai Secret Police and Intelligence Force was headquartered in the old YMCA Building in Stamford Road,close to the Cathay Building in Dhoby Ghuat. This unit also employed locals as spies as well as to write propaganda articles in English ,Malay and Chinese,and for posters which were put up all over Singapore. Some future very prominent,internationally-famous local politicians who would one day play important roles in Singapore's strive for independence from Britain,decades hence, were hired by the Nips to do their dirty propaganda work,and after the war,even though their identities were known,they were never arrested or pinpointed as traitors. Underneath the building the enemy had built detention cells,and the rumour was that if one were ever detained in them,one was slated for eventual execution.

On the evening of Cecil's first night at home,after his regular stint of duty,he was amazed and not a little perturbed when he heard Scully's voice hailing him at his front gate. Siddon had never ever indicated to the Eurasian where he resided and he was shocked,his senses reeling,to see his junior mechanic at his home and asking to be invited in.Even if Cecil had wanted to make a pretended overture and invite in the Eurasian, the terms of his conditional 'release' had been contingent on his having no visitors of any kind.That had been expressively impressed on him by the kempeitai when he and the other Europeans had been allowed to return to their respective

families. Siddon had to get rid of the mechanic fast, it was a matter of survival.

"It's getting late, near to curfew, shouldn't you be indoors, at home?" the Englishman stated in a civil tone, even though he really wanted to yell at the lowly cur to bugger off.

"Aah! Don't worry, I've got a pass — see!" Siddon knew he had to get the man to leave as his very survival depended on it. The Japs sometimes never bothered about whys and wherefors, and could, if it so inclined them, summarily punish everyone involved in any kind of 'hiccup'.

"I'm sorry Scully, I'm not supposed to have visitors, I'm on twenty-four hour curfew."

"Oh! I didn't know that," said Scully as he turned away.

Siddon realised that the Eurasian had come out into the open and thus revealed himself as a kempetai stooge because something was brewing. But what he just couldn't yet fathom. How low could a man go? Obviously he had been sent to trap him, and instantly sensed that his days as a 'free' man were numbered. How many more days would he have left with his family or were the enemy about to imprison him for the duration of the war, now that most of the bombed-out ships clogging the Naval Base berths at the dock were clear of wrecks. Was he soon heading for Changi Gaol?

When he returned to duty the following day Ahern, his Dutch colleague, was no longer with the unit, and the usually jabbering Scully had said nothing, which made Cecil uneasy. Sharp at eight that morning he was summoned to the commandant's room. He knocked before being commanded to enter, and bowed Japanese-fashion to the officer seated behind the heavy desk in the room.

"You-ah complain you on twenty-four-hour karfew, cannot see any friend — you are lucky you are not in prison!"

"Commander, Scully came calling on me at home yesterday, when it was close to curfew, so I told him I wasn't allowed visitors, and reminded him that curfew was fast approaching, that's all."

"Ah-so, you may go."

What the heck, thought Siddon, the Eurasian sod had cooked up his own version of his visit to me yesterday, and turned it into grounds for making a totally-untrue report. No doubt to curry-favour with the Japs, and to be rid of the Whites in the Naval Base workshops, no doubt.

Unknown to Siddon Scully had in fact reported that he had overheard the two White engineers discussing the extent of damage to the remaining bombed-out vessels in the port at Seletar, and that the British Allies would welcome the information. Scully's report sealed their fate. What Cecil

didn't know yet was that his Dutch friend was already languishing in a kempetai cell in Stamford Road.

They came for him later that morning. He would never ever see his son again, and, except for a brief visit to him in his cell, later, he would never again set eyes on Luci either.

Siddon met Ahern in the Jap secret police detention cells in Stamford Road in the afternoon after he had been taken away by the Japs in the Naval Base. The Dutchman was already delirious with pain. His finger-nails had been torn-out and an ear-drum pierced. His heart hammering against his rib-cage, the Englishman knew it would be his turn next. He tried speaking with Ahern, to somehow console him, but the Dutchman was already too crazed with pain to know anything. Siddon began to fear for what lay in store for him.

He didn't have long to wait. Two Jap guards brought him to a room, tied him firmly to a chair, and forced a rubber-hose into his mouth. A powerful jet of water gushed straight into his gullet, almost drowning him, as his guards ensured that he couldn't twist free of the hose somehow, by holding him down forcibly. His belly filled to bursting and ached horribly. He was untied and made to lie down on the dirty floor. Suddenly one guard pounced on his swollen belly, causing him to throw-up the water threatening to burst his sides. He blacked out. His Jap torturers revived him and repeated the torment three more times, reviving him every time he had fainted. Not a word was said. Finally he became unconscious.

When Cecil Siddon regained consciousness he was back in his cell at the kempetai headquarters in Stamford Road, lying on his cot. He glanced sideways instinctively for his Dutch friend Ahern and found him lying on the floor with his eyes open. He was dead.

It was July 1942.

## Sime Road Camp

### *Chapter Two*

Despite her dreaded fear of the place Luci Siddon forced herself to go to the *Kempeitai Headquarters* which was housed in the pre-war British-run YMCA Building in Stamford Road, everyday since she had learned the shocking truth from Colonel Suzuki, her husband's pre-war Japanese barber who had since the outbreak of hostilities proved to be a Japanese Army officer in disguise, of her husband's detention by the dreaded kempeitai. (Before the Japanese Occupation of Singapore the YMCA at this location was run and managed by the British colonials for their ilk primarily. The Chinese had their own, called the Chinese YMCA, and which had several branches located at various parts of the island).

She had already tried several times, but unsuccessfully, to gain admission into the building but whenever she drew near the entrance, her heart in her mouth, the stern-looking Japanese sentry would angrily wave her away, despite her timid attempts to tell him why she was seeking admission into the building. Her heart always froze cold whenever she was within earshot of the building because she could distinctly hear the anguished screams and cries for mercy emanating from the detention cells below the building. Luci knew the cries came from the tortured men and women under detention. She prayed hard that among the anguished sounds her husband's was not included, that, by some miracle he was not being subjected to whatever untold horrors the Japs were inflicting on the other poor souls in their grasp.

Despite her fears Luci had noticed the passers-by quickening their pace to get past and beyond the awful building which everyone in Singapore had

grown fearful of, ever since they had learned what it was and what it housed. In everyone's eyes she saw reflected the horror of what must have been transpiring within its innards, as the moans and groans of the unfortunates inside pierced their ear-drums. To Luci everyone was fearful that the brutal new "owners" of the former British colony might decide, on a whim, to detain them, and they sped past the awful place as hurriedly as possible.

When she had lost all hope of ever being allowed into the building, she hit upon an idea she was sure would get her in to see her beloved husband. She and Thomas, as it had become their habit ever since Cecil had been arrested, left their Owen Road home in the morning and walked down Serangoon and Selegie Roads, past the row of Indian millers' shops which ground customers' spices on-the-spot, and headed in the direction of the Cathay Building. She gathered her son in her arms as she turned the corner opposite the Cathay Building, and walked alongside the Stamford Canal, (originally the 'Brass Bassa' — "Wet Rice" River in Malay). She suddenly began pinching and smacking his arms, and knocking his head with her knuckles as they drew closer to the Kempeitai building. Her baby son squirmed in his mother's arms, thinking that she had suddenly grown mad. He stared at her in fright, wondering what had happened to make his normally loving mother act so angry with him. She caught his look and yelled:

"Cry you stupid child, cry!"

It was more her tone rather than the pain she was inflicting that got him bawling at the top of his lungs. This was what Luci was hoping would happen. She quickly crossed the street and headed straight for the sentry pacing the front of the building. The guard, seeing her about to plonk him with a 'situation' beyond his control, began to frown his irritation. It was clearly a 'problem' beyond his scope. As the young Eurasian woman drew nearer she put on a doleful look and tearfully begged to be allowed into the Kempeitai headquarters.

"Please let me in, can't you see my son is missing his father."

At a loss the soldier yelled out for assistance, and an officer poked his head out of the massive front doors, which he had swung open on hearing his sentry's yell. He took in the scene and impatiently beckoned the young woman inside and she quickly slipped in. The kempeitai lieutenant glanced at the baby in Luci's arms and a slight frown crossed his features. Young Thomas had stopped his bawling and was quietly whimpering. He was still angry with his mother, whom he had always found to be kind and loving, and who had transformed into a mad person, causing him pain for no rhyme or reason.

"His father English-neh? Give me his name,address, place of previous employment," the officer commanded,scorn underlying his tone.The Jap obviously didn't think much of dark-skinned young women marrying Whites. Ignoring his contempt Luci gave the necessary details which would enable the kempeitai officer to find who her husband was among the many prisoners languishing in their cells. She was instructed to wait in the foyer of the building,which was immediately behind the huge front doors which she had just come through. The man in the meanwhile had swivelled on his heels and disappeared behind the large main stairway of the building which faced the main doors,and which would take him to the basement where the detention cells were located.

Nervously she picked up her boy,who stiffened at her touch as he was still upset by what he felt was his mother's unreasonable manner toward him.Tenderly wiping away the tears from his face she kissed him and spoke softly in his ear.But little Thomas was till unforgiving.

"Please be good son,so that we can see daddy,you do want to see him,don't you? Well,if you don't make that soldier angry,and you musn't because we both will get into trouble,maybe he'll let us in to see daddy." Her little boy relented at once and hugged his mother.He loved her so much.

The kempeitai officer returned within five minutes and confirmed that Cecil Siddon had been detained as an enemy alien,and was being charged with spying.Luci begged permission to see her husband and the officer reluctantly relented,but Thomas was to remain with him in the hallway.Her ruse to get into the kempeitai headquarters and see her husband by making Thomas cry,had worked like a dream! As she disappeared with a Jap guard who had been summoned by the lieutenant to escort her to the cells,the Japanese officer picked up the infant Thomas and laughed when the child stiffened in his arms.The Japanese liked children,and the man knew how to distract the little child to win him over.

"Wait, I bring you Japanese cake,"he said.

Leaving young Thomas alone he strode to a side door and returned almost immediately with what looked to the little boy like the long bar of washing soap his mother used to wash daddy's working overalls with.The officer patted his head as he unwrapped the cake from its decorated paper-covering,unsheathed the sword at his side and used it to cut a slice which he handed to Thomas.The cake was made of very sweetened red bean paste mashed and kneaded into a dark dough and steamed again.The taste was extremely sweet but delicious and the young boy began eating slice after slice that the Japanese began cutting for him.

The officer now placed him on his knee,and the child,intent on enjoying

the food, smiled at the man warmly. The soldier beamed, he had succeeded in winning the boy, he felt, as he offered the complete bar of cake to him. Thomas accepted it, thinking that the man was nice. The soldier allowed the child to touch his medals and campaign ribbons, and tried answering his many child-like questions. Young Thomas' eye fell on the man's sword by his side.

"What is that?" he asked pointing at it.

"This sword, very sharp."

"What do you want it for?"

"Cut-off father's head!"

Young Thomas lashed out with his tiny hand, striking the soldier's face. The man leaped to his feet, tumbling the tot from his lap as he grabbed for his sword-hilt instinctively. Then he froze as he glared balefully with eyes wide open, nostrils flaring, as he hissed like a snake about to strike at the young Siddon. Then he suddenly smiled, relaxed his grip on the sword and patted the little boy's head.

"You have strong heart-neh."

But Thomas had become unfriendly again and turned away from him. Moments later Luci his mother came up, looking breathless and teary-eyed. What she had seen in the detention cells had to be ghastly for her to look the way she did. But she did manage to bow to the kempetai officer who had allowed her to visit her husband.

"Your son hit my face!"

Horrified now, Luci swung on her boy, giving him two tight slaps, one on each cheek as she pushed his head down in the direction of the Japanese officer.

"He is a bad boy, I will punish him when we get home and teach him to be polite," she whispered tremulously, terrified that she might suddenly be on the receiving-end of the Jap's wrath should he suddenly have a hankering to teach her the lesson on behalf of her boy. You never knew what these damned Japs would do from one moment to the next, she thought to herself.

Young Thomas again was angry. First his mother had pinched, and conked him on the head, then the man had wanted to cut off his father's head, and now his mother was punishing him for striking the naughty man who said he was going to cut off daddy's head! She's forgotten she's my mother! But he wouldn't cry out this time because he didn't want that man to see him crying. Luci kept her hand on her son's inclined head, keeping it lowered whilst with downcast eyes herself she frantically prised-open the main door and swiftly got into the street.

Once outside she did a quick bow to the Jap sentry, picked up her boy, crossed

Stamford Road and ran along the canal in the direction of the Cathay Building. She prayed as she sped along that the officer in the building that she had just left would not decide to call her back. It was dangerous times they were now living under. Thomas was silent as he studied his mother's face, sensing that she was under some kind of strain. When they were immediately in front of the Cathay Building she finally stopped and then set him down, finding herself weeping uncontrollably because she had seen her husband who had been badly tortured, and she was fearful that her child's rash action in hitting the officer's face could have resulted in her being detained, and God knows what would have happened to her child then. No passers-by even spared her a glance, everyone on the island had his own troubles.

"Don't cry mummy, see, I've got cake for you, that man gave it to me."

Luci gazed at her boy in wonder. Despite all that had unfolded back at the kempeitai headquarters Thomas had hung on to the cake given him by the officer and he was happily offering her a share. He was a gem. And in starving Singapore the cake was gold! Her thoughts swung to her husband, Cecil. How terribly he had looked! How horribly emaciated! His stomach, eyes and fingers were swollen, and he could hardly utter the few words he had spoken to her, which were done in a hoarse whisper. Her once dashing husband had stunk of putrefaction.

"Get out of the house quick!" he had urged in almost soundless urgency, "stay with friends but don't go back home. I know they'll be coming for you soon. Kiss Thomas for me."

Despite Cecil's warning Luci knew she still had to return home and organise herself. She hadn't yet been troubled by the Nips, since her husband's detention but, in spite of what Cecil had warned her about making herself and Thomas scarce, she still had to begin from home, to get things rolling for herself and her boy. She knew she would very likely be classified as an enemy alien, since she was married to an Englishman who had been detained as a spy, because that was what her husband told her.

Luci's thoughts swung to two first-generation English-Eurasian girls, Baby and Rose Davies, who were blonde and blue-eyed, and worked as "taxi-dancers", (a term used in pre-war colonial Singapore to describe women of easy virtue who earned a living by dancing with customers who paid for each dance-number at the "New World" Cabaret on Kitchener Road, off Jalan Besar, the red light district). Before her marriage to Cecil Luci had helped the girls' mother receive specialist treatment at the General Hospital in Sepoy Lines, which the girls never could have afforded, and the old lady's life had been saved. The two young ladies had sworn undying



gratitude and Luci Siddon felt that she had a right to 'collect' on it because her husband was in trouble, and they had to agree to take in her boy, feed and protect him until she had made the necessary preparations for both of them. She had heard that they had Jap boyfriends who protected them and she was sure Thomas would be out of harm's way if the girls agreed to take him.

Baby and Rose, and their mother were spontaneous in their wholehearted agreement, even though times were then very bad, what with food shortages and the controls over *everything* but Luci's stock of rice, which comprised two sacks, was the clincher. The young mother breathed a sigh of relief, at least her young child would be safe, even if *anything* untoward were to happen to her. She was banking on the Asian emotions of the Eurasian family, that they would care for him even though his mother never turned up again. Luci knew in her heart that even were she to be detained and imprisoned, when she got back home, Thomas would be safe with the Davies family. Luci told them that she would be returning to nursing at the Kandang Kerbau Hospital and needed for Thomas to be looked after while she worked. This was untrue but she felt that she had a right to try to save her son's life even if it meant lying. Steeling her nerves Luci told her son that she was leaving him with her friends for a short holiday while she went to work to feed the two of them, and tore herself away. Somehow she knew that the Japs would be coming for her, and she didn't know how to be 'on the run'.

She spied the Nippon truck at the main gate to her home in Owen Road, a long way off but was too tired to make herself scarce. She had no where to go, anyway. As she reached the vehicle the front-seat escort gave her just ten minutes to pack all that she felt was precious and necessary, and she was taken to the Sime Road Internment Camp, which was located close to the MacRitchie Reservoir. Luci knew she would never see her husband alive again, or her boy. She prayed hard that when it came time for Cecil to die it would be quick and, please God, painlessly. She prayed also to the Virgin Mary, her 'favourite' religious benefactor, to whom she always turned to whenever she was troubled, for the safety of her boy for the duration of the war.

Unknown to her when she arrived at the Sime Road Civilian Internment Camp that day in August, and clambered down from the Jap transport, was the moment her husband was shot dead by an enemy corporal. Cecil Siddon, that afternoon, had been allowed to visit the latrines, which were close to the exit, and successfully slipped past the sentry guarding the

doorway, when he had noticed that the Jap's attention was distracted because one of the women clerks, a Chinese, had passed him to visit the ladies' and he cheekily called out to her, which gave the Englishman his golden chance to slip out behind him into the passageway leading to the entrance and up the short flight of steps into the Fort Canning Road which ran past the back of the YMCA building, opposite the Raffles Museum. He had sped past the Wesley Church on his left, keeping close to the long row of trees at the top of the rise which looked down, some fifty feet onto Penang Road, and reached Tank Road. He crossed over into Oxley Road, from there, near to the Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church, and got into Oxley Rise. He immediately made for a deserted colonial bungalow, which he knew, because as a boy he and his parents had called on the owners, who were their friends, and hid in some tall *lallang*, (Malay: razor-sharp wild grass), growing in profusion within the compound. Somehow he just felt safe being in familiar surroundings. He realised the Japs had probably been immediately aware of his disappearance and were probably scouring every nook and cranny from both directions of the Kempeitai Headquarters, at back. But he felt safe where he was, and decided to remain hidden until night and curfew before making good his escape. Somehow he had to get to one of the local groups, there had to be, organising resistance against the damned Japs.

Siddon's disappearance was discovered bare moments after he had gotten clear of the building but in the bedlam of the discovery of his 'vanishing act', time was lost and he was nowhere in sight when the enemy got onto the Fort Canning Road. The captain of the guards held the laxed sentry solely responsible. The 'baggarro' Englishman had to be recaptured at all cost and 'taken care of' immediately — he was not to be brought back to the cells. Otherwise the guard would be executed in his place. It was a question of Japanese pride and honour and the Englishman's capture and summary execution was to be regarded as *merai* — the highest form of orders which had to be carried out at all cost, even to the extent of losing one's life and that of others involved. A *merai* order, once given by a superior officer, was irrevocable and recognised no possibility of the exercise of independent judgement on-the-spot. It conferred on the recipient an acute sense of forming part of the great and glorious *ija*, (the instrument for fulfilling the Japanese Mission). Circumstances excusing failure did not exist and non-compliance had to call for the supreme penalty — death in action or suicide.

Fate next dealt the doomed Englishman her final tragic hand. It was turning dusk when there would be many dark spots to hide in, in the fast-

falling night, and thinking it opportune to leave his secure hiding place, Siddon broke cover, hoping to be safely indoors, in a friend's home, before the enemy went about on his nightly rounds looking for curfew-breakers. But just as he left the *lallang* undergrowth the Nip search-party from the kempeitai cells in Stamford Road came upon him. He was instantly surrounded, and Siddon knew his number was up. Without further ado he smashed through the human-cordon and dashed toward Tank Road, knowing he wouldn't make it, even to the end of the road. The vengeful Jap sentry who had been held responsible for allowing him to make good his escape, drew his pistol, took a bead and shot him in the back. The guard then calmly walked up to Siddon, where he lay bleeding, and fired into his head.

Siddon's kempeitai executioners next dealt him their final insult. Ignominious burial in a pauper's grave. His death was kept secret throughout the war to prevent relatives discovering exactly how he had met his demise. Cecil Siddon became just another casualty of Japanese torture and imprisonment. His death certificate would state that he had died of dysentery.

His wife would never know — not until many years later when the war had long been over and their son was a grown man. But that day in 1942 she was beginning a three-year ordeal as a civilian internee at the Sime Road Civilian Internment Camp for White enemy aliens, (of the Japanese). Forty years later Thomas Siddon would finally locate his late father's grave tucked away in a forgotten field, slightly off the main *Biddadari* Cemetery. (Malay: *Biddadari* is taken from Malay folklore and is a story about fairies), in Upper Serangoon Road. A Malay cemetery-gardener would give him a vital clue, relating how, as a young lad he had helped his own father, a cemetery-gardener before him, dig graves for a truck-load of prison corpses dumped on the roadway by the kempeitai, for the gardeners to deal with. On impulse Thomas had harried the record-keeper of the cemetery, who finally allowed him to look through his burial records, warning the young man that even if he were to find his father's name included in the unaccounted-for war-dead, the plot reserved in his father's name would not, in all likelihood contain his father's remains as the corpses had not been tagged for easy identification and, anyway, the Malay cemetery-gardeners did not read either English or Japanese, so even if they could there still would have been mix-ups. But Thomas insisted and his persistence finally paid off.

But in 1942 Thomas, still a two-year-old, had become the guest of Rose and Baby Davies, who took him with them every night to the cabaret where they worked at the "New World" Cabaret. He found the night-life at the cabaret exciting but always fell asleep across the table each night, and woke

the following morning in the girls home with no recollection of how he got there.

Singapore was in the tight grip of the Japanese Occupation and the 'liberated' population soon discovered the price of that 'freedom'. The island was on the brink of starvation due to food shortages caused by the Imperial Japanese Armed Forces commandeering all food resources. Many native residents as well as civilian internees and prisoners-of war were starving. But the Japs and their girlfriends, all over the island, lived off the fat of the land. This included the girls working at the "New World" Cabaret, where food was plentiful. There were nightly banquets where Jap officers and men entertained their women to sumptuous feasts, and paid for them in their "banana-currency".

Young Thomas was made a fuss of by all the girls who would try to place titbits of food in his mouth but as he wasn't used to being spoon-fed, would turn away, causing them some embarrassment in front of their boyfriends. The Japs tolerated his presence, because of the girls, but, sometimes, a frown would cross a soldier's face, seeing the child refuse the choice bits of food specially-chosen by a girl for him. Even they realised that the rest of the island had nothing to eat. On his third night there, a Chinese girl took him on her knee and when the music grew loud and she couldn't be heard, fiercely hissed into his ear: "Don't be stupid, people are starving, you have good food to eat-eat — you make the soldiers angry, they'll cut-off your head. Eat or they won't allow you to come here anymore!"

Thomas nodded his understanding, stretched out his hand and helped himself, much to the delight of the Japs present, who broke into smiles. Some patted his head. Thomas didn't tell them that he would have eaten before but everyone was always trying to put food into his mouth, and he wasn't used to being spoon-fed. He would eat now because he could help himself. From that night on, and over the following two nights he filled his little belly to bursting. He didn't want to stop coming to the "New World" Cabaret with Baby and Rose Davies.

The nights spent at the cabaret would haunt the toddler for the next three years as his young body craved for nourishment as he starved on a diet of watery gruel in the civilian internment camp his mother was forced to get him to, because he was the offspring of a White enemy alien.

Upon internment Luci was questioned about the whereabouts of her boy, and had to reveal that she had placed him with the two Davies' women, or receive punishment. Unknown to her word was conveyed to the two Eurasian girls to return the enemy-agent's child immediately to his mother at Sime Road. Fearful of dire consequences, the young ladies begged

their respective boyfriends for help with the Nippon Authorities, and Baby's lover vouched for them with the camp commandant, and agreed to bring the toddler to the camp himself.

On the fifth morning of Thomas' stay with Baby and Rose, Baby told him she would be taking him back to his mother that day as she had asked for his return. The young child was excited and happy to be seeing his mother again, as he had missed her but felt a tinge of regret that he would no longer be accompanying the girls on their 'excursions' to the cabaret. Baby made sure he had a good, full meal, and at five that afternoon her Jap boyfriend arrived at her home, by car, to take them both to Sime Road. The car sped from the Davies' home in Lavender Street onto Balestier Road after crossing over Serangoon Road, and turned right heading in the direction of Thomson Road, where Balestier Road became narrow and traffic flowed in single-file in both directions. It started getting shady and young Thomas, seated in the back, noticed the trees growing along the roadside, and the market-farms which grew all manner of vegetables. After the farmyards came dense secondary jungle as they turned right again into Thomson Road and headed in the direction of Lornie Road and the MacRitchie Reservoir.

Every mile or so since leaving Lavender Street there were road-blocks manned by Japanese soldiers but since the car flew the 'Rising Sun' flag of a Japanese officer of the Imperial Army it was waved on, the sentries saluting smartly as the vehicle sped past. Thomas seated in the back noticed the bright, cheery smiles of the men transform into smirks as they exchanged knowing looks with one another, seeing the attractive blonde woman seated next to their officer.

The car had gone approximately a mile-and-a-half up Lornie Road when it suddenly veered off into a dusty, unmetalled lane on the right. Travelling just a few yards it halted almost immediately in front of a wooden gate crisscrossed with barbed-wire. The Eurasian woman, Baby, alighted and nodded at Thomas to follow. She implored her Jap boyfriend with her eyes, and the man rattled-off a string of Japanese to the sentry pacing at the gate, which was the entrance to the Sime Road Civilian Internment Camp. The sentry had seen them approaching but had continued his pacing without letup because he had also noticed the officer at the wheel. Acknowledging the officer's instructions with sharp, brisk nods, he rent the air with simultaneous high-pitched shrieks to indicate his understanding of them. "Come quick," Baby's boyfriend commanded her, "we go now, it karfew-hour soon, the guard know what to do."

"Bye Thomas, wait here for mummy, don't leave this place, understand?"

Wait for mummy until she comes for you. Remember, wait for her," Baby implored of the toddler, her eyes were anxious and her heart went out to the two-year-old she was about to leave behind outside the entrance to the concentration camp. She was loath to leave and tried delaying her departure but the Japanese in the car smacked the steering-wheel in impatience, and she reluctantly tore herself away.

Young Thomas Siddon watched her go, half-expecting her to turn and wave a last goodbye, a kind or assurance that he was not alone in the world. But without a glance Baby got into the car, slammed the door, as it drove off leaving a whirl of dust. The child looked at the Japanese sentry, hoping for a smile, some sign of warmth, an indication that the alien world he now found himself in, wasn't true. It was so cold and unfriendly as the sentry continued pacing his well-trod path and ignored him completely. The toddler turned his attention to his mother, hoping that she would make an early appearance. It must have been several hours since Baby and her boy-friend had deposited him at the gate because Thomas suddenly realised that it was getting dark. And mosquitoes had begun taking sucks from his face and exposed arms and legs.

Sharp at seven-thirty the sentry was relieved by another. Speaking to his countryman in Japanese, both men formally exchanged responsibility for the command at the main gate. Relieved that the first man could at least speak, even if it was in a language he did not know, Thomas was chagrined that both men had behaved as if he wasn't even there. The first sentry walked back into the camp and disappeared behind some buildings the little boy could barely discern in the darkness. As the surrounding gloom deepened he began to feel nervous. The mosquitoes were torture now but he was too afraid to move away for fear of missing his mother. In desperation he began smacking at the buzzing insects around his face as their bites started becoming unbearable. He kept glancing at the new sentry but the man paid him no heed. Thomas now began to have feelings of anxiety. Maybe his mother didn't know he was waiting for her! He had a sudden strong urge to pee but dared not go to the bushes to do it in case his mother turned up, and didn't see him there, and left without waiting for him. But the water in him began to hurt, and in frustration he released it, relieving himself where he stood, making a little pool about his feet and wetting his pants through and through. He kept a watchful eye for his mother all the time, looking toward the gate to try to see beyond it into the darkness of the concentration camp but his view was cut-off by a large wooden hut. Suddenly the sentry made a sound in his throat, and, relieved, Thomas turned toward him, about to break into a smile, relieved beyond words that at last the adult was

acknowledging his existence. But instead the Jap sentry thrust at him with his bayoneted-rifle, indicating that he wanted the child away from the pool of light bathing the area in front of the gate where he was standing. The alarmed toddler hastily moved away and stood in the dark. Crickets chirping now filled the air and his ears.

Thomas was beginning to feel weary and sleepy from standing and waiting for his mother for some three to four hours. He finally decided to lie on the dusty, sandy and stone-filled ground because he could not keep standing any longer. He realized that his mother would be annoyed when she clapped eyes on the state of his clothes but he had become exhausted. Deciding that he stretched his tired limbs on the dusty ground as he tiredly gazed up at the starry sky. He began to vaguely hear the sound of human voices coming from the direction of the concentration camp's main gate through his sleepy haze, and in a panic struggled to his feet and dashed toward the camp, just in time to witness his mother turning away, with helplessness written all over her features as she wearily trekked her way into the blackness that was Sime Road Camp, as the camp sentry kept on with his unceasing pacing.

"Mummy!" Thomas screamed in fright, running toward the light he had been driven from earlier that evening, unafraid of the Jap anymore, "wait for me, I'm here!"

Luci swung round, her face a mixture of despair and despondency turning to heartfelt relief. Her boy had been there and the damned sentry had been lying through his teeth! Ignoring Thomas who Luci really wanted to sweep into her arms and smother his face with her kisses, she pleaded softly with the camp-guard to open the gate and allow her son in. The brazen soldier demanded an 'official' authorization first. Frantically the young Eurasian woman pulled out the all-important note from the camp commandant which she had craftily tucked into her bodice before arriving at the gate, and proffered it. In the meantime the sentry had placed a restraining hand on the toddler who was feeling annoyance at the lustful way the man had regarded his mother's action. The guard spoke in the harsh, guttural pidgen-Japanese that the enemy used when speaking with everyone on the island. He forcibly reminded Luci about the proper procedure in getting permission from him. Bowing repeatedly, giving no sign of his lascivious look, the young woman humbly indicated her understanding of the camp's regulations, and finally satisfied, the Jap allowed Thomas into the Sime Road Civilian Concentration Camp.

The little boy rushed into the concentration camp with open arms toward his mother who, to his shocked dismay grabbed one of his hands, turned and

pulled him briskly away from the camp-gate light,into the inky darkness without a word. Thomas thought his mother's behaviour extremely odd but,once away from the light,and the sight of the camp-guard,she again transformed into the loving parent that he had always known.

"Oh my darling,you're safe!" she breathed,kissing his face all over.

"You're wet and smell of pee-pee!"

"Sorry mum, I couldn't stand it any longer."

"Well you'll just have to see Captain Susuki like that." She gave Thomas swift,strict instructions as she sped him toward the camp commandant's office.

"This isn't your father's house. Its Sime Road Camp and the Japanese are in charge. If you make them angry they'll beat me or make you stand in the sun until your eyes hurt, or even worse things.

"Promise you'll be good. Bow to the captain,bow to all Japanese,especially the kempeitai — don't say a word to any of them unless they speak to you first."

Her son nodded his understanding,wondering all the same why he had to bow to 'Japanese' and 'kempeitai', what was that anyway? All the grown-ups he had come across in his young life so far, seemed afraid of these two words,especially the second one. They had to be something fearful but he did not know why.

By this time mother and child had arrived at a large wooden hut bathed in light from a large naked bulb suspended from the apex of its roof. Light shone out from all its windows.Obviously the Japanese didn't feel the threat of a surprise bombing raid from the Allies. They had become the new masters of the 'south seas'.

Mother and son walked up to the building's door,which was in shadow,and Luci knocked. She kept placing her index finger to her lips,indicating silence to her son. A harsh voice commanded "come" in Japanese,and she pushed open the door,keeping her son behind her. Three soldiers dressed in underwear-shorts and singlets were seated round a table with glasses of local beer in their hands. The Eurasian woman stepped inside, bowed low and remained in the stooped position. Her child aped her then looked up at the men curiously.

"Keep head down!" a voice barked out harshly. Luci snaked out an arm and pushed her surprised son's head toward the floor. The Jap who had spoken continued in the intimidating bellow all the Japs in the concentration camp used on the internees to subjugate them. It was a guttural, thundery, harsh and demanding.

"Nani Si-don-san!",(What is it Mrs Siddon).



Luci replied meekly in pidgen-Japanese that her son had been given permission by the camp commandant to join her on camp, and she had come to report his arrival to Captain Susuki.

"You skin black, he white, he papa ingerris-neh?"

"Hai."

"Ah-so."

Captain Susuki, the camp commandant, heard them and called out. One of the men barked back that Luci Siddon had brought her son to meet him. The commandant ordered mother and child into his office and the soldiers impatiently waved them on, annoyed that their drinking had been interrupted. Inside Susuki's office Luci again bowed low, pushing her son's protesting head down as well. The Japanese officer ignored the child.

"Okay, he stay in Block Twenty-nine with you. You tell fat, black woman, Mrs W'son look after him daytime," the captain instructed Luci.

"Hai, Susuki-san," Luci responded.

"Okay, go now, karfew on."

Luci bowed low again, prised open the door, slipped out, bowed to the three Jap guards outside the commandant's office, and slipped out of the hut into the darkness.

Sime Road Internment Camp was one of the places of detention for White civilians in Singapore, the majority being British, but there were New Zealanders, Australians, Dutch, several stranded Americans, first-generation Eurasians, and some Malacca-Portuguese Eurasian, Chinese and Indian women who had married Whites, and their Eurasian children. It was a community of over a thousand souls. The area of confinement, carved out of the primary-jungle surrounding the MacRitchie Reservoir, which was in the interior of the island, was away from the more populated areas of Singapore of those days. There were two camps — one for women and the other for the men — and completely segregated from each other by a massive cassava, (known colloquially as tapioca), farm that isolated one camp from the other.

Inmates from both camps worked under the searing sun, the men doing the heavy toil like tilling and harrowing with *chungkuls*, while the women did the planting and collection of the cassava-root after the men had uprooted the 'ripe' tapioca trees, which was the staple diet of the internees.

The women of Sime Road Camp were sub-divided into various sections according to the type of work groups of inmates were allotted to do. Each building, which was referred to as a 'block' and numbered, had its own block-leader who was in charge of between twenty to thirty women and their respective children. As a further humiliation of the British and the

other Whites, the enemy chose dark-complexioned Eurasians or Indians as block-leaders to demonstrate the **new order** in Asia to all and sundry. Whites were purposely not housed in Whites-only huts but were herded in with Eurasians and Asians. In the beginning some of the Whites had voiced objections to being in such close proximity with non-Whites but the Japs dismissed their protests,thundering their displeasure of what they considered as 'White-stupidity', in thundery voices as superiors to underlings.

The Asian women on the camp, both Chinese and Indian, had been or were still married to British or other Whites,and had been interned because of this. In a way they were 'thankful' to have been confined because on the 'outside' many Asians had been executed on the false reports of those wishing to curry-favour with the enemy.

As time passed the Japs were amused to note that the Whites had become 'black' through constant exposure to the scorching sun,and that there was no *difference* between Whites and those of Asian stock. The observation was wryly noted by all. They were all prisoners and they were starving.

The Whites had never bothered to learn the 'native lingo' of Singapore during peace-time, lumping the various Chinese dialects, the Malay and Indian languages as alien and incomprehensible. The Japanese language was completely *greek* as far as they were concerned. The Eurasian knew a smattering of the Asian tongues,and the Asians, some English, and everyone born on the island or who had come from Malaya or Indonesia,spoke the *bazaar*-Malay of Singapore, as had always been the tradition. The enemy could speak with locals in Malay, and some Singapore-borns,since the war, had 'picked-up' pidgen-Japanese.

The Whites suffered most because they could not understand what was being said to them by the enemy, and the Japs, who could speak a pidgen-English, showed their contempt of the Whites by shouting at them only in Japanese, over and over again, completely bewildering the Anglo-Saxons further. Many of the other inmates, both Eurasian and Asian, would take pity on the confused and terrified White internees, and would pretend to call one another, very loudly in English but in fact would be translating what the amused or irritated Japanese was getting them to do, in the hope that the wretched 'victim would catch on and respond appropriately. The enemy, it seemed, never suspected, and were even under the mistaken impression that the Whites had finally begun to 'pick-up' their tongue! What the enemy never realised was that the achievement of learning another alien non-European language was an impossibility for the average White of those days, in view of his cultural background,attitude and ' position in the world

. But, despite this *handicap* by war's end every White who had been interned in Sime Road had gone 'native' enough to be able to speak the **bazaar-Malay** of Singapore and Malaya.

The Japanese endeavoured to turn the Eurasian against the British but they were loyal, preferring to sacrifice their lives then to forsake their own White ancestry. After the surrender of the enemy, later on, many Eurasians would turn bitter when their former White fellow-internees, who had been 'grateful' for moral support or even succour during the strife years, reverted to *type* and conveniently 'overlooked' the help they had received from their 'subjects' when the status quo of old had been overturned.

After Luci Siddon and her son, Thomas, left Captain Susuki's office they went straight to Block 29. Luci knew she had to drive home to her child the seriousness of the situation on the camp. She began by spelling out things simply, avoiding use of sensitive terms like 'Japs', 'behead', 'kempeitai' and 'Nips', because Thomas had the disconcerting tendency or 'habit' of picking up and using words he'd overheard adults using, out of context. The Japs were alert to the antagonism of the internees, and disliked being called 'Nips'. And she didn't want to be on the receiving-end of any Japanese punishment for corrupting her child.

She was the block-leader of Block 29, an 'important' block because it housed the women-camp's only female doctor. Many on the camp were jealous of Luci because in addition to being block-leader, she held the 'cushy' job of typist to Captain Susuki. Being attached to his office also gave her additional 'protection' from the Jap guards who were not exactly sure what her 'status' was with their superior officer, and treated her with caution. Luci, on her own, kept out of their way, performing her office duties diligently so that they would have no cause to complain about her to their commandant.

Block 29' like all the blocks on Sime Road, was a long, wooden, single-storied godown-looking building whose thick attap-roof hung over the attap-covered walls, cutting-off the sunlight, and had a stamped-down earth floor. There was a main dormitory with fifteen beds and two smaller rooms. Luci had one, as block-leader, and the other was the medical-examination room for the whole women's camp, both White and Asian. It was also the private quarters of the Dutch woman doctor, Mrs van Breuklen. Her husband, a doctor as well, was attached to the men's camp across the tapioca plantation which divided the two camps. Husband and wife were a familiar sight to everyone — men and women — as they were permitted to visit each other for medical consultations. They could be seen long before they

arrived at a place because of the white *topis*, (Malay: pith helmets), they always wore when they went on their rounds, visiting the sick, and only took them off when they bowed to any Japanese. The couple were at liberty to move between the male and female camps to render service, and very often were able to let separated spouses in both camps know of the health and welfare of each other.

There were no doors to block entrance-ways, or to the 'private' rooms within, just sack curtains, and Japanese officers and men were at liberty to pass through huts as they pleased, and frequently did so on the pretext of checking for unauthorized acts like the smuggling in of food bartered 'illegally' from the Malay villagers who came in to sell their farm produce to the enemy, or attempts at escape. The Japs of course would, quite frequently, come upon women in various stages of undress but would ignore their outraged protests. The womenfolk wised up fast and would place a lookout at the door to give them advance warning of an uninvited visit by a lustful Jap guard.

The camp curfew was on in full swing by the time Luci brought her son, Thomas, to Block 29. The young boy saw a group of women and their children huddled together near the doorway, awaiting the arrival of his mother! He was surprised that others would wait for his mother. He was further amazed at her sudden business-like manner, giving orders and instructing her hut-mates to return to their respective beds in the block, as she called out their names to ensure that everyone was accounted for. The young boy suddenly realised that the whole block was in total darkness, yet he could still 'see' clearly enough to discern what the women and their children were doing. A young Englishwoman came up to his mother and handed over a kerosene lamp and matches, while his mother instructed two other women at either end of the block to roll down the 'doors' there. Luci then lit the *lampu cha-cha*, (Malay: a kerosene wick lamp), and placed it on the floor in the centre of the hut. She trimmed down the wick so there was just sufficient to see by. Later Thomas would learn that the light was important as it kept roving, drunken, wanton Japs at bay. They would not enter a block to molest or rape an internee so long as they could be seen by everyone else! 'Face' was important to a Jap, and he wouldn't be caught red-handed sexually abusing a woman because punishment would mean his decapitation.

But darkness brought with it terror and fear to Sime Road. Nearly every woman had been raped in the early days, and while the Imperial Japanese Army provided its off-duty soldiers its own 'comfort girls', who had been shanghai'd from their colonies of Korea and Taiwan, (Formosa), as well as

occupied China and the Philippines, and placed in brothels in Cairnhill, Middle Road and other areas of the island, these places were too far away from the Sime Road Concentration Camp, and permission to leave was always withheld. The only official past-time for the camp-guards was drinking beer, acquiring stolen watches and cameras, trying to outsmart one another in deals, and, should opportunity arise, waylaying a hapless woman-inmate in a lonely spot on the camp and ravishing her. And nightfall always gave the Nip added encouragement. No one among them dressed sufficiently, including the camp-commandant. They all went about in vest, shorts and slippers. Under cover of darkness camp guards would often try to creep into sleeping women's beds before the women had a chance to cry out and warn their hut-mates to come to their aid, and terrify the poor woman into submission by holding a bayonet at her throat.

Veneral disease officially did not exist in the Japanese Army. Treatment was deliberately made painful to discourage the other ranks from going with whores. It became a measure of 'protection' for the women of Sime Road to let on that they were down with the affliction and thus keep the would-be Jap rapists at bay. But a drunken Nip soldier never knew discrimination.

After Luci had taken the roll-call and ensured that the block's security light stood sentinel against their being attacked by a roving, would-be Jap rapist, she brought her son to where a large, dark blob lay in her bed. It was Mrs Wilson, a Malayalee Indian from Kerala, India.

"Mrs Wilson this is my son Thomas, the one I've told you about. Could you please include him together with the other children under your care, during the day, when I'm away. Don't worry about his meals, he'll queue up with the others."

"Sure, Mrs Siddon."

"Thank-you, good night."

Young Thomas stared at his mother. When they lived at home with daddy mummy never spoke so strictly, she's changed, he thought. His mother was giving instructions and everyone was listening! He scampered after her into their room. At last. They were finally alone and he could hug his mummy. He smelled her familiar smell. His mother, in the meantime, had lit her own little security lamp, shedding its weak glow over their cramped quarters, which was a luxury, compared to the regimented rows of beds in the outer hut where the other women were sleeping.

"Don't make a noise, I've got some powdered milk which I'll mix with cold water, if you want?"

"Oh yes, thank-you!" His mother poured some water she kept handy in a tin

mug and mixed in the milk from a folded packet of paper she had been keeping in her bosom.

"Here, drink it quickly, we don't want the others to see you having it, someone could make a complaint."

Her son thought that it was a strange thing to say. How could people complain because you were having a drink of milk? He would learn about concentration camp life soon.

His mother undressed him and helped with his pyjamas which she had managed to bring with her when she first had been detained by the kempeitai and brought to the Sime Road Civilian Concentration Camp from their home in Owen Road. Thomas would share his mother's narrow camp-bed. He clambered up it while his mother left with her kerosene lamp to wash-out his pee-soaked clothes. Her boy didn't mind being in the dark, it held no terrors for him. His father had seen to that when he was very little.

The 'bathroom' that Luci disappeared into was a doorless cubicle with a sack curtain to afford one some privacy, and which was at the end of the block so as to ensure that the stench from it did not pervade the sleeping area. Inside it were tins of water which it was the duty of one of the Whites to fill up everyday. The Japs had specified that. There was a lavatory in it as well. This was a ditch dug approximately mid-way of the bathroom floor, and led to a cesspool outside the hut, away from the usual human traffic that would normally pass the block. An internee would sluice the ditch each time after use. Every thirty days or so, one of the Whites would be picked to augment the 'shit-brigade' of the women's camp to clear the cesspools at the back of each block of the odious excrement, using tin-cans, basins, or any other kind of hold-all. The putrefacted muck was then spread by the 'shit-brigade' over fallow ground waiting the replanting of tapioca stems, which were stuck into the ground. By the time Luci returned from the bathroom, her son was fast asleep.

Thomas was surprised to find his mother shaking him awake early the following morning. He had only just fallen sleep! But his mother persisted, urging him in an urgent tone to stir, and he groggily sat up in the camp-bed.

"Put your clothes on, and wait until I come for you," she instructed him firmly. Thomas dutifully did as he was bade, hurt that his mother had left him to cope by himself. He felt thirsty and hungry, and wondered when breakfast would be served.

All over Sime Road Camp the sound of bustle could be heard as every block scurried with its own preparations for roll-call. Luci had earlier sprung from bed as the first gong for the Japanese other-ranks had gone,

turned up her kerosene lamp and the one in the main sleeping quarters, and clapped her hands briskly, calling out to everyone to waken for the day. As block-leader she was responsible for the punctual attendance of her block. The tardiness of anyone meant a demerit point for the whole block, which could result in no meal for that day, which nobody wanted as it was their only meal, or any 'extra' such as Red Cross parcels, if they got any at all.

Tenko or roll-call was at 6.30 a.m. sharp and it was Luci's duty to ensure that everyone in Block 29 was assembled outside except when it rained, when tenko would be held indoors. The young Eurasian woman did not have a time-piece anymore because she had sold it very early in her life at the camp for *banana currency* to buy some basic necessities. But she was still able to wake up in good time every morning because the Japanese would sound the dinner gong at six to alert the block-leaders. The Japs themselves would have been up and parading on their square at five-thirty. Captain Susuki would appear at the internees' parade ground sharp at six-thirty to take the women's camp in their morning drill. Another senior officer took the men at their camp.

No one missed roll-call, no matter how sick they felt. Luci and the other block-leaders made sure that all fellow-inmates under their charge made it to tenko. It was never advisable to miss the drill by reporting sick. The only way one missed the morning parade was when one was so incapacitated that she just could not move from sheer exhaustion or very severe illness. The Japanese attitude was that medical attention was too much of a bother, and treatment was restricted to cases of extreme and absolute necessity. There was non-recognition of dysentery. If an internee passed a stool less than thirty times in a day she was not suffering from it. If an internee was so sick that she absolutely refused to move, her block-leader, very reluctantly would report it to the camp commandant before the morning parade, knowing full well what the repercussion would be.

After the morning's parade the commandant would visit the 'sick' person. He would first approach her bed and give it a tremendous kick with his boot, knocking over the bed and spilling her onto the floor. If the woman were still able to crawl she would be kicked continually until she forced herself to the front of the block where she was pushed by the captain's boot outside. She would then be made to stand on her own and gaze full into the sun for the whole day, and miss her meal.

Under 'normal' circumstances, when there were no 'untoward' cases, block-leaders would call out the names of each adult and child in their respective blocks and mark attendance on a sheet provided. Each leader would then shout across the square, from where she would be standing that

everyone in her block was accounted for. The morning's activity then ended with a pep-talk by Captain Susuki who would remind everyone that they were inferior to the Japanese Race, and that they had to work harder to ensure Japanese victory in the war still being conducted elsewhere in the Pacific.

The order to work hard was always **merai** for fulfilling the great and glorious **ija**, the Japanese goal of conquest. Everyone would then stand to rigid attention for the **Kimigayo**, the Nippon national anthem, and the **Hinomaru**, the national flag, would be raised and everyone would yell 'banzai!' 'banzai!'

No talking was permitted during tenko, not even underbreath. Anyone caught mumbling was punished with missing the one meal of the day or being made to stare into the sun. Asians caught talking were usually slapped on the spot, while Whites and 'stupid' Eurasians got the full treatment — slapping, missing the one meal of the day, and staring into the blazing sun.

Immediately after tenko internees returned to their respective blocks and stood by their own bed which had already been made before roll-call. Everything in the block had to be spick and span — the floor swept clean, litter cleared and personal items kept away from sight. Then came inspection by a Japanese officer or NCO. Everyone dreaded inspection if it were "Blue Stockings", (Lieutenant Hatshichi Kawazue), "Specs", (Sargent Minoru Myamoto), or "OK Charlie", (Lieutenant Shoshiro Kobashi), because if it were any one of the three, someone would always be up on a charge for the slightest reason.

"Blue Stockings" was feared most because he was capable of passing the death sentence for the smallest or most petty 'error'. "Specs" was a moron who smiled all the while as he pinched a woman's breast until she was near fainting, and "OK Charlie" appeared jolly and everything was 'OK' until an internee was summoned to the administrative office for an 'OK' punishment, which meant either staring into the sun or missing the day's meal.

That first morning of his life in the Sime Road Civilian Concentration Camp Thomas Siddon stood with the others of his block in the chilled morning dark. To him the sunless dawn really felt cold and he shivered frightfully. He had never been out in the open so early in his life before. He stood in the ranks as his mother busied herself getting everyone in neat rows before standing in the front to lead them all in exercise. Despite his discomfort he really felt proud of her that morning.



After tenko Thomas half-expected to get his breakfast and was chagrined when his mother concentrated instead on getting the block prepared for the all-important inspection by the Japanese. As he and his mother stood by the bed awaiting the arrival of the particular officer who would conduct the inspection that morning, he demanded his breakfast. He was shocked and dismayed to learn that he would have no breakfast, nor any other meal until noon, when the gruel that would be his daily fare would be served. But Luci relented later, after the day's inspection, quickly brought him to their room and gave him the last of her powdered milk. She vehemently made him promise that he would not ask anyone for food during her absence. He nodded his head and she left him with Mrs Wilson.

The Indian woman's husband had been an English rubber-planter in Johore who had been killed in earlier skirmishes with the invading Jap force in Malaya. She and her daughter, Mary, who was twelve, had fled Johore to Singapore and had been among the first interned after the fall of Singapore. The woman suffered from painful, swollen feet and found it difficult to walk, so the Japs had put her in charge of the children of Block 29.

Thomas found her too lazy to bother about the lot of children under her care, and just left it to Mary, her daughter, to attend to her young charges. That first day of his life at the camp Thomas found it amusing that the only thing all the children talked about was food. It seemed to be perpetually on their minds. Mary had to keep alert that none of them 'strayed' too close to the cook-shack situated at the end of the soldiers' parade ground, before it was time for their once-a-day meal at noon. But invariably hunger and the smell of cooking would draw all the children on camp to the cook-shack.

There were two separate kitchens, one for the Japs, where all the good smells came from, and the other for the inmates where the gruel was prepared. The Japs' food was prepared by their own army-cooks, who prepared chicken, pork or mutton with vegetables and even eggs. The internees gruel was cooked by the inmates selected for the kitchen detail, which was supervised by a Jap guard. Everyday it was a thin rice-and-water slop. On 'lucky' days there might be bits of tapioca or sweet potatoes or a 'hint' of dried prawn in it. Meat was never served, except once, when everyone was sick as a dog afterward because the meat had been rotten. Ever so often a Japanese cook would come out of his kitchen to shoo the children hanging around outside from sheer starvation, and sometimes, if he felt like it, a 'lucky' child might receive an unexpected surprise. The cook would throw a precious morsel of meat in front of a group of children and laugh away gleefully at the vicious scramble among the children in

trying to get possession of the dirt-encrusted precious morsel. The Japs found it highly amusing to witness a White child fight for possession of the now-filthy scrap of food, wipe it clean of the sand and dirt and pop it into its mouth, quick-as-a-flash.

Thomas also found out that there were no privileges for the children. When the dinner-gong sounded, everyone, children included, would dash with their plates in hand to be first in the queue. Sometimes a Jap guard would insist that a lone child have his parent present, with him, so as to forestall any attempt at 'doubling-up' for an extra share. Adults without children sometimes had no regard for the young ones, and could when they were particularly hungry, because they had been 'punished' the previous day with foregoing the once-a-day camp-meal, push a lone child aside just to get to the head of the line. It was well-known that there never was enough to go round, and with the next meal, twenty-four-hours away, children had to be protected from the unscrupulous few.

That first day of his being at Sime Road Camp, Thomas noticed that all the children, including Mary their minder, went all over the place before the meal was served, with their camp-issued enamel-plate in their hands. Everyone kept them closeby, together with the spoon, so that they could be grabbed hold of quickly in the dash to be head of the queue lining up to be fed. But Mary didn't mix with the children, she usually stayed in the background, always under the shade of a block-roof so that she would not stand out but would still be close enough to everyone, to be part of the crowd. The young girl was following the strict instructions of her mother who feared the wanton attention of the Japanese camp-guards on her pretty daughter. In the early days of internment several young women and adolescent girls had been lured by the Japs to quiet, secluded spots on the camp and raped. Every woman was on her guard against the enemy who was ever-ready to satiate his lust.

And there was no punishment for the culprit as actual proof of rape, on camp, was hard to establish. The soldier's usual defence, each time, a complaint was made was that the female in question had offered *jig-jig* (her services), in exchange for food, cigarettes or some other privilege. No soldier had ever been found guilty.

Sharp at noon of Thomas' first day, Luci appeared with an enamelled-plate and a spoon for her son, and took him to the queue. She left him with Mary Wilson, who promised to show him the ropes. Thomas was hungry and waited impatiently for his turn. He was ravenous, and when it came his turn, held out his plate to be served. He received a dallop of gruel for all the time that he had spent waiting to be fed. Instinctively looking up from his plate

to grumble at receiving what he considered a small portion, he witnessed everyone intent on their meal, and the look of contentment on each face. He realized that no one would sympathise with him as they had just as small a portion as he! He began eating his food, surprised at how good it tasted. The only thing wrong with it was that there wasn't enough. He licked his plate clean, just like everyone else was doing.

Mary then showed him how to 'dry-wash' his plate with sand, to rid it of the grease that couldn't be licked off, since there was no soap, before immersing the now-dusty plate in a kerosene-tin of murky water that everyone else had been using before him. She then bade him to leave it in his mother's room in Block 29. It was then that he began to recall the good food at the cabaret in the "New World" in Kitchener Road, and his belly churned in torment. The only thing left to him was to gulp down water to help ease the hunger pangs.

When his mother returned from work as a typist at Captain Susuki's office, after six, that evening, Thomas had half-expected that she would be bringing him a snack, and was sorely disappointed to see her empty-handed, though he didn't say anything. Luci read the dejected look on her boy's face, it shone through his eyes, but there was nothing that she could have done. There simply wasn't any food to be had for the internees except for the once-a-day plate of watery-gruel.

Thomas Siddon went to bed that evening on an empty stomach, 'filled' to bursting with water to ease the hunger-pains. It was eight o'clock and the camp-lights were doused immediately.

The following morning, groggy with hunger, he became a full-fledged member of the civilian internment camp — continuously thinking about food, talking about it, imagining past repasts, carrying his tin-plate everywhere before lunch, and hanging around the cook-shack. He would spend his waking hours dreaming about food and planning ways of assuaging the permanent 'empty' feeling in his belly.

As he grew older he learned from experimentation which were the edible plants, and the wild fruit that could be found growing on some of the trees in the camp. He learned to get away from the group of children after morning tenko, and unerringly return on time for his one meal of the day at mid-day.

Most of the children were timid to wander far from their own blocks, except to go to the cook-shack for their meals, but hunger drove young Thomas further and further afield in his search for sustenance, and his absence from the group was a relief for Mary, who had one less to worry about.

At various times of his young growing years he suffered malaria, beri-

beri, and recurrent dysentery. The ailments took their toll, and his frame became gaunt-looking, his body completely covered in sores from lack of vital nutrients. But he would recover to begin his foray into the undergrowth around the camp in his search for anything to eat.

Even his mother began to notice the mental change in him. He no longer waited for her return from her duties in the camp commandant's office. Every evening when she got back she would find him at Block 29 but she could sense that he didn't depend on her presence any more. She remarked on this to her block-mates but many assured her that she was lucky that her son had become a 'man'.

"The others are too pampered, they should be more like him, and fend for themselves."

As the war in South-east Asia lengthened the mood of the internees began to change. The Japs had started a sewing factory making uniforms for their various forces on the island rather than have them shipped out from Tokyo, and shirts, trousers, socks and cloth caps were sewn by specially-chosen women in a 'factory' on the camp. Obtaining work in it was attractive to the detainees as it meant escape from the hard grind in the searing sun on the tapioca farm, and lavatory-detail, and the enemy had the pick of the women, selecting the prettiest and more 'co-operative'. Mainly Whites.

In the evenings, when the 'factory' was closed, certain women were permitted to sleep in the spacious, more comfortable premises, or in special huts closeby. It soon became apparent to the whole camp that there were drunken revellings every night between the women and the enemy soldiers. The officers visited the younger women who were housed in the huts, while the other ranks paid calls on the older ones inside the 'factory'. The noise created by the men and women kept the whole camp awake, and resentment against these women grew. They were branded by their fellow-internees as 'pro-Japs' and regarded as traitors. At first the women were lectured by their friends but the women just become impatient with their critics and scornfully replied that Britain would never be able to drive the Japs from Singapore, and pandering to their captors ensured their own survival. Their detractors, they said, weren't attractive enough.

Many of the Eurasian and Asian internees still regarded the British as 'special', and were dismayed to witness the then unimaginable spectacle of White women, the former 'mems' of colonial Singapore, sucking up to the enemy, and behaving like 'taxi-dancers', hoping to catch the eye of the 'right' Jap officer or soldier who would give them the most benefits. But any criticism was crushed by threats to report the complainers to the guards.

This was normally sufficient to silence most protesters, except a Mrs Cynthia Kirby, an Englishwoman of twenty-nine, who could not put up with the self-degradation of her fellow-countrywomen, and burst out one day, to them about their 'sickening behaviour'.

The following day an anonymously-written complaint was received at Captain Susuki's office about the derogatory remarks Mrs Kirby had made about the Japanese. She was immediately summoned to the commandant's office and Lieutenant 'Blue Stockings' Hatsuichi Kawazue, the dread of Sime Road, interrogated her. She was defiant and told him exactly what she thought of Englishwomen fraternising with Nips.

'Blue Stockings' made her kneel down on bare knees and bend forward as he began whacking her, from neck to bottom of her spine, with a one-and-a-half-inch-in-diameter stick, as a soldier kicked her hard on each breast. Another devoted himself to bringing himself down to the level where she was kneeling, where he punched and slapped her repeatedly. She mercifully lost consciousness. When she came to she found herself spread-eagled on a table-top, and a naked Jap soldier availing himself of her body as a group of his mates, stripped to their shorts, stood or sat, drinking beer and awaiting their turn. She became insensible again.

When she was again fully aware of her surroundings, she was still stark naked on the table-top. As she weakly got off the table 'Blue Stockings' returned and beat her about her back with his swizzle-stick. He then placed a sheet of paper before her and instructed her to write out that she had always been treated with respect and dignity by the Japanese, ever since her arrival at the concentration camp. That she believed Britain would never return to Singapore or vanquish the Japanese people. The sinister look on the camp-terror's face told Mrs Kirby exactly what more lay in store for her should she decide to thwart the man's explicit instructions. Memory of what she had just gone through had been an adequate warning, and she picked up the proffered pen in the officer's hand, and wrote out the statement as it was dictated, almost vomiting at the lies she was being forced to record on the sheet of paper, just to escape further degradation. It finally dawned on the Englishwoman that the Japanese knew her language well enough to read and understand all that she had been made to express! Finally satisfied with her text he allowed her to get dressed and return to her block.

From then on all comments and public displays against the pro-Jap women stopped. No one trusted another to speak up about whatever was on their mind, as far as these women were concerned.

Luci Siddon siezed the opportunity to silence the rumour-mongers in Block 29 about her 'relationship' with Captain Susuki, the camp

commandant, for good. She told everyone that if she were the captain's mistress, as everyone whispered behind her back, she could have had all her enemies receive the same treatment Cynthia Kirby had suffered. She pointed out the Japanese widow and her half-English daughter who had a hut all to themselves, and whom no one on camp ever fraternised with, just because everyone knew she was ethnic Japanese. Why didn't anyone say that the woman was 'loose'? The whole camp was aware that the Japanese woman and her daughter received 'gifts' from the commandant and the guards. And whenever the commandant or any other senior officer passed the blocks everyone had to come out and bow low until they had passed. But the Jap widow never came out of her hut. She always remained just inside, and 'bowed' with a slight inclination of the head, which the officer 'returned'. None of the internees' bows was ever acknowledged. The woman never queued but obtained her food direct from the cook-shack. And while mother and daughter were ostracised by the rest of the camp, and the guards pointedly ignored them, everyone knew that they received Japanese foodstuffs from the commandant.

Before the Mrs Kirby incident many women on camp had jealously spread gossip that Luci Siddon had been selected by Captain Susuki as his typist because she was his mistress. The young Eurasian woman had been powerless to defend herself — until the Cynthia Kirby 'incident'. And Luci drove home the point to good measure. She knew she had been appointed Susuki's typist because of her ability to speak rudimentary Japanese, and also because it was Japanese strategy to win people such as herself over their side against the British.

Though many were still unhappy about Luci's 'special' position, the weight of evidence was on her side, and, as time passed everyone began to realise that she was a good friend to all of them. As typist to the captain she was privy to the location of all male inmates in the other camp, and sometimes she was allowed to accompany the captain across the tapioca farm when he required to do a check on the male internees. At tremendous risk to herself she often helped locate lost husbands, sons or sweethearts, and passed messages to and fro. She did this because at the back of her mind she had hoped, one day, to come across her husband, probably sick and injured, in one of the male camp's blocks, even though logic told her he was long dead.

Back in her office, every time a new list of forthcoming new male inmates arrived on her desk for typing, Luci would tremulously scan each page, hoping, one day, that somehow Cecil's name would be included. But it was in vain. She would never know of her husband's execution until long

after the war was over, and then only from friends who had not been interned, and who had only guessed.

The shortages of food in the camp, and in fact throughout the rest of Singapore, as the war years dragged on, began becoming acute, and even the enemy was short of his own rations. Red Cross parcels for the internees were now kept back by the Japs who took the best and lion's share before passing on to the prisoners the leftovers. And no matter how much of the 'cream' was pilfered by the senior officers, the lower-rung guards still cast their greedy eyes on what was left.

Children had to attend compulsory Japanese classes in late 1943. There was initial objection from the Whites, in private, but no one dared voice open dissent, knowing what the 'usual' repercussion would be. A Chinese woman came to the camp from town, each day, and tried teaching the unruly mob of White and half-White youngsters, whose ages ranged from toddler to pre-adolescence, the rudiments of the Japanese language. Everyone had to recite:

"ah, ee, oo, eh, o, ba, bee, boo, bay, boh, kah, kee, koo, kay, koh" etc.

The woman seemed harassed by the number of children, who showed her no respect except when a Japanese was present, which was not too often, and she found it uncomfortable to teach White children. Thomas attended her classes for a week when he realised that the woman didn't really know the names or identities of her charges, and he stopped attending the next day and returned to his old pursuits, foraging for food.

Everyone on camp was desperate for nourishment. All the internees' bodies, including their arms and legs, were covered in open sores. The Japs finally began issuing gooey red palm oil, which was thick and difficult to swallow, to try to treat everyone's skin affliction. But despite everyone's starvation, no one was able to take the waxy-tasting medication, and the enemy was forced to mix it with margarine and sugar to hide its obnoxious taste. And everyone realised that the Nips had been hoarding the margarine and sugar for themselves.

Yet despite the supplementation of the red palm oil into their diet, the appearance of the internees assumed that of 'walking skeletons' — their eyes sunken in their sockets, their ribs, elbows and knees sticking out. Even Luci on her meagre monthly wage of two hundred 'banana-dollars' couldn't purchase *anything* for herself or her boy. The Malay villagers who lived in the *kampong*, (Malay: village), close to the camp were permitted in to trade with the guards and do menial work, and sometimes a blind eye was

turned to allow them to barter with the internees, and she still couldn't afford to buy anything from them. The Malays' asking price for a single chicken egg, (a quarter-cent before the war), was one thousand war-dollars in Japanese currency. This would have taken Luci five months to save for, and in the meantime the price of an egg would have again risen substantially.

The desperate internees began scrounging the ground for the odd snail, (because most had already been found and eaten), to boil for soup so as to have some form of nourishment. Tapioca leaves became valuable greens, if they could be picked without a Jap guard catching one red-handed. Some inmates took up Thomas' trick of eating wild green leaves and fruit like *Buah Kedondong*, a round, thick-skinned sourish fruit which only the Malays ate.

On 5th November 1944 American B-29 Bombers raided Singapore, and successfully sank the floating dock at the Jap-controlled Naval Base.

Later that year in a prisoner-of-war exchange, a large group of English internees was repatriated. Those leaving camp promised those left behind that they would all meet again, and swore undying gratitude for succour in the past. There were still many English internees left, who were bitter at having been left out, and badgered Luci, trying to pry from her when the next shipment of prisoners-of-war would take effect. But she was unforthcoming because she didn't know. Some, to get her to cooperate, jokingly told her that she would probably be on the next list. Cynically she retorted that she had no where to go to. Her husband was missing, she was Dutch-Portuguese Eurasian, born in Malacca, which was under Japanese control, to which country would she be repatriated to, she countered.

The atmosphere in camp began changing gradually. Internees began realising that things seemed more relaxed from the rigidity of the past, around March 1945. The first thing everyone noticed was the smaller number of Jap guards. (They had been despatched to other parts of Singapore for more 'important' work). In the meanwhile the Javanese-speaking *kebuns*, (Malay: gardeners), who used to cut the grass on Sime Road camp, took on the task of camp-guard but without guns, except their scythes. Electricity had come to Sime Road but the nightly curfew, from ten in the evening till six in the morning, was still maintained by the Javanese.

But with the thinning out of the Japanese guards there arrived a new hazard — the *orang minyak*, (Malay: "Oily Man"). These were dark-skinned, naked males who oiled their bodies to prevent against being caught, and who would sneak under cover of darkness during the curfew,



to rape or fondle sleeping women in their camp-cots, and, if the opportunity arose, to take anything else that caught their eye. Women fell asleep in fear as there had already been stories of some befalling the *orang minyak's* wicked spell. The myth of the *orang minyak* used to strike fear in the hearts of most Asians and Eurasians. It was part of the fantasy of the **Malay World**, and anyone born or living in South-east Asia, in those days, was familiar with the tale of the wily, slippery devil who stole his pleasures from powerless, petrified women, sometimes with their powerful, strappy husbands sleeping by their sides. And who would be unaware of what was happening because of the oily devil's magical powers.

Each block began to organise itself, appointing its own nightly team of guards to keep watch throughout the night, and just as suddenly as they had appeared the *oily man* disappeared. But every camp inmate knew that the appearance of the oily devil had come with the arrival of the Javanese gardeners.

Discipline at Sime Road started becoming more relaxed day by day, and even *tenko* was discontinued. Soon the men from the other camp crossed over to join their own womenfolk.

On his last trip to the MacRitchie Reservoir area to scavenge for edible plants, Thomas came across a large body of water for the first time. He had never gone that far into the undergrowth before and he mistook it for the sea. Rounding a curve of the reservoir, coming out of a clump of trees, he spied what looked to him like a boat on wheels going in the opposite direction. It was an amphibious craft, but he didn't know it then. To his utter amazement he saw White men in khaki, carrying rifles, which he recognised as he had seen the Japs with them too. Spinning on his heels he sped back to Sime Road and burst upon his mother who was still busy typing away at her typewriter even though Captain Susuki had been away from the camp for weeks.

"Mummy! I saw English soldiers in the jungle!" the little boy, now five exclaimed to his mother.

"Hush, don't let anyone hear you, keep it to yourself," his mother cried out in alarm, still under the impression that the camp was under Japanese control.

But Thomas was too excited and dashed out of his mother's office, yelling to everyone he came across that he had seen English soldiers in the 'jungle'. No one took any notice of what he was saying, thinking the imaginative little fellow had begun to believe what they all were hoping for. Some adults tried preventing him getting into trouble by telling him to shut up but he just ignored them.

The young boy ran over to the Japanese soldiers' cook-shack and food storehouse and pushed the door open. He knew there would be food there. And he was right. Food! Precious food! Strewn all over the floor, and for the asking. Helping himself to as many cans as his small arms could hold within their crook, he darted out of the building and ran smack-dab into the first British amphibious craft on Singapore that had come to a stop right in front of the Sime Road Internment Camp's cook-shacks.

Thomas Siddon's eyes sparkled. The British South-east Asia Command under Lord Louis Mountbatten had come to finalise the liberation of Singapore. It was 5th September 1945. Singapore was free again.

After the United States of America had dropped her atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan had in fact suddenly capitulated on 14th August 1945, with her Emperor Hirohito signing the surrender documents. It was the first time his people had seen their 'god-king' in public.

## York Hill Home

### *Chapter Three*

With liberation on 12th September 1945, with the signing of the official Japanese surrender at the Municipal Building, (City Hall), the civilian internees with relatives, or who still had homes on the island swiftly departed Sime Road Camp, the former Japanese concentration camp for White civilians, to pick up their lives broken off suddenly since 1942. But a few hundred souls still remained in the former war-time concentration camp as they had nothing, and nowhere to go to. Among these were English and first-generation Eurasian families with no threads of life to pick up because they had nothing. For them World War Two had been a complete personal disaster. It had not only destroyed their lives personally, everything that everyone of them had built up or put away before the conflagration just did not exist any more. Gone was home, job, way of life, even close friends and relatives. These poor souls had remained behind at Sime Road while the British Military Administration, (BMA), decided what was to be done for them. Among this group were Luci Siddon and her son, Thomas. War had taken away the man of the family and Luci just did not know where to start or what to do, to begin their lives again. She had tried making inquiries about his fate but no one it seemed had ever heard of a Cecil Siddon, she felt. Neither were there relatives of her husband to fall back on. Johnny the shore-based engineer had perished in the bombing, and so had William, Cecil's elder brother at Penang, at the onset of the Jap invasion. And the Siddons' only sister, Alberta, who had settled in England years ago, could

not be traced, and even if she had been contactable, she would not know Luci as she had departed Singapore ages before the war.

By November 1945 an intermediate base was established on York Hill by the BMA, and the displaced local-born English and Eurasian former internees were placed there until a decision was made as to what was to be done for them. The 'half-way house' was named the "York Hill Home", after the rise of the same name, which was on the outskirts of chinatown, that part of Singapore where the original Chinese immigrants to Singapore had first settled. Because of the area's proximity to the harbour, the original Chinese from the Riau Archipelago, and later in 1819 when Stamford Raffles had first set up his British Station on Singapore, the 'second-wave' from China, attracted by the many incentives the British held out to them, had arrived at Singapore and settled in the same district. Stamford Raffles, the founder of modern Singapore, had divided his station into 'ethnic zones' for easier administration and control of the Asian immigrant population, and from 1819 onward, thousands of Chinese settled the chinatown area, creating a district so sino as to be unique even for an island which already had an ever-burgeoning Chinese population.

Of decisive importance to the story of Singapore were the many influences that motivated a steady stream of 'chinamen' to sail from China to the south seas to start a new life. Due to a series of occurrences in China at the turn of the century, many Chinese had departed their own shores to seek their fortunes abroad and remit money to improvised relatives in their homeland rather than stay home and face the uncertain times. And many headed for Singapore which, through the decades had become known as a Chinese haven. One reason was the short-lived Boxer Rebellion of 1898, another the installation of Pu-yi, the child-emperor on the demise of his grandmother, the empress-dowager, and the resultant aftermath. On 10th October 1911 Chinese troops in Wuch'ang mutinied, leading to widespread revolt after pressures from European and Japanese powers making additional territorial demands. Marshal Yuan Shih-k'ai, China's overall military commander, after some half-hearted attempts at trying to suppress the uprising, joined the movement in December. This led to the abdication of Pu-yi, 5, on 30th October 1911, ending three centuries of Manchu rule and the establishment of the Republic of China under Yuan on 12th February 1912. The 'Summer Revolution' of June 1913 was suppressed by Yuan who had intended to re-establish the Chinese empire with himself on the throne but rebellion broke out throughout the country and lasted until March 1916. Yuan died three months later. Li Yuan-hung became president but the tuchuns, (northern military governors), became dissatisfied and revolted,

and established a rival government at Tientsin. A group working for the restoration of the Manchu Ching dynasty overthrew the government at Peking and re-established it from 1st to 12th July 1917. It was overthrown, in turn, and Feng Kuo-chang was installed as president. On 21st January 1924 a new political movement was formed — the Kuomintang, (National People's Party), under Sun Yat-sen — and met in Canton to plan the liberation and unification of China. A young man, Chiang Kai-sek had become involved in the new party, while another, Mao Tse-tung had become involved in the Kuomintang's Communist wing. All these occurrences had far-reaching effects on the Chinese in neighbouring Annam, (Vietnam), Singapore, and the scattered Chinese communities in South-east Asia, who still regarded themselves as Chinese on a sojourn, who would, one day, return to the mothercountry.

York Hill, the 'half-way house' in which the former internees were placed, consisted of threble-storied blocks built at different levels into the rise, going all the way to the top. Families were allotted two-to-a-room and singles of the same gender shared the same room. There were no doors except for the common bathrooms and lavatories but the residents hung their own curtains over their living quarters' doorways, to afford themselves privacy. Two British Army lieutenants, a Colin Wilkinson and a Jennifer Robinson, administered the home and the lives of its inmates. A quartermaster-sargent, Bob Walker, ran the kitchen and the food stores.

Every single adult inmate had only just one thought in mind — employment, the chance to depart York Hill, and with it freedom from regulations, and the chance of a private life of their own. After three years of Japanese internment no one wanted any more curbs constricting their lives. The feeling that it was still war-time because of the regulations they all had to adhere to at York Hill, weighed on everyone's mind.

In reality the English and Eurasian inmates of the home were among the fortunate few of Singapore in the early days of liberty after the recent Japanese Occupation of Singapore. The ravages of the strife-torn years and their effects on the tiny island were too indescribable to be believed by anyone who had not experienced it. There was an acute shortage of rice, the basic staple, as well as chicken, pork, mutton or beef — and rationing had to be re-introduced, (there had been rationing during the war), to control a flourishing black market. Poverty and hunger were still the way of life, and barter the best way of obtaining necessities. The breakdown of the pre-war stable monetary system during the Japanese occupation of Singapore and Malaya, when purchaser and purveyor had lost faith in the 'banana-currency' issued by the conquering Japs, had led to an uncontrolled market,

and which continued even after war's end with the late arrival of the British liberation forces. Whatever was in demand was the *coin of the realm* and used for trading. Rice was a key commodity. So was sex, liquor and clothes. With the large garrison of British soldiers on Singapore, many women, young and old, used their charms and bodies to get the vital straits currency needed to purchase the basic necessities for their families. Post-war economic conditions were further worsened by the removal from legal tender of the Japanese *banana-notes*, which badly-affected the economic plight of the population, so much so that a 'people's kitchen' had to be organised by the colonial Social Welfare Department with volunteer help to offer those who couldn't afford anything better a proper meal at very low cost. There was severe unemployment as well.

But, with time, life began its slow, gradual and unhurried return to the former status quo. Where once there had been shortages, now one could get almost anything for the asking, so long as one had the *right* currency. Bars began selling liquor openly, attractive bar waitresses sat at customers' tables or on their laps, and local itinerant hawkers plied their cooked-food trades. Armed British soldiers began patrolling the streets as a measure of security and re-assurance to the local population that peace and stability had indeed been restored, especially after armed Chinese who were members of the Malayan Communist Party had attempted to seize authority after the surprise surrender of the Japanese forces and before the arrival of Lord Mountbatten's liberation forces in late September 1945.

For though peace had come to Malaya,(and Singapore), certain events had taken place in other parts of the globe before the war which would have a bearing on the recently re-occupied British colony. Before World War Two had begun in 1939 in Europe, America had been strongly critical of Great Britain's territorial ambitions when it looked that there would be conflict between her, and Germany and Italy. This was translated into what was known as the "Atlantic Charter" in which Britain agreed not to acquire more territory as a result of war, and that she agreed to the "...right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live..." This was the formal starting-off point for the eventual dissolution of the British Empire, though the treaty did not impose a time limit. The Charter was signed by US President Franklin D.Roosevelt and by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill on 14th August 1941, three months before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour in the Pacific and Kota Tinggi in Malaya, and brought America into the war.

In London, at that time there was an Edward Gent, who as head of the Eastern Department in the Colonial Office, realised that because of the treaty he did not have time to lose, despite the fact that at the time Japanese forces were already occupying Malaya, Burma and the Netherlands East Indies, (Indonesia). The loss of the Dutch East Indies had prompted the Dutch to announce a new post-war policy, on the assumption that they would re-occupy, once again, their former colonial possession. It was this that stirred Gent into action, made more compelling by the Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations which was scheduled to meet in Canada in December 1941, that year.

Gent had been critical of the attitude of the Malay states before the war towards the non-Malays, (mainly the Chinese and Indians), who were not 'temporary visitors' but who regarded Malaya as their home. These resident non-Malays did not enjoy the same civic rights as those accorded to Malays by their respective sultans. It was apparent to him that there was little prospect of preparing Malaya for self-government whilst there existed nine virtually independent Malay states in juxtaposition with the Straits Settlements, which were under direct British rule. And each of the Malay states was headed by its own sultan who was a sovereign head bound by a treaty with Great Britain. This relationship, between the sultans and Britain was essentially a protection against external threat, and advisory in administrative matters only, which was a form of indirect rule. The British High Commissioner for the Malay States, and the Governor of the Straits Settlements, resident in Singapore, were one and the same person. This distinction in nomenclature recognised the juridical fact that when the Governor changed hats on a visit to Kuala Lumpur he did so because he was treading on foreign soil!

With the sultans remaining behind in Japanese-occupied Malaya, Gent felt justified in considering that the former treaties between them and Britain were abrogated, and that new, fresh treaties had to be drafted. But this was not the correct juridical position as the Colonial Office legal adviser informed him. And the sultans explained, after the war, that they had felt it was their duty as rulers not to desert their subjects during the Japanese Occupation. But Gent was determined to remove the sultans' sovereign rights so that a governor in Singapore could administer the whole of Malaya without restraint after the British had re-occupied it.

The opportunity was created by a British statement of intention delivered at the Institute of Pacific Relations Conference in Canada, that year. This was a proposal that Britain should return after the war to her dependencies, with the intention of preparing them for self-government, developing their resources and ensuring their security.

To achieve these aims Gent advocated a Malayan Union which would include both the Malay States and the Straits Settlements,(including Singapore), under one colonial administration. Sarawak,North Borneo,(Sabah), and Brunei would eventually be included.

But when he formed a Malayan Planning Unit, mainly composed of former members of the Malayan Civil Service, their combined influence made him alter his original plans, and by March 1943 he had excluded Singapore and the Borneo territories from the Malay Union proposal. Some of the reasons given for this change in thinking were that Singapore's wealth and power were resented and feared on the mainland, and that Singapore had a special status as a free port and naval base.

But in actuality the Colonial Office feared that the inclusion of Singapore in the Union might adversely affect the Malay attitude toward the proposals for the union. That the sultans' agreement to the proposed new treaties, which included the transfer of their sovereignty to the British Crown would be jeopardised if Singapore became part of the Union, which envisaged equal citizenship rights and employment opportunities in the public service for all persons born in the Union. So Singapore was excluded. Gent was confident that in the euphoria that would come about as result of British re-occupation of Malaya, state by state, as the Japanese withdrew, the sultans would do as they were told without fuss. But it was not to be because the Japanese surrendered unexpectedly on 14th August 1945, and the British themselves were completely unprepared for this eventuality. This resulted in a three-week period of no government control of Malaya after the Japanese had surrendered, and a terrifying retribution of wanton bloodshed as the Communist-controlled Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army reeked vengeance on those, and mainly Chinese, who had collaborated with the Japanese. Thus to the disappointment and dismay of the British 'liberators' the vast majority of the population was under the impression that the MPAJA had delivered Malaya from the boot of the Jap.

But there was some more delay when Sir Harold MacMichael arrived in Malaya in October 1945, by sea, to 'arrange' ,(not 'negotiate') with the sultans the new treaties. He visited each state in secrecy for nine weeks, setting up separate, private meetings with each sultan and his state officials, and secured his last signature to the new treaties, four days before Christmas. Nothing was heard about the Malayan Union proposals until 22nd January 1946, when the British Government issued a White Paper which spelled out the granting of equal citizenship rights to non-Malays, the sultans' diminished status, the concept of a Malayan outlook, no single people claiming to represent the people of Malaya and Singapore to be severed from the mainland.



The colony of the Straits Settlements, which had come into being after the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824, and which had politically separated Singapore and Malaya from the rest of the then Malay World, would cease to exist constitutionally from 31st March 1946. Penang and Malacca were to be taken out of the Straits Settlements and merged with the other nine states of the Malay peninsula, and Singapore was to be politically separated from Malaya and grouped with the Christmas and Cocos-Keeling Islands to form a separate Crown Colony, with provision for a legislative council. All constitutional powers lay with the Governor, Franklin Gimson. This political separation was to have far-reaching effects for Singapore, which, since the days of Stamford Raffles, had always been linked with the Malay peninsula. Civil government was first restored on 1st April 1946.

The Malays in every state of Malaya coalesced like quicksilver, rallying round an aristocrat by the name of Dato Onn bin Ja'far, a District Officer in Batu Pahat, Johore, who issued a rallying call for a Pan-Malayan Malay Congress, after the publication of the British White Paper. He bitterly opposed the Malayan Union and his objections were taken up by the Jawi-script, (Malay script) newspaper, *Majlis*, and his ideas caught on like wild-fire among the Malay community. The Malay Congress, the first of its kind in the country, (Peninsula Malaya), was organised with amazing swiftness. The Congress' first item of business was the incorporation of a United Malays National Organisation, of which Onn became its first president. Secondly the Congress declared that the sultans should not welcome the new governor, (he was not to be a high commissioner under the Malayan Union), when he arrived at Kuala Lumpur Railway Station, from Singapore, on 1st April 1946 to inaugurate the Malayan Union and install himself as governor. Dato Onn hastened to the Station Hotel in protest and pointed out to their highnesses the error of what they were contemplating to do. He persuaded them not to attend the installation ceremony but to appear instead on a balcony to acknowledge the cheers of the crowds below. It was a stunning snub to the governor, who was none other than Edward Gent, (now Sir), himself. The effect of this totally unexpected display of Malay nationalism, together with the sultans' threat that they would go to London to petition the British king personally unless Gent reverted to the status of a high commissioner and annulled the MacMichael treaties was sufficient to undermine the governor's confidence. But the British Colonial Office remained stubborn, so Gent held his ground until Malcolm MacDonald arrived to take up his post as Governor-General. He too was boycotted by the sultans, and within days of his arrival recommended to the Colonial Office, with Gent's agreement, that new constitutional proposals would

have to be drafted by an all-Malay-British Constitutional Working Committee whose existence had to be kept secret, and with no participation of the non-Malay communities. By June 1946 Gent's Malayan Union was stone-dead and the secret talks by the exclusive Anglo-Malay Working Committee had been underway in Kuala Lumpur. It was officially announced in October that new constitutional proposals were being formulated, and which would be submitted to Malcolm MacDonald, Gent, the Malay sultans and UMNO in November. And that after their subsequent approval and a decision reached by the British cabinet, the proposals would be referred to various committees for comment. The draft constitution which would replace the Malayan Union did not have any major amendments but allowed for the centralisation of authority under a federal system but permitted the sultans, through state councils, to retain much of their former authority. There would be a centralised system of government on federal terms.

Parallel to the 'political awakening' of the Malays in the Malay peninsula, there were other factors occurring within both Singapore and Malaya which would have far-reaching and telling effects on the peoples of both territories. With the delay in the British amphibious-landing on Malaya and Singapore, some three weeks after the Japanese had surprisingly surrendered, an under-current of future aggression, and a demand for change, would soon course through the region, and which would affect the peninsula as well as the island at its end. One was Communism, conceived and inspired in Russia in 1920 and brought to Malaya, (including Singapore), via mainland China, this would manifest itself as a potential threat to Britain's re-occupation of its former colony, (Malaya and Singapore), and, later, as an attempt to intimidate, overpower and subjugate the newly-emerged states of South-east Asia. The other was nationalism which the peoples of Malaya and Singapore, in the light of the recent war, felt they had a right to, and that British colonialism should be done away with.

The first Russian revolution of 12th March 1917, which was not Communist-inspired or led, had thrown out the reigning Tzar Nicholas II and established a provisional government comprised of workers' councils, (soviets). Eight months later, on 7th November 1917, the Communist Bolshevik Revolution led by Lenin and Trotsky, began, and seized power in 1922 after a four-year civil-war against the original provisional government which was helped by fourteen anti-Communist powers. In the midst of this war, Lenin in 1919 set up his Communist International, (Comintern), to help fan the flame of nationalist discontent in the European colonies in Far East and to bring about by 'opportunist agitation' the seizure of political power and the establishment of Soviet regimes based on the USSR

model. The Comintern sought to deprive the colonial powers of their sources of wealth and raw materials by creating discord through its selected agents, who had been trained and indoctrinated by it. The key agents in South-east Asia were Ho Chi Minh in French Indochina and Tan Melaka, a China-born Chinese who was domiciled in the Dutch East Indies, and who was to be 'responsible' for British Malaya, (and Singapore). From the formation in 1924 of the 'Nanyang General Labour Union', the Nanyang (South Seas) Communist Party was formed out of the Communist wing of the Kuomintang. The central committee of the South Seas Communist party was known as the Malayan 'Central', which was a Singapore organisation that controlled Communist activities in Burma, Siam, the Dutch East Indies and British Malaya. Out of this grouping came the formal inauguration of the Malayan Communist Party in July 1931, which still had a disproportionately large Chinese membership with practically nil applicants from the Indian or Malay communities. Due to the revelations of Frenchman Joseph Ducroux, who had been arrested by the British colonial authorities in Singapore in 1931 as being a Communist agent, the Kuomintang and the Malayan Communist Party were banned in Malaya, (including Singapore).

The ground which made it easy for Communism to take root in Malaya, (and Singapore), had two aspects — 1) British colonial rigidity over British nationality, as a result of which there was denial of financial help for Chinese schools for children whose parents who were not born in the Straits Settlements. English language education was supported by the colonial government and was available only to British Subjects, (or whose parents were born in the Straits Settlements); and 2) the 1919 Treaty of Versailles after World War One which transferred to Japan the former German rights in the Chinese province of Shantung following a secret deal between Japan and the European allies in 1917. As a result, the Bolsheviks were invited to come to the moral and political aid of China as a stepping stone to a revolution in India. And in Singapore the alien Chinese, (those born in China and were not British subjects), would not celebrate the Allies victory. In retaliation the British pursued a rigorous, protracted anti-Chinese education policy, and the Chinese were left to fund their own Chinese-language education.

The Malayan Communist Party, from its inception, had great difficulty in overcoming its very-apparent Chinese base. Because it was already an illegal association its leaders trusted no one, except a secret inner-core of trusted cadres. The more the threat of danger, the more the trusted inner circle contracted, and those admitted into it were permitted entry purely on ethnic lines. But apart from questions of mutual trust, language also played

an impediment to non-Chinese in-take. Party members and cadres were not just overwhelmingly Chinese but Mandarin-speaking as well; and in the jungle camps during and after the Japanese war, Mandarin was the official language. English-speaking Chinese were regarded as bourgeois that is, politically and socially unreliable. As a result the prospect of taking in non-Chinese-speaking, (Mandarin), non-Chinese, whether Malay or Indian was viewed with scepticism.

During the short-lived period when Malaya, (and Singapore), did not have an 'official' successor-government in the face of the Japanese surrender of 14th August 1945, the MCP and the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army did not seize their opportunity to form a government but instead went on a rampage paying off old scores against traitors, (mainly Chinese), who had collaborated with the Japanese, as well as political adversaries who were simply killed off. Thus the MCP and the MPAJA missed the boat. Instead, during this period of anarchy, the Communists raised their Red Flag with its three yellow stars — purporting to represent the Chinese, Malay and Indian — and were acclaimed as heroes by many Chinese but not by the other communities. The MCP had again come up against its age-old dilemma — the Chinese could be inspired to revolutionary zeal for a cause with which they could identify their own interests and that of mother-China, but they were unmoved by the idea of being partners in any international movement which supposedly cut across ethnic divisions. Since armed insurrection without mass support from the other communities of Malaya was an impossibility, the only option left to the MCP and the MPAJA was a constitutional one. The two groups decided they would openly co-operate with the British Military Administration but secretly would leave political agitation on the ground to the new labour movement they were in the process of organising, and to the politically-rabid Chinese school students. The aftermath of the recent war, as far as the hearts and minds of the peoples in the British colony was concerned, had yet to manifest itself, first on the communities themselves, and secondly on the British themselves. The Communist Party of Malaya because of its strong links with the Communist Party of China, had instigated the Chinese masses in Malaya and Singapore to be anti-imperialist, and had decided to overthrow the colonial government and set up a people's republic in 1946. The plan was in three stages — 'liberate' specific districts and establish recruiting bases, broaden those areas until they merged, and the whole country would be in their hands. The former Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army was resurrected under a new title — the Malayan People's Anti-British Army, and they waited. The Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army had been disbanded by the British

Military Administration in December 1945, surprisingly without protest, and through cash rewards had already retrieved more than the total number of weapons that the Force 136 had air-dropped to the guerillas during the Japanese Occupation. More than 4,765 guns were surrendered by the MPAJA, and each gun fetched the price of US\$117, though the guerillas had loudly claimed that the 'bounty' for the return of the guns was derisory. But the money was quickly accepted as the BMA had already declared that the Japanese occupation-script illegal tender. This move was planned to thwart the MCP, whom the BMA had learned, had amassed vast sums of 'banana-money', before and after the Japanese surrender. But the Communists had retained their sten-guns, carbines and pistols, which they had declared as 'lost', and had only given the British their heavy weapons.

But in a victory parade in front of City Hall on the morning of 6th January 1946, sixteen leaders of the disbanded MPAJA, wearing their standard olive-green uniforms with peaked caps, gave a clenched-fist salute after Lord Louis Mountbatten had pinned two medals, (the Burma Star and the 1939-45 War Star), on their chests. It signified their defiance toward the resumption of colonial rule. It was a first move toward a direct and early confrontation with the returned British colonialists.

On another plane, in December 1945 a new political party, the Malayan Democratic Union, was formed, which the Singapore police, then run by Colonial British officers, identified as an 'open front' organisation for the Malayan Communist Party, though it was a grouping of well-educated Eurasians and equally well-educated, English-speaking Chinese young men and women. All of them were strongly anti-colonial, and that was why the police had been curious about them in the first instance, though some of them did have Communist leanings. In order to project at least a veneer of respectability, a leader of good standing was needed, and one of the founding members, a Lim Hong Bee, approached a former Cambridge University-mate, a Lim Kean Chye, to approach his uncle, Philip Hoalim, Senior, a Singapore lawyer, to become the party's chairman.

Lim Hong Bee was Singapore-born and had gone to Cambridge, London in 1937 to read law where he met up with Lim Kean Chye, the son of a prominent Penang lawyer. And they became fast friends, being at the same time fellow-Malayans, one from Singapore, the other from Penang. Hong Bee had been caught up with the British Communist Party activities in London that he neglected his studies and was sent down from Cambridge, arriving in Singapore just prior to the Japanese invasion of Malaya, (and Singapore). During the Occupation he was among those who were sent by the Japanese to Endau in Johore to a 'camp' whose inhabitants were left to

fend for themselves, growing crops and living off the land. (There was another such camp at Bahau in Negri Sembilan). It was at Endau that Hong Bee was contacted by one Wu Tien Wang, a leader of the MPAJA, which was operating in the area.

Philip Hoalim was Guinana-born and London-trained, and a very good friend of Mr and Mrs Lee Chin Koon, the parents of Lee Kuan Yew, the future prime minister of Singapore, who, at the time, was a 22-year-old whose mother had always thought highly of Hoalim, and had inferred that her son should model himself after him. Lee Kuan Yew helped in the drafting of the Malayan Democratic Union's constitution, a radical document, (for those times) spelling out in moderate terms, the party's aims in achieving self-government for a united Malaya within the British Commonwealth, an elected legislature and the vote for all Malayan citizens. The party was launched on 23rd December 1945.

Lee Kuan Yew, at the time, was preparing to leave for Britain to secure admittance to the Middle Temple in London and to read law at Cambridge. He had successfully obtained passage on board a British troopship, the *Britannic*, bound for Liverpool. He had become a student of Raffles Institution in 1937 and was awarded the Anderson Scholarship in 1939 after he had come out top of all candidates in Malaya sitting for their School Certificate examinations for that year. He sailed for Britain in October 1946.

But the Malayan Democratic Union with its mainly Eurasian and Chinese members did not get off the ground as its leaders had hoped. With everyone speaking only English it failed to 'communicate' with the masses that counted most — the Chinese, Malay and Tamil-speaking communities. Membership never rose above 300, and of which only 50 were really active. Because of this the party gradually came under the influence of the Communists through their well-controlled General Labour Union, which had been formed with extraordinary speed, within a month of the Japanese surrender. In the end the Democratic Union became a 'lame duck' in local politics whose policies were never taken seriously. One of its glaring weaknesses was the poor state of its finances. Hoalim, its chairman, contributed a monthly \$250, about half the party's income. In an effort to try to revitalise its flagging membership the party invented a flag: red for bravery, white for purity, and twelve yellow stars to represent the nine Malay states and the three former Straits Settlements. The flag was hoisted on 10th December 1947 outside the Liberty Cabaret Hall in North Bridge Road, where the party's offices were, but it went unnoticed, and was never heard of again.

The dramatic changes, as they were quietly unfolding in Singapore, were unknown to the inmates of York Hill in November 1945, everyone, from adult to child, had only one thought in mind, and that was looking forward to a short stay in the half-way house before obtaining gainful employment and beginning life anew on the 'outside'. But the former Sime Road Camp internees, mentally still lived in the Singapore of the Thirties, not quite realising the transformation that had come about among the other islanders, since the war and the Occupation. The 'natives' no longer would accept the Colonial British labelling them by this term, which was considered to be derogatory. They were not and had not been inferior racial sub-groups lorded over by a superior White race — the Anglo-Saxon. If anything the Japanese had shown that Asians should not accept White supremacy as a world-wide universal truism. No human was superior because of the colour of his skin. *It was his brain and how he used it that set him apart from another.*

It was a different Singapore to which the British regime was restored in 1945. With defeat by the Japanese in the Battle for Malaya, (including Singapore), and the umbrella of British protection removed during the Japanese Occupation, the people of Singapore had faced their dangers head-on, relying solely on themselves for their own survival. Many had greater responsibilities under Jap rule than when the British were in power. And their time of trial had been a harsh testing-ground from which they had come out with flying colours. Before long the Asian races of Singapore, who separately boasted ancient and distinctive cultures and histories equal, and sometimes even surpassing western cultures in many aspects, would reclaim their inalienable right to independence. By force, guile or diplomacy.

World War Two had stimulated and crystallized national emotions, and the Jap had lit the powder-keg. The former war-time enemy had come as the conqueror but he was Asian, not White. And despite the terror, degradation, chaos and sorrow the Japanese had inflicted, with time they began to be regarded as 'awakeners' — the White man was not invincible the Asian could live by himself without a White colonial 'master', which the Asian had done long before the era of colonialism. Such is the way of mankind.

Singapore-islanders had come to detest all forms of oppression. The White had shed 'his burden' during the war, and subservient to him, his former subjects would no longer be.

But while these sentiments may have been felt by a majority of the Asian communities in Singapore, the Eurasians at York Hill faced a different reality. There were no jobs to be had, and whatever there were went to those

'outside', who had the right connections, or so they thought. In order to land a job a man had to be 'outside' to learn of an opening available, and once having landed the position, a man had to have good contacts to hold on to his post. The days of old, when one had 'family connections' did not suffice any more.

The women of York Hill begged their husbands to allow them to look for work, since it appeared easier for them, they had been told by friends on the outside. But their menfolk would not hear of it. They still clung to the 'old ways', remembering a former grand way of life, gracious homes with attentive servants, private carriages and life in the palm of their hand. A woman stayed home while her man went to work and supported the family. But as the weeks of waiting and hoping turned to months of nothingness, despondency set in, and helplessness pervaded. And when the story reached them that British Military Administration had even exchanged the Occupation *banana money* on par with Straits Settlements dollars, with those on the 'outside', their misery knew no bounds. Every single one of them had, on liberation from Japanese occupation in Sime Road, either discarded their war-money or burnt the lot! It did their morale no good to learn, much later, that the practice was stopped within days of the exercise beginning. As far as the men at York Hill were concerned, they had missed the boat.

On 27th December 1945 it was officially announced that a total of one thousand, one hundred and one Japanese, among them, several generals, would be tried by British Military Courts in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur for crimes against British and Allied prisoners-of-war and civilians in South-east Asia, during the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, (including Singapore). Many residents in the two territories, both civilian and military, would be appearing in court to give testimony.

All liberty outside York Hill Home was cancelled temporarily in January 1946, and the Eurasian inmates, (all of the local-born Whites had already departed because they had obtained employment), were told to give written statements to the British Administration officers at the home, describing their personal ordeals in the Japanese civilian internment camp at Sime Road. The first two women being interviewed at the administrative office of the home were subjected to repeated and intense questioning of their personal experiences by Jennifer Robinson, the BMA's officer in charge, who wanted to ensure that all descriptions of ordeals recalled were as accurate as was possible, in case these personal reports could be used in the forthcoming war crimes' trials. But Robinson seemed to have got carried away when she persisted in getting the women to admit that they had been raped by the enemy during their internment.



But before the shocked and upset women could answer, a husband of one of them who happened to be waiting in the outer office with the other inmates and Lieutenant Colin, the other MBA officer in charge of the home, overheard the callous query and angrily barged into the other room. "What kindavar question is that you expect any woman to answer — that a Jap raped her? How would you respond if such a question was hurled at you? That's no way to interrogate, especially in front of others — don't you afford privacy!"

The furious man yanked his wife by the arm out of her chair and strode with her from the room as Lieutenant Robinson ran after them in panic, mouthing an apology.

"Please wait, we are compiling dossiers of Japanese atrocities committed during the war, in case they can be used in the forthcoming trials, that's why I was questioning your wife, to make sure she had her facts right," she explained in a hurry.

"Did you hear that! She blithely asks my wife such questions then admits that they are compiling reports for the Jap trials — I think we shouldn't wait around to answer any more questions until we know exactly what's what, do you all agree?" the man demanded of the inmates present. The group nodded its assent and followed the enraged man and his wife downstairs to the hostels' dinning room area. It was agreed by everyone that all of York Hill's inmates should meet to discuss this latest development of the hostel's administration. The meal-gong was struck, and inmates from all over York Hill converged in the dining room, curious, since lunch was still a good three hours away. Sargent Walker came rushing out as well, demanding to know why 'his bell' had been struck without his permission. He was curtly instructed to inquire from the other two British administrative officers.

Upstairs the two officers who ran the home heard the gong sounding and resignedly waited to hear the outcome of the obvious protest meeting being conducted in the dinning room.

Downstairs several hundred inmates were told of the incident that morning. Some shrugged their shoulders, brushing off the "hoo-ha" as a minor incident. Most felt that John, their fellow-inmate, was making an unnecessary fuss. But some realized the point he was making — that the actions of the two British officers were high-handed. Several began drifting away, mentally dismissing the whole thing as inconsequential. But the man who suddenly had leadership thrust upon him, climbed onto a nearby table and rallied those nearby. He had to have their total support, and chose his words carefully. For sometime he and many others at York Hill had felt a vague sense of unease about conditions in the hostel and the cold,

impersonal attitude of the two British administrators toward them all. John, the Eurasian, knew he had the ideal opportunity to speak up about what they were all feeling but had not openly admitted to, before this. He knew that if he could whip up enough feeling of being wronged, he could get total support for what he had in mind.

"We held the flag high during the war, some of us even sacrificed our lives helping the England-born when the Japs bullied them, don't you think they should now treat us with a little more dignity?"

"They took care of their own native-borns, repatriating them back to England after Sime Road, we too deserve better, don't you think, or are you afraid to stand up to them?"

"Listen John, we're not afraid, as you seem to imply. They just want to know some details about what happened during the war, that's all. And we want jobs so that we can start to rebuild our lives, and getting at logger-heads with them isn't going to help us one bit," someone retorted.

"I know what they want, and I know that they can't help all of us with jobs but we still require our dignity. Look at how they are going about things, treating us as if we're imbeciles, that we wouldn't understand the urgency or the necessity to have accurate statements about the war. But don't you think our womenfolk need to have some respect as well?" he asked.

John the Eurasian had touched a sensitive nerve and the deserters returned. Ever since their arrival at York Hill from Sime Road, the former internees had been aware of the detached, superior airs of the two British personnel entrusted with their welfare. Most of the Eurasians at the hostel had at least one English parent, and they had all been interned as enemy aliens by the Japanese, yet the British at the hostel hadn't treated them as compatriots, except the local-born Whites. The first-generation Eurasians had expected warmth and friendship but instead had received a cool, impersonal attitude. Sargent Bob Walker had also been overheard calling them *nig-nogs* (niggers).

A committee was formed to work out a list of 'requests' to be presented to the entire body of inmates for ratification within three days, before it would be tabled to the administrators. The 'ad hoc' committee slaved those three days, hammering out a 'manifesto' of demands for their fellow-inmates to go through before it would be presented to the two British officers in their offices.

It was agreed that the hostel would be better run by the inmates themselves, with the British administrators handling the 'external' matters like dealing with officialdom, or with the departure of inmates to a new life. The nightly 'curfew' from nine o'clock was to be scrapped, and discipline

would be in the hands of of the ad hoc committee. The residents would cook their own meals while Sargent Bob would be in charge of the food supply only. The reason for questioning residents regarding personal experiences at the Sime Road Internment Camp during World War Two was to be explained in detail, in writing. Any query of a private or personal nature was to be conducted under confidential circumstances, and residents had the perogative of refusing to answer any question.

The 'manifesto' was received in silence by the hostel's administrators. The two British officers realised that the inmates hadn't been as docile as they had mistaken them to be. Two days later the 'official' reply was forthcoming. All requests were agreed to with one proviso. Lieutenant Robinson would be the permanent administrator while Lieutenant Wilkinson would be transferred out. Jennifer Robinson would be assisted by two female inmates, whom she would select. The kitchen was to be run by the inmates who would give Sargent Bob a daily list of whatever they required.

Thereafter things settled down. British Military Administration explained that a file was being compiled of all Japanese war crimes committed on Singapore during the Occupation, from 1942 to 1945, with a view to trying specific Japanese for war violations. The enemy which had not escaped had been imprisoned, while those who had managed to skip before the arrival of the Allies, had been detained on neighbouring islands. Compiling the dossier had been kept confidential to prevent anyone 'colouring' accounts, if they were to discuss their experiences with a third party before talking with the BMA recorders.

The British hastened to get the island ticking again by reassuring the population that they were going to try those Japanese who had been accused of specific war-crimes. Instead of immediately trying those Japs who had committed offences against British and White Allied prisoners-of-war, they kicked off the two-year war-crimes trials against one Captain Gozawa Sadaichi, and nine officers and NCOs of his company on 21st June 1946. They were tried on charges of inflicting shocking atrocities while in charge of Indian prisoners-of-war enroute for and at Babelthuap Pulau, between 20th April 1943 and 10th September 1945, in violation of the laws and usages of war. In March 1947 Lieutenant-General Nichimura, Major-General Kawamura, and five other officers, were tried by a British Military Court for the massacre of several thousand Chinese civilian residents of Singapore, between 18th February and 3rd March 1942. All seven were convicted. Kawamura and another were hanged. The others received life imprisonment. By February 1948 nine hundred and thirty-one Japanese war-criminals had been tried and convicted by military courts.

Content though they were that the British were demonstrating that they were going after those Japanese who had committed crimes against Asian civilians and Singapore-islanders, many serious-minded Singapore-borns, some politically-inclined and some not, but who loved their island-home and thought as a single island people, felt that the prewar social conditions could never be re-imposed once again. The Occupation had made Singapore the country for which they all had fought, and some had died for, and the sacrifices made during the war had established new bases for the establishment of certain basic 'rights', and would not confine itself to the restoration of the previous colonial status quo. The rehabilitation of the economy as well as the whole economic structure of Singapore was viewed as a joint endeavour in which *all the races of Singapore — the Chinese, the Malay, the Indian, the Eurasian and the others who felt that Singapore was their home —* would play their part. *Everyone would have a stake in Singapore's future!* The new Singapore attitude reflected a very different balance of priorities which, at first glance, did not seem to be apparent to the colonial administrators as they continued to act as if they had picked up the reins from where they had dropped them when the Japanese had invaded the island.

Colonial Malaya, (which included Singapore), had first put into effect the **Aliens' Ordinance** of 1932 during the first world slump, which had also affected the whole region gravely, in an effort to control the influx of mainly Chinese coolie-workers, by imposing a monthly quota on immigrants from China, but only on men. The immigration of women was left unchecked, and from 1933 onwards until May 1938, shiploads of Cantonese females, mostly from China's Shun Tak and Tunk Kwun districts in Canton, fled poverty in their villages for Malaya, (and Singapore). Some entered domestic servant work, some the rubber, tin and building industries as well as factories. And some were tricked into a life of prostitution. Many settled in Singapore and the Malay peninsula, and married their own countrymen in the two territories and raised families who had never known China, but who were raised as Chinese, steeped in the folklore, culture and traditions of Old Cathay, to a chauvinistic level, and who looked down upon the peoples, cultures and traditions of their respective host-countries.

An immigration policy started over a century ago which had always been regarded as temporary, had created second-and-third-generation communities who only knew little of their parents' or grandparents' country of birth — China and India, and though these new generations were familiar with the new lands they had been born in, their respective upbringing turned them toward the land of their ancestors. But the recent war had slightly

changed precepts, and Malaya, (and Singapore), became the land everyone had fought and died for. Family ties in this region had begun to challenge family ties in the respective two sub-continents.

Oblivious of the newly-emerging sentiments on Singapore or the dramatic events taking place that would re-shape their lives, the Eurasian children at York Hill began school. Thomas Siddon and the other boys of his age attended the St Anthony's Boys' School in Queen Street in early 1946. The girls went to the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus in Victoria Street or to the St Margaret's School in Mount Sophia, which had recently re-opened. British Army transport ferried the children to and from their respective schools.

Lessons for Thomas meant sitting in a packed room with older Chinese and Indian children of various ages, learning the phonetic sounds of the English alphabet, and singing. No one was permitted outside to romp in the school-compound, which was next to the St Joseph's Portuguese Mission Roman Catholic Church, because the island still seemed lawless. There were roving bands of lawless men, mainly Chinese, and sometimes Indians who were purported to be members of the Indian National Army who had become renegades, ever ready to inflict harm or damage on innocent, unsuspecting passers-by.

Young Thomas had barely begun at St Anthony's, when Luci, his mother, met him downstairs, one afternoon after school, while he was having lunch at the York Hill dinning hall. She was one of the two female civilians that Jennifer Robinson, the BMA administrative officer, had picked to help her in the office. Usually his mother remained in her office when he returned from school, and he would see to his own meal. He normally saw her in the evening after she had finished working for the day. Though surprised at her sudden presence, he remained silent, waiting to hear what she had on her mind because from her expression he realised something was 'bothering' her.

"We're going to see Lieutenant Robinson after this," she blurted out.

"What for?"

"She wants to talk to you. Whatever she tells you, say you'd like to discuss it with me first, okay?"

"Okay."

Thomas, really curious, finished his lunch quickly and followed his mother upstairs to the lieutenant's office. The British administrator smiled as he walked into her room, after knocking and being invited to come in. His mother remained behind at her desk in the outer office.

"How's school Tommy?" the Englishwoman asked.

"It's alright but crowded."

"What would you say to going to another school, with children of your own age, who are like you?"

"The children here are like me," he said, surprised at her indication that he was somehow different from the other kids at York Hill.

"Tommy, there is a place in Tanglin for English children which we hope you will like, I'm sure your father would have wanted you to go to."

"My father's dead, the Japs killed him, why do you say that he would have wanted me to go to this other place?"

"Well, if he had been alive today, we're sure he would have wanted you to go to such a place — and it would help your mother, who's going to be very busy helping us in an important matter.

"And later we can see to having you in England, when things are more settled," the young woman said kindly. The surprised Thomas was told that he would live in the school at Tanglin and be permitted to go home, once a month when things in Singapore were more settled but, for the time being, he would live at the school with other children of his own age, who were already there. Lieutenant Robinson bade him not to discuss her proposition with anyone in the meantime, except his mother.

"Would you let us know by tomorrow afternoon as arrangements will have to be made fairly quickly, should you decide to go," the young Englishwoman said.

That evening he waited impatiently for his mother's return from work, anxious to know what she thought of the strange and surprising proposition. He wondered at being the only child at York Hill to be selected for the children's home at Tanglin. His mother rushed back to their room that afternoon, panting, consternation written all over her face as if she was fearful that he had agreed to 'something' which she would not have wanted.

Luci was glad and not a little flattered that her son was being placed in an English-run boarding school, entry into which was strictly controlled. She had never heard of such a school before but she felt that it had to be exclusive. What really worried her though, was that her son would agree to their being repatriated to England after "everything" was over. She had heard about the cold from Cecil, her husband, and subsequently from the English persons she had met at the Sime Road Concentration Camp, and she dreaded the thought of having to live in such a climate. Her Iberian genes dreaded what to her seemed a dismal climate.

She was going to be busy over the following twenty-four months in the forthcoming war-crimes trials which were going to be held at the Victoria Memorial Hall in Empress Place, as an important prosecution witness as she

had worked as secretary to Captain Susuki, the camp commandant at Sime Road. But she didn't want her son accepting any British offer to repatriate them both to England when the trials were over.

"Promise me you'll tell Lieutenant Robinson you don't want to go to England, whatever you do. It's too cold and I won't be able to stand it, son. But the boarding school in Tanglin is good for you."

The following afternoon, after school, he told the British officer that he would like to go to the boarding school but preferred not to be repatriated to England.

"We're glad you'll go to Melrose, would you like to pay it a visit, to see what it's like?"

Thomas nodded his assent, making a mental note of the school's unusual name, which the British officer had let slip.

"Right. We'll arrange it. Let's leave England for now, maybe you'll change your mind," she smiled disarmingly.

As he had barely three days to go before being admitted into Melrose, it was decided that it wouldn't be necessary for him to attend the disorganised class at St Anthony's. He and his mother would visit the children's home in Tanglin on the following day.

The next morning, bright and early after breakfast Thomas Siddon and his mother set off down the slopping driveway of York Hill toward Eu Tong Sen Street, a half-mile away, to catch the bus to Stamford Road and another to Tanglin Road. They got off at Tomlinson Road, which, in those days was a quiet tree-shaded lane off Tanglin Road, and walked the sloping, tree-lined road toward what looked like to Thomas a forest of trees in the distance. The boarding school was at the far-end of the lane, its entrance hidden by tall grass and more trees. Walking through this they came upon the red-gravel roadway that led from Tomlinson Road, round a large lawn, and 'disappeared' under the porchway of a huge mansion in the distance, from where he and his mother stood. The massive house had two stories. The top-floor of the rambling building had wide, airy-looking verandahs, from which striped 'chiks', (bamboo roller-blinds), hung down from high-arched windows. They walked curiously toward the house.

His mother rang the doorbell and a woman dressed in a nurse's white uniform answered it. Luci Siddon introduced herself and the nurse-looking woman took them up a large, imposing stairway to the upper-level of the house. The woman had seemed familiar to Thomas but for the life of him, he didn't know why. The matron of Melrose, Miss Marguerite L. Looker, an Australian, greeted mother and son at the top of the stairway, and ushered them to the school's living-room.

While his mother sat talking with the matron, a girl of about fourteen showed him round the place. When he got back his mother was ready to leave. Miss Looker shook his hand, saying:

"We'll see you after tomorrow Thomas, you'll be happy here, there are many children just like you," she smiled at him.

It was April 1946. The Philippines were holding their first-ever democratic general elections preparatory to gaining independence from the United States of America, which had annexed the Malay chain of islands from Spain in 1899, after the Spanish-American War and three hundred years of Spanish rule. The granting of independence to the Philippines had been made by the United States of America under the pre-World War Two Atlantic Charter signed between the USA and Great Britain, who still had to keep her word on Malaya and Singapore.

The first South East Asia Food Conference met in Singapore from 15th to 17th April 1946 under the chairmanship of Lord Killern, to look into the urgent matter of the dwindling rice stocks in the region. Singapore and Malaya had already announced immediate cuts in the rice ration which everyone had to queue for.



## Melrose

### *Chapter Four*

The children at the York Hill Home wondered at Thomas Siddon's sudden disappearance from the half-way house, as one day he was with them, eating meals together and playing their children's games, and the next he was abruptly gone without a word of farewell or explanation. Fifteen years on, he would come across one of his former childhood playmates, as a young adult, and learn, in amused disbelief, of the protestations by some of the parents at the hostel who had felt that their children better deserved the 'favouritism' shown him.

But that day in April 1946 he was a mess of mixed emotions as he bade farewell to his mother and his short-lived stint at York Hill, to start life afresh, so to speak, at Melrose, the children's aid society which only took in half- or pure-White children. A British Army Landrover, which was arranged by Lieutenant Robinson, transported him and his small bundle of clothes to the co-ed children's boarding school at Tanglin where he was to spend the next six years of his childhood. He had been upset to witness his mother crying profusely as the vehicle conveying him disappeared down the slope of the hostel and out of sight of everyone who happened to be in the vicinity of the half-way house's front entrance. He had waved frantically to her before he had 'vanished' from her sight, hoping, somehow, to convey to her by his smiling face and hearty wave that everything was alright but she was sobbing buckets when she didn't have to. There was nothing to cry about. Wasn't he going to a better place?

Melrose seemed desolate as the military vehicle turned into its gravel driveway from Tomlinson Road. He immediately spotted Miss Marguerite Looker, the Australian matron, and her assistant, Mrs Kerr, the Japanese nurse, waiting for him under the porch. As the Landrover drew up by the front stairs at the main entrance-way, he noticed some children, not yet of school-going age, playing in the inside verandah, which was on the ground-floor. They seemed oblivious to everything as they happily played their games. Miss Looker smiled a welcome and thanked the Malay driver, a private in the British Army. The soldier smiled back, saluted smartly, got back in the front seat of the Landrover and drove off in a cloud of dust.

Thomas suddenly felt lonely and his mind harked back to Sime Road Camp for no rhyme or reason, despite finding himself in serene, pleasant surroundings that had no bearing on what he had experienced during the war, which was well past. But laughter from the children he had first noticed when the Landrover drew-up under the porch, that morning, rent the air and his feelings of loneliness and abandonment when he had waited for hours for his mother outside the concentration camp, during the war, swiftly melted away. And Miss Looker's gentle voice, chiding the children for being boisterous, made him feel safe again.

"Listen you binatang's (Malay: beast), you're too noisy", she admonished in a gentle, affectionate voice. Young Thomas was amazed. He had half-expected, for no earthly reason, for one of the two adults who were there, (the matron and the nurse), to burst out in the harsh, guttural tones of the Japanese guards at Sime Road. The grown-ups at York Hill were no different from the Japs either. They were either telling someone off or arguing. In this new place, Melrose, everyone spoke softly. A pretty little girl with tumbling blonde hair, face pouting, marched up to where Thomas was standing with Miss Looker and Mrs Kerr, and with arms akimbo demanded redress from one of her playmates for an alleged 'wrong'. The young boy was curious to see the matron bend swiftly down, pick up the child, kiss her face, stroke her hair, and bring her back to her playmates, sorting out the 'hiccup' pleasantly before returning to where Thomas and Nurse Kerr were waiting. The matron indicated for Thomas to accompany her and nurse upstairs in the sprawling mansion.

Matron showed him the boys' dormitory which had rows of beds against the walls, with an aisle down the middle. He saw that none was occupied. As he was the first boy being admitted into Melrose, since the war, matron permitted him to choose whichever bed he preferred for his own. He would be the only boy in the large dormitory until other boys joined the children's aid society. He was six. He was shown the upstairs bathroom and toilets, and

where he would place his toothbrush. Nurse pointed out a large, round wooden table on the back verandah, outside the upstairs bathroom and explained that he was to collect his clean clothes from it every day, which the Malay amahs would place everyday for the children to collect. She would see to his getting some new ones later on. Thomas was to fold his own clothes and put them away in his own clothes-drawers. If he didn't know how, one of the older girls would teach him. He would then be expected to do things for himself. Everyone ironed his or her own things, and made their own beds as well. Shoes were polished every Saturday. Later, when he was more settled, she would allot him a special task to perform everyday, so that he would learn how to be useful in his own home of the future. Matron smiled. She felt Thomas had sufficient to think about for the present. He would soon get the "hang of things" at Melrose. In the meantime he could begin exploring — that was what everyone did when they first arrived, she beamed at the young boy.

"Don't remain in the sun too long, you'll get sun-stroke, lunch is at one on weekdays and at twelve-thirty on weekends. You'll hear the gong, run along now," she said kindly.

The young boy ran out into the open to begin learning about his new home. Twinges of loneliness kept creeping into his consciousness every now-and-then when he recalled his mother remaining behind at York Hill. But the beauty of his surroundings, coupled with the solitude of that quiet corner of Tanglin, soon distracted him. The children's home was a sprawling mansion built on the lines its Chinese owner thought was the kind of abode senior British colonial officers favoured. It looked across an oval-shaped, football-sized lawn, bounded by a reddish, loose-gravelled driveway. Beyond the lawn, toward Tomlinson Road, there was thick belukar growing all the way up a slope which ended at a barbed-wire fence separating Melrose from another large colonial-type mansion. In fact that building and Melrose belonged to the same owner, a Chinese businessman. Thomas would discover, later, that the businessman had fallen in love with the Englishwoman living in the other mansion, which she was renting from him, and he had allowed her to convert some of the house's many rooms into bedsitters which she let out to single English colonials. The woman taught at the Portuguese convent, next-door to St Joseph's, the Portuguese Mission Roman Catholic Church on Queen Street.

Taking in all the sights and smells of Melrose, he saw popping up across the sea of lallang, widespread branched trees, heavy with foliage. He would get to know them in time, including the fierce, angry kerenga, (Malay: giant, red ants), which guarded their domain of sweet mangosteen fruit which

ripened each season, once a year. They were much prized locally. He had come across similar fruit in the forest near Sime Road during the war, as well as rambutans.

Later as he became familiar with the grounds of Melrose, he would discover the old war-time shelters within the undergrowth, and the insignificant Japanese war-relics, like rusted torch-lights and water-bottles, which the Malay orang-kampong, (Malay: village people), who had their collection of huts on the edge of the properties fronting Paterson Road, had not bothered to cart away after the Japanese surrender. Melrose in fact had been the Japanese garrison for that part of the island during the war, and its grounds were pock-marked with air-raid shelters. The metal-tops of some had been removed and the 'hallows' created used as a play-area, and others as a convenient garden collection-bin to store the dead leaves that the home's gardener collected and swept into.

On the left of the driveway, from the main entrance at Tomlinson Road, there was a 'pocket-sized' banana and tapioca 'plantation', which was really the Malay servants', who relished eating them. The 'plantation' continued all the way inside Melrose toward the servants' quarters at the back. It acted as a kind of barrier, running along the last bit of metalled Tomlinson Road, which led to the home of a senior British Army officer. The road continued past the officer's house as a loose-pebbled lane covered by banana trees at its mouth, and which led to the Malay village fronting Paterson Road. Melrose and the British officer's residence were the last two houses on Tomlinson Road.

A bunga raya, (Malay: Hibiscus), fence in front of the home's garage, at the end of the 'plantation' inside the grounds, screened-off the servants' quarters. The quarters adjoined the garage and turned right behind the main house to link-up with the home's own main kitchens. There was another lawn in front of the hibiscus fence that went right up to the side of the main house, which was an open-sided room. There was an exact replica on the opposite side of the mansion. That side was identified as 'monkey side' because the wild monkeys from the "Botanic Gardens" in Tanglin called at the home whenever the home's and the area's fruit, were in season. 'Monkey side' had another span of grass, at the end of which there was a barbed-wire fence separating Melrose from yet another estate. Throughout his time at Melrose Thomas was to discover that this estate's owners seemed perpetually abroad, and the only signs of any occupancy were the Malay gardeners going about their daily business of maintaining the grounds. Everywhere all the young boy could see was trees — all the way to the horizon, which was blotted-out by them! Melrose was massive.

He decided that he should start learning the layout of the building itself, and began at the front. The ground floor, just inside the verandah he had first noticed when he had first come to look over Melrose with his mother, comprised a series of doors, each wide enough to allow a grand-piano through with ease. Immediately inside there was a huge hall, and from here, opposite the main entrance-way, there was a massive dark-stained stairway which swung from view at the first landing. He knew that it led toward the living quarters of the matron, Miss Marguerite Looker, and the children's dormitories. On the ground-level, where he was presently standing, on either side of the main staircase there were two storerooms, and under the landing of the main staircase was a passage which led to the back of the house, which was the kitchens and the servants' quarters. The back of the house was also a large hall with a long serving table, where the home's Malay servants dished out the children's meals on plates for the kids to help themselves and convey to the dining tables at the front of the house. On the right of the serving table a steep, narrow staircase hugged the wall and went straight upwards to the back verandah which matron and nurse had brought him to, when he first arrived that morning. At the top of this back-staircase, on the left, were the girls' dormitories which were a series of interlocking rooms, above 'monkey side', and which went all the way to the front of the mansion, next-door to matron's own living-room. A heavy, large wooden bookcase cut-off the girls' dormitories from Miss Looker's sitting room. The boys' dormitory was on the far side of the huge building, and led from matron's bedroom, next-door to a balcony similar to the girls' room on 'monkey side'. It was matron's re-assuring habit, Thomas was soon to discover, to look in on her sleeping children everynight.

Matron's living room was also the children's, and it was large and airy. It was immediately above the front porch, and hung with chiks, just like all the rooms facing outdoors. The living room had large, comfortable, deep-cushioned malacca-cane chairs for visitors, a radiogram, (a luxury in Singapore then), and shelves filled with books, all over the place. Just outside Miss Looker's own bedroom, which was on the boys side of the house, a telephone was placed on top of a cocktail cabinet which had a full complement of drinks for the management committee which met regularly to raise finance and discuss the merits of each new child being considered for admission into the home. Commanding the entire living-room area was an almost life-sized carved wooden figure of a wizened, old Chinese fisherman lugging a carp almost as tall as himself.

A meal-gong sounded below and he ran downstairs to investigate. He discovered it was time for "elevenses", a morning snack between breakfast

and lunch, which he was grateful for, after his 'tour' of discovery. He found the light meal of biscuits and a glass of milk that the Malay servants had laid out on the serving table at back a welcome break. He helped himself to a serving and went to the front of the house where the dining-tables were located and sat down at an unoccupied place. A girl of about fourteen came and sat down beside him.

"Hello, I'm Jasmine, I saw you arrive this morning, did you enjoy exploring? What's your name?"

"It's Thomas, call me Tom."

He tried engaging the girl in conversation but almost immediately discovered that apart from telling him her name, and everyone else's, she only appeared interested in talking about 'her cat'. It was a siamese and really belonged to the Malay servants but Fatimah, the chief cook, who also spoke the most English among the home's servants, had let her 'adopt' it, though the servants fed the creature everyday.

He learned later that Jasmine's father had been American and her mother Chinese. Both had perished in the Japanese bomb-blast of Singapore, at the onset. Luckily for the young girl she had been safe at Bombay, when the war had broken out, because her parents had had her admitted into Melrose in 1937. An old European called Weitzel had adopted her after the war and was awaiting the day when parents and guardians could take their children out for the day on the first Sunday of the month. He lived in nearby "Burnside", the mansion run by the spinster Englishwoman who let out bedsitters.

Another girl of about Jasmine's age plonked herself next to him, on the other side.

"Hi, I'm Kay Gordon, you're Thomas Siddon, right?"

He nodded in affirmation, surprised at the new girl's friendly greeting. She had on a blue dress. Her hair was light brown and fell down to her shoulders, and she had a fringe which she kept blowing with her bottom lip. Her eyes were blue.

Nurse Kerr came over, just then, and told Kay to show him where the sink to wash his plate and utensils after meals, was, and where to return his things afterwards. Nurse reminded everyone that talking during meals wasn't allowed. Kay nodded her understanding. As soon as nurse returned to her own table, across the room from where they were all seated, she began talking again. A look in her eye warned him she didn't care to be reminded about nurse's directive. Thomas turned his attention to nurse, studying her face which now seemed all the more familiar. And it wasn't because she was Japanese. To him then, there was no visible difference between Japanese

and Chinese features. They were all Mongolian. With a sudden start he instantly realised where he had seen her before! It was at Sime Road Camp. She was the Japanese widow who had a half-caste child, and who were both ostracised by the whole camp, and who were given some "favours", like Japanese foodstuffs, by the camp-commandant! He recalled the harsh, guttural tones of the Japanese guards at the civilian concentration camp, waiting for his mother for ages outside the camp gates, going hungry all the time. Kay, who had been studying his face all the while, had noticed the abrupt change in his pallor, and looked curious. She didn't pose a question because she didn't understand what had set it off, and she didn't want to know.

Some more girls joined their table, eager to question him and to find out as much as they could. He had never met such a pack of busybodies! Mavis was seventeen. She was hoping to sit her final school leaving examinations as soon as formal education had begun on the island. The schools weren't functioning normally yet, though some institutions like the Christians Brothers' schools, and the convents, had attempted informal sessions. There was a huge population of over-aged pupils, and children who had grown up since the war, who were now ready for formal education, as well as the younger ones who had recently reached school-going age.

Two other girls, Maureen Hall and Norma Ward, were practically grown up at eighteen. Maureen was dark, with jet-black hair and eyes, and Norma was tall, with light-brown hair and blue eyes. They were first-generation English-Eurasian. Their respective English fathers had perished in the bombing of Singapore, though both girls had been admitted into the home in 1940, before the war, and had been repatriated to Bombay with the rest of the Melrose "crowd". Ever since returning to Singapore, neither of the two girls' mothers had put in an appearance, and it was presumed that they too had died during the Occupation. The young ladies were hopeful of landing jobs in "town", and waited impatiently for the event to occur. Thomas found everyone friendly and was amazed by their warmth. Such feelings didn't exist at York Hill. When he was older he would remember his days at Melrose and realise that the comradeship there was something unique, which he would never come across again.

The girls told him that the children's home had been established by a group of English men and women since 1902 to provide a haven of free board, lodging and education for children, one of whose parents had to be White. There were children who were full-White, as well. They usually came to Melrose because their parents worked "upcountry" in the Malayan peninsula, either in oil-palm plantations, rubber estates or tin mines. In

Melrose, the girls told him, every child had a 'good' upbringing as well as being properly looked after. Matron and nurse provided the 'right sort' of guidance, and matron ensured that everyone did not forget their English heritage. Some children like Thomas, had fathers who had been killed during the recent war, while some had fathers who had deserted them by returning to England and forgetting their families in Singapore, or had simply turned their backs on their Singapore-families after being transferred to another country-station. What his new friends had omitted telling him was who was responsible for the love that filled the air, permeating everything, and which radiated from all their faces.

For a child to be accepted into Melrose, he was told, he or she had to be recommended to the management committee by a senior English government official or a senior officer in the British armed forces. The committee met once a month to discuss the merits of each child seeking admission. It was felt that being brought up at Melrose gave each child the right opportunity to begin life in the colony with a head-start. The patron of the home was the Governor of Singapore.

Many local organisations contributed to the children's welfare, one way or another. The owner of the Pavilion Cinema in Orchard Road gave them complimentary tickets to any film show at his theatre. His brother, who was in charge of the hawkers' section of the Municipal Department in Singapore Town, always gave the home the best part of the confiscated goods like unlicensed poultry, meat, eggs or vegetables which the hawkers had failed to pay for as this would mean a stringent check on the hygiene of their surroundings, which they didn't want. The remainder of the confiscated goods, after Melrose, was distributed to the various convents and other orphanages. Mercantile companies as well, donated tinned food, milk, toiletries, even toys and games. The children went for nothing.

They were also the 'unofficial' members of the Whites-only Singapore Swimming Club at Tanjong Rhu on the east coast. And, every year they attended the British Armed Forces' annual Christmas party for English children which was always held at the Admiralty House in Chatsworth Road, in Tanglin.

While the girls were giving him the 'lowdown' on Melrose, Thomas had been studying Nurse Kerr and Mavis as their resemblance to one another was striking. Then he had it — Mavis and Mrs Kerr were mother and daughter. Mavis was the half-Japanese girl at Sime Road Camp! Just as the realisation hit him he caught Mavis looking at him and immediately was aware that she too had 'recognised' him. She leaned forward and spoke loud enough for only him to hear:



"We had a bad time of it during the war, don't ever bring it up to her — you're probably too young to remember, but, whatever you do, don't ever bring it up to her, she'll be cross. Her memories are vivid."

He looked wide-eyed at the Japanese-White girl, attempting a look of innocence. His memories of Sime Road were just as stark as nurse's but the war was over. Done. Just then nurse came over to tell everyone to stop dilly-dallying, and to leave the table if they were finished. All of them rose up simultaneously, taking their utensils with them to be cleaned, and then drifted off to various part of Melrose.

Thomas went through the grounds and the house again. The layout was forever etched in his mind. He savoured the silence of the outdoors, the twittering of the birds, the chirping of the crickets in the background, and the total lack of traffic-sounds.

He was glad when lunchtime came around. He was hungry. It was corned-beef and mash, with gravy. And a glass of lemonade. He walked to the dinning room, to his table, and saw everyone standing behind their particular chair, with their plate of food placed in front, between a knife and fork. Kay Gordon signalled him to stand next to her. Nurse said Grace and then they all sat down to lunch, waiting first for nurse to pull out her chair and sit, before they all followed suit. After lunch nurse invited him to lie down, if he wanted to since matron had not yet worked out his study routine. But he had to be up by half-past four.

Around a quarter-past four Kay popped her head into his dorm and yelled that Fatimah and the other Malay cooks had begun laying out the plates and cups for tea. He followed her downstairs and she said she would show him how to play "Rounders" later. Curious, he impatiently joined her for tea as she helped herself to her portion of sandwiches and biscuits. He wondered aloud why they didn't go out to the lawn straightaway after tea so that he could learn the game immediately and still have extra daylight time to play in. The young girl gave him a scathing look, and in a superior tone said it was too hot at five o'clock in the afternoon to play energetic games outdoors. The sun would be lower after half-past five, and that was when they would play. Thomas waited an eternity.

Sharp at five-thirty Kay Gordon got out a frayed tennis ball and a battered-looking tennis racket, and signalled him to accompany her outside. "Rounders!" she shrieked, dragging the word out long and loud, and with accompanying yells of delight all the young ladies of Melrose came tumbling out onto the lawn, choosing sides, arguing as to who would play for which side. Kay chose him for her team. They won the toss, and were to "bat".

She got him to watch the first few girls in their team hit the ball played to them by the other side's pitcher, so that he would "cotton-on" as to how "Rounders" was played. And he gave his full attention to the game unfolding before his eyes. When it was his turn to 'bat', June Whitfield from the 'fielding side' threw him a long, looping ball and he swung hard. The ball curved from his racket straight into her waiting hands. Their side was "out". Kay tried him at every position on field, and quickly removed him from the pitcher's position when his first three balls resulted in three straight 'rounds' for the opposing side. There was good-natured argument as the opposing-side demanded his reinstatement as pitcher but Kay ignored them and banished him to the outer-reaches of field. Someone hit a long high ball right into his hands and the other side was "out" but, just then, Miss Marguerite Looker, who had been watching the game all along, clapped her hands to signal the end of the evening's activity as it was already too dark to see. Kay promised revenge the following day, good-naturedly blaming Thomas for their poor showing. It was the happiest day of Thomas' life. Just as everyone began trooping indoors and the bathrooms, matron called down from her balcony overlooking the front lawn to the home's first boy inmate since the war.

"Thomas your legs are wobbly, we'll have to see about getting you some cod-liver oil, won't we?"

He nodded, surprised that she had taken the trouble to study him. From that day on, taking their cue from matron, he was always known by his full name at Melrose.

The dinner-gong sounded just as he had finished showering in the downstairs boys' bathroom and had changed into pyjamas. Dinner was boiled macaroni and cheese in tomato gravy. The first taste told Thomas that he would never like the flavour ever but he was famished and finished the lot, after matron, who had joined them for dinner, had said Grace. When matron had finished eating she excused herself to Mrs Kerr, stood up, replaced her chair under the table, and took her plate behind. One by one each girl, as she was done, followed Miss Looker's example. Kay who had finished her dinner about the same time as matron, waited for Thomas and they left together. To his relief no one had paid him attention when he copied Miss Looker's movements.

A bell tinkled in the direction of Miss Looker's bedroom, half-an-hour later, and he joined the general scramble upstairs. He noticed Mrs Kerr closing the doors and windows downstairs, making sure that each one was securely fastened. Kay instructed him to join the Roman Catholics in Miss Looker's bedroom for evening prayers, while she joined the Church of

England children in the sitting room. Nurse strode into matron's room, lit the candles on the small altar by matron's bed, as Miss Looker walked in to join them. Prayers ended and it was just half-past seven. Thomas joined Kay and the others in the sitting room. There was an hour's free time before study or bed. Kay called him over to where she was sitting by the radiogram. She switched it on and music came flowing into the room. He was fascinated. It had been a day of several surprises. He had never seen such an instrument before. At York Hill Home there were only loud-speakers placed high on pillars, out of reach of everyone, and these used to blare non-stop music, except when the administrators had wanted to make an announcement. The home's telephone suddenly began ringing, and Thomas started in alarm. He had never heard a telephone ring before. Miss Looker walked over to the instrument, lifted the receiver and spoke into it. She paused as if listening, then began speaking again. She did this several times. Thomas caught Kay studying him, a faint look of amusement on her features as she realised that he had never seen a telephone before, let alone see one in use.

"I think we should bring the volume down, matron's trying to hold a conversation," he said, annoyed with his new friend for catching him unawares. Though he hadn't known what a 'phone looked like before, he had gleaned enough from stray conversations he'd overheard at York Hill, and had guessed what it was that matron was doing but he wasn't going to give Kay the satisfaction of feeling superior at his ignorance.

"So you know what a phone is then?"

"'Course, there're three at York Hill."

He wasn't going to let on that he hadn't known what it was called, in the first place, because Kay could be devastating at times. Telephones in Singapore, in those days, were uncommon. Those already installed were in government offices, the military and in companies. Private lines were mainly in Whites' homes or the local wealthy. Most islanders didn't have an instrument in their homes either. The locals and the British very seldom, if at all, fraternised socially.

Young Siddon turned to the radiogram, listening to the music, fascinated by the matter-of-fact voice coming from the instrument, as if the announcer was in the room, talking with them across a table. Kay suddenly felt the need to regain her friend's attention.

"Late at night, when we're all in bed, the programmes get saucier," she said in a conspiratorial whisper.

"What do you mean," Thomas demanded, anxious to know more.

"They talk about falling in love, kissing, that sort of thing," she drawled.

cocking an arched eyebrow as if she were bored with the whole thing. "How would you know," went on Thomas, unimpressed with her act. "You know," she said impatiently, "our bedroom's behind this bookcase and everynight matron forgets and turns the radio up to hear from where she sits on the settee, so we get to hear as well, stupid," she said in triumph. Kay was satisfied. She had scored one against him. Just then Mavis Kerr joined the two conspirators, and further conversation on the topic was curtailed.

Kay fiddled with the tuning knob and got the Malay language station of Kuala Lumpur. The music was Malay and the Eurasian girl impatiently spun the tuner away, seeking an alternative English language radio station. "What was that station," inquired her friend, surprised at her apparent disinterest in foreign music.

"We don't listen to that kind of native stuff," she answered coldly, twiddling the knob impatiently, hoping to get the English language station of the Malay States' capital. Young Thomas wondered at his friend's total lack of curiosity in the language and music of the locals, which she had just exposed to him by her display of impatience at his inquiry. He felt that she was displaying a narrow-minded attitude and tried steering her into admitting what her taste was like as far as non-English music was concerned.

"Do we only listen to the English language stations of Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, don't we listen to other stations?"

"Of course we do, we tune to the BBC Overseas Service, in fact every evening when matron thinks we are all in bed she listens to the BBC broadcast coming all the way from London."

How Thomas wished he could have been with Kay and the other girls at night to listen to a broadcast coming all the way from another part of the world.

Nurse came in tinkling matron's bell. It was bedtime for the toddlers and study for the others. Even though formal school hadn't yet begun in Singapore, the home was making sure the children maintained a proper routine of study. Since it was Thomas' first day at Melrose, nothing had been drawn up for him and he wasn't expected to do any studying that evening. But he joined the girls of his own age, nevertheless, as they busied themselves taking out their study things and getting prepared. The study area was the top of the landing from the main stairway, between matron's bedroom and the girls' dormitories. He sidled over to the two girls of about his own age, and they showed him their readers. He flipped the pages, pretending to read but couldn't. Thomas wasn't sure whether the girls could but he wasn't going to embarrass himself, in case they could. He was nonplussed when they began reading aloud from their books, and he hastily

called a goodnight and fled to bed. He was tired anyway, and embarrassed. The girls were of about his own age yet they read with fluency. He had only been taught the phonetic sounds of the alphabet in Sime Road Camp and had never been shown how to 'make' words with the letters. Kay called out as he passed:

"We get up at six, that's the final bell from nurse, if you're not up by half-past matron'll wake you up as well as give you a talking to — mind that she doesn't, g'night."

He climbed into bed and sank deep into the mattress, a feeling of peace and contentment enveloping his senses. His first day at Melrose was over and he had many more to look forward to. He became drowsy quickly and dropped off into untroubled slumber for the first time in his life since war began in Singapore. Thomas woke up during the night, momentarily bewildered as to where he was, the house was still and darkened, except for a light on matron's balcony and he knew it had been left on for him. He remembered he was at Melrose. Safe. He didn't need the light but it was nice to realise that someone cared enough. He swiftly dropped back into sleep.

The twinkling of a bell and nurse calling out to the older children to waken, aroused him. As he threw off his bed-clothes, the dormitory lights switched on and Kay, looking drowsy and dishevelled in crumpled pyjamas, yelled out:

"C'mon, I'll show you how to make a bed."

She roughly pushed him aside, pulled the bedsheet off the mattress, threw it, his pillow and blanket onto the floor, then effortlessly lifted his mattress, turned it over and swung the bedsheet off the floor, onto it again. She next showed him how to smooth the sheet over the mattress and how to fold each corner of it under the mattress. She fluffed his pillow, folded his blanket, and showed him where each went on his bed.

"Got it?"

He nodded.

"Good!"

Grabbing hold of everything, she yanked them off the mattress and flung them onto the floor once more.

"Right, now you do it," she said, grinning, walking away looking very pleased with herself. The young boy hated her with all his might at that moment as he wearily picked up his fallen things and tried remembering exactly how they were replaced on his bed, as Kay had shown earlier. He was really sore. Bed made he quickly joined the mad rush to the bathroom. Suddenly Kay poked her head in and yelled:

"Hurry slow-poke, we're waiting morning prayers for you!"

Frantically completing his toilet he ran out to join the others standing about the large, round table on the back verandah. Nurse began a general morning prayer for both Christian denominations and everyone joined in. He glanced sideways suddenly and spied Miss Looker standing outside his dormitory door, saying the prayers with them. Afterwards, in a loud, officious-sounding voice Kay demanded to know whether he'd made his bed exactly as she had shown him that morning. Matron prudently intervened: "Let's see whether Kay's shown you how to make a bed properly or via her usual short-cuts."

Thomas who had been feeling uncomfortable ever since Kay's outburst, was tickled pink to witness his friend's speechless consternation as she glared at him. Matron's obvious ploy had put her in her place! He grinned impishly at bossy Kay and sauntered over to where matron was now standing by his bed. Kay hovered anxiously in the background. Her look told him that she now hoped that he hadn't taken any short-cuts of his own. The matron inspected his efforts critically, pointed out his clumsy attempts at making corners with the ends of his bedsheets, patted his head and congratulated him for learning so well from Kay. She told both children to hurry along downstairs for breakfast.

"Huh, you get the credit and I showed you how to it in the first place," she said sarcastically.

"You're lucky I didn't take any short-cuts myself, otherwise you'd have been in the soup — you had no call chucking my things on the floor this morning, I really hated you."

Both children had arrived downstairs by this time and immediately forgot their squabble. Kay yanked his arm toward where their plates of oatmeal-porridge were. On their breakfast table in the front dining room, when they got to it, were two plates of buttered bread, it was margarine, and a steaming pot of coffee. Everyone was standing, awaiting their arrival, so that they could say Grace together. After breakfast most of the girls went upstairs to study, while Thomas went out on to the front lawn. He had already been told, by nurse, that he could play outside until half-past ten but to be inside by then, before it grew too hot.

He stepped off the gravel driveway unto the grass of the lawn, which was wet with the night's dew. Birds flapped overhead and butterflies flitted among the flowers. He became aware of the younger children trooping down for their breakfast, from the babble they made. Their child-voices wafted through the rich, thick atmosphere that was Melrose. Obviously the rule against talking during meal-times wasn't enforced for them.

He was alone on the lawn. The beauty of Melrose and the silence of the outdoors were overpowering and he drank in the ecstasy of it all, feeling safe, and lost in a contented sensation of peace. Something which he had never experienced in his life before. Miss Looker, the matron, called down to him from her balcony and he sped upstairs to her sitting room above the porch. Matron told him that the British Army School for the children of British servicemen in Singapore was being established in a few months and that she was making arrangements for him to attend it. It was important, she said, that he become familiar with the English school system, which the army school in Singapore would follow, in view of his future repatriation to Britain.

"I told Miss Robinson at York Hill I prefer not to go 'home' as England's too cold for my mother and me. Should I attend the school at Alexandra since I won't be returning?"

There was a fleeting look of astonishment on the Australian woman's face. She told him to leave the matter aside for the time being, adding only that Singapore had yet to begin the school system and he would be missing a golden opportunity to start his own education without delay.

Appearing suddenly to have made up her mind about something, she told him that he would begin lessons with Mavis Kerr that afternoon, after lunch. Thomas was relieved that he didn't have to attend the British Army School and thus jeopardise his word to his mother. Matron next told him that she had arranged with Mrs Kerr, the Japanese nurse, to give him daily doses of cod liver oil for his wobbly legs.

Oblivious of the look of disappointment on the Australian woman's face, he happily returned to his wanderings downstairs. He had been doubly thrilled that morning. First he would learn to read, and next he would begin lessons just like everyone else. There were elevenses, the morning snack, and lunch to look forward to. He was settling into Melrose very nicely, thank you.

That afternoon after lunch, when he began lessons with Mavis, he became aware of a drawback as well as achieved a personal triumph. It began after he had gone to the Japanese-English girl for his first lesson and she had given him a basic reader, borrowed from one of the girls he had seen reading the night before. It was a straightforward reading book with accompanying pictures for each word being learnt. But of course Thomas couldn't read and Mavis found out straightaway.

"Thomas Siddon, you're already six and still can't read," the young woman, trying to sound and look severe, but failing, said. Just then Kay Gordon came along to poke her nose where it didn't belong and Mavis

shooed her away before going on at him:

"You seem to know the phonetic sounds of the letters of the alphabet but you're lazy to combine their sounds to form words, that's your problem. Concentrate on one letter at a time then combine two letters together, then the rest, and you'll be able to read."

"Give me the reader," he said, embarrassed that he'd been found out. Finding a quiet corner in the study room he sat down and began to concentrate. He turned to the first word in the reader. It was "apple". He ignored the accompanying picture and concentrated on making the sounds with the letters that spelled "apple".

"Eh - per - per - l - eh." he read out quietly to himself, repeating the letter-sounds again and again. Then he tried combining the sound of two letters together:

"Ap - per - ll, ap - ple, apple - apple!" He had read the full sound! But he wasn't yet convinced because he could still see the accompanying picture. He flipped a page and read "boy" with ease even though he could still see the picture. He flipped several more pages and found he could read "yawn" and "zebra". He could read, Mavis had been right all along, he had been lazy.

Confident now he returned to Mavis and asked for the second-year reader. Wordlessly she handed it over and he opened and read from it, stumbling over some of the harder, unfamiliar words but reading fluently, nevertheless.

"You scoundrel, pretending you couldn't read when you were able to do so all along. Were you trying to pull my leg?"

Kay Gordon who had been listening to Thomas learning how to read instead of sticking to her own studies, turned up in his defence.

"I heard him," she said, "he couldn't read at first, repeating all those silly sounds over and over, then suddenly he said 'apple' and then he could read! You know he reads better than when I first started."

But Mavis was unconvinced, suspecting the two fast-companions of conspiring to 'pull one' over her, and shooed them downstairs. The young girl and boy ran off laughing. They knew they would never be able to convince anyone of Thomas startling achievement that day.

From the time he discovered he could read Thomas devoured every and any book he could lay his hands on. He began with the readers, progressed to literature and history text books, then graduated to Enid Blyton stories. In about a year he would discover the home's bound copies of the British "Daily Mirror" from London, as well as "Country Life", which an Indian booksellers supplied to Melrose every month. The written word fascinated



him. One day he discovered an old copy of the colonial-owned-and-run "The Straits Times" daily newspaper, which matron had absentmindedly left lying around in the sitting room, and he poured over it, absorbed in the startling revelation of the war-crimes trials being conducted in Singapore Colony then, though, of course he did find lots of words he didn't understand. Mavis Kerr caught him, snatched away the paper and returned it to Miss Looker's bedroom. No one was allowed to read the daily morning paper at Melrose because of the war coverage.

During 1946 and most of 1947 the Singapore radio station and the daily newspapers, both the vernacular, and the English language ones which had White senior journalists, were full of the war-crimes trials being held at Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Manila and the rest of South-east Asia. Matron had made it taboo for any child to read the news or listen to the radio news bulletin, though she did herself. The children of Melrose were spared the details of reading and hearing about what had happened during World War Two in Asia. No committee member discussed the trials in front of them, in fact the children had no inkling of what was happening 'outside', on Singapore. Theirs was a care-free, ordered, White-world which ran smooth, like clockwork.

Most schools on the island had not yet begun to function normally in 1946, though some institutions were open but there was no organised curriculum of study because there was a shortage of teachers, and text and exercise books. School heads found it difficult to pick up the reins of education which had been so rudely snatched away at the onslaught of war.

Meanwhile the committee at Melrose decided to await the establishment of the formal school system before placing the children. Miss Looker still hoped to convince Thomas to attend the British Army School at Alexandra and bided her time. He was the first boy since the war to join the children's aid society but with each passing day other boys and girls began swelling the ranks of boarders. He had arrived on a Wednesday. On the following day an English boy of fifteen and his two sisters joined the home. Jim and blonde-haired Eva and Jennifer Sturrock were going to be at Melrose until their parents sent for them. They lived in the Cameron Highlands in Pahang in Malaya, where Mr Sturrock was the new manager of a tea plantation on the mountain range. On Friday morning two Anglo-Indian girls, Celine and Veronica Thomas, arrived from Burma. Their mother was joining the General Hospital in Sepoy Lines, (this district name no longer exists). Two more children, Gwen and June Ward, arrived that same afternoon. On Saturday two boys, twins, John and Albert Miller, about five, arrived from Jakarta. The population of Melrose was increasing, soon it would reach the approved-complement of fifteen boys and thirty-five girls.

On Sunday, his first, matron woke everyone up at seven, instead of the usual six in the morning, for Sunday mass. An army truck came to pick them up, while Miss Looker and Mrs Kerr travelled by Miss Looker's battered old car, driven by syce-kebun (Malay: driver/gardener), Ahmad. The children piled into the army vehicle which drove up Tomlinson Road toward the junction of Tanglin Road. Thomas was disappointed that he was unable to see where they were headed as he sat in the rear looking backwards. He only caught glimpses of places after they had whizzed past. He saw a road, on his right, leading into the road they were travelling on, and read "Cuscaden Road" on the road-sign, after they had gone past. The army truck stopped at the top of Tomlinson Road and turned left into Tanglin Road. He read a sign on a small isolated building which said "Tanglin Post office" as they passed it and stopped at another junction, and turned right into Napier Road. After some seconds the vehicle veered left, slowed down and began going up a slope. They passed a signboard facing away from them and Thomas couldn't see where they were heading. It was frustrating. The truck came to a halt, a uniformed British soldier came around from the front, smiled a good morning and waved them on. They continued up the gradual slope, stopped at the top of it, turned right almost immediately and stopped again. They were beside a red-bricked building from which organ-music could be heard. Kay and the other Anglicans clambered down, and the truck continued past some two-storied soldiers' barracks to a low-roofed building. Thomas craned his neck past the canvas-hood of the truck shielding them from the sun and rain, and read "Church of Christ the King" on an arch spanning a walkway leading into the building. It was the British Army Catholic Chapel at Gilman Barracks. Matron and nurse were waiting for them by the roadside, near to the entrance-way. Thomas Siddon was attending mass for the first time, even though he had been baptised a Roman Catholic as a baby. Everyone followed matron and nurse into the building.

Matron strode through the open door to where several empty chairs in two rows on the right of the aisle were "reserved" for the Melrose crowd. All over the garrison-chapel British servicemen and their families sat at similar wooden chairs ranged in rows facing a cloth-covered, crate-like altar. Thomas noticed that each chair that was empty had a cushion on the floor in front of it. There was a little red-edged booklet on each seat, (he would learn later that these were called 'missals'). Just outside the area where the priest conducted the Sunday service he noticed a hexagonal-shaped structure which had steps leading to its side. It was the pulpit.

Mavis Kerr had told him before the army truck had arrived to pick them up that morning, that Catholic churches normally had receptacles for "holy water" in all the doorways, for the congregation to dip their fingers in before making the sign of the cross across their bodies, before entering the church. And that each churchgoer would genuflect toward the tabernacle before entering his row of seats. But Mavis had been mistaken. In this church there was nothing in the doorways so nobody made the sign of the cross before entering and you didn't bend your knee before going to your seat.

Matron sat in the first of their two rows, next to the aisle, while Thomas was immediately in front of her in the next row. He sat fiddling his ten-cent coin which nurse had handed to him and each child before they had all left for service that morning. It was to drop into the collection-box which the altar-boy would bring around sometime during the ceremony, nurse had explained. The chapel started filling up with more soldiers and their families. Some were seated reading their missals, other knelt on the cushions provided, saying their rosaries. Their eyes were closed and their lips moved in prayer.

Miss Looker had cautioned everyone back at Melrose not to look around at anybody, especially during the service. And that they were not to stare at anyone afterward, the way most locals did in the streets, at the Whites. It was considered rude. Thomas wondered who would check Kay and the other Anglicans. He picked up his missal and browsed through it, reading the prayers and the shortened passages from the bible. His mind was watchful for the first sign of the priest arriving from behind to conduct the service. There was a sighing, flowing movement behind him, and as he grew aware of it, Miss Looker pressed his shoulder gently in a signal to stand as she did likewise. The chaplain, an Englishman garbed in colourful robes preceded by two young English altar-boys of about Thomas' own age, and similarly-dressed as the priest, strode up the aisle toward the altar in front. Mass then began.

Service was tiring. He wasn't used to kneeling down for so long. It came as a relief when the priest went up the pulpit to read from the scriptures and deliver his Sunday sermon. At least he had a chance to sit through this. Not long after the sermon was over, when it was time for Holy Communion, he got a fright when uniformed men, soldiers, went up the aisle and knelt at the altar rails to receive the Host. Soldiers were fierce and carried weapons. Where were these soldiers' guns? He was fascinated to see them kneeling in supplication to receive the body-and-blood of Christ, and walk with eyes downcast back to their seats. No where in Singapore had he ever seen White men look so humble before. They almost didn't appear brave or fierce for

that matter, in his eyes. His eyes followed their stride all the way back to their respective chairs. Matron's gentle hand turned his face forward again, reminding him, with a start, of her warning that morning, not to stare. He wondered whether he would be admonished later.

Mass over, the children waited matron's signal to begin leaving their seats. She always gave the congregation time to vacate the place before she stood up, which was the Melrose-crowd's cue to do so as well. Thomas found Kay and her group already waiting for them in the army truck. They had walked over from their chapel. The truck returned the way it had come that morning and Thomas had a chance to read the noticeboard at the entrance to the army barracks, which he had missed, going up the slope on the way to church. It read: "Far East Land Forces, Gilman Barracks". As they turned right at the bottom of the slope Mavis pointed out the entrance to the Botanic Gardens, which, she said, had been initiated by Stamford Raffles, Singapore's founder.

Breakfast was waiting at Melrose when they got back. It was a half-boiled egg, buttered bread, porridge with milk-and-sugar, and coffee. Everyone trooped off to matron's sitting room afterward to listen to the radio, play parlour- games like cards, ludo or snakes and ladders, or just chat. Matron spent the time reading the Sunday papers in her bedroom. At her call Kay went into the woman's chambers and dashed out immediately with the Sunday comics which everyone made a grab for, shrieking their heads off in glee, in a meleé' of arms and legs. Thomas told her later that she should've stayed behind in matron's room to read the comics first then to have to fight everyone for a first 'read'. Giving him a mocking look she scornfully replied that the fun lay in fighting for the 'first-read', not in reading it first. He was learning all the time.

It was too hot to play in the garden and everyone remained indoors lazing the Sunday away as they pleased. And depending on whether the municipal lorry had called by earlier in the week with confiscated livestock from errant hawkers, lunch or dinner would be either a mild chicken curry-and-rice, roast turkey, beef or pork with gravy and roast potatoes. Fatimah didn't mind cooking pork for them, even though she was Muslim. In the evening after dinner around seven, several committee members of the home's management committee would visit until nine-thirty. After the children were in bed or doing their homework, the committee would meet in Miss Looker's sitting room.

Three weeks after he had come to live at Melrose matron announced that two young dogs, "Peter" and "Simon", had been donated to the home and that Kay and Thomas would be put in charge of looking after an animal

each. Kay immediately 'bagged' "Simon" and Thomas good-naturedly agreed to "Peter". The animals arrived the following day and Kay was chagrined to discover that hers was female. Thomas wouldn't hear about a 'swop', much to her outrage.

As the weeks became months Thomas found himself settling comfortably into the routine of Melrose. He'd begun to stop wondering whether his mother would ever get in touch or come visit. The memory of Sime Road and York Hill began to wane. As he became familiar with the grounds he began to make deeper forays into the belukar, always making sure to be indoors before it grew too hot. Matron repeatedly reminded everyone about the dangers of sun-stroke.

One day Kay told him about the wild cotton-tree growing close to the servants' quarters at the back of the house, which was supposed to 'house' a pontianak (Malay: a woman who had died in childbirth and transformed into an evil spirit, a banshee which preyed on others and could transform herself from an ugly evil-looking hag to an alluring young woman), the young boy was curious and sauntered over to the cotton-tree to examine it closely. Its tall, wide-spread branches cast a cool shade over the low roofs of the servants' quarters.

A Malay boy of around fifteen came out of the doorway to the servants' common kitchen, a wooden shack built into the side of the main servants' quarters. Smoke poured from a chimney-stack on its roof and the wooden slats located at the top of the walls of the hut. It was obvious the Malays cooked with firewood. A babble of voices and cooking sounds blared from within.

"Hello Jonie, wat you wan'?" he asked of Thomas. A woman's voice from within the kitchen called to the boy in Malay, warning him to mind his behaviour with the White child:

"Buang jaga, jangan gila-gila, ka-lau anak-ne chakap salah dengan mem, ma-engkau hantam-lu mati." (Buang be careful, don't act crazy, if this child repeats any mad things you teach him, to Miss Looker, your mother will trash you dead!). The Malay youth seemed not at all bothered.

"Jonie me Buang, you name wat?"

"Hello, I'm Thomas and I've come to see the spirit in the tree," said the White child. Buang, derision in his tone, turned toward the darkness of the kitchen and spoke in Malay:

"Look at this ma'salleh, (Malay derogatory slang for "English"), he's come to see the pontianak, he's so stupid, everyone knows you can't see one in the daytime!"

"Remember Buang, your mother — she'll flay you alive! Remember who this child is, say the wrong things and he gets nightmares, and we'll all be

in trouble," a feminine voice warned from within the kitchen. This reminder seemed an adequate signal to the Malay boy who decided against spinning Thomas a 'yarn'.

"No Jonie, no devil, see this nail, this one, and this one, and this one? No devil, she stay in pokok". (Malay: tree).

As Thomas was wondering what 'pokok' was, Fatimah, the chief-cook and Buang's mother, arrived on the scene. She reprimanded her son in Malay sternly and quietly:

"Have you been saying stupid things to this child, do you want Miss Looker to tell us to leave, have you gone out of your senses?"

She had caught hold of her son's right ear with the fingers of one hand as she brandished a faggot of firewood in the other. Alarmed by the menace in the Malay chief-cook's manner toward her own son, Thomas quickly explained that Buang had been showing him the nails in the tree to warn him against climbing it. Fatimah, unimpressed, turned from him and continued speaking to her son in the same intimidating voice. Buang, Thomas could see, seemed in mortal fear of his mother, pleading plaintively as he shook his head, denying whatever she was accusing him of. He knew that the Malay boy would really cop it were his mother to discover the truth of the situation, and he quickly intervened, telling Fatimah that he would not attempt to climb the cotton-tree now that he knew it was studded with nails. Fatimah turned on him for a split-second, and in pidgen-English instructed him not to fraternise with the home's servant-children as this was the strict order of the matron. Hearing this Thomas turned on his heels and departed but not before he had noticed that the servant had not relaxed her grip on her son's ear.

He caught sight of Kay playing with the home's two dogs, went up to her and reassured her that the "pontianak" couldn't harm anyone as the Malays had nailed it into the cotton-tree. He omitted telling her the incident of Fatimah and Buang.

Several mornings later as he played beside the 'plantation', close to the home's garage, he heard a hissing sound coming from the road outside the clump of banana trees that made up part of the 'plantation'.

"Pst...psst ...hey boy, you wan' fight?"

Thomas immediately recognised Buang's voice coming from beyond the trees.

"You're silly, did your mother thrash you the other day?"

Thomas studied the Malay boy's face and arms for marks of the thrashing his mother had threatened him with the other day. There were none. Buang made a scornful, mocking sound in his throat, as if the other lad's question

was incredulously stupid.

"No, she no beat," he said, continuing the same noise as if to say that he hadn't been at all bothered by his mother's menacing manner when she had caught him, red-handed, spinning a yarn to the English child. But Thomas knew better. Buang that day, had been in a blue funk.

As if to change the topic, Buang told Thomas that he would show him how to get onto the roadway where he was standing, through a 'special' way. He instructed the young boy of six to head into the clump of banana and tapioca trees and he would be hidden from the house, and no one would be able to see the two of them talking together, and raise a ruckus. The young boy did as instructed and after the first two rows of trees he saw Buang standing just outside the Melrose perimeter-fence, on the road outside. The Malay youth next told him to follow the fence and make his way toward the home's main entrance. After about some ten paces, he spied Buang matching his steps on the road outside.. The Malay next stopped at a low, six-inch-high marker on their side of the road. There was an exact duplicate on the opposite side. It obviously marked an underground drainage system from Melrose which passed underneath the road.. Buang suddenly jumped behind the marker on their side of the road into a tangled mass of grass growing profusely behind it, and appeared, almost instantaneously inside Melrose. The "drop" in fact brought the home's drains level with the public drainage system outside. Thomas realised that if one were not "in the know", one would never have guessed that the grass hid a "secret entrance" into Melrose.

"Hey that's handy!" Thomas blurted out, excited at the prospect of having a hidden passage leading outside Melrose, which no one, except, of course the Malay servants, knew about. It appealed to his sense of adventure.

"This my secret, I s'ow you — all Malay boy, girl, here know this. Leave dog, follow me," Buang instructed.

The young lad commanded "Peter", his dog, to "stay", and leapt into the recess after Buang, as the Malay youth disappeared under the Melrose fence. Thomas found himself in a concrete box-like structure, with the last strand of barbed-wire fence immediately over his head. He stooped under it as he had seen the Malay do, and found himself outside Melrose, looking up at the road level. There was a faint smell of 'drain' mixed with that of the grass growing profusely around the culvert-entrance. Looking beyond the form of Buang ahead of him, he saw a long tunnel in front, and blue sky at the end of it. He suddenly realised that the edge of the road fell away to a lower-level field of tapioca tress planted by the Malay servants of Melrose. Buang wriggled inside the tunnel under the road, and Thomas

followed. They came out onto a grassy slope that fell-away to the field of tapioca which he had earlier noticed. Surprisingly the underground ditch had been "clean". Their tunnel became a drain again, in the open, and continued through the tapioca trees, up to and beyond the hedged property of a terraced-house which was the office of the British Army Kinema Corporation.. Thomas saw a vast "pasture" of fruit trees, tapioca plants and "Flame of the Forest" trees which had bright-red flowers.

"Good-eh", Buang said with pride, as Thomas' enthusiasm for the scene around him shone through his eyes, "many t'ing I s'ow you, next-time I s'ow fish, Eenglees call 'Rainbow fish', in big-drain, we catch with punkis ,(Malay: workman's wicker-shovel), OK Jonie, OK?"

The Malay lad had both his thumbs up in front of his face, to emphasise his pride, hoping that the English child would agree with him. Seeing Buang's hopeful look of anticipated concurrence to his question, Thomas nodded his agreement.

"I'd like that, he replied, "but we'd better be getting back now." He kept wondering what a punkis was.

"Peter", his dog, wasn't anywhere in sight when he got back under the fence at Melrose. He came across the creature gambolling with "Simon" and Kay under the porch of the home's main building. He decided against relating his morning's adventures with Buang, in case Kay kicked up an unnecessary fuss and matron overheard it from her 'usual' place at the balcony.

His Malay playmate didn't meet him, as agreed, on the following morning because Buang's father, Ahmad, had collared him to help in the garden. Father and son used their wicker-shovels to clear the earth dug from some flower-beds and Thomas overheard them referring to the shovels, and finally comprehended what a punkis was. When Ahmad, Buang's father, wasn't around, much later, Thomas new friend told him that he would show him where the durian 'fell' within the grounds of Melrose.

The next day he pointed them out. There were five durian trees, three soared skywards behind the home's kitchens, and two grew in the front belukar ,(Malay: secondary jungle). The Malay lad indicated where the prickly fruit were growing near the top of each tree, almost fifty feet in the air, with his thumb, (later Buang would explain to his friend that the Malay always pointed with his thumb and not a finger, because it was considered rude to indicate anything with one's finger), and explained to his young,curious friend that the durian was well-liked by the Malays, because it was a Malay fruit, but the Chinese, who also liked them, paid a lot of money for them, and as a result the durians sold in the market were exorbitantly-priced. Young Siddon couldn't understand the significance of



what his friend was trying to tell him, but he would when he was much older, and he would remember it was Buang who had. But that day he was more curious to know how the fruit were got at, since they seemed to grow so high up in the air. Buang laughed in derision. The fruit fell of their own when they were ripe, everyone knew that. But when would anyone know when the fruit would fall, insisted the curious Thomas. The Malay appeared thoughtful, then glancing at his young friend said:

"When monkey come from Tanglin, (referring to the Botanic Gardens by the district-name), durian ripe."

The young White boy instinctively felt that his friend wasn't being at all truthful but held his peace. It just didn't make sense, there had to be trees all over the island and there weren't enough monkeys in Singapore, conveniently at hand, to throw down the durian. In the meantime Buang waxed enthusiastic about the fruit, and promised Thomas untold delights when the lethal-looking durian fell down and were ready for eating because he would save one for him to sample. So, Thomas thought to himself, the fruit weren't flung down by monkeys, Buang was acting the silly goat again. His Malay friend warned him though, that many orang puteh, (Whites), didn't quite like the smell, the ripe fruit gave. Hearing this Thomas was intrigued, and promised himself that he would, one day, get a taste of the exotic fruit the first chance he got.

Buang next brought him to the undergrowth in front of Melrose and pointed out the mangosteen trees growing in profusion within. He told the young boy to make his own way into the belukar and they would meet at a pre-arranged spot. They did this because they didn't want the home to catch them together, since their fraternising was frowned down upon. The young boy readily agreed as he didn't see eye to eye with the home's policy.

The spot Buang had chosen was under a mangosteen tree where the belukar grew thickest. As Thomas arrived under its heavy foliage Buang suddenly grabbed hold of a close-at-hand-branch and shook it vigorously. Angry kerenga, (Malay: giant red ants), rained down on young Thomas' head, face and shoulders, biting deep and painfully wherever they landed on bare skin. His face, scalp and arms burned hot with a searing fire. Despite the pain coursing through his body, young Siddon bent down, picked up a stone and flung it at his tricky friend, who, laughing in glee at his plight, easily evaded the missile. Angry now, Thomas calmly began picking off the maddened red 'devils' whose fiery-bites were shooting shivers of pain through him. The gouging-bites were becoming unbearable but he somehow withstood the discomfort and continued picking off the insects, leaving some of their heads still embedded in his skin.

"Eh, no pain!" exclaimed Buang incredulously as Thomas coolly rid himself of the biting insects. But the young boy knew what he was going to do. When he had finally cleared his body of all the ants, save one, he swiftly stepped close to his friend and smoothly placed the enraged ant under the youth's collar. The kerenga bit deep and Buang bellowed in pain and fright. The White child had not been so stupid.

"Can't take your own medicine then?" Thomas remarked cynically as he smiled in scorn. His own bites were still glowing all over his body but he wasn't about to give any indication of it to the Malay.

Buang looked hard at the 'green-horn' six-year-old he had thought was too dumb and wouldn't have been able to withstand the red-ant bites. He wasn't bodoh, (Malay: stupid), so he would have to be trickier, the next time. Buang brought Thomas further into the 'bush' to see how he would fare with mosquitoes. He first distracted Thomas by telling him about the old war-time shelters still within the belukar, which got the boy interested, and they waded deeper into the undergrowth. Now mosquitoes buzzed about their ears, and the six-year-old could feel them starting to become troublesome. He swatted at the dive-bombing pests but more just seemed to be attacking him. Suddenly he recalled waiting for his mother outside the gates to Sime Road Internment Camp. That part of his life, that he'd thought had slipped away for good, but it now came crowding back to the surface of his mind. He was again isolated and defenceless and the mosquitoes were unbearable. He suddenly caught sight of Buang studying him guardedly, a faint smile of triumph playing at the corners of his mouth, and he snapped back to reality, nauseated at the sight of mosquitoes alighting on Buang's face, taking sips from his skin, as the Malay nonchalantly brushed away those that came too close to his eyes. Otherwise he didn't seem bothered by them at all.

Thomas, by now had become maddened by the relentlessly-attacking mosquitoes and broke into a frenzied dance, striking helter-skelter in the air, trying hard to ward them off. The English child was no match for the tiny dive-bombers and Buang changed instantly.

"No Jonie, no scratch, wait bengka, (Malay: It will swell), this Malay secret, Malay no scratch nyamuk, (Malay: mosquito), bite, rub little O.K.." he advised.

Buang pulled him from the undergrowth back to the safety of the home's laundered grounds which were kept mosquito-free by regular fumigation. Though to Thomas the bites were stingingly-sharp, the Malay insisted that he didn't attempt to scratch them. He pointed to the spots Thomas had already scratched and the bumps beginning to appear. The six-year-old now

knew what *bengka* in Malay meant. He blew on the mosquito-bites as his friend directed him to, and gradually the discomfort began to wane and the bites that he hadn't touched had all but disappeared completely.

"The trouble with you is that you're always being funny just because I'm friendly. Well scram now — get lost!" he yelled at the Malay who wordlessly departed, leaving Melrose by the main entrance to return to the servants' quarters.

Jim, Eva and Jennifer Sturrock suddenly appeared on the scene.

"You seemed to be ticking-off that Malay, what'd he do?" Jim asked.

"The nit tricked me into being bit by red ants in there, (pointing to the undergrowth), and then by mosquitoes, and you know how matron's warned us about malaria and all that, so I told him to buzz off," said Thomas, realising that he had to give his friends the proper picture or get Buang into untold trouble for being with him.

"You should've warned him he'll be in real trouble if matron finds out he's been on the grounds when he's no call to be, and playing with you!"

"We don't want 'Singapore Foot' or hook-worms you're silly to encourage these 'natives'," the elder English boy said.

"He's alright, he just needed reminding to behave, that we're not stupid or something — anyway you three had nits in your hair when you first arrived in Singapore and Buang doesn't, and I was covered in sores from the war, so don't talk tripe about 'Singapore Foot'."

Thomas had directed his last missive at Jim Sturrock, in case Jim decided to get Buang in trouble. He still wanted to know where the fish in the drains were and Buang would tell him.

Jim next wanted to know what was so interesting about the 'bush', that he and the Malay had just come from, and Thomas pointed out the durian and mangosteen trees, and where the war-time shelters were located. Jennifer, the youngest Sturrock girl, immediately dashed into the lallang, eager to inspect the trees and war-time shelters up close. Thomas yelled a warning about the giant red ants that could fall on one unsuspectingly, and about the mosquitoes, but she seemed have turned a deaf ear. And, as if to spite him, Jim also followed his younger sister in, though Eva remained with him.

"Let them find out the painful way," was all she said as she tugged at his sleeve, and they strolled back to the house together. Eva and Thomas were just helping themselves to milk from the fridge at the back of the house when Jim and Jennifer came rushing in, hopping around, rubbing and scratching themselves desperately. Thomas helpfully gave them Buang's advice about not scratching their bites but Jim cast him a scathing look and dashed

upstairs, rubbing his limbs furiously. Jennifer suddenly looked at Thomas and abruptly stopped her scratching. He could see that she was close to tears and kindly advised:

"Rub the bites with your finger-tips, not your nails, c'mon Eva, give her a hand, blow on the bites, the discomfort will ease up soon and you'll not have so many welts."

Gradually Jennifer began to relax as the pain eased, and soon she was showing no sign of any discomfort.

"A shower will do us all good," said Thomas.

That evening at prayers Jennifer stood with Thomas, Kay and Eva, none the worse for the day's misadventure. Jim was in bed, the doctor had been sent for, and who had prescribed him a three-day rest in bed, and medication. Matron had also given everyone a lecture on the dangers lurking in the 'bush', especially from being bitten by poisonous tropical insects. Jim had been silly, she said, trying to explore it. No one was ever to venture in it any more. Thomas was extremely annoyed, hearing that, because from that day on whenever he went into the 'bush' he'd be committing a disobedient act. And he knew he would be visiting the undergrowth again and Jim's wilful refusal to heed his friendly advice, in the first place, had placed him in his predicament.

On 8th June 1946 the children were allowed to stay up and listen to the Victory Parade broadcast 'live' by the BBC from London. Among the persons from Malaya, (including Singapore), receiving the OBE was a Chin Peng, a Communist leader in the guerilla resistance force, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army, (MPAJA), that had fought the Japanese in the Malayan jungles during World War Two. Earlier that year, on 6th January, he was with 15 other leaders of the disbanded MPAJA who were awarded two medals by Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander on the steps of the Municipal Building, (City Hall). A native of Perak, Malaya, he was deputy to the then Secretary-General of the Malayan Communist Party, Lai Teck, a Vietnamese.

On 5th November the home celebrated "Guy Fawkes' Day". Matron helped them to make a 'guy' from old clothes stuffed with rags and newspapers. Thomas was fascinated to learn the story of the man who had plotted to blow up English Parliament several hundred years ago, and who had failed. The young boy found it curious that the English commemorated the day with a holiday. Although matron wouldn't allow the children out on the streets with their 'guy', (she had been horrified at Thomas' suggestion!), to ask for a 'penny for the guy', nurse placed their dummy in

an old pram, and the children pushed it around the grounds of Melrose singing:

Remember, remember, the fifth of November,  
Gunpowder, Treason and Plot!"

while Thomas and Kay shouted at the top of their lungs:

"Penny for the Guy! Penny for the Guy!"

Matron told them that the day was a school holiday in England and everyone went home from work in the evening to light bonfires in their gardens in which they placed their 'guy', lit fireworks and let off crackers. In Singapore, she said, it was celebrated privately as it was strictly an English holiday. She allowed the children to light "sparklers" but not fire-crackers, because the sound of their exploding was so like gunfire. There already was talk of "Communists" planning a "conflict" against the British, so soon after the recent world war with the 'Japos', Thomas overheard a White committee-member saying to Miss Looker,

Christmas that year in 1946, and for the next four years, would be memories that would remain with him the rest of his life. Matron told the children, that first Christmas at Melrose, that the home's annual Christmas party was always held on 23rd December, and that, sometimes, some of the former children who had grown up and left Melrose, would come back for a visit on that day. Everyone was to write a letter to Santa Claus by 15th December, telling him exactly what they wished for Christmas, and, providing the request wasn't too extravagant, a child's Christmas wish might come true. Thomas was thrilled. That first year he asked for and received a tricycle. His mother never called, wrote or visited him but he wasn't missing her any more. His heart was now filled to overflowing with the love he received from matron and nurse. He was happy, well-fed, loved and cared for, and there was nothing to worry about.

On Christmas Eve, together with everyone else he placed a pillowcase at the foot of his bed for the additional presents, matron said Santa would be stuffing in it. It was stupendous, Thomas thought. Unbelievable. That night he lay awake all night, waiting impatiently for Santa to appear. Then when he thought Father Christmas wouldn't be making an appearance he saw matron walk in sometime in the wee hours and begin collecting everyone's pillowcase, except his. He was devastated. She had only glanced down at him, with his wide-open eyes, smiled, and walked away

without taking away his pillowcase! Omigosh, he thought to himself, matron's not taking my pillowcase for Santa, I won't be getting the extra prezzies. He finally dropped off, disappointed.

The excited sounds of pleasure coming from the other boys in the dormitory penetrated his sleep and his eyes flipped open. Instantly he recalled matron leaving the dormitory, the previous night, without his pillowcase. He was miserable. One of the twins, Albert Miller, called out to him:

"Hey Thomas aren't you going to see what Santa's given you?"

Causally he glanced down at the bottom of his bed, half-expecting to see nothing and instead saw his familiar-looking pillowcase — crammed to the top, bursting with toys! His heart missed a beat. Matron had given him his first wonderful Christmas after all.

The dying days of that first year, and well into 1947 were an idyllic time for the children. Life at Melrose was full of love with no problem of any kind. Outside in Singapore there were long queues for rice which had to be obtained with a ration card. For Melrose it was an ordered world, with no inkling of the misery and being without, that many others, not so lucky, must have experienced.

Jim Sturrock and his sisters, Eva and Jennifer, finally began school at the British Army School at Alexandra in mid-1947. The school's opening had been delayed for several months because of a lack of teachers from Britain. Thomas, though, was still uninterested in attending the British-run institution. Jim, whenever they were all away from the adults, said that Thomas not wanting to attend the school had nothing to do with going to a local one, he was just bone-idle and matron was silly to put up with him.

After the incident of the mosquitoes the previous year, Buang stopped trying to catch Thomas out in any more crafty tricks and remained his 'secret' friend. Whenever they played together the young boy, now seven, would listen idly to the Malay youth's tales from the Malay World, surprised to learn of the previous rulers of Singapore before the coming of the British. "Sultans" Buang had called them, who had been buried on *Bukit Larangan*, (Malay: Forbidden Hill), on which the British had built their own fort and renamed Fort Canning. Sometimes Buang would forget himself and call Thomas *anak harimau*, (Malay: 'tiger's child', Malay derogatory aimed at the half-caste child of the English) but every time he did so he would check himself and address his young friend as 'jonie'. For years as he grew up in Singapore Thomas would wonder about the meaning behind the term but when Malay became his 'second' language, he would realise how cynical his childhood pal had been.

But from Buang he heard the stories of Singapore he had never come across in the vast collection of books in the Melrose library which had several books whose plots contained a Singapore background, but which were colonial. He learned of the names: *Tumasek*, the old Malay name of Singapore, which meant "sea town", of *Iskandar Shah*, *Mahmud Shah*, *Johor Lama*, and that Stamford Raffles, Singapore's founder, had installed one of two half-brothers on the throne of *Old Johor*, which used to be located on Riau, which is in Indonesia, in order to achieve the ceding of the island of Singapore to the British. None of the Malay names meant anything to him then but he was surprised at the disclosures of British craftiness, and though he did argue with Buang, refusing to accept any implication of British slyness, the sincere and matter-of-fact tone in the Malay boy's voice finally convinced him that he had learned an aspect of local history that rang true. As he grew up in Singapore he did make an honest attempt to verify the truth of Buang's words. In those early days of awakening awareness he started to look at his island home with 'new eyes'. He looked at the trees, at the birds about him. This was Malay land. Not British. The very idea seemed strange. Why did Buang and his family behave as if they were the *foreigners*?

The first inkling that the English gossip about Communist agitation was accurate came from press reports that the Communist Party of Malaya had begun a wave of strikes up and down Malaya and Singapore as a prelude to violent action in early 1947. The MCP first suffered a setback in March of that same year when their Secretary-general from 1939 to 1947, a Vietnamese called Lai Teck, alias Wong Kim Geok, alias 'Comrade Wright', alias 'Mr Lighter', was exposed as a treble-agent of the French, British and Japanese. He was supposed to have had an Eurasian or European forebear and could thus carry the pseudonym 'Comrade Wright' with credibility. He had been an informer of the French in Indochina from the mid-1930s until the French introduced him to the British in 1936, with a view to infiltrating him into the ranks of the MCP. His first move into the MCP was to stabilise the then shaky-ground of the Party which had become unstable due to the confessions of one Joseph Ducroux, (Le Franc), a French Communist arrested by the colonial British Special Branch in Singapore in 1931 because of his associations with the Nanyang, (South Seas), Communist Party. Lai Teck gained the party's respect and confidence in 1937 when he helped organise a campaign to boycott Japanese goods in Singapore and Malaya against Britain's posture of neutrality at the start of the Sino-Japanese war, and removed opposition to his bid for power by getting key rivals arrested by the British, and became Secretary-general of the MCP in 1939. In 1941,

after the Japanese had already invaded Malaya from the north, the Governor in Singapore, Sir Shenton Thomas, released all political prisoners and Lai Teck arranged for 165 Communist-cadres, (which would form the nucleus of the Malayan Peoples Anti-Japanese Army), to be trained to fight what they saw as the enemy of China — the invading Japanese. The fight would be waged together with the 'stay behind' parties of British, Chinese, (all of whom were Kuomintang supporters), and Malay volunteers who together made up Force 136. Subsequently this 'co-operation' proved ineffectual due to Lai Teck's directive to his MCP-members not to work together with the Chinese Kuomintang members of Force 136.

During World War Two Lai Teck had also been a Japanese informer and would slip frequently into Singapore to make his reports to his new masters, the Japanese, as well as visit his two wives. Within six months of the Japanese occupation of the peninsula he arranged for a meeting with some ninety members of his party's central executive committee at the Batu Caves, some eight miles from Kuala Lumpur, where the Japanese were waiting. About 20 were killed outright and the remaining seventy captured. In 1944 he helped set up the trap that led to the capture of Lim Bo Seng, the Kuomintang activist, at Ipoh, Perak, and his subsequent imprisonment at Batu Gajah Gaol. This heroic Force 136 officer, after the Japanese invasion of China in 1937, joined the Chinese Mobilisation Council, a volunteer group set up in Singapore by Tan Kah Kee, the philanthropist, for China Relief. Lim Bo Seng was an ardent supporter of the Kuomintang Government of China, and had close connections with its top command. He was born in 1909 in Nan Ann, near Amoy in China, and came to Singapore in 1925 with his father who had come to set up a biscuit factory. He was admitted, that same year, into the Raffles Institution. He married a Nonya who spoke only Malay and English. After the war his remains were found and brought back to Singapore to be honoured at a ceremony at the Padang, and flanked by armoured cars and a guard of honour of Chinese and British troops of Force 136 was buried in a grave on a hillock overlooking the MacRitchie Reservoir.

But Lai Teck's days were already numbered. A Vietnamese waiter had reported to members of the MCP that he had seen the traitorous treble-agent dining with Japanese kempeitai-men in Singapore. Investigations were initiated secretly while the war-time informer was away from Singapore in December 1946 for a briefing in Hong Kong by General Fong Feng of the Chinese Communist Party. He returned to Kuala Lumpur and issued a directive to the MCP central committee that the Party would refrain from armed insurrection; would rely on united front tactics; would limit its



demands to self-government so long as the British Labour Party was in office; and would look to the Communist Party of Great Britain, (not China!), for both aid and guidance. To play for time, the central committee endorsed the directives. In March 1947 Lai Teck was charged with treachery and ordered to face a tribunal. He instead misappropriated the entire funds of the Party, was given facilities by the British to depart Singapore, and absconded. He was reportedly assassinated in Hong Kong, as well as Bangkok.

Surprisingly the revelations of Lai Teck's treachery over more than a decade did not result in any major re-organisation of the Party. The only formal change was the appointment, at the age of 26, of Chin Peng, the Perak-born guerilla-leader as its new Secretary-general. The first thing he did was to visit Hong Kong and like Lai Teck, met with General Fong Feng who had a letter from Chou En-lai, to wit, that Chou was unfamiliar with the situation in Malaya and the likelihood of when it would be ripe for an armed insurrection in the peninsula. In the absence of a clear directive Chin Peng decided to pursue a policy of strike-action by the MCP-controlled trade unions, instigating some 300 major strikes in 1947 alone.

Elsewhere the stirrings of change in the region were commencing. In the Dutch East Indies, (Indonesia), bare miles from Singapore and Malaya, ever since 17th August 1945, when Soekarno and Dr Hatta had proclaimed an Indonesian republic to the reverberations from the explosion of the second atom-bomb in Japan, and took its blessing from the dying hand of the Japanese Empire, the peoples of the thirteen thousand, six hundred and seventy-seven islands had been waging a relentless struggle against their Dutch colonial masters to wrest the control from them of their various islands back into their own hands.

In fact prior to the complete surrender of the Japanese in the Dutch East Indies, there had been many instances of refusal on the part of the Indonesians to accept the return of Dutch hegemony over their islands. On 20th July 1945 Netherlands forces in the then Dutch East Indies began 'local military actions' at midnight to subjugate the would-be freedom-fighters. Dutch aircraft bombed and machine-gunned a train, towns and villages. But word of the Dutch reprisals leaked out and Holland was condemned in the United Nations. The issue was placed before the world body.

Indonesia became independent on 27th December 1949 but details of this mind-boggling event, ( for those times and in that part of the world), were never conveyed to the subject populations of Malaya and Singapore by the colonial-owned and managed press and radio. But the news ,however,

filtered down through the private grapevine of relatives both the Malays and Chinese had in the newly-born republic.

Thomas would sometimes 'overhear' Buang and his Malay friends, sons of the home's other servants, talking among themselves about the 'troubles' in the Dutch colony (Indonesia), referring to specific islands within that nation's grouping. Obviously his friend had re-assured the other youths of Thomas' friendship or else they considered him unknowledgeable about their language, and felt safe speaking in his presence. They had been wrong, he did speak some Malay, though he had never let on.

Years later, in his adulthood, when he understood "more", he would recall the heated discussions behind the home's garage where the Malay youths used to congregate. The Malays at Melrose had wondered whether they too could ever achieve independence from the British. Some felt their position in Singapore in relation to the **Malay World** surrounding them was unique. Some were descended from the Bugis who had come from Riau at the invitation of Temenggong Abdul Rahman, some were descended from the Melayu Orang Laut, the 'pirates' of old, and there were those who were the offspring of Malays from Malacca who had come with the British themselves, as well as the Javanese who had settled the island since the time of Raffles, and since the Japanese Occupation. Singapore had been ceded to the British in perpetuity, and incoming hordes of non-Malay immigrants who had come at the invitation of the 'new owners' had transformed the place into a multiracial society.

In future years Thomas would reflect on the 'position' of the various immigrant communities on Singapore should the British ever depart, though, at the time of his Malay friends' discussions and later, the thought never struck him. But he would think again of the Chinese, Tamils, Pakistanis, and Sikhs, as well as the Eurasians of British, Dutch and Portuguese descent, and reflect on what they thought their 'position' was in the former Malay island, and where their loyalties lay. For the Chinese and Indians then the answer appeared straightforward. Their forefathers had come from China and India respectively, and should life in the British colony in 'the Malays' change radically they could all return to their mother-countries. The English-Eurasian looked toward Britain and a Whiteman's way-of-life, and looked down on the 'natives'. They erroneously thought that the colonial British would side with them in any 'confrontation' with the Malays and the Chinese.

The Eurasian had yet to realise that insofar as his being part-White was concerned, it was a dispassionate British attitude, and a constitutional view, that after the first "mixed" generation, subsequent "mixed" generations

were not regarded as part-White but "native". The Eurasians of British, Portuguese and Dutch descent in "the Malays" of the colonial era had conveniently chosen to forget their Malay or other Asian 'heritage', and merely remembered White forebears and a western life-style. And for subsequent generations of Eurasians there were memories only of White ancestors. Thomas Siddon would mentally question this later in adulthood, when he had a better picture of his mixed-community but, inevitably, he would arrive at the same conclusion — how could the Eurasians of 'the Malays' remember Malay or other forebears when their own maternal "links" were themselves "mixed" and several generations removed from their own original Asian roots, having been raised as Christians, practising a White life-style, instead of their Asian ancestors' religions and cultures?

And the word "native" to the British meant just one thing — the subject, coloured inhabitants of their colonies who they considered inferior and alien because of skin-colour, features, way-of-life, religions and cultures. For while the British were mainly Church of England and never tried to proselytize, they had allowed in French and Portuguese Roman Catholic priests and other missionaries, to "spread" their respective Christian faiths, as well as allow the respective Asian religions to flourish in 'the Malays'.

Much to matron's horror Thomas still preferred to attend local school, and in January 1948 he was admitted into the morning session of the recently-opened St Joseph's Institution in Bras Basah Road, a Roman Catholic mission-school run by the De La Salle Brothers, a lay Catholic order. He was admitted to Primary One. There was a shortage of schools on the island then, and each educational institution had two separate sessions, one in the first half of the day, from seven-thirty in the morning till one-thirty in the afternoon, and a second school session from one-forty-five to five-thirty in the late afternoon. There were a large number of children seeking an education, and apart from those of Thomas' age there were others who had 'missed' their 'schooling' during the war-years, as well as those who had had theirs interrupted. It was decided that the best arrangement was to allow children to cram into rooms really too small to sit them all in comfortably and to promote the 'clever' ones as quickly as possible.

A school-van, donated to the home by an English motor firm in Orchard Road, conveyed the Melrose children to and from their respective schools everyday. Their gardener, Ahmad, whom the children called "syce-kebun", became the driver. He always dropped the girls attending the St Margaret's School on Sophia Road, at the Orchard Road Circus, (a round-a-bout), in front of the armed English sentries guarding the entrance to the Governor's mansion, (today it has been renamed the "Istana Negara" in Malay, meaning "National Palace").

Kay and the other Church of England girls attending St Margaret's would pass the serious-looking English soldiers who would allow them onto the grounds of the palace because the girls were English as well. The schoolgirls would walk up the slight slope from Orchard Road and three-quarter-way-up, turn off the main roadway of the palace toward a revolving-type side-gate that permitted one person through at a time, into Sophia Road. Kay told Thomas later that her school had previously been owned and run by an eccentric Englishwoman in the early 1900s who had also run a boarding section on the premises. She had called her school by the weird name of 'Church of England, Zion, Methodist School', and the local "loafers" who lived in the vicinity kept teasing all the St Margaret's schoolgirls by yelling after them, whenever the girls were on their way to or from the school: "...Chimpanzee, Elephant, Zebra, Monkey School..." after the initials of the former name of the school. She said she was awfully pleased the school-name had been changed to St Margaret's. The former owner must have been 'loony', she said. Thomas felt a vague stirring in his memory. He faintly recalled his mother telling him, a long time ago in Sime Road, that his late father had told her about his English relative, an aunt, who had established a school for girls in Singapore, next-door to the governor's mansion, a long time ago. But he wasn't sure, and dismissed it from his mind.

The Roman Catholic girls were dropped off at the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus in Victoria Street, opposite the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd. Thomas got off at the Queen Street-Bras Basah Road junction for St Joseph's, and the other boys were dropped-off further down Queen Street to get to St Anthony's Boys' School. Jim, Eva and Jennifer Sturrock were picked up by a British Army 3-ton truck from Melrose for the British Army School at Alexandra, ever since they had begun school in 1947.

Thomas discovered that he was a year older than the 'normal' school-entry age but didn't feel the odd one out as there were others of his age in the same class. In fact throughout the whole school there were boys too old for the particular standard they had been admitted to. There was a sense of urgency to get the older pupils through their studies in the shortest possible time without jeopardising standards, so that these 'senior' boys and girls could enter the working stream as quickly as possible as it was in sore need of 'educated' workers who were colloquially referred to as 'clerical officers'. The colonial administration was also finalising arrangements for local schools to prepare eligible students to sit the University of Cambridge school-leaving examinations. The "gap" of the war-torn years had to be bridged as swiftly as possible.

Within a few days of school Thomas' class teacher, a Chinese lady called Miss Leong, discovered, by chance, that he read fluently. He had become bored with the repetitious chanting of each letter of the alphabet, during 'reading lesson-time', and had put aside his reader to devour an Enid Blyton story. She had come up from behind, pointed to a word in his book as the others were still chanting their letter-sounds, by rote, and discovered that he read well. She had walked away without a word, carrying on taking the class through the basic-reading lesson while Thomas guiltily put away his story book and joined in with the others. She called him to her desk, afterward, and got him to read out the names of his classmates from the class-register. He did so, stumbling at first, at some of the strange-sounding Chinese, Indian and Malay names, (to him), and she put him in charge of taking attendance everyday, even though his classmates tittered whenever he mispronounced their names in his English-accent.

He found it strange to find so many of his classmates' mothers, grandmothers or servants hovering outside the classroom, looking in with anxious eyes. Miss Leong had attempted to ignore these adults, despite their distraction of her pupils but Thomas had noticed her look of complete disgust, and sometimes resignation when she thought no one was looking. He wondered why she just didn't shoo the pack of women from the class-doorways, where they usually crowded, looking in on their respective child. When he grew into adulthood and understood more about Asian 'face' he would realise that if his class-teacher, Miss Leong, had attempted to tell these women to leave the classroom-area, it would have been tantamount to her blatantly insulting them to their face, which was never done.

Recess, the mid-morning break in school, was pure pandemonium. In the first two weeks of school, the moment the school-bell rang for lessons to stop for the break-time, lessons would come to an abrupt halt as chalks in children's hands were flung to the ground, slates dropped from hands clutching them, books banged shut, and children began bawling for parental attention. Miss Leong who would be completely ignored, would sigh, gather up her books hurriedly and quickly depart the class as a horde of relatives and servants immediately descended on their respective children.

Moist, cool-looking hand-towels would be whipped out and young, pampered faces wiped clean of the morning grime and heat. Tiffin-carriers, brimful with succulent meat, fish, eggs and fluffy-rice would be taken out and each child spoon-fed by a doting relative or servant. Thomas noticed that every single pampered child was Chinese. It crossed his mind that they were the biggest lot of "softies" he had ever met.

For those school children who did not have a relative or servant to cater

for them, recess was a fight of the fittest at the tuck-shop, in order to obtain any kind of refreshment or nourishment. It could have been the recent war, or the way they had been brought up, but those in the tuck-shop appeared not to have any regard for one another. The place was chock-a-block with boys of every possible age and size, fighting their way to be in front of the foodstall of their choice to place an order. He sometimes saw children of his own age and height literally come flying out of the melee, shoes missing, shirts torn, and crying because they had lost their pocket-money in the scuffling. He was always glad Melrose had packed him a biscuit or sandwich snack everyday because he didn't relish having to fight and claw his way daily against the surging mass of schoolboy arms and legs. Anyway he preferred drinking fresh water from the school-taps in the toilet, though he did feel annoyed at the way the local boys, again mainly Chinese, poked fun at him for this.

Finally, as things became so bad during recess, Brother Ignatius, a Canadian, divided the school-break into two sessions — one for the very young boys at the original time, and a second one for the older ones, a half-hour later. Apparently teachers like Miss Leong had also complained about the army of relatives and servants hovering about the classroom doors, because these people were instructed by the Canadian, personally, to wait for their respective children at the school tuck-shop.

St Joseph's Institution was in complete contrast to life at Melrose. Thomas hated school. He disliked the undue competitive atmosphere and the habit of comparison his classmates had about practically everything. For the first time in his life he became aware of race as he heard boys of different ethnic-groups refer to one another by the slang-derogatory for each other's race. He heard words like "Chink", "Ker-ling-kiah", (Chinese derogatory for the Indian and a mispronunciation of "Kling", an Indian word which once described a warrior-tribe from India, or the 'clink' of chains worn by Indian convicts from India when Singapore was also a penal-colony), "Mah-lye-kiah", (Chinese derogatory for the Malay), "Chap-cheng-kiah", (Chinese derogatory for the Eurasian), and "Ang-moh-kiah", (Chinese derogatory for any White). His local vocabulary was increasing rapidly. He found the referring to one another by race-terms, both disturbing and distasteful. And while his classmates spoke English to him, he never fully understood what was being conveyed. The terminology was 'new', the 'slang' foreign, the pronunciation strange and the accents alien. Getting an education was important but how he wished he had listened to matron and chosen to school at the British Army School at Alexandra.

He looked forward to returning home to Melrose everyday. Life there was sedate and civilised. Apart from his weekly cub meetings at the British Army School at Alexandra on Wednesday afternoons, he also learned ballet and singing. His English singing teacher, Mrs Bones, who came twice a week to Melrose, had mentioned to Miss Looker that she and her husband would like to adopt him and take him back to England when they finally returned. But he would have none of it. He said it would have to be up to his mother, knowing full well that she would never agree. His mother, Luci, since he had been in Melrose for over a year, had visited him irregularly because she was working as a housekeeper on a rubber estate just outside the village called Ayer Hitam in Johore, Malaya. During her last trip to Singapore and a visit to him, she had confided that she was engaged to the estate manager, an Englishman called Lionel Jeffries. And she had said that Jeffries had wanted to legally adopt him and take him to England when his contract expired, and after she and Jeffries had gotten married. He knew his mother would never agree to his being adopted by Mrs Bones and her husband, and he was content in his English world of Melrose.

Alarming events in Singapore, beginning around mid-June 1948, had the population in Melrose filled with unease as they overheard matron and the management committee members discuss the 'Communist trouble'. This 'bother' had begun not long after the end of the Second World War, when the Japanese had surrendered, for want of an identifiable enemy to the MPAJA, because the British were no where in sight, and the MPAJA's masters, the Malayan Communist Party, had anticipated playing an 'important role' in the politics of Malaya, (which included Singapore), but instead, found themselves in a diminished position, with no participation at all in the administrative life of the country because the returned British had cleverly curtailed their 'sting' by having them surrender their war-issued weapons, back to them. Since the MCP always stressed the 'absolute necessity' of complete control of the trade unions and thus the economic well-being of a society, the Party went ahead and formed the General Labour Union in October 1945, a month after the Japanese surrender. And branches sprang up all over the Malay peninsula and Singapore, preempting the unions that would be set up by the colonial government.

The MCP still smarted from the British strategy in getting them to hand over their war-issued weapons, and an opportunity presented itself to cock a snook at the British in the form of a court trial of one Soong Kwong, the general-secretary of the Selangor branch of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army who had been charged with threatening a Chinese family for collaborating with the Japanese during the war, and demanding \$300,000

as compensation otherwise they would be killed. In two previous hearings Soong had been found not guilty by the jury comprised of locals, who were fearful for their own personal safety, and despite the fact that the British judge had disagreed with the findings because of the weight of evidence against Soong. At a third trial with a British judge and an all-British jury Soong was found guilty and sentenced to four years imprisonment. The General Labour Union and its affiliates went on strike, bringing all business and transport services to a halt for two days in Singapore. The British Military Administration was forced to release Soong.

Word had already leaked out that a Federation of Malaya was being contemplated by Britain in place of the Malayan Union. It was officially announced in October that new constitutional proposals were being formulated and a decision reached by the British cabinet, who would then send the proposals to MacDonald, Gent, the Sultans and UMNO in November, before they were presented to the other various communities in Malaya. In fact by September 1945 the MCP had already decided to show its hand even before the constitutional changes had been announced.

The draft constitution allowed for the centralisation of authority under a federal system but permitted the sultans, through the State Councils, to retain much of their former authority. The MCP could not accept matters as they stood, and, through their 'satellite', the Malayan Democratic Union, turned for support to anyone or any organisation who would show them the slightest bit of sympathy, for an essentially pro-Chinese cause wrapped up in all-Malayan colours — the asking for 'freedom', and the recognition for non-Malays to remain in Malaya, which was a safeguard for those 'alien' Chinese not wanting to be repatriated to a Kuomintang-controlled China. A new organisation, called the Malayan Council of Joint Action and headed by Malacca-born Tan Cheng Lok, the father of Tan Siew Sin, who would eventually play an important role in Malayan politics in the future, was formed. But it was an organisation which did not have the support of the local business circles, either Chinese, Indian, Straits Chinese nor those 'alien' Chinese who still were staunch supporters of the Kuomintang Government of China. At the eleventh-hour meeting of the British-instigated Consultative Commission in January 1947 to seek non-Malay views on the proposed Federation of Malaya, Mr Tan Cheng Lok was not invited to sit on the commission, and, consequently the Council boycotted the meeting. The Council called for a 'hartal', (a peaceful work stoppage), which had a slight response from several quarters, among them the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce to protest the exclusion of Singapore from the Federation of Malaya but the hartal-idea was of no consequence.



With the onset of the federal constitution in February 1948, and Malay political power paramount in Malaya the MCP and its 'satellite', the Malayan Democratic Union, had nothing to offer, except so-called 'liberty' aimed solely at the Chinese, both local-born and immigrants. The Communists felt that a new political grouping was necessary, shorn of leftist leanings, with 'new' faces involved. But dramatic new events were soon to overtake any intended implementation of such a move. First, Gerald de Cruz, Secretary-general of the Pan-Malayan Council of Joint Action resigned on 10th February 1948, because, he complained, insufficient funds prevented him doing an adequate job. Tan Cheng Lock's son, Tan Siew Sin, accepted the nomination to become a member of the Federal Legislative Assembly. The MDU itself abstained from participating in the first Legislative Council Elections which were held in Singapore on 20th March 1948. In the same month, (March), at a meeting of the Fourth Plenum of the Malayan Communist Party central committee, it was agreed that the struggle for independence had to be a 'people's revolutionary war', and that the Party would 'revise' the decision it had made, soon after the end of the war, to cooperate with the British. The British should not be permitted to retain control over defence and external affairs. This 'new' direction, instigated mainly by the newly-appointed Chin Peng as Secretary-general of the MCP set the Party along an unswerving course of struggle against the British for the domination of the Malayan economy by utilising the unions as vehicles of anti-British propaganda. This was an extension of an existing strategy of disruption. At the time, one of the mainstays of Malaya's economy was its plantations — rubber, tea and palm-oil, wide-spread in many states though isolated and scattered, and mainly manned by European managers. The bulk of the workers on these plantations were semi-literate Tamils and Chinese, all of whom were under the powerful influence of the former members of the Indian National Army, and Chinese members of the war-time guerilla force, the MPAJA, that had come out of the jungles since peace-time. All these groups were also under the control of the General Labour Union of each state.

On 31st May 1948, the governments of Singapore and Malaya banned any federation of labour unions, except by trade, and decreed that trade union officials must have a minimum of three years' experience in labour organisations, thus removing overt Communist influence over the unions. The two governments also included a clause that enabled them to deport 'alien' Chinese, (those not born in Malaya, and who were in the majority) to Kuomintang-controlled China. This was a terrifying prospect, and left the MCP no option but to go for drastic measures. An emergency meeting

was held in Kuala Lumpur on 11th June 1948 to which leaders of the former MPAJA, from Pahang, Perak and Negri Sembilan attended, and where they were told by Party leaders to sell their property, destroy all records and prepare for evacuation to the jungles and hills. A State of Emergency, empowering the authorities to detain suspects without trial was declared in Perak and Johore on 16th June, following the cold-blooded murder of three European rubber estate managers. This was extended to include the whole of Malaya on 18th June. Singapore followed suit on 25th June. On 27th June the Singapore headquarters of the MCP, and the Communist-controlled Singapore Federation of Trade Unions were closed down. On 29th June 1948 the military wing of the MCP, the MPAJA, issued a call to arms to the peoples of Malaya and Singapore (which the Communists have always regarded as being part of Malaya), against the British. Malcolm MacDonald, the Commissioner-General in South-east Asia in a broadcast over Singapore radio revealed a deliberate MCP-plan to stage violent revolution throughout the length and breadth of Malaya and Singapore. He promised swift, punitive action, and warned that the expectation of life of a terrorist would be "...a matter of days ..." from the time of his capture. The Singapore Legislative Council, the colonial administration, conferred emergency powers on the Singapore Governor, Sir Franklin Gimson, on 13th July 1948. On 23rd July the respective administrations in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur simultaneously announced that the MCP and its affiliated organisations were outlawed. Eight thousand members of these illegal organisations went immediately underground. Philip Hoalim, Senior, the chairman of the Malayan Democratic Union, and another member, on 23rd June signed a statement dissolving the Union on the grounds that 'extraordinary powers acquired by the Federation government, and no doubt in due course by the Singapore government, makes free expression of political views impossible'. Some of the key individuals who had been involved in the Malayan Democratic Union, from the start, departed Singapore. Gerald de Cruz and his wife hitched-hiked through Asia and Europe, suffering poverty and hunger along the way until arriving in London where de Cruz became involved in working for British retarded and handicapped children. He eventually got a 'soapbox licence' for a stand at London's Hyde Park Corner where he publicly renounced Communism. Lim Hong Bee became the European representative of the MCP and remained in London. Lim Kean Chye escaped to China. Eu Chooi Yip fled to Indonesia, while Willie Kuok and G.R. Thumboo turned jungle bandits and were eventually killed by British troops.

The alarming events in Singapore, happening while the memory of World War Two was still fresh on everyone's mind, and Malcolm MacDonald's official statement over Singapore radio were taken seriously at Melrose. On the morning of 23rd July, while Mrs Kerr the nurse, was keeping an eye on some toddlers playing in the garden, a strange Chinese man wearing a "bush-jacket" walked onto the grounds of the home, on the far side from where everyone was, and quickly made his way to the grounds of the house of the owners who were forever abroad. To everyone witnessing this strange occurrence the sight of the stranger was abnormal. Melrose was the last house on Tomlinson Road and anyone not connected with it would never venture onto its grounds uninvited, let alone use it as a convenient short-cut. As the man passed them on the far side everyone noticed that he had unconsciously adjusted his jacket which had come loose and everybody had become aware of the bulge in his pants' waistband, underneath the jacket. When the man got to the barbed-wire fence he parted several strands and slipped through, and as he did so his jacket fell open to reveal the butt of a pistol tucked into his waist. All the children called out in alarm and just then matron coincidentally popped her head out of her balcony, as was her habit, and she too spied the stranger.

"That man has a gun!" shouted a child who had seen matron looking out from her usual place on her balcony. Miss Looker reacted instinctively. She dialled the police at the Orchard Road Police Station and dashed downstairs. She saw nurse and demanded whether she too had seen the stranger and his gun. Nurse Kerr confirmed it. The whole of Melrose was agog. At that moment matron realised that she hadn't verified facts first before summoning the police, and began to feel embarrassed.

Just then a police Landrover, a British officer in the front seat, next to the Malay police driver and the back of the vehicle filled with Malay policeman, screamed into the driveway. The British officer grilled nurse, going over details repeatedly, verifying every point meticulously. On the Englishman's crisp instructions the Malay constables fanned out from the home's fence, from where the man had slipped through into the next-door estate. A second group of Malay policemen suddenly appeared on the far end of the next-door property and met the first group in the centre of the estate, confirming that there was no one on the grounds any more.

Matron, in the meantime felt chastened, thinking that she had acted impulsively without first verifying facts but the British officer reassured her that her actions were commendable. In fact that very morning an official order had been received at his police station to anticipate trouble from the 'terrorists'. The circular had warned that an alert had been initiated as the

Malayan Communist Party had organised a plan to start an insurrection, beginning that day. In fact that very evening an important announcement was being made over the radio, and he requested everyone to listen as it was of the utmost importance. What nurse and the children had seen was a valuable "tip-off". It confirmed the seriousness of the Communist situation, and that the reports of planned armed agitation were accurate, he said. Matron breathed a sigh of relief.

Several constables remained behind in case the armed stranger put in another appearance. On his return from school that afternoon, Thomas was sorely disappointed to have missed "all the fun". That evening the whole home sat up to listen to the broadcast on the Communist threat, and that the MCP and its affiliates had been outlawed.

Thomas tried discussing the "terrorist threat" with his classmates on the following morning in school but no one seemed interested or the least bit bothered by what he was going on about. He tried bringing up the world war and the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, and the only response he got was from a Chinese classmate who told him that his grandmother had told him that it had been dangerous to have a tattoo of a swallow or of five dots in a specific pattern at the base of the thumb, as the Japanese had considered them insignia of the Chinese Nationalist Party, (the Kuomintang), then. Disgusted by his classmates' apparent lack of interest in the Singapore "troubles" looming on the horizon, he dropped the subject.

At the end of 1948 the Malayan Communist Party changed the name of its fighting arm, from the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army to the Malayan Races Liberation Army, echoing Mao'tse-tung's People's Liberation Army.

Ever since he had started at St Joseph's Institution, which was a Roman Catholic school, Thomas attended the daily morning Catechism classes which all the Catholic boys had to go to learn about their religion. Because he was already eight the lay brother in charge of the Catechism class told him that he had to prepare for his first Holy Communion at the French Mission Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Good Shepherd in Bras Basah Road, as he had been baptised there. When it came time for him to receive this first sacrament of his religion, he was sorely disappointed that his mother had to be away in her job as a housekeeper in Ayer Hitam and couldn't witness his receiving the body-and-blood of Christ in Holy Communion for the first time, as she was the one who always harped about her religion, which was his as well. But he prayed fervently everynight for her safety against Communist-terrorist reprisal against Eurasians like her for working for a White plantation manager. He had heard that the

Communists not only shot the English planters and their families but their Eurasian workers as well, who they considered part-White. What a paradox, Thomas felt, the English would not consider his mother as being even part-White because she was dark-looking and generations removed from a pure-White ancestor, yet the Chinese Communists would kill her for the slight trace of White-blood which coursed through her veins.

A Melrose management committee-member, John Ford, and his sister Mary, who both visited the home every Sunday, on their first evening kindly told him that his mother was safe at Ayer Hitam, ever since the "troubles" began because the plantation manager had hired an 'army' of security guards to patrol the estate including the main house. Hearing this young Thomas released his breath in a long sigh of relief, and everyone realised he had been worried about his mother's welfare all the time.

When school re-opened in 1949 Thomas was promoted to primary two for a week, and then transferred to standard two, skipping two class-levels in between. School now became tougher and he was out-of-his depth in arithmetic. And try as he would, throughout his entire school-life, from then, he would 'fight' a losing battle with the entire field of mathematics. And he received no sympathy from his teachers who had expected better of him, since he was already well-known among them as being able to read even before he had joined the school. But he excelled the others in his class in all the other subjects, especially English grammar and composition, and was even invited to write his own short story of two thousand words, which he composed in less than a week and which he read aloud to the class.

A group of Jewish children joined Melrose from Jakarta. They had departed Indonesia because of the 'independence trouble' in the country and would be returning to Israel, the new Jewish state that was being set up in Arabia. The children's parents had requested their being allowed to stay at the home until the arrangements for their journey, with their respective parents were finalised. Alec Manesseh became his friend. The Jewish boy liked to box and boasted that his father used to be a prize-fighter in his youth, in Jakarta, and all his father's 'know-how' had been passed on to him. Within hours of their getting to know one another Alec began egging him to a friendly 'spar' with open-palms instead of fists, since there weren't any gloves Thomas grinned his agreement as it was going to be an innocent exchange of slaps. He waded in, only to be slammed back by a hard fist to his chest. Gasping in hurt surprise he went in again, only to be knocked back by Alec's wicked right-hand as he smiled mockingly at Thomas. The Siddon boy grew hot all over, rushed in, caught the Jewish lad by the waist, flung him to the ground and threw himself on top of him. Alec tried ridding

himself of the other's weight but Thomas hung on grimly. He was going to show his new 'friend' that he wasn't 'easy meat'.

Kay Gordon suddenly turned up, and to Thomas' complete shock bade Alec and him goodbye! She told them she was leaving Melrose for Canada, that day, and her mother would be arriving 'in a minute'. Her eyes were red and 'weepy'. Thomas clambered off Alec's chest, saddened by the abrupt news of his best friend's impending departure. He was going to miss their daily evening games of "Rounders". Kay told him to look after "Simon", her dog, and swung away from them as he mutely nodded. A taxi arrived just then, pulled up under the porch and a glamorous head peeked out of the back window of the vehicle, while a manicured hand flurried a "hurry-up" to her daughter. The young girl, now seventeen, ran upstairs, appearing moments later with her luggage, which the taxi-driver placed in the boot of the taxi. Kay's face was streaming with tears as she climbed in the back of the car with her mother. As the taxi circumnavigated the gravel driveway of Melrose Thomas felt saddened that his pal since the war had not turned to wave him a final farewell.

That evening during the 'usual' games' time, Thomas was relieved when Alec suggested a new game, he called "Forfeits", instead of boring "Rounders". The young Siddon wouldn't have been able to play the 'old' game and he was glad when Alec made the suggestion. He duly offered his "token", as everybody else did, to the "forfeit-taker", who happened to be Alec's younger sister, Merle. She was to be blind-folded and the forfeits placed in front of her, and she would select a token and call out a 'forfeit' which the token's owner would have to accomplish or forfeit ownership of the token to the 'forfeit-taker', who happened to be Merle. Unknown to everybody Alec had worked out a signal with his sister, Merle, that whenever she chose a girl's token, Alec would cough and Merle would then call out a 'kiss' forfeit. The Jewish lad was confident that all the girls at Melrose would choose him should they ever be 'lumbered' with the 'kiss-forfeit'.

As the game progressed and Merle only chose boys' tokens and gave them such 'ordeals' as running round the garden a certain number of times or collecting fallen leaves within a certain period, Thomas gradually grew aware of Alec's barely-concealed excitement and impatience, and began suspecting that he was up to something. The first girl's token chosen finally, was Eva's. But when she was given the 'kiss forfeit', she calmly walked over to Thomas and planted a smacker on his startled lips in full view of everybody. Eva had openly shown that she liked him a lot. When the next girl received a similar 'kiss forfeit', she followed Eva's example by kissing

Thomas. And everyone gasped when Eva grew furious, smacked the girl, and demanded that she not kiss him again, much to the amusement of the others and the embarrassment of young Siddon. Alec looked exceedingly unhappy. Afterwards when the game was over he sidled over to Thomas and warned him not to be conceited because Eva had kissed him, since it was only a silly game.

Manasseh was quick-witted and sharp, always seeking to outsmart everyone else. He attended the St. Anthony's Boys' School in Queen Street, together with two other boys from Melrose. His school-satchel bulged everyday with the comic-books he'd con from his classmates, who were always falling into his 'trap' of taking bets with him, and losing. He seemed to have a poor opinion of them because he was forever referring to them as 'idiots'. Thomas, Jim Sturrock and Alec became chums and it appeared that Alec liked to share the 'read' of the comic books he'd tricked from his Chinese classmates, with the other two. After that first day of "Forfeits", when Eva had shown that she liked Thomas best, Alec would only allow Thomas a 'read' of his comics after Thomas first agreed to "purchase" the 'read' of them for a "fee". And Alec would always demand a promissory-note first. Thomas thought him mindlessly vindictive and silly, because he knew he would never pay up, but agreed to the 'arrangement, just the same, to salve the outraged feelings of the Jewish boy.

Before the arrival of Alec and the other Jews from Indonesia, Jim and Thomas were close pals. Alec saw this and tried to drive a wedge between them. One of his tricks, which failed, was to allow Jim 'first read' of the comics and to get Thomas to collect them from the English boy afterward. Unknown to him, Jim and Thomas would read the comics together before settling down to read whichever current book they were then reading. Jim preferred self-help books, and at that time was gleaning as much as he could on the finer points of swimming. Thomas liked adventure stories. The Sturrock lad had promised the other two that he would show them how to "float", the next time the Melrose-crowd went on one of their regular swimming outings to the Katong Park, which was on the east coast of the island. The opportunity came several weeks later when it was a public holiday and Nurse Kerr took the whole Melrose-crowd in the home's school-van to the Amber Road 'pool' which was in the Katong Park. The 'pool' was an enclosed space in the sea, formed by a series of wooden stakes driven into the seabed, an inch apart, permitting sea-water and nothing larger than a tiddler to flow through. On top of the stakes was a kind of 'walkway', made of concrete, which went along the 'pool's' edge, circumnavigating it. It was convenient for the more daring among the

swimmers to walk to the far end of the walkway and dive from there into the 'pool's' deeper water. Fishing enthusiasts used the 'walkway' to fish the open waters outside the enclosure.

When the Melrose-crowd got to the 'pool', Jim took his friends away from the rest and began to show them the strokes for the "Crawl". Alec wanted to learn more, while Thomas concentrated on mastering the first few strokes he had learned that day. The Jewish boy kept pestering Sturrock and finally in exasperation he nodded his agreement, signalling for the other two to follow him to the deeper-end of the pool. Some sixth sense held Thomas back and he begged excuse not to follow the other two, saying that he wanted to perfect what he had been taught earlier. But Jim insisted, allaying any fears Thomas might have had by reminding him of their friendship, and that the water wasn't deep anymore as the tide was receding.

Jim put his arms round both boys' shoulders as he walked in-between them, three-in-a-row, holding each firmly in his grip as if to signal their great friendship. The two boys, several years younger than Jim, felt great walking with someone who looked as tall as an adult, and who was their friend. The trio merrily trudged their way along the walkway toward the far end of the 'pool'. When they arrived there Jim suddenly lunged forward, dragging both boys, now completely shocked, into the water. They all sank into the 'pool' like stones, with Jim laughing at the two for falling for his 'trap'.

Thomas immediately sucked sea-water into his shocked lungs as he choked, gasped and swallowed more sea-water, because there was no more air about him. Just sea-water. Despite his torture he remembered Jim saying that the tide was receding and stood up, hoping somehow, that it was low enough to enable him to stand up with his head clear of the water, and that Jim had known that, and was only giving them a fright. But the sea-water was still above his head and all around him, threatening to take his life away. He was starting to panic and his lungs were threatening to burst. But suddenly the panic transformed into alertness. He would save himself somehow. He would get himself out of his situation and show Jim what he thought of him. Anger became his friend and gave him strength. Squatting down on the sea-bed, despite feeling that he was going to black-out at any minute, he shot body upward, jack-knifing himself toward the surface and the sun which he could see shinning through the water above him. He didn't quite break the surface but he had gotten close enough to the top to give him renewed hope as he sank like a leadened-weight again. He hunched his body, this time, and pushed upward harder, breaking the surface and getting his first taste of sweet life-giving air as the waters closed around his head



again and he sank downward and began to feel light-headed. Was this how a drowning person felt? Light-headed and giddy? But the will to live, galvanised by that first sweet taste of fresh air, steeled him and he would not give up. Not by a long chalk. He pushed even harder this time and his head cleared the surface completely, enabling him his second tortured sweet, stab of fresh, life-giving air. He sank back again into the sea but he had seen where the shore was and how far away he was, and he shifted his body appropriately underwater, to help him get to the shallows, and away from the water which still was pulling him down into its cloying embrace. His stomach sloshed with the water he had already swallowed and he felt nauseous and wanted to puke, and his ear-drums were throbbing but he knew could save himself. His brain in the meantime shrieked: *why did Jim do this to us!* But he had to concentrate on getting himself clear. His next thrust upward took him closer to the shore though he still was in water up to the top of his head, but he had been able to suck in some air before he fell back in and his mind was clearing. Another upward slanting thrust took him to water up to his chin and the ability to breath normally again, though he was panting heavily. He sucked in the sweet air greedily. But he knew he wasn't going to drown. Just then Jim laughingly came up and slapped him on the back heartily as if it had all been in fun. But Thomas knew that Jim had played them a nasty trick, and pushed his hand away. Thomas found himself perspiring heavily.

Then he spied Alec on the beach ahead on all fours, quietly being sick as a dog, and immediately became aware of the water sloshing about in the pit of his own belly. Thomas pushed his middle-finger down his throat, bringing most of the sickening sea-water in his stomach up. By then he had arrived at the beach, next to Alec and lay down on his back, sucking in the sweet air, savouring it for the first time since he had been rudely pulled into the water by Jim. His mind had started to clear. He then saw the English boy, the cause of his and Alec's frightening experience, sitting next to the Jewish boy, trying to make light of the whole thing but he was nervous because his face was pale and Thomas knew Jim realised that he had gone too far that day. And he kept darting quick glances in the direction of nurse and the others. The Melrose-crowd was seated on the far side, away from where the boys were, with the 'local crowd' in-between, thus shielding the boys from their unwanted attention. Thomas realised that Jim was fearful that nurse might notice Alec sprawled on the beach and immediately guess that something was amiss, and he didn't want that. When the English boy pulled Alec up in a sitting position and called him a sissy, it became intolerable for young Siddon. He lashed out with his fist at Sturrock, full on the mouth, and as the English boy keeled over in surprise, jumped on top of him, straddling his chest, and pummelled his faced relentlessly.

A shocked Eva dragged him off her elder brother, who, in the meantime had made no move to defend himself or to ward off Thomas' blows. Siddon stood up, dusted the sand off his person and walked to join the Melrose-crowd at the far end of the pool, away from Jim, Eva and Alec. No one with nurse had seemed to be aware of the 'goings-on', thank goodness, Thomas breathed to himself. Minutes later Eva joined him, handing over his picnic-sandwich, which she had volunteered to bring over for the three boys. After Thomas had departed the scene of Jim's humiliation, Eva had demanded to know what had brought on Thomas' sudden rage, and Alec had enlightened her. The young English girl then threatened to report her brother to matron when they all got back to Melrose unless Jim apologised to Alec and Thomas before they all returned to the home, and Jim had abjectly agreed, begging his sister to first persuade Thomas to allow him to say sorry. As she handed Thomas his sandwich, Eva told him, and he nodded his head mutely. Eva waved her brother forward and left the two boys alone, as Jim came over to proffer his regrets. Siddon accepted Jim's apology, but from then on stopped regarding him as 'special', as far as their friendship was concerned.

From then on Eva began to hero-worship Thomas. No one among their peers at Melrose or at the school at Alexandra had ever stood up to her brother before, let alone use their fists on him, and get away with it. Thomas had done both and had even got Jim to apologise to him. That evening when they were back playing their usual evening games on the front lawn of Melrose, Jim, who had never participated before, joined in. Thomas immediately walked away with the home's two dogs. Eva scurried after him, much to his annoyance as she prattled on and he pointedly ignored her.

One afternoon before tea, a few days later, she came across him sitting alone at the dining tables doing his homework, and sat down beside him. This time he couldn't conceal his annoyance and frowned, which Eva noticed.

"What's the matter, am I intruding or what?" she demanded feeling slighted by his cold attitude.

"Don't be stupid, you're never a busybody," he replied, though what he really wanted was for her to leave him alone and stop hanging around, because Alec and the other boys had begun to notice and were ribbing him. "Then why don't you join us for 'Forfeits' any more, you know Alec always wants to kiss me so I don't join in the game any more 'cause its no fun without you.

"Don't you like having fun?"

" 'Course I do."

"Then why are you avoiding me, do I squint?" she demanded. "No you don't" he said impatiently. Grabbing his hand she said: "Come with me". And pulled him toward the back of the concert stage at the far end of the hall. She took him back-stage, behind the last side-screen at back, which was used for stage-entrances and exits, and where they couldn't be seen by anyone crossing the hall inadvertently. Placing his hand, which she still held, on her crotch, she fumbled for his penis. Shocked, Thomas, despite himself grew hot under the collar with the realisation of what the home's prettiest girl was doing to him. The blood pounded in his temple and despite himself his wayward fingers began exploring between her thighs. The blonde girl next drew his head down and kissed him on his mouth, pushing her insistent tongue between his startled lips. His penis had become painfully erect and Eva gently pulled him down onto the stage floor. He lost his innocence and virginity that day. He was nine.

A week later the Sturrock family departed Melrose for good to join their parents in Malaya. The Jewish children left in September. Some were headed for Australia, some for Britain, and some for the United States of America. They and their parents would eventually go to the newly-created state of Israel which was being set up in Arabia, (the Middle East).

Amnesty terms were offered to Communist terrorists by the British Colonial Administration of Singapore and Malaya in September. The jungle bandits were invited to give themselves up instead of continuing their guerrilla warfare. On 8th October 1949 the University of Malaya in Singapore was established at Bukit Timah, Singapore. On 6th November the government officially announced that amnesty terms offered in September had resulted in only a "trickle" of surrenders. There were many insurgents, it was reported, who would have given themselves up but fear of their own leaders had prevented them.

Mao 'tse-tung declared China a People's Republic on 1st October 1949, as the Kuomintang Army of General Chiang Kai-sek was still fighting against Communist forces in Canton. In Singapore on 10th October of that same year the Singapore Hokkein Association, the largest dialect group in Singapore, sent two telegrams to China — one to Mao 'tse-tung in support, and the other to General Chiang, "...to retire...", while some one hundred Chinese clan associations and Chinese middle schools in Singapore celebrated the "birth of a new China" and sang the anti-Japanese marching song "The Volunteers March", which had been adopted by the Chinese. There were two large-sized Communist flags flying where the group was assembled, as well. (The 10th October is known to all Chinese as the "Double Tenth", the anniversary of the Chinese Republic founded in 1911

after troops mutinied and the child-emperor abdicated). The Kuomintang Nationalists, founded in 1924 by Sun Yat-sen, who was succeeded after his death by Chiang Kai-sek, fled China in the wake of Mao 'tse-tung's victorious Communist army, for Formosa, the former Spanish, and Japanese colony, which they re-named Taiwan, (the Japanese had lost Formosa, the Pescadores and Manchuria after World War Two).

After a century of wars and revolutionary upheavals the Sino subcontinent had become one, and this reunification would herald the gradual re-awakening of a country which had been the supreme force and power, politically and militarily in East and South-east Asia before the arrival of the White Man in the late 1300s.

Thomas Siddon would sometimes overhear matron and some of the Melrose committee who were all Whites, talking about events taking place in the region and beyond, and wonder. He would overhear words like 'Chinese chauvinism' and 'alien Chinese' which he didn't understand at all. But as the topics kept on cropping up he became familiar with the words and would sometimes stop playing to listen in on what the adults were discussing without fully realising what was being bandied about among them. He overheard that the region they were all in, had had a relationship with China spanning over a millenium, and the Whites often wondered what the former most powerful force in East Asia would see her role as, in the new, modern era.

To the north of Singapore the colonies of French Indochina had already begun their fight for freedom and independence. On 7th February 1950 the United States of America accorded recognition to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Thomas also overheard matron telling nurse that on 3rd March 1950 an English sergeant had been killed by a hand grenade thrown by a Chinese who had been shot dead. On 28th April the radio and press reported that an assassination attempt had been made on Sir Franklin Gimson, the Singapore Governor, when he attended a boxing championships at the "Happy World" amusement park at Mountbatten Road. On 29th April, the following day, the Malayan Colonial Administration imposed the death penalty for Communist terrorist offences. On 30th April Singapore radio and the press reported that the Singapore police had arrested the entire Town Committee, the secret executive arm of the Malayan Communist Party, which had its mobile headquarters on the Thai-Malayan border, as well as the man responsible for the assassination attempt on Sir Franklin Gimson. The raiding police party had also seized plans for terrorist actions to commence on 1st May 1950, that year, to disrupt life in Singapore Colony. Organisations

which remained intact after these arrests included the 'Party Cells', the 'Anti-British League and the 'Sympathiser Cells' in the Chinese Middle Schools. The death penalty was imposed on all persons convicted of grenade-throwing, and up to ten years imprisonment for knowledge of terrorist activities were gazetted in Emergency Regulations on 26th May 1950.

As Whites in a quietly brooding island the threat to life and limb was taken seriously at Melrose. It was impressed on the children that on no account were they to travel outside on their own. Trips to school were only undertaken via the home's own van, which would be driven by Syce Ahmad. Apart from school and the occasional trips to the Pavilion Cinema in Orchard Road to watch films, tickets to which were given free to the home by the owner, their travel outside was to functions organised and laid on by the White community for themselves. Thomas used to see the local children walking freely in the streets as the Melrose-crowd was on its way to some Whites-only function, and while the local children showed no indication in their gait of the alert unease privately felt by the English, he would wonder about it, puzzled that the Whites seemed more aware of the danger from the Communists than did the locals.

In November 1950 Buang, his Malay friend, stopped coming to look for him on Saturday mornings. Ever since Thomas had begun school and couldn't play with him as often as before, the two companions only played together on Saturday mornings, after breakfast, without the knowledge of the rest of Melrose. Thomas was disappointed when his friend did not put in his regular appearance but when certain events unfolded later, he put two and two together and understood why his friend had given up their Saturday routine.

A sensational child custody case was being heard in court and on 1st December, that year, Fatimah, the home's chief cook, and Buang's mother, with a deadly serious look requested a private meeting with Miss Looker. That evening at prayers everyone was told that there would be no school on the following day and for several days after that as something serious was about to take place on the island. The children were openly curious but matron was unforthcoming. In fact she had earlier telephoned the Orchard Road Police Station and informed a senior officer that Fatimah had told her of a planned demonstration by the island's Malays against the British authorities should the following day's court hearing into the custody case find for the child's real Dutch parents.

The Dutch-Eurasian child, *Maria Huberdine Hertogh*, a girl, born on 24th March 1937 in Tjimahi, West Java, and who was already thirteen in

1950, had been given away by her natural mother to a Malay woman family friend in Java in 1942, when she was five. Maria's natural mother, a Java-born Dutch-Eurasian, had been hard-pressed to look after her large brood of children after her Dutch husband, Adrianus Pertus Hertogh, was interned by the Japanese in a prisoner of war camp as a sergeant in the Royal Dutch Army. She had offered Aminah Adabi, who was a wealthy Malay woman from Trengganu in Malaya, the choice of any of her children to adopt, and Aminah had chosen Maria. In accordance with Malay custom permission for Maria's adoption by Aminah was given by Maria's maternal uncle, (as Maria's father was languishing in a prisoner-of-war camp), attesting to the agreement between Maria's mother and Aminah. And Maria's mother was present when Aminah's newly-adopted daughter was circumcised according to Islamic practice.

Aminah Adabi, whose home-town was Kampong Kemaman in Trengganu, was a trader who travelled regularly between Kemaman, Singapore and Java. She got on well with the Japanese as she spoke their language proficiently and utilised her 'position' with them to help many a Javanese who had run foul of the enemy during the war. Her ability to speak Japanese had been due to her previous marriage to an aide of the Sultan of Trengganu who was stationed in Japan, where she learned to speak the language fluently.

In 1947, after the war, Maria, who had been re-named Nadra by Aminah, was brought by her adoptive mother to her own hometown, Kemaman, and continued her upbringing and education as a Malay girl in her mother's village. Around this period Maria's, (Nadra), natural parents, the Hertoghs, instituted a search for their daughter in Java, Singapore and Malaya. A British administrative officer, Ian Smallwood, who was in charge of the district in Trengganu which included Kemaman, noticed the European-looking girl, remembered the official inquiries about a missing Dutch child, and began discreet inquiries. But he was transferred out before he could complete his investigations. His successor, an Arthur Locke, continued, and finally met with Aminah. He persuaded her to take Nadra, (Maria), to Singapore so that she could formalise her adoption of the girl, since she was Dutch, by meeting with the Dutch Consul-General to get things 'sorted out', and thus 'legitimize' the adoption.

When Aminah and Nadra arrived in Singapore in early 1950, at the initial meeting with the Dutch Consul, Aminah was told that she would not be allowed to keep her child and that Maria's, (Nadra's), conversion to Islam was not 'recognised' in law. In the meantime Maria's natural mother had arrived from Holland and had instituted proceedings against Aminah to

regain custody of her daughter in April. During this period Aminah was persuaded by her family and friends that since Nadra, (Maria), had already reached the age of puberty she was of marriageable age, and a marriage was arranged between Nadra and Mansoor Adabi, the adopted son of Aminah. It was felt that once she became a married woman, according to Islamic practice, there could be no objection to her being a Muslim or living in Singapore.

At the subsequent hearing at the Singapore High Court on 2nd December 1950, the judge returned custody of the girl to her natural parents from the Netherlands, declared invalid the marriage between Maria Hertogh, (Nadra), and Mansoor Adabi, and did not recognise her conversion to Islam. The Malay community in Singapore looked upon the court finding as an European ruse to cheat the young girl and her adoptive mother. It was regarded as a conspiracy of White Men — the English and the Dutch.

An appeal was lodged immediately in the name of Maria Huberdine Hertogh and Mansoor Adabi, requesting a stay of execution of the court hearing, pending the hearing of the appeal in March 1951. The Court of Appeal for the stay of execution, met on 11th December 1950 and dismissed the application for the stay of execution and allowed the girl to accompany her biological parents to the Netherlands, on the undertaking by the Dutch Consul-General in Singapore to produce the girl before the British Ambassador at the Hague and to arrange for the young girl's return to Singapore should the appeal in the name of Maria Hertogh, (Nadra), and Mansoor Adabi succeed, or should the girl desire to return to Singapore after a trial period in the Netherlands. She was temporarily lodged at a convent before being spirited, with her Dutch mother, by ship to Holland on 12th December 1950. All the Singapore press media had made much of the Maria Hertogh case, highlighting the coverage with dramatic photographs, but the one picture of her that appeared in "The Straits Times" which showed her in a Roman Catholic convent, before a statue of the Virgin Mary, even though she was a Muslim, raised the hackles of Malay and Muslim resentment against Whites and Eurasians further.

Rioting by the Malay community in Singapore had already begun on 11th December 1950, after a demonstration by some three thousand Muslims outside the Singapore Supreme Court Building in Andrew's Road, and who turned on police squads standing guard around the premises. The disturbance spread to the then mainly Malay parts of Singapore — Kampong Glam, Geylang, Jalan Eunos — over the next ten days, and attacks took place against Europeans and fair-looking Eurasians who could pass for White. The police warned the population to remain indoors while

wireless appeals for order were made to the Malay community by the head of the Muslim religious movement in Singapore, the Chief Kathi.

A curfew was imposed on 12th December 1950 and four battalions of troops with armoured vehicles patrolled the streets. Eighteen persons, including five Europeans, were killed and a hundred and seventy-three injured, some seriously. A large number of motor vehicles was gutted. Order was subsequently restored on the evening of 13th December, and the curfew lifted on 19th December 1950.

Melrose spent the nights of the rioting at the mansion, "Burnside", next-door, because that property had a high perimeter-fence and a proper main gate which locked. A British Army armoured vehicle stood guard at the entrance while armed British soldiers patrolled the grounds of the houses in the vicinity, which all contained White residents. The daily trips to "Burnside" by the home's residents was via the side garden-gate which was opened to allow the children to pass through to the other mansion. Each evening everyone, with the exception of Miss Looker who preferred to remain in Melrose, converged under the home's porch and trekked in twos to "Burnside". Sharp at seven the following morning everyone would return for breakfast at Melrose, feeling safe at the sight of patrolling armed British soldiers. Fatimah, the chief cook, seemed depressed and avoided looking directly at anyone. It appeared that she took the blame for her community's anger against the Whites, while the other Malay servants remained unseen, keeping hidden within their respective quarters. Thomas felt that Fatimah shouldn't have acted as she were personally responsible for her community's violence.

Two decades later, when he would be in his twenties and Singapore's Chinese and Malays turned on one another, Thomas would recall his first 'experience' of racial-strife in his island-home as a child, since after the Second World War. He would recall the "Maria Hertogh Riots", as they would become known, and feel that at that time the British judge had erred in his handling of the case, and the administrators had also failed to recognise the extent of the resentment, as seen through Malay eyes in Singapore, at the unfair 'bullying tactics' used by the ruling colonial power against a lone Malay woman who had showed mercy by going to the aid of another hapless woman during the war, and accepting to adopt her child and save her from hunger, and being cheated of her child after she had grown to care and love her.

When school re-opened in January 1951 Thomas learned to his immense relief that he had passed his year-end final exams and was being promoted to standard two. The riots of the previous month, in 1950, had delayed



everyone's results. No one in St Joseph's Institution ever brought up the topic of the Maria Hertogh riots, and he felt that it was best that he too not touch on it, even though it was a topic of much heated argument among the Whites. Racial-type subjects, it appeared to him, were meticulously avoided on multiracial Singapore.

The day school re-opened a Chinese detective was shot dead by two gunmen who escaped into the back-streets of Singapore's chinatown. A week later the police made twenty-four arrests of suspected Communists of the Min Yuen, (the People's Movement), the group operating among Chinese workers, small-time farmers and rubber-tappers in the Malayan peninsula, to obtain help, food and money for the Communist jungle bandits. The Min Yuen was originally known as the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Union and comprised a fiercely-loyal, (to the MCP), and co-operative group of small-time subsistence farmers ekeing-out a living on the fringe of the Malayan jungles, who, during war-time had supplied the MPAJA fighters with badly needed vegetables and other food.

A new couple, Mr and Mrs Potts, joined the Melrose committee in early February. They were recent arrivals from England, and Mr Potts was the new head of a leading British accounting firm in Singapore. The couple invited the children to their home in Tanglin for tea and Thomas seemed to have made a good impression because they commented on it to matron. He was invited to help Mrs Potts when she took the handicapped children of the St Andrew's Hospital, which was located just on the outskirts of chinatown, to Katong Park every Saturday. The following week, after his initial visit to the Potts', was the first of his many excursions with them and the disabled children. The English couple seemed to have taken the young boy to their bosom and after each outing would take him on long drives to various parts of the island, that he had never been to before. Once they passed Frankel Estate and Thomas was about point out where his mother lived in the squatter-colony of attap-huts and filthy fish-ponds, but as his hand came up Mr Potts disgustedly described the conglomeration of flimsy shacks, pig styes and pools of filthy water as a "blight" on Singapore, and kept his mouth shut, for the first time feeling a sense of shame and embarrassment. His mother had brought him to her hut once, on one of her rare visits to Melrose in the early days, and that day with Mr Potts had made him realise why she had instructed him to never tell Melrose where she was living. He had not 'noticed' the squalor until Mr Potts description opened his eyes.

The regulation governing the children being able to visit with their parents on the first Sunday of each month, which had been disallowed since the home returned from India after the war, was reinstated from February

1951. That first Sunday his mother, Luci, whom he had not seen for five years, except for brief visits to his day-school, St Joseph's, occasionally in 1948, arrived to pick him up. He was wonderfully overjoyed, surprised, as he thought she was either away from Singapore or that she didn't know. Apparently Melrose had a way of keeping in touch with the parents. His mother told him she was back in Singapore for a short holiday, and was living in a flat in River Valley Road, opposite Oxley Road, with her fiance. She wanted him to meet Lionel Jeffries who would soon be his step-father.

When he and his mother got to the block of flats where she lived, the local children that he met, all Eurasian, seemed nervous of him and wouldn't look him in the eye. He tried being friendly by asking their names and telling them his, but they seemed not to understand what he was saying. Irritated and disturbed by their timid behaviour, he went in to his mother to seek an explanation. She came back after having a word with them and told him that the children had been terrified of his English accent. Relieved that it wasn't because he had suddenly grown an extra pair of eyes or ears, he thought their attitude weird. If the way he spoke sounded "White", that didn't make him an abnormality. He just wanted to be friends. Fed-up he remained with his mother indoors and watched her preparing lunch.

A little later she got him to go outside to keep a lookout for a "big" Englishman, she said. He, more than likely, would be arriving by taxi, and would probably be drunk but Thomas was not to 'notice' it. Just pretend not to know, she said. He went out and sat by one of the concrete benches overlooking the street, some ten feet below. He saw the taxi draw up, and, inside, a big-sized, red-faced White could be seen waving his arms at the Chinese taxi-driver who merely smiled and nodded all the time, and looked nervous. The man got out of the vehicle, slammed the door shut took his first step away from the taxi and placed a foot on the stairway leading up to the block of flats where Thomas was waiting and studying him. The White angrily brushed aside the taxi-driver's helping hand and unsteadily began his trek up. He looked to the top of the stairs at the young boy.

"You must be Thomas," he shouted when he was about mid-way, "hello son, give us a hand, will you?"

"Help your old man, that's the stuff," he said gruffly as he panted his way up. The man who had been so blatantly rude to the taxi-driver, a few minutes ago, now spoke in a gentle tone. Young Thomas was surprised. The man even knew his name. He stretched out his little hand which became 'lost' in the bear-like paw of the White, which was thrust at him. The hulking man's eyes now looked piteous in their drunken stupor. Thomas tugged at the man's hand with all his might as the man smiled. The young boy didn't

have the necessary strength to move him but his steadying hand had helped Jeffries pull himself up to where Thomas was standing.

"That's it son, you'll look after us, won't you? Where's that damned mother of yours, oops, sorry lad didn't mean to swear, just force of habit. Luci!"

His mother opened the door to their flat smiling but her son could see that she was embarrassed. He could see that she didn't like seeing Jeffries arriving home in his condition, in full view of the whole block of flats. She assisted him through the door, and once in, and she had closed the door after him, chided her fiance for the state he was in. Jeffries sobered up immediately. "Listen Tom, I'm sorry for the state I'm in. Listen, I'm marryin' your mother and I'd like you to call dad, al'right?"

Thomas nodded, noticing that the man's pants were soaking. And that he reeked of piss. His mother caught his gaze and signalled with her eyes for him to go outside. As he turned away she told him that lunch would be ready soon.

When he returned, half-an-hour later, Lionel Jeffries wasn't around. He was sleeping off his usual Sunday morning "binge". The boy had lunch with his mother. He never saw the White again. Lionel Jeffries was still asleep when it came time for Thomas to return to Melrose that evening.

In early March Miss Marguerite Looker was admitted to the Singapore General Hospital in Sepoy Lines. She had been sickly for some time but had never let on. The children expected her to remain in hospital for a few days, and return to them feeling much better after a few days' rest. She died a week later of cancer. The impact of her death on the children of Melrose was traumatic. The children were numbed with grief, and went around in a daze, trying hard to comprehend how the most important person in their lives had just gone and left them forever, without a word of farewell.

The funeral turnout was phenomenal. The cortege stretched for miles and it would seem that the whole of colonial Singapore had come to pay their last respects. At the cemetery chapel at Biddadari on Serangoon Road, the children of Melrose sat in the front two pews. After the coffin was lowered into the ground and the prayers said, each child picked up a clod of earth and threw it into the grave, as if by that gesture they had bade their final farewell to the one person who had meant so much to them in their young lives. No one would ever again ever occupy their hearts in the same way as she had.

When most of the mourners had departed Nurse Kerr took the children to where the graves of John and Mary Ford were. Brother and sister, who had died within months of each other, had preferred to retire in Singapore then return to their native England. Someone said that the place where they

were buried, as was Miss Looker's, was reserved only for Whites. The other Christian residents of Singapore were buried further up, nearer the Malay grave-diggers' quarters. Thomas wondered why there had to be 'special' places for different dead people. They were all dead. He thought back to matron. He would return to her graveside in future, when he was older and had left Melrose. Because she was the only one he could "discuss" things with. He held her responsible for his life because of the values she had ingrained in him.

Within a week of Miss Looker's demise a young widow came to replace her. She was an Irishwoman named Monica McIssac. Her husband had been killed in a car-accident at the Cathay Cinema car-park, when he had fallen into the monsoon ditch after parking his car. Mrs McIssac was direct, forceful and spoke her mind. She drank, smoked, liked 'modern' music and loved to dance. She had a gay, infectious and peeling laugh that could be heard all over Melrose. Instead of attempting to step into Miss Looker's shoes she introduced a new way of life, treating the children as equals and ribbing them. She seemed to like Thomas especially and gave him his first taste of alcohol, a sip she told him, not to let the others know. She would tease the girls that they all had eyes for him, which made him embarrassed, and she would throw hysterics everytime she said it and saw his predicament.

Americans from the American business community in Singapore joined the Melrose committee in April 1955, and every Friday afternoon it was like Christmas for the children of Melrose. They were picked up around four-thirty in the afternoon and taken to the American Club, which in those days was on the fourth floor of the Cathay Building. There were non-stop cartoons screened in one corner of the club, while in another corner a clown would entertain with his antics. And everywhere there was food, the like of which he had never had before. Including the popcorn, which was salty, which was a surprise as all over Singapore the popcorn was always covered in sugar. The children also received toys everytime they went. Thomas just couldn't believe that people lived and enjoyed their lives to the extent that he saw displayed there.

Luci Siddon, his mother, returned for good to Singapore in May 1951. Lionel Jeffries, her fiance, had died of a heart attack on the plantation where she worked near Ayer Hitam, and had been buried in Johore. She was going to work for the the British forces as a clerk on one of the British military bases. Thomas was glad his mother was back in Singapore because he would be able to see more of her. She was even present when he received the sacrament of Confirmation at the Cathedral of the Good shepherd. She had missed his First Holy Communion, two years back.

On the first Sunday of the month in October, that year, his mother came to pick him up to spend the day with her. It would be the first time since 1946 when he had been admitted into Melrose from York Hill that he would have the chance to spend a whole day with her at her home, the first he had ever known since the war, and the York Hill Home. She was renting a room from an Eurasian family in Tampenis, (Malay: a kind of fruit), and which has been re-named "Ow-kang" in Chinese. He was surprised and annoyed when the husband of the lady of the house took him aside and lectured him for being a bother to his mother but he was silent. Thomas felt that his mother had no right to complain to a total stranger about him, especially when it wasn't true. She had not brought him up since 1946 when he had been admitted into Melrose, so how could she complain about his being a "bother"?

In December 1951 Mr Potts, after getting matron's permission to allow him to visit his wife, Mrs Potts, in the recently-opened Gleneagles Hospital in Napier Road, took him to the hospitals' cafeteria and over a cup of tea told him gently, that he would be leaving Melrose soon as he was already too old to remain in the co-ed home. He would be twelve in March, the following year, and the committee, after discussing it with his mother, had found him a place in a Roman Catholic boarding school in East Coast Road.

The kindly Englishman then told him that since he didn't have a father, he would assume the role and relate to him about the "birds and the bees". Despite feeling despondent at having to leave Melrose for good, Thomas Siddon smiled inwardly, realising that he knew more than what the kindly Mr Potts was about to 'reveal' to him.

King George VI died in his sleep at Sandringham House, Norfolk on 6th February 1952. His daughter, Elizabeth, ascended the throne. A week later everyone at St Joseph's Institution received a bronze medal to commemorate the start of the reign of Elizabeth II. Books on the British Royal Family were passed around among the children at Melrose.

Thomas left Melrose in mid-March 1952 after his first-term examinations and the school holidays. He had passed. Mrs McLissac packed his clothes in one of her own trunks and kissed him goodbye before his mother arrived by taxi to pick him up. He gave the two dogs a final pat, walked round the home's grounds a final time and was waiting for his mother when she turned up. He helped load his trunk in the boot and joined his mother in the back seat. Matron and the other children of Melrose waved him a goodbye and his heart was heavy, like when Kay Gordon had told him she was leaving Melrose for good.

As the taxi turned off the gravel driveway of Melrose onto metalled

Tomlinson Road, he cheered up by reminding himself that he could look forward to spending a few days with his mother for the first time since he had left her at York Hill in 1946. It was Friday and school only began on Monday. Thomas heard his mother instructing the driver to head for Siglap.

## Becoming Local

### *Chapter Five*

When Luci Siddon told her son, Thomas, in the taxi taking him away from Melrose and Tanglin where he'd spent the better part of since 1946, after the second world war, that his school was located at Siglap, the boy had no idea where that part of Singapore was. He did remember though, once, when some of the Melrose girls had been discussing among themselves about the various districts of Singapore, someone had said that Siglap was by the sea, on the "other side" of the island, which was the suburbs on the east coast, where the locals lived. He also remembered the drives to the east coast with the Potts, and anxiously inquired of his mother whether she still lived in the attap hut in Frankel Estate, dreading the thought that the English couple had probably known where she was living, all along. Frowning her displeasure at what she deemed was an impertinent query, Mrs Siddon retorted that she no longer resided there, and said no more.

As each mile took him away from the only home he had known and loved and felt safe in, for so long, Thomas began giving in to feelings of being cheated, because to him, it wasn't fair. After six years at Melrose, without his mother to care for him and a proper home of his own, instead of spending the weekend before school reopened with her he was about to begin a new life in a new boarding school instead of at her place first. He just couldn't believe that he was on his way to another boarding institution, (even though he had spent the best six years of his life growing up in the children's aid society at Tanglin), without even getting the opportunity to get to experience what true home-life really was like. In barely less than

half-an-hour he would be stepping into a new, and to him, an alien world. And he had never known a home of his own ever since he had been a baby. Because the war had come and deprived him of it.

He listened dully as his mother described St Patrick's School, telling him that it was by the sea and that he would be able to swim everyday. As if that mattered. The tears began to well as he thought his thoughts, and his mother, on seeing the flood-gates open, smacked him hard across the face, startling the taxi-driver who swung round with a jerk before concentrating on his driving again.

His mother snapped that it was Mr Potts who had insisted that he go straight from Melrose to St Patrick's Boys' School. Probably because she didn't have a decent home for him, thought her son viciously. She tried explaining that Potts and a Catholic priest from the Katong parish church had arranged his admission into the school. She had nothing to do with it. Changing the subject she inquired whether he went about after school-hours in slippers, or did he go bare-foot? Thomas was shocked. She had asked the question as if going about without shoes or slippers in this tropical climate was the natural thing to do. Didn't she know about hook-worms? And to think that she had once been a nurse! He wasn't local. He was English, and at Melrose everyone went about in open-toed sandals all the time.

The taxi had by then reached Joo Chiat Road off the Geylang Serai Road in the east coast district, since they had left Melrose, and turned into Joo Chiat. It travelled down it toward the East Coast Road junction. His mother instructed the taxi-driver to stop at a row of shop-houses fronting East Coast Road, after they turned off Joo Chiat into East Coast Road. The vehicle was pointing eastward now. His mother bade Thomas follow her, after she had instructed the taxi-driver to wait for them. As they got out of the car and were headed toward the shops, she warned him not to speak in front of the Indian shopkeepers, when they got to them. She didn't want his English accent to influence the shopkeepers to jack-up their prices. Curious now, as he didn't know what she had in mind, he remained silent and waited to see what she was on about.

As mother and son got nearer the shops fronting the street, Thomas saw different businesses being conducted in them. There was a dhobi, (an Indian laundry), a barber, a tailor, a mending service for household appliances, and one shop with long glass-covered show-cases displaying buttons, bows, spools of thread and an assortment of fussy things, he couldn't quite place. Each shop-front was an open space that faced the street. Thomas knew, from his experience with the street-shops on Tanglin Road, that their shop-fronts were secured in the evening by wooden slats that slid into a groove



to make a 'wall' when they closed at night. To him the local shops resembled crates with their fronts removed. In the corner of most of the establishments there was a "teeny" 'nook' in which sat an Indian man perched on a tiny platform, surrounded by all kinds of bric-a-brac, stacked on shelves about him, going all the way to the ceiling of the shop he was occupying. His mother headed toward the nearest one.

The man had seen them approaching as he sat cross-legged on his small platform built into his 'niche', which was a small squeezed-in space approximately two feet from the ground. The Chinese shop-owner who let the nook out to the Indian, for a monthly rental, had allowed him to build his bit of tight-space, which actually was the Indian's "shop", on which was displayed the wares he had on offer. Underneath the platform where he was seated, there was a hollow which was used as a 'store'. All about him, on shelves built into the three "walls" of his cubicle, were displayed an assortment of "handies" that a local housewife, man or child might find useful. Thomas took note of the cigarettes, sweets, toys, spools of thread and countless other items he couldn't place a finger on, being displayed for sale but which still appeared familiar.

Across from where the man sat, strung high above the heads of passers-by, and spanning the "five-foot-way", (Stamford Raffles after establishing the town of Singapore in 1819, had decreed that all establishments fronting main streets would provide a covered walkaway or pavement, at least five-foot wide, to protect pedestrians from the blistering sun), dangled American comics, magazines and local newspapers from string that went all the way from the man's "shop" to the supporting pillars of the building facing the main road. The publications were like banners, offering minor respite to those immediately below as they meekly waved in the humid, thick air. It seemed to Thomas that the man catered for the slightest whim of his local custom. At Melrose he had never come across the like up close, as there hadn't been a need to go down to the local shops fronting Tanglin Road, because everything the home needed was provided for. The shops at Katong, in his eyes, seemed strange and somehow alien in comparison. In fascination he silently watched the scenario being enacted by his mother and the Indian shopkeeper.

Carefully munching a preparation of betel-nut leaf with condiments, the Tamil pedlar wished his mother politely as he ignored Thomas. On Mrs Siddon inquiry he pointed to his selection of leather slippers dangling from one of the pillars, being quick to re-assure her in bazaar-Malay, (Malay-patois), of the superior quality and long-life wear-ability of his 'superior' product. His mother, surprisingly, (to Thomas), appeared disappointed at

his offering, and wondered out loud whether the other Indian "holes-in-the-wall" had a better and more reasonably-priced selection. The man hastened to confirm the 'genuine quality' of his product as well as the fairness of his price. His mother suddenly included her son in the discussion, and asked Thomas what he thought of the slippers she was choosing for him. Startled, he felt slightly irritated when she didn't even bother for a reply, and instead insisted on the price she had in mind. He then realised why she had bade him say nothing in front of the pedlar, when they had first got out of the taxi earlier. The Indian now turned to the young boy, addressing him as 'young master' and proffered the slippers in his direction but his mother got in between and snatched them away as she handed the man the sum of money she was willing to pay, and for which the Indian graciously received. The man next said something in Malay to his mother, which Thomas did not quite catch, but he was shocked when she snapped back an impatient retort.

Later when they were wending their way to St Patrick's in the taxi, she seethed soto-voiced, so that the driver couldn't overhear, that the Indian pedlar hadn't believed that he was her son because Thomas was too fair to be the child of a woman as dark as she, even if her husband were English. She had to be the servant, he had told her, fumed Mrs Siddon. A flicker of annoyance passed across her son's features. A total stranger, and a tradesman at that, had spoken familiarly to his mother and had even doubted her word! It was unheard of in the English world he lived in and was rapidly leaving behind. Tradespeople didn't address their customers voluntarily. It was downright rude.

The taxi began to slow-down as they came to a high-bricked fence and turned right into a wide-open gateway. His heart fluttered because he knew that they had arrived at St Patrick's. There was a low, single-storied building on their right after they turned in. It was the living quarters of the school staff, like the senior clerk and the gardeners, he would learn later. The taxi went past the quarters, turned left and immediately right again, past a large hall on their left. He saw local boys of his age, playing badminton and ping-pong within. He spied a large playing field on his right, and a tennis court, and suddenly recalled that they had in fact passed a much larger field when they had first turned into the school from the main East Coast Road. They now went past a large building, obviously classrooms, on their left, turned left again, and stopped at another large building. He saw a tennis-court immediately in front of it. As he opened the car door to get out he became aware of a continuous roar filling the air, like water crashing on large rocks, again and again, and instantly remembered his mother telling him that the boarding school was by the sea.

An European in white robes, similar to the ones worn by the Roman Catholic priest at the Church of Christ the King in Tanglin, where he used to attend Mass on Sundays with the Melrose-crowd, stood in front of an open-door. As he helped his mother unload his trunk from the taxi he noticed rows of cupboards in the large room behind the White man. Somehow the sight of him gave Thomas a feeling of comfort and familiarity. At least there would be one other English person at the school. He smiled a greeting at Brother Remejus, anticipating a warm acknowledgement in reply but received a stern cold stare instead. But Thomas was not put off. He would get to know the Englishman later, and he would come to know that they both belonged to the same world. His mother wished the man, surprising Thomas, because, where he came from, at Melrose, a man greeted a woman first, not the other way round! His mother had called him 'Brother Remejus', and Thomas heard an Irish name for the second time in his life. The first was Mrs McIssac. The man was White but he wasn't English. That's why he didn't smile. The robed man ushered mother and son into the boarders' changing room.

Thomas was allotted a cupboard and Brother Remejus made him unpack his trunk and put away his clothes himself before getting him to tote his emptied bag to where the school's storeroom was at the far end of the changing room. The religious next took mother and son up two flights of steps to the boarders' dormitory and showed Thomas which was to be his bed. He was surprised to overhear Brother Remejus advising his mother to get him a strong lock from the school tuck-shop to ensure the security of the valuables in his cupboard.

At Melrose there had never been any need to keep anything under lock-and-key, and he was dismayed at the thought that people living together under the same roof were not to be trusted. He followed his mother to the school tuck-shop which also acted as sundry-shop to the school's boarders. He found the impersonal, almost arrogant manner of the Chinese tuckshop-keeper, rather disconcerting. To him the man appeared unfriendly, so unlike the other locals he had come across in the shops in the Melrose vicinity on Tanglin Road.

When they got back to the boarders' changing-room Brother Remejus was still standing at the open doorway where they had first seen him, awaiting the return of the boarders from the Borneo territories who were arriving from Sarawak and British North Borneo by plane that day. The service only flew to Singapore on specific days, so that was why they were returning to the school on that Friday. The boarders living in Singapore would return on Sunday afternoon. When he heard that Thomas felt really

"cheated", because he too could have stayed with his mother until Sunday instead of going to St Patrick's straight from Melrose.

At their arrival at the boarders' changing room, Brother Remejus turned to Mrs Siddon and commented that if everything was 'settled' he would appreciate that she left as he preferred parents not to tarry unnecessarily. Out of the blue Thomas' mother blurted out that 'her son' had always been troublesome and gave her endless worry. She was a widow with no one to lean upon, and 'her son' had a habit of talking back whenever he was reprimanded. He needed caning and strong discipline. The young boy just couldn't believe his ears and glared at his mother. He'd grown up at Melrose since 1946 and had never lived with her. And before that they had been at York Hill Home, and earlier than that they had been in the Sime Road Concentration Camp. How could she say that he was a 'trouble' to her when he hadn't been living with her, as 'her son', ever since the war? Brother Remejus caught Thomas' enraged look and curtly told him that he wouldn't stomach any nonsense from him in future. He re-assured Mrs Siddon that he would mould her son's character for the better, otherwise Thomas would be sacked. Startled, Luci Siddon nodded and wordlessly departed the school at the apparent dismissive tone in the man's voice. Her son felt hurt that she had not even spared him a glance as she briskly walked toward the main gate, some two hundred yards away, leaving him behind. He was starting to feel despondent.

Some well-tanned boys, weighed down with bags, came round the corner, passing his mother as she disappeared behind the building housing the classrooms, and made her way out of the school. Singing out a "Hello Brother", they stared at the newcomer, Thomas, as they trooped past him into the changing room. There had been no warmth in their eyes as they sized him up. He became aware that an older-looking boy was signalling to him by the changing room door and went up to him. Thomas was told to change his shoes for slippers. He was informed that he was considered a 'junior' and had to "obey" instructions given him by 'seniors' such as the one who had just signalled him. Otherwise he would be canned by Brother Remejus. Or instantly dismissed. My goodness, young Siddon thought to himself, he hadn't yet settled in and already he was being threatened with a possible thrashing or a sacking. He was also told to keep his ear peeled for whistles. Any whistle from Brother Remejus or any of his 'seniors' meant a command that had to be obeyed instantly. He would soon get to know which whistle meant what exactly.

Even as he was being clued in there was a shrill blast and he saw a queue forming up outside the changing room's main entrance. He joined it, and

two lines of boys trooped through a doorway on another shrill 'peep' and crossed a tiled floor. On his left he noticed a lift and a main stairway next to it. On his right were two doors, one marked "Brother Director", and the other "Office". The queue went down another passage and there were more classrooms. They turned right, left and right again, and there were more classrooms. Past that and they were in a covered passage which brought them to the boarders' dining hall. Inside there were two rows of metal-topped tables, side by side, cut off by another metal-topped table on the far end. Brother Remejus' table was on a raised platform which gave him a clear view of the entire dining room area. Thomas saw a large bell at one corner of the brother's table.

A place was found for him as everyone else stood by his regular place at a table, waiting for the lay religious to say Grace. Immediately that was over and Brother Remejus had rung his bell to signal that everyone could sit down and begin eating, pandemonium broke loose as everybody scrambled to sit while at the same time grab for the nearest plate of margarine-covered slices of bread or a kettle of tea. Concealing his bewilderment, Thomas sat down and waited patiently as confusion reigned about him. Every single boarder was spreading lavish helpings of jam on thick slices of bread, which were already coated with margarine, while at the same time help himself to as many slices of bread as he could. Looking at the mad rush about him, put Thomas off eating and he satisfied himself with a cup of tea from a momentarily-unattended pot. He found it strange that milk and sugar had already been added to the brew. Everything tasted *different*. Everything was foreign.

Melrose was English and there was refinement in the behaviour of the children there. The boys at St Patrick's were crude, and even barbaric in comparison. A boy next to him belched while another farted loudly, sending everyone into hysterics. Another dug his nose and flicked the dried mucus on his finger into the air. Loathsome. He glanced at Brother Remejus, expecting that since he was White he would be enraged at the local boarders' goings-on. But the man was deep into his religious book, munching his slice of bread contentedly. He didn't even look up from his page as he poured himself another cup of tea. Melrose and the management committee had been wrong. The locals weren't poverty-stricken, they ate well and even wasted food. He saw some boys, after helping themselves to generous helpings of bread, margarine and jam, simply discard the lot after a few perfunctory nibbles. When they caught him looking at them they challengingly remarked that it was alright since their parents had already paid for their share, they weren't 'charity cases'. He noticed that some of

the boys were studying him openly with no trace of embarrassment whenever he happened to look their way. He overheard them discussing him but for the life of him couldn't make out what was being said because of the peculiar pidgin, mixed in with local words, which he couldn't quite make out. A Chinese seated opposite him asked the first question.

"What your name, man?"

"It's Thomas Siddon, what's yours?" he replied with a smile, (someone was actually talking to him!). Ignoring him the other continued to interrogate him:

"You come from overseas 'eh?"

"No," he said in surprise, wondering where the inquirer had got such an idea.

"Der bugger speak funny, like *ma' sallah*, balls." The Chinese boy who had first questioned him, flung in the air, not even bothering to look at him, while Thomas felt his hackles rising at the crude word spoken out loud.

"Fucking *cherlop*," (Malay slang: someone who wasn't White but who behaved like one, meaning he was dipped in flour), said another. Swallowing his anger even though he didn't know what the word meant, he ignored their animosity as he fought down his feelings of outrage, and asked to know what a 'cherlop' was.

"That mean you dip in flour, man. Your mother is black, we saw her, but you speak like a fucking *ma' sallah kotek bengkok*," (Malay slang: White man with the bent or limp penis, Malay derogatory for the English).

Everyone at the table burst out in guffaws. The young boy just couldn't believe his ears. He'd just met his fellow-boarders for the first time, had yet to get to know their names but already they were being offensive. His inclination, right then, was to leap to his feet and run all the way back to his civilised, White world at Melrose. St Patrick's was a walking nightmare!

The bell at Brother Remejus' table rang a half-ring and thankfully distracted he listened as the religious told them that day-school resumed on Monday, two days away, and that they had to maintain their reputation for passing exams and playing good football over the day-scholars. The boarders, Brother Remejus said, had to stick together as a family and not allow the day-scholars any opportunity to bully any one of them. Thomas felt immensely relieved, hearing that, yet cynical, in view of the recent display of 'manners' from his fellow-boarders. He fervently hoped that Brother Remejus' words would have the desired effect and discourage them from ragging him any more. The bell was rung again and everyone, except Thomas, scrambled to his feet and scattered in all directions. Siddon was aghast that no one excused himself nor cleared away his particular set of dirty plates and cups.

He decided to explore the school first, familiarising himself with its layout, what each building was, the various fields and tennis courts. He decided to leave getting to know the sea to later. That was a treat that had to be savoured on its own. He didn't get the chance that day. A whistle blew suddenly, and on checking found his fellow-boarders filing into the changing rooms for their showers. He joined them, blushing because everyone disrobed in front of each other without a trace of self-consciousness. He had never ever undressed in front of others before. He forced himself to follow-suit and quickly joined everyone under the showers as Brother Remejus, cane in hand, trotted from shower to shower in the long bathroom, barking harshly at any one caught cavorting under the spraying jets.

Changed into pyjamas, he joined the queue outside the changing rooms, and on a whistle marched upstairs through the doorway he had first gone through earlier that day, when they had marched along the corridors to go to the dinning room for tea, to the school chapel which was on the first floor. Someone showed him how to dip the fingers of his right hand into a shallow vessel of water at the chapel doorway, and make the sign of the cross across his body. He was told to genuflect toward the tabernacle at the altar before entering his pew. He recalled, years ago, that Mavis Kerr had told him about this practice when he had first gone to live at Melrose. That was such a long, much-missed time ago.

Dinner had already been laid out on the dinning tables by the time the boarders had finished evening prayers and had gotten downstairs. Thomas decided to get into the swing of things, grabbed the nearest basin of rice, helped himself to two ladles-full, and poured lavish amounts of the pork curry that was being served that night, over his rice. It smelled super. Feeling hungry from the sea-air he tucked into his meal with gusto. The curry burned his tongue immediately and he regretted pouring so much of it. But he would be like the others so that they wouldn't continue to rag him, and ignored the discomfort in his mouth, easing it, from time to time, with gulps of water. Some of his table companions noticed him sweating from the curry he had taken, and smiled knowingly. The *cherlop* was pretending to like the hot curry. To Thomas' surprised relief he found his tongue gradually growing tolerant of the burning sensation.

Someone noticed his red eyes, wet brow and runny nose, pointed at him and laughed, and he joined in the general mirth directed at himself. Better to laugh with them, at himself, than to incur their animosity, he felt. Maybe the boarding school crowd was beginning to accept him. After dinner the boarders were marched to the front of the school, near to the main East Coast Road, from which he and his mother had come, that day, and were allowed

to play or stroll about for thirty minutes. Brother Remejus stood under one of the school's street lamps and read from his book. Occasionally he would look up and stare into the pitch darkness of the evening, indicating that he was still keeping an eye on everyone. \*

Some boarders began telling Thomas something of the school's background. The head of the school was a Brother Lawrence, who came from Penang. Everyone called him "Sahara Desert" because he was completely bald. Boarders weren't allowed home until the end of each school term, after the examinations. Some of the boys talked about their parents and their homes, and as he listened Thomas wished that he too had a home to return to. He felt alienated because everyone appeared relaxed, and there seemed to be a common bond among them, because they all spoke the same way, whether they were Eurasian, Chinese or Indian. There were no Malays he noticed, because, he was told on his inquiry, they were Muslim and St Patrick's was a Roman Catholic school. Hearing that he thought of Buang and remembered Melrose in a rush. The realisation hit him like a bomb-burst — it was not his to go home to ever again, he thought in dismay.

Brother Remejus blew his blighted whistle again, and the boys filed up and marched toward their study hall which was above the dining room. Thomas was given the books for his standard and a study desk was allotted him. He was pleasantly surprised to discover that boarders didn't pay for text-books, only the exercise books to do the lessons in. These were available from the school's bookshop, and he could order what he required and the cost would be added on to his monthly boarding dues.

When he finally got to bed that evening, in the safety of the darkness of the dormitory, which hid him from strange alien eyes, he quietly broke down and sobbed his heart out, missing the warmth and love of Melrose, that had been his just bare hours away that day before he had been admitted into St Patrick's. He couldn't understand his mother's reason for placing him in another boarding school, especially this one, after he had grown up without her as a little child. He would've thought that she would have wanted him with her now that the war was long over and everything on the island was back to normal. The whole atmosphere at St Patrick's was foreign and some of the boarders displayed open hostility toward him, as if he were some kind of strange being. And he didn't even know their names or why they showed him such animosity. Thinking such things he finally dropped into fitful sleep.

A shrill, sharp whistle penetrated his slumber, and on squeezing open his sleep-leaden eyes, brilliant, painful, glaring light stabbed into them.



Groggily lifting his head in bewilderment, and trying to recollect his surroundings, he sadly remembered in dismay that he was no longer a part of Melrose but in a *local* boarding school that did things by threat. He felt disoriented.

The boarder in the next bed, Cheng, warned him to get up snappishly and make his bed, otherwise Brother Remejus would lay into him with the cane he kept handy in one of the long pockets of his robe. He hurriedly did as Cheng advised, then joined the mad scramble toward the lavatory. He found an-already long queue, four-deep, with each border impatiently waiting his turn. When it came his turn at the urinal, self-consciousness and the urge to release his water clashed with each other and he stood frozen, praying somehow, that his swollen testicles would relax their vice-like hold and allow him sweet relief. Mid-way through his long-awaited sweet-respite, Brother Remejus blew his bloody whistle again and a senior boarder poked his head into the lavatory and yelled that late-comers to morning prayers would be caned. Why did they do *everything* by threats?

At breakfast in the dinning hall he grew conscious of a dull roaring sound and immediately remembered that it was water lapping on a beach and breaking over rocks. St Patrick's was by the sea in Siglap. Brother Remejus announced that there would be swimming after breakfast, since it was high tide. Someone warned Siddon not to fill his belly with too much food, otherwise he could get an appendix. But he didn't care, thinking the boy foolish and filled with old wives' tales about eating before swimming. He'd never heard it before, so it had to be a local superstition. Anyway the sea air had given him a galloping appetite.

He was surprised Brother Remejus didn't supervise their swimming. He saw why when everyone displayed an ability to swim like a fish. Someone got hold of a coconut husk and placed a decaying fish found on the beach, in it. Siddon suppressed a groan of squeamishness seeing the boy mash up the lifeless creature with his fingers and then mix the broken-up pieces with sea-water, kneading the mixture into a pulp. He stared in sickened fascination as several boys dipped their finger-tips into the "concoction", bent down and sprayed drop-lets of water from them onto the sand just where the surging waves broke on the shore. Almost immediately waving blobs with tiny claws poked through the sand, seeking out the dead fish, and quick-as-a-flash each boy darted his hand downward and plucked-out a plump-looking sea-worm which he placed in a discarded cigarette-tin, one of them was carrying. Soon the single strands of sea-life grew into a writhing, slimy ball of wet, red, raw-looking flesh. Overcoming his squeamishness Siddon had a go at trying to catch a worm. It looked so easy. But none

seemed to pop its head out of the sand, until someone told him not to cast his shadow over the spot he was hoping to 'fish' for worms. His shadow, he was told, forewarned the worms so they wouldn't show their heads. Enlightened, he tried again, and though the clawing blobs did appear this time, he was always a shade too slow in grabbing hold of one.

Someone brought out spools of nylon cat-gut string to which were attached several fish-hooks and a balled lead weight. Learning new things by the minute he watched as his seasoned fellow-boarders 'threaded' a hook into a worm, leaving a tiny blob still wagging over the pointed end. When all the hooks in a spool were baited, a boy swung his line, with the lead weight of his spool flying over and over his head until it gathered speed, and flung it out to sea. The thrown lines were taut against the crooked fingers of the boy-fishermen as they played with their lines, suddenly jerking them toward their chest and winding up the excess line in swift, smooth movements. Sometimes a boy would reel in his line, and as the weights appeared in the shallow water Thomas would catch a glimpse of the silvery shape of a caught fish struggling against being pulled in. He watched in suppressed excitement as each successful fisherman among their crowd threaded his caught fish through a string of lallang attached to his waist, which allowed the caught fish to remain alive in the water and stay fresh. All over the beach the St Patrick's boarders were reeling in their various catches.

Someone built a fire in a cluster of mangrove, which grew profusely all over the beach, completely covering the sand, except at the water's edge and which stretched over the whole beach, beyond the horizon left and right of where the boys were, past the school, and disappeared out of sight over both horizons. The day's successful fishermen gathered round the open blaze and began roasting their respective catches. Others who had been digging for cockles in the sand brought along their share of goodies, and soon everyone was helping himself to the 'goodies', in an impromptu picnic, including Siddon who had been invited to join them even though he had 'contributed' nothing. As he helped himself to the day's 'sea-harvest', and discovered the wonderful deliciousness of freshly-caught seafood, Thomas promised himself that he would learn to be as good a fisherman as his fellow-boarders. It was fun.

That evening after his first football lesson and the morning's fishing, his skin burned an angry red, with pulpy, water-filled welts. He was sun-burned and remembered how Melrose had forbade him to remain in the sun for too long. It was a relief to just stand under the cool jets of water from the shower at bath-time. He was pleasantly surprised when someone offered him a lotion which eased the painful, burning sensation, somewhat.

When day-school began on Monday, after the first term holidays, the whole student-body of St Patrick's School was told to assemble in the school hall, which was something that had never happened before. There was much speculation among the schoolboys as to why this was happening, and they grew really curious when they saw senior girls from the nearby Katong Convent assembled in the front of where they were, just below the school stage and who kept completely to themselves even though they knew some of the boys, some of whom were their own brothers. The complete hall of schoolboys began buzzing when Brother Lawrence, the Director, and Sister Finbarr, the Mother Superior of the convent, climbed the steps leading to the stage and faced the assembled boys and girls with deadly serious looks on their faces. Everyone grew silent when it was realised that something "dramatic" was about to unfold that morning.

Brother Director Lawrence first addressed the crowd, informing them that during the previous school-holidays three male students of the school, in their late teens, had intimidated a young convent school teacher and some of her female students by first barring and preventing the young woman, who had her students in her car, from moving along narrow St Patrick's Road, a lane which ran between the two educational establishments. They then began "blowing kisses" to the girls in the car and when the young teacher had gotten out of her vehicle to reprimand the young men, they had attempted to fondle her but luckily for her, she had had the presence of mind to yell at the top of her lungs and the boys had panicked and bolted, thinking they wouldn't be identified by the girls. But the girls, who recognised the boys, told the teacher exactly who they were.

The whole body of boys and girls was silent as Brother Lawrence related the incident, with all the boys pondering as to who the culprits could be. The school head, without first identifying them, called on the boys concerned to step forward to receive their just deserts. But no one was forthcoming. Several more appeals were made to no avail. At this juncture Brother Lawrence called upon Sister Finbarr, the convent principal, to call out the culprits' names.

The whole assembly of schoolboys gasped in surprise and embarrassment when the names of three of the most popular Eurasian boys in the school were called out. The three young men, almost twenty, shame-facedly slunk toward the stage to meet their accusers, (the teacher and the schoolgirls), who, in the meanwhile, had also joined Brother Lawrence and Sister Finbarr. The young men were questioned by Brother Lawrence and pale-facedly admitted their guilt. The Brother Director then stated that since education was extremely invaluable in a Singapore still emerging from the

war-years, the three over-aged young men would not be expelled but would receive a public canning in front of the ladies present. He said that he would have preferred to have the lady teacher concerned mete out the punishment but he wanted the guilty parties to realise the seriousness of their conduct by receiving a sound thrashing which a lady couldn't do, and invited his school's discipline master to inflict the punishment. This was done in front of everyone present that day. Immediately it was over the boys waited until the convent schoolgirls and their teachers had departed, before making their way back to their respective classrooms.

During the whole time the three young men had been on the stage receiving their just deserts, Siddon gradually became aware of two Eurasian boys from his class shoving him, and stepping on his shoes. He had been too engrossed in the spectacle unfolding on the stage, at first, to be immediately aware of what they were doing to him. But just as the public canning of the three concluded he became conscious that he was being pushed and his feet stamped on. He now stared at the two in surprise and irritation. He recognised them. Prior to the assembly in the hall that morning they had been taunting him with "Fucking chelop" over and over, and he had ignored them. It was the first day of school for him and he wasn't going to seek a confrontation with anyone, especially those who were his classmates. But these boys' taunts had become a physical thing and he knew they were going to be his enemies, though he didn't know why. Looking down at his shoes he was dismayed to discover them blackened from the two day-scholars' constant stamping on them. Melrose had taught him to look after his things and he had taken so much trouble to have his shoes spotlessly white for his first day at St Patrick's. Rather than confront them he decided to move away, out of trouble.

When his class got back to its room, after the public canning, Thomas was perturbed to find that his desk was located immediately in front of the two. Throughout the school day, whenever the teacher's attention was concentrated on something else, one of the two Eurasians would either kick at his heels or pester him with the word: "chelop". When the final school-bell rang at one-thirty to signal the end of the school-day, in the mad scramble to get books packed before departing for home, one of his tormentors sidled up to him and challenged him to meet them at the "zoo" for a "show-down". Irritated and thoroughly annoyed by this time, without any inkling of what or where the "zoo" was, or meant, he accepted, thinking that he would find out what had them so miffed with him, and sort it out.

Cheng, the Chinese boy who was also a boarder, and who sat at the back of the class, sauntered over so that he and Siddon could return to the

boarders together. Thomas told the Chinese boy to 'cover' for him as he had a meeting at the "zoo" with two-day scholars who had been pestering him all day, and he wanted to get them to stop it. They had been badgering him all day without stop, and had 'invited' him to meet them at the "zoo" for a "show-down". He failed to note the look of shocked amazement on the Chinese boy's face.

"You know what 'zoo' mean or not?" Cheng demanded incredulously. "No," said the innocent schoolboy, thinking that Cheng's command of English paltry, "but I think its outside school and I'm going to meet them there and get them to stop their fooling-around."

The Chinese boy studied Siddon for a moment, then walked swiftly away as his fellow-boarder followed in the wake of his two Eurasian tormentors and several other classmates who had overheard the challenge for the meeting at the "zoo", and wanted to see "the fun". The group walked out of the school-gates at East Coast Road and crossed over to what to Thomas looked like a coconut plantation. He began fathoming the funny look on Cheng's face, when he overheard the sniggers and whispers of the others that there was going to be a "scrap" at the private zoo which was located within the coconut plantation. With that startling 'revelation' came immediate resignation. He could not opt out of the forthcoming fist-fight but he would take on each boy at a time, to show them that he was unafraid. In the meantime he kept his counsel, his mind reeling with the knowledge that he would soon be trading fisticuffs, the first in his life, with total strangers whose very names and existence he had never known before in his life, until that morning. They must really hate me, Thomas Siddon thought to himself, I wonder why.

He looked around for the "zoo" but all he saw was a high chain-link fence after all of them had gone behind a thick cluster of bushes and trees. He followed the increasingly-excited throng deeper into the 'bush' and everyone's view was cut-off from the main road.

"C'mon you bastard," said the taller of the two Eurasian schoolboys, "I'm going to hammer you, you fucking chelop."

The half-smile on Siddon's face vanished at the sound of hatred in the boy's tone. This boy hates me, he thought, because I behave English and speak with an accent, and he's going to fight me because of this. Why does he feel this way toward me?

He suddenly caught sight of the other Eurasian boy sliding to his right and realised that they were both going to attack him together. A familiar voice rang out from the main road where they all had just come from, giving Siddon hope:

"Hoi — you want to fight with boarders-ah?

Thank god! It was the voice of Cheng, his fellow-boarder. The fellow had come round the corner with the entire population of St Patrick's boarders, seniors as well as juniors, and all of them jogged to where the bunch of would-be scrapers were congregated. As Siddon turned in absolute relief to his friends, the two Eurasians who had planned on giving him a thrashing, defended their action.

"The bastard want to fight what, so we come to 'zoo'," said one of them. "Don't bullshit, he new-comer, don't know about 'zoo', only St Pat's boys know about 'zoo'. If he know, you-all finished — the whole boarders fuck your arse. How can come alone if he know about 'zoo'?"

"How many people you got?" Cheng demanded.

The two aggressors now found themselves without allies as everyone who had accompanied them began claiming that they had only come to watch 'the fun'. Cheng glared at everyone contemptuously, then grabbed hold of the shirt-front of the taller of the two Eurasian boys, he knew had led Siddon into their trap that day.

"You damn stupid man, der bugger only joined St Pat's on Friday, he don't know about 'zoo' .

"You thought he new day-scholar you can *makan*, (Malay: to eat, slang for: to take advantage of), and your *kaki*, (Malay: feet, slang for sidekick(s), can *cha-bak*, (Chinese Hokkein: eat pork, slang for: to have a good time, in this case to steal in a few shots).

"You so damn strong you going to kill the bugger — any day-scholar try hammer boarders, they finished balls!" said Cheng with a sneer as he shoved the Eurasian, who didn't try stop or resist him.

"He boarder-ah? He never say what. If he boarder what-for we fight, small matter bub," said the tall Eurasian.

"Christopher de Silva you better stop talking stupid. Siddon you want to hammer or not, don't worry, I arrange one to one", Cheng said, ignoring de Silva.

"No man, how can fight now we know he boarder, maybe *you* cha-bak," replied de Silva meekly, his face was now pale in anticipation of a rough-housing from the army of boarders. But Thomas wouldn't fight, all he wanted was for them to leave him alone. Cheng appeared dissatisfied and commenced pushing the two Eurasians who had been full of bravado earlier that morning but who now looked extremely nervous. As Thomas still indicated that he felt that the whole thing was over, Cheng gave them a final hard shove, and the would-be tough-guys scurried away in relief.

The Chinese boy was annoyed with his fellow-boarder for being 'soft',

if it had been him, he would have given them a bashing to remember. Boarders, he said, had to show day-scholars that they could not be bullied. His new Chinese friend advised him to immediately stop speaking like a ma'salleh, otherwise he would still get into trouble with other day-scholars. "Two, three ma'salleh in St Pat's, their mother fetch them everyday — you got no where to *chabot*, (Malay: scarper), one day they get you alone, you finish. Better don't speak like ma'salleh," he advised. Cheng told him that he would teach him how to box and weight-train in the afternoon, before football every evening.

As he became familiar with school-life Thomas discovered that there were two planes within St Patrick's — the strict routine of the boarding section and the relaxed day-school system. And that the day-scholars didn't seem aware of the severe regime that the boarders were subjected to. Like all English language schools on the island St Pat's had two separate sessions, a morning-school from a quarter past eight in the morning to half-past one for the brighter students, and an afternoon-school for the slow learners, 'duffers' and those who had failed their term examinations in the morning-school and had been transferred to afternoon-school. Boarders were treated with respect by all day-scholars. They always passed exams, were good in the school's favourite game — soccer, and excelled in athletics. In their turn the boarders kept aloof and looked down their noses at the day-scholars. They spoke in their own "lingo" to purposely keep out the day-scholars, who stood in awe of them.

As a boarder Siddon found the grind of constant daily prayer, morning, noon and in the evening, tedious, and disliked doing things on command of a whistle. The fixed times for accomplishing specific tasks, prayer or for play were monotonous and boring. He hated the constant reminders about his "sinful" soul, and how he had to pray hard for eternal salvation to get to heaven. He wanted a good, happy and satisfying life on earth first. The never-ending long-winded prayers in the school chapel, the weekly Confessions to the Roman Catholic priest, and the almost daily Holy Communion that the religious brothers endeavoured to get the boarders to receive, made life in the boarding section, for him, overbearing. What he enjoyed most, when he was done with afternoon study, were the daily workouts with weights, and boxing with Cheng, and football.

Mr and Mrs Potts from the Melrose committee of his former children's home in Tanglin, came for a visit, one evening, about six months after he had come to St Patrick's. He was in the middle of a goal-mouth scramble during one of his daily afternoon football sessions when he suddenly noticed two familiar figures from his recent past peering at him, in what

appeared to him as dismay. He wasn't sure but it was a feeling he had. But, right then, he couldn't believe his eyes, the memory of Melrose came surging back powerfully, and overjoyed, he broke into a run, abandoning his football game, much to the dislike of Brother Remejus who was refereeing. But as he ran toward the couple he could see their shocked disbelief at his transformation. The visible reaction was written on their faces. His joy turned to sadness, and by the time he had got to where they were standing, his attitude had grown cautious. But he proffered his hand, anyway, to Mr Potts who, it seemed to him, received it reluctantly and swiftly released it. Mrs Potts was horrified that he was bare-foot, and wondered out loud to her husband whether he had hook-worms in his soles. Thomas found himself feeling disconcerted at Mrs Potts very English manner of talking to her husband as if he wasn't present. It made him an "outsider". The look in their eyes confirmed his "alienness" to them. He had become local. Murmuring embarrassed pleasantries they quickly departed. Feeling sad that his English world now saw him as 'native' he swiftly pushed the feelings aside and concentrated on the existence he was presently in.

After the English couple had gone the boarders clustered around him, curious about who they were. Some boys began calling him "chelop" again but his hard glare at the silly fools stopped them immediately. No one wanted to tangle with him any more as he had become good with his fists, and a few day-scholars had discovered it the painful way. He'd become dark-brown through almost daily swimming in the sea and had dropped his accent, and didn't tolerate anyone calling him "chelop" or *orang puteh pantat-hitam*. (Malay: White man with a black backside, meaning someone who wasn't really full White), any more.

The 1952 second-term holidays began in August and all the boarders who lived in Singapore left for their respective homes, with the exception of those from Borneo, who only flew home to Borneo at the end of the year, and Thomas Siddon. The 'Borneo boys' who remained behind were curious that he wasn't going home and asked him, and he lamely explained that his mother was too busy working and couldn't see to his wants. The look they gave him, told him that they found his 'explanation' too contrived. In fact Thomas' mother had neither come to see him nor had she written to tell him where she lived, ever since he had been admitted into the school. Anyway Thomas wasn't used to being around her and was content spending his term-holidays swimming and fishing and when the tide was out, walking the exposed continental shelf, about a hundred yards from the shore, which was submerged at high tide, looking for crabs lurking under large rocks. They



made excellent meals skewered on sticks and roasted over an open fire made from driftwood and mangrove bits, that he built on the beach. He also dug for clams and cockles. Occasionally he would glimpse European tourists, mainly travellers and aircraft crew enroute to other destinations who were put up at the Ocean Park Hotel, next-door to the school, because the aircraft of those days could not make the long haul from Europe to Australia, and back, in one go.

One afternoon, not long after he had gone on his usual "romp" over the sands scavenging for seafood, Brother Director Lawrence sought him out. He was told that the school head wanted to meet with his mother the next time she visited him. Parents were normally allowed to visit their sons during term-time to pay each month's boarding-fees or to hand over spending money to their respective offspring. But Thomas Siddon's mother had never come to see him. And the only way he could inform her of the school head's request was to write her but he didn't know her address. Thinking that Brother Lawrence had it, Thomas asked him, only to be reprimanded for speaking with the school head so familiarly. The religious then stalked away muttering darkly, leaving Siddon looking at him in astonishment. The boy had felt that he was only continuing a conversation, an important one to him, which the school head had begun in the first place, but instead had received a reprimand for lack of respect. His years at Melrose had taught him that it was perfectly natural for a youngster to speak with an adult on an equal footing, without fear of being accused of having shown any disrespect but he had been in the local school long enough, and knew it wasn't 'on' even though he didn't agree with this outlook. To Thomas, he had only been responding in a conversation initiated by the school head, and felt it wasn't fair for the school head to treat him as if he had committed something wrong.

After the term holidays in August his mother turned up in October to pay his back-dated fees but refused to meet the school head. But her son did manage to prise from her where she lived, after promising that he wouldn't reveal it to Brother Lawrence, although he did feel uneasy about doing so. He passed his final exams in November that year and was to be promoted to standard five in 1953. This time though, Brother Remejus, the brother in charge of the boarders, told him that he wouldn't be allowed to remain in the school during the year-end holidays, which spanned five weeks, because the school boarding section would be completely shut until the following year. Thomas, he said, would have to return home.

"The brothers are returning to their seminary in Penang, the cooks will be on holiday, there'll be no one here — you must return home," the Irishman said sternly.

Nodding his head as if what the religious had suggested was the most natural thing, he packed his convenient wicker-bag with several clothes, smashed his clay money-box to smithereens, extracting the precious three dollars he had managed to scrimp over five months, and walked out of the school-premises. He turned left at the main road and headed toward the Telok Kurau junction, a half-mile away. Though he had never been on the public roads before as he had come by taxi with his mother directly from Melrose to the school at East Coast Road, from conversations with his fellow-boarders as well as the day-scholars in his class, he had a rough estimate of where the way out of the area lay. He knew he could catch the Singapore Traction Company, (the bus company owned and run by the English colonials), from there into the city, (Singapore had been raised to a city under a Royal Charter granted by King George VI of Britain on 22nd September 1951). The English-owned company's local bus conductors, either Chinese, Malay or Indian, at least, would understand him when he gave them his money for the ride to town. The Chinese-owned buses which plied the rural routes, only had Chinese employees who spoke in different dialects and a smattering of Malay, seemed unfriendly and pretended not to understand English.

The fare into town in those days was only ten cents for schoolchildren, and he got off at Bras Basah Road, near the North Bridge Road junction, and walked to Bencoolen Street, asking directions on the way. His mother had written down one-forty-two Bencoolen Street as her address and he started where the street began at Bras Basah Road and walked its length until he got to the junction at Middle Road. Crossing over he passed an Indian Muslim's "hole-in-the-wall" alcove at the corner to his right, then a barber's and a Chinese-owned local coffeeshop. After passing a Chinese clan association's premises, and a conglomeration of zinc huts clustered together like a school of winnows against what was once a magnificent bungalow, he saw a row of 1942 "Swatow-style" shop-houses. One-forty-two was the last house on this row. It was a Chinese plumber's. The man seated inside on a rickety, old chair, pretended not to understand his query and he departed in exasperation. Seeing a dark-skinned woman come out of a local coffeeshop nearby, he followed her across the street into what had once been another grand mansion that had seen better days eons ago. It was now a beehive of rooms, each cubicle the home of a complete family, and its once extensive grounds also filled with a cluster of lean-to shacks, housing yet more families. The whole "network" of rooms was home to a mixture of Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian families, living amiably side by side. His years at Melrose had never prepared him for such a sight. The dark-looking woman

and two young boys with her, told him in English, on his inquiry, that they had never heard of a Luci Siddon. Disappointed he turned and walked out of the place into the street again.

Thomas had no where to go because since Melrose, which had been his home since 1946, and St Patrick's, he didn't know any other place. Singapore itself was alien, despite his living with locals for some nine months in the boarding school. It all felt 'out-of-this world' because everyone he met in the street and whom he tried speaking to, didn't seem to understand English and even appeared annoyed when he spoke to them in the colonial language. He knew he was really in a fix. In the past, when he had been at Melrose, the only places he had been to were the garrison church at Gilman Barracks, the British Army facilities in Tanglin, and school at St Joseph's Institution in Bras Basah Road, to which he was taken to in the home's van. He now couldn't return to St Patrick's because the school was shut for the duration of the holidays. In desperation he decided to pay his former children's home a visit, hoping against hope that somehow, Melrose would ask him to stay the night. Deciding that he took the bus from Stamford Road to Tomlinson Road.

Everyone was glad to see him, thinking that he had come for the day. Embarrassment held his tongue from telling them that he had no place to go to, that he hadn't had a meal, didn't know where his mother lived, nor had a bed to sleep for the night. Finally when it started becoming evening and dark, and no invitation was forthcoming from his former home to spend the night, Thomas tore himself away after bidding everyone a cheery goodbye, even though he really felt in the pits. He realised that as far as Melrose was concerned he was an outsider. The empty feeling in his belly due to lack of a meal, was overpowering and the wicker-bag of clothes in his hand weighed a ton.

He returned unconsciously to one-forty-two Bencoolen Street, praying that this time, his mother would be home. But the plumber's shop was already shut and he decided to remain outside, in case she put in an appearance, somehow. By ten that evening, as the street grew quieter with slackened traffic and street-life, and as the surrounding darkness seemed to grow even blacker, despite the whicker of light from inadequate street-lamps, he realised that he had to somehow find a place to lay his head for the night. His mind went immediately to Melrose.

The two dogs, "Simon" and "Peter", didn't bark when he got onto the grounds, wagging their tails in welcome and recognition. It was a heart-warming sight to the hungry, homeless Thomas. Oh, how he wished that nothing had changed and that he still belonged in his former English world!

But he was hungry and he had to get something to eat, and he knew a way to get into the mansion, and if he was still lucky that way hadn't changed. Leaning against the last two doors on the front verandah which led to the back of the stage at ground level, he made a sufficient gap between them to allow a finger through to lift the dead-bolt holding the door shut, and got into the building. He crept to the back of the house where he knew the fridge would be, and helped himself to the milk he knew would be there for the children. Luck was with him, this time, there were come fruit as well, and he helped himself. He spent the night under the stage as Melrose slumbered in their respective beds. About dawn, before it grew light, he tip-toed back to the fridge and helped himself to two more glasses of milk and quietly let himself out the way he had come in. Thank goodness the dogs were silent as he bade them a sad farewell. He knew he didn't belong any more. He crossed the lawn from the stage-side of the building, went through the 'plantation' of banana trees and got onto metalled Tomlinson Road.

Hoping somehow, to run into his mother before she departed one-forty-two Bencoolen Street to catch her early-morning motor-ferry to RAF Changi, where she worked, he was outside the plumber's shop before six, after managing to catch the early-morning first-run bus from Tanglin Road into Stamford Road. But his mother never appeared! He kept waiting until it was light and the Chinese coffeeshop he had noticed earlier on the previous day had thrown open its doors to the public. He went in, and being the first customer that day was immediately served by the surprised owner, who, by his facial expression indicated that he found Siddon's 'intrusion' unusual. Ignoring the man's overt inquisitiveness Siddon ordered a slice of margarine-coated bread and a cup of coffee for twenty-five cents, in Malay, and idly watched the proprietor sieve hot water he had just boiled through a cloth strainer into a hand-made tall brass coffee-pot with an extremely long, pipe-like spigot, "pulling" the kettle of boiled water away from the coffee-pot and bringing it closer again, several times, before setting the kettle down and covering the coffee-pot for a moment. The man next poured the thick coffee he had just made into another similarly tall brass coffee-pot which was placed on a heated stove, adding some hot water in it to dilute the brew, before pouring some of it into a coffee-cup resting in a saucer, which he then served to the young, sleepy boy. Thomas found the condensed milk the man used unusual, but had his breakfast hungrily, ignoring the man's open curiosity. Taking stock of his position, he knew he couldn't continue to sleep under the Melrose stage, because he would get caught, which would be embarrassing, and he also knew that he would not be able to "survive" on his steadily-depleting "funds", of which only fifty cents remained.

His mind raced in desperation, seeking an answer to his problem, because he knew he had to somehow arrive at a 'solution' and, thankfully, a brain-wave hit him. He recalled his mother telling him that whenever she was at St Patrick's to pay his boarding fees she always called on a Portuguese-Eurasian family that lived in the nearby-to-the-school Frankel Estate. They were friends that she had known since her 'Malacca-days'. From her several conversations with him, Thomas was sure he could locate their house. He had to, otherwise it would be the streets for him until school began in January, which was five weeks away.

He didn't dare take a bus to Katong because he didn't know where to go to wait for the correct service to get to that part of Singapore, and he didn't have much money left. He had noticed when coming into the city the previous day, that the roads had all been converted into one-way streets, so he didn't know which street would be the route to take the bus to the eastern part of the island. He did try asking for directions from a Chinese man in a Singapore Traction Company khaki uniform at a sub-depot opposite the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus on Bras Basah Road, but the man inside the wooden cubicle disinterestedly shrugged his shoulders. Neither were the Chinese bus conductors milling about the depot, helpful either. So he decided to walk instead, and headed in the general direction of where he thought Katong lay.

He trekked down Victoria Street in the direction of Geylang, though he didn't then know the name of the district yet, relying on instinct to get him headed correctly. But before the day was over he would learn a little more about the island he had been born in and hadn't yet had the chance to get to know. Thomas was wearing leather shoes without socks, which were okay for short walks but, by the time he had reached the gas-tank depot at Kallang his heels were blood-raw. His arms and hands ached with the constant switching of the wicker-bag of clothes he had packed for his 'holidays' and he was perspiring profusely. He was thirsty as well but wouldn't quench his thirst at any of the ice-water hawker-stalls he passed, because Melrose had ingrained in him a dread of local hawker-hygiene, and he had to conserve the last of his hoard of hard-saved fifty cents. He would wait until he got to the home of the people he was finding. Somewhere near the Kallang River a Chinese woman came out of her shop, smiled and invited him in. He saw that she had sensed his distress. But he wasn't going to cave-in. Then her husband came out from the back of the shop with a mug of hot, steaming coffee and proffered it to him. And he couldn't resist any more. The man's wife, with gestures, invited him to sit, and then offered him a plate of Chinese cakes. Thomas was famished and devoured the food. The kindly

couple tried persuading him to stay, speaking to him kindly in Chinese, but he tore himself away, crossed the bridge spanning the Kallang River, and saw the terminal building of the Kallang International Airport, on his right, up ahead.

Despite his fatigue Thomas had noticed the lean-to huts on the river-edge and promised himself that he would get to know them one day. He had seen a distinct way of life along the thoroughfares, the Chinese shops doing a variety of businesses, also the coffee-shops, the Malay kampong when Victoria Street crossed over the Kallang River, and some grand-looking, old, large mansions within vast compounds. He had also taken in the small mirrors placed at certain spots on the front of houses and promised himself that one day, he would learn the reason for such a practice. Singapore as a country was beginning to come alive for him — the streets and houses it seemed, cried out to tell him their different stories, if only he knew where to begin! (Years later Thomas Siddon would learn that the Chinese believed that by placing a mirror above their doors or windows, their families would be protected from evil forces, as demons and bad spirits feared the light reflected by a mirror, or seeing their own ugly reflections.).

His momentary distraction, musing about a local way of life he was just beginning to become aware of, had taken him past the entrance to the island's then international air-gateway, Kallang Airport, and he saw, on his right, the road-sign: "Mountbatten Road". He was on familiar ground now, and turned into it. He knew his unerring way into Katong. Thomas realised that he could now take the Chinese-owned bus service into the suburb but decided that he would walk the distance, to see whether he had the 'stomach' to go the last remaining seven-odd miles. Mountbatten Road was lengthy. Almost mid-way across the wide road the main runway of the international airport passed over, and he had to run briskly over the cross-section at this point, fearful that the traffic barriers would begin to descend whilst he was in the centre of it. He saw the guards manning the gantry-points eye-balling him curiously. It wasn't common, it seemed, to see a young boy, leadened with a wicker-bag, dashing across the planes' take-off track.

After the runway the main road veered left and merged with the East Coast Road, once past the junction of Fort Road. The garish, tinsel atmosphere of Geylang Road with its bawdy coffee-shops and cheap bars with beer at a dollar fifty a bottle, where it merged with Kallang, had been left far behind in a matter of less than a half-mile from the start of Mountbatten Road with Geylang Road. Now the scene after a matter of only several yards, took on a grand-looking feeling with stately houses set in

wide gardens. (In the "old days" these were the rural seats of important English colonials or wealthy Chinese. In Thomas Siddon's time those owned by the English colonials and who had married Malacca-Portuguese women, had been passed down to their Eurasian offspring.). Another twenty minutes of steady walking brought him to suburban Katong, which began proper from the "Roxy Cinema". He next passed the Joo Chiat Police Station and the Joo Chiat Market, realising that there were many places in Singapore which had either Chinese or Malay names. He found the unusual smell of fish, meat and vegetables emanating from the "wet market", off-putting. Thomas had never been so close to a local market before.

Siddon continued walking until he reached Telok Kurau, then deserted St Patrick's Boys' School, and finally came upon sandy Frankel Estate. It was actually a concentration of attap huts set among a sea of coconut trees growing in the dusty sand. In between the huts there were ponds, and about these there were wooden lean-to bog-houses which squatted over the greenish-looking water. Frankel Estate takes its name from its previous owner, an English Jew. Before World War Two he had allowed his workers, who 'harvested' his plantation of coconut trees for copra, to build their wooden hovels on the estate but since the Japanese Occupation, and war's end, he had disappeared to never return, and more squatters had built their attap huts on the estate, and these had 'developed' into a 'village' of sorts.

Thomas found the sand he trod hard to move along on with ease, and seemed ungiving, but this probably was because his heels were raw from his hiking without socks, and had turned beetroot-red. But despite the pain shooting up to his brain he persevered and finally arrived at a hut pointed-out to him by a Chinese villager he had inquired from, as being the abode of the Pestanas', the Portuguese-Eurasian family who had five sons, the villager had volunteered. The wooden-plank walls and attap-roof hut was a bare ten feet from the main Dunbar Walk, the sandy "road" of the estate which led to the main East Coast Road, a hundred yards away. Strange, he thought to himself, a squatters' colony with Brit names for the thoroughfares.

Mrs Pestana, the woman of the house, recognised him before he even opened his mouth, addressing him thus:

"You're Thomas not, Luci's son?"

Thomas was surprised as he had never met her before, and wondered to himself how she had realised who he was. The Eurasian woman, under the impression that he had walked over from St Patrick's, which was virtually 'across the way' from her house, bade him come in and sit. It was only after he had wearily plonked himself down and gingerly taken off his murderous shoes, that she spied the brilliant raw-red flesh about his heels. Mrs Pestana

exclaimed in alarm and demanded to know how he had got them in such a condition. Feeling a sense of guilt that he would be complaining about his mother's lack of responsibility, he told her in barest detail that he had been impatient for his mother to fetch him from the boarding school and had gone looking for her that morning, but had been successful, so he decided to seek assistance from the Pestana family, since his mother had told him that she used to visit them whenever she came down to pay his boarding fees. Thomas left out the part about him sleeping under the stage at Melrose, the night before. The good woman quickly bathed his sore feet in warm water and applied a soothing ointment over the raw flesh, which took the pain away. When her husband returned home from work that evening he insisted that young Thomas stay with them for the holidays. Mr Pestana would phone his mother at her work-place the following morning to tell her. Thomas gratefully breathed a sigh of thanks. He didn't have to spend the rest of the year-end Christmas holidays in the streets.

His mother arrived at the Pestana home a week later, on a Sunday. To Thomas she appeared cool and calm, without any trace of anxiousness as to her child's well-being since learning that St Patrick's School was closed for the year-end holidays, that he hadn't known how to get in touch with her, and that he had been told to leave the school and make his way to a home whose address he didn't know. Instead she inquired whether he had been behaving himself at the Pestana household, and upon hearing that Mr Pestana flew into a rage, calling her a negligent parent for not being concerned that St Patrick's School would be closed for the Christmas holidays and that her son would have no place to go to in the meantime. Thomas would learn later that Mr Pestana knew that Luci Siddon did not have a decent place of her own and preferred living by herself. When his mother began answering the man in her native Malaccan-Portuguese patois, (a mixture of 16th-century Portuguese and Malay), her son knew she didn't want him to know what they were arguing about. He had never learned the lingo of her Malayan home-town because his mother had taken pains, ever since he was a baby, to not utter a single word in his presence, and, in his immediate recollection he had never met any Portuguese-Eurasian friends of hers, being raised since birth, during and after the war as an English child and among the English. But he knew it was her 'dialect' because he knew she was from Malacca, and it definitely was not Chinese, Malay or Tamil. Despite not knowing what was being bandied-about between the adults he could tell that she was on the receiving-end of kind-hearted Mr Pestana's tongue-lashing from her scowls and the man's strident voice. His mother suddenly stormed out of the house at something Mr Pestana said, without



a glance in his direction, and as Thomas made to follow her, the kindly Mr Pestana restrained him with a gentle hand, calling out to his youngest son, Patrick, some five years older than he was, to get him to help with chopping firewood for the evening meal. Most of the villages in Singapore then didn't have electricity and everyone relied on charcoal or wood for cooking. The Pestana family made a fuss of him that evening.

At the Pestana's Thomas got to know about having a home and living as a family. He ate with them and was gently shown to behave with respect to his elders, both the father, as well as the elder boys in the family, and even learned to control his galloping appetite. He had never eaten Portuguese-Eurasian food before coming to the Pestana's and now he had it everyday. Mrs Pestana was an excellent cook and he would look forward, to what to him were her exotic meals, which she took pains to prepare each day. He even acquired a taste for *sambal blachan*, (Malay: a paste of stone-mortar pounded red chillies mixed in with roasted preserved shrimp paste), and would put lavish helpings on his plate until Patrick took him aside and kindly pointed out that there was insufficient to go round for everyone else if he helped himself to too much.

His first Christmas outside Melrose was spent with the Portuguese-Eurasian family. It was a wonderful feeling to be greeted by their relatives and friends when he and Patrick went round visiting. He had never eaten so much in his life. His mother never came and Mr Pestana told him to return to his boarding school, after the five-week year-end holiday, from their place.

For Singapore and Malaya the previous two years, 1951 and 1952, had their fair share of events. In January 1951 the Federation of Malaya promulgated the Manpower Regulations, calling up young men, aged between 18 and 24 for service with the security forces, (police and 'jungle companies'). Only 20,000 young men were actually required, and the government made it clear that those sitting school examinations would not be called up. But the announcement threw the Chinese in Malaya into a panic and by August 1951 those liable to register, (though not necessarily to be drafted), had taken ship to China. The government retaliated by passing regulations making a re-entry visa before leaving the country, obligatory. The effect was to bar those who had already left, which was an extreme penalty against the Chinese-speaking community. In the end only 1,800 Chinese were eventually conscripted — a disproportionate number of whom were English-educated. Some Chinese had also fled to Singapore.

On 13th March 1951, Sir Henry Gurney, the British High Commissioner for the proposed Federation of Malaya, announced the names of those who

would make it into the Malayan Federal Legislative Council. This legislative body was viewed as a first step, by the British, toward a ministerial system of government. Prior to this constitutional change the Federal Legislative Council consisted of the High Commissioner, three ex-officio members, eleven state and settlement representatives, eleven official members and fifty unofficial members. The Federal Secretariat ceased to exist on 9th April 1951.

Elections for nine "unofficial seats" in the new Singapore Legislative Council took place on 10th April, with the majority of votes still being with representatives of the colonial administration for the 25-seat legislature. The majority of the elected legislature comprised English-educated Chinese who had been born in Singapore, and who seemed perfectly content to leave government to the British while they engaged in commercial pursuits protected by British jurisdiction. Among Singapore's adult population, half of whom, (about 200,00) were 'alien Chinese', (those born in China and still holding China passports but who would not return to the mother-country because it was under Communist administration and preferred freedom in Singapore but who still held on to a chauvinistic Chinese view), there had been a reluctance to register as voters or to vote.

On 17th May 1951 the colonial government placed an embargo on rubber exports to China in retaliation for China's support of North Korea which, with her Soviet Russian-trained troops and Chinese Communist regulars, had invaded South Korea on 25th June 1950.

In Malaya on 6th October, 1951, Communist terrorists ambushed and killed Sir Henry Gurney, the British High Commissioner to Malaya, and his secretary.

It was announced on 15th January 1952 that Sir Gerald Templer would succeed the late Sir Henry Gurney as British High Commissioner to Malaya. In Singapore Sir Franklin Gimson was retiring and Mr John Ferns Nicholl, the Colonial Secretary in Hong Kong, would be replacing him.

In Malaya, the United Malays National Organisation, (UMNO), which had come into existence in 1946 as a result of protestations by a district officer, Dato Onn bin Ja'afar, to fight the British-proposed Malaya Union constitution, had evolved into a right-wing political party, and abandoned him in 1952 because of his attempts to invite non-Malays into the party. Tengku Abdul Rahman, a Malay prince, became the new President, and in a "loose alliance" with Tan Cheng Lok's Malayan Chinese Association, (MCA), won nine out of 11 seats in the 1952 Kuala Lumpur municipal elections. Dato Onn in the meantime, had formed his "Independence for Malaya Party".

When Thomas Siddon returned to St Patrick's School, after the holidays, he immediately missed the happy family life shown him by the Pestanas but it was already 1953 and he was going to be thirteen in March, and each year that he grew older was a year closer to completing his education, becoming independent of his mother, and fending for himself. He looked forward to that day because it would enable him to be free of her whims. He was on the first rung of senior school and his latest interest was the school army-cadet corps. It was his main passion after football and working out with weights. Schooldays seemed brighter since Mr Pestana had told him he was to go straight to the Pestana home in Frankel Estate when the first term holidays came around. The man said he would arrange it with his mother. The dull routine of boarding life did not appear to be a drag any more, now that he had a place to go to when term-end came.

In February 1953 some 276 Chinese associations led by Mr Tan Lark Sye, President of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, pledged their support for a Chinese-medium Chinese university, the first in nanyang, (the 'south seas'), which later would be named the Nanyang University, which would offer further education to the Chinese Middle (secondary), School students in Singapore, who could no longer go to China's universities, due to the then prevailing political conditions, (Communist China was banned to the Asian residents of Singapore and Malaya by the respective British colonial administrations of both territories). In March the Singapore Hokkein Association offered 550 acres of land in Jurong for the building of the proposed university. Donations from both rich and poor Chinese poured in, and five months later building work had commenced.

To the colonial administration, the English-educated Singapore-born Chinese, and the Malays, Indians and Eurasians of Singapore this 'alien' Chinese desire for a Chinese university was nothing more than a blatant chauvinism, with the proposed university being a vehicle for the perpetuation of Chinese language and culture, aimed at a life-long retention of a sentimental attachment to China itself. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce, ever since its beginnings in 1906, when the-then Chinese Consul-General in Singapore, Chang Pi Shih, had first established the Chinese Commercial Association, the forerunner of the Chamber which came into being in 1917, the association's (and subsequently the Chamber's), primary aim was to promote the 'unity of overseas Chinese', as well as their remittances to China, which, for aeons, had given China the necessary foreign currency to purchase badly-needed military hardware.

Thomas was glad to return to the Pestana's in mid-March during the holidays, and Patrick, who wasn't going to school, showed him how easy

it was to catch the pond-fish in the estate with bread pieces thrown over a submerged fish-net, whisking it up as soon as he noticed the bits of bread bobbing in the water. It was so easy he soon lost interest, and Mrs Pestana was adamant that she wouldn't allow them into "her house" because the fish lived off the village lavatories over the ponds which everyone used.

The next thing he discovered was the collecting of fallen, ripe coconuts, which were brown in colour, and selling them to the several Indian or Chinese grocery shops in Frankel Estate for ten cents a piece. The shops would peel and grate the fruit and sell the grated coconut to housewives who needed them to make "coconut milk" for local cakes or curries. He and Pat went out everyday looking for coconuts that had fallen during the night and when they had collected around ten to fifteen a piece, would sell them to the grocer who offered them the best price according to demand.

A mentally-retarded Baba-Chinese boy called Wee, who preferred to speak in his fluent Malay rather than English, which he spoke reasonably well also, often called at the Pestana's, because like them, his family originally hailed from Malacca and he felt "at home" being with the Malacca-Portuguese family, often dropped in on Patrick to "yarn away". Wee's family was well-to-do, though this wasn't why Wee's visits were looked forward to. He enjoyed a certain popularity because his attractive sister had won an island-wide beauty contest and had represented Singapore in an international beauty contest in Europe, though she had been unplaced. But she was beautiful and she had been abroad to spread the name of everyone's small unknown island, and Wee was treated as if *he* somehow, had been responsible, and he revelled in everyone's open admiration. But Wee had a habit which everyone found annoying — he could spin the tallest yarns and with such conviction no one ever knew when he was telling the truth about *anything*. Whenever Wee, who visited the Pestana home everyday and would spin his fantastic tales, realised that he had gone too far, he would invite all the boys who congregated there over to his place which had its own sprawling plantation of coconut trees, to gather the fallen ones which they could sell to the Frankel Estate grocers. Everyone relished this because apart from the opportunity to make enough to see a film at the "Roxy Cinema", everybody hoped to catch sight of Wee's reputedly-beautiful sister who had won the beauty contest. Though, whenever they were at Wee's place they never ever got the chance to catch a glimpse of her because like all 'good' Baba-girls she remained indoors, away from the eyes of 'strange males'.

That holiday, after Wee had again performed his usual 'brilliant act' and after he felt that he had gone too far telling his tall tales, he invited everyone

over to his house. Thomas followed everyone to the Baba's home, which was an old-fashioned Baba-Nonya bungalow on East Coast Road, immediately in front of the St Patrick's School. The actual living quarters of the rambling house were situated above the ground, while below it was an empty space which was used as a storage area. Each boy within their group selected his own tree and shinned up it. Aping everybody-else Thomas 'squatted' on his and pushed himself up with the aid of his legs, fitting them into pre-cut groves on the trunk while pulling himself up at the same time with his hands. Climbing a coconut tree for the first time in his life and intent on making it to the top like everybody else, so that he wouldn't look a twerp, he scratched his thigh on a rusty nail sticking out of the trunk, ignoring the slight discomfort the scratch caused when it mixed in with his sweat. He felt a sense of triumph on arriving at the first lower-fronds of the coconut-palm and pulled himself into its widespread branches to look down on the fruit dangling below. The coconuts resembled melons to him, from his position. Patrick had told him to go only for the old coconuts, which were a dirty-looking grey-brown as Thomas wasn't yet familiar which of the young coconuts were ready for drinking and also had succulent tender flesh in them.

The "gang" collected a rewarding 'cache' which ensured them a satisfying 'harvest' of pocket-money to spend at the "Roxy Cinema" that evening. Afterwards when they had sold all their fruit and divided their spoils for the day, Thomas remembered his scratch and washed it at a convenient well nearby, and forgot about his 'wound'. He hadn't bothered walking to the fresh-water stand-pipe on East Coast Road, opposite the Ocean Park Hotel, because there always was a long queue of villagers waiting to fill up their respective oil-drums. Fresh water at the stand-pipe was free to the villagers and was only used for cooking and washing up plates and utensils. Everyone in the village, including the Pestanas, had their own arterial-well, dug ten-to-fifteen-feet deep in their own homes and brought the water to the surface with the aid of a bucket attached to a rope. This water was used for bathing and the washing of clothes. Everyone in Frankel Estate, because of this, smelled 'earthy'.

Thomas became aware of pus seeping from his scratch several days after climbing the coconut tree at Wee's home. Irritated that it had turned septic he washed it with some more well-water. That day his mother came for a visit and he showed her the sore on his thigh because she had told him, when he was young, that she had been a nurse before he had been born. He was surprised that she fussed over him, cleansing and dressing it, and promising that it would heal quickly because it had been attended to "properly".

Several days before the holidays were over and his return to St Patrick's he grew embarrassed because the sore was giving out a peculiar odour. But he mentally dismissed it because he felt that it would heal soon. The following day he was back in boarding school and into his second term.

The next morning in the boarding section, in the bathroom, he found that he couldn't open his mouth fully to brush his teeth though he did manage, after a fashion to get his toothbrush in and clean them. He felt no discomfort, though the "pong" from his sore had become more pronounced. He hadn't yet associated the wound with the condition of his mouth. The following morning the toothbrush could only barely be squeezed through with much pushing on his part. But he still wasn't worried. His appetite was normal, which meant that he was ravenously hungry, and his general sense of well-being wasn't impaired. On the third morning he found his mouth clamped shut but he still didn't fret, thinking that his mouth would 'loosen-up' later, after his first cup of coffee, and he could go to the bathroom and brush his teeth before school began, afterward. But when he and all the other boarders were in the dinning hall for breakfast Thomas found that he couldn't get anything into his mouth as it was shut tight. Swearing aloud between clenched lips in frustration, his unconscious reflex-action was overheard by a "senior", who looked at him accusingly. Swearing out aloud was expressively forbidden and something had to be upsetting Siddon for an "experienced" boarder like him to openly court trouble.

"What's the matter Siddon, somebody being funny, you better not say that word again," the senior warned.

Thomas indicated his clamped-shut mouth. The senior took one look, opened his eyes in amazement and horror, got up from his seat and walked over to Brother Remejus' table, and spoke to him. He waited there while Brother Remejus left the dinning room for a few minutes, returning with the boarding school's medic, Brother Anthony. The pale-looking Chinese lay-religious stood at Brother Remejus' table and summoned Siddon to him with a wave of the hand. When Thomas got to where he was, the medic took one look at the young boy and pronounced:

"Better go to Confession and then say your last prayers, you're going to die, you've got tetnus!"

Reacting instantaneously Siddon burst out crying at the unfairness of it all. "I'm not going to die — I will fight it, you're talking shit, not like a man of god", he yelled between clamped teeth, angrily stomping away. Brother Anthony, realising that he had treated the situation erroneously, ran after Thomas to calm him down. An ambulance was called for.

On arrival at the Singapore General Hospital in Sepoy Lines, he was

warded and immediately given intravenous anti-toxin drips. Three times. He was dying of hunger since he hadn't been able to have breakfast that morning, and informed the doctor attending to him. A nurse brought him some egg-nog. Siddon noticed that the doctor appeared grave. He received egg-nog for lunch and dinner, and more anti-toxin drips. About mid-day of the second day an European priest named Bonami looked in on him. He inquired whether Siddon would like to receive Holy Communion, and Thomas nodded. The priest said he would give it to him on the following day.

That evening his mother called in after work. She told her son that he had tetnus, which was dangerous, and that he could die. It was dangerous in his case because the tetnus was in an advanced stage, and which manifested itself in his fully-locked jaw but since his body was putting up such a strong fight, the doctor in charge of his case felt Thomas had a fighting chance and was banking on the anti-tetnus toxin drips he had been feeding into his veins to overcome the germs in his body. All the time, while his mother was relating this to him Thomas was gazing at her in quiet amazement. She wasn't displaying any emotion, and she usually was the first one to keel over and break down in tears whenever things got 'bad'! To him then, she could have been talking about preparing curry-chicken, as far as her son was concerned. When she finally decided it was time to go he was relieved to see her depart, after giving him the mandatory perfunctory kiss on his cheek.

Father Bonami, the French priest, arrived the following morning as promised, and told the young boy that he was going to anoint his body with holy ointment. Sometimes, the priest announced, the holy oil did God's work and people recovered. It was then that Siddon finally realised the seriousness of his own situation. His life was in danger but all he could feel was galloping hunger. He knew he wouldn't die. But kept it to himself.

The French priest looked in on him for four more days and then stopped, and Thomas knew, for sure, he wasn't going to die. Then the doctor took over. He made Siddon do bend-overs to try to touch his toes, which he couldn't do because his back had stiffened but the doctor kept on coming everyday to see that he kept up with what to Thomas was a "chore". Nevertheless with each passing day the space between his finger-tips and the floor, when he bent over, grew smaller and smaller, until he could almost touch his toes. Finally when his young patient could easily turn his head from side to side as well as reach behind over his shoulders and touch his shoulder-blades with opposite hands, the doctor pronounced him free of tetnus.

"People die from lock-jaw within twenty-four hours, I don't know why but you were spared — you've got a brand-new life, it's wonderful!" he exclaimed with pleasure. Thomas Siddon felt a sense of satisfaction. He had cheated death and proved Brother Anthony, the lay-religious Chinese medic wrong.

The hospital permitted him to return home that evening and his mother, who had called after work, brought him by taxi to St Patrick's. Thomas was surprised that she accompanied him to the Brother Director's office. The school head wasn't in but a boarder went upstairs to his quarters and got him. Curious because he could see that his mother had come prepared to meet with the school head, he demanded the reason for her wanting to meet Brother Lawrence, and instantly knew that she still hadn't been keeping up with his boarding-fees payments. Thomas felt embarrassment as well as annoyance, and despite feeling slightly weak from the continuous medication at the hospital, curtly told his mother that her inaction had made life a misery for him at the boarding school because he was the only one who was always behind in his fees. He demanded that she take him out of the boarding school then and there, and allow him to continue as a day-scholar. She flatly refused.

Just as they were arguing Brother Lawrence appeared at the top of the stairs leading from the brother's quarters and began climbing down. As he reached the bottom of the stairs where mother and son were arguing, Luci Siddon threw herself on the floor at the man's feet and begged him not to expel "her son" as she was a widow struggling to send him through school despite the trouble he gave her. Annoyed at his mother's lame attempt to evoke sympathy from the Eurasian school head by her blatant lie about his character because he knew he had grown up at Melrose without her help since after the war, he was also stupefied at the man's lack of embarrassment in allowing her to lower herself by grovelling at his feet. In his eyes his mother was stupid but he hated the man for gazing down at her without any sense of awkwardness and in permitting her to grasp his shoes in supplication, as if he were some bloody saint!

Despite feeling weak from the drugs given him in hospital Thomas strode forward and angrily pulled his mother off her knees. The pitiless, so-called religious, bastard!

"Never bow or scrape to any living thing except god — he's no god, (pointing at Brother Lawrence), and he shouldn't have allowed you to beg before him. Who the hell does he think he is anyway?"

"You're stupid mother, lowering yourself this way, if he's sacking me, so be it! But you don't beg from no man!" Thomas yelled in hurt and angry



humiliation as he glared defiance at Brother Lawrence, all his loathing and frustration pouring out from his eyes at him. In that split-second, for the first time in his life he truly lost his temper, raising his voice and imitating the Japanese sentries in Sime Road Camp when they were reprimanding a prisoner. Thomas felt unafraid. Mighty. No one would make his mother cringe any more. She was a widow but now she had a son who would fight for her. To hell with everyone. The doctor at the General Hospital had been right. He had a new life and it was going to be different.

His mother's reaction to his display of anger was instantaneous. She grabbed hold of his shoulders, spun him round and propelled him from the room where Brother Lawrence stood with an amazed expression on his face. She ordered him to wait outside while she had a word with the school principal in private. She came out in fifteen minutes, telling him that he wouldn't be sacked from the boarding school, and chided him again for his outburst against Brother Lawrence.

"Don't be like that son, he too, (referring to Brother Lawrence), has his problems," she admonished. But Thomas knew that his mother was to blame for the position he was in, and that by his display of anger he had shamed the school head into not expelling him. He thereupon demanded and obtained his mother's correct address, and the times she would normally expect to be in. The school had been unable to notify her about his being admitted into hospital, and in desperation he had asked Cheng, his fellow-boarder, who had gone to visit him at the hospital, to go over to the Pestanas in Frankel Estate to get word to her. Having given Thomas her correct address, his mother said she was leaving, and immediately began walking out of the school grounds toward East Coast Road.

Brother Lawrence and Thomas, from then, kept out of one another's way. The school head had in fact remained distant and aloof ever since he had first spoken with Siddon about mother's lateness in settling his boarding fees since the previous August holidays. But now he openly scowled whenever the young man came into his presence. Before long all the boarders became aware of the friction between the two. Siddon, on his part, made sure that the religious had no cause to reprimand him again by reminding his mother in a note each month, to upkeep her payments of his boarding fees. But she still was behind, and the school head would angrily caution the young boy whenever the two happened to run into one another in the school. Siddon always felt shame as he knew his mother had a job with the British forces and had no one else to look after except him, and that she could easily have afforded his fees. But he was powerless.

Queen Elizabeth II was crowned Queen of Britain, her Commonwealth

and Colonies, on 2nd June 1953. It was a public holiday in Singapore, and elderly Brother Sieberg who liked to potter in the garden, give Catechism classes which never stuck to the lesson on hand but "wandered all over the place", and go on long hikes all over Singapore, took the boarders on a long walk to the Esplanade in the city, which overlooked the mouth of the Singapore River, to look at the decorations put up by the municipal council. When the school group arrived at the Singapore River-mouth Thomas suddenly remembered his childhood friend, Buang and his tales of the Malay pirates of the **Riau Empire** who used to kill their victims of the ships that they had ransacked off **Pulau Blakang Mati**, (Malay: "Death from behind Island"), inside the Singapore River, and that when Singapore's modern founder, Stamford Raffles, first arrived on Singapore, the river's banks had been lined with rotting skulls and bodies. In honour of the Queen's Coronation, the Esplanade was renamed "Queen Elizabeth Walk".

Slightly more than a month later, on 27th July, the Korean armistice was signed at Panmunjon, bringing the three-year war in the Korean peninsula to halt. Korea was divided into North Korea and South Korea. Soviet-trained Koreans and Chinese Communists had humiliated the modern, well-equipped troops of the Western Allies which comprised the United Nations' Peace-Keeping Force. Morally the Communists had won.

Most overseas Chinese of the Chinese-speaking community in Singapore, both adherents of the Kuomintang, and the Communist Party of China, as well as those who just loved China, were nonetheless proud when they learned that Chinese forces had helped halt the United Nations' advance, and even rejoiced on learning that the UN forces were forced into a humiliating defeat, especially after the hostility of the United States toward China.

When he returned to spend the Christmas holidays in December with the Pestanas, Mr Pestana kept blaming himself for Thomas becoming infected with tetanus through living with his family. Try as he would, the young boy couldn't convince the good man otherwise. Something dramatic in the meantime had occurred in the estate while Siddon had still been in St Patrick's. The whole Frankel Estate village was agog with the news that an Eurasian woman in her twenties had been raped and murdered in her attap hut in the coconut plantation, several weeks before. The attractive Eurasian had been a dance-hostess at the "International Club" in Beach Road, which was very popular with British servicemen stationed on the island. Thomas had picked up from the village gossip that girls "like her" were prostitutes on the side. Her naked body had been discovered by her Chinese landlady who also doubled as the murdered woman's "daily", when she had let herself in on the morning after the tragedy to clean up the premises as usual. She had discovered the Eurasian strangled with a tie.

Several days later a RAF technician confessed to the crime. Thomas was staggered by the ease which had decided the man to take a human life because he could not have his way with her. The English must be a violent race, he thought to himself. He avidly followed the court proceedings in the papers until it was time to return to the boarding school for another term of studies.

He would soon be fourteen and by virtue of the class-standard he was in, was considered a 'senior', which meant that he was now permitted to go out on Sunday afternoons, after study, to Katong, the suburban town, which he had passed through, several years ago, when he had first come to St Patrick's from Melrose. It was 1954 and he was also being ear-marked for 'better' things in the school's army cadet corps. He enjoyed every minute of his once-a-week muster. The two teachers in charge, a Mr Mcleod and a Mr Perimeter, both Eurasians, recognised an ardent devotee and waited to see how he would develop.

He was already well-known in school as the producer of his own one-man monthly class-magazine, foraging for information, writing, typing and doing the layout for the pages as well as using the school's stenciling machine to print each edition. But his maths grew worse, and his maths teacher, a Mr Philips, told his colleagues in the teachers' common room that he would 'straighten' the well-known and popular schoolboy, when Siddon was transferred to his class in the following year.

Sir John Nicholl, the new Governor of Singapore, announced new government reforms on 24th February 1954. A commission was appointed to study possible revision of the colony's Constitution. As the population seemed tardy in voluntarily registering as electors, an automatic registration system was to be adopted. The City Council and Rural Boards were replaced by an island-wide authority called the City and Island Council, and English would remain the official language of the Colony.

In March 1954 the English-language "Straits Times" suddenly began carrying in-depth articles reflecting the agony and heroic bravado of a beleaguered French garrison defending against waves of fanatical "Indochinese" revolutionaries fighting for their respective freedoms from French colonial rule. Help from China for the Indochinese was also forthcoming. The Chinese had mastered a new kind of fighting — guerilla warfare — and showed the Indochinese how to subdue an enemy fighting in jungle terrain against the enemy's so-called mighty armaments.

India, Pakistan, Burma, Ceylon and Indonesia met in Colombo and Kandy in Ceylon, (Sri Lanka), in April and May to form a new economic grouping called the Colombo Powers.

On the night of 6th May 1954, the last human wave of Indochinese freedom-fighters overwhelmed French defenders at Dien Bien Phu. It was a decisive battle of contemporary history — a brilliant military show-down between General Vo Nguyen Giap of Vietnam, a formidable exponent of Mao Tse-tung's theories of revolutionary war, and General Henri Navarre of the French Army.

In Singapore the colonial government had embarked on a project to register young men for national service. Reaction from the English-speaking Chinese and the other Asian and Eurasian communities presented no problems but widespread resistance was met at the Chinese Middle Schools where only some 500 students were required to register. On 11th May 1954, the day registration was to end, the Director of Education formally advised the Middle School principals that students could apply individually for postponement of national service if they so wished. As the final day for registration, 12th May, drew near, students from the Chung Cheng High School posted a petition to the Governor asking for 'exemption' from national service, not 'postponement', the Chinese High School did likewise. The students from Chung Cheng High School decided to stage a demonstration outside government house on 12th May but the police withheld permission.

Thwarted, on 13th May, students from the Chinese Catholic High School and the Chinese High School quietly enlisted the help of Chinese girl students who hired lorries, (for a "picnic"), to take their male compatriots to King George V Park, (Canning Park today), where they were joined by more students from the Chung Hwa Girls' School and the Nanyang Girls' School to form a procession which marched to Government House, in defiance of the police refusal to issue them a permit. At the park the students lined the railings along the pavement outside the park, on Clemenceau Avenue, linked arms and broke into heroic songs of the Chinese revolution. The police tried breaking up the demonstration which soon degenerated into a melee, and scuffles ensued. Eight students, aged between 16 and 23 were arrested. All British troops who were off-duty were recalled to barracks by notices flashed on cinema screens in the town.

On that same day, (13th May), representatives from the various Chinese Middle Schools, with Communist help, formed an All-Singapore Chinese Middle School Students Delegation, which organised joint tactical operations. Those students who had already registered for national service then handed in their national registration cards to the seniors of the new body, for 'safe-keeping', and a list of names who did so was kept. The group next demanded that the detained students be released by the police, and to

exempt all students for national registration. If no action from the authorities was forthcoming the students threatened that they would stage a sit-in. Finally the anti-Communist Chinese newspaper, the "Nanyang Siang Pau" which had been been accused of publishing adverse reports against the students was boycotted.

Support for the Chinese students came from all quarters of the 'alien' Chinese population in Singapore, both the Communists and the Kuomintang, who strived among themselves to appear "more" for the striking students, over one another. As tension between the pro-Communist and pro-Kuomintang groups flared up, each began attacking one another. The Kuomintang supporters smeared tar on the premises of the pro-Communist Chinese newspaper, "Sin Pao", while the Chinese Chamber of Commerce which had Kuomintang adherents who were also members of Middle School management committees, was attacked by the students, on Communist instigation, for changing its appeal to the authorities on national registration from 'exemption' to 'postponement'. The students also attacked those of their teachers who were known Kuomintang supporters. But the decision to stage a sit-in, as far as the students were concerned, was arrived at when the Chamber, trying to regain control of the rebellious student groups and to re-assert its authority, applied to the colonial government for permission to close the Middle Schools in advance of the normal holidays. This was acceded to by the government.

Members of the non-Chinese public, not cognizant of the difference between Communist and Kuomintang 'alien' Chinese followers, (or who was 'alien', because this term was not used publicly), both of which were officially frowned upon, were not aware that what they were witnessing was a Chinese-perceived, (both Kuomintang and Communist), score against the British for alleged British discrimination against their race, since the previous century when their poverty-stricken relatives and countrymen had fled the motherland for 'nanyang', (including Singapore), to seek their fortunes, and for the British not allowing them English education in the British colony of Singapore, to secure suitable employment, (since the British viewpoint was that they were not British subjects but 'alien' Chinese on a sojourn to earn money before returning to the motherland), or supporting them in their need for Chinese education, which the Chinese had to underwrite on their own, and which they had successfully accomplished. The 'alien' Chinese and their offspring regarded the official 'involvement' of the British authorities on Singapore into what they considered their private affairs, as an intrusion because they were supporting themselves as far as Chinese language, culture and education were concerned, and their

children did not want to register themselves for national service, (which also had the support of their parents and relatives), because they did not regard Singapore as their country.

As far as the non-Chinese public in Singapore was concerned these 'sinkeh', (China-born), Chinese were 'trouble-makers', and while the island's other communities — the Malays, Tamils and Eurasians, and the English-educated, Singapore-born Chinese did understand about "Communist terrorism", they did not fathom why the Kuomintang were tarred with the same brush. This was because they did not speak or write Chinese and could not understand the chauvinistic 'pulls' in the direction of Chinese language and culture that was common to both groups.

One thousand students, male and female, assembled at the Chinese High School, and resolved to remain there until the government accepted their demands. The students, in the meantime, had agreed to accept the 'postponement' rather than the 'exemption' condition in the national registration exercise, though they barred the gates, and piled desks and chairs at every entrance. Classes were conducted by the older students with periods for recreation, the singing of Chinese patriotic songs, political study groups and a strict lights-out policy at bedtime. By 24th June the government agreed to the postponement of national service and to the re-admission of all students to their respective schools. Barricades on the front gates of the school were torn down and 20 minibuses went in to return the students home after their 23-day sit-in.

But all Chinese Middle School managements were instructed by the government to reject students of doubtful character, to re-register students with two sponsors each, to ban students expelled from other schools, and to screen teachers, dismissing those who were considered 'doubtful'. But in reality none of these stipulations was carried out except by the Catholic High School. Power within the Chinese Middle School though, had passed from teachers and principals to the leaders of the Middle School students, who had won not only the admiration and sympathy of their own parents but a majority of the Chinese-speaking community, both Kuomintang and Communist, as well. Though seven students who had been arrested on 13th May, were imprisoned for three months.

While the Chinese-educated, solely Chinese-speaking population had been making public their disgruntlements and dissatisfaction over British colonial policy and attitude to them, the English-educated students, in particular those from the University of Malaya, (which then was located at Singapore), and which had a student-body comprising residents of both Malaya and Singapore, were intent on passing exams, getting distinctions,

and obtaining excellent examination results. This was the all-important focus, to pass with distinction so that the better jobs in government and the private sector would be theirs for the choosing. These students were part of the general island-wide attitude among the English-educated, whether at university level or otherwise, who were content to passively accept the British domination of their society so long as that guaranteed for them a lifetime of employment and being able to keep up with the joneses. The other Asian-speaking communities, whether Malay, Tamil, Urdu or Punjabi-speaking, were indifferent to politics, because, like the 'alien' Chinese, theirs was a preoccupation with the making money and remitting sums back to their respective homeland. Among the English-educated there was also the fear of detention without trial under the Emergency Regulations, and being labelled as political subversives.

But within the University of Malaya, (in Singapore), there was one outlet where the politically-aware could let off steam. This was the University of Malaya Socialist Club, members of whom were the idealistic English-educated elite as well as some who had leftist-leanings, with a small faction who were actually card-carrying Communists. Students who were not members of the Socialist Club either regarded it with fear and suspicion or, if they were politically unaware, just weren't interested in joining them. But this university club, with its small membership, (in comparison to the total student-body of the university), though minuscule in size represented a whole range of leftist views, some of which were quite alarming to the authorities, who kept a keen eye on their activities. The club published its own publication, *Fajar*, which was considered radical in its views as it published criticisms of the prevailing social conditions of those times, including the introduction of new official regulations meant to keep either the population or the students in line. The club's seventh issue, a mere three days before the Chinese Middle School students clashed with the police, was considered seditious by the government and the student-members of the editorial board were arrested a fortnight later, just as they were about to sit for their examinations, and were to be tried in court in August that year.

Lee Kuan Yew, a practising lawyer with Laycock & Ong, whose senior partner was John Laycock and a supporter of the Progressive Party in Singapore, used to give legal advice to trade unions, political detainees, to the Council of Joint Action, to the University of Malaya Socialist Club and to the militant Chinese Middle School students, and arranged for his friend in London, D.N. Pitt, QC, to fly to Singapore to act as senior counsel in the forthcoming case. A Defence Fund, suggested by a K.M.Byrne and Toh

Chin Chye, both of whom would become founding members of the People's Action Party in the not too distant future, and Chinese Middle School students, helped raise public contributions for the fund. The monies raised were only to meet Pitt's travelling expenses.

The trial on 23rd August 1954, before District Judge F.A. Chua dismissed the case. At a celebration party in the Faculty of Medicine afterward, which was attended by the Pan-Malayan Students' Federation and the Singapore Chinese Middle School Students' Delegation, the *Fajar* students presented Pitt with the gift of a ruby. The Chinese Middle School had decided, in the meantime, to engage both Pitt and Lee Kuan Yew as counsel for the seven students who had been arrested and subsequently given three months' imprisonment, following the 13th May 1954 incident.

Pitt returned to Singapore on 7th October for the case which was heard on 9th October before Mr Justice Knight who commented that the case had been blown out of all proportion, and that it was not just a 'storm in a teacup but a typhoon in a thimble'. The judge found that there wasn't any need to even call the prosecution in the case. The appeal was unsuccessful and the students were given an opportunity to sign bonds of good behaviour which they declined to do. An appeal to the Privy Council was mooted but it came to naught, much to the relief of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce which had been embarrassed into meeting the \$30,000 fee of Pitt, by the Chinese Middle School students who had accused the Chamber of letting them down after the students had agreed to meet Pitt's fees.

Elsewhere in the region, as a direct result of the Indochinese success against the French, a meeting was convened at Manila from 6th to 8th September, that year, to discuss collective defence in South East Asia. Pakistan, Siam.(Thailand), the Philippines, the United States of America, France, Britain, Australia and New Zealand drew up a treaty, known as the "Manila Treaty". An organisation was later set up at Bangkok and called the South East Asia Treaty Organisation, SEATO. It warned Communist forces not to follow up their Indochinese success with aggression beyond existing boundaries.

In accordance with the terms of the Geneva Agreement, after Dien Bien Phu, the French Army evacuated Hanoi on 9th October.

On 21st November 1954 a new political party called the People's Action Party, (PAP), was launched in Singapore Colony. It was viewed by the British as a radical, extreme left-wing organisation professing a multi-racial idealism, and drew support from young professionals who had either been born in Singapore or the Malay peninsula. Among the party stalwarts was *Lee Kuan Yew*, a lawyer who had studied in London and, who, since his



return had been an adviser to extreme, (in the colonial administration's view), left-wing trade unions, political detainees and militant Chinese students.

He had been admitted to the Middle Temple in 1950 after being awarded first class honours in law at Cambridge in 1949. Lee had been active in socialist circles whilst at the university in England, and had been canvassing for the British Labour Party, which was then in power, for the British general elections which was imminent, and had been impressed by their challenging of some die-hard British assumptions about Empire. He had made the acquaintance of several British left-wing political leaders, and was under political surveillance for his visits to left-wing trade unions and to branches of the British Communist Party. The British Security Intelligence Service maintained a dossier on him which stated that they feared that when Lee returned to Singapore he might spread propaganda on behalf of the Communist International. It was also known that in 1946 he had helped in drafting the constitution of the Malayan Democratic Union, a known 'open front' organisation of a traditional Communist United Front, which the Singapore Police knew was a proxy for the Malayan Communist Party.

Just before this, in London, there were two student bodies for Malayan students: the Malay Society which catered for Malay students and the Malayan Students' Union which embraced Malayan students of all races, including Malay students. Both were essentially social organisations. In 1949 the need for a more serious political organisation was felt, and a group of overseas Malaysians was brought together by Tengku Abdul Rahman to form the "Malayan Forum". The group included Toh Chin Chye, Tun Abdul Razak, Maurice Baker, K.M. Byrne and Goh Keng Swee. They met in Abdul Razak's flat in Gloucester Road and the "Malayan Forum" was formed. Lee Kuan Yew was later associated with it.

The forum held regular meetings where they examined their political beliefs, and to debate the future of Malaya, and would call upon one another, as fellow-members, to address these gatherings and to expound their thoughts and beliefs as to how they viewed the future for Malaya would be. Lee was invited to speak at one of these gatherings. He spoke on "The Returned Student". He put it to the gathering that 'British imperialism in Malaya would be well on its way out' had there not been a Chinese community almost as large as the Malay, had the population been six million, all Malays'. There were two problems: the first was 'racial harmony between Chinese and Malays'; and the second was 'the development of a united political front that would be strong enough, without resorting to armed force, to demand a transfer of power'.

The English in Malaya formed the ruling caste. He had superimposed on the people his language, institutions and way of life. His was the model of perfection, and the closer the approximation to his standards the individual Asian attained, the better would be his social and economic position. That was beyond controversy. In the few years the Japanese were the ruling caste, there were already signs that the nearer one was to being a Japanese, the better off one was going to be in a Japanese-dominated Malaya. Lee went on:

*"Had they stayed long enough, I have no doubt that those of us who could speak Japanese, behaved like the Japanese, and who had been educated in Japan would have been the most favoured class of Malayan. For we would have been the most acceptable to the rulers who, because of their economic and military hold on the country could dispense such extra privileges. Many of us will remember the unhappy spectacle of English-speaking, Western-educated colleagues suddenly changing in their manner of speech, behaviour, making blatant attempts at being good imitation Japs. Indeed, some were sent to Japan so as to be better educated to enlighten their ignorant countrymen in Malaya and doubtless also to become the privileged class, second only to the genuine Japanese himself. It is pertinent to note that the Malayan student returned from Britain ceased under Japanese domination to occupy that second-class status, except in so far as it was impracticable to dispense services for the time being.*

*"It is four years now since the British have returned. For them, nothing could be better than to revert to the pleasant orderly society of 1939. Once again the English-educated are given their old privileges: and, of this English-educated class, the returned students form the uppermost crust. In the brief space of four years, we have seen the emergence of six Asiatic countries to national independence: India, Pakistan, Burma, Ceylon, Indonesia, the Philippines. Malaya now finds herself the only remnant of colonial imperialism left in Southeast Asia surrounded by these new Asiatic national states. The only other fragment of colonialism left in Asia is French Indochina.*

*"In all these new Asiatic states it is the returned students who have led the fight for independence. The Indians, Pakistanis, Ceylonese and Burmese returned from England, the Indonesians returned from Holland, the Filipinos returned from America: they have formed the spearhead of national movements.*

*"If these should conjure visions of future greatness in any of us, I hasten to add that the pattern of events never quite repeats itself, and there are cogent reasons for believing that this pattern will not do so in Malaya. Had*

*there not been the difficult racial problem in Malaya, had there not been a Chinese community almost as large as the Malay, had the population been six million, all Malays, I venture to suggest that British imperialism in Malaya would be well on its way out. But the facts being what they are, we must accept British rule for some time, during which we can attain a sufficient degree of social cohesion, and arouse a sufficient degree of civic and political consciousness among the various races of Malaya. This time is vital if we are to avoid a political vacuum that may otherwise follow British withdrawal from Malaya.*

*"Returned students in any British colony fall broadly into two classes: (1) the rich man's son, and (2) the impecunious government scholar. The first on returning home finds himself better equipped to be a bigger and more efficient capitalist entrepreneur. The second finds himself linked up with the colonial administrative system, given a position second only to the Englishman who must, necessarily, in a colonial system be at the top. But they will be better off than their fellow Asians who have not been to England. Hence both groups on returning to Malaya find themselves a part of the vested interests of the country, both somewhat reluctant to dislodge the system under which they enjoy these advantages...*

*"Empires never last forever. Either the master and subject races finally merge into one unified society, as in Britain, where the Welsh and Scots, once English-dominated form part of one political society, enjoying equal rights with the English. Or the Empire ends with subject races violently resisting and finally emerging as a separate national and political entity as in the case of the Irish Republic, India, Pakistan and Indonesia. The indefinite continuance of the subjugation of one race by another is only possible where the subject race is inherently, both mentally and physically, inferior.*

*"Anthropologists are unable to prove any innate superiority of one race over another. This scientific fact, and the historical fact that no empire has been able to last more than a thousand years is, I think, no mere coincidence. We in Malaya are now seeing British domination, after over a hundred years, enter its last phase. Colonial imperialism in Southeast Asia is dead except in Malaya, and our generation will see it out.*

*"No sane man, whether he be English, Malay, Indian, Eurasian or Chinese, can honestly study the situation in that part of the world, and not come to the conclusion that, either with or without the opposition of the western-educated intelligentsia in Malaya, British imperialism will end. The two things we the returned students can help to decide are: firstly how soon and orderly the change will be, and secondly, whether we shall find*

a place at all in the new Malaya. At the moment it is clear that the only party organized to force the British to leave, and to run the country, is the communist party. They are not so many bandits, shooting and being shot at in the jungle, and creating terror for the sake of terror. There is a tightly knit organization making their bid for power.

It is this element of international communism which I fear will make the pattern of development that has unfolded in India, Burma, Ceylon, etc., unlikely in Malaya. In all these countries the leaders form the educated classes, the returned students had time to organize and were already, like the Indian Congress Party, before communism became a force in the political life of these countries. But this does not mean that communism is not a force in these countries. It is, right now, the biggest threat to the newly established national governments of Asia. How far these governments can counter the appeal and force of communism will depend on how far they are bold enough to carry out social reforms in the teeth of their own vested interest. There is another feature in the political development of our neighbours: the active support of native capitalists in the national aspirations of their fellow countrymen. But it is abundantly clear to Malayan vested interests, and that would include Chinese and Indian commercial interests, the Malay royal families, and the professional classes, that with the disappearance of the British Raj must also disappear the great inequality in wealth of the peoples of Malaya. For any independent Malayan government to exist, it must win popular support, and to gain any popular support it must promise, and do, social justice. Indeed, and this is a fact important enough to warrant repetition, the continued existence of the new Asiatic states depends upon whether they are able to carry out long overdue reforms; whether they can, without the communist religion, do all that a communist state can do for the masses.

"We, the returned students, would be the type of leaders that the British would find relatively more acceptable. For if the choice lies, as in fact it does, between a communist republic of Malaya, and a Malaya within the British Commonwealth, led by people who despite their opposition to imperialism still share certain ideals in common with the Commonwealth, there is little doubt which alternative the British will find the lesser evil.

"Despite the general political apathy that exists in Malaya there are many who are awakening to the critical position Malaya is in, both internally and in relation to the rest of Southeast Asia. If we, who can become the most privileged part of the local population under British rule, openly declare that British imperialism must go, the effect will be immediate. But if we do not give leadership, it will come from the other ranks of society, and if these

leaders attain power, as they will with the support of the masses, we shall find that we, as a class, have merely changed masters. The difference between the British, the Japanese and the new masters who will rise if we remain unorganized will be a difference only of degree and not of kind.

"The first problem we face is that of racial harmony between Chinese and Malays. The second is the development of a united political front that will be strong enough, without resorting to armed force, to demand a transfer of power. To both these problems we, the Malayan students in England, whatever our race and creed, can make a substantial contribution. If we who are thought of as the intelligentsia of Malaya cannot make a sincere start now towards a solution of these problems, the future is grim. No class in Malaya is better equipped to lead a Malayan national movement. The common man in Malaya, rightly or wrongly, associates intelligence and ability with an education in England, perhaps for the reason that such an education makes possible a greater and more rapid acquisition of wealth in a British Malaya.

"We have already seen the birth of Malay nationalism, we are seeing the first movements of a Malayan Chinese nationalism. There is no doubt that the other racial groups will also organize themselves. This may be a prelude to a pan-Malayan movement, or it may be the beginning of serious dissensions and communalism that may end in another Palestine. The prerequisite of Malayan independence is the existence of a Malayan society, not Malay, not Malayan Chinese, not Malayan Indian, not Malayan Eurasian, but Malayan, one that embraces the various races already in the country. Were it possible to eliminate the non-Malay population by deporting them to their countries of origin, there would be no danger of another Palestine. But even the most extreme Malay nationalist will concede that the Chinese, Indian and Eurasian population already in the country cannot be excluded by this simple process. Irresponsible communist leadership will bring disaster. Since, therefore, the non-Malay communities must be accepted as part of the present and future of Malaya, it follows that unity must be attained.

"We can study with profit the solution Switzerland has found for her racial problems. Here is a national state, with three large racial groups—French, German and Italian—and a fourth small group, the Romansh, able to maintain its unity and independence through all the strain and stress of two world wars, when the French, Germans and Italians were fighting on different sides. Whether we have the Palestinian or Swiss pattern emerging in Malaya is still in the balance.

*"The present political situation is rapidly changing. Colonialism, with its fantastic discrepancies in wealth and power, will end whether or not we do anything. It is not a question of our fighting for independence in the way the Indian Congress Party fought for theirs. It is whether we are to play any part at all in the political life of the country. There is still time for us to organize ourselves into a force in the country. But the final question is what each individual does when he goes back to Malaya, for, in the last eventuality, any party, any society, any body politic, consists of individuals.*

*"There can be no leaders without a body to lead. There can be no body to lead if there be no cohesion. As a single individual, any Malayan nationalist who attempted to propagate ideas that would lead to the end of British Malaya would be considered undesirable by the British authorities. Their main interest is to prolong British control of our country. For them Malaya means dollars. Losing Malaya would mean a big widening of the dollar gap, with consequent loss of essential imports to Britain and resulting unemployment. We must be prepared to see that, whatever the political label of the British Government in Britain, be it Conservative, Labour, or even Communist, British colonial policy in Malaya may remain unchanged in its fundamentals. A British Labour government may sincerely believe in socialist, egalitarian principles, but no British government can of its own free will give independence to Malaya, and face the British electorate unabashed when the British cost of living index has gone up by some twenty points.*

*"But our trump-card is that responsible British leaders realize that independence must and will come to Malaya and that therefore, it will be better to hand Malaya to leaders sympathetic to the British mode of life, willing for Malaya to be a member of the British Commonwealth, and, what is most important, willing to remain in the sterling area. For the alternative is military suppression, a policy which another imperialist power has found impossible in Indonesia. We may take heart in the knowledge that no one can concede more graciously an already untenable position than the English. Our duty is clear: to help bring about social cohesion, and to bring home to even the most die-hard imperialist that his is an untenable position.*

*"What actual steps we take when we get back will depend on the political temper at that time. Whether we can openly advocate and propagate our views, or whether we should be more discreet and less vociferous, is something that can be answered only when the time comes. Only if a spirit of co-operation and political independence be infused among our fellow Malaysians can pan-Malayan political parties really exist and Malayan leadership emerge. We must break the soporific Malayan atmosphere and*

*bring home the urgency of the problems facing us. We must break down the belief that we are inferior and will always remain inferior to the Europeans. If every returned student makes known his convictions to his own immediate circle, the cumulative effect will be tremendous ...*

*"If we fail to fulfil our duty, the change that still will come must be a violent one, for, whatever the rights and wrongs of communism, no one can deny its tremendous appeal to the masses. Whatever our political complexion, from deep blue Tory to bright red Communist, we must all remember that we are not indispensable in this struggle for freedom. But we can affect the speed and orderliness of the change. What the individual returning home chooses to do is a question of personal inclination, economic circumstances, and political convictions. But if the majority of us choose to believe that Malaya can be insulated from the nationalist revolts that have swept the European powers from Asia, then we may find that there is no place for us in the Malaya that is to be after the British have departed."*

Not long after making this speech to the Malayan Forum, on 1st August 1950, Lee Kuan Yew took ship to Singapore. Ahead of his departure, and unknown to him, British Security had reported to Singapore Special Branch that as a student in the British capital Lee had been seen in the company of left-wing trade unionists and British Communists, and that he might attempt to spread Communist propaganda on behalf of the Comintern. The Singapore authorities had, in the meantime decided that on his arrival at Singapore Lee would be prevented from landing and, instead, would be sent to a camp for political detainees on St John's Island, because he was to be considered as 'highly dangerous, probably an underground Communist'.

Luckily for Lee Kuan Yew, a Lady Hilda Selwyn Clarke of the Fabian Society in London, wrote a letter to Assistant Superintendent R.B. Corridon, a Special branch officer in Singapore, to look out for 'two very brilliant young Singapore men who were becoming known in political circles in England — Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Keng Swee'. As a result of this letter Corridon advised Alan Blades, the Director of Singapore Special Branch: "For heaven's sake don't arrest and detain them, let's see how they shape up when they come."

Thus, unknowingly having avoided arrest, detention and being classified as a political subversive, Lee Kuan Yew became a practising lawyer with the legal firm of Laycock & Ong in Malacca Street, where he became adviser to several militant and left-wing groups.

On 21st November 1954, when the People's Action Party was launched, the Victoria Memorial Hall, which was the venue for the ceremony, was packed with an audience of over a thousand people. On the stage, where the

key individuals of the fledgling party and their VIP guests sat, there was an empty chair marked "Special Branch". Surprisingly Tengku Abdul Rahman of the UMNO Party of Malaya, and Mr Tan Cheng Lok of the Malayan Chinese Association, were honoured guests. Speeches were made in Malay, Chinese and Tamil. The Tengku and Tan Cheng Lok pledged their respective support for the fledgling political party.

The party manifesto introduced a radical change in the political tempo of then prevailing times, and was more in keeping with the pronouncements of the Malayan Democratic Union. And that despite the 'growing political and economic discontent and a vigorous nationalism', the colonial machinery remained intact. Exports of Malaya's two greatest raw material assets, rubber and tin, were dependent largely on the fluctuating American market and provided the sterling area with its greatest source of dollar earnings. A strategic embargo on rubber exports to China had already closed down half the rubber mills in Singapore, throwing 2,000 rubber workers out of work. Seventy percent of commercial investment was in British hands, securing for Britain a predominant economic control in Malaya's rubber and tin industries, in trade, banking and industry. This state of affairs, said the party, would remain until the colonial economy passed into the hands of the Malaysians. A 'change in economic structure' was not envisaged by the Party until there was freedom of political action.

The manifesto also sought to remove the Emergency Regulations which imposed 'serious restraints on the activities of democratic trade unions and progressive anti-colonial forces'. Among other things the manifesto also advocated that Chinese and Tamil should be given official recognition, and that Malay rather than English, should be the lingua franca. Finally the manifesto listed the party's aims. It was opposed to the Rendel Constitution for Singapore and to the new constitution that was about to be introduced in Malaya because both constitutions 'still retained the essential features of colonialism'.

The "Straits Times" reporting on the launching of the People's Action Party said that its policy was 'nicely calculated to attract the unthinking, a feast of promise with little regard to facts'. The British-owned-and-controlled newspaper was concerned about the evident belief of the party's founders that it was 'not the Communists but the Emergency regulations which are the deadly enemy of Malayan nationalism and democracy'.

Thomas Siddon passed his final standard six examinations and was promoted to secondary school. From 1955, in the new year, the word for class standards was changed to "form" to differentiate between the more 'senior' school over the primary classes. He was promoted to Form Three,



instead of Standard Seven. Malay-language and Chinese-language classes were introduced into St Patrick's for the first time. Mr Perimeter, his cadet-master, told him he was being considered for the rank of quartermaster-sergeant, and to apprentice himself to the outgoing quartermaster who was awaiting the University of Cambridge school-leaving examination results. Thomas was over the moon. He was being promoted barely twelve months after joining the school-cadet corps. Fortune seemed to again be smiling on him, since leaving Melrose to join St Patrick's. He also felt that he had deserved the promotion as he had passed all his qualifying tests and had worked hard at being an exemplary cadet.

He spent the end-term holidays of 1954 with the Pestanas, surprised to find sandy Frankel Estate laid-out with tarred-over roads, which also had street lights. Electricity had even come to the houses. What a change from the previous gloomy and darkened coconut estate! Thomas also noticed the modern brick terraced houses being built. Modern housing was definitely creeping up on the attap-houses and would eventually displace them. The young man told the Pestanas that he would be visiting his mother, now that he knew where she lived, to tell her that he had passed his exams. He would be returning to their home to spend his holiday with them after visiting her. He didn't tell the good people that his mother had again been late in his boarding-fees payments and Brother Lawrence had firmly instructed him to get her to settle her outstanding commitments, or he would be summarily dismissed.

Armed with her correct address this time, he went unerringly to Bencoolen Street, to the building he had first called at, more than a year previously — the Chinese plumber's. This time the bloody middle-aged man, (whom Thomas noticed had a glass-eye), acknowledged that his mother lived at the back of the building, upstairs, and waved him on into the darkened passageway behind where he was seated at his desk, the only one in the shop. The remainder of the premises was filled with the usual glass-cases and masses of plumbing-pipes strewn all over the shop-floor, making an untidy sight. Siddon went past him into a narrow, confined space. At last, he would finally see his home, the first he had ever known since he had been a two-year-old, when World War Two had broken out in Singapore in February 1942.

In a larger, airier and brighter room at the back of the building ahead of him, he spied a fat Chinese woman who beamed at him. It seemed that she knew who he was though he hadn't yet said a word. He inquired after his mother in halting, newly-improved bazaar-Malay, (since joining St Patrick's), and the woman who Thomas noticed had extremely tiny feet

bound in brightly-coloured, tight shoes,(he would learn later, that it had been considered attractive by "old-fashioned" Chinese who were still 'China-minded', that Chinese women should have tiny, bound feet, which were cultivated by having their female-babies' feet tightly bound, so that their feet would not grow over a certain size, though the Chinese girls born in Singapore of parents who had come from China, did not follow the custom because it was considered painful and barbaric to have their feet so tightly bound as to cause them excruciating pain).

The plump woman, who was in her own kitchen, the only one in the house, which was also for her tenants' use, (she and her husband, who was a trishaw-rider, were the chief tenants of the building and sub-let their rooms upstairs, usually to other Chinese but, somehow, they had made an exception in Luci Siddon's case, probably because she spoke their Hokkein dialect), indicated with a flourish of her large hand to somewhere behind the young man, who somehow understood that he was to go toward where she had just indicated. He turned round and noted the murky doorway from whence he had first come through, and a darkened spot to its left, and went forward. He made out a doorway, and immediately behind it a steep, narrow stairway which hugged the wall on the left that went upward almost vertically.. He began climbing up. The stairs were rickety and creaked horribly. What in heavens was his mother living in a slum like this? Surely she could have found something better?

Reaching the top of the stairs, he called out unsurely, disbelieving, hoping and praying that the horrible house was not what his mother called 'home'. It couldn't be, it was a fire-hazard and a death-trap! His voice sounded uncertain as he called out for her again:

"Mum, where *are* you?"

A curtain raised to his right and he made out his mother peering out from under. She beckoned him forward with a hand-wave and he walked through her doorway into what he considered was a pigeon-hole of a room. There was a single malacca-cane bed against the wall, to his left, from where he stood at the door, and in front, to his right, against another wall was a small table, ostensibly for eating on. He saw an enclosed area underneath the table, and supposed it was for keeping food in. To his left, on the opposite wall of the constricted room his mother called 'home', there was a narrow clothes-cupboard, and a set of wooden shelves which had cosmetics, clothes, and odds and ends. There was just one straight-backed chair by the window in front of him, and which overlooked the roof of the slum-dwelling's kitchen, from where he had just come. For guests, he presumed. Thomas' heart sank to the floor-boards on which he stood. My god! We are

truly poor or else why would she live in such a pig-sty? Surely she can afford better, he thought to himself, she's paid well-enough by the British service that she was working for!

"Do you live in this room," he asked his mother, still not quite believing that this was home, praying hard that it wasn't so.

"Why? What's wrong with it?" she answered defensively.

"Mum, it's a hovel," her son exclaimed in exasperation.

"It's forty dollars a month, you know," she said defensively.

"But mum, for a little extra you could live in a new Singapore Improvement Trust flat, they're being built by the government, you could have a flat with two rooms and more privacy — no wonder you've never wanted me to know where you live!" her son exclaimed in desperation and embarrassment.

"I can't afford it son, I don't have money," she replied in a begging tone, and instinctively Thomas knew she was using it on him to get around his objections. She always used it whenever she wanted something from someone, anyone, she thought was in a better position than she was.

Sheer frustration at being powerless to influence his mother's choice of life-style caused the young man to react angrily.

"Do you know that Brother Lawrence is fed up — you've only got me and you earn three hundred a month, more than a lot of Chinese, Indians and Malays who are scrimping and looking after a whole family! Your transportation to work is provided for by the British and your meals at the air base are subsidised. My boarding fees are sixty dollars a month and that includes board as well. After paying for this bloody hole you'll still have two hundred a month left, what on earth are you on about," he blurted out, his face flushed with anger.

"Don't be rude to me, I'm your mother! I've struggled hard to bring you up and this is the thanks I get — you'll regret this, God will punish you for your sins — get out of my sight, go back to Mr Pestana!"

Dismayed, with a sense of helplessness that he would never be able to get his mother to change, and with the realisation that he and his mother were truly poor, he swivelled on his heels and disappeared down the steep stairs that he had come up on moments earlier, and departed the house through the plumber's shop at the front. He headed for the Pestana's, recalling and feeling it unfair that his mother hadn't even asked whether he had passed his exams. He returned to Frankel Estate with heavy steps. What did the Pestanas think of him and his mother. No wonder Mr Pestana had told his mother off last year when he found out that Thomas hadn't even known where she lived because she hadn't bothered to tell him. He now realised why they had invited him to spend his school holidays with them,

knowing the kind of mother she was, Thomas thought to himself. He felt truly grateful to the Portuguese-Eurasian family when he got to their home and they made him feel welcome. They were 'special people' because their kindness came from the heart and they knew that he had no place to go home to, even if he wasn't a relative and they were finding it difficult to make ends meet for themselves. But they had a home which they opened to him, while his mother chose to live as a single, and didn't like the idea of having him around.

On 23rd December London announced that Robert B. Black, the Colonial Secretary in Hong Kong would succeed Sir John Nicholl as Governor of Singapore on 3rd July 1955.

After the Christmas holidays which he spent at the Pestanas, he returned to St Patrick's in January 1955. He was now a "senior" and was permitted to visit Katong, the town, on Sunday afternoons after study. He and Cheng, his boarding-school "buddy" would visit the rural seaside town together on bikes 'borrowed' from junior-boarders who daren't refuse as they wanted to be in the "seniors" good books. Brother Lawrence still kept his aloof, disapproving distance and Thomas knew that his mother was still being tardy in her payments toward his boarding fees.

One Sunday afternoon, queuing up for cinema tickets for the afternoon matinee at the "Roxy Cinema" he noticed an attractive Eurasian girl with light brown hair and green eyes, just behind him. He knew who she was because Katong was a small suburb and everyone knew who everyone was. She had recently returned from England where she had been to school until her father, a first-generation Eurasian, had decided that she should finish her education in her birthplace and become 'local' again. Thomas was flattered when the girl turned up for Sunday Mass on the following Sunday morning at the St Patrick's school-chapel. Though there was a main Catholic church in Katong, to which the Eurasian, Indian and Chinese Roman Catholics went to, Catholics who lived near to the school would attend the school's chapel for their Sunday service because it was convenient. But Thomas knew that she had come because of him. Thereafter, every Sunday she would be there, with eyes downcast, never sparring him a glance as she walked up the aisle to take Holy Communion. But Thomas knew. Cheng, his pal, "sussed" as much but said it wouldn't work. She was of the same age and she'd become old too soon, and no one wanted an old-looking wife. Thomas said he was daft. He wasn't thinking of marrying the girl, only to get to know her. They were both too young he protested, anyway, he was only flirting.

In his heart Thomas knew a girl like her wasn't for him. He was too poor. And she had a father who had sent her to England for studies, which meant that they were well-to-do. The relationship, if ever there had been a chance of it developing, would never have lasted. Without confiding in his best pal, Cheng, he decided not to try to develop any kind of relationship with the girl. One Sunday after Mass Cheng told him that her name was Gloria and that she had wanted to know why he seemed so aloof. Ignoring his best friend's question, Thomas demanded to know how Cheng had dared to speak to her as her father had a reputation as a "terror" who discouraged any interest in his daughter from the local boys. Cheng said her father only didn't want Eurasian boys getting to know his daughter because they were potential sons-in-law and he didn't want his daughter to settle down too early in her life. Chinese boys, Cheng said, were different. Eurasians married Eurasians or Whites, while Chinese married Chinese, as it had always been, so Gloria's father wasn't threatened by Cheng getting to know his girl. It was just Eurasians that he was fearful of, especially the bad kind.

Thomas knew what the girl's father had been referring to. There had been a sensational murder of a thirteen-year-old Eurasian girl who had been assaulted, strangled, and her body dumped into the sea off Marine Parade, not far from where her convent was situated. The person subsequently arrested and charged with the crime had been a young Eurasian man who had escaped the gallows because a Jewish lawyer named David Marshall had eventually got him acquitted on a technicality but everyone in Katong knew he was guilty because not long after the man committed suicide out of remorse. Eurasian parents with pretty young daughters, from then, had been anxious for their precious offspring, while some felt antagonism toward the Jewish lawyer for obtaining the accused an acquittal as his subsequent suicide proved his guilt in their eyes. Thomas told Cheng that he wasn't interested in the girl any longer to prevent his friend from harping on it any more. To him the matter was closed.

Apart from his 'escapades' with his pal, Cheng, in the first few months of awakening awareness as a teenager the young Eurasian was gradually coming to regard his boarding school life and its religious routine as oppressive and irksome. He spoke his mind to another senior, Daniel Teo, who was caught up in the religious fervour the boarding school seemed to be cultivating among the boarders. Everybody called Daniel "pope" as he was always moralising, pointing out what wicked lives everyone was living and how they could obtain salvation for the sins they had committed by prayer. More in irritation than in beginning an argument, Thomas told the "pope", one day, that the school placed too much emphasis on religion,

instead of teaching everybody what was right or wrong. He told the boy that the school's religious teaching implied that mankind was some sort of 'dumb dope', telling him to rely on prayer for his salvation in his daily life, not on how to survive in the world as a good Christian by being good and honest and feeling charity to one another. There was too much insistence on praying, attending Mass, going for Confession, receiving Communion and worrying about not going to hell. If we were to accept Christianity's teachings, everyone was already 'saved' because Christ had already sacrificed himself on the Cross, to God. Christianity, Thomas said, should show people how to be good to one another because despite "salvation" from God, mankind was still a thief, a murderer, and dishonest.

The "pope" appeared intrigued and asked him to expound his thoughts in greater depth. What the heck, Thomas Siddon thought to himself, I'll knock the silly prig off his religious high horse. He'd already gone through life, he felt, with enough suffering to 'arrive' at certain "truths", and he gave them to Daniel Teo with both barrels.

"Life is despair and suffering, there's no escaping that, but it is still our choice how we work out our own 'salvation'. It is hypocritical to beg the Divine to 'save' us from our own actions, to leave responsibility for deliverance at his doorstep — we should worship God because he is God but we shouldn't regard him as being responsible for our fate, that is the wrong reason for praying to him. Because he is God we pray to him, but not because we want him to 'save' us."

"Pope" Daniel inquired whether Thomas had any further comments on his Catholic religion, and Siddon continued:

"No man or 'gods' are responsible for our plight. Man stands alone in this Universe and is responsible for himself — there is no 'original' sin, that's the imagination of the writers of the Bible, whoever they may have been — we are what we make of ourselves and we should not blame heredity, environment, race, caste, father, mother, upbringing, teacher, impulse, or our own inclinations, attitudes or experience — good or bad — for the type of human being we have become. We are free to chose our own deliverance. "Do you have any other observations?" enquired the "pope".

"Yes. Look at the anti-Jew feeling among Christians. This was created by the early Christians who blamed the death of Jesus Christ on the Jews, and as a result we, as Christians, continue to practice a racial bigotry and call it a justified 'anger' against the 'killers of Christ', what hogwash! And another thing, I don't believe in the 'Immaculate Conception, because bible history tells us that Jesus had older and younger brothers, one of whom was James, the apostle, and by believing in such a concept we are treating sex

in marriage as something dirty, which it is not."

Ignoring what Siddon had just said, the "pope" countered with a question of his own:

"So you don't think it necessary that we attend Mass or to pray to God?"

"I didn't say that, I said that if we accept God we should worship him because he's there, he'll not intervene in our lives and we shouldn't expect him to."

There was a look of amazed horror on Daniel Teo's face and Siddon realised that his outburst had had the wrong effect — he'd failed to put across his point-of-view, instead he had created a wrong impression of himself. He listened with sinking heart as the so-called "pious" senior prayed aloud for his 'lost' soul and his 'wayward' thoughts which had been placed in his head by Satan. The other boarders within earshot of the two boys' conversation and the "pope's" reaction, snickered, as inwardly Siddon shook his head in despair. He had created another enemy and regretted his rash impulsiveness in trying to initiate a 'dialogue' with an ardent Catholic schoolboy who had misunderstood his intentions.

Thereafter the "pope" kept out of his way and would even leave any group of boarders as soon as Thomas came over to join them. The Eurasian boy felt that Daniel was still merely upset because he felt that he had been ridiculed, and that he would eventually "calm down" and be friends with him again.

Singapore's first-ever general elections were held on 2nd April 1955 under the new Constitution which had been announced in February 1954. Thomas, spending his school holidays at the Pestanas, was caught up in the election excitement as the eldest boy of the family was actively engaged in the polling. The political parties contesting the elections included: the Progressive Party, the People's Action Party, the Labour Front, the Democratic Party which was founded a month before the elections, and was supported mainly by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and had a marked communal platform — seeking redress over citizenship for 'alien' Chinese and Chinese language issues, and the 'Alliance', which was made up of UMNO, MCA and the Malay Union Alliance, plus 10 independents and a solitary member of the Singapore Labour Party.

The Labour Front had emerged from an involved combination of political parties and personalities, which owed their origins to the original Singapore Labour Party, which was formed in September 1948, a few weeks after the Communist Emergency had been declared. The Singapore Labour Party, had drawn its membership mainly from a small band of English-speaking Indians who chose Francis Thomas, a British schoolmaster

who had gone along to witness the inauguration of the party, as its chairman. Lim Yew Hock, a trade unionist and a member of the Progressive Party was persuaded to join them as well. Rivalry for the leadership of the party had led Lim Yew Hock and Francis Thomas to form the Democratic Labour Party in October 1953. David Marshall, a former member of the Progressive Party, and already a well-known lawyer who had made a name for himself in sensational criminal cases, joined the new party to oppose the Progressives. But this failed, and in April 1954 the Democratic Labour Party was renamed the Singapore Socialist Party. It formed an electoral alliance with the Singapore Labour Alliance in July 1954 to form the People's United Front which was renamed the Singapore Labour Front.

The Singapore Labour Front unexpectedly won the island's first-ever elections with a landslide victory over the Progressive Party, led by Mr C.C. Tan, who was president of the longest established party in Singapore, which everyone had expected to win hands down. Tan, aged 44 and a lawyer educated at St Joseph's Institution in Singapore and at the Middle Temple, London, had been a member of the Advisory Council from 1946 to 1947, a Legislative Councillor since 1948 and an Executive Councillor since 1951.

Mr David Marshall, 47, the son of Orthodox Sephardic, (meaning Asian and not Askanazie or White Jews from Europe) Jews from Iraq, had been born in 1908 in Singapore and lived on the corner of Selegie and Wilkie Roads, the former 'Jewish Quarter', (it has ceased to exist as a Jewish quarter after the exodus of Singapore-born Jews from Singapore from the 1950s right up till the 1960s, to Israel, Australia, Europe and the United States. Under the 1980s urban renewal programme most of the former Jewish homes in the Waterloo, Bencoolen, Selegie and Sophia Roads area were demolished), and attended St Andrew's School and the Raffles Institution in Singapore, and at the Middle Temple and the London University in London. He had been a volunteer during World War Two, was taken prisoner in 1942 and sent to Japan before returning to Singapore at war's end in 1946.

The Democratic Party was represented by Lam Thian, aged 28, and educated at the Chinese High School and at St Joseph's Institution. He was also a member of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and adopted their call for a multilingual legislature, advocating the right to vote for any person who had lived in the colony for ten years and prepared to take an oath of allegiance to Singapore.

Lee Kuan Yew of the People's Action Party called for independence and the repeal of the National Service Ordinance and said only an independent



and fully-elected legislature had the right to impose conscription.

The Progressive Party was represented by Lim Seng Tiong, a teacher and part-time lecturer at the University of Malaya, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Chinese YMCA. He stressed the need for stable government on the road to self-government.

Soon after his election, Mr David Marshall, talking as the Chief Minister designate, on the people of Singapore electing him, said:

"By electing a member of the smallest domiciled community, (the Jewish community), here, they have proved that Singapore can work, think and act non-communally. By electing a stranger to politics in preference to the founder President, (who was Chinese), of the longest established party in Singapore, (the Progressive Party), the people have proved that Singapore has a spirit which can be touched by an ideal."

David Marshall had thought that he had successfully proved that Singapore could react as one people, without drawing on their racial and emotional 'tugs' to influence their judgements. But things would change.

A month later, in May, workers of the Hock Lee Bus Company went on a Communist-initiated strike, paralysing a large area of the island serviced by the bus company. In those days the private, (which were all Chinese-owned), bus companies, as opposed to the monolithic British-owned Singapore Traction Company whose bus routes covered all the key areas, did not span the island but small 'parochial areas' which the STC was not interested in. The industrial action at first didn't affect the east coast and the students in the district attended school as normal for a few days. But that was soon to change. Several thousand transport and industrial workers in related industries struck in sympathy and Singapore's total transport network grounded to a halt. It finally ended on 14th July after David Marshall intervened and called on the workers to return to their jobs. In the meantime, from 11th to 12th July several thousand Chinese-language Middle School students, many in their late teens and early twenties, erected barricades in their school compounds, scattered broken glass and barbed-wire on the main roads, overturned cars and lorries, and began rioting which lasted into the month of June. Press and radio bulletins described the Chinese students as "Communist". They also took to the streets spreading death and destruction. A Chinese Special Constable, a Chinese detective, and an American press correspondent, Gene Symonds of the United Press International, were hacked to death by a mob. The police opened fire and killed a student. British, Malay and Gurkha troops were called out to protect important buildings and installations. The peace-keeping force finally had to baton-charge, and use water-hoses and tear-gas to restore order. All

schools were closed.

The boarders at St Patrick's who remained in the school during the strife were ordered not to discuss the events among themselves, and prefects were instructed to take down the names of anyone caught talking about them. It seemed to Siddon that the Irish Brothers always gave out these instructions whenever "similar" incidents happened in the colony.

Mr A.W. Goode, the Colonial Secretary, accused the People's Action Party and Lee Kuan Yew of responsibility for the student unrest. The school pupils, he said, had come under "Communist indoctrination", and the PAP and its Communist supporters were responsible "...deliberately provoking widespread industrial unrest..."

Mr Lee Kuan Yew, in reply, declared that the PAP and he, personally, were opposed to Communism and violence, and denied that they had ever instigated the riots or mob violence.

The newly-elected Singapore Legislative Council voted to introduce an emergency regulation empowering the police to place Singapore under curfew if "circumstances" justified such action.

The Central Fund Ordinance came into force on 1st July 1955. It set up the Central Provident Fund which provided for a five percent deduction compulsorily on all employees wages earned in Singapore, which would go to a savings fund on behalf of the employee concerned. It was viewed as a compulsory savings scheme, to ensure that those entitled would have savings upon their retirement at the age of fifty-five.

Malaya's first general elections were held on 1st July. Malay prince, Tengku Abdul Rahman's Alliance Party, representing Malay and Chinese communal interests, won fifty-one of the fifty-two seats for election. The new Constitution of Malaya, marking the birth of the Federation of Malaya came into force in August 1955. This allowed for a majority of six elected seats in a House of 98 members, (52 elected and 46 appointed).

Early in July Thomas Siddon was summoned to Brother Lawrence's office and officially informed that since he was a bad influence on the "pious" boarders, and to prevent his shaking their belief in Christianity, he was being summarily dismissed from the boarding section of the school with immediate effect. The Eurasian school head would brook no pleas from him or listen to his nervous attempt at explaining what had actually transpired between him and "pope" Daniel Teo. He was instructed to pack up and leave forthwith. Dumbfounded and confused, he stumbled from the school principal's room, threw his things into his bags, took the bus to his mother's and waited for her to return home from work that evening.

When Luci Siddon heard her son's story, instead of being angry with the

Christian brother for his unfair treatment of her son, she lost her temper with him instead. He was a damned nuisance. And he could not stay with her. Glaring her displeasure, she was silent for a minute, then said that she would take him to the home of his late father's friend at Telok Kurau. Maybe that man would take him in, since he had been a good friend of Cecil's before the war. Despite feeling upset at all that had transpired to him since that morning, Thomas was intrigued. There actually was another human, apart from his mother and he, who had known that his father had been alive once. Ever since Siddon could remember, no adult friends of his mother that he had met had ever told him that they had known his father. Finally he would be meeting someone who had actually known him! Mother and son, that evening, took the bus from Bras Basah Road to Teluk Kurau, which was the Malay name for what should have been a cape at the place but there was none. Thomas supposed it was because the British had reclaimed land from the sea, at this point, sometime in the past before World War Two, and had changed the land formation.

The main Telok Kurau Road spanned from Changi Road in Geylang, the Malay part of Singapore, to the start of East Coast Road, not far from where the sea washed the shore of the east coast of the island. There was a series of sandy lanes named after the letters of the alphabet, leading from either side of Telok Kurau Road. His mother turned into Lorong 'J' and they trekked deep into it until they arrived at a wide monsoon drain. It was the "canal" which flowed past St Patrick's School into the sea. So they were not too far away from his former boarding school, Thomas thought to himself. Close-by he saw a dilapidated-looking tower-like structure which had seen better days as part of a larger building, obviously demolished during war-time.

An Eurasian man and a woman, obviously his wife, stared in surprise at Thomas' mother. They never had visitors that late, and they had never been visited by Luci Siddon before. It was clearly written on their faces that they realised that she had something on her mind. But being local, in the courtesy of "the Malays", they cordially invited mother and son into their home. Addressing the man as "Willy", Luci told him that she had brought along "Cecil's son", and wondered whether the man and his wife would "put him up" as he attended St Patrick's and she lived too far away in town to see to his needs. She also told them that he had been 'giving trouble' in school and had been dismissed from its boarding section. Ignoring the last bit about him, the man stood up, walked over to Thomas and cupped his face in his gnarled hands. He smiled a dazzling smile and said that he looked like his father. Yes, Cecil's boy could stay so long as he was satisfied with whatever

they ate and where they were living. Brushing off the man's attempt at humility, Mrs Siddon said Thomas should be grateful that he had a place to lay his head down at night. She would pay sixty dollars toward his board and keep. Thereupon she opened her handbag and handed over the sum, which, Thomas noticed, the couple accepted gratefully. Luci promised them that she would pay them promptly every month. Reminding her son to "behave himself", she wished the couple a goodnight and swiftly disappeared into the inky darkness.

Thomas once again found himself in strange, unfamiliar surroundings. Space was made for him to sleep on a wooden bench set against the wall of the dilapidated tower. He was given two sheets. One to cover the bare-boards of the bench, and the other in case he should feel cold in the early hours of the morning. He had no pillow. The man proudly related how he had come across the abandoned, damaged box-like structure after the war and had claimed it for himself. He had put in his own roof over the building, and an upstairs floor of sorts, where his wife, son and another 'adopted son', a *Baba*, lived. Continuing with his commentary, the man told him that he had also found a water-pipe still with a tap attached to it, and had built a bathroom by erecting a wall around it. From it he had run an extension tap into the house for his wife's kitchen, which was next-door to where they were all seated. So far, he proudly stated, he had yet to receive a water bill. The "bog" was a narrow wooden lean-to with a bucket which was cleared by a team from the Municipal Council every other day and which arrived by a special "bog-lorry" which had covered drawers to hold the lavatory-buckets. Feeling squeamish at the thought of performing his toilet in such a primitive manner, Thomas resignedly put it down to another aspect of his growing experience in life.

Willy Misu, for that was his name, his wife, Alicia, his son "Sonny" and his "adopted son" called Stephen, who worked as a lift repairman in the city, were the only ones allowed "upstairs". Thomas was instructed to address him as "Uncle Willy". He told Thomas that his late father, Cecil, had taught him to be a mechanic, and that he ran his own workshop outside. He told the young boy that even though Stephen, his "adopted son", wasn't really legally adopted by him, he was regarded as the oldest boy in the family and Thomas was to give him "respect". "Uncle Willy" explained that he had 'adopted' Stephen as a lad of twelve, when Stephen's father, on his death-bed had "given" him Stephen to look after, since he had no other living relative. Stephen was a *Baba*, "Uncle Willy" said, and *Babas* considered themselves Chinese even though they were a mixed Malay-Chinese community. Their antecedents, he said, had

intermarried first with the slaves of Malay royalty of old, as well as the Malay wealthy of those times and the Chinese 'adventurers' who had come to the area without their own womenfolk, were permitted by the Malays to marry their slaves who had come from the Nicobar Islands. Since the Chinese mark their racial ancestry from their menfolk, the mixed offspring of the Chinese and slaves were considered by the Chinese themselves as their own kind. The Baba and Nonyas, as this Malay-Chinese community is called, are many generations removed from the original Chinese who came from China, "Uncle Willy" explained, and many have even lost their ability to speak Chinese fluently and instead regard Malay as their language. Recently though, he said, some of this community had disciplined themselves and "re-learned" Chinese. This Sino Community, unique to "the Malays", prefers Malay-style cooking, with curries and hot chillies. They are a proud people, more particular in their "Sino" customs than even the China-born full-Chinese. (Similar to the "Straits-born" Chinese in sharing a common birthplace in Southeast Asia, the **Baba difference** is the Malay blood coursing through their veins, their mastery and command of the Malay language, as well as adoption of Malay-style cooking, and several Malay customs and practices, and their origin in Malacca. There is another Malay mixed-race of pure Asian descent which also has its origins in Malacca. These are the **Malacca-Chitty** whose origins are similar in that their Indian-Hindu ancestors married with Malay brides. Malacca is also the birthplace of the **Malacca-Portuguese** who are a European-Malay-Baba-Malacca-chitty mix).

The following morning at six, of the first day of his life at "Uncle Willy's", after a breakfast of plain unsweetened tea and biscuits, Thomas crossed a wobbly coconut-tree-trunk "bridge" spanning the "canal" that flowed to the sea past St Patrick's, to get to Dunbar Walk which took him to East Coast Road and his school. He passed by the Pestana's, dismayed to discover that their home had been demolished to make way for a spanking-new terraced house. On inquiry at a neighbour's he learned that the family had moved to their own brick terraced house on Changi Road.

He felt the change in his status in school when his best pal, Cheng, cut him dead on his greeting him. But he didn't care. He was too immersed in becoming the school's quartermaster sergeant. But disaster struck once more. He had barely been a day-scholar for several weeks when he was summoned to Brother Lawrence's office because the maths teacher, Mr Philips, had complained that he wasn't doing his maths homework. The school principal had him transferred to the afternoon school, despite his protest that his "crime" did not warrant such excessive punishment. The two

cadet-teachers, Mr Mcleod and Mr Perimeter, appealed on his behalf to Brother Lawrence but the religious wouldn't be persuaded otherwise. Thomas knew that the man just had it in for him.

The fast-paced changes in his life just took his breath away. In a short span of a few weeks he had gone from day-scholar to becoming one of the 'duffers' in the afternoon school session. His new form teacher, Mr Fernandez, an Indian, was deeply involved in the trade union movement. For some reason, known only to himself, Fernandez chose Siddon as class monitor, entrusted with class discipline and taking the daily class attendance. The teacher was a Malayalee from Kerala, India who had come to Singapore because it held better prospects than his own native homeland. He was habitually late and relied on Siddon to keep the class in order until he arrived. It did much for Thomas who felt that life was again dealing him an unfair hand. In the meantime he knuckled down to study and passing his exams, which he saw as the only way out of his predicament.

"Uncle Wily" surprised him one day by handing him a letter from a Mrs Bertha Berry in London, saying that she was Thomas' "auntie" from England, who was his late father's elder sister. The man had written the woman after World War Two to tell her of the deaths of her brothers during the strife in Singapore, and she had replied to inquire whether there had been any surviving offspring. "Uncle Willy" said that it was "plain luck" that he had kept the letters she used to send her brother, Cecil, before the war, since Thomas' father and he were such good friends and Cecil usually left his personal things with him, especially before he got married to Thomas' mother. And that was how he had been able to write and let her know, though, until Thomas had come to live with him, he had not known about his existence.

Thomas took the surprising document with a feeling of elation. At last he would discover his origins. He never questioned the improbability of his quest. He just knew that his Aunt Bertha in London would be forthcoming. Because he too would have done exactly that, if such an inquiry had come to him from a long-lost relative from abroad. He knew it was the Siddon way. That evening "Uncle Willy" told the excited young boy as much as he could remember about the Siddons of Singapore that Thomas' late father, Cecil, had related to him before the war. Now Thomas even had a source in England to tell him more.

He sat for his mid-term exams in August and became the talk of the afternoon school because his marks for most subjects matched the top marks of the best boys in the morning session, which had the 'slow learners', though of course, his maths dragged his overall marks' aggregate

down. But his high marks were regarded as an achievement for the afternoon school, which only had the 'slow-learners', increasing Mr Fernandez' standing, being the form teacher responsible. The Indian proudly awarded him the class prize for the best marks in literature.

The following day was the school's annual Sports Day, and the afternoon session boys would attend school in the morning to compete against the morning session boys, and because the following day after Sports Day was the start of the second-term holidays. The atmosphere that afternoon before Sports Day was relaxed. Exams were over, the results, as far as Mr Fernandez was concerned, were satisfactory, and there would be no more lessons until after the holidays. School would "break" early that day and everyone would meet in the boarders' dinning hall on the following morning.

Mr Fernandez told his pupils that in view of the following day being a half-day, because of the sports meet, and with exams over he was relaxing discipline to talk with them "man-to-man", as a friend. He would give them a taste of open, matured discussion, and would treat them as adults. They were all young men and he wanted to "open" their eyes to what was happening in Singapore. After he had finished his piece, if anyone wanted to make any statement, or ask him a question, all he had to do was raise his hand and speak. No one was to feel nervous or intimidated, and was to speak his mind on any subject. Except sex. All the boys snickered.

The teacher began his 'lecture' by telling them that the British had been exploiting their parents by paying them pittance for wages, while they paid themselves handsomely. The Whites had done it before the war and were doing it in Singapore again. It was his "duty" as a caring individual to "open" their eyes to the injustices in Singapore. The body of boys in the class remained embarrassingly quiet as their teacher ranted on, because they found it boring, and they weren't interested. He had never spoken like that before, though the boys knew that he was mixed up with some "union work". He said that it was up to caring persons like him to expose the British, even if it meant going to prison. The teacher glared balefully around the classroom at his students and demanded to know whether anyone had anything to say. Thomas Siddon shot up his hand.

"Sir, you say you want to lead people, show them the proper way, sir, but you arrive in school late everyday, never give us tests, and all you do is give us notes to copy, how can you expect to lead and get others to follow when you set the wrong example?"

The whole class roared with laughter and derision. Silly Mr Fernandez was at it again, talking nonsense. Thomas smiled at his teacher, anticipating a

smile in return. Mr Fernandez was a great guy. He even allowed his pupils to talk back to him as equals. But his shocking reaction to Siddon's words cut-off all laughter in the room.

"Get out of my class, stand outside until Brother Director comes on his rounds. I want him to see you being punished!" rebuffed the angry Mr Fernandez. The whole class' jolly mood was completely frozen into sobriety. Siddon was in big trouble, especially if Brother Lawrence came on his rounds and caught him standing outside class. Everybody sat stone-faced as their "hero" Thomas, walked out to the corridor to 'undergo' his punishment and await the arrival of Brother Lawrence on his rounds. Just then the final school bell rang and everyone automatically began packing his books, prior to being dismissed by the teacher. Thomas walked in and did the same. Mr Fernandez said nothing and he followed the others as they wished their teacher a "Good day" and departed for home.

The following morning when he turned up at the boarders dining hall to join his classmates, Mr Fernandez, who was unexpectedly early, instructed him to report to the headmaster's. Unknown to Siddon his form-teacher had already had a word with Brother Lawrence. When he was admitted into the school principal's room, on knocking, the religious angrily informed him that he was no longer a student of St Patrick's. He could pack his books and depart immediately. Shocked, the young schoolboy pleaded for a second chance, despite feeling that he was being given another 'raw deal'. But the religious would hear nothing and was adamant:

"Get out, I don't want people like you in my school, you're a bad influence and I've been waiting for the right opportunity to get rid of you, and you've given it to me. Collect your school-leaving certificate from the clerk next door, it's already been prepared!"

Siddon staggered from the headmaster's office into the school-clerk's room. He found his school-leaving certificate waiting for him. The elderly Eurasian clerk appeared annoyed with Brother Lawrence as he sympathised with the stupefied schoolboy.

"Try St Anthony's Boys' School in Queen Street, the Brother Director there is a Canadian and he's very understanding. tell him everything. What has been done here is not right. Tell him *everything* but don't tell him I told you."

On hearing the man's advice Thomas head cleared. He would try St Anthony's and get on with his schooling. Brother Lawrence had shown that he was an inhuman beast. Years ago when he had first come to St Patrick's, Thomas remembered that the man had shown mercy to three teenagers who had been caught red-handed molesting a young woman teacher from the



Katong Convent. But Brother Lawrence had singled him out for harsh punishment just because his mother hadn't paid his school and boarding fees on time. And he had used the 'incident' of 'pope' Daniel and his having to stand outside class as an excuse to get rid of him. And he was a religious. It wasn't his fault that he was poor. Thomas promised himself that he would still succeed in completing his education and departed St Patrick's School without regret.

## Sea, Land, Mountain

*(Hai, Lok, San)*

### *Chapter Six*

Getting off the bus, that brought him from St Patrick's School in Siglap, near the Odeon Cinema on North Bridge Road, Thomas Siddon cut through Miller Street, a side-street that ran alongside the cinema-hall, into Victoria Street, a main thoroughfare that took traffic away from the city toward Kallang. He crossed Victoria Street and headed in the direction of St Anthony's Boys' School, to his right. The school shared the same compound with the Portuguese Mission St Joseph's Catholic Church and the Portuguese Convent. He asked directions of a teacher when he got to the boys' school, and made his way to the first floor of the school's main building on being told that the school principal's office was situated there.

Brother Michael, St Anthony's Brother Director, looked questioningly at the young schoolboy who had knocked and now waited nervously by his office doorway. The man took in the schoolboy's white shirt and dark-blue short-pants and knew that he was from St Patrick's, another school run by the De LaSalle Order, of which he was a member. The lad had something on his mind, he could tell from his face, and the Canadian waited patiently to hear what it was.

Taking the bull by the horns, Siddon informed the White man seated behind the desk that he was seeking a place in his school, and then proceeded to relate the exact circumstances which had led him to his doorstep. Thomas briefly touched on his own background, that he didn't live with his mother as she held a job and couldn't see to his welfare, and

that he was staying with a friend of his late father's.

The Christian brother studied the boy's face for several seconds, which, to Thomas seemed an eternity, then abruptly reached for his telephone and began dialling furiously. Siddon instinctively knew that he was calling Brother Lawrence of St Patrick's Boys' School. Brother Michael spoke into the instrument's mouthpiece, demanding to know why the former St Pat's schoolboy had been sacked that day, just before the term-holidays, and listened intently to the reply coming over the wire. Siddon in the meantime prayed fervently that Brother Lawrence wouldn't "cook-up" a false version of what had actually transpired at St Patrick's to warrant his dismissal. He had banked on his telling *everything* to Brother Michael in the hope that the truth would help him gain admission into the man's school. Then he heard Brother Michael speak harshly into the receiver, catching him by surprise. Thomas couldn't believe his ears! The Canadian school-head was actually telling-off the St Patrick's principal! He listened with a pounding heart: "You're not behaving like a human being, nor a man of God, how do you expect to lead children if you aren't compassionate — have you forgotten what the De LaSalle Order stands for?" he yelled as he slammed the phone down on Brother Lawrence's ear. There was a pronounced scowl on his features.

Thomas was told that he would begin school at St Anthony's after the mid-term holidays but he was to bring his mother along the following day, even though the holidays would have already commenced, so that his entry into the school could be formalised. On hearing that the young boy released the pent-up breath which he had unconsciously been holding ever since the religious had got on the phone to Brother Lawrence. Thomas heart exalted, he had been believed!

As if to remind the young boy of his future behaviour in his school the Canadian gave him a parting shot:

"Don't get big-headed just because you heard me tick-off that brother director, you seem to be a boy of promise and I'm willing to to give you a crack at getting your schooling.

"You see this fist? I'm a Canadian but first of all I'm Irish and a boxer, if you ever get out-of-hand in my school I'll not hesitate to use it on you — now be off with you and bring your mother along tomorrow morning," he growled. Despite the man's stern demeanour Thomas knew that Brother Michael had given him another chance at getting an education, out of the goodness of his heart.

His mother's aggravation, when she returned from work and heard that he had been expelled from St Patrick's, had been accepted into St Anthony's

and that she had to miss a day's work to meet his new school's principal the following morning, vanished the moment she met Brother Michael. The school-head told her that Singapore needed boys like her son who, of their own volition, sought an education instead of taking the 'easy way' out and missed school, blaming 'circumstances' for their problems. Most children of his background, without a proper family life, generally preferred truancy. Thomas seemed to be the exception. He advised Mrs Siddon to provide her son a home instead of putting him to live with others. Thomas was definitely bright and would fend for himself. Flattered at Brother Michael's comments, Thomas was slightly peeved, a little later, to hear the lay religious describe him as coming from a not too wholesome family background. How could Brother Michael think of him that way? He had grown up at Melrose, which was an English boarding school, and from there he had gone to live at St Patrick's as a boarder before being dismissed unfairly and going to live with "Uncle Willy" who was a decent man.

Thomas hadn't realised that Brother Michael had already received a full report from Brother Lawrence, since the Canadian had first spoken to the Eurasian school-head of St Patrick's on the previous day, about how his mother had failed to upkeep his boarding fees payments, and that her personal way-of-life, from a Christian point-of-view was suspect. But he was intrigued to hear his mother agree to everything the religious suggested that she do where he was concerned, hardly believing his ears. Thomas was next told to wait downstairs while Brother Michael had a private word with her.

When she came down several minutes later, she didn't touch on what had been discussed upstairs during his absence, but from her face and eyes her son knew that she was upset, as if she had been reprimanded like when Mr Pestana had ticked her off for not letting him know where she actually lived. Brother Michael must have also given her a telling-off, he thought to himself. But Thomas grew cynical all over again when his mother told him to return to "Uncle Willy's" and remain there until school re-opened, after the mid-term holidays, and then he could come live with her. He felt that she had been hypocritical in Brother Michael's office, agreeing to everything he had said but going back on her word as soon as she had left his presence. He resignedly took leave of her and made his way to Telok Kurau and "Uncle Willy's".

When school resumed after the holidays Siddon was pleasantly surprised to discover that his former Melrose pal, Alec Manesseh, attended St Anthony's Boys' School as well. Obviously the Jewish boy's family hadn't gone to the United States or Australia before settling in the new Jewish

homeland of Israel in the Middle East, (which was the new name for Arabia). He had already heard that Alec was the school's "number one" as well as a Singapore schoolboys' boxing champ. He also had the reputation of being a heavy-puncher who could fell an opponent with a single blow. But to Siddon's disappointment Alec acted aloof, sticking only to his own close circle of fawning hero-worshippers and ignoring him entirely. Young Thomas was crest-fallen because the friendship they had once shared in Melrose had not stood the test of time.

But despite the personal let-down he found St Anthony's a pleasant change from St Patrick's. It had first been set up by a Portuguese priest in a small house in Middle Road in 1879, and had been known as the St Anna's Mission School. When it was moved to its premises in Victoria Street, in 1926, its name was changed to the St Anthony's Boys' School. Thomas found the teachers, and the brothers, who also took classes, friendlier than St Patrick's and conversed with the boys the way he had been accustomed to in Melrose. He was surprised though, that the school only had classes up to standard three, and those who were successful in their final exams for that standard were transferred to St Joseph's Institution in Bras Basah Road, while those who failed the year-end exams had to leave school. Alec was in the same standard as he but in a different class.

Thomas decided to put aside his former childhood friend's cold reserve and concentrated on his studies, scared at almost missing his education by the unfair attitude of Brother Lawrence. He was determined to pass the final form three exams at St Anthony's to qualify for the much-coveted place at St Joseph's Institution in the new year.

His prowess at football was discovered and he was roped into his class soccer-team. He liked that. Being cooped-up in his mother's pigeon-hole of a room in Bencoolen Street made him dizzy, and he sorely missed the active life of St Patrick's. Before long he grew aware of several Eurasian school-prefects dogging his heels wherever he went about in school and decided that he best keep a low profile in case they attempted to get him in trouble for some reason or other, which only they knew. They had to be up to 'something' where he was concerned, he felt, otherwise why would they be following him wherever he went. He didn't need a recurrence of soured relations with another school head, especially someone as warm-hearted as Brother Michael.

The Irish principal was a fight fan, and every time the radio carried a "live" broadcast of a world boxing fight, of any weight division — heavyweight, middleweight or lightweight — in the United States, school would come to a halt and everybody, from schoolboy to teachers and

religious brothers, would set lessons aside to follow the round-by-round commentary coming over the school's broadcast system. Thomas found it humorous that whenever this happened and his class was being taken by a Chinese teacher, the woman or man would make it very clear that she or he found the "interruption" a nuisance. The other teachers though, whether they were Indian, Malay or Eurasian, didn't appear to mind.

One day he foolishly accompanied three Chinese classmates over the school-wall during the recess-period, which was expressly forbidden, to go exploring the recently-opened Odeon Cinema in North Bridge Road, and the Capitol Cinema further up, and was caught red-handed clambering back into the school grounds by the sinister group of Eurasian prefects who had been lying in wait for all of them. The Irish school-head dismissed them on the spot.

There was a crucial football match that afternoon against a rival-school's class-team, and despite being sacked Thomas turned up at the school-field to represent his class, and his teacher allowed him to play. Their team won. When he got to school the following morning with his fellow-culprits from the previous day's "fiasco" to collect their respective school-leaving certificates, Brother Michael gruffly sent them packing back to their classrooms. Thomas was reflective. He pondered on the humanity of Brother Michael as well as the vindictive actions of the Eurasian prefects, and how they seemed to have it in for him. He wondered what was it about himself that somehow caused him to incur others' ire. He wasn't speaking like a *ma'salleh* any more, so what was it?

On 25th July 1955, in the Singapore Legislative Assembly, the right-wing Progressive Party proposed a resolution calling for immediate independence for Singapore. There was a dissenting vote from a Mr G.A. Sutherland, the nominated English member. The Chief Minister, Mr David Marshall, suggested that the word "independence" be substituted by the words "self-government", and the Assembly passed this by a majority of votes. Mr Alan Lennox-Boyd, the British Colonial Secretary, had already begun a tour of British Far East colonies, and was due to arrive in Singapore around August, and the Singapore Governor, Mr Robert Black, who had taken office on 3rd July, that year, was asked to convey the request to Mr Lennox-Boyd when he arrived in Singapore. The Colonial Secretary arrived on 31st July. On 18th August the Singapore Governor sent a message to the Singapore Legislative Assembly advising it that the British Government would be glad to welcome to London, at a suitable date, a representative delegation to consider the situation in the light of a year's working of the colony's then existing constitution. A Singapore delegation

could leave for London about April 1956, by which time the colony's constitution would have been in force for a year.

Mr David Marshall welcomed the Governor's message. The Opposition, including the three-member People's Action Party, complained about the "calculated ambiguity" of the message, and asked for time to consult among its members. Mr Marshall refused, and all twelve opposition members walked out of the Assembly. The remaining seventeen, all from the Labour Front Government, and Mr Sutherland, the nominated member, expressed thanks for the Governor's message.

Emperor Bao Dai of South Vietnam was deposed on 26th October 1955 and a republic, with General Ngo Dinh-Diem as president, was proclaimed.

At the end of school-term that year, and after the final exams in November, St Anthony's held their annual boxing tournament. Alec the Jewish boy, unknown to Siddon, had spread the word that he was pretty handy with his fists, which he wasn't, but the school teacher in charge of boxing believed Manesseh and matched him up with the school's fourth-ranking pugilist. To Thomas' surprise he found he was more than a match for the other, and quietly, to himself, thanked Cheng his former St Pat's friend, for their daily work-outs of the past. He won his match fairly easily. The boxing master next invited him to "go" one round with Alec and he foolishly agreed, immediately regretting his impetuosity when immediate silence befell the school-crowd when he nonchalantly pulled on his boxing-gloves and squared with Manesseh.

The Jewish lad toyed with him, lightly tapping his chin continuously and dancing away out of reach whenever he attempted a counter. Thomas only then cottoned-on that he had been set-up by his childhood "pal". Heart in mouth, he knew he was no match for the Jew, who he found a tremendous, swift-moving, heavy-punching machine, out to knock his block off. He felt clumsy stumbling after Manesseh but stubbornly hung on, determined not to be downed by his former childhood friend who, now, was frantically trying to get him to "kiss the canvas". But somehow, through sheer doggedness, he managed to keep out of the way of the other's "killer-punch" to last the full three-minute round still standing up and squaring with him. The entire school voiced its thunderous approval of the one schoolboy who had prevented Alec keeping his "knock-out score" intact, much to his dissatisfaction, and whose dismay was visibly written on his mug.

Several days later Siddon discovered to his joy that he had passed his final term exams and was being transferred to St Joseph's Institution, the school he had first begun school-life in at Melrose, not long after the war. From January 1956 he would be in Form Four. In March of the new year he would be sixteen.

In the final days before the school closed for the year-end holidays Alec Manesseh suddenly started becoming friendly, and even invited Thomas to join his group of fawning admirers. Surprised but wary, Thomas went with the crowd but would always leave them whenever he grew tired of their open adulation of "the champ". Thomas was at first, under the impression that Manesseh had become friendly again because of their recent boxing match and that he hadn't been scared of his friend's "reputation". But at the back of his mind there was the nagging worry of the Jewish boy's former "antics" at Melrose — with Eva Sturrock, and the comics he used to con from his classmates. He decided to bide his time until he knew the exact lay of the land where Alec was concerned.

It came out during the December holidays when Alec invited him over to the Manesseh home in Short Street, just two streets from his own in Bencoolen Street. He had been amazed to discover that the Manessehs lived nearby, but in a "proper" flat, while he lived in a garret-like room with his mother. During the months when he had attended St Anthony's, Alec had never indicated that they were practically neighbours. The Manesseh home was in one of the newly-built, Singapore Improvement Trust, (known colloquially as the "S.I.T.") flats, that the colonial government had been putting up in several selected districts on the island, and which featured a "modern" water-closet for the lavatory. Ever since coming to live with his mother Thomas had been nagging her to apply for one of them. In their room at Bencoolen Street their lavatory was the primitive bucket-system located in the dingiest corner of the building, right at the back, and which was so dank, dark and putrid that one had need of a candle to light one's way, even in broad daylight, and the place was infested by giant-sized Bandicoot-rats which were bold enough to attack one, even in day-time. (The Singapore Improvement Trust first began operations in 1927 and was initially preoccupied in creating back-lanes behind back-to-back shop-houses so that refuse could be placed there for easier disposal and the lavatory-bucket trucks which had to come almost daily to clear lavatory-buckets, could have convenient access to the lavatories of the houses. It was also felt that the less-savory activities, (to the British), of the Chinese, who occupied practically all of the buildings in the "town", could be conducted in the rear, out-of-sight of the main streets. The SIT had begun construction of the island's first low-cost public housing town at Tiong Bahru in 1936.)

It had taken Manesseh three months, since Thomas had first arrived at St Anthony's, to invite him to his home, but despite his misgivings about his friend's true motives, Siddon decided to keep an open mind until he knew what his "friend" was up to. Anyway, he felt cooped up in his mother's



room during the day and running on his own in the St Joseph's Institution school-field in Bras Basah Road in the evening everyday since the holidays began, because he didn't have any friends of his own ever since coming to live at Bencoolen Street. It was boring, and Manasseh's invitation was something to look forward to, albeit that it had come from the "tricky-dicky" Jew.

Despite his suspicions he went over to Alec's SIT flat in Short Street at the appointed time and was taken to the colonial government-built community centre on the ground floor of the Jewish boy's flat. Deciding that the place wasn't appropriate for what he had in mind, Manasseh suggested a tea at the *serabat* stall, (a roadside wood and canvas lean-to built on wheels, manned by a Muslim Indian or Pakistani, who purveyed pipping-hot *serabat* or sherbet, a ginger drink, coffee, tea, and an assortment of locally-made cakes at moderate prices), on Short Street, just outside the "sprawl" of SIT flats in the area, where he lived. After their drinks were served and both of them were sipping them, Alec causally inquired after Thomas' mother's Jewish boyfriend. His name was Ezeikel, did Thomas know? Were they planning marriage? Cynically alert now, Thomas matched the Jew's nondescript tone and said it was early days yet, his mother hadn't quite made up her mind because it was difficult. The man was Jewish, she was Roman Catholic. And she needed her parish priest's permission first, otherwise she would be excommunicated from her religion. Alec then told him that the Jewish community in Singapore was also wondering. There weren't many eligible Jewish bachelors left on the island as most had gone abroad, and with the already small number of Jews left in Singapore, if Ezeikel married a non-Jew he would further depreciate their size. Jewish religious law, Manasseh said, required the female in a marriage to be a practising Jewess, otherwise the children would not be considered Jews, even though the man's roots were Middle Eastern and he continued to practice Judaism. The Jews on the island was anxious, Alec told him, looking at Thomas quizzically. The Eurasian re-assured Manasseh and said he didn't think his mother would marry Ezeikel because she was a staunch Catholic, and he was very sure Ezeikel wouldn't convert to her religion. This seemed to convince Manasseh.

Inwardly Thomas Siddon was reeling. To date he hadn't known a single thing about his mother's personal life, and he had never met any of her friends, least of all her male friends. Most days she was home by eight in the evening, after work and evening mass at the St Joseph's Church in Queen Street. She normally handed him either thirty or fifty cents, depending on how "rich" she was feeling, and he would go out to buy his cheap

hawker's dinner. Mid-week she usually got home after half-past ten, having left a dollar for his evening meal on the table before she left for work in the morning. He'd adjusted his study schedule to have his homework done before she got home every evening. And she had never said a thing about a boyfriend. Alec's statements were a startling, disturbing revelation. If his mother did have a "steady", and she re-married, maybe one day he would have a proper home instead of living in a "cubby-hole". He kept his thoughts to himself as he listened to Manesseh ranting on.

The Jewish boy next told him with boastful pride that his family was emigrating to Australia in the new year. Remaining silent Thomas thought it hypocritical of his former childhood friend and his family, if they were behind their son's interrogating him, pretending to be anxious about the shrinking number of Jewish males on the island, when they were all leaving the country for good. Thomas had already resolved that the friendship was over. He was surprised at his own attitude. He realised he was gradually developing into a person where principles mattered more than anything. He didn't know how that had come about because he had never thought along those lines before.

Returning to his mother's garret-like room he wondered whether she would ever tell him about her boyfriend and her private life. She would have to, one day. He wasn't a child any longer. He'd already learned things about her in the most upsetting way. But how do you discuss such things with a parent who is trying to bring you up in the strict traditions of the Malacca-Portuguese?

When school began in St Joseph's Institution in January 1956, the senior master of the school, a Mr Frank James, an Irishman, told him he'd received a bad report on him from St Patrick's School, that he'd been a rascal, and an eye would be kept on him. Young Thomas didn't care for the teacher's remarks but remained silent. Mr James, he'd found out, was popular in the school and he didn't want to make an enemy of someone who seemed to have the support of everyone. He also didn't want to get on the man's bad side because he wouldn't have a happy time of it. Thomas didn't want to again be in jeopardy of being dismissed again, especially since he was almost nearing the end of his schooling in a couple of years' time. Mr James had been given a wrong impression of him but, with time, the young lad hoped to change that perception. In the meanwhile there were other priorities. A few days before he had begun at St Joseph's his mother had abruptly announced that she couldn't afford to pay for his school text-books and insisted that he seek the assistance of a Mr Rudy Mosbergen, an Eurasian teacher at the school who was a member of the Eurasians

Association, to get the body to help with his books. The association, she said, helped needy Eurasian children with financial assistance for their education, and if it wasn't forthcoming he might as well quit school and get a job. He was old enough to start looking after himself.

She's a cheat, her son thought, after making all those promises to Brother Michael of St Anthony's Boys' School, last year. He barged into Mr Mosbergen's classroom on the second day of the new school-year, during recess-break, when he'd noticed the man alone at his desk. And made his fumbling request. But he had been too late. All bursaries earmarked for the year had already been allotted to the respective Eurasian pupils in need. New applications were to be made in mid-year for the year following. The schoolboy felt that the man wasn't being sympathetic and doggedly persisted. He had to get the teacher on his side or else he would have to leave school without a full secondary-school education and begin his working life at a lower-rung, probably as a labourer. Thomas stuck to his guns, trying desperately to convince the man to release the necessary funds for his text-books. That was all he needed. Text-books. He could even get them second-hand, from one of the second-hand bookshops on Bras Basah Road, near the school he told the teacher. Maybe he could even get the donation of someone's previous year's text-books. His mother would take care of his exercise books as well as his school-fees, he said desperately.

He was aware that the teacher was studying him covertly but with a faint look of puzzlement, and knew it was because he was expressing himself fluently in correct and well-pronounced English, not like someone from a "deprived" background. Damn his luck for being raised in an English environment in Melrose. He mentally brushed aside the man's unasked questions and continued with his badgering. Thomas had to get an education. It was the greatest asset of a human being, which no one could take away, once obtained.

Just when he was about to give up Mr Mosbergen said he would look into the matter and let the young boy know. As he murmured his appreciation and left the teacher's classroom for the remainder of the recess-period, he hoped his mother wouldn't kick up too much of a fuss when she learned that he had said that she would pay for his exercise books as well as his school fees. She had wanted him to try for full free education but from his conversation with the teacher he realised that they had left it till it was too late, and he had to sway Mr Mosbergen into helping him by going for half-a-loaf. He had also felt that his mother should do her part since she was earning, by Singapore's then standards, an adequate salary.

Several days later Mr Mosbergen handed him a stack of books which he accepted gratefully. He went by the following day with a thank-you note for the Eurasian Association. It was a trait ingrained in him at Melrose. One always expressed one's appreciation for a good deed coming one's way. Mr Mosbergen beamed when he handed over his note and said that if he were to require further assistance for the following year he was to make his application around the middle of the year. Thomas smiled his thanks and departed. He now had a chance to complete his education.

The following morning he set out for school with confidence, now that he had the requisite text-books. He wore the white shirt and short-pants uniform of St Joseph's Institution which his mother had bought for him, and made his way down Bencoolen Street, turned left into Middle Road until he reached the junction of Waterloo Street and crossed over. He went up Waterloo Street, behind the trade union offices on Middle Road, which perpetually had crowds milling about outside on the ground floor throughout the day, and turned left into the back-lane that would bring him out on Queen Street near the post office.

Other schoolchildren, like him, were on their way to their respective schools in the vicinity. As he passed the Queen Street Boys' Club his day-dreams of school-life were rudely interrupted by someone on a bicycle yelling out: "Kway-teow, kway-teow." (Chinese Hokkein: "rice-sticks, rice-sticks"). As the bloke whizzed past, the rider leaned forward and kicked Thomas sprawling into the deep monsoon ditch beside the road. The young Chinese, about Thomas' age, laughed mockingly as he sped on, turned right into the back-lane between the Queen Street Boys' Club and the Chinese Mission St Peter and Paul Catholic Church, and headed toward Waterloo Street. Children close-by laughed out loud as Thomas clambered dazedly out from the filthy, clogged-up sewer of those days, chock-full of faeces and discarded junk of every description. Thank goodness he'd managed to fling his school-books clear of the drain in time. They weren't really his as they had to be returned to Mr Mosbergen at year's end for the next needy Eurasian schoolboy. His knees were skinned and there were long deep scratches on both palms. His new school-clothes were a mess and he knew his mother would raise a stink were she to clap eyes on them in that state. Murder was in his heart and he didn't even know who the bloody boy was who had knocked him down!

But there was barely ten minutes left to the school starting-bell. He spied a school-prefect on his way to St Joseph's, gave him his name, explained that he had fallen into the ditch, was returning home for a change of clothes and would be late to school. The prefect nodded his understanding and

Thomas dashed pell-mell toward Bencoolen Street, changed into a clean school-uniform, took his filthy clothes downstairs to the young Chinese woman, their boarding-house neighbour, who washed his and his mother's clothes daily and for which his mother paid her, and told her not to let his mother know the state his clothes had been. The woman nodded her understanding.

He ran all the way back to school, arriving forty-five minutes late, but the school-prefect had done his job and Thomas' class-teacher admitted him without a murmur. Later, during recess, he treated his cuts with disinfectant from the school's infirmary. He couldn't be too careful, that ditch he had fallen into had been atrociously filthy and he didn't want a recurrence of lock-jaw. After a week his wounds healed and he breathed easier again.

Siddon hadn't yet realised that where he was living, Bencoolen Street, was the "turf" of a Chinese triad-gang. That they "controlled" their 'area', which was from Rohore Canal up to Bencoolen Street and Middle Road, with an iron hand. In fact approximately five square miles of the city was "carved-up" into gang-districts under the control of various Chinese secret societies. Thomas hadn't as yet come across any of the so-called "gangsters" in the city, but he had read about them in the newspaper that his mother brought home from her office each evening. The daily papers were full of the almost-daily gang-fights and wanton killings in the streets, and, as far as he was concerned, that was a totally-different, alien world.

Thomas didn't know yet that the secret societies guarded their respective domains jealously, and treated newcomers to their areas, and non-residents, with suspicion and contempt. Strangers could be rivals "sizing-up" the place for a takeover bid, or a police *hantu*, (Malay: "devil", in gangster jargon a "police informer"), spying, and they had to be "dealt" with before they became a "problem".

A week after being knocked into the filthy drain at Queen Street, as Siddon went into the corner coffee shop at the junction of Bencoolen Street and Middle Road, to have his lunch 'on tick', (an arrangement his mother had worked out with the Hainanese, (a Chinese dialect group), stallkeeper, where she would settle-up every month), a middle-aged, scrawny-looking Chinese man who habitually frequented the place, beckoned Thomas to his table. (His mother had already begun grumbling, almost everyday, that her son would eat her out of house and home and Thomas had tried co-operating by only having a mid-day meal every other day to keep the bill low as well as to avoid her constant nagging, even though his was a gnawing hunger.)

Thomas had seen the man every time he had gone into the coffee shop or when he was on his way to and from school, and passed the place. The Chinaman seemed to be there morning, noon and night, seated just inside the place, on the Bencoolen Street-side, though Thomas had never paid him any mind before. The schoolboy wasn't used to total strangers speaking to him out-of-the-blue, and was wary when the man first addressed him. He gestured a question with both palms in front of him, at chest height, as he shrugged his shoulders in an unspoken reply, indicating that he wasn't interested to speak with him. He wasn't going toward any stranger, no matter what. The man suddenly stabbed a forefinger at another Chinese, a young male seated at his table, and poked the same finger in Thomas' direction. It was a cue for the Chinese male to address the now-alarmed schoolboy.

"What 'number' you play?"

Thomas' blood froze cold. He immediately knew that he was being addressed by a Singapore gangster. The world of the Chinese secret society had rudely come into his.

"You like fall down drain?" the young man laughed at him. So, that incident at Queen Street a few days ago had been a set-up! He now knew who had been responsible for his uncalled-for humiliation — it was this group which congregated at the Middle Road-Bencoolen Street junction coffee shop. But he still didn't know why they had singled him out and purposely sent one of their own to demonstrate their authority. It had been an eloquent message. The secret society toughs he had read and heard about had finally come into his world!

"I don't know what you're talking about, I live here, just like you, and I have my meals in this shop, you see me here everyday, don't you?" he asked, trying to emulate the pidgen-English of the hooligan. He was extremely frightened.

The coffee shop owner and the Hainanese stall-keeper tried intervening on his behalf and spoke in Chinese to the reedy-looking middle-aged tough who had first beckoned to Thomas. He was obviously the leader of the group of young Chinese men who habitually congregated in the place. The man grinned, flashing gold and silver-capped teeth. He wagged an admonishing finger at the Eurasian schoolboy, warning him in Malay, to watch his step from henceforth, then he contemptuously waved Siddon away. As Thomas turned from him in relief he caught sight of the man's tattoo-covered forearms.

Two weeks later, one afternoon, as he was about to turn into the Queen Street side-door of St Joseph's Institution to go to the air-conditioned study-

room of the school-library, he was surprisingly hailed by three tough-looking, young Eurasian men he saw standing at the mouth of a back-lane which ran behind a row of shop-houses facing Bras Basah Road, on the opposite side of the street. It appeared that they had been waiting for him to appear. Thomas recognized all three as altar-boys of the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, the Roman Catholic church diagonally opposite his school. Though he didn't know them, he nevertheless crossed over to where they were, a smile beginning to form around the corners of his mouth. As he got to where they were, the largest-looking, a hulking body-builder, prodded him in the chest and at the same time flashed him an odd-sort of gesture with his other hand. His recent 'experience' at the Bencoolen Street coffee shop a fortnight ago had already wised him up and he stepped backward swiftly, though he was still reluctant to leave and go his way because he didn't want to appear cowardly, even though he was nervous. But he was watchful.

"What do you want?" he asked, pretending annoyance, though there were butterflies in his stomach. He was angry at himself for having been "suckered" into crossing the road and falling into the trio's trap.

"We're three, two nine — what your *gee-oh*," (Hokkein Chinese for "number", meaning gang-sign).

"I don't know what you mean," Thomas answered firmly though he was quaking inside.

"Don't fuck around bastard, come inside the lane, we can talk," the hulking bully said with a sinister grin. Thomas glanced furtively into the back-lane and spied a group of young men, all Chinese, loitering about mid-way in it, attempting to look nonchalant but failing. The way they looked, and what to him was their aggressive manner, told him that they were up to no good. He saw that they were standing by a turn-off in the back-lane which would have allowed them to beat a hasty retreat into Brash Basah Road, after giving him a bashing, if he had foolishly gone in with the three who had led him into their trap. Still "green" to the ways of the street, instinct had 'warned' the young schoolboy that he would be set upon if he went in. He sensed the obvious ploy. Did they think him *that* stupid?

He wasn't going to accept *any* invitation for any kind of back-street "chat". From *anybody*. They obviously had known about his routine of study in the afternoons after school, had planned to "way-lay" him, and bring him into the back-lane. To give him a hiding that would tell him that he was on their "turf"! Thomas decided to bluff his way out, hoping, somehow, that he could hoodwink the thugs to not lay a hand on him. He didn't like the look of the big, tough-looking bully who had spoken to him

first. He did recognise him though, he was the elder brother of his Filipino classmate.

"Look, if you're trying to be funny I'll report you to the teachers at St Joseph's — I know your brother, he's in my class," he said to the tough-looking bully, who, to his immediate alarm, pulled out a big wicked-looking pocket-knife from his trouser-pocket, flicked-open its shiny blade and began stroking the tip of it with his thumb.

"Bugger, if you report to the teachers you won't live long — you know what I mean," the big Filipino threatened, sinisterly brandishing the large blade in front of Thomas' now-pale face.

"Come back tomorrow with five dollars, same time or watch out!" The trio turned and sauntered leisurely back to where their cohorts were waiting inside the back-lane. So, Thomas thought to himself, he had been right, if he had been stupid to have fallen for their trap and went inside the lane, in the first place, he probably might not be alive at all. The knife which the big Filipino had also been brandishing, had been frighteningly large as well.

Siddon's thoughts, at that juncture, were wild in consternation. He just didn't know what to do or think. He decided to flee into St Joseph's, to seek solace from his classmates and some kind of explanation for what had literally fallen out of the sky and into his lap! He knew that several of his classmates also attended the library for private study and sought their advice, since he knew of no other source where he could get the right advice. The boys he spoke to, after listening to the nervous schoolboy, 'enlightened' him in the 'Singapore-pidgen' that they all spoke in:

"You better be careful, they give you gang-sign you must bring money or throw your own 'number' and then bring your 'people' for 'talks'. Either you give 'time' for meeting and they give 'place' or you give 'place' and they give you 'time'. Your gang either fight, and if win the other pay, or your gang 'settle' and you pay," he was told.

"But I'm not a gangster," he protested, nervous now. But his 'helpful' classmates stressed the importance of his handing over the demanded-for sum of money at the appointed time and place, otherwise he would have to face the "consequences". It was "protection-money", he was told. He had to pay to be left alone by the group of thugs, otherwise he would be set upon and probably even killed. So long as he paid and continued to pay the group regularly he would be "protected". The young schoolboy, fresh from a boarding-school environment and completely ignorant of life on the streets of Singapore, saw that he would get no help from his classmates because no one had even attempted to offer him any real help. And none of them had enlightened him as to how he could get out of his predicament. Thomas realised that he was alone.



The demand by the group of thugs meant that since he did not "belong" to a secret society he would have to keep on paying at regular intervals or otherwise get bashed-up or worse. His mind raced, thinking about the implications to his life-style. He would never be able to get five dollars together. His mother didn't give him any pocket money except what he got from her for his evening meals, which was a pittance at the thirty or fifty cents she gave him every evening, depending on how "rich" she was. And what about that other group at Bencoolen Street? They too might soon demand "protection money", especially when it became known that he was paying another lot of thugs to remain "safe". Thomas balked at the idea of paying money to *anyone* just to be safe in the streets where he lived. But he had read about the almost daily murders in the press. In all his life he had never imagined that Singapore was such a dangerous place to live in. Most of the victims were probably people like him, — innocents caught in a trap — pay up or be killed.

He suddenly recalled that he used to know some toughs in his former school, St Patrick's. They had been friendly, despite their unsavoury reputation. Maybe they could help him somehow, or tell him what he should do. He thereupon took a bus to Telok Kurau to the "usual" serabat stall where they normally hanged-out before and after school or when they were playing truant. To his relief the three he most wanted to meet were at their usual place. Dispensing with preliminaries he asked Ahmad and Kercil, the two Malay boys and Seng, a Chinese, what he should do since getting into his tight-spot.

"No problem," said Seng, "we can arrange our boss give you 'protection' but you must first join our gang."

"I don't mind," said Thomas with mixed feelings, elated at finding a 'solution' to his immediate "headache" but anxious that he was getting in deeper than what he had first intended when he had set out to meet his three 'friends'. But survival was paramount and he had found a 'way'.

"We can recommend you to our *hang tuah*" (gangster idiom for "main chief" taken from Malay folklore hero's name, a "peculiarity" of Chinese triads that came over to Singapore from the "Old Johor" Sultanate at Riau, which originally was the Sultanate of Malacca before Portuguese conquest. Hang Tuah was a famous and great warrior of the Malacca Sultanate), "he damn-tough balls, he punch, you must stand, OK?" asked Kerchil.

"Okay," said Siddon with a troubled heart.

His friends took him on the Chinese-owned-and-run bus service to Woo Mun Chew Road in Siglap, with Thomas paying the fares. It was a dusty lane with dark-looking sand, next to a local wet-market. Minute particles of

debris and dust floated about in the air, choking him. Adults, both Chinese and Malay, obviously residents, glared at the youngsters with distaste. The grown-ups knew the reason for their being there — they were headed for the *wayang*, (Chinese opera), stage which also was the known "hide-out" of the area's gang-chief. The boys ignored the nasty looks of the residents and walked deep into the suburban avenue which wended its way from the street shops on the main East Coast Road, the wooden huts and shacks of the Chinese villagers and the attap-huts of some of the original Malay villagers whose ancestors had been on the island long before Stamford Raffles had turned up to found his British Station, toward the fish-ponds and duck farms in the interior.

To Thomas the hike seemed endless, like trekking a primitive region, especially when the sounds of the main road, of cars whizzing past, cars-honking and bicycle-bells ringing, were totally cut-off. Instead he heard the call of birds and fowl, croaking frogs, buzzing insects and barking kampong dogs.

Finally in the dusty, murky air he spied a rambling wooden building with an open, bare stage facing in their direction. He knew it had to be the *wayang-stage*, whatever that meant. The group eventually reached it and his three companions led the way round back to a door underneath the stage itself. Seng knocked boldly and instantly the door swung open violently. Thomas couldn't see who had opened it because the inside was in darkness while the four of them stood out in the open, in the bright sunshine. He nevertheless followed his friends in as they trooped into the yawning darkened space from where the man's shape could now be seen. As his eyes got used to the dimly-lit room underneath the stage, Thomas discerned that it was a kind of "changing room" for actors and actresses, for that was what the place was, he could now tell, as there were tall mirrors on the walls with seats in front of them. For the actors to do their make-up as well as check that their gear was on correctly, he guessed. He saw a single sheet of discoloured, off-white cloth dangling from the roof of the room, which was the floor-boards of the stage above them, and realised that it acted as a "dividing-line" between the sexes so that they could undress in relative privacy. The door they had just come through was firmly slammed-shut behind them by the burly Chinese who had opened it for them, and he brushed past them to join three others at a table. Seng signalled with a hand-wave for Thomas to remain where he was while his three schoolboy-thug 'friends' went forward and stopped respectfully several feet from where the four sinister-looking Chinese adults sat with playing cards before them. It was obvious their game had been interrupted prior to the boys' arrival. □

Two young and quite attractive Chinese women in close-fitting *samfoos*, (Chinese-style woman's garb of trousers and blouse), hovered close-by. It was their high-pitched voices Thomas had heard crying out encouragement during the game of cards which had been going on until the arrival of the schoolboy quartet. One of the women topped-up the glass of the man who had opened the door for them with brown liquid from a bottle and water from another. Brandy.

Siddon saw that the men inside had already known of their imminent arrival when they were at least some twenty feet from the wayang-stage, because of a "gap" at the bottom of the wooden wall of the stage which faced the lane from which they had approached. A plank of wood had been shifted slightly to afford those inside a clear view for some hundred yards. There was another "gap", just as artificially-created, on the opposite side of the building to give advanced notice of the approach of anyone from that side. When he and the others were outside the chinks in the walls hadn't been noticeable. It was a good "spy-hole" because it gave the men inside visible warning of the impending approach of unwanted or unfriendly persons.

A thin, consumptive-looking Chinaman got up and signalled the schoolboy trio who had brought Thomas to the gangster hide-out, away from the table of adults, out of earshot of his henchmen, for that was who the men were, Thomas was to find out later that day. The senior men, now feigning disinterest, appeared to become immersed in their resumed card game. Thomas noticed the wicked-looking scar running down from the corner of one eye across the cheek, cutting a deep "groove" through the nose of the skinny Chinese holding a conversation with his friends, splitting it in two. Air went into his lungs via three "holes" in his face — his nostrils and the groove. Siddon shuddered inwardly. Much later, when he was into the Chinese secret societies proper he would learn from Seng that the man had come by his horrific scar — a permanent mark of gangland reprisal — for past treachery to his *tong* or Chinese secret society.

The man suddenly ceased talking to his friends and sauntered over to the would-be entrant to his gang. Thomas' friends had already pre-warned him, before they had set out that day, that he was not to smile or say a word to the "chief" but await reaction from him. It was not long in coming. The evil-looking man, reeking of stale booze, grinned into his face and abruptly shot a swift fist into his belly, knocking the wind from him. Thomas doubled up in pain, surprised at the heaviness of the man's blow. He was deceptively strong for such a skinny runt! But Siddon was pleased that he hadn't uttered a sound. The only "noise" he had made had been the woosh of startled-air escaping his lips on impact of the man's fist into his belly.

He had already been forewarned not to cry out or indicate that he had been hurt, if he wanted to get through the mandatory first-test for entry into the gang and he was pleased that he had been able to do so. The man's grin now became a mocking glare. Thomas felt nauseated as the waft of stale liquor from the man's breath blew over him. He would learn later that the Chinese measured their success by their ability to afford the best quality of *everything*, brandy being uppermost in the scale of things. The man signalled his three gang-members to draw nearer. Then he spoke in the Hokkein dialect, while Seng translated:

"Our boss say you can join, his name Ah Lek — you wan' be fighter or *chukar*", (Malay: "pickle", gangster idiom for "protected one"), "he ask you now."

"What do 'fighter' and 'chukar' mean?" countered Siddon.

"'Fighter', any time we call, you come for 'talks' maybe fight, night or day — 'chukar' you pay three-dollar one month, no need come down, any trouble we come down 'protect' you, which one you wan'?"

"I live too far away, I can't come down every night."

"Don' worry, I say you my 'chukar', I your 'holder', (minor gang-chief), you pay me three dollar one month," Seng said, then related their conversation to Ah Lek.

The Chinese gang-chief, casting a scornful look at his newly-acquired 'protected' member, signalled Thomas to follow him to the table where his senior henchmen sat playing cards. His three friends remained where they were, close to the backstage door. He was presented to the henchmen, then Ah Lek said something in Hokkein and they all displayed contempt. The young women chipped in as well, obviously commenting on his state of manhood, but he didn't understand then, though in future, he would, and realise what they had said about him. The gangster chief next burned a chit of yellow paper which had red Chinese characters written on it, and after Seng had poured a glass of water, Ah Lek mixed in the ash of the burned paper in it and commanded his new recruit to down the whole concoction. The Eurasian swallowed it fast to prevent from bringing it up. Immediately Ah Lek spoke while Seng interpreted to inform Siddon that he was now a "protected member" of the — *hai, lok, san tong*, (Chinese Cantonese: sea, land mountain tong), Ah Lek was his **hung tuah**. He was not to return to Woo Mun Choo Road again unless summoned. He was "water class", not a "fighter", to be used as back-up in any impending confrontation with a rival tong, to show a rival gang "boss" the total combined strength of the gang, and thus dissuade the rival gang from carrying out any plans for a fight. Thomas would never become a 'tiger-general'. The boys, on a dismissive wave from Ah Lek slunk out of the opera backstage.

Once outside Seng showed Thomas how to "make sign" and how to "throw" it. He was to uphold the honour of his tong always and it was a great "wrong" to side-step any confrontation. And he was to meet any challenge by responding with his own "sign". It was a matter of "face". Siddon suddenly realised that belonging to a gang-tong didn't carry a guarantee of safety. He was also not to "throw" his sign indiscriminately or unnecessarily make known the fact that he was hai, lok, san, especially to **hantus**. But he had to return "sign" thrown him by rival gangsters, to call out his chief's name to show whose tong he belonged to and that he was unafraid. And he was to either give the "time" or "place" for any proposed "confrontation-talks" that the other side sought, that if they suggested the "place" he would give the "time", or vice-versa. In unfamiliar territory he was to use utmost caution. Sometimes someone seeking a "confrontation" would attack on the spot, once gang-signs were exchange, because the other would be on his own home-ground and knew it was safe for him to attack.

Be careful, Seng warned or he could end up dead. As a chukar he could not "throw sign" to challenge another but he could "return sign" thrown at him. Seng assured Siddon that Ah Lek, their chief, was well respected by other secret society chiefs who knew him to be a ruthless killer. Thomas' head was reeling with all the information fed to him, and he felt doubtful that he could ever become a "proper" secret society tough.

Seng next turned business-like, instructing him to "return sign" to the group of Eurasian thugs who had accosted him that day, and to give them the "time" as five in the evening for the day after. The Chinese thug told his reluctant protege not to be nervous, as he could see that Siddon was starting to look unsure. He said the "...buggers..." would be *chuah*, (Hokkein Chinese: "scared"), once they heard the name of their chief. Everyone was afraid of Ah Lek because he was a killer, he boasted.

"Show them you are hai,lok,san, your boss Ah Lek, and fuck their arse," Seng instructed firmly.

The hai,lok,san had enough "water" like Thomas in Bras Basah Road, maybe they would even decide to takeover the Cathay Cinema and Dhoby Ghaut area of the *chap tse-beng tong*, (the fourteen tong-group), of which the Eurasians had to belong to, because that was their territory.

"Tell them they don't give 'place' their 'area' *kye-giam*, (Hokkein gangland jargon: "curfew" — opposition gang- members attacked on sight), straightaway — watch the big bastard face, who threaten you, if he gangster he will chuah when you say your chief Ah Lek, if he ask for 'settle' don't give 'face'," Seng commanded.

If Thomas was "smart", Seng said, he could get the group of Eurasians

to pay for his membership dues when they asked for a settlement, otherwise if they were chap tse-beng, Ah Lek would have to meet their chief and come to an "arrangement" so that both sides would not lose "face". If that were the case Thomas would have to pay more than the five dollars the group of Eurasians had demanded of him. Siddon was nervous with the knowledge of the street that he now possessed, which he had never wanted to have, but comforted himself that since he knew Seng he would not have to "pay up" immediately should it come to his having to pay a higher figure than what he had hoped for, and that he also had an effective 'answer' to the ever-threatening violence to his person ever since coming across the first group of gangsters at the Bencoolen Street coffee shop. By the time he returned home from Siglap, after taking his leave of Seng and the other two, it was way past midnight and his mother hadn't yet returned, which made him glad because she would not know that he had come home late.

There was open gang warfare in Singapore in the mid-1950s — each Chinese secret society-tong seeking to establish itself kingpin of the island's underworld. The long-standing "big-timers" were the *sar, ji, kow tong*, (three,two,nine tong), of which the chap tse-beng were a "satellite". But the gang-chiefs were getting old. The kong-pueh, (zero-eight), hai,lok,san and the *ji-tse tong*, (twenty-four), with up-and-coming "young blood" were challenging the suzerainty of the *sar,ji, kow*, who controlled everything, and whom the two "upstart tongs" wanted to usurp and take over the "cream" of Singapore-crime's big-stakes — prostitution, the opium, marijuana and morphine rackets, the smuggling of illegal immigrants from China, contraband tobacco, liquor and anything else that the Colonial Government had put a restriction on and which was a guarantee of big earnings if these "restricted" items could be made readily available to those who wanted them, for the 'right' price. The two "challengers" were hungry to takeover the "traditional trade" of the "old war-horse" *sar,ji,kow* and would often fight one another to establish the "right" to take on the 329. In turn the 329 kept clear of the street-skirmishes, hoping that the two "younger" tongs would finally annihilate one another and leave the 329 to continue its dominance of the "real-money" crime-stakes.

The two emerging tongs had already begun gaining control of various outlying parts of the island but the lucrative districts were still in the hands of the *sar,ji,kow*. The zero-eight appeared to attract the western-educated Chinese, while the twenty-four, which was headquartered in the traditional "Chinese-hinterland" of *chinatown*, took in the more "china-minded" Chinese. Many gang-members from the minor gangs, and even the 24, had tried switching over to the kong-pueh, which appeared to be drawing ahead

in the "districts-war stakes" but the zero-eight chiefs preferred not to accept these "traitors" into their fold because this same "new-blood" could just as easily change sides again, if the kong-pueh suffered a reversal of fortune. But it had become a "safe passport" through gangland Singapore to be known as a member of hai,lok,san, which Thomas Siddon had now become.

The following afternoon after school Siddon met up with the three Eurasian bullies at the same spot where they had first threatened him and demanded that he pay them five dollars for "protection". They laughed mockingly, seeing him cross the street from the St Joseph's Queen Street side-entrance toward where they were standing. Obviously their scare-tactics had worked, the bugger was coming over with the "buck-shee" (Indian: "free"), five-bucks! But their laughing mouths twisted out-of-shape, in shocked surprise when Siddon instead "returned sign", called out the name of his chief and demanded "time" for the "meeting". He had thrown his gang-number with a vindictive flourish, freezing the thrown sign in mid-air, his eyes large in a fierce glare, savouring the visible shock his actions had induced in the three would-be "protection-money collectors". They clearly hadn't expected him to come-back with a "reply"! There was at first, a look of total disbelief and amazement, then caution and fear crept into their eyes. The "sucker" had been conversant with secret society "law" all along, and he had, instead, caught them in his trap! Or else why had he pretended not to be connected with a secret society yesterday and now demand the "time"? He had only pretended to be nervous because he had wanted to get his gang tipped-off so that they could be trapped. It was their turn to be scared. It was clearly written on their now-pale features.

The big tough of yesterday, who had brandished his pocket-knife so wickedly, tried injecting friendliness into his voice, hoping, somehow, to neutralise the situation which had caught them all on the wrong foot. "Where you playing, balls? Why you never say anything yesterday?" he inquired in a panic, forcing out a laugh which came out insincere. "Is your group chap tse-beng, your chief owns the fishing-rods shop?" Thomas countered with a sneer, relishing the power he now had over the trio, "tell him kong-pueh, hai,lok,san, my chief Ah Lek, will meet him to 'settle' this matter — give me 'place' fucker," Siddon countered in the Sino-English pidgen of the colony, mocking him. The big tough now started to plead, fear clearly showing through his eyes: "We're not looking for trouble man, we just play the fool yesterday, honestly — we don't 'play', we're just working people." Siddon now began to realise that the 'tough' of yesterday was speaking the truth. He and his cohorts weren't secret society members, just damned

bullies who had thought he was "easy meat"! But they had singled him out just because he was new to the area, to put the shit in him for their own perverse sense of fun. And he had become a triad member because of it. The enormity of what he had done the day before, hit Siddon strongly, causing him to feel dizzy momentarily. As his mind reeled, he thought to himself: "What have I done, I've taken a step from which I can't get myself out of!" Life had played him a dirty trick but the bastards would suffer because they had got him entangled in the Chinese secret societies. It would now be their turn to experience the fear that he had felt the day before.

"Listen, you took out a knife and threatened my life — you can't get off so easily bastard!" Thomas could see the effect his blunt words had on the trio. They were all in a blue-funk and stood rooted to the ground. Confident that there would be no retaliation from them, the young boy took a step forward and swung his right back-hand against the mouth of the swaggering bully of yesterday, who had now become cowering youth. All the despair and frustration of the first sixteen years of his life went behind the angry swipe, which got the young adult reeling from his blow. He grabbed hold of the shinning "cowboy-belt" buckle on the bully's waist and jerked him forward. "Give me your knife bastard."

And without waiting for compliance shoved his own hand into the man's right pant-pocket, drew out the weapon, unsheathed it and placed the point of its blade against the now-frightened man's chin.

"Who's tough now, fucker?" he sneered.

Thomas looked swiftly past the cowering youth toward the back-lane, to where he knew the group of "supporters" from yesterday would be hanging around, waiting for the "action" against him to commence. Instead he caught the look of complete bewilderment on their stupid mugs, even from that distance. They couldn't believe that they had just witnessed their "leader" have the tables turned on him! The schoolboy "punk", the butt of their joke yesterday, had even taken away his prized-possession. Thomas now pointed the blade of the pen-knife at the group and bellowed: "Come you bastards!"

But the group took to its heels, leaving the trio behind.

"You're on your own now, your friends have *chabot*. (Malay: run away), "since you won't give me 'place' or your chief's name, you come to the coffee shop next-door to the fishing-rods shop tomorrow, five o'clock, if you don't, *kye-giam*, (Hokkein: "curfew — attack on sight"), for your whole fucking chap tse-beng," Thomas flung at the now openly cowering trio as he threw the confiscated pen-knife into the ditch alongside the lane where they were all standing.



He crossed over Queen Street toward St Joseph's Institution, furtively looking up toward the religious brothers' quarters which overlooked the street, in case one of them happened to glance out of his window and had caught the "action" transpiring below.

That night he travelled to Telok Kurau and informed his "holder" Seng, of his afternoon's adventures. Seng said there would be no confrontation because the "stupid buggers" weren't chap tse-beng. They were in worse trouble because they had pretended to be triad-members, used the sign of a tong and tried to obtain money from him "unlawfully". Seng said he would know what to do, and told his "protected one" Thomas, to meet him the following day, as arranged, at the coffee shop in Bras Basah Road.

In school the following morning Thomas' Filipino classmate, Frobrago, approached him and begged forgiveness for his elder brother who had now realised that he had committed a grave error in trying to 'be funny with him' and was prepared to "settle" quietly. Siddon instead walked away without a word. The schoolboy "thug" was starting to emerge.

Thomas met Seng at the coffee shop that afternoon. Another Chinese, very muscular and vaguely familiar, was sitting at the same table as Seng. There were no introductions. The Chinese coffee shop owner and his helpers were surprised that an Eurasian, and a schoolboy at that, was sitting with their tough-looking countrymen, especially the brawny one who they knew to be the chief of the chap tse-beng controlling the district where they all lived, worked and received 'protection' from. The schoolboy was just too young to be associating with persons of that ilk, no matter that they were Chinese. They were too dangerous. No one had a drink.

Sharp at five Frobrago, the muscular Filipino and the other two Eurasians, looking ashen-faced, walked into the coffee shop. As they drew closer to the table where Siddon and the two Chinese gangsters were seated, the muscular Chinese somehow suddenly kicked three chairs in their direction, hitting them against their knees with the coffee shop furniture. The trio plonked themselves down immediately, as if relieved to be sitting. The muscular Chinese spoke:

"Bastard, you dare to 'throw' my 'number' — you mad or what? Jus' because we stay in the same kampong, (Malay: "village", local slang meaning the same neighbourhood), and we 'play' weights together, *you* my people — bastard!" The muscular Chinese looking enraged and upset, pounded the table with his fist. The three men said nothing except to look furtively at the three persons facing them before their muscular 'leader' handed over two hundred dollars to Seng, who took it as if it was his due. They also paid for the two large beers that Siddon and the two Chinese then

ordered. After downing their drinks Seng stood up, shook hands with the other Chinese, then he and Siddon walked out of the coffee shop. Afterwards in the quiet corner of a neighbourhood back-lane, where they wouldn't be seen by passers-by, Seng informed Thomas he was being elevated to "fighter" class by Ah Lek their gang-chief, for handling himself so brilliantly. He wasn't considered a "chukar" any more. A day would be chosen for his "proper initiation" into hai,lok,san, in the meantime he was to regard himself as a full-fledged tong-fighter and needn't pay any monthly dues. Seng handed him fifty dollars as his share of the day's takings. More money than he had ever had in his life, in a single sum. The remainder of the "loot" was to be shared between Seng and Ah Lek, he was told. Seng said that his bravery that day with the "stupid buggers", was like a "tiger-general's".

Word somehow got back along the schoolboy grapevine about how Thomas had put to flight a group of adults and even sat down with real gang-chiefs for "gang-talks". He was "big-time". The non-Chinese boys in the school couldn't quite believe he was mixed up in the secret societies or that he was dangerous, and sought his companionship, bathing in his somewhat dubious "glory". The Chinese boys of St Joseph's, more conversant with their race's secret society culture, treated him as volatile and dangerous, and kept out of his way.

The following afternoon after the "show-down", Thomas visited the grave of his former matron, Miss Marguerite Looker, at Biddadari, to review his life and the way it seemed to be shaping. He went to her because up till the time of her death he had always gone to her when something was troubling him, and he didn't have anyone else to turn to. He stood by her grave-side at the cemetery off Serangoon Road, thinking his thoughts. She had taught him to be courteous and considerate, in other words to be English — and he felt that he had let her down even though his life had taken an uncontrolled, dramatic turn for the worse, of late. *If* he were to not head into a life of crime and shame, something in his life would have to change, otherwise he was being sucked headlong down the wrong road. He didn't want to remain a gangster and all that it entailed. Everything that she had accomplished as far as he was concerned, would come to naught. Change, he told her, had to come.

Then and there he made up his mind that he would make the change happen. He would talk with his mother that evening to see whether she would agree to their moving to a different part of the island, away from the Bencoolen Street area. Lately she had seemed a little more agreeable and appeared to be in a better frame of mind, and had even tailored a few new dresses for herself. If they could get one of the new Singapore Improvement

Trust flats they could leave their garret-like existence in Bencoolen Street behind. And he would be free of secret society influences. His "discussion" with the late Miss Looker had done him a world of good.

Thomas' first attempt at speaking with his mother turned into the first of many loud quarrels between them. She would not even hear of their moving house. She said she didn't like living in a large place, cut off from other people, she preferred staying in their Bencoolen Street room. It was ideal, being small and easy to maintain and keep clean. And it was inexpensive. Anyway, she liked hearing the sounds of people moving about in a house, and Thomas was mouthing nonsensical things again. It would be impossible to get a SIT flat because there was a long waiting list. Her son tried convincing her by volunteering to approach Mr Potts of the Melrose committee to speak to the 'right' person in the housing authority to "bend" the rules on their behalf. In the middle of their 'discussion' Thomas suddenly realised that his mother seemed preoccupied and had only been listening to him with one ear. Her mind seemed to be elsewhere. He noticed that she was dressed as if she were going out again, and asked her. She told him that she had an appointment and would be leaving soon.

She thereupon threw down a dollar onto the small table where he usually had his meals, saying that it was for his dinner. He was surprised because she usually only let him have either thirty or fifty cents. He made another attempt at bringing up the topic of moving house and pleaded with her to at least consider the idea. She flatly refused. Thomas tried a new tact, hoping to distract her and leave the way open for him to broach the subject again in the future by inquiring whether they could install a Redifussion set, the square wooden box which piped in non-stop music via cable throughout the day and night up till midnight. It cost only six dollars a month to hire from the British-run company. She flared up instead and yelled at him, as her son caught the flicker of harried anxiety on her features and immediately stopped his badgering.

He asked her what seemed to be troubling her. She looked at him long and hard for several seconds, as if deciding what to do, then in a gush told him that she had to leave their room before her ex-boyfriend turned up. She was in a hurry to meet her new "beau". Thank goodness, Thomas exclaimed, she was finally breaking up with the Jew. No, she said, he was the new boyfriend. Her "ex" was a policeman called Charles Rideout. He had threatened to shoot her and her "new" boyfriend that evening and she was hurrying away in case he turned up. Her son's mind boggled. His mother was relating her private life and it sounded just like the pictures to him! Who would believe it?

He decided that he would stay to meet the man, and told his mother to go, telling her that he would talk to Rideout. His mother, on hearing his words began to look somewhat relieved, then told him to make sure the man was out of their room before ten that evening as she had to have sufficient sleep to get up early for work in the morning. She collected her things and swiftly departed the room, leaving her son behind to await the arrival of Charles Rideout.

Thomas wondered about his mother, whether she was embarrassed that she had left her child behind to meet a man who had threatened to come with a gun, and who might turn nasty when he discovered that she wasn't there. Or had she originally intended for him to face her ex-boyfriend by himself? He was only sixteen!

There was a hesitant knock on the room-door and an almost timid-sounding male voice called out Luci's name. Thomas sprang from the one bed in the room, where he was seated, and flung the door open, surprised to see a tall, fair-complexioned Eurasian standing outside. The man, in turn, appeared rather shocked to see him standing in his mother's room-doorway but recovered quickly and asked to be let in. Thomas stood aside and the man strode in, sitting down, uninvited on the only chair in the room. He had obviously been there before. Thomas got straight to the point. He told Rideout that his mother was finished with him and he should let her be. She was a widow but she had a child, himself, how could the man even consider shooting his mother? Had he spared a thought for her son? Thomas' knees were quaking as he uttered those words. He was ticking-off an adult, one who was supposed to carry a gun and who could turn violent at any moment. As if reading his thoughts the man next drew out an American Army-issue Colt Automatic from his pocket and placed it between his knees. Then he spoke in a quavering voice:

"I was going to shoot her and him, and kill myself tonight." His voice appeared to be cracking with the threatened onset of tears. But the young boy had by now become mad. A man had made a decision to kill his mother without bothering about him.

"Did you spare a thought for me, after the two of you are dead, do I go into an orphanage?" he asked in fury. Rideout now appeared remorseful as he returned the weapon from between his knees into a trouser-pocket. For the first time, since the gun had appeared, Siddon began to feel safe. Then, surprisingly, he felt sorry for the man.

"I didn't think," the man said, "please tell your mother I'll leave her alone, she needn't worry any more," he said sadly. He held out his hand, which Thomas took. After shaking the boy's hand Rideout departed, shutting the

door after him. Thomas saw the tears streaming down his cheeks as he went through the doorway.

His mother, Luci, returned home after midnight. Thomas knew because the piped-in music from the Chinese-channel of Redifussion filled the whole neighbourhood, in which there were sets in every room except theirs, with the station's closing "Solitude" theme, and he heard the regular male Chinese voice downstairs calling out to remind everybody, as if the neighbourhood were still in China, to lock and bolt their doors. His mother had awakened him to open the downstairs backdoor which the landlord shut sharp at eleven forty-five, every night, by chucking a stone through their room-window, and which fell with a thundering clatter on the floor, next to his face, missing him by fractions where he lay sleeping. He had angrily informed her that her missile could have cracked his skull and she soothed his enraged feelings by proffering him a *pow*. (a Chinese steamed bun).

From that night on his mother started going out every other evening after work. She would give him two dollars before she left in the morning to stay out after six in the evenings, and not return until after eleven-thirty. That was her strict instructions. One dollar was for dinner and the other to go to the "pictures". Even though she was with her boyfriend in her room every other evening, his mother went out with him every night. Thomas cooperated by having his homework completed in the afternoon so that he needn't have to be in their room when her boyfriend arrived. She still expected him to 'control' his meals at the Bencoolen Street coffee shop, where his lunch was concerned.

Thomas hadn't yet said a word to his mother about his having to stay in the streets all evening. He was worried that his secret society "links" would somehow get him in more trouble than he had bargained for. And he wished that he didn't have to walk the alleyways like a vagrant because it opened him to all kinds of influences and hazards. He wished Singapore was something like the cities in America which had shopping centres. If there were all-night shopping areas he could at least spend time in such places which were brightly lit. He had read about such things in the novels and in the films he had seen at the cinema. Most of the cinema-houses in the main city area showed English-language films, in the those days, the majority being American-made. He hadn't, as yet become aware of the differences in culture and attitude between America and Britain, and like the majority of Singapore-islanders thought the two countries' ways-of-life were similar. Thomas did find it odd though, that the British in Singapore seemed stand-offish, not like how they were portrayed in the films. He was still looking

forward to receiving a reply from his aunt in England, ever since obtaining her address from "Uncle Willy" in the previous year, when he had lived with him for a while. He wondered why "Aunt Bertha" was taking so long.

But with time he began to become familiar with the darkened, dimly-lit streets of those days, exploring the city after his dinner of hawker-fare. He had an extensive "menu". He could choose from Chinese, Indian or Malay hawker-fare. There were numerous itinerant food-peddlars all over the city. Food by European standards was unbelievably cheap. A hawker-meal could be bought for under a local-dollar.

Thomas got to know every back-street short-cut and moved with confidence from gangster-district to gangster-district. Unknown in the beginning, it was not long before it became common knowledge among the street riffraff that he was 'connected'. His face now became familiar to every secret society tough in most areas. Word had got round within the perimeter of Rochore Canal Road, North Bridge Road, South Bridge Road, Upper Cross Street, Stamford Road, Dhoby Ghaut, Selegie Road and Serangoon Road that the young *chap-cheng*, (Chinese: "ten-bloods" — Chinese derogatory for mixed-bloods, irrespective of whether one parent was pure and the other mixed or both parents were of different races but "pure" of their respective "strains"), who spoke funnily, was **hai,lok,san**. He had even been "tough-enough" to "handle" some adults, and important enough to sit with gangster-chiefs. This one was either destined to become a gang-leader one day, or be stabbed to death. Time only would tell. He was also steadily becoming known as a "toughie".

Sometimes for want of something better to do he would prowl the "poor mans red-light district" of Johore Road where sex was purveyed as cheaply and as carelessly as an item for sale at a roadside vendor's. The side-street was not far from where he lived at Bencoolen Street. Here the "pross" past their prime sold their charms at a vast discount. The pitch-dark area in front of the tourist-type, (though there were then no tourists, as such), shops along Bras Basah Road, diagonally-opposite from the Cathay Building, which sold cheap watches, cameras, clothes and sundry items of interest to European travellers who found themselves inadvertently "stuck" on the island due to the extra-long flights to Australia and had to remain "a while" on the island until their aircraft were ready to take on the last-leg to the land down-under, as well as British servicemen, found it "an interesting place" after ten in the evening. There was also another place further up Bras Basah Road where there was some more "action" as well. This was a narrow "gap" between buildings just before the Raffles Hotel, where the bar-waitresses from several nearby bars would bring "favoured" clients for a "stand-up

quickie" after eleven, when the streets were quiet and deserted. (In the early 1900s Bras Basah Road had been Singapore's hotel and traveller's-belt, and the western boundary of the island's "square-mile of sin" since 1840, and what was transpiring in Thomas Siddon's day was a "carry-over" from its former days.)

At Stamford Road, near the museum and library, he would stare at the hermaphrodites "strolling" and the men who would go up to make a furtive proposition. At Bugis Street which was already "world-famous" and well-patronised by the island's British servicemen, visiting foreign soldiers and sailors in port, he would chuckle at the sight of both foreigners and locals gaping at the street's attractively-attired queers who came out sharp at midnight to preen and pick-up customers, revelling in the stir they always created whenever they put in their appearance. He found it paradoxical that from around six in the evening till about eleven at night, local families, Chinese in the main, would patronise Bugis Street for its "menu" of exotic food but come eleven forty-five the nature of the place would transform into a pick-up joint for homosexuals seeking the pleasures of the flesh with transvestites and transsexuals. The street had first started on its road to dubious 'fame' around the time of the Japanese Occupation when it was one of the very few places then, which served a freshly cooked meal, even in the wee hours of the morning but mainly to the occupying forces who had the money. The transvestites, who originally had operated at the nearby "red-light" Johore Road-Desker Road area during the war, had been attracted by the street's bright lights and the enemy-soldiers out on the town and began "strolling" there instead, and from that time on it had "grown" into the Bugis Street of world-wide notoriety.

The Bugis, before Stamford Raffles had set up his British Station on Singapore, had played a dominant role in the region as the war-like people whose tribe from South Sulawesi had gained control of the "Old Johor" sultanate at Riau. With their own rulers holding a dominant role at the Riau Court, they, being a roving race, had already established a settlement on Singapore before the 1700s. Temenggong Daeng Abdul Rahman, himself a Bugis, had encouraged them to follow him to Singapore in the 1800s. They were in fact among the early 'adventurers' and traders in Singapore waters, and, because the Bugis controlled the Riau Court, were able to establish a settlement on Singapore. They originally settled on the right bank of the Rochor River, where their population swelled. But not long after the establishment of Singapore as a British base a Bugis prince in Sulawesi was put to death by the Dutch for going against them, and his brother fled the country and sought asylum in Singapore with some 500 followers, swelling

their ranks here further. (In the latter half of the previous century, the Bugis Village was moved to approximately behind where the Kallang Gasworks on Kallang Road are located, though still in the vicinity of the river-mouth. Between 1989 and 1990 of this century the village was "dispersed" by the Singapore Government and no longer exists.) When the village had existed as "Kampong Bugis" at the mouth of the Rochor River, behind the gasworks, there used to be annual visits from fleets of Bugis craft from Sulawesi and Riau, some 200-strong each time, as 'late' as 1960, who would anchor off the Rochor River mouth, and along the coastline right up to the Nicholl Highway. These hardy traders would come to Singapore to trade coffee, tortoise-shell, colourful plaids or petticoats, or gold-dust with their kinsmen who had been born in Singapore, who would resell them again to the Chinese businessmen along Beach Road and North Bridge Road. The "original" Bugis Street, (before the one that took its place off the North Bridge Road), used to be close to the Rochor River, at the end of Beach Road, near the Rochor River-mouth, and the Bugis would cross from there on their smaller boats, moored at the river's edge to return to their village on the opposite bank, after a day's trading and bartering. By the strangest coincidence, within Bugis society there is a tolerance of the male members of their society who are sexually ambivalent. But the transvestites who used to "stroll" the "Bugis Street" off North Bridge Road, before it was knocked down in 1985 to make way for the construction of the underground mass rapid system, were not Bugis nor had anything to do with that community.

Not far from the 'original' Bugis Street is Kampong Glam, which, since Raffles' days up to the Second World War, used to be called *Kota Raja*, (Malay: "royal town"), where "Sultan Hussein's" palace is located at Sultan's Gate, off Beach Road. Before and during the time of Raffles, the modern "discoverer" of Singapore, the Bugis and the Orang Laut pirates who used Singapore as their base, would bring all the young women they had come across on the ships they had pillaged, to the Bugis' kampong to be sold as slaves, and these women would be kept in chains in the Bugis Quarter. Despite Singapore being a British Station it was still within the realm of the sultan of "Old Johor", and the Malay and Bugis pirates were then under the control of Daeng Abdul Rahman, Temenggong Sri Maharaja of Old Johor, and the British could not control them. In the early days of Singapore's colonisation both Englishmen and Chinese coolies who had left their wives behind in their respective home-countries would visit the Bugis Quarter for their "needs".



In his meanderings through the red-light areas Thomas also sought-out self-imposed tests of courage. He would deliberately go down Bencoolen Street from the Bras Basah Road-end, after his stroll past the "tourist-type" shops, where the old hags sold their faded charms, hidden from view in the almost pitch-dark, to drunken British soldiers on the prowl for 'a bit of skirt', because he knew the area was "controlled" by the rival eighteen tong, to see whether the eighteen would challenge his right to go through their district.

One evening in a coffee shop at Middle Road, near the junction of Selegie Road and Short street, as he sat eating his evening meal of *char kway-teow*, (fried rice-sticks), an Indian in his thirties, whom he recognised as one of the "chiefs" of the 329 tong "controlling" the area, came up to his table and smacked his palm hard, close to his plate of food, almost spilling the entire contents onto the floor. The man's breath reeked of stale beer. Wary, Thomas looked up quizzically, not too sure why the man had decided to single him out for a "demonstration" of his "authority" as he had never had a set-to with the 329 in that area before.

"What the fuck you doing in my territory?" demanded the man.

"Having a meal, I live near here," Thomas replied in explanation, hoping to reassure the man that he wasn't a rival gangster sizing up the place for a planned sneak attack in the future.

"You trying to be funny?"

"No, just having my meal."

"Fuck off."

Thomas got up from his half-finished meal as the Indian sat down at the table he was about to vacate. The boy's knees were quaking. He knew the man's reputation as a cold-blooded, mindless killer who had wantonly stabbed innocent victims in his drunkenness to death just for being in his presence. But that day, for no rhyme or reason, Siddon decided that he had to show the Indian that he had picked the wrong victim. The Indian secret society chief had purposely sat with his back to Thomas and the street, to show his disdain and unconcern for any sneak-attack from the young boy or from rival-gangs. He was in his own area and in "his" coffee shop, which was his "headquarters". It was his second mistake that day. Thomas made as if to pay for his unfinished meal with the hawker that he had ordered his meal from, but as he passed a nearby empty table, smoothly pulled out a chair from under it, turned and swung down hard on the seated figure. As the man crumpled to the floor Thomas hit him repeatedly with the now-broken chair until it disintegrated in his hands. Rage spent he cleared his throat of every ounce of phlegm, spat it on the now-motionless figure, and

sat down again to finish his rudely-interrupted meal which had become stone-cold. He informed the silent and shocked Chinese hawkers, who couldn't believe that a boy had just disposed of the feared "holder" of their area, that the next time he and the man met, the Indian would die. Thomas knew that he would be quoted.

He was fully into the "way" of the Chinese secret societies, proving how tough he was all the time. There would be no let-up. So long as he was part of the street he would be challenged or would do the challenging. And either fall back on his secret society to lend "weight" to his confrontations or took on challengers on his own. The zero-eight gang near his home in the Bencoolen Street coffee shop now left him alone as he was recognised as a "brother". But he always smarted at memory of the humiliation meted out to him when he had been a new arrival to their "kampong" and one of their members had kicked him into the ditch.

Despite the problems of growing up and surviving in the streets, Thomas would devour the pages of "The Straits Times" that his mother brought home every evening after work. He was surprised to read that on 9th February 1956, the Singapore Legislative Assembly had decided that Malay, Mandarin-Chinese and Tamil, as well as English, might be used in Assembly debates. This decision, which was unanimous, ended the position whereby English had been recognised as the sole official language of Singapore ever since its founding by Stamford Raffles.

General elections were held in South Vietnam on 4th March 1956 and Ngo Dinh Diem was installed as president and prime minister.

Mr David Marshall, the Chief Minister, in the meantime, together with a 13-member delegation comprising four of his Ministers and two backbenchers on the Government-side, four members of the Liberal Socialist Party, and two from the People's Action Party, one of whom was Lee Kuan Yew, left Singapore for London on 15th April 1956 to attend the first Constitutional Conference to negotiate with the British Government for self-government for Singapore within the British Commonwealth. Prior to the Singapore delegation's departure for London the Chief Minister had promised the people of Singapore that if he failed to achieve the objective of obtaining self-rule for Singapore at the talks, he would resign from Government on his return.

The conference on Singapore's constitutional future opened in London on 23rd April. After weeks of negotiations the talks broke down on 15th May, mainly over the question of responsibility for internal security after Singapore attained full self-government within the British Commonwealth. Upon returning from the London talks on 28th May, the Chief Minister, Mr

David Marshall, in a broadcast over radio, re-called his promise to the people of Singapore that if he failed in the London talks he would resign from Government and step down. He kept his word. He had been the island's first-ever chief minister, and had held it for barely 15 months. Mr Lim Yew Hock, 42 and a father of four, the Minister for Labour and Social Welfare in Marshall's Labour Party Cabinet, became Chief Minister. While in London Lee Kuan Yew, who had always been addressed in private circles as "Harry Lee", made it known to the press on 18th April 1956 that he wished to be known only by his Chinese name. He instructed them to 'cut out the Harry'.

Luci Siddon, Thomas' mother, grumbled everyday that her son was eating too much at the corner coffee shop on Bencoolen street. Why did he have to take the Cambridge School Leaving Examinations, couldn't he be satisfied with a "junior Cambridge" and leave school immediately and get a job? He thought his mother was being unfair. He badly wanted to have a full secondary school education. And he had co-operated in keeping expenses down by only eating every other day at the coffee shop since he could get feeds through his secret society contacts. But he knew that she was only nit-picking because she wanted him to stop school and look for work. Finally in exasperation at her constant griping he agreed to quit school after the final exams that year and get a job.

He just didn't know how to get on with his mother. And he knew that he was just as well to blame for the friction between them. But Thomas was also embarrassed by her relationship with the Jew, Ezeikel, which seemed to be going "nowhere", and, what to him was her hypocrisy in attending evening mass after work every day while 'going out' with the man. He knew that she was alone in the world and didn't have relatives to lean on but he had heard of families without fathers and with more than one child to look after, who somehow strived together and got on. But any attempt at "normal" conversation between him and his mother always ended up in bitter acrimony.

Even though he felt helpless at his own plight Thomas never had any inclination to give up. His teeth hurt from lack of dental attention, which he knew his mother couldn't afford, and he badly needed glasses. But he was young and healthy and would bear up. The only thing was the ugly scenes between them everyday when he would storm out of their room to go out into the streets, again and again, to be free of her waspish tongue, which brought him into contact with the underworld despite his intentions to keep away.

Thomas would always hover around the trade union premises next-door to the former pre-war Japanese department store, "Echigoya", on Middle Road. There used to be crowds always milling about the building, spilling into the streets in the evenings after office-hours, in those days, and in the union premises itself. Many would lean out of the windows of the union's offices, some sitting on the window-sills with their back-sides sticking out. There used to be a constant clanging of Chinese symbols and the thunder of drums from within. Whenever he turned up on his way to Queen Street, the people on the ground floor would stare at him aggressively, which made him behave even more intimidatingly, and they would let him be, pegging him for a hooligan from the area. He'd heard and read somewhere that these people were Communist-inclined but didn't understand what the term really meant despite his looking it up in the Raffles Library, (the National Library today). If, as the encyclopaedia stated, Communism is an ideology whereby the masses had a "right" to the wealth of their particular countries and could control their own destinies, why did the Communists have so much trouble from the authorities of their countries? There had to be more than what he had read, and he promised himself that he would learn about it in time.

The trade union hard-core Communist organisers of "demonstrations" always ignored him as he passed among them with a faint look of amusement on his face. All they were good for was to bang away on their drums and symbols, shout slogans in Chinese and make a lot of noise. If they were for "the people" how come no other languages were ever used at these meetings, except Chinese? And how come the only people he saw at the meetings were all Chinese?

He tried enrolling at a "Chinese art" martial art class which was taught at a Chinese mutual aid benevolent society in Bencoolen Street and was politely turned down by an official, in Malay, who told him he had to first become a member of the association, and be able to speak Mandarin. Why the hell do they talk of Singapore heading toward being one society when they won't even allow me to become part of their group, he thought to himself. What the press said in its pages just didn't jell with actual reality.

In school he was regarded as a "bad hat" because gossip had marked him as a ne'er do well because he had also been associated with secret society toughs. He became aware of this attitude one evening after sports practice when together with his classmates he had stood at a rope-barrier separating him and his friends from the runners in the school-field. Some schoolboy-spectators had crowded the athletes, and prefects had come along to push the more-exuberant ones behind the barrier. Thomas was some distance

away but joined in the good-humoured ribbing of the prefects. The following morning at school he was summoned to the disciplinary-master's room and accused of being the ring-leader of the previous day's "fracas". Astounded, he strenuously denied the accusation. But his name had been given to the master by the prefects on duty that evening. Their report had stated that he had been seen talking with several of the hecklers before the "trouble" began and the master had believed their story that he had put them up to it. He was warned that the next complaint against him from any source would mean an immediate suspension from school. Shocked and dismayed he left the teacher's room in enraged silence. His accusers had been Eurasians who should have been friendlier because he was Eurasian as well but, somehow, they just didn't like him, he felt. Maybe it was because he was poor and was not like them as far as his economic background was concerned.

He knew he couldn't afford to be suspended because he had to complete school that year and pass so that he could easier find employment. He hated the prefects for their unjust, biased accusation. School, from then became a place to while away time until he could sit his final exams, pass, and get a good-paying job.

In the meantime his battle of wits with the hai, lok, san tong group at the Bencoolen Street coffee shop never let up. Though they now knew he was a "brother", (he did find it strange to share "kinship" with Chinese), they still took the "mickey" every chance they got. Everyday, either to or from school, someone in their crowd would stop him and "throw sign", just to get him to "reply". He knew he had to respond in the code of the triads, and that he could not ignore their harassing him because he lived in their "territory". They did remind him frequently though, and that he was allowed to do so on sufferance.

On afternoon in June, after school, as he walked by habit, along the streets of the zero-eight he was hailed by a young Tamil near the Victoria Street Hotel on Victoria street.

"Hey! My boss wants to talk to you — in this car," he told Thomas, pointing to a blue Hilman parked in the street-hotel's grounds.

"Who the fuck is your boss, man?"

"Errol."

Thomas Siddon's face paled. A fourth-generation "Ceylon-Burgher", (a Ceylon Eurasian), Errol Rajasinge was the undisputed leader of the most notorious triad-tong in the city, south of "chinatown". It was known as the *Double 'X' Chap Kapak 'Independent' Zero-Eight*, and practically every "group" within the city feared the gang, especially its leader. The core of the tong comprised hardened criminals who had been in and out of prison and

were reported to have no qualms about tackling with the law openly. The right-hand man of Errol was "Omar-Diamond", a known gunman who was on the run from the police after shooting down a policeman in a robbery-bid. He had earned his nick-name, "Omar-Diamond" because his father had been the former watchman of the "Diamond Cinema" in North Bridge Road, which used to screen Hindi films for largely Indian and Malay audiences. Errol was big-time and anyone coming in contact with him treated him with kid-gloves or felt the extent of his wrath. An ex-policemen, he ran his multi-racial triad-tong like an army. There were separate Chinese, Indian and Eurasian "units" within the chap kapak. Somehow, though, Malays were never accepted into the gang. The tong had its "headquarters" at the "Happy Cafe" a restaurant and bar in the Capitol Building in Stamford Road which had "upper-class flats" in the upstairs floors.

Siddon went cautiously up to the blue Hilman which was parked by the side of the hotel. He spied a tanned Eurasian in the back seat, seated next to him was a prosperous-looking middle-aged Chinese man. He didn't know it then but the Chinese was the "treasurer" of the tong, whose rank was above that of the Eurasian, even though Errol was the chief. The Eurasian smiled at the young schoolboy and the sight of his strong white teeth sent shivers down Thomas' spine. He mind swiftly raked through his memory-banks, trying to grasp the reason for this most-feared of gang war-lords setting up a meeting with him. He had never had any dealings with this gang before as he had made sure to keep out of its way.

"You smashed a chair on Ali, the Indian 'holder' of sar.ji.kow, (329), in his coffee shop in Middle Road, you trying to takeover his territory or what?"

"Der bugger told me to fuck off when I was eating, so I hit him with a chair, anyway, the coffee shop is on the 'border' between sar.ji.kow and chap-pueh, (eighteen tong), it's not really 329 district". Thomas was wary. The fact that Ali, the Indian headman of the 329 in that district had taken the trouble to complain about his "humiliation" at his hands, spoke volumes. He had obviously made an impression, otherwise why would Errol seek him out. He was alone in that part of the island and the way the gang-leader had "arranged" their meeting warned him he was on very shaky ground. Errol didn't speak to anyone, least of all a young schoolboy like him. The 'incident' with the Indian headman had been months ago, why was Errol using *that* as the pretext to "tackle" him now. He was aware of the strict "fight-code" of the chap-kapak and decided to "explore" that "avenue".

"Your 'people' don't fight for nothing, if I'm your 'people' should I have walked away?"

"Fuck! If you my 'people' you kill the bastard and we take over the whole place, no one dare take on the chap kapak!"

"So how can 'settle', unless he wants to pay me 'medicine money'." (Gangster parlance for money extracted by a victor against the losing-side for injuries sustained in a street-fight).

Errol and the Chinese *tua kong-si*, (treasurer), laughed uproariously, obviously the young punk had a sense of humour.

"I like you, you're hai,lok,san but come to 'Happy Cafe' nine o'clock tonight," Errol commanded, signalling the young Indian man who had first accosted Thomas that afternoon, to get in the car and drive off.

That evening at nine Thomas turned up at the "Happy Cafe" on Stamford Road. The bar was jam-packed with British soldiers drinking beer, playing the juke-box or trying to kiss the bar-girls seated at their tables. Every soldier was "Johnnie". The Tamil driver of that afternoon who had told him about Errol, suddenly appeared at his side from nowhere and signalled him toward the back of the place, behind some curtains. He went through and found himself in the bar's kitchens and toilets. He spied a door marked "Office", and took in that the "Happy Cafe's" back-exit opened to the one-dollar seats entrance of the Capitol cinema. His Indian escort indicated for him to enter the office. Thomas pushed the door open.

Errol the Eurasian, the Chinese "treasurer" of that afternoon, another Chinese, and an Indian were seated round a large office-desk drinking brandy. Two young, attractive Chinese bar-girls got up at once and swiftly slipped out behind him as he stood at the doorway with a cocky smirk on his mug, taking in the scene before him. Errol became nasty, pointed a finger at him and said:

"You can't fucking live in Bencoolen Street, belong to fucking hai,lok,san in blady Siglap, and fight with my friends here — many people complain about you and how you threaten them, and they afraid because they think you are chap kapak, you bastard."

Stabbing his same finger at the other Chinese in the room, whom he called Hock Seng, and who was seated less than an arm's length from where Thomas stood, Errol nodded his head sharply in the boy's direction. The Chinese' sudden socking-lunge into his gut drove all the wind from Siddon's body but he wasn't hurt, though he pretended to be. He gasped and clutched his abdomen with both hands, putting on an act. But he had to demonstrate that he wasn't scared and glared defiance at his assailant who hit him again, harder. He was hurt now, but didn't let out a peep. He was into the "way" and there was to be no let up. He had accepted that a long time ago. He wondered whether he would be killed that night after they had toyed

with him sufficiently. Hopefully they might make a slip and he could make a dash for it through the back-door. Errol spoke:

"That's for thinking you can come into our 'area' and act tough. The second 'shot' was your test into chap kapak — you're under Hock Seng, he's your chief — now fuck off."

Thomas Siddon staggered from the room, his brain jumbled as he tried fathoming the import of what the Eurasian gangster-chief had just said to him. He now was an accepted gang-fighter of one of Singapore's notorious triads, and he hadn't even asked to join! Still trying to sort out the new circumstance in his young life, he leaned against the outside wall of the cafe's office and breathed deep to clear his muddled head. The stench of urine, stale vomit and food hit his nostrils penetrating through to his brain, nauseating him and making him reel in disgust.

Hock Seng, his new leader, came out just then, and instructed him to "report" to Ahmad the Indian Muslim ice-water seller whose stall was located under the Capitol Cinema's coming-attractions billboards facing the St Andrew's Cathedral on North Bridge Road, near the Changi Bus Terminus. He was to inform Ahmad that he had been sent there by the Chinese.

Ahmad the ice-water seller instructed Thomas to "report" to him everyday after school so that he could learn everything about the chap kapak, 'gangster-law', the history of Chinese triad societies and the rites for his initiation ceremony as quickly as possible. Errol, the "boss", wanted him to "hold" an area, since he already had a reputation as a fighter who never ran from a set-to with anyone. Siddon knew what Ahmad had been referring to. He was already known by the Chinese nick-name of *pah-tse boh chow*, (Hokkein: "hammer-die, won't run away"), because he always appeared at a gang "skirmish" with his pair of matching *parangs*, (Malay machete), in each hand, refusing to back down, and wading into the thick of a street-fight until he had everyone scattering in all directions. Ahmad, his Indian "instructor", gave him a glass of his ice-water in sympathy for the punches he knew Thomas must have received as his entry into chap kapak.

His first lesson began the following afternoon. Ahmad told him the chap kapak "held" the Capitol Cinema, Tiong Bahru, Alexandra and Tampines, (which is also known by the Chinese name of *Ow-kang*). The gang kept out of chinatown because another "big chief", a friend of Errol's, and Errol's "boss", had instructed him to do so. So, Errol also had a "boss", thought Thomas. Part of chinatown was also controlled by the *ji-tse*, (the "24" group), and part by an 'allied' group of the chap kapak but which only comprised Chinese members. No one except gang-leaders and "holders",



("minor chiefs"), waited inside the "Happy Cafe", and no one was to "hang around" the vicinity of the bar or the Capitol Cinema. Also Thomas was not to be in any group larger than three because the "cops" always stopped and searched bands of more than three in case they were "war-parties" on their way to a "clash", or were "subversive elements". Ahmad described this last group as "stupid arses".

Ahmad told him that being in the secret societies was "business" — not for the sake of just terrifying itself. Things like "staring" at someone to provoke a fight or picking a fight over a girl was totally banned in the chap kapak. Being an ex-policemen Errol knew the law and how far they could go when dealing with people that they wanted to "frighten". A good thing to know when a "cop" was around, Ahmad said.

Errol was backed by wealthy Chinese criminal kingpins who weren't interested in just arranging "clashes" with rival gangs. If there was to be any fight it had to be because money was going to be earned, Ahmad said. The immediate *tua kong-si*, (Hokkein: "treasurer"), of the gang was a fire-brigade man from the Hill Street Fire Station, whom Thomas had already met. He was told that the chap kapak came about because the individual members who founded the tong and who were previously *hai, lok, san* broke away from the "traditional" triad-group which had its origins in the Riau Islands, and though the "forefathers" of the *hai, lok, san* from Riau were originally from other parts of the "Malay country", they had come originally from China. These "Indonesian tongs", Ahmad said, were mainly Hokkein and Teochew in origin and were always fighting one another because the Hokkein and the Teochew couldn't get on with each other. That was why the chap kapak didn't call their chiefs "hang tuas", like the "Indonesian tongs". Thomas was told that the chap kapak controlled all the extortion, "protection" of hawkers, small businesses and shops, smuggling, drug-pushing and prostitution in the areas under their command. And that they were on the brink of wresting control of the whole of the Singapore River from the ageing *sar, ji, kow*.

Thomas was not to ape the other gangs in sporting a "uniform". The zero-eight "Cobra" tong, which operated out of the Odeon Cinema in North Bridge Road, wore a brown-and-white combination, their shirts being white and pants brown, or the other way around. They also wore metal-caps on their shoe-heels to "click" as they walked along. The *ji-tse* sported a black-and-white combination and were called "*or-peh*", (Hokkein: "black-and-white"). The *sar-ji-kow* made their shirt-collars stand-up behind their necks, as their insignia. They were all "stupid", because they stood out in "public", Ahmad said, and brought unwanted attention of the "cops" on

themselves. The chap kapak were "gentlemen" and didn't go "yankee". In that way they were not noticeable by the *mata-mata*, (Malay: "the eyes", meaning the police).

The permutations of secret society tong-numbers were explained to him. 329 added up to fourteen, 969 became 24, eighteen was nine, and so on and so forth. The "sign" of the "Double 'X'" chap kapak was the "X". Their "tong-trick", essential in tong-etiquette, was the open-flaunting of their gang-sign in public, even when there were policemen about. Sometimes the "cops" didn't cotton-on but sometimes they did, and even then the "stupid" *mata-mata* couldn't do anything because theirs wasn't a "traditional" tong-sign. But Thomas was never to attempt to do what the more senior and experienced gang-chiefs did, insofar as the police were concerned. They had all been to prison and knew what they were letting themselves in for whenever they did that. Thomas was to always ensure that his name never appeared in the police files, he was told.

His lessons continued over several days. Ahmad told him that the triads first became known as a force during the reign of the second emperor of China, (Kian Hsi, second Manchu ruler, 17th Century), and they were known as: **the Society of the White Lily, the Hung Society, the Incense Burners, the Origin of "Trouble", (Chaos), the Society of Heaven and Earth, (T in Tei Hui )**, and **the Origin of the Dragon**. The Chinese character "hung" enclosed by a triangle represented the union of heaven, earth and man, as well as the **Three United Association**, (which referred to the Chinese secret societies).

He was told on another day, that centuries ago there was a threatened invasion of China by "outsiders", and the monks of the *Siu Lam*, (Hokkein: Shaolim), Monastery in Hunan Province, China, helped the Ching emperor, and at different times they were instrumental in coming to the aid of subsequent Ching emperors against "foes". But the monks eventually fell into disfavour, due to court jealousies, and one emperor sent his soldiers to sack the temple. But some monks who were martial arts experts managed to escape. Originally there were 128 monks, all trained and expert martial artists who put up a strong defence and the emperor's men could not breach the temple-walls. But finally they were betrayed by the seventh monk, one *Ma Ling Yee*, who showed them a secret way into the temple. One hundred and ten monks perished, while the surviving 18 fled by jumping over the walls and dispersing into the countryside. Thirteen were killed during pursuit, leaving five. These five managed to cross a river by means of a straw sandal which changed into a boat, and made good their escape. They became known as the **Five Ancestors** of the first Triad Societies, Ahmad

explained. The Five Ancestors set up five lodges all over China, and these were:

**1st Lodge** — Green Lotus Hall of Phoenix District to cover Fukien and Kiangsi Provinces;

**2nd Lodge** - Hung Obedience Hall of the Golden Orchid to cover Kwangtung and Kwangsi Provinces;

**3rd Lodge** — Heavenly Queen Hall of the Happy Border to cover Yunnan and Szechuan

**4th Lodge** - Great Blending Hall of the Beautiful Lotus to cover Hunan and Hupei Provinces; and

**5th Lodge**—Conversion Hall of the Western District to cover Chekiang, Kansu and Honan Provinces.

He was told the several ranks within the triads in the upper echelon — **Mountain Lord**, the head of a tong, **Assistant Mountain Lord**, head of a branch of a tong, (Ahmad told him that Hock Seng, his "chief" had this title), **White Paper Fan** adviser on finance and discipline, **Red Pole Head**, fighter, and **Straw Sandal**, messenger, "battle organiser" and deliverer of demand notices to rival gangs. Ahmad then told him that the lowliest "rank" was the "49", the fee-paying gang-member who paid to be "protected".

After some ten days Ahmad pronounced him sufficiently "schooled" in gang-lore. Close to sunset, a day later, Errol, Hock Seng, Thomas' "chief", and the Chinese "treasurer" who, Thomas now understood, was known as the **White Paper Fan** in his newly-acquired "parlance", took him by their Hilman, deep into a massive Chinese cemetery off Upper Thomson Road, near the 5th milestone not far from where the Little Sisters of the Poor Home for the Aged was located. They alighted at the "Cantonese Hill", a mound of graves where members of the Cantonese community were buried. Thomas noticed several other mounds in the vicinity. He would be told, later, that these were the separate burial mounds for each of the other Chinese dialect groups in Singapore. (It is an *Overseas Chinese 'dream'* to be able to return home to China, eventually, but should the "unfortunate" Chinese die before he is able to return, if he can afford it he will make provision to be buried on a slope facing toward his motherland.)

As Thomas trudged up the slope of the "Cantonese Hill", which had appeared to be deserted when they first arrived, in the gathering gloom he discerned several figures, one of whom was a white-robed Chinese. He was the *Incense Master* or 'Master of Ceremonies'. At the apex of the mound a wooden hut with an altar had been built. Ahmad had already informed the young Eurasian that he would be the only one taking the initiation rites that day as he was being initiated to formally join the chap kapak as a minor chief

instead of as a "mere fighter". Errol had also reminded him before they had set out that day, that once he had taken part in the 'special' initiation ceremony he would never cease to be a triad as he was becoming a "blood-brother". Until death, and death was the payment for *anyone* who ever tried to leave once they had undertaken the oath and had gone through the rites. He was in deep. Without any preliminaries the Incense Master began the ceremony.

He saw several figures moving around at various points on the slope and knew they were stationing themselves at "gateways" through which he would have to pass, and these "guards", as represented by the figures standing at specific points, would challenge him when he 'arrived' at their "gateways". Each place would either be marked by a bamboo-pole or a tree-branch which would all be tied with a strip of red-cloth bearing Chinese characters. He would first kneel at the altar, which would be guarded by two guardians, and pay his respects. Then he would pay \$28.80 to the Incense Master. This figure in Cantonese means "easy prosperity". Then he would undress and tie a white cloth round his head. Two armed 'guardians' at the first "gate" would utter the "first oath" in Cantonese, which he would repeat and promise afterward never to break, on pain of death. Altogether, that day, he would take 36 oaths, each with the deadly penalty of death should he ever break any one of them. He knew he would be crawling through four "gateways" making further vows at two, and his middle finger would be pricked at the fourth. His blood would drip into a bowl of Chinese wine and the mixture drunk to symbolise his blood-brotherhood with the members of his triad. The whole ceremony would take some six hours.

Ahmad had explained to him the crux of the ceremony he was taking and the meaning of the many oaths and Cantonese phrases he would be repeating, (and very badly-pronounced by him!), that he had somehow managed to learn by heart. It was the enactment of the journey his soul was taking into death, through the "gates" of death and into the world beyond, perhaps to reincarnation, perhaps to paradise. And it was to be a binding Death Oath into the secrets of the *Hung Society*.

As the initiate he would start out on his "journey" by treading the pattern of lines drawn on the ground of the cemetery. The "trip" began in the East, the place of Dawn, in which the spiritual and the real world merge. He would answer a series of questions put to him by the "Incense Master", in Cantonese, (and which he had already learned the replies to by heart), which would serve to "identify" him and how he had managed to "arrive" at the "lodge". The questions, Ahmad had told him, were based on Chinese culture and belief. The composition of the "soul", the bonds of belonging

to the same tong, the form of afterlife, the Eight Immortals of Chinese mythology, and others from the Chinese pantheon of heroes and deities.

At the appropriate juncture, at his arrival at the first of several gates, Thomas would describe the wonders and puzzles he saw on his "journey" — a wondrous ship in which the Goddess of Mercy, Kwan Yin, stood in the prow, and how he set sail in the ship in the company of deities to protect him. The ship sailed to the Underworld and came eventually to the "Island of the Blest" on which stands a bridge guarded by the souls of the dead and the Buddhas. The bridge is watched over by an old man selling magic fruit. Thomas then passed the bridge, and at this point was initiated, entering into the mystical triad "brotherhood". A white cockerel, a symbol for oath-taking and bearing witness to the "purity" of one's vows, had its jugular slit while blood flowed from the fowl's vein over his wrists into a porcelain bowl. On signal from the "Incense master" he downed the congealing blood, swearing allegiance in Cantonese, to the chap kapak. He renounced all other former secret societies and placed his tong before him and all others. Thomas hadn't liked repeating that last bit when Ahmad had first explained its significance to him, during the days of his "lessons" at the coming-attractions' billboards at the Capitol Cinema. But he said them nonetheless.

Continuing his "journey" he passed through a great hall filled with people and came upon the "Circle of Heaven and Earth" in which he found the "City of Willows", a holy city. This city is surrounded by five double walls inscribed with verses. Inside the city he came across the corpse of a man with his legs crossed. This was the traitor-monk, A' T'sat, who had betrayed the Siu Lam monks, and, at the same time, since "t'sat" means both seven and death in Cantonese, it also represented Thomas' "death" on earth since his initiation into the "Brotherhood".

He then passed through the West gate and came upon a fiery mountain guarded by a spirit. He by-passed the spirit and came, once again upon the very place he had first begun his "journey". As a newly-initiated brother he was then welcomed by his "brothers" — Errol, Hock Seng, and the "treasurer" — in the "temple", which was the spot from where he had begun his "journey" that day. It was called the "Red Flower Pavilion", after the legendary first meeting of the first Triad Society. Outside the 'temple' stood the sun and the moon. Thomas then informed the "Incense Master" that he had been re-born, and summarized the "journey" he had just completed. Swearing on "Guan Gong", (known also as *Guangti Yeh* in Mandarin), the general with the flashing red face from China's Three Kingdoms, (Ad 220-280), the "patron-saint" of the triads, he then took the

"Thirty-six Oaths" which he had also memorised, which bound him to observe all the rules of his tong, or die. Errol reminded Thomas that if he ever betrayed the chap kapak he would be regarded as a 'seven', the sign of the cowardly traitorous seventh shaolim monk who had shown the "invaders" the secret passageway into the "Shaolim Temple" to kill the "Immortals". Hock Seng and the "treasurer" then lit-off some fire-crackers. Thomas suddenly became aware that among the shadowy figures in the background who had never come forward throughout the whole of his ceremony but who only "appeared" within his vision as and when they had a role to play in his initiation, was a wealthy-looking Chinese, around fifty, who stood apart from everybody, about two mounds from where they all were, and who had followed the entire proceedings intently. The young initiate had made to shout a warning, then realised that everyone knew the man was there, and kept his trap shut.

He had become a full-fledged gang-member of one of Singapore's powerful triad secret societies. Where once he had paid to become a "protected one", he now didn't have to pay because he had "made the grade" and had proved his "worth". His membership would become his shield against any and all other rival tong-members who would ever dare to "confront" him. He now had the 'right' to openly "throw" his Double 'X' gang-sign at any other thug, even a rival "chief", because he was chap kapak, which looked down on the "Indonesian-originated" tongs. By some twist of "fortune" or "luck" he was part of a group of gunmen, murderers and other dangerous criminals. And he hadn't sought to join them. He recalled his unspoken thoughts with the late Miss Marguerite Looker but immediately brushed them aside. It was time to "settle" an old 'score' as well as face his first test of courage as a "holder".

Intentionally the following day, after school, he dropped by the Bencoolen Street coffee shop and causally "replied" to the, by-now, routinely-thrown gang-sign from one of the regulars in the zero-eight gang who hung about the place but this time he threw his chap kapak gang-sign. He demanded a meeting with the middle-aged Chinese whose smile contained gold-and-silver-capped teeth, and who was the "hang-tuah", (chief), of the group. The astounded young Chinese listened in silence as Siddon said he would be back at four that afternoon for "talks".

When he returned at the appointed time the zero-eight chief and his lieutenants, together with a score of his lesser henchmen, were seated all over the coffee shop premises. The "chief and his "seniors, as usual, were seated just outside the passage to the shop-kitchen where the coffee and tea were brewed. Thomas seemed alone as he strolled nonchalantly into the

coffee shop at the appointed time. He walked up to the "chief's" table and called him a *poo-boh*, (Hokkein: "no balls"). There was a momentary startled look on the older man's features but he recovered swiftly, and with an eerie smirk quietly told the schoolboy that he wouldn't be leaving the place alive that day, even if he was "chap kapak". Thomas pursed his lips and let off a shrill whistle. Ahmad, Omar "Diamond" and Hock Seng trooped in from around the corner where Thomas had first put in an appearance. Omar "Diamond" and Hock Seng openly brandished guns as they took up positions. Ahmad brazenly sat at a table occupied by a group of thugs clicking his teeth loudly to annoy and unnerve them, and to show his unconcern. Omar "Diamond" walked past the group of "Zero-eight" seniors including the "chief", and leaned against the doorway kitchen. He had tucked his pistol into his waistband. Any sly attempt to grab handy kitchen "weapons" like meat-cleavers or even boiling-hot water, had been stymied by his position there. Hock Seng blocked-off egress via the side-door to the Bencoolen Street-side by sitting at a table which he pushed from a different part of the coffee shop. The gun tucked in his waist preventing any protest.

It was to be Thomas' show. Errol had approved his plan to obtain "satisfaction" from the coffeeshop-gang for the past "embarrassment" of his being knocked into the ditch along Queen Street, when he had been new to the district. Errol said that he had to establish his new 'status' in the *hai, lok, san* neighbourhood because he was about to assume the rank of "holder" and couldn't allow the "insignificant" gang to forever boast that they had once sent him sprawling. In rumour-prone Singapore details weren't important, it would suffice to state the fact — he had been 'kicked' into the filthy ditch — all other details paled in significance. Thomas, Errol stressed, had to humiliate the *hai, lok, san* chief on his own, in the man's area. It was to be part of his initiation into the senior ranks of the *chap kapak* to qualify him eventually as a "Red Pole Fighter", a battle strategist and a top-combatant.

Thomas' searching gaze fell on the hapless Chinese youth, who, months ago had sent him flying into the monsoon drain. He threw the boy a gangster's greatest insult:

"I fuck your arse now bastard! Come here *chee-bye*, (Hokkein: "cunt"), ever your arse get fucked?"

He yanked the now-terrified Chinese from his chair, and as the boy's head came up, smashed his own head into the other's face, immediately drawing blood from his nose. The middle-aged "chief" and his henchmen sat in stony-silence. They fully understood that in the manner of the "triad-way",

Thomas was venting his vengence. Their awaited their respective turns. It would do no good to attempt to run. They had underestimated the damned *chap-cheng*, (Hokkein: "mixed-blood"), he should have been killed when he had first set foot in their kampong. Now he was in the strongest tong in that part of the city.

The newly-initiated chap kapak member turned toward the gold-and-silver-capped teeth gang-boss, who now sat impassively, no trace of emotion showing on his features. He just looked straight ahead, awaiting his "destiny" which was now in the "mad hands" of the young fool. Thomas lifted his right foot, placed it on the edge of the marble-topped table where the man was seated, and pushed hard, sliding the table forward, pinning him to the wall. The gang-boss was now stuck between table and wall, while his henchmen, who had been seated with him, stared at one another across the "space" where the table used to be. The shop's several hawkers clustered at the front, silently watching their "protector" receive public humiliation from the schoolboy they had once asked him mercy for, just mere months ago.

"Now who's going to die, *poo-boh*?" Thomas yelled in triumph, in Malay, face flushed with excitement. He felt great. Mighty. He strode forward, grabbed hold of the shirt-front of the man and yanked him from his seat, pulling him, struggling, to the nearest hawker-stall in the front of the coffee shop. Grasping him tightly, so that he couldn't break free, Thomas stretched for the hawker's cleaver, he knew would be conveniently lying on the hawker's chopping-board in the front of the stall. His eyes bored into the gangster-chief's as he re-called the contemptuous way he had once been dismissed by the man, when the zero-eight had mocked him after knocking him into the drain. The tables were now turned!

His groping hand touched the handle of the meat-cleaver and he grabbed it, swinging the knife upward in a sweeping arc. Hock Seng's vice-like grip prevented his arm moving any further. As Thomas glared at him questioningly, Hock Seng signalled him with his eyes not to even contemplate the action clearly indicated in his young henchman eyes.. Siddon's "chief" addressed the other "chief" in Hokkein:

"This shop no more hai, lok, san 'headquarters', okay one man stay — next time our 'people' come see.

"You", pointing to the other 'chief', "come to 'Happy Cafe' nine o'clock tonight for 'settlement'."

The band of chap kapak members, including Thomas, stalked out.

When they were clear of the shop, a street away, Hock Seng reprimanded his new "senior" for lack of control at the coffee shop.



"You going to 'slash' him or what? Bastard, chap kapak don't kill for nothing — you going too far," he chided.

"I just wanted to give him a fright," lied Thomas. Inwardly he was shocked at himself and the lengths he now seemed prepared to go to. First he had wanted to hurt the man badly with the meat-cleaver, and secondly, he had denied it to Hock Seng. In his heart he knew he had become a dangerous animal of the street, and shuddered inwardly.

That evening before the 'settlement talks' with the hai, lok, san gang-chief, Errol confirmed that Thomas was being allocated his own "area" to "control". It was to be the stretch of Waterloo Street from Middle Road, which crossed over Bras Basah Road up to Stamford Road. It was a "lucrative" street as it contained the Indian *rojak*, (Tamil-style "salad" of greens, fried prawns, boiled potatoes, chillies, cuttlefish and hard-boiled eggs over which a thick, sweetish gravy is poured), the Indian *mee-goreng*, (Tamil-style fried mee), and Javanese *mee-rebus*, (Javanese-style boiled mee with a thick gravy and diced green chillies), stalls which did a roaring trade from morning to late in the evening, the market stalls in the centre of the street, close to the St Joseph's Institution, the lorry-hire company, and the taxis which parked at the taxi-stand close-by, at night. He would collect "protection" dues once-a-month. Hock Seng would tell him where to obtain his "water", (back-up forces), later. And he was to only "milk" the area already outlined, and no other place, Errol commanded.

Thomas knew the "Waterloo Street Rojak Stalls" well, as they were popularly known. After World War Two, on the site of the **Old Jail**, which used to be near the junction of Bras Basah Road and Bencoolen Street, on the Stamford Road-side, (built in 1841 to house convicts from India), "The Shackle Club", behind high zinc-walls, played host to hundreds of British servicemen and their local girlfriends, who were mainly Eurasian. After "The Shackle Club" closed for the evening everybody would converge on Waterloo Street, next-door, for the Indian rojak and Malay mee-rebus, for which the place was famous. Most of the "Malays" were really Javanese brought over from Java by the conquering Japanese military during wartime, and who had remained behind at war's end to go into business for themselves. Some also purveyed *satay*, (a Malay version of the original shish kebab), a marinated meat skewered on sticks, roasted over a charcoal fire and eaten with a thick gravy, together with rice wrapped in a bundle of coconut leaves and cooked, accompanied by raw slices of onions, and *mee-rebus jawa*, (mee-rebus cooked Javanese-style). Bars too had sprung up all over the place.

The other side of Waterloo Street, across Middle Road, where the Kwan Yin Temple was located, was under the control of the rival chap-pueh-tong, (eighteen gang), and Errol hadn't yet decided whether to move in on that side of the street. Thomas was to keep clear of Stamford Road. It was the personal "area" of Errol, who collected the dues from the St Joseph's schoolboy *ah-kuas*, (Hokkein" queers"), as he also fancied them apart from the bar-waitresses at the "Happy Cafe".

Thomas was told that he would also need an "assistant". He met his second-in-command on the following day. He was called Mong, and he was fifteen. Mong's features so resembled a monkey's in his eyes that he nicknamed him "Monkey", and Mong good-naturedly accepted the "tag". The two boys hit it off from the start and worked as a well-oiled machine. With Thomas in school "Monkey", who wasn't going to school, took over "supervision" of their "area". He would delay any decision on "confrontation" with a rival group throwing him a challenge, in Siddon's absence, until his holder, Thomas, turned up at their "headquarters" in the afternoon after school. Their "HQ" was a serabat stall in the small park next-door to the Jewish synagogue in Waterloo Street itself.

The Communist "trouble" in Malaya was in full swing during the fifties and Colony Singapore was teeming with British soldiers who were stationed on the island to help "quell" the "trouble" upcountry in Malaya. The British soldiers would spend two to three weeks in the Malayan jungles "flushing-out" Communist terrorists, before returning to the island for a week for a "respite", and then would go back to the Malayan jungles to continue the "war" again. The "Happy Cafe" was one of the off-duty "hang-outs" of these British soldiers. They were there practically every evening, whenever they were "in town", as soon as they were off-duty, to guzzle beer and "book" women for the night, ending up usually in the "Mayfair Hotel", round the corner in Coleman Street. The British "johnnies" were reputed to be full of "the pox" because of their indiscriminate "sex-habits". Like typical men of violence they bought and paid for easily-available sex from the local women working in the bars, in the towns and villages up-and-down the Malay peninsula, as well as Singapore. They regarded venereal disease as a "natural hazard" of their "pre-occupation" and would openly discuss the topic of "catching a dose" among themselves in the "Happy Cafe". Sometimes they would warn one another about a particular bar-girl working in the cafe, from whom they might have "caught it", unaware or unconcerned that their topic of conversation both horrified and embarrassed the local women who, though they couldn't quite catch all of the regional accents of the British servicemen, knew enough English to "catch" was being bandied about among them.

As a "holder" Siddon could now openly frequent the cafe and sit at the back-office of the cafe's owner, and which also was the "headquarters" of the chap kapak. The presence of the British servicemen gave the gangsters their regular "work-outs" and kept them on their toes. It was a cinch that in any week a beer-sotted soldier, airman or naval-rating, either English, Scots or Welsh, would become obstreperous and refuse to settle his bill, claiming to have been "short-changed". Each time that happened the drunken serviceman would be persuaded to step outside to "discuss" the matter with the bar's "bouncer", (who was a chap kapak member as well), because it was "too embarrassing" to talk over "such matters" in front of the other customers, and each time the chap kapak henchmen, whose turn it would be to be "on duty", would "deal" with the "trouble" before returning inside the cafe. Sometimes though, a free-for-all would erupt inside the cafe, with tables, chairs, bottles and glasses thrown helter-skelter all over the place. Even though the soldiers always lost because they were too drunk or were insufficient in number to the chap kapak members present, the "British boys" would return the following day and pay for all the damage caused, sometimes even when it hadn't been they who had started the fracas in the first place.

The British military police unit stationed near the hawkers' stalls on Waterloo Street always arrived after everything was over and no gang-member was in sight. Thomas used to wonder that the British servicemen had never seemed to realise that they had enough manpower round the corner in the "Union Jack Club" behind the Capitol Cinema, to snuff out the chap kapak for good and all. There was always a good-sized crowd of them milling about those premises and one man despatched to the "Union Jack" would have brought an "army" of reinforcements to "rub-out" the gangsters at the "Happy Cafe", once-and-for-all. It was a good thing for the gang that the obvious never seemed to have dawned on the British servicemen, or they just didn't care.

As he gradually grew in confidence as a gangster and became familiar with gang-lore, Thomas moved about his "district" as if he "owned" it. He was familiar to the tradespeople and residents of the outlying areas between the Capitol, the Cathay, the Rex and the Odeon Cinemas. He still attended school though, intent on getting his "junior" Cambridge certificate. He had passed his first and second term exams easily and was confident of "overcoming" the final exam-hurdle at the end of the year. In between school and his gangland activities he spent a great deal of time at the Raffles Library doing his homework and devouring as many books as he could on a vast number of subjects.

One evening in August Errol, his "Big Boss", summoned all senior chiefs and "holders" like Thomas to the "Happy Cafe" for a crucial meeting at the back of the bar. There were going to be important triad "talks" in the "Southern Cabaret" in Eu Tong Sen Street in chinatown, the "heart" of the *ji-tse tong*, (24 group), area. The real "Big Boss" of the chap kapak and several other big gangs in Singapore, would be heading their own side of the "talks". It was to decide who was to control the top-money earners of the "big" criminal-stakes on the island. There was plenty. Apart from the prostitution, "protection", and robbery rackets, there was the control of the Singapore River, the vital waterway that "fed" the island's economy. Control of the river implied governing everything that passed over its waters: drugs, illegal immigrants, especially from China which still was being carried out, smuggling, and bona fide cargoes through the regular shipping companies and the *tong-kang*, (Chinese barges which plied the river conveying cargo from the ships anchored in the Outer Roads of the harbour) operators. The chap kapak was going for it all or nothing. The proposition simply boggled Thomas' mind. He had never realised, until then, that through the gang he was involved in more than just street-fighting and control of "territory"!

He had also been astounded to learn that Errol, his "boss", had his own "Boss"! He heard the name "Hylam Kopi" spoken with reverence by his own chief and could not believe his own ears. Errol had always seemed to have no respect for *anyone*, including the police, and here he was talking about the name of a man Thomas had never met before, with such respect. The man had to be really tough! Sidon knew the name. It was commonly bandied about by everyone connected with the secret societies. "Hylam Kopi" was the biggest and most successful criminal kingpin who even had the police in his pockets. "Hylam Kopi" was a pseudonym, whose true name no one knew. Because he had wanted it that way. He was reputed to control several large Chinese triad-groups while he lived the life of a respectable criminal lawyer in Tanglin. The authorities knew who he was but could never garner sufficient evidence against him to charge him with anything specific.

Errol said the "talks" being held at the "Southern Cabaret" was crucial to the chap kapak and all the affiliated groups that belonged to it. "Hylam Kopi" had decided to "break cover" and head the triad negotiations personally because it would be the "final show-down" between the "Zero-eight Tong" and the "Twenty-four Tong" to decide finally which of the two strongest deserved to be "number one". "Hylam Kopi's" separate tongs would be meeting for the first time, and Thomas then began to understand

that he was in a Chinese tong that was part of a massive network of crime under the control of just one criminal mastermind. He listened intently as Errol outlined his instructions to all of the 'seniors' present that day.

No gang-member was to "recognise" or acknowledge "Hylam Kopi" on the "big day" of the "talks". Everyone was to know who he was but each was to remain within his respective group at the "talks" site. The two "Big Bosses" from the two rival gangs would discuss "terms" at a table in the middle of the "meet" area, which was the main dining and dancing room of the cabaret, between their respective "armies". In keeping with "triad-law" there would be an up-turned coffee cup placed in a saucer, with a porcelain Chinese coffeeshop-spoon on top of it, between the two men. Everyone was to keep his eyes on the up-turned cup as well as the coffeeshop-spoon, and to "forget" about trying to overhear what the two "bosses" were saying to each other. This part was crucial, Errol said.

If "Hylam Kopi" pointed the spoon-handle toward the other, everyone was to brace himself for the other man's reaction. If he turned the handle back toward their leader, everyone should be keyed to respond to one of two reactions from "Hylam Kopi". He could choose to again swerve the spoon-handle back toward his rival to "re-consider" or "Hylam Kopi" could dash the cup and spoon from the table with a sweep of a hand as he simultaneously attacked his rival. *Red Pole Fighters* as well as "normal" fighters from the rival tongs would then "battle" until only one side was left. The side that won would assume control of the stakes they had all gone to the "Southern Cabaret" to "settle" for. The ageing *sar, ji, kow*, (the 329 tong), had already relinquished its "authority" over the Singapore River, and the chap kapak and the ji-tse were "meeting" to decide who would finally gain full control of the waterway.

The chap kapak henchmen, including Thomas, would assemble at their usual *sin-seh's*, (Chinese medicine-shop), in Synagogue street, on the Singapore River-side, in two days time, at three in the afternoon, to collect their gang-weapons. Thomas was to use his two *parangs*, (Malay machete), in the attack-technique that had earned him his tong-reputation of *pah-tse boh chow*. Errol said that in the past Thomas had put to flight rival-fighters by going at them head-on, despite acid-bomb light-bulbs "exploding" about him, and he was to lead his group to scatter the enemy. It was on such an occasion that a "fighter" becomes a **Red Pole Fighter**, Errol said. But Thomas already knew that he was to be cannon-fodder. His heart thundered as he pondered on the enormity of it. He knew he wouldn't be able to get through this forthcoming "skirmish" unscathed.

He turned up at the Sin-seh's on the appointed date and time, amused that he had even time to reflect that there was no synagogue in the chinatown alley. In fact the first synagogue in Singapore had been consecrated in that alley in 1845, to serve the religious needs of Jews from India, Persia, Iraq, Turkey, Rumania, France and Britain, in the early days of the island's colonisation. Thomas collected his two parangs, wrapping them in newspapers to camouflage the fact that he was carrying offensive weapons, which was banned and put him in jeopardy of the law, and that he was on his way to a gang-fight. He began his "trek" to the "Southern Cabaret" through the back-streets of chinatown toward Eu Tong Sen Street.

Other chap kapak members who had also been to Synagogue Street, began arriving behind him. Thomas climbed the back-stairs of the cabaret together with them, as well as with the rival gangsters from the other side. He marvelled that everybody, who would probably end up killing one another that day, should the "talks" fail, ascended the same stairway together but in the queer "code" of the triads kept ignoring one another going up to the "talks site". The time to "do battle" and kill would be upstairs, and until such time, there was a defacto "truce". He steadily climbed the steps toward the top of the building that would bring them all to the "Southern Cabaret".

He sat with Hock Seng's group of "holders" for a minute, and then moved away to head his own group of fighters at a different table. He immediately recognised "Hylam Kopi" as the wealthy-looking Chinese standing in the background on that fateful day when he had been initiated into the chap kapak tong off Upper Thomson Road. He was amazed to discover that his gang was part of the triad that included the "Eighteen", the "Dragon", the Cobra, and the "Tze-tong" or "Skeleton Tong". They had all been rivals in the streets, now they were here, members of the same large secret society!

Errol had instructed him to have his "attack-squad" ready to dash forward together with the senior chiefs, who carried guns and would shoot to kill. Thomas realised that if the rival gang also had guns, and that was a certainty, he would be among the first to be cut down by a bullet. His mind raced to the "conversation" he had held with the late Miss Marguerite Looker, his former matron at "Melrose", at her grave-side not so long ago. Then he had said: 'If my life is to change you must help me get away from the secret societies, or I will get in deeper.' It had been like an evil prophesy he had wished on himself. He was about to go into a fight where he knew he would be killed that day. But brushing aside his feelings of 'weakness', Thomas keyed his mind to focus on the other side, taking note of the

opposition arranging themselves and brandishing their weapons to look aggressive, to intimidate his side.

"Hylam Kopi" sat down at the "meet" table in the centre of the cabaret-hall, at the same time as the leader from the opposite side. The young teenager's brain boggled! Dispensing with preliminaries his "Big Boss" simply swivelled the Chinese porcelain spoon in the direction of the other man, indicating only one thing as he calmly folded his arms across his chest and gazed unblinkingly into his rival's eyes. Thomas knew. There was to be "no talk". His "Big Boss" had indicated that he wouldn't negotiate, and that it was up to the other man.

Without taking his eyes off the spoon on the upturned cup in the middle of the "talks table", Thomas unwrapped his two parangs and slid each into either hand, holding both long-blades by their handles, at an upward slant at shoulder level. He readied himself to hurl his body at the enemy gang-chief. He could hear his own side bracing itself. To "glory or doom". Chairs were being scraped as owners manoeuvred for a good take-off position. Paper was being wrenched off concealed weapons all over the place. Thomas found himself breathing hard. He knew he was about to die that day. Before he had even become a man. His lips lifted in a sneer. He would lop-off the head of the opposing bastard gang-chief first before he was gunned down or hacked in half. Mentally counting his steps, he measured the paces he would take to get to the other gang-leader. Five big steps. From the corner of his eye he saw Errol, Omar Diamond and Hock Seng take out their hand-guns, and draw a bead on the head of the opposing gangster-chief.

With a quiet sigh the rival gang-boss smiled, leaned forward, lifted the porcelain spoon from the up-turned cup, and placed it beside the cup, which he then up-righted as well. There would be no gang-clash! They had won. The *ji-tse tong* had caved in! Hock Seng's light tap on his shoulder brought him out of the self-imposed mind-set he had assumed to keep out any feelings of guilt which would have slowed down his reflexes.

"Keep your parang, no fight but wait and see first," Hock Seng directed. Thomas caught sight of Errol instructing the opposing-side's fighters to leave their weapons behind as they departed the cabaret. He suddenly realised that "Hylam Kopi" was nowhere in sight. He had departed as swiftly and as silently as when he had first made his appearance earlier that day. Thomas helped with the taking away of the other side's weapons. It was a safety-measure. It was well-known that some disgruntled members of a losing side in a gang-clash could sometimes way-lay lone "victors", flushed with triumph, who had mistakenly left their own weapons behind for 'safe-keeping' and weren't anticipating any kind of sneak repercussion, to fall victim to a 'final revengeful blow' that usually spelled death.

The chap kapak now had complete control of the Singapore River, the life-blood of the colony's entrepot trade. The main chiefs, including Errol, Omar Diamond, Hock Seng, as well as the other chiefs of the losing-side, would continue the 'closing negotiations', as the lesser members dispersed. Thomas and the other holders began collecting the discarded weapons to return everything, theirs as well, to the Chinese medicine shop at Synagogue Street. Everyone felt good. They had won and there was a slap-up meal to look forward to, made especially palatable because the other side would be paying for it and in their own domain, the "Southern Cabaret". The chap kapak had known that they were entering the lion's den when they had agreed to hold the "gang-talks" in the ji-tse headquarters but "Hylam Kopi's" long-shot had paid off. He had known all along that the enemy had been in no mood for a fight to the finish.

Thomas listened to the talk around him as he helped clear away the weapons. With their victory the chap kapak was the strongest tong on the island. They would now have complete control of all the smuggling, drug-trafficking, illegal immigrant-smuggling, gun-running and white slavery rackets on Singapore, and they would have sole use of the Singapore River to 'deliver their goods'.

It dawned on the young schoolboy that his tong was more than a street-gang going after "protection money" — it was the undisputed 'war-lord' among the Chinese secret societies on the island. Unwittingly he had become involved in big-time crime. And he had 'discussed' with Miss Looker, at her grave-side, months ago, that he did not want to get in any deeper. Fighting with rival gangs because they threatened one was one thing, but drugs, prostitution, gun-running and smuggling, were a different kettle of fish. He had to get out of the triads. And he had to do it gracefully. Without the 'usual repercussions'.

Several days later, in September, as he was mulling over how best he could get out of the triads, he read in "The Straits Times" that Chin Peng, the Secretary-general of the banned Malayan Communist Party was seeking a meeting with Tengku Abdul Rahman, the prime minister of Malaya, to "arrange" for a possible ending of hostilities between the Malayan Government and the Communists. It was suggested that the "talks" be held at Baling, some twenty miles from the Thai border.

In Singapore during the same month and into October, the Singapore Government under Chief Minister Lim Yew Hock, took action to counteract Communist and subversive influences in trade unions, in particular students' organisations as well as school children from the 'alien' Chinese community. Five Chinese school teachers, three from the Chung Cheng Secondary



School, were deported to China on the ground that their activities were not in the best interest of the people of Singapore. This move was followed by protest meetings at the schools, and, as a result on 24th September the Singapore Government ordered the dissolution of the Chinese Middle, (i.e. "secondary school") Students' Union because it was a "Communist front" organisation and had persistently carried on political agitation among the Chinese-educated school children. This measure was strongly criticized by the People's Action Party which accused Mr Lim Yew Hock of agreeing to the repression of anti-colonial forces, (*who were all mainly Kuomintang and Communist 'alien' Chinese*), as the price for constitutional concessions by the British Government in London.

As a protest, over a thousand ethnic-Chinese students of the Chung Cheng School and the Chinese High School staged a sit-down strike on their school-premises on 10th October, and which continued for nearly a fortnight, despite appeals by Mr Lim Yew Hock to the students' parents to remove their respective children from the premises. On 25th October large crowds gathered outside the two schools to demonstrate in support of the children and which led to a number of clashes between demonstrators and the police — and the imposition of curfew. On 26th October police entered the two schools and ejected the students with the use of tear-gas.

Serious rioting occurred during the day in which police stations were attacked, government buildings set on fire, and cars and other vehicles wrecked and gutted. The rioters were mainly the 'alien' Chinese students and workers who had gone on strike in support of the students and against the government's educational policy. "Hooligan elements" were also reportedly involved.

Five thousand British troops, called in from Malaya to reinforce the police, were forced to open fire several times. Between 27th and 31st October the police raided a number of trade union offices and arrested two hundred and fifty trade unionists, including Lim Chin Siong, then Secretary-general of the People's Action Party, who had accompanied David Marshall, together with his own party-compatriot, Lee Kuan Yew, to the first London-Singapore Constitutional Talks in May of the same year. He was detained for two years under the **Preservation of Public Security Ordinance**. It was officially recorded that thirteen persons were killed in the rioting, and some one hundred and fifty injured. By the end of October the situation had returned to 'normal', and the curfew was lifted. Reports stated that many used prophylactics had been found discarded on the floor of the two schools involved, where the school children had camped together during the "troubles".

Thomas Siddon, cooped up in his garret-like room in Bencoolen Street, marvelled that the violence displayed by the school children, which he regarded as being "hooligans" just like him, had been described as "heroic", especially in the Chinese press, as well as by the opposition parties, particularly the People's Action Party. He didn't believe that the "inspiration" had been because the children had been against the colonial forces — there was a simmering hatred for the White man but they were just as violent as he, and antagonistic because they did not owe anything to the country, that was all. But he was a 'hero' in his own kampong, when he spoke up for several Chinese school students living in his neighbourhood, who had been stopped during the curfew by patrolling British soldiers who had caught them, red-handed, crossing over from the opposite side of Bencoolen Street. He had been standing "indoors", under the covered pavement-way in front of the shop-house where he lived, together with his kampong-neighbours, when the troops detained the hapless group. They were rough-handled and prodded with the rifles in the men's hands, and made to put their hands above their heads. Thomas had shouted in perfect English that they had only gone over to deliver food to a sick relative, and for some inexplicable reason the armed soldiers accepted his story and let the trio go, much to the relief of their respective parents who were standing by Siddon's side as they all lived in the shop next-door. But Thomas knew that they had been out causing "mischief" elsewhere in the town, and had just been "unlucky" getting caught by the British patrol while they were about to get under-cover of the shop-house where they lived. The whole kampong knew what Thomas was as well, though they never breathed a word to his mother. They all knew that he moved through the labyrinth of interlocking streets and back-lanes of their neighbourhood with impunity. He was with the dreaded chap kapak. Later, when his mother somehow picked up the kampong-gossip about her son's "heroic" deed that day, she admonished him for his foolhardiness. Didn't he realise that talking with armed soldiers who had strict orders to shoot, even if he was "indoors" under a covered pavement, foolishly exposing himself to being shot? He didn't answer her but thought to himself, weren't the budding leaders of the island forever saying that theirs was a multi-racial society that would, one day, merge into a **nation**, how could they be "one" if they didn't even act protective toward one another?

He sat for his final school exams in November. During the year he had passed his first and second term exams with flying colours and had expected to breathe through this "final hurdle" with similar ease. Thomas had some apprehension because of his involvement with the chap kapak and hadn't

spent as much as he would have liked on his studying but he still felt confident that he would get through.

Just before the final exams, though, he had made-up his mind to speak with Errol, his "boss", to allow him to "resign" from the chap kapak, and had even seen him about it. The Eurasian gang-leader had listened to his up-and-coming "holder" as Siddon "cooked-up" his reason for leaving the triad forever, that he had to go "upcountry" to Malaya for further studies as soon as his exam results in Singapore were known. Errol's face had been stern. Didn't Thomas realise that when he had been initiated into the gang that he had sworn never to leave, except through death? A "gang-brother" never cut-off his ties with his triad, except as a "traitor", an a'tsat, or because he was dead. There was no other way. But, finally Errol relented and told his promising henchman that he would discuss Thomas' proposition with "Hylam Kopi" and the other senior chiefs, and would let him know.

Throughout his tests, his "conversation" with Errol weighed heavily on his mind as he tried concentrating on giving his best to every paper that he sat for. Several days later, coincidentally on the final day of the exams, Thomas was "summoned" to the "Happy Cafe", via "Monkey", his second-in-command, and told that he would be permitted to "retire" but he was not to join any other triad in Singapore or Malaya. He "belonged" to the "Double 'X' " gang always. He need not be 'active' but he should keep in touch with the group whenever he was back in Singapore from Malaya. And if he were ever summoned to help the gang, in any matter, he was to come forward unhesitatingly. He agreed whole-heartedly, even though, in his heart he knew that he would have nothing more to do with the triads, for as long as he lived. His second-in-command, "Monkey", would assume control of their Waterloo Street "area". And Thomas' "retirement" would not be made "public", to safeguard his life. In case any vengeful rivals thought it fit to seek revenge. Shaking hands with Errol, Hock Seng, Ahmad and the remainder of the chap kapak, he departed the "Happy Cafe". He was no longer a part of criminal Singapore. He was free.

The examination results were announced in the school a few days later. To his complete horror and dismay he learned that he had failed. Surprisingly his mother said that it was "alright". He could start looking for a job and pay his own way in life. He was old enough. His class-teacher tried persuading him to remain behind for another year but Thomas was adamant, he would leave St Joseph's. He had given his word to his mother, and formally applied to quit the school for good.

Despite feeling despondent he took note of press reports that in accordance with a suggestion made in September, that year, by Chin Peng, the Secretary-general of the outlawed Malayan Communist Party, a meeting took place between Tengku Abdul Rahman, the Malayan prime minister, Sir Tan Cheng-lok, the leader of the Malayan Chinese Association, and Mr David Marshall of Singapore, the former chief minister, on one side, and Chin Peng and two other Communists — Abdul Rashid bin Maideen and Chen Tian, on the other, at Baling on 28th and 29th December 1956. The negotiations broke down after Tengku Abdul Rahman insisted on the dissolution of the Malayan Communist Party, and the MCP refusal to allow an investigation into the loyalties of the MCP members toward Malaya after the cessation of hostilities.

A new kind of music was being aired over Redifussion, the English-owned private radio station which piped music into subscribers' homes via cable, and Thomas, even though he didn't have a set, could hear it all over his neighbourhood. The government-run station in the meantime, refused to "touch" it. It was called "rock 'n roll", and a musician named Billy Haley of the United States of America was popularising it. It was reported in the Singapore papers that some teenagers, mainly Eurasians, had actually "grooved" to the new music and broke into a dance in the aisle of the "Rex Cinema", where a film, "Rock Around the Clock", featuring the new music, was being screened. The music was described as "...new...wild...primitive..." Thomas Siddon liked the description. It was him ...to a "T".

## Leaving 'Inherited' Guilt Behind

### *Chapter Seven*

After Christmas 1956 and the year-end seasonal holidays, Thomas Siddon began applying for clerical positions in various mercantile companies as his mother told him that he stood a good chance of obtaining a job in such firms as they normally preferred Eurasians for such kind of work due to their better command of the English language over the other locals. He had first enjoyed his Christmas holidays, visiting the Pestanas and their friends and relatives, as he had done when he used to be a boarder at St Pat's, before knuckling down to look for work. He felt that he had to at least enjoy the festive season, which all the Eurasians celebrated, making Singapore, for their community a 'special place', before he began job-hunting. The British and the other Europeans "stuck" on Singapore also celebrated their X'mas but theirs was a *different world*, and their festivities strictly European, in keeping with how Christmas was spent at "home". Though in Singapore, for them, this usually entailed going to a night-club for the Christmas dance, which the Eurasians did as well but *they* preferred to have their grand "night-out" at their "New Year's Eve Dance" at the Victoria Memorial Hall, which was organized by the Eurasian Association.

But for Thomas and the others of his community Christmas was more the celebration of the birth of Christ, with Midnight Mass and the singing of carols in church as well as at friends' homes after Christmas service, the giving of presents, *and* the inclusion of the Asian tradition of wishing one's elders first before the rest of the family, and later, the visiting of relatives' and Christian friends' homes. The Eurasians, in common with the other

communities of Singapore during their respective festivals, also threw open their doors to friends from the other communities, welcoming everyone to almost non-stop eating and merry-making, and to the sampling of goodies, like the western-style roast turkey as well as their other 'typical' Eurasian Christmas *makan*, (Malay: "food"), like *Kari Diablo*, (Devilled Curry), *Feng*, (a mild curried stew of pork innards), and *s'moe*, (beef slices marinated in a spicy mixture and cooked in gravy), that each Eurasian family, (who usually had a Malacca-Portuguese 'tradition' due to the woman of the family more than likely being from Malacca herself), took particular pride to prepare in anticipation of these visits.

But after the holidays, when he began looking for work, Thomas discovered that jobs were hard to come by, with opportunities coming, if one were lucky to get an 'opening', from the colonial administration, the British military, and the small-scale European businesses or the local Chinese or Indian family-firms which paid poorly and who mainly employed their own relatives or the vernacular-educated. The young Siddon soon found out that with Singapore's then prevailing economic climate, job openings were few and far between for all.

He wondered at the wisdom of having to quit school prematurely just because his mother felt that he had the sufficient educational 'basic minimum' for obtaining a "starting position". It gradually began to dawn on his young mind that if he had chosen to remain in school and take and pass the Senior Cambridge Examinations, he would have had a better chance of not only becoming employed but in landing something with scope.

He knew that Errol his former secret society "boss" was under the impression that he was away "upcountry", studying in the Federation of Malaya, and if he kept out of sight, his absence from the streets of his neighbourhood would continue to make his story plausible. In the meantime he wrote out job-applications everyday, couped-up in his mother's garret-like room above the Bencoolen Street shop house, pouring over every single page of "The Straits Times" that his mother brought home from work everyday, scanning for appropriate job-vacancies, and despite his growing boredom, becoming steadily aware of the political "arguments" being bandied about by the various pressure-groups on his island-home as they were reported in the press.

His letter-writing suddenly brought on a writing-urge, long-suppressed because he had always felt inadequate since he had quit school and his formal education had been curtailed. But the creative demand had to manifest itself and the compulsion and fury in him to put his thoughts down on paper, just to obtain respite, were unrelenting. Poetry seemed easier than

prose to him and he began penning the ideas going through his head, in verse-form. The words gushed-out in a torrent that had to be jotted down quickly in order for him to feel required. And he always felt embarrassed afterward, like a spent lover. How could he write poetry when he didn't even have basic education? But the need to write was powerful, unrelenting, and he would scribble away each day, tormented until each "writing-attack" was done. Later, reading his attempts at "deep thought", sheepishness would creep into his mind and he'd hastily stuff-away his daily-endavours in his handy-box of personal keep-sakes.

Siddon finally landed a job in February 1957 as an apprentice-engineer with an English company in Robinson Road, the "business-part" of the city. The company assembled and sold steel office furniture. He earned seventy-five dollars a month and the factory where he worked was off River Valley Road, accessible through a maze of side-streets that led to the Singapore River. There were other warehouse-factories, similar to his, in the vicinity. He was glad that he worked close to home because he need only cut through Fort Canning Road to King George V Park, (Canning Park today), to get to work from Bencoolen Street where he lived. He could save on transport and his mother need only give him a dollar a day for lunch. She had already begun grumbling that his wages were inadequate to feed him or for her to put anything aside. He pacified her by promising that he was due for a twenty-five dollar raise after he had completed his first three months of "probation". A month later, in March, the factory moved to larger premises in Alexandra, a district in the south-western part of the island, which was mainly British Crown Land. There was a large British Army Camp close by. The surrounding area comprised the decrepit attap-and-wooden hovels of Chinese market-gardeners who were the offspring of some of the original "alien" China-born immigrants who had come to Singapore because of a past British colonial policy, as well as "recent" newcomers since the war who had fled China because of Communist rule. There were also the attap-huts of Malay villagers too, descendants of the original Malay pirates from the former Riau-Lingga "Old Johor" Sultanate who had followed their leader, (the original temenggong who had signed Singapore over to Stamford Raffles in 1819), to the island after he had broken off with the Dutch-protected sultanate and sought British protection.

Getting to work from Bencoolen Street to Alexandra for Thomas now became "stiff" on his small wage. His daily transport, to and fro by the Chinese-owned Hock Lee Bus Company bus, which plied the route from Bencoolen Street, was a dollar-twenty, and he had to reduce his lunch-money to fifty cents. He'd foolishly aped his Chinese work-mates, all adults

earning full wages as labourers, and took to lunch-time cigarettes. A cup of serabat-coffee, a Malay *kueh*, (cake), and two fags took it all away. Or he would alternate his lunch-time fare with a cheap thirty-cent bowl of Chinese noodles, feeling alien and uncomfortable all the while, though he was born in Singapore and felt local, because of the surprised glare of Chinese "fellow-lunchers" from the surrounding area who seemed to indicate by their looks that he shouldn't be there. In those days Eurasians mainly worked in "town" and seldom patronised the Chinese, Indian and Malay hawkers in public. They usually brought their own pre-packed lunch from home or got a Chinese or other local colleague to *ta'pow*. (Hokkein Chinese: takeaway), a meal from a hawker-stall for them to eat in the office, as the Eurasians felt that they would "lower their dignity" to be seen eating hawker-food in the 'open'. Thomas realised that most times he was the only non-Chinese, let alone the only Eurasian, in the Chinese-owned-and-run coffee shop but didn't think that they had any right to regard him as "foreign", or that he didn't 'belong'. He was born, and of the island, whereas some of them had come as immigrants on a sojourn, whose attitude was that they would one day return to their respective homelands. But hunger gnawed deep in his bowels and he forced himself to withstand the unfriendly looks from his so-called "fellow-citizens" to obtain respite from hunger. Disgustedly he reflected on the sanity of being employed and going hungry because of it. He always gave his mother his entire wage-packet and she doled out his meagre daily allowance before she left for work in the morning, grumbling each time that he took more than he earned. But it had been *she* who had insisted that he stop school to go to work and he had not questioned her 'wisdom' until now.

When the factory had been located off River Valley Road, sometimes to forget the continuous 'empty' feeling in his belly he would explore the Singapore River banks near his place of work during lunch-time. Some godowns, it seemed, had to have been there almost since the time of Raffles, the island's modern founder. The pain in his gut would fade as he marvelled at the existence of Victorian-era public-loos, gas street-lamps that didn't function any more, and cattle-troughs that no longer served a purpose. All these things gave him the impression of time standing still as he imagined what it might have been like in those early days of a bygone, newly-colonised Singapore. He delighted in the narrow, humped bridges, the Ord and The Read, that spanned the murky-black waters of the island's main waterway, which, barely a few months previously he had helped win control of for his former Chinese tong. But at Alexandra there was nothing. Except overgrown undergrowth used by the British military for field exercises, the



scattered clusters of Chinese and Malay dwellings, and the newly-built warehouses for concerns such as the one he was working for.

Singapore politicians were still continuing their relentless efforts to get Britain to grant Singapore independence, despite the almost apathetic attitude of the majority of the population who, according to their respective outlooks, couldn't care less whether Singapore remained a colony just so long as they could continue making money and remitting sums back to their respective homelands. The "independence move", Thomas realised, was largely the politicians' desire, not a mass movement for "freedom". How could there be when many felt that they just didn't belong and that Singapore was only a transitory stop, to make money and remit it to the home-country, until it was time to retire and head back to where each one had originally hailed from?

On 11th March 1957 the Chief Minister, Mr Lim Yew Hock, led an all-party delegation to London for a meeting with the British Government to negotiate on full self-government for Singapore. Exactly a month later, on 11th April, it was officially announced in London that agreement had been reached for full self-government for Singapore which would come into effect after 1st January 1958 on a suitable date which was to be fixed. Thereafter the island would become the **State of Singapore** and would no longer be a colony. The office of Governor was to be abolished and a Malayan-born person, to be known as the **Yang di-Pertuan Negara**, (Malay: Head of State), would be appointed by the Queen's representative for a four-year period. The United Kingdom Government was to be responsible for external defence, and occupy, control and use the military bases and installations on the island. The Singapore Government would take full responsibility for preserving internal security and all other matters.

Though the British-owned "The Straits Times" newspaper didn't carry the full text of the agreement in London, Thomas Siddon on his own accord looked up the details in the British Council. He felt a sense of re-assurance that Britain had taken trouble to "safeguard" the interest of the **minorities** when he read the preamble to the proposed **Constitution** :

*"Minorities*

*It shall be the responsibility of the Government of Singapore constantly to care for the interests of racial and religious minorities in Singapore. In particular, it shall be the deliberate and conscious policy of the Government of Singapore, at all times, to recognise the special position of the Malays, who are the indigenous people of the island, and are in most need of assistance; accordingly it shall be the responsibility of the Government of Singapore to protect, safeguard, support, foster and promote their political.*

*educational, religious, economic, social and cultural interests, and the Malay language."*

To him, at that stage of awakening awareness, the Preamble seemed an assurance that minorities such as he, (being an Eurasian), would not be made to feel outsiders or alienated, that Singapore, the island that he had been born in and had spent his babyhood in a Japanese concentration camp for, was as much his as it was the Chinese, Indian and the Malay.

A separate **Singapore Citizenship** as well, was to be created by legislation enacted in Singapore, and the United Kingdom Government would amend the British Nationality Act 1948 so that Singapore Citizens would be recognized under that Act as British Subjects and Commonwealth Citizens. Thomas Siddon thought to himself: wasn't he already British through his father and grandfather?

From 26th to 30th April 1957 the Singapore Legislative Assembly in Singapore debated the London Agreement and accepted the motion approving the constitutional proposals but rejected the British clause banning persons known to have taken part in subversive activities from contesting the island's first-ever elections after the attainment of self-government. This provision had in fact been introduced by the British delegation at the final plenary session in London and Mr Lim Yew Hock in a press statement in the British capital on 11th April, had stated that as far as he knew there were about ten persons detained, and "...we can fight them, and we feel it is wrong to debar them from contesting the elections."

There had been bitter exchanges between Lee Kuan Yew of the PAP and David Marshall, the former chief minister who had become an Independent since resigning his seat in the Labour Front Party in protest against certain provisions of the London Agreement. The former chief minister next resigned his seat in the House on 30th April and challenged Lee Kuan Yew to contest him in a by-election to test which of them the electorate would support. Mr Lee didn't respond.

What Marshall hadn't realised was that support for political leaders in Singapore had already become race-based. "Multi-racialism", a concept flung far and wide by all the aspiring politicians in the country was not really accepted nor understood by the populace which was predominantly Chinese and which measured its **connection** with Singapore only as "recent" as immigrant foreign-born, (China, Malaya, India or Indonesia), parents in search of a better life than was available in their respective homeland. They were still "chinese", "malay", "indian", or "indonesian" in their hearts, minds and bodies. And they would support their own ethnic leaders on the island purely on racial-grounds. So long as Marshall had been a part of the

Legislature he had been a force to contend with. By his rash act he had become a nothing.

Young Thomas Siddon in the meantime was preoccupied with his job and hating it thoroughly. He found that his Chinese work-mates, grown-ups with children of his own age, could talk of nothing except sex, drinking and gambling. And he was the butt of all their sick jokes. They didn't speak English but would address him in "fractured" Malay while they communicated with one another in their several dialects. Even his own mediocre command of Malay was a sight better than theirs, and he had been raised a White for the first twelve years of his life. These Chinese were the "guests" who had come to the Malay island, had refused to be accepted, and only regarded the White British as the "guiding light" to follow. By their behaviour toward him he felt as if he was the outsider when he was a true part of the island-population, more so than they because he was of the soil through his mother. And he wasn't learning anything as an apprentice because he had to do the same heavy manual work as they and got paid a lot less! Because he was an apprentice. The young man was always glad when it came five-thirty in the afternoon and he could return home, hopping on the bus back to town and once again relaxing with English-speaking acquaintances.

Malaya was on the verge of obtaining her independence from Britain in August that year and again, apart from the politicians on Singapore the majority of the populace didn't appear to be affected by this impending change in the region. The Philippines and Indonesia had already gained their respective freedoms in 1946 and 1949, a decade previously, and Malaya was finally achieving hers that year. There was an overture from Lee Kuan Yew to Tengku Abdul Rahman, the prime minister-designate of Malaya, to merge Singapore with the Malay mainland so that on Kuala Lumpur's independence the island would be free of British colonial rule as well. Lee said that on economic, geographical and historical grounds it was desirable that the two territories should come together. Economically Singapore was the trading entrepot of Malaya, geographically it was the continuance of the peninsula, and historically Singapore is a Malay country and part of several former Malay kingdoms. (The settlement of *Temasek* or "Sea Town" in Malay, which was the ancient name of Singapore, was founded by *Sri Tri Buana*, a prince from Palembang, (Indonesia), around 1297 A.D. His grave is reputed to be located close to the site of his landing on Singapore, near Radin Mas, (Malay: Golden Princess") a district of Singapore not far from Telok Blangah, the "royal town" of Temenggong Daeng Abdul Rahman, the Bugis prince who signed Singapore over to

Stamford Raffles in 1819. Radin Mas is named after the famous Malay beauty who was imprisoned and enslaved by her wicked step-mother, and who was killed by her equally-evil groom-to-be on the day of the wedding that her step-mother had forced her into, when she threw herself in front of her father to prevent him being stabbed by her intended husband who feared being exposed as a co-conspirator. The last legally-crowned king of Singapore, *Tamugi*, was assassinated by the Hindu prince, *Parameswara*, a refugee from the Mejavahit Court at Java, who made himself king. He reigned for approximately five years before fleeing Singapore due to his oppression of the people and because *Tamugi's* father-in-law, the powerful king of Siam, had finally come to seek vengeance on his daughter's husband's killer. *Parameswara* fled northward up the Malay peninsula and eventually founded Malacca around 1396, converted to Islam and took the name *Iskandar Shah* in 1403. The reason why *Parameswara* fled the king of Siam was at that time the Malays of the north, from Kedah to the Isthmus, were the controllers of international trade from the Isthmus of Kra, north toward Ceylon and south right up to Kedah, and were allied to Siam. The king of Siam, a country which originated in the Isthmus of Kra, was of Parsi descent and directly descended from the king of Kedah whose empire strongly rivalled that of the Sri Vijaya Empire in the south, which had Palembang as its capital, and *Parameswara*, coming from another rival Malay empire, the Hindu Mejavahit of Java, knew he would receive no mercy. Another Malay kingdom which also included Singapore as a vassal-state was the Riau Malay kingdom of *Indera Sakti* on Penyengat Island, a 15-minute boat-ride from Tanjong Pinang, the capital of the Riau Islands, whose origins can be traced to the Old Johor sultanate. Apart from its well-documented conflicts with the Portugese and the Dutch, and its own court intrigues, the Malay language as it is spoken in the Riau Archipelago and Singapore today, owes its pronunciation to this Malay kingdom.)

When Lee Kuan Yew had made his overture the tengku wouldn't hear of it because, in his reckoning, in a straight merger between the two territories, the Malays would be outnumbered by the Chinese. In Malaya the Malays outnumbered the Chinese, while in Singapore the opposite was true, but in any coming together of the two countries the Chinese would be numerically dominant. There was a fear, as well, of the Communist element in the Chinese-dominant island. The People's Action Party at that time was deeply infiltrated by Communists and the Malay prince didn't want Singapore's security problems, as well as his own, to contend with.

One evening after work Thomas Siddon, alighting from the bus which brought him to Bras Basah Road from Alexandra, bumped into an old

school chum, Gilbert Wilson, who had been a classmate of his at the St Joseph's Institution. The two young men hailed one another, glad for the opportunity to catch up with one another again since leaving school. Wilson invited the other for a drink at the "Catholic Centre". Hearing the name for the first time, Thomas grew curious and accepted. He was nonplussed to discover that it was the rambling old house at the corner of Bras Basah Road and Queen Street, opposite the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd. He hadn't realised that it was an informal meeting place for Roman Catholics. When he had first arrived from St Patrick's to live with his mother, if he had known about the place he would have gone there to spend the time instead of prowling the streets and getting involved in the Chinese secret societies!

When he got inside, he found it was a public canteen selling reasonably-priced drinks and food, cheaper even than the Chinese-run coffee shops in the vicinity. Gilbert introduced him to a crowd of Eurasians of about his own age and he found that all of them were recently-returned from studies in Australia. It was apparent that they all came from wealthy middle-class families as well. Their accent was a clipped Australian drawl and he immediately felt at ease among them, slipping back into his childhood "Anglo" accent without even realising it. The posh-looking group surprisingly took to him despite his rather unkempt appearance and he was flattered. They were a group he could identify with. He glanced down quickly at his hands, noting the calloused, bruised texture of his skin, due to the nature of his job lifting heavy crates and handling hard materials out in the open, and decided that he couldn't mix with such a 'grand' lot, dressed the way he was and tore himself away, much to everyone's surprised disappointment. But he promised to return the following evening and everyone appeared pleased. But Thomas decided that he would spruce up first, feeling shy among the well-turned-out crowd. But he was drawn to them nevertheless, despite his embarrassment. They were his "type" of first-generation Eurasian, with one pure-White parent. They weren't like his mother whose kind originated in Malacca many generations removed from their original Portuguese or Dutch forebears and whose outlook was "parochial". To him the "Catholic Centre crowd" seemed to view the world as a "happy" place where opportunities 'happened' because they had the right attitude, and because they had been born on the 'right social rung'.

Thereafter he patronised the "Catholic Centre" every evening after work. Everyone in the crowd he had just come to know seemed loaded with money and would insist on buying him cups of coffee which he always refused, revelling in their utter looks of dismay. He was no sponger.

As he became familiar with the Catholic meeting-spot he grew aware that another crowd, mainly Chinese and Indian girls, congregated in an adjacent room across from the main hall-way of the building from where 'his group' of "posh" Eurasians" normally met. The other room was similar in size, with the same deep, malacca-cane armchairs for lounging in. It seemed mainly filled with young Chinese and Indian office-types who were all accompanied by their respective off-duty English-soldier boyfriends. The same kind who patronised the "Union Jack Club" behind the Capitol Cinema off North Bridge Road and the "Happy Cafe" in the Capitol Flats Building on Stamford Road. He would quietly study the soldiers as they conveyed pipping-hot cups of coffee or tea from the self-serve counter of the canteen to their respective Asian girlfriends. It seemed incongruous to him to witness these Whites acting as waiters to the Asian girls. He wondered whether the Chinese and Indians girls ever realised that should they marry the English soldiers they too would beget offspring like him and his friends. Were they ever conscious that they would also be responsible for a 'new' generation of chap-cheng, ("Ten-bloods": Chinese Hokkein derogatory for the Eurasian), who would also be looked down upon by their own respective kind?

He noticed, as well that his own group pointedly ignored any English soldier who happened to wander in off the street into the "Centre" and accidentally made for "their room". He was faintly amused by the mutually-sought segregation of the two groups, belonging to the same religion but completely alien from one another as far as mores, attitudes and motives went. He wondered too whether the English "boys" ever realised that the Eurasian teenagers in the "Centre", because their well-off parents preferred that they obtained their secondary or college education in a White environment whose standard was well above the colony's, regarded them as inferior. His new friends called the British soldiers "working class", of a lesser social order. They were "tommies", not even officers, whom the Chinese and Indian girls, because they didn't know better, felt they were moving up socially with, "by going out" with them, because they were fraternising with 'superiors', when in fact they weren't. The Eurasian teenagers in the Catholic Centre were descended from colonial Britons of English middle-class backgrounds who had married Eurasian girls who had come to Singapore either from Malacca, Ceylon or India, and who had some semblance of European upbringing. They felt that they were socially superior to the British soldiers.

From his regular contact with the same "smart" bunch he gradually began to become aware of the different races in his society, which he had always previously taken for granted, and the stereotyped attitude of one community toward another. It shocked him because he had never thought along those lines in his life before. Once he had accepted the Malay, Chinese, Indian, Eurasian and European as part of the "natural make-up" of his island. They had all been there when he had been born in Singapore! But listening to the smug comments of the Eurasian crowd, he grew conscious of their prejudices and from their comments realised that the other communities too had their respective attitude toward his kind. Coming into contact with the "sophisticated bunch" had made him conscious of the differences in features, complexions and cultural mores of the various races on 'his' island and that they too, in turn, more than likely regarded him by his race rather than by his character. Thomas felt stirrings of disquiet.

Barely two months into his job his mother began grouching that he wasn't earning enough. All his wage seemed to be going into transport and food costs at work, and there was 'nothing' left for household expenses. She still had to pay for his Sunday meals. His mother felt that he should resign from his company and start looking for another, better-paying job.

Thomas felt cheated by her attitude. He had forgone his education because she had told him to, and now she was egging him to quit before he had even settled into his job or had found alternative employment. He hung on stubbornly for a few more weeks, hoping for the promised increment that had been made to him when he first began with the company. But it didn't materialise. May came along and when there still was no wage increase, he acceded to his mother's wishes and resigned but after first obtaining her agreement that it was at her insistence. She would have to put up with his being out-of-work, and feeding him. His mother instead gave him six months to look for another job or get out. He pondered on the ease with which she made her decisions. He could have better spent the time he had already spent working, and the six months 'grace' she gave him, re-doing his standard eight exams instead, he thought bitterly to himself.

He returned to sleeping-in till late in the morning again after his mother had left for work at the military base at Changi. He'd waken at ten and slowly munch his breakfast of a large *pow*, (a Chinese steamed bun filled with either pork or sweetened bean-paste), and down a giant-sized mug of Chinese coffeeshop coffee which his mother would purchase from the shop below, before she left for work in the morning, making sure that the man used the more expensive tinned evaporated milk instead of the condensed version. Because to her since the evaporated milk cost more it was "better".

The local breakfast was still alien to his system and he would run to the lavatory several times during the day but he never complained because he didn't want his mother to start bitching again about his being out-of-work. He was grateful for the food which she took the trouble to buy for him every morning as it was the one meal he could anticipate to have, to give him sustenance because he avoided the Bencoolen Street coffee shop at all cost, in case of running into Errol again.

One morning in June he was rudely wakened from slumber by loud insistent banging of the frail wooden door of his mother's "bedsitter". He sleepily called out from the floor where he was on his "bed" of sorts, made out of a piece of cloth spread over the linoleum-covered floor of the room. Despite his sleep-induced haze he had made out the voices of two Filipino-Eurasian schoolboys he had known slightly in the previous year when he had attended St Joseph's Institution.

"What is it?" he asked groggily, irritated at being jolted from sleep before his 'usual' time and pace.

As he pulled himself off the linoleum-covered floor he had time to be amused that the two had known where he lived. He had told no one in his former school where his home was, and he had never had a caller in his life before. Obviously Singapore was so small, anyone could find out where a person was staying, if they really wanted to, he thought to himself.

"It's Vincent and Dick Alexandro, can we come in?"

He had recognised the voice of the younger Dick as he opened the door to them. The two buggers had probably *chabot*, (Malay: "scaped"), from school again, he thought to himself. They were well-known in the school for that. He hoped that they wouldn't make it a 'habit' to use his place each time that they did. He suddenly caught their hungry look at his breakfast displayed invitingly by his mother on their one and only table which had a space of sorts underneath to keep food in. Thomas was surprised by their hunger because he had heard that their father was a senior civil servant and that they lived in a large colonial government-provided house in the Rumah Miskin district near Lavender Street. Surely they could not have been that hungry as they had a home and a family and had regular meals. He was poor and what they were coveting was his one and only meal for the whole day. And he had to keep expenses down otherwise his mother would start belly-aching again. But his mother had taught him to "call" any visitor to their home to join them in a meal whenever they were about to part-take of food, should someone be visiting. It was an Asian and a Malacca-Portuguese custom, she had explained, and by habit he invited the two boys to share in his meal. They accepted with such celerity he wisely decided to eat with them in case they scoffed the lot!



As the two boys began sharing his breakfast, Dick Alexandro said that he was forming a rock n' roll combo and wanted Thomas to join them. Flattered and surprised as he didn't play any musical instrument, he wondered why they had thought to include him. Seeming to read his thoughts Vincent the elder brother explained that Eurasians, being part-White, understood the "new" music "naturally" and would pick up the playing of a western musical instrument easily. The Malays and the Indians were only interested in their own kind of music and the "Chinks" had no sense of rhythm. He and Dick were trying out several Eurasian boys before deciding who would join the group. The two brothers would come by on the following day, if Thomas was interested, (he nodded in the affirmative), to leave him an old guitar to practice on. Dick would show him how to make the basic chords. Thomas knew that Dick was regarded as something of a musical wonder in St Joseph's because he played several musical instruments proficiently and could read music. Dick would also show Thomas how to tune the guitar, and he nodded his agreement, amused that he had been included in the band-formation. They had been his juniors in school.

In the meantime he returned to his old "preoccupation", writing out job-applications in the day-time, agonising over some new poem buzzing around in his head, and dropping by the "Catholic Centre" in the late afternoons, after four, to spend time with his Australian-educated "posh" Eurasian friends. One in the group, a Stephen de Roza, lived close by in a newly-built luxury, (for those days), block of flats on Princep Street, near to the Registry of Vehicles on Middle Road, not far from the Cathay Building. Thomas thought about the strange juxtaposition of residences for rich and poor within the same vicinity. There didn't as yet seem to be any conscious effort on the part of the wealthy to insist that the poorer classes lived away from them. Maybe that would come about one day in the future. Like what he had read and heard about in the "European countries". He and his mother lived in their garret-like room in the pre-war, early twentieth-century "Chinese-style" shop house in Bencoolen Street while a mere two streets away was the "sophisticated" four-storied block of modern, middle-class flats, each with a servant's room at back, (which was even larger and airier than his and his mother's room!), and a front and back entrance, in Princep Street. Thomas realised that his and Stephen's backgrounds were totally different, like chalk and cheese. Though his friend's surname was either Portuguese or Spanish he didn't seem at all like the Portuguese-Eurasians from Malacca who behaved as if they had a cross to bear, and like his mother appeared to seek ways to inflict "punishment" on themselves. From their many conversations later, he would discover that Stephen's

family had come originally from India. So that would explain Stephen's dark-complexion. But what made him behave like he had nothing to fear in life? He carried himself with confidence, enunciated his English well and didn't behave "Asian". He also appeared calm under any situation. It had to be the way he had been brought up. Both young men became fast friends. Steve studied at a private school in Serangoon Road, even though he had failed his final school certificate exams several times already, because his father insisted that he continue studying until he passed. Thomas envied him his golden opportunity to obtain an education even though he was totally disinterested.

Dick and Vincent Alexandro, true to their word, left him their old guitar as promised on the following day after their initial visit, and he faithfully practised everyday from then on, before he left for the "Centre" in the evenings. He persevered on the guitar, despite the discomfort and pain from the welts on his finger-tips from pressing down on the steel-strings of the instrument's neck, and after three weeks the dull aches began to ease and his notes grew smoother and clearer. His chord changes started to become sleek and he found he could accompany himself on simple songs.

He tried co-operating with his mother to keep their daily food bill down by missing lunch everyday, even though she still had the arrangement with the corner coffeeshop on Middle Road to let him have his meals on 'tick'. But he knew he could not go to the shop because if he did Errol his former gang-chief would soon get to know that he wasn't in Malaya. So he waited instead for his mother to return from work each day with her left-over ham-and-egg sandwiches from lunch. She seemed satisfied with this arrangement and he was relieved that she had stopped nagging him to look for work or get out of her life. He dreaded the prospect of being turfed-out of his own home and didn't fancy wandering the streets. Because of Errol. He thought his mother cruel in threatening to chuck him out whenever they had an argument, or when she felt dissatisfied with life.

The first break for the "Alexandro Combo", as the group of hopeful rock n' roll musicians styled themselves, came in July when they were hired as the main band to provide the latest pop hits for a music-request stall at a fun fair organised by some students of the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus in Victoria Street. The boys had got the job because the trainee-teacher in charge of hiring the bands for the stall was an aunt of the Alexandro boys. Several days before they were due to 'debut' at the fun fair the combo met at the Alexandro household in Rumah Miskin off Serangoon Road to practice every day.

Thomas felt great that Saturday morning of the fair belting out the current top-tunes for the first time in public to the mainly convent-schoolgirl crowd. Midway through a "hot" number he became aware of the steady, unwavering gaze of a petite-looking Chinese girl as she stood transfixed watching his every gyration, a-la Elvis Presley, in front of the mike. The attractive "chick's" stare was nerve-wracking. He suddenly noticed his pal, Steve, standing beside her, whispering in her ear while she said something back without taking her eyes off Thomas. When Siddon broke into his next number she had vanished and he felt Stephen de Roza tugging his trouser-bottoms to catch his attention. His friend indicated that he wanted to have a word. Thomas got off stage after his final number, before the next band took over, and went over to where his friend was standing. Stephen invited him to go to the "pictures". He declined because he hadn't as yet been paid for his 'work' that morning, playing music for the request stall, but Stephen assured him that he needn't worry because the "loaded" Thai girl, Prisna, would be paying for all of them. Thomas had discovered that the girl wasn't Chinese and that she was rich but he wasn't going to get a treat from *any* girl. He wasn't a bum.

"I'll pay my own way," he said flatly, as he walked away because Dick Alexandro in the meanwhile had been frantically waving to him to get back on stage and begin singing again.

It seemed that everyone of the young French Mission convent schoolgirls was clamouring for him to sing some more. Thomas felt sky-high. In all his born days he'd never been sought after, least of all by girls displaying the kind of adulation being directed at him that morning. He'd heard and read in the papers and the magazines that it happened in stage shows in Europe and America but never in Singapore! Funny, he'd always thought that Asians, especially the Chinese, were too conservative to give vent to their real feelings in public. He belted out three more numbers, growing steadily bored with the ranting crowd of young convent schoolgirls. It was a relief when Dick signalled that they were done for the day and that the substitute band would take over and close the show. He jumped off the stage and sidled away as soon as the band change-over took effect.

A sudden whiff of subtle flowers hit his nostrils and with a delicious anticipated shock he felt a light touch on his forearm. The singularly-attractive Prisna had been on his thoughts all the time. She spoke his name. It was a pleasant, sultry Australian drawl. Thomas covertly studied her features to gauge how old she was but, like all East Asians she just didn't show her age. And the slight hint of lipstick didn't help either.

"Hi, I'm Prisna. come to the pictures with us. there's a boy in our crowd I

don't particularly like sitting with and he won't if I'm with you." She said it like that and he nodded in agreement as she placed her soft, pampered hand in his and they walked together out of the convent school-gates toward the Capitol Cinema. He was amazed at her boldness because he had heard that the *Madam Botaks*, (Malay: "Madam Bald-heads", local slang for Roman Catholic nuns who were reputed to cut their hair really short), frowned upon public displays of affection between the convent girls and their boyfriends. He marvelled at her bold confidence.

When the two of them walked past the "Happy Cafe" he kept a wary but unobtrusive, (in case Prisma noticed by accident), look-out for Errol or his former chap kapak gang-members but nothing happened. Stephen, and the others, who he was meeting for the first time that day, were "hovering" impatiently in the cinema lobby. They all trooped into the cinema-hall and sat in the last row, after the Thai girl had purchased everyone's tickets. Prisma clung to his arm and made sure that she sat between him and Steve. As the lights dimmed Thomas caught sight of his friend kissing the girl sitting on his other side. He had been told that her name was Virgina, and that she was Steve's girl. His attention returned to Prisma when she squeezed his fingers and got him to put his arms round her shoulders, saying that she felt chilly, as she snuggled up to him. Impulsively he tilted up her chin and planted a smacker on her yielding lips. They were shockingly soft. She was the first girl he had ever kissed.

After the film-show they all went to the home of Virgina, Steve's girlfriend, for a bite. Her father, a Malay, was a senior officer in the Singapore Harbour Board Police and the family lived in the executive quarters for the harbour police officers, which was at Jardine Steps, a stone's throw away from the docks at Keppel Road. The girl's mother was French. Virgina, to Thomas' surprise, seemed embarrassed of her father's police-provided flat, which he thought silly, because compared with his ramshackle room above the Bencoolen Street plumber's shop, the brown-haired, blue-eyed girl's home seemed a virtual mansion. He knew though that she felt shy of her home because Stephen and Prisma lived in private accommodations, and in those days only the very wealthy or the White Colonials, lived in such places.

Prisma got him to accompany her, by bus, for part of her trip home, an hour after they had been at Virgina's. He thought it pleasant of her not to flaunt her wealth by taking a taxi back. They got off at the bus stop near the Selegie Road-Bukit Timah Road junction and she then hopped into a taxi to take the last leg of her trip back home. He heard her tell the taxi-driver in Teochew dialect to head toward Binjai Park. He recognised the name as

one of the residential districts where the rich and the senior British administrators lived. His girl had already told him, before they got to Bukit Timah Road that her parents were strict and would prevent her going out unaccompanied any more if they were to catch sight of him with her. He wondered whether it was because they were both of different races or because he was poor.

He met her the following morning, as arranged, after the ten o'clock mass at the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd. His eyes widened in pleasant surprise to see her with four walloping packets of Malay-style nasi beriani, (rice cooked in saffron accompanied with either a piece of curried chicken or mutton). Steve and Virginia had come along as well. Later, when they ate, he found the dish lovely, slightly different from the original Indian version. Out of earshot of the other two, before they had parted for the day, Prisma made him promise to meet her everyday after school at two in the afternoon outside the "Catholic Centre". Her Malay driver would park the family car on the Queen Street-side, opposite the St Joseph's Institution, before he went for his own lunch. The driver would return around four and keep his mouth shut about their meetings because Prisma would pay for his lunch and tip him as well.

Prisma always waited for him in the back seat of the car, so that they wouldn't be noticed by passersby, dressed as she was in her blue convent-uniform. She looked a schoolgirl then and he had to remind himself that she was old enough because he had already kissed her and she had kissed back. From the day he began meeting the Thai girl after school he realised that she had all along known that he was poor because she always had a too big packet of food for them both to share. On the first day of their meeting outside the "Centre" she told him that she had "gastric" and couldn't go long on an empty stomach, and since she really didn't "eat much" they could share her meal. But he knew that she was making sure he had at least one proper meal a day because he had a gaunt-looking frame and his bones stuck out.

After about a fortnight of such meetings he began hating himself for sponging off the wealthy young schoolgirl. She was well-heeled but she was still a schoolgirl and he had been taking advantage of her generosity. The relationship had to be terminated. He'd do it before she dropped her own ton of bricks on him one day instead, and tell him that she wanted to break off with him. Hardening his heart he told Prisma that he was starting a new job the following week and wouldn't be able to meet her after school from then. She was overjoyed for him, replying that she would be content to meet him once-a-week, Saturdays. He told her would call to confirm their appointments each week, but never did.

He forced himself to keep away from the "Catholic Centre" for several weeks, hoping that with time she would "get the message". It was August and he threw himself whole-heartedly into practising his singing with the Dick Alexandro Combo at the Alexandro home. Prisma was a good thing in his life he had relinquished. There would be many occasions in the future when he would turn his back on "good things" because, in his estimation, he didn't deserve them or have a right to enjoy them. It was how he viewed life.

The Lim Yew Hock Government issued a White paper on 23rd August 1957, announcing that the government had uncovered a new Communist plot to take over the colony by violence and armed revolt. Acting under the Emergency Powers for the preservation of public security, the authorities arrested thirty-five Chinese carrying on subversive activities in trade unions and political organisations, with a view to seizing power on behalf of the illegal Communist Party of Malaya at the next general elections. Those arrested included Tan Chong Kim and Kan Kong Yuan, the chairman and vice-chairman respectively of the People's Action party's central executive, as well as three other members of the same committee, thirteen branch members and thirteen trade union officials.

Mr W.A.C. Goode, Chief Secretary in the Singapore Government, was appointed Governor of Singapore on 27th August 1957, in succession to Sir Robert Black. Mr Goode was to be the last governor of the island, in keeping with the constitutional agreement signed in London in April of that same year, which provided that the office of governor be abolished and that a Malayan-born person become Head of State when Singapore achieved internal self-government after 1st January 1958.

Full independence came to Malaya within the British Commonwealth on 31st August 1957, with the Alliance Party comprising the United Malays National Organisation, (UMNO), and the Malayan Chinese Association, (MCA), in power. In Singapore the Malayan event was treated with muted fanfare though the rallying Malay cry: *Merdeka!*, (Independence!), had crossed the causeway and was being heard on the British-controlled island from then.

The band of "posh" Eurasian boys and girls, which included Prisma, stopped frequenting the "Catholic Centre" in Bras Basah Road by September as many of them had emigrated with their respective families to either Australia or England because of the Malayan independence and the forthcoming self-government of Singapore. They did not want to remain in Singapore because, as far as they were concerned with the "government in native hands", the country would "go to the dogs". Thomas Siddon began

calling at the place again. Through Gilbert Wilson, who had first introduced him to the "Centre", he met a young Ceylonese called Maurice Dupon who worked as an announcer at "Radio Singapore", the government radio station, (the other station was the British-owned, cable-run "Redifussion"). Maurice was nineteen, spoke in measured, modulated tones, and pronounced his words distinctly, in a "good speaking voice". He appeared matured for his age, though he was runt-sized and very conscious of it. Gilbert said he 'worked out' with weights at the Wilson home every afternoon.

Maurice Dupon stared at Siddon, on introduction, and began flexing his muscles. Thomas glared at the newcomer, surprised at his hostile reaction, disliking the Ceylonese instinctively. He glanced sideways at Gilbert wondering whether he had caught the other's unfriendly look but apparently he had not. Thomas was amused. He had been weight-training for three years in the boys' club on Queen Street, (though his undernourished body didn't show any "bulges"), ran regularly in the St Joseph's Institution school-field on Bras Basah Road, every chance he got in the evenings, swam in the public swimming pool on Mount Emily at the top of Sophia Road, and even practised a Hainanese, (a Chinese dialect group), martial art, (in those days the Chinese martial arts were known as "Chinese Art", 'kung-fu' is a recent term coined and popularised by the late Chinese actor Bruce Lee), and he had been a "fighter" in a notorious Chinese triad society — and here was this aggressive "midget" trying to show off his manliness. He decided to ignore him. The Ceylonese would be the first of many who would try to demonstrate their "macho-ness" to him just because they felt threatened by his appearance and reputation as a secret society member.

In an island just beginning to demand and expect a say in its own destiny there was talk among the population, through press-publicised political "gospels", espoused by the newly-returned from England young, radical graduates such as Lee Kuan Yew of the People's Action Party, and even David Marshall, (who, at times, seemed to be supporting the British cause), that the "common good" meant that everyone on the island was "equal". That no one could claim he was better because of race, wealth, education, creed or colour of skin. To young Thomas Siddon, an Eurasian growing up and struggling to understand why he had first of all been born, let alone on the island of Singapore, the proposition made a lot of sense. He liked the concept that *the races who had decided to make Singapore their home would one day be merged as a single nation.*

With each subsequent group or individual that entered his life Thomas became painfully aware that he was being regarded in a derogatory light. That he was a thug, or worse, someone of low mentality. And he was

positive that the persons he was meeting for the first time had no inkling that he had ever been mixed up in the Chinese secret societies.. He refused to accept that it really reflected on his being poor, and that he lived in a garret. So many persons lived in rented rooms in those days, sometimes cramped ten-strong, in box-like spaces of no more than 100 square-feet. And there were many attap "estates" situated in squalid, unhygienic conditions all over the island. At least he lived in a brick-house in the city. So it had to be because of how he *looked*.

He was aware of the "social-order" of those times. The English, Scots, Welsh or Irish — the "British" first, followed by the Eurasians of pure-White British fathers or mothers, second-generation English-Eurasians, the educated, well-placed Portuguese-Eurasians who had come originally from Malacca, and then the other British subjects of Indian, Chinese and Malay 'extraction', according to the social status among them, in wealth, communal rank and standing with the British. And despite the fact that some "natives" had more social "clout" over those born on the "right rung", Thomas had never thought of his Asian fellow-islanders as beneath him because he knew that he was poverty-stricken. With him there was just the single-minded intent to better his lot. He felt part of the growing wave of "new nationalism", identifying with it. He was *Singaporean* and called himself one, even though his "betters" told him he was silly since no such word or concept existed.

The mutual dislike between Thomas and Maurice Dupon was held in abeyance by Gilbert Wilson's innocent presence. They found their mutual friend a likeable chap who seemed to only look for the good in others. His father worked in the British passport section of the colonial government and the family lived in spacious, Tudor-styled government quarters in Penang Road. It was a "typical" house in the colonial genre — a row of separate, airy, heavy-beamed, English-styled, two-storied accommodations, each with its own front garden, with hedge and gate, and a spacious enclosed back-yard which also contained a servant's quarters. Across the road where they lived were the workshops of the motor showrooms which fronted the main-thoroughfare Orchard Road. Next to this was the perpetually-closed, high-fenced Jewish cemetery which also faced Orchard Road, immediately opposite the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in MacDonald House.

Late one evening, around seven, Thomas turned up at the "Catholic Centre", by habit, looking for someone, anyone, to spend time with. He was lonely and hoped he'd bump into Gilbert. But the place was practically deserted, save for the odd English soldier hugging his lonesome cup of coffee or tea between folded arms, mulling over whatever topic he had just finished discussing with one of the Catholic priests upstairs. The floor



above the canteen was a warren of rooms which housed the many groups of the "Legion of Mary", a lay-Catholic group involved in practising "Christian charity" toward the less fortunate as well as aiding lapsed Catholics to return to the fold. English servicemen were in the habit of approaching the priests who were there to "guide" the lay-Catholic groups, for "advice" whenever they fell for a local girl, because there were "problems" from the servicemen's military authorities who discouraged inter-marriage between British servicemen and local girls as far as they could prevent it, and the objections from the girls' parents who didn't want, nor like their daughters marrying outside their own race and culture, especially with the British soldiers.

Thomas was about to leave the "Centre" to return to his depressing room in Bencoolen Street when Maurice Dupon sauntered in. Both eyed one another silently, one from the entrance where he'd just walked in off the street, the other from within the canteen, seated at a table drinking his coffee. Deciding to acknowledge the other, the Ceylonese boy lifted his eyebrows in a form of greeting.

"Do you think Gilbert's turning up tonight?" he inquired in his usual quiet manner.

"I don't think so, the place's closing."

"Like a coffee?"

"Thanks."

Both young men made an effort to be pleasant, forced, under the circumstance to be polite. They talked inconsequential, snippets of gossip, girls, the cinema. Abruptly the dark-skinned Dupon inquired whether Thomas "fooled around" with weights. Sure. The Eurasian hoped the other wouldn't ask for how long because he had been at it longer than Dupon even though his undernourished body hadn't developed significantly to indicate that he had "worked out". His muscles were hard but his limbs were wafer-thin while Dupon had nicely-shaped bulges already beginning to show. As the canteen began closing Dupon invited the other to have a coffee with him at the Esplanade, a public walkaway which began from the mouth of the Stamford Canal and ran alongside the Padang, the green in front of the City Hall, before stopping close to the mouth of the Singapore River. They chatted as they strolled toward their destination, beginning to discover that they, in fact, were enjoying one another's company. Sensing the affinity developing Thomas opened up about things close to his heart and Maurice's ears pricked up, his astonishment clearly written on his face, and growing by leaps and bounds as Thomas rattled on. The Eurasian boy had noticed Dupon's incredulity as he spoke about his interest in books, local and

European history, writing, even the Druids. Several times Maurice nodded his head vigorously in agreement at something Thomas said, and Siddon gave the other top marks for not mocking him or any of his far-fetched opinions. In the past whenever he had ever voiced an opinion with adults they had either dismissed or derided his reflections.

"I'd never put you down as the sort who'd be interested in such topics, and to even know about the Druids, I don't think many locals have even heard the word!" Maurice burst out, "you're a wonder."

"What 'cher mean?" Thomas bristled, his old suspicions of Dupon returning instantly.

"If you don't mind my saying, you look and speak just like a thug — you know that's your reputation, don't you, but I just couldn't believe my ears to hear you talk about reading books, the history of the region, and of all things, the Druids," the Ceylonese explained quietly. Thomas had assumed a cock-of-the-walk stance and Dupon knew he had to calm the firebrand or risk severing the budding new friendship. He held out his hand to emphasise his sincerity. The other studied his face for a moment, as if trying to decipher his true intent, then satisfied, accepted the proffered hand warmly. They had become comrades. There would be no questioning Maurice Dupon's motives in future. Over a cup of coffee each they yarned the night away.

They talked about their island and the awakening political arguments being bandied about in the English language papers and in the coffeeshops. Maurice didn't try to correct or change Thomas' opinions but just nodded in understanding at the points he made, venturing forth some of his own. He disagreed with Thomas that Singapore's various communities could be forged into a single nation. Thomas put forward the example of Hawaii. It had people of various ethnic origins yet everyone called themselves "Hawaiians". That island had proved that it could be done, except Thomas wondered, what had happened to the original indigenous Hawaiians. He had heard that they were poorer than the "newcomers". Dupon demanded to know why he thought about such things, and Siddon said that historically Singapore was a Malay island and that this had to be taken into consideration when planning for the future of the island. He had heard that when the Spanish gave up Formosa, (Taiwan), nothing was done for the indigenous and the part-Spanish people, some of whom were Chinese and some of Malay stock. He wondered about the Spanish-Eurasians of Taiwan. What had happened to them? Dupon demanded to know whether he was Communist-inclined. The other retorted that he was too young and unschooled to know anything about it. Talking about Communism, the conversation turned to Soviet Russia. Thomas had an opinion as well.

Everyone said that the Europeans should give up their colonies and free their subject peoples, how come no one had demanded the lifting of Russian "colonialism" from the workers' republics in the Soviet Union which were completely dominated by the Russians? Maurice said he hadn't thought about it.

Relishing the impact he was making on Dupon but unsure whether he was being taken seriously, he decided to bring out his "trump-card". Impulsively he pulled out his small notebook of poems and shoved it into the other's surprised hand, who flipped it open, glanced down, then darted popping eyes at Siddon before re-reading the page he had just scanned. "Merdeka Bridge", he enunciated slowly, looked up swiftly, eyes boring through Thomas' before he continued reading aloud:

"Do not look at the road  
or the fine bridge  
It's only a short-cut to the city  
See the river, smell its stink  
This belongs to you."

Dupon closed the notebook and handed it wordlessly to his new friend. Thomas Siddon felt he had to defend his poem.

"I know the bridge isn't finished, yet everyone is so proud of the new, modern structure, what I'm trying to remind, is that isn't the important thing in our lives, it's our island that we have to think about now, when independence is given us, before it becomes too late."

It now became Thomas' turn to become amazed when Dupon brought out his own notebook of poems. They not only wrote poems, they put them down in a notebook as well. They were kindred spirits, Thomas thought.

The "discussion" lasted until two that morning when the two new fast-friends strolled slowly to the "shared-taxi" pick-up point on North bridge Road, opposite the St Andrew's Cathedral. The "service" ran from there to the Royal Air Force base at Changi Point. Maurice's home was near the Bedok-Changi junction, along the taxi-route. Before his cab left Maurice told Thomas that his reputation was that he was forever talking about girls, sex or fighting. The other replied that everyone talked about sex or girls, he was just a little more "colourful", that was all. What made him "special" since he talked about the same things that everybody else did? Just because he hadn't finished school didn't make him incapable of serious thought or of being "gifted". Dupon was silent. After the Ceylonese boy's taxi sped away from the pick-up point, the Eurasian teenager strolled home, less than a mile away. He felt good. He had made a friend.

His writing now grew prolific, the urge reinforced since he had someone to show each new writing attempt to and discuss it with, and who wouldn't laugh at his efforts. Not that he had ever shown his work to anyone before. The two young men met everyday at the "Catholic Centre" in the evenings, after the Ceylonese had bused from Radio Singapore on Caldecott Hill in Thomson Road. They would either walk to the Esplanade near the Padang or to the Clifford Pier in Collyer Quay where the bum-boat "ferries" took passengers to the various outlying islands or to tramp-steamers anchored just inside the Breakwater, which could be clearly seen from the shore. Maurice told him that some bum-boats provided a "floating-brothel", shipping has-been whores from Desker Road and Johore Road, the two well-patronised red-light districts, to ships anchored just outside the "Mole".

Or they would amble along the coastal Nichol Highway that led all the way to the Merdeka Bridge spanning the Kallang River, both of which were still being constructed, to visit the ships of the Bugis seamen-cum-traders who had anchored their craft alongside the sea-front that ran parallel to the coastal Nichol Highway. Speaking with the Bugis sailors in their bazaar-Malay the boys had learned that the hardy seamen regularly sailed their tiny cockleshell craft all the way from Riau or Sulawesi, (Celebes), to ship their clay water-jars made in their respective islands to Singapore for barter with their kinsmen living in Kampong Bugis, not far from the Kallang River-mouth. The Bugis told them that depending on the wind and current they would either "hit" Singapore or Trengganu but it didn't matter because they had kinsmen in both territories with whom they could do business. Thomas noticed that among the visitors to the Bugis vessels were effeminate-looking countrymen from the Bugis kampong off the Kallang River-mouth, who would fuss and scold the seamen to eat and-or wash, and to whom the fierce-looking seamen paid deference to. These effeminate-looking men reminded him of several similar-behaving men living in a large rambling house on Bencoolen Street, except that those in Bencoolen Street were Eurasian, though they were tanned enough to pass off as Bugis themselves.

Coming into contact with Maurice Dupon caused Siddon to "agonise" over his lack of education or any encouragement from his mother, Luci, for his wanting to improve his prospects in life. She had always insisted that passing "standard seven" was sufficient to get a job and that he should not think too highly of himself. But, to him, this meant that he had to be content to live at the level his mother thought he should be satisfied with, and not aim any higher. But he wasn't satisfied with that. He knew he could strive for better, and would set out to do so, despite what she said. To him her ideas about education were unrealistic. What had been acceptable in her day and

during the colonial era, which was fast drawing to a close, just did not apply in the new Singapore. The world too had changed and even the up-and-coming politicians in the colony seemed to be lawyers and doctors.

He knew that his mother could easily afford a better home for them but somehow preferred their cramped, miserable quarters above the Chinese shophouse. Whenever he was moved to protest, her frequent rationalisation was that she liked the idea of having people moving about in a house, outside her door. It gave her a feeling of comfort, she said. She was nervous living by herself in a house too big for the two of them she often told him.

Years later in his manhood he would come across a university paper, a thesis on the Portuguese-Eurasians of Malacca who had come down to work and settle in Singapore from Malacca, in which it was stated that "...squatter-type living conditions were not novel to the majority, (of Malacca-Portuguese), ... for several generations... and (they) ... seemed to prefer living in conditions of poverty as it was synonymous with piety..." It made him understand what to him was his mother's weird, uncomfortable and unhygienic choice of life-style but he totally rejected it for himself and his children. It was anathema because first it was unhealthy, and, secondly, he had been raised as English by his own father, from birth, and at Melrose when a child, and growing up in fast-changing, "modern" Singapore after World War Two, in a Chinese-dominated society, he had acquired a new code of values than those held sacred by his mother. Thomas would set out to improve his lot rather than docilely accept what life just handed him.

His mother's surname was Dutch but sometimes he was confused whether her European "roots" were from the southern Iberian peninsula instead. Because she had Malacca-Portuguese values. She had taught him about "Natal", the Portuguese word for "Christmas", "Senor Morto", (the "dead lord" in Portuguese), and insisted that he attend the annual Good Friday procession at the Portuguese Mission St Joseph's Church every year, and even told him about the "Festa San Pedro", (Feast of St Peter), the most important feast-day of the fisher-community of the Malacca-Portuguese. She had fired his imagination with the story of the "Iramos de Igreja", (the Brotherhood of the Church), an underground lay Roman Catholic sect founded by Dominican friars who had played an important role keeping the Catholic faith alive during Dutch persecution of Portuguese-descent Catholics in Malacca during its Dutch period of colonisation. She had told him that most of the **Malay World** had been colonised by the Spanish and Portuguese, and that in Indonesia and the Philippines there were vast majorities of Catholics.

What she did not tell him, maybe because she never knew, was that the

"converted" forebears of these Catholics had only become Catholics because converted Christians were given free rice-grain from the vast supplies under Spanish and Portuguese control during their respective colonial eras. And that these 'natives' had become converts rather than starve because the coloniser had the monopoly of the rice harvests. And these Christians became known in history as "rice-Christians".

But he had also been amazed to learn from her that many of the words which he took for granted in the Malay language were Portuguese in origin. And that the Portuguese had also introduced some of the well-known local dishes like "dosa de ovos", (Malay: "serai-kaya" or egg-jam), "chin-cha-lo", (Malay: fermented shrimp paste), "blachan" (Malay: preserved shrimp paste), and popularised the use of papaya-leaves as a tenderiser or preservative. That some five hundred Portuguese words, such as "escola", (Malay: *sekolah* - school), "merinho", (Malay: *merinyu* - inspector), "mesa", (Malay: *meja* - table), "roda", (Malay: *roda* - wheel), "misti", (Malay: *mesti* - must), "grafo", (Malay: *garpu* - fork), "manteiga", (Malay: *mentaga* - butter), "nona", (Malay: *nonya* - woman), "cuijo", (Malay: *keju* - cheese), "careta", (Malay: *kereta* - car), "bandeira", (Malay: *bendera* - flag), "janela", (Malay: *jendela* - window), "igreja", (Malay: *kreja* - church), "festa", (Malay: *pesta* - festival), "peon", (Malay: *peon* - officeboy), and so on, had been assimilated into the Malay language. That even the original mixed-bloods of pure Portuguese and Dutch fathers in Malacca had either Malay or Javanese mothers of mainly royal lineage, and everyone prayed in Malay to their new god, Jesus, in their new faith.

Luci Mansvelt had also told her son that the Portuguese were the only White race in South-east and East Asia with an official policy of inter-marriage between Portuguese men and women with non-Whites, and that the offspring from such unions, so long as they were baptised Roman Catholics, were officially regarded as full-blooded Portuguese. And that was why the descendants of the Portuguese in Malacca still refer to themselves as Malacca-Portuguese because it was an historical 'right' handed down to them from the Portuguese king, Manoel, when he sent out his nation to colonise and convert the world to Christianity.

From her he learned that the British Governor, Robert Farquhar in 1807 had deliberately set out to demolish the Portuguese-built Malacca "A Formosa" fort in Bandar Hilir but, somehow, the "Malacca Gate" could not be obliterated. The British had intended to completely wipe out all traces of the previous European power, (the Portuguese), who were their hated enemy in those days, from the memory of the Malay, Chinese and Indian inhabitants of their new colony of Malacca, while leaving some of the

buildings built by the Dutch still standing because the Dutch were 'allied' to the British through their Prince of Orange who had sought refuge in England from enemies in Holland. But the living descendants of the Portuguese in Malacca had survived to the present time, and the Dutch and British mixed-races of Malacca who had 'evolved' through inter-marriage during the respective eras of Dutch and British colonisation of the Malay sea-town, had even married with the Malacca-Portuguese to perpetuate a distinct Malacca-Portuguese culture that is still alive to the present day, she told him.

The British, she said, had also destroyed the graves of Singapore's Malay sultans buried on Fort Canning Hill, (formerly known as *Bukit Larangan* — "Forbidden Hill" in Malay), to show that British power was greater than the Malay sultans who had forbidden their subjects to ascend the hill except to bury a dead ruler. The British then developed their own fort and Christian cemetery on the hill instead, to wipe out the historical and cultural Malay "hold" on Singapore. (Since Singapore's independence from Britain the Lee Kuan Yew Government has exhumed all the British graves on Fort Canning and converted the cemetery into a park). The British had also obliterated Singapore's Malay past with its developed culture, and a historical Malay city from the Mejapahit era on the island which had been there since before the fourteenth century. Thomas' mother had also told him. Farquhar had even given instructions for an ancient monument inscribed with an unknown script, that had lain at the mouth of the Singapore River at the time of Raffles' coming, to be blown to smithereens.

Stimulated by her many stories yet having spent his childhood as a White, he felt confused where his loyalties lay. He was English in his heart but couldn't forget the lore of his mother's culture. But he had an Asian ancestry of sorts, even though his "Asian side" was a mixed one. And he couldn't rightly say that on his mother's side he was of pure-Malay stock because his mother's side, for generations had been a mixed one, and his "Malayness" had been watered down by over four hundred years of Dutch-Portuguese Eurasian intermarriage in Malacca as well as by marriage with other Europeans and mixed-breeds from the surrounding region who had come to Malacca to seek Malacca-Portuguese brides who had some semblance of "White ways", as well as marriage with the Malacca-Babas and the Malacca-Chittys. He was a hodgepodge! Yet in his heart he had "Malay" in him because he could speak the language without having had to learn it, he enjoyed the curries and chillies of his mother's mixed community whose cooking ingredients were Malay, and his "reserve" was Malay. His western brashness only came out when he was angered, or could that have been the *amok* of his Malay ancestry?

His life seemed to be stuck in a rut. He wanted to accomplish things on his own. Be a sailor, travel the world, finish his education. He thought that if he went to London he wouldn't feel the false sense of pride his mother was forever accusing him of having, and obtain the necessary "charity" from the British government to help him complete his studies. Because the British had welfare for their people and he could get it. He had tried Singapore's colonial government's Social Welfare Department but they had turned him down because his case wasn't "needy" enough and they only gave out money to families who needed food. He had even registered for a seaman's card because he was told sailors had to be registered first, and went on board ships lying alongside the wharfs and spoke to the captains who turned him down.

Disheartened by his many unsuccessful attempts at lifting himself out of his 'environment', the one bright spot in his life was the evening meetings with Maurice Dupon. Their "creative binges" had developed into relishing over romantic boyish plans. Despite their camaraderie Thomas still kept certain personal thoughts to himself. He had never told the other of his visits to the Social Welfare Department, the Labour Department to find work or to the ships in the harbour. That he "agonised" about many things. The existence of god. The helplessness of being born half-caste in an Asian society that frowned down upon the watering-down of "race". He had read with trauma, a story in a weekly newsmagazine that in Korea after the 1950 to 1953 war, some half-breed American-Korean children had either been strangled at birth or the males castrated to prevent further begetting of still more mixed-blood offspring. That many pure Koreans had advocated the total destruction of all half-castes in their land to prevent the furtherance of even more 'miscegenation' among their race. Such information was disturbing to Sidon. He hoped that it would never become common knowledge on his island. Otherwise some stupid "bright-spark" might think it a good idea for Singapore as well.

Didn't those who advocated the continuance of "pure races" realise that through nature the "links" between races were valuable? That they made a unity of creation? As in nature there is diversity, then an ethnic "unity" made life an on-going phenomenon. Surely when two "pure" varieties in nature united to produce a new "kind" that offspring had as many desirable qualities than its own parents, and wouldn't two different ethnic forms together bring forth a child that had "more"? And wouldn't that "new" human being be "important" in its own right?

He thought about his future when Britain eventually turned the island over to the those who were then clamouring for an independent 'say' in their



own affairs. When that came about would he feel that he "belonged" or would he be made to feel an "outsider"? Would the other races, especially the Chinese since they were the majority, dare to discriminate against people like him? He thought about his dead father who had been "responsible" for his birth on the island, and looked forward in impatient anticipation to the long-awaited reply to his letter written to his grand-aunt in England after "uncle" Wily had given him her address when he had lived with him for some time, not so very long ago.

As if in answer to his thoughts the long overdue letter from his Aunt Bertha finally came! (And was he glad that he had had the good sense to have given his Bencoolen Street address instead of "uncle" Wily's). It was a lengthy document and Thomas was grateful that his English relative had taken the trouble to write him such a detailed missive. In it she explained that his letter to her had been delayed because she had moved from the address given him by "Uncle" Wily and the postmaster had had to re-direct it to her new address. She was unsure which of her brothers was his father, (Thomas would reply to try to explain but he was never sure whether she was ever clear that it was Cecil, her youngest sibling, because he realised that she was getting on in years and that time would have made her confused). But in her letter she did tell him something of the family-history on his English-side. He learned that his paternal great grandfather, John Siddon, was born in 1810 and came from Tynemouth, a suburb of Newcastle in Northumberland, and that his paternal great grandmother was from Devonport, Stowe and that her name was Hannah Poobey. She was a descendant of French Huguenots who had come from France to England as refugees against Catholic persecution. John, his great grandfather had run away from home at the age of fifteen, lied about his age and managed to join the Royal British Artillery. As a bombardier he had been stationed in Port Royal Jamaica, in the West Indies, (where, in 1835 he had first married a widow who had subsequently died), had eventually been promoted to sergeant, then stationed in the British Colony of Gibraltar before returning to England and being stationed at Devonport where he had met and married Hannah Poobey, Thomas' paternal great grandmother. Due to severe Rheumatism attacks as a result of his army service, which almost left him crippled, he was admitted into the Chelsea Hospital in London for veterans and became a "Chelsea Pensioner". On being discharged from the Royal British Artillery, due to the acute Rheumatism, John obtained appointment as a Harbour Agent for the port of Tynemouth where he eventually grew wealthy and ended his days as a ship-owner. His great grandfather had several children, one of whom was his direct ancestor George, who was the

father of his own father, Cecil. When John died George, who then had been a boy of twelve, was raised by his eldest sister, Emma-Jane, who was married to a Church of England pastor named John Addison. She sent George to school and maritime training until he had qualified as a master mariner. Captain George Siddon first arrived in Singapore around 1890 to take up a job as a ship's captain for a Chinese shipping company here because he had been fed-up not being appointed a captain by his former Scottish shipping company as there had been no vacancies. He had married a beautiful Dutch girl named Edith Idenburg from Batavia in the Dutch East Indies, brought her to live in Singapore, and raised a family. When George died, his elder sister Emma-Jane, who he had sent for from England because she had been widowed, took over control of his properties and was "cruel" to her nephews and nieces by her brother George, and as they grew up they had all left the family home because they could not stand her. Thomas' Aunt Bertha wrote in her letter to him. Emma-Jane, according to his aunt, had also started a girls' school on Mount Sophia but after she had died, a set of cousins, a young man and woman, had arrived in Singapore to take over the property of George Siddon, his aunt had heard. She said she had not been able to do anything about it at the time, because she had already returned to England. Her Dutch mother, Edith, Thomas' grandmother, who had remarried after her husband had died, passed away in Singapore in 1934.

The letter from his English relative for Thomas was like a catharsis. He wasn't a "ten-blood", a chap-cheng who did not know whose his ancestors were, as the Chinese were wont to accuse his kind of being. He had "real" ancestors whose lives were documented and their records could be traced. That was more than a lot of Chinese, Indians and Malays could ever hope to do. Because before these Asians had first come into contact with the White man they had not known how to keep and maintain proper records of births, deaths and marriages like the Whites. From the moment he received his aunt's letter Thomas no longer felt insecure about his "roots". He decided though to keep the knowledge to himself, as it was no one else's business except his.

He continued his evening meetings with Maurice Dupon though he didn't breathe a word about the letter from England. The feasibility of his becoming a deep-sea diver came up during one of their evening tete-a-tetes and the two young men got caught up planning for an imaginary pearl-hunting expedition. Suddenly the older one glanced at his younger friend and realised that he was serious. Thomas was really intent about going to New Guinea, cutting forests, tilling the land and striking out on his own. Dupon couldn't fathom what made the other think the way he did but he

knew Thomas was already thinking of making it to the big island off Australia. Surprising even himself, Dupon heard himself suggest that he accompany Thomas on whatever 'expedition' he was planning. The Ceylonese said he would resign his job in radio and join his friend on his "New Guinea expedition", the money to underwrite their trip coming from his last pay-cheque, plus payment he'd received from publishing several short stories in overseas magazines. It would be their "grub-stake". But they should "practice" first, nearer home, until they were ready to take on the "New Guinea jaunt". Dupon had done some coral-diving with an Englishman called Johnnie Johnson who sold decorated pieces of 'stuff' to Europeans at a booth in the Cold Storage in Orchard Road. They could do the same thing. Maurice had friends opening up a radio-repair shop in the newly-developed Serangoon Gardens Estate off Yio Chu Kang Road. There was a large community of British Army families coming to live there soon and they could be the boys' prospective customers. Dupon was referring to the intending stationing of British servicemen and their families in Singapore. It was a new concept for the Far East. Locals, mainly Chinese, had already begun to develop private housing estates to accommodate them. There was one more coming up at Frankel Estate in Siglap and another at Chip Bee off Holland Village. Foreigners, Maurice said, went in for acquiring coral because they were considered exotic. Both young men agreed to undertake practice coral-dives off the reefs that meandered through the continental submarine shelf of the islands fringing the Riau Archipelago which were within Singapore territorial waters. Thomas beamed. At last he was doing something about his life instead of waiting for "luck" to change it. He would "make" his own fortune because his destiny was in his own hands, not in fate's.

When he informed his mother that he was going to stay with friends for a few days, because he was fearful that she would object to his intended 'jaunt', she chose the opportunity to tell him flatly that it was time he fended for himself. He need not bother to return after his stay with his friends, except to visit. He was old enough. He was sixteen. Slightly dazed by her sudden decision he could only gaze at her speechlessly. His mother was relinquishing her responsibilities as a parent because she wanted to be "single" without any "hindrance", so that any prospective boyfriend wouldn't be put off by her having a grown-up live-in son. Releasing his pent-up breath in a rush he told her he would stay for a few more days before leaving her garret-like room for good. Thomas had no regrets.

As pre-arranged with Dupon when they had both agreed to go on the skin-diving jaunt together, in early October he turned up at the Telok Ayer

Basin, the mooring-place for the Chinese tongkangs, (barges), and lighters in the harbour. His haversack was full because it contained all his personal possessions that he had taken away from his mother's room. Because he was no longer a member of her family at her insistence. Arriving at the passenger-terminal he was surprised to meet his old pal, Gilbert Wilson, who had first introduced him to Dupon, standing there with him. The Ceylonese said Gilbert would be accompanying them. Since Dupon was bearing the cost of their trip, Siddon remained silent though he was surprised that the 'newcomer' to their party was with them as Maurice had said nothing all the time that they had been planning their excursion. The Ceylonese had already finalised the arrangements with a Chinese barge-man to convey them to *Pulau Sudong*, an island to the south of the Singapore Straits, for twenty dollars, and the excited trio clambered aboard the barge.

Two hours steady chugging from Singapore and the island loomed ahead. Just a mile-and-a-half from Indonesian waters. Maurice told the two boys that *Pulau Batam*, an island in the Riau-Lingga Archipelago, was due east from the island that they were heading for. Again Thomas recalled his childhood conversations with Buang at Melrose, and the Malay boy's tales of the **Malay World**. In a bygone era Singapore and Batam had been the dreaded outposts of the *Orang Laut* and *Bugis* 'pirates' from the Old Johor Sultanate located then on the Riau-Lingga chain of islands, who had wrecked havoc on ships passing through the straits between Batam and Singapore, to and from the Straits of Malacca. The two islands, in fact, had a strong "historical-connection". But he kept his thoughts to himself as he wasn't sure the other two would be interested.

Both Gilbert and Thomas became aware of the uneasy behaviour of the tongkang, (barge), man at the tiller, as they approached the island. His head had been fixed at an awkward angle toward the open sea instead of where they were headed, his eyes raking the horizon back and forth. The two boys followed the direction of his gaze, due south, and spied a powerful-looking cruiser just on the edge of their vision. They hadn't noticed it until they had become aware of the peculiar actions of their barge-man. Maurice had in fact seen the Indonesian gun-boat the same time as the Chinese tongkang-man, but had chosen to remain silent so as to prevent his two young inexperienced friends making any untoward sound that could inadvertently attract the unwanted attention the gun-boat's crew. The Singapore newspapers in those days were full of stories of the unwarranted incursions into Singapore territorial-waters by the Indonesians who preyed on the outlying islands of Singapore and Malaya. The two youngsters in the barge

lapped-up the tales that Dupon, now that he could see that his two friends were already aware of the Indonesian vessel, spun out for them, of Indonesian gun-boats raiding the outlying islands to loot and rape before making for the "safety" of their own waters because the British-controlled territories of Singapore and Malaya weren't eager to create an "international incident" by going in 'hot pursuit' after the raiders. In the meantime the boys' barge headed toward their destination without further ado.

As their barge glided into the shallow waters off *Pulau Sudong's* coast, Maurice took over, guiding the barge-man and bidding his friends remain in the vessel while he waded ashore to 'negotiate' the *pengulu's*, (Malay: "village chief's), permission for them to land. He sought out the chieftain, who was a large, jovial-looking man standing in a group of Malay-islanders gathered on the sand watching their approach. After speaking with the man for a while, Maurice turned and signalled Thomas and Gilbert to get the barge-man to bring his boat as close to the shore as his vessel would permit, then the three boys began hauling their paraphernalia ashore. Later, when they were camped out on the beach, after the tongkang had departed, Dupon told his two companions that no island-chief of any island within Singapore waters could refuse permission for any local to land on 'his' island but obtaining the 'permission' of the chieftain was a matter of courtesy and ensured better co-operation from the islanders by the affording of their chief some "face".

The island-chief had allotted them a camp-site away from the village, close to the community-well which was used by all for morning ablutions and the washing of clothes. The *pengulu* told the young men that their spot was close to a *kramat*, (a Malay shrine), and the island-children would keep away from their tent because of their fear of the *gin*, (Malay: "spirit"), inhabiting the shrine. Their equipment, the chief said, would also be safe during their diving excursions. Thomas thought the man considerate.

Early on the following morning after their arrival, Maurice and Thomas awoke to a "pleasant" surprise. Lolling on their ground-sheets under the tent, still drowsy and loathe to stir, despite the bustling calls of birds outside, an excited babble of female voices wafted in from the direction of the communal-well, whetting their curiosity. Wide-awake now, both young men peeked out from under the bottom of their canvas-tent and their amazed eyes spied nubile Malay damsels, around fourteen to eighteen years old, laughing and joking with one another as they drew up ice-cold water from the nearby communal-well with the aid of a bucket attached to a rope, and flung it over themselves and one another other, squealing with the shock of the tingling water hitting their bodies which were draped with sarongs from

their breasts downward, and which clung tightly to their forms, delightfully revealing their charms. The boys' eyes bulged when the young women swiftly stripped their "protective apparel" down to their waists as they cleansed their upper torsos. As the unsuspecting maidens horsed-around among themselves, the hidden twosome in the tent began studying and comparing their forms until the girls had completed their baths and departed. Immediately after it was the turn of the older, married women of the island, and the boys, disinterested in watching sagging, pendulous breasts, turned back to their tent, grinning at each other in glee. They discovered Gilbert Wilson on his knees praying. The fellow had apparently awakened, discovered what his two tent-mates had been up to and took it upon himself to pray to god for their "forgiveness". Maurice, with a look of guilt, quickly joined his worshipping companion on the ground with clasped hands. Thomas thought them both hypocrites as he disgustedly left the tent after the older women had completed their respective toilets and departed the area. He later privately spoke his mind about Wilson's "behaviour" that morning to Dupon. He was intrigued when Maurice strongly defended the other, saying that their friend had been dismayed by both their "sinful ways" that morning.

The boys spent the next ten days making forays down the coral-reef of the island at low tide when it was possible to "trek" through the shallows from the beach to almost the edge of the reef itself. The Malay islanders showed them how to "clean" their still-fresh, beautiful specimens by helping them dig deep holes in the sandy beach, just where the surging waves broke over the sand, and placing their damp pieces in them, packing them tight with sand. The surging water, the islanders explained, would loosen the rotting mollusc-flesh off the brittle coral, leaving them white. Day by day their collection grew and the boys were forced to dig yet more holes. They finally agreed to wait another forty-eight hours to allow sufficient time for the coral to be thoroughly cleansed, when they would return to Singapore.

The remaining forty-eight hours were spent either chatting with the island's young fishermen after their return from the day's fishing and all their work was done or hanging around camp in idle chatter among themselves. They learned that the islanders' daily catch was purchased outright by Pulau Sudong's sole provision shop, the *kedai cina*, (Malay: "Chinese shop"), who bartered his shopwares for the fish from the fishermen, which he sold in Singapore. Maurice and Gilbert suddenly began sending Thomas on some, to him, frivolous errand into the village and each time, as he approached camp on his return, would spy the other two from afar in

earnest, animated conversation which ceased immediately he drew closer and they caught sight of him. Gradually it dawned on him that they preferred to be on their own and didn't want him hanging around them.

By evening of the second day it had become perfectly obvious that it was Gilbert who wanted him out of the way, and Thomas decided to have it out with Dupon as to the other's motives. The Ceylonese suggested that the two of them go for a walk, out of earshot of the "pious one", as Thomas had started to call him. After Maurice and Thomas had strolled the sandy beach for some minutes Maurice asked Siddon what he planned doing with his life. Irritated because the question seemed totally irrelevant, he indignantly replied that the subject had been settled before their island-jault. He restated their original plan about going to New Guinea, as he accused Wilson of swaying Dupon against the idea. With that realisation came the blow. It would change all his plans and hopes. He would be heading toward the "big island" off Australia alone because Dupon had had his mind changed for him! But Maurice was more discerning than Siddon had given him credit for. He looked at his impetuous young friend and decided that he had to come out and tell him the "truth" about all their dreams.

He gently told Thomas that he was going back to Singapore to look for a job. He had to support himself and not depend on his own mother. Both their plans for adventure in New Guinea was a young man's pipe-dream. They were youths and young men always had phantasies at one point in their lives. Hearing his friend put forth his opinion the way he did, Thomas, to his own surprise found himself agreeing with the other's logic. Going to New Guinea had always been a figment of his own imagination. Then he instantly re-called that he was homeless because his mother had told him to leave home and he had packed all that he needed in his haversack before he had set out on their "adventure" to Pulau Sudong. He would need to find a "roof" on return to Singapore, and look for employment himself now that their "expedition" was scrapped. He immediately sought and obtained the other's agreement to allow him to "crash" at his home in Changi until he found a place of his own.

Dupon said that there were some people wanting to meet him and it could mean a new job, maybe even one for Thomas. He next "revealed" to the by now upset Thomas (who hadn't let on that he was), that Gilbert was considering joining the priesthood. Accompanying them on their island-adventure had been a "last-thing" before he entered the seminary. Maurice extracted a promise from the hot-headed Thomas not to question Gilbert about his intending vocation because Wilson had told him that he didn't feel "close enough" to Siddon to tell him. He needed to tell his parents first

before anyone else. Telling Dupon had been "special" because they were "best friends". Thomas replied that he found Gilbert "selfish" because he hadn't "tipped" either of them of his intentions before the trip. Maurice looked at his upset young friend in surprise. Thomas had never spoken like that before.

The trio broke camp the following morning and Maurice arranged with an islander to take them back by the man's sampan, together with their cache of coral, for ten dollars. They landed at West Point, off the Pasir Panjang Road. A Dutch priest friend of Dupon and Wilson came to pick them up in his battered-looking car after Maurice phoned him. In the priest's tired-looking Austin going down the Tanjong Pagar Road into the city, Thomas felt irritation again when Gilbert announced his intention to become a priest to the Dutchman. He was annoyed because it had been "alright", as far as Gilbert was concerned, to make known his intention to become a priest in the priest's car, within Siddon's earshot, but it hadn't been okay when they had been on the island. The religious man's cautious rejoinder seemed to upset the eager-sounding Wilson, and Thomas felt pleasure. Serve him right for keeping him out of it, in the first place. The Dutch priest dropped off Dupon and Thomas at Dupon's home in Changi, together with the coral-collection, while Wilson accompanied the priest to his home in the city to break the glad tidings of his intention to join the priesthood to his family.

Immediately upon the other duo's departure Thomas brought up the topic of his "crashing" with Dupon again. He was visibly shocked to hear his friend say that it would be "okay" for him to sleep in his garden-shed, quickly explaining to Thomas that his family was conservative Ceylonese and very tradition-bound. His mother would never condone a strange male in her home because she had two grown-up daughters. She was a nurse at the large Kandang Kerbau Maternity Hospital off "Little India", and was away from home for hours when she was on duty. Thomas' heart fell even lower when he caught sight of the "sleeping quarters" his friend had in mind for him.

The garden-shed that would be his quarters was a leaky lean-to. He saw puddles of dirty water, gritty sand and dried caked mud on the filthy floor. Wind blew through holes in the shaky plank-walls. He was positive Maurice wouldn't have allowed his own pet-mongrel to kip in such a filthy hovel. To Siddon it was another indication of how he was actually regarded by the bloody bloke. But he gritted his teeth and thanked his "lucky stars" that he had a place to rest his head at night. He had made the decision to fend for himself and accepted that he had to take the rough with the smooth. He was used to tough conditions anyway. In Sime Road Internment Camp



during the world war and, much later after Melrose. He knew his life had to change for the better, somehow, and in the meantime being in Changi helped maintain his distance from his former gang at the "Happy Cafe" in the Capitol Flats Building. The gang wouldn't know where to look for him. Sleeping "rough" wasn't new anyway.

Seizing the opportunity to catch up with "developments" on the political scene since their recent island-trip, Thomas piled up all Dupon's back-issues of "the Straits Times" in the garden-shed and began a long "read". He read that on 16th October 1957 the Legislative Assembly had passed the Singapore Citizenship Bill which conferred citizenship on persons born in the Federation of Malaya, citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies, and citizens of the other Commonwealth countries which granted reciprocal rights; provided such persons had lived two years in Singapore and had taken an oath of loyalty to Singapore. The Act also enabled aliens who had lived in Singapore for the previous eight years to be registered as citizens after taking the oath of loyalty to Singapore. The latter provision was aimed primarily at nearly two hundred thousand Chinese immigrants, who had first come to Singapore as indentured servants holding China passports, originally from the last Ching emperor's time to the era of the Kuomintang, and who had been "trapped" on Singapore after China had first been seized by the Japanese during their invasion of China, just before and during the Second World War, and then after the war by the Chinese Communists who had driven the Kuomintang to Formosa, (Taiwan), and these 'alien' Chinese had been "stranded" on Singapore because they held "illegal" Chinese passports. These 'alien' Chinese, because they still had Kuomintang passports, could not and would not return to China. After the war they had been permitted by the British to remain on Singapore due to the "condition" in China, and these **Chinese nationals** preferred to regard themselves as Chinese nationals *despite their long period of residence in Singapore, (some having grown wealthy), having been married and raising families since before, during and after the Japanese Occupation of the island.* Lee Kuan Yew of the opposition People's Action Party objected to the enactment because, he said, the "loop-hole" caused *a lot of undesirables among the 'alien' Chinese to obtain citizenship without going through any pre-qualification test.*

About this time David Marshall, the former chief minister of Singapore, who had resigned his seat in the Legislative Assembly in April of 1957, announced his return to politics and the formation of a party he called "The Workers' Party. It was hoping to contest the municipal elections in December that year, and the general elections in August 1958. Thomas felt

that the man's proposed "political come-back" ineffective. His earlier resignation from the island's legislative body had been a grave error. By "relinquishing" his responsibility when he had resigned the first time he had *unleashed a new force which had always been dormant under the surface and which had never previous dared "reveal" itself. His earlier departure from the halls of power on the island had given life to a new factor which would grow and become the dominant power that would eventually turn Singapore into a "Sino society" legally.*

Thomas and Maurice Dupon spent the next two days cleaning and boiling their coral pieces in caustic soda, drying them in the sun to bleach them sparkling-white. Gilbert hadn't come by to help because, he said, he hadn't agreed to go coral-hunting with them, his was just a "last fling", and, anyway, he was too busy sharing the news of his "vocation" with cousins and family-friends. On the third morning of their return from Pulau Sudong, Dupon told his young "boarder" that they would be going to town that day as the coral was ready for distribution to selected outlets and he would be meeting someone who knew of several possible places. They travelled by bus to town and split at the "Catholic Centre", agreeing to meet again at five that afternoon at Gilbert Wilson's home in Penang Road. Maurice said that he was on his way to share in the celebrations of the Wilson family regarding their son's "vocation", before he and Thomas met again about the coral. He handed the other a dollar for his lunch and departed the canteen.

Siddon got to the Wilson's just at five and waited for Maurice to join him outside as he didn't know the family and wasn't too sure whether they would welcome his uninvited visit. He was somewhat crest-fallen that his friend hadn't been ready to come out when he got there because, from where he was he could see figures standing and talking in the front room of the house, and he was positive that they could see him just as clearly. But nevertheless, he perched himself on the culvert-stone just outside the Wilson's gate and waited for Dupon's appearance. Several minutes later Maurice came out and sat alongside him on the culvert, placing an arm over his shoulders. By that gesture Maurice seemed to indicate to Thomas that he could somehow sense the despair coursing through him and felt somewhat comforted. The Ceylonese told him that he was expecting two persons along at any moment who could, maybe, help both of them with jobs. Thomas turned to his friend in surprise. Dupon had not said a thing when they had set out that morning, nor when they had parted later at the "Catholic Centre", except that he was meeting someone about their coral collection. It seemed that Maurice was wont to keep things to himself. The older boy told him that the person he was meeting that evening was a "government person" and the other a foreigner passing through, as they were all wont to.

While waiting for the two strangers to turn up Thomas thought about the rather unfriendly attitude of the Wilsons. They must have known that he was waiting outside their home yet they hadn't invited him in. He would have thought that since he, Gilbert and Maurice were friends the Wilson family would have been more welcoming. Hadn't the three of them just returned from a coral-diving "expedition" together where their son had "revealed" that he was joining the priesthood?

He spied a light-blue open-top car hugging the kerb, crawl toward where he and Maurice were seated. There were two persons seated in the second-hand Morris Minor, a fair-complexioned Eurasian driving, and a glamorous-looking blonde with hair up to her shoulders. The vehicle stopped alongside them. Thomas recognised it as a much sought-after make in those days of popular British-made products. The woman in the front seat next to the driver smiled, her blue eyes seeking out which of them she was supposed to greet and be polite to. The fair-skinned Eurasian waved and beckoned to Maurice who sighed, slowly pushed himself off the culvert and ambled over to the duo in the vehicle. The young woman extended her hand in self-introduction and Thomas' ears pricked at the sound of her very-attractive American-drawl. Just like the voices in "the pictures". It reminded him of the accents he had heard in the American Club as a child at Melrose. The woman invited Maurice to join her in the car.

"I've got a friend, can he come along too," he inquired pleasantly.

The girl turned to the driver inquiringly, who nodded, and she stepped out of the vehicle, pulled back the front seat to allow the two young men into the vehicle. Thomas was surprised that a White would do such a thing for Asians. He was also pleased that she did not appear overly tall. She was just slightly shorter than him. Not like most of the European women in Singapore that he had seen — overly tall and manish-looking.

Maurice introduced everyone. The girl was Merle Jordon and the man Jeremy de Cunha. (Damn it Thomas thought to himself, Maurice had known their names all along and hadn't said what they were before the both of them had got into the car.) The car had, in the meanwhile moved and turned right into Tank Road, and left almost immediately into Orchard Road. They travelled for a bit then stopped outside the newly-opened "Mont d'Or Cafe" in the Ngee Ann Building. The cafe had been boasting in its advertising that it was introducing the new "westernised way" of catering to the island. Later, inside the place Merle Jordon spoke directly to Maurice Dupon, ignoring Thomas completely. The American girl said she was "passing through", (didn't all foreigners?), and had heard from "well-placed sources" in town that Dupon was a writer of promise. Thomas

immediately disliked what sounded to him like condescension, and wondered whether his friend had detected the same tone in her voice. He waited to see whether Dupon would explode. He had seen him do it several times before whenever anyone they both knew had been too patronising or officious-sounding during conversation. The two of them had always scoffed at so-called "intelligentsia", (the in-word of those days), who deemed that they were apt assessors of creativity, and that only a university education would bring it out. Believing totally in the idea of being born with talent, the two aspiring writers were firm believers in some people being born "gifted". They did accept that there were those who could be trained to "communicate" in the various fields of the arts but only the special "few" were born with the "gift". Surprised that his pal, Maurice, hadn't as yet taken Merle to task he put it down to his bidding his time until he knew what the woman's real motives were. His friend had indicated to him silently, with hand-signs in the car, when they were on the way to the cafe, that he thought Merle was the kind of "Ang-moh" (Chinese Hokkein slang: "red hair" meaning a White), woman who got her thrills having sex with "exotic Asians".

As if second-guessing their thoughts, and still speaking only to Maurice, the blonde stressed that her only motive in meeting up with him was to encourage his writing endeavours. Talented persons owed it to themselves and their own country to "speak up". Dupon could prove that Singapore wasn't a "cultural desert". Thomas Siddon felt the woman could have better spent her time helping the Blacks in her own country. She inquired what Dupon did for a living and Thomas was surprised to hear Maurice say that both of them were coral-divers who sold their "finds" to foreigners, (the word "tourist" had yet to be included in the Singapore-islander vocabulary). The woman's eyes widened in horror and Maurice, as was his wont, added his "usual" colourful embellishments to their job-description. Jordon firmly indicated that she would have none of it.

"A man with your genius should not put his talent in jeopardy," she burst out, eyes showing concern, "leave that kind of labour to persons like him!" she swept her hand in Thomas' direction. Her voice had been dismissive as her hand had indicated him, seated in a corner across the cafe-table from her. The young man thought her brash and crude. Here was someone whom he had just met for the first time and already she assumed what his character as well as his background, was. He recalled Maurice's comments several months back when he had told him that people judged him by the way he spoke and the things he did. Maurice had been mistaken. He hadn't yet opened his mouth and already the silly bitch was drawing her own conclusions. Probably because of how he looked and dressed.

Merle Jordon in the meantime had caught hold of Maurice's right hand and was gazing deep into his eyes. In an emotion-charged voice she begged him not to undertake any more perilous skin-diving expeditions. Thomas could clearly see that his friend was "rolling" because he kept up with his "selfless act" of bravery. He told the woman that he had to contribute to both his and Thomas' common good because he and Thomas were equal partners. He couldn't expect his "pal" to do the heavy, "dirty" work. They shared the "dangers" equally. Thomas thought him a bloody humbug. They had already given up diving because Maurice had wanted to return to his "career" in radio. God, he was pulling a fast one!

The girl, in desperation turned to Jeremy de Cunha and appealed for his support. The up-to-then-silent, forever smiling man tried dissuading Dupon, reasoning with him and pointing out the uselessness of their coral-diving venture. But he was no match for the Ceylonese. Almost screaming now the American girl demanded to know Dupon's share of the operation. His friend studied her face silently, sighed, then "grudgingly" revealed that it came to four thousand dollars a month as Thomas' heart leaped at his friend's figure taken out of the blue. They hadn't spent that amount, not even by half, on their inaugural trip. He mentally shrugged his shoulders. It was Dupon's look-out. Chickenfeed was the woman's response. She disparaged the whole operation. The whole "project" should be called off, it wasn't worth a cent. Thomas knew that Maurice's bluff hadn't worked. He'd played for peanuts and got back empty air. Merle Jordon had instinctively known that Dupon had been "pulling a fast one". Thomas studied de Cunha silently under his eyebrows. The man still smiled and sipped his coffee which they had all ordered. Thomas suddenly grew aware that the man and Merle drank their coffee black without sugar. Barmy.

The American girl next turned on him and demanded to know his occupation. So, she didn't believe that they were divers. It confirmed what he had already guessed, that she had "sussed" that Maurice hadn't been at all frank about what they both did for a living. Taken slightly aback by her sudden none too friendly and unexpected interest, he noticed that her brilliant-blue eyes were sharp like daggers. Aggravated, he cockily announced that he was a singer. She turned to Jeremy de Cunha and said that she had guessed it all along. Look at the way he dressed and combed his hair over his forehead. The man spoken to ignored her question and instead smiled disarmingly, which made Thomas think him docile. He, himself, had been startled by the young woman's remarks. He knew that his appearance was unkempt and that he looked shabby. But that was because he had left home on his mother's insistence and had to wash and wear his clothes

without ironing them. In no way could she have guessed that he was a singer. *She* was pulling a fast one now, picking on him after having "disposed" of his pal. Just what was wrong with the way he dressed? He was decently clothed as most boys of his age dressed in those days, even if the shirt and pants were unpressed. And, anyway, everyone copied their fashions from the films. He felt compelled to reply:

"How should I dress, like a kampong Malay in a sarong?" he tossed at her recklessly in his indignation as well as for Maurice's loss in the cat-and-mouse game his pal had just lost to her.

Maurice intervened saying that Thomas was interested to return to school to complete his secondary education. His sentence fell on deaf ears. The American girl instead began on Dupon again, trying to get his commitment to start writing again. But his friend was evasive. Deciding suddenly that she had spent sufficient time with them she declared that she would be spending the impending Christmas holidays "upcountry" in Malaya. She would be returning to the island in early January. She left her phone-number with Dupon and instructed him to call her in the first week of January, the following year. Before they all departed, Jeremy de Cunha arranged to meet the two boys at the "Catholic Centre" in Bras Basah Road on the following day to discuss about the coral. He seemed pleased that the "Centre" was still in existence. He said that he had been a habitue before he had gone to England, years ago. He told them that he would introduce them to several shops who might take their coral pieces on consignment.

Jeremy met them as arranged on the following morning and took them round to his contacts at Serangoon Gardens as well as in the city. By lunch they had succeeded in distributing a quarter of the total load from Pulau Sudong to his contacts who agreed to display the pieces for sale "on consignment". Thomas felt that their "coral business" was finally getting off the ground. De Cunha bought them lunch at the "Catholic Centre" and agreed to meet them at the "Centre" every day. Thomas was quietly thankful for the free meals from their new friend. Maurice didn't buy him meals regularly and he didn't expect him to, so he went hungry most times.

Not long after they began meeting Jeremy regularly the two young men realised that all the older man ever talked about was his many "sexploits" in London. They both thought it highly amusing at first. Thomas was even moved to comment that if it had been he who had shown such an "interest", he would have been labelled a sex-maniac. Dupon told him that de Cunha was a journalist. He appeared friendly and out-going and had the knack of putting people at their ease effortlessly but was apt at biting sarcasm whenever he grew annoyed. He claimed to have been a Communist in his

youth and when the British Colonial Government in Singapore had outlawed the Communist Party of Malaya, he had left Singapore with his wife, Joan, an Eurasian from Penang. The couple had hitch-hiked through Asia and Europe until they arrived at London. Jeremy told him, Dupon said, that he had realised the true "worth" of Communism when he was starving during his travels and could get no help from the Communists he had come across in those countries, and when he had arrived in England publicly renounced his support of Communist ideology in London's Hyde Park one Sunday, which was the day anyone in England could command a soap-box in the park and speak his mind. Dupon said that Jeremy had been allowed to return to Singapore by the British and claimed to be working for the Lim Yew Hock Government as a "propaganda expert".

During the times that the three new friends met regularly, Jeremy and Maurice talked at length on what, to Thomas were "taboo" topics, with him doing most of the listening, absorbing and checking what they discussed against his own feelings and inclination as far the subjects were concerned. Sometimes he would join in but most times he remained silent, unused as he was to openly deal with matters he had always thought no one ever brought out in the open. because he had never dared bring such things out in front of others, and because he also felt inadequate to "handle" such topics in conversation. But he had long questioned his own existence and his place on earth though he had never dared face up to the conclusion he had arrived at a long time ago. His world before he had left it to live like a tramp at Maurice's garden-shed in Changi had been the garret-like room in the Bencoolen Street shophouse and a mother who was staunchly Catholic, who would have damned him to hell-fire if he had ever deigned to speak up about his misgivings regarding religion to her.

But hearing his two companions openly discuss the "taboo" subjects caused him to accept that it was something that had "troubled" others before him, and that it could be talked about openly without any feelings of guilt or shame. He had never trusted "luck" or a heavenly providence that would change his circumstances, preferring to rely on himself. His "salvation" would come from within himself. He had to do it on his own and wasn't interested in making it to "heaven". Just satisfaction on earth. If he suffered while on earth and went to hell because of a "sin" what was the point of life anyway?

In the City Hall elections of 21 December 1957 the People's Action Party won thirteen out of the fourteen seats it contested. The entire 'house' of City Hall was fully elected for the first time in the island's history and by a new and enlarged electorate, including all adults irrespective of language

but with certain residential qualifications. This elections, which would also see for the first time an elected mayor, was the forerunner to the general elections, which was supposed to be some months away, and was viewed as a critical indicator of things to come. There were some 32 wards contested by five political parties and eleven Independents. The parties included the Liberal Socialists fielding 32 candidates, the Labour Front with 16, the People's Action Party with 14, the Workers' Party with 5, the United Malays National Organisation with 3, and 11 Independents. There had been lively public interest in the hustings during the pre-election campaigning, with large crowds following the various parties as they went a-polling but in the final count only 33 percent of Singapore-islanders actually voted. The PAP took 13 of the 14 seats it contested, the Liberal-Socialists only 7 out of the 32 they fielded, the Workers' Party 4 out of 5, the Labour Front 4 out of 16, and the UMNO 2 out of 3. Only 2 out of the former members of the colonial-era Council who stood for election were re-elected.

With its 13 seats, the PAP, though it had the the largest number of seats out of the 32-seat Council, did not enjoy a majority. But by allying itself with the UMNO, which had 2, the two parties commanded a total of 15 seats, giving them a minor voting position. In the PAP "camp" Ong Eng Guan had received the largest majority of votes, (3,108), in his Hong Lim Ward just outside "chinatown" proper, Miss Chan Choy Song had the highest percentage of votes in her ward, some 80 percent, and Ong Pang Boon, (who would marry Miss Chan Choy Song), was third highest. Ong Eng Guan, an accountant by profession, had graduated from Melbourne University, and was tri-lingual, being able to effectively speak Chinese, (both Hokkein of which he was a forceful speaker, and Mandarin), Malay and English. In Australia he had been President of the Melbourne University's Australian Overseas Club, and founder-President of the Asian Students' Federation of Melbourne. He was also reputed to have a multitude of wives.

At the inaugural meeting of the new City Council at 2.15 p.m. of 23rd December, two hundred spectators and PAP supporters gathered at the top of the steps of City Hall to greet Ong Eng Guan and his newly-elected PAP Councillors. When Ong and his colleagues, wearing open-neck shirts instead of the all-white Colonial "uniform" of the British civil servant, reached the top of the steps to the hall, the crowd that had gathered yelled a thunderous "Merdeka". The mayor-to-be responded with a clenched-fist salute which was followed by the lighting of fire-crackers by persons in the crowd. A police-officer demanded that the cracker-firing be stopped but not the slightest notice was taken by the crowd. Above the din Ong was



overheard saying that he had given permission for their use and instructed the police officers to desist in insisting that the crowd stop its cracker-firing. This ended in scuffles between the police and the PAP supporters, eighteen of whom, including Ong Eng Guan and three Councillors were arrested and taken by police-van to the Central Police Station. At the police station Ong refused to be freed until all his supporters who had been arrested with him were first released, which was complied with, adding further to the growing popularity of the newly-elected mayor.

Meanwhile at the City Hall, because of Ong's arrest and that some opposition members had departed, the meeting lapsed. J.T. Rea, the British outgoing President of the Council, who had been expecting to hand over the seals of office in a manner suiting the occasion, remained in his offices waiting for the appropriate time to hand over the implements of office, when Ong and his fellow-Councillors burst in on him and demanded that the meeting be re-convened.

But the Minister for Local Government, Mr Abdul Hamid, ordered a postponement of the meeting until Christmas Eve. Mr Rea announced the Minister's decision from the Chamber and departed with his officials amidst wild and unruly scenes. The inauguration of Ong Eng Guan on the following day was pure bedlam. Long before the Councillors had arrived the crowds had already jam-packed the public gallery, spilling over into the council Chamber. Rea, the outgoing president, with his Mace-bearer before him, took some 15 minutes to force an entry through the back-door. With the belated appearance of the Mace-bearer, followed closely by Rea, Councillors customarily rose to their feet but not the members of the People's Action Party who remained seated, waiting disdainfully for the Sheriff of the Supreme Court Tan Boon Teik, in robes and wig, to administer the oath of office to the new Mayor. Ong Eng Guan then took the President's chair to a tumultuous roar.

During the proceedings Rea invited the new mayor's attention to the Mace which he said should precede the Mayor as he left the Chamber at the close of all meetings. Ong instead took a snap vote and with only six Liberal Socialists abstaining, ordered the removal of the Mace which he referred to as 'a relic of colonialism'. Ong demanded that a loud-speaker be placed outside the City Hall so that he could address the waiting crowd. Speaking in Mandarin from the balcony of the Chamber to the crowd outside for ten minutes he interspersed his tirade with shouts of 'Merdeka' in unison with the throng outside. The British-controlled "The Straits Times" of the following morning had a field-day.

The words of the mayor fired Thomas' imagination, when he read about it, but he also felt a dismay that they were seemingly directed only at Ong Eng Guan's community, not to others such as he. He felt uninvited in the invitation to turn Singapore into a country for everyone born in it or who had sacrificed for it.

In early 1958 Maurice and Thomas were seated at their "usual" spot in the "Catholic Centre" canteen when the phone rang. The place was then empty except for the canteen-staff preparing the day's menu and Maurice, by habit, answered it. It was Merle Jordon. Afterwards Dupon told him that they were having Chinese "steam-boat" with the American girl at the rest-house on the Bedok-corner.

The dinner-meeting, the first since they had last met at the Mont d'Or in Orchard Road in the previous year, was especially enjoyable for the young Thomas Siddon as all the woman's attention was focussed on his pal. She grilled him about his creative writing endeavours since they had last met. Thomas knew that Dupon had done nothing and even though she had not asked him to do anything he was relieved that he wasn't in the woman's firing-line. He hadn't really wanted to come along but he had to eat, and it was a super meal. He enjoyed "dunking" the tempting morsels of sea-food to "cook" in the bubbling broth of the steam-boat for a few minutes before fishing them out with a wire-net "spoon" and popping the scalding-hot titbit into his mouth. He didn't relish returning to his friend's leaky garden-shed to sleep but knew he had no choice. Eventually he would have to follow Dupon home.

The next morning he decided to "have it out" with Maurice about his continued animal-like existence in the shed. He waited until they had arrived at the "Catholic Centre" before bringing it up. Maurice told him that his mother had already got to know that he was sleeping in their garden-shed for the past ten-odd days and had instructed him to get rid of Thomas as quickly as possible. Maurice said that he had been ignoring her since. Just then Jeremy de Cunha joined them. The look on his face told them that he had overheard their "discussion", which caused Maurice to bring the matter out in the open.

"Do you know what this foolish chap has done, he's left home" he announced to Jeremy.

"Oh? What ever for?" inquired the other.

The young Thomas stared at de Cunha, trying to assess de Cunha's reaction to Maurice's "slightly inaccurate" description of what he had actually done. His 'pal' hadn't said that he'd been living in his garden-shed since before Christmas in the previous year, in the cold and wet. Siddon heaved a sigh

and announced that he wanted to fend for himself. The older man gazed at him in silence for such a long time, that Thomas thought he was about to get a telling-off for doing such a stupid thing.

"Well," Jeremy finally announced, "if you're going live on your own, you might as well come live with us, I'm sure my wife won't mind."

Thomas' heart soared. His degrading time at Changi was finally over, he needn't continue living like a vagabond any more.

His moving-in was accomplished that afternoon after Jeremy phoned his wife, Joan, and obtained her agreement. Thomas thought her an extremely kind-hearted lady, even though he had yet to meet her. While Jeremy busied himself talking with his wife on the phone, Maurice swiftly demanded that Thomas never reveal to anyone that he had been living in his garden-shed all along since their return from their "skin-diving expedition" in the previous year. Thomas knew then that his friend had always realised that his treatment of him had been shamefully shabby.

He moved into a room de Cunha and his wife rented from an Indian widow who lived with her schoolgirl daughter a street away from their own home in Aida Street in Opera Estate, a new middle-class suburb in Siglap. Jeremy said he would see his mother to inform her that he would assume responsibility for him as his guardian, since he was still under-aged. Thomas wondered what all his new friends thought of his mother for relinquishing her duties as a parent, in the first place.

## An Adult At Nineteen

### Chapter Eight

Joan de Cunha, Jeremy's wife, really wasn't enamoured of the idea of Thomas Siddon coming to live with them or that she and her husband should become responsible for him. He had a mother who should have acted more responsibly by providing him a home and seeing to his education. She should have been more concerned about his welfare even though her boy was already in his late teens. And he was a total stranger, not even a relative to either her or Jerry. But she tolerated the young man's sudden appearance in her life because she had always supported her husband's will o' the wisp ideas, whatever they might turn out to be. This time it was in providing a home for the seemingly homeless Eurasian teenager who appeared 'lost' because his own mother had taken it upon herself to stop caring for him. Mrs de Cunha justly felt though, that the 'burden' should have been Merle Jordon's, and that the American woman could have taken a more active role in the young man's life rather than saddling them with him. It should be *she* who should really be responsible since she had become involved in his life in the first place, Joan thought.

Siddon, sensing Joan de Cunha's misgivings, co-operated by not getting in her hair. He always made sure to be at the couple's home, sharp at seven each weekday morning from his rented room arranged by Jeremy with the Indian widow, round the corner in Dafne Street, for the breakfast that Joan would prepare for everyone. After eating heartily with the couple, he would accompany them in Jeremy's battered Morris Minor to town. De Cunha always dropped off his wife near her office where she worked as secretary

to a criminal lawyer in the Bank of China Building, close to the mouth of the Singapore River, before he and Thomas drove over to the "Catholic Centre" in Bras Basah Road to eventually meet Maurice Dupon who would saunter in a little after nine since he had to travel all the way from far-off Changi by bus.

Coming to live with the modern young couple who had recently returned from London, brought back for Thomas memories of a long-gone era of happier times at Melrose when everyone he had come across in the English-run boarding home had been considerate and kind. Then, and at the de Cunhas, he was enveloped in a totally-different world to the one that had been his lot ever since leaving Melrose years ago when he had been twelve and had first been admitted into St Patrick's Boys' School, then later with "Uncle Willy" in Telok Kurau, and finally with his mother in Bencoolen Street. During those 'ugly' times after Melrose, he had only come across, as far as he could remember, depressingly-rude and crude individuals who seemed to forever seek the worse in others while inflicting as much anguish and discomfort on everyone they came in contact with in order to make them feel small and squashed. But with Joan and Jerry he again discovered that humans could be warm and tender-hearted and that home could be a lovely place to return to at the end of the day. It seemed that after Melrose and before he had met the de Cunhas, such an existence only happened in the fantasy-like dream-world of the cinema or in romantic books of fiction because he had forgotten what it was like to be a caring person. He had in fact, begun to believe that loving relationships could not exist in real life but with the couple he saw that it did. They were even warm and friendly with him and never disagreeable, though sometimes, Joan would shoot down some of what she considered were his more 'hare-brained' ideas, in her matter-of-fact way.

But despite the genuine affection he developed for her, Thomas never told Joan that her husband wasted the whole day with him and Maurice at the "Centre". It was painful for him to realise that it was she who kept the family going, both morally and fiscally, while her husband whiled away time and spent her money on him and Dupon. It just didn't seem fair. But he wasn't a "shit-stirrer", nor stupid, because Jerry had given him a home, regular meals and money to spend.

One afternoon at the "Centre" in early January 1958 Maurice, for no rhyme or reason suddenly announced to Jerry that Thomas wrote poetry. Surprised, the older man requested to see a sample of his 'work' and Thomas reluctantly proffered his small notebook of "scribblings". The two teenagers' friend, his popping eyes swiftly sweeping through each and

every line in the book, wore a look of unbelieving amazement on his face, though he said nary a word. After reading every single poem in Thomas' notebook he politely asked whether he could keep the book so that he could transcribe Thomas' poems on his typewriter for easier reading. Grudgingly the young man agreed. To him, at that moment, the handing over of his "secret" book of poems was akin to the pain he had experienced after he had convinced Merle to pay for a dentist to clean, scrape and plug his teeth which had never previously received dental attention.

In February, several weeks after going to live with the de Cunhas, at one of his and Maurice's meetings with Merle, the American girl, she suggested that Thomas could "profitably" spend his time helping out with the "donkey work" in her office rather than waste it needlessly at the "Catholic Centre". He could "earn his keep" doing the menial tasks in her project. The young man agreed because he felt that he had to make some gesture of appreciation for Merle and Jeremy coming into his life and "saving" him. As he didn't need to accompany Jerry and Joan into town any more, after breakfast, he would take the bus from their home into Katong, the suburb, just past the "Roxy Cinema" and walk to nearby Amber Road where the American girl's office was located, arriving there at nine. On his first day at Merle's office he was surprised to discover de Cunha beavering away at a typewriter. Jerry hadn't let on at breakfast in Aida Street in Opera Estate, that morning, that he would be at "Amber Road". If Thomas had known he would have hitched a ride and saved time and needless bus-fare. Later Merle explained that Jerry was writing the one book that he had to at least complete in his life. The young Siddon had heard so frequently that de Cunha was employed as a "researcher" in the ruling Labour Front Government in Singapore, he was somewhat surprised, and puzzled, how the other could have so much free time to work on a private thing during "office-hours". But he kept his thoughts to himself.

Merle's office was located in the annexe of a Jewish millionaire's palatial home, which was by the sea in Amber Road. She had become involved in a project to do research into how Islam came to Malaya. Thomas found out that she was apparently regarded as a "whiz-kid" of some sort because she was in her late twenties, which was considered as being quite young for the "preoccupation" she was in, though she was highly qualified and extremely intelligent. He found her too serious for his liking. The millionaire Elias was one of many wealthy or well-placed individuals who had voluntarily contributed time and money to help her "project" which they all regarded as "important and significant" to the region, to give the "newcomers" as well as the Malays, an understanding of themselves and

their society. (By "newcomers", Thomas was later to discover, her supporters were referring to the "recent" — after 1819 as well as after World War Two — Chinese and Indian immigrants who had come to the "south seas", including Singapore, because of White colonialism — and who had no inkling of the histories of Malay civilisation and the empires of the Malay World long before the arrival of the White man). The young Thomas really didn't have a clue what her research entailed but he did know that she took her work seriously and seemed frustrated and perturbed that the "responsible people" around her hadn't fully understood the import of what she was attempting. She was always harping about "phenomena" and "dichotomies", and seemed upset that the British had never undertaken research to understand the Malay societies in the region. He wryly thought that his mother could have told her a lot about the British policy of never being interested in the "good" or the accomplishments of other societies, especially those of subject-peoples, were his mother to relate to Merle her tales of British Malacca and Singapore and how the British had destroyed valuable historical buildings and other things of the past in both territories, that she had related to him as a teenager.

But he listened with flapping ears to the surprising, (to him), information about the society he had been born in, and the surrounding region which he had never known about before, that he picked up at Merle's. He started to gain an insight into the **Malay World** of which he was surprised to learn Singapore was a part of. He had never previously thought of the region and his island as being Malay nor of the historical and social aspects of Singapore history before the British. But with the "facts" available to him in the stories the others in Merle's office related among themselves when discussing their work, and from the books available in her office-library, he began to realise that Singapore *is* a Malay island. That it had been given away by a "king", crowned ruler because the British had thought it expedient to "recognise" the claim of one of two royal half-brothers for the throne of the *Riau-Lingga Empire of which Singapore was then a part*, in exchange for Singapore. It dawned on him that his own Asian heritage was *Malay*. That was why he could speak Malay even though it was a "bazaar-pidgen", he thought to himself.

He learned that with the Malay, his Islamic religion, customs and tradition dominated his life and how he regarded the world. That his very attitude could be summed up in one saying "...*Biar mati anak, jangan mati adat...*" ("Let my child die but not my customs"). That for centuries this proverb was the hallmark of Malay social life and that any Malay who dared go against the accepted customs and beliefs of his society was treated as an

outcast. It struck him that many local customs, beliefs and superstitions on his island, common to all the other non-Malay communities in Singapore, were in fact Malay in origin. He wondered whether the other Asian communities in Singapore were aware that several local "habits" were "borrowed" from the Malay whose country they had all come to settle in. But which was custom, which was religious ceremony? Surely not all Malays in the Malay World were Muslim? The Philippines was Roman Catholic and Indonesia had Hindus, Buddhists and Christians among her population, as well as Muslims. He refused to accept the then prevailing attitude that the Malay would be slow in accepting "progress", if its benefits were explained to him thoroughly.

Unknown to the American woman she had fed Thomas' brain with the kind of information he had instinctively been looking for all his life but hadn't known where nor what to look for — but he had realised, long ago, that 'something' was missing in his knowledge of his island and the surrounding region. Coming to know her had given him the opportunity to "understand", even though he had had no background of "understanding" before. His was an English upbringing as a child and a "hybrid" cultural collection of "habits" picked up since from the streets which was Sino. What was *his* "cultural tradition"? Surely not Malacca-Portuguese because his mother had been careful in preventing his "exposure" to her culture and customs. But he had a mind unmanacled by religious or cultural tradition, and he was curious, and would be mentally "free" to go in search of his quest without feelings of going against his culture because he hadn't any, Thomas thought to himself.

Jeremy de Cunha disappeared one day, saying only before he went away, that he was "returning to work". Several afternoons later he turned up at the Jewish man's, Elias' mansion, with Maurice Dupon in tow, just when everyone was about to sit down to the regular lunch the Jewish millionaire always provided for Merle and whomever she invited to join her. After the meal, with a flourish Jerry whipped out a sheaf of typewritten-sheets and handed them to Merle, who in the meantime kept demanding what he and Dupon were up to. Then she grew silent as she became absorbed in what she read in the sheets. Thomas, not in the know, studied Maurice and Jerry, and indicated with gestures that he too wanted to know what was going on. But both friends kept putting their respective fingers to their lips, indicating by their almost-comical facial expressions that 'something' was up.



Merle looked up from the sheets of papers she had been reading and stared directly at him.

"I never knew you wrote poetry, this is quite powerful and lucid. If I didn't know Jerry better I wouldn't have believed this was written by you," she commented matter-of-factly. The young Thomas Siddon immediately hated her for those words. She had no right to assume that just because he hadn't completed his secondary education he was stupid or incapable of expressing himself. *English was his tongue*. You don't need any kind of education to express yourself in your mother-tongue. And he had the "gift". What he was seeking from his new friends, Merle and Jerry, was constructive criticism, not platitudes. He wasn't a freak, to be marvelled at because he could write poetry despite his background and inadequate schooling. "Isn't there anything wrong with it, can anything be improved?" he demanded aggressively. It went unnoticed.

"No, I couldn't have put it better myself, you have a definite talent," the American girl stated flatly, looking him directly in the eye. He glared back, trying to see beyond her crystal-sharp blue eyes. Nothing. Maurice and Jerry then began their praises. Thomas looked at his three "best friends". How could he tell them that he didn't want compliments without their thinking him conceited? Frustration creeping into his brain. He wasn't used to friendship, and before this time he had never had a close friend before. Couldn't they understand that once it became known that he could write and think he would never be able to hide under a bushel of ignorance? That he was aware and didn't like having to acknowledge a conscience. Unable to give voice to his innermost feelings for fear of conveying the "wrong" image, he just broke down weeping. The trio before him now sat immobilized, frozen in surprise. Tough Thomas was crying. Jerry reached out to pat his head but Siddon ducked away. Maurice said nothing as he gazed up at the ceiling, lost in his own thoughts. Merle kept drawing on her forever-lit butt. Exasperated, Thomas sprang from his seat, stalked out of the house, through the grounds of the mansion and out to the main Amber Road. Away from that place. Others discovering that he could write hadn't been as exhilarating as he had expected it to be.

When he turned up the next day he found Maurice Dupon in a spare room of Merle's suite of office rooms, busily scribbling away. He was told that the Ceylonese was starting on *his* novel. It seemed that revelation of Thomas' poetry-writing ability had been the "spur" to finally get Dupon to begin on what the American girl jocularly referred to as "Maurice's great masterpiece". She had even left strict instructions that Maurice was not to be distracted by anyone. Thomas was overjoyed for his friend.

Exactly ten days after ensconcing himself in the "inner-sanctum" of Merle's "institute", Dupon came out with a sheaf of papers and announced that the first chapter of his novel was completed. In celebration everyone, Merle, Jeremy and Thomas met for high-tea at the Adelphi Hotel in Coleman Street, a colonial "hangout" of the British. The hotel-site was once the home of a bygone Singapore "pioneer" whom the street is named after. He is credited with being the architect of some of the former colonial structures on the island which had made Singapore Colony an unusual sight during the days of the British raj.

Inside the Adelphi Hotel the main tea-room had paintings of coral-reefs on the walls and Thomas thought it an apt setting. He and Maurice had once gone coral-diving together on Pulau Sudong in the hope of eking out a living selling coral specimens to foreigners. As everyone sat themselves down and ordered their tea and cake, the American girl's eyes bored through Maurice as she impatiently waited for him to hand over his manuscript. But Dupon bided his time until everyone was served with their respective refreshments, then he whipped out his manuscript and handed it to Thomas. "The first 'read' will go to Thomas, he and I have a lot invested in this, which you, Merle and Jerry, will never ever realise," he announced in quiet dignity.

As he spoke his hand gracefully indicated the other two with a sweep of his upturned palm. Mixed, ill-tempered emotions swiftly passed across the girl's features but the Ceylonese teenager ignored her. Jeremy, as usual, just smiled at everybody. Thomas accepted the stack of typewritten sheets, mindful of the air of irritated impatience reeking their part of the room. He felt triumphant, though not a little envious that his pal had been first, between them, to start on his book. Thomas knew he would write one day but first, he would have something to say, otherwise one would be "inarticulate" without good reason for putting pen to paper.

As he began reading Thomas recalled how he and Maurice had talked about making writing a vocation when they had first got to know one another. He also recalled that he had told his friend that he would only begin when there was "something" to say. Writing was a "gift" that was to be used to improve or inform. As he read his mind began racing through his own collection of words that he would chose that would best compliment his pal's work. And it wasn't because he just wanted to flatter his friend. Dupon wrote beautifully and Thomas enjoyed what he was reading and he wanted to convey in a nutshell exactly how much he enjoyed reading his friend's first chapter with all the sincerity of their friendship. Somehow he felt unqualified to pass "judgement" on Dupon's writing and hoped fervently

that Maurice wouldn't feel like he had at Amber Road, and breakdown. Looking up finally he pronounced that Maurice's writing was similar to Peter Cheney, his favourite detective author.

Thomas took in the disapproving glares from Merle and Jerry but ignored them. He was speaking only to his pal who knew exactly what he was conveying to him. Anyway, the day was too auspicious for the both of them to be affected by the 'ignorant' reaction of the two uncomprehending adults, who he and Maurice numbered among the so-called "intelligentsia", (the "in-word" of those days), of Singapore who thought that everything "creative" had to be assessed from an academic standard, and that only a university degree could "decide" and "allow" whether one was "creatively talented" or not. He handed over the manuscript to his pal who then gave it to the blonde and she immediately swooped on each page, devouring it ravenously before passing it to de Cunha. Both the adults were lavish in their praises.

"The greatest compliment today, that will spur me on, came from my buddy Thomas, I know he enjoys Peter Cheney, a successful western author, likening my work to him is praise indeed, thanks buddy," Maurice announced.

Not long after this Thomas gradually grew aware that Maurice was becoming antagonistic toward Merle and Jeremy. He was alarmed because despite feeling ill-disposed toward the forceful young woman at times, especially when she displayed what he called her *typical foreigner's attitude toward things local that she didn't appear to want to understand*, he had never regarded her with hostility. Merle and Jerry were the best things that had happened in his life, and he had Maurice to thank for that because it was he who had brought them into his life. And he wanted badly for his best and only pal to share the same warm feelings he had for them. He wished hard that whatever was wrong among his three friends would be resolved with the passing of time.

In the meantime, as tremendous things were being planned for Dupon by the "duo" of Merle and Jerry, unknown to Thomas they were also discussing his future. Both adults agreed that he had shown an ability to learn, the fact that he could write good poetry showed that he had a capacity to think logically and express himself clearly. One afternoon after lunch at the mansion the young American woman flatly put it to him that he should return to school since he was not quite eighteen and he could still go to university after completing his secondary education, if he were so inclined. Hardly believing his ears, the young man jumped at the suggestion. It had been a long awaited answer to a prayer he had been silently saying ever since meeting Merle and Jeremy.

To his amazement the American girl next suggested that he approach the parish priest whom he had told her about in the "Mont d'Or Cafe" in the Ngee Ann Building, when they had met for the first time in the previous year. With a start Thomas recalled that he had told Merle of his Basque priest friend, Father Caraquiri, who was the parish priest at the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd in Bras Basah Road, who had been his other 'friend' apart from Maurice before he had met Merle and Jeremy. In the past whenever he had passed the cathedral and Father Caraquiri happened to be walking in the church grounds, he would wave to Thomas and inquire after his health and whether he had eaten. Thomas had once told Merle that sometimes, in the past he had been without meals but, somehow where the priest was concerned he would never admit it because he knew the priest would have invited him in for a bite, and he was too embarrassed to receive "charity".

Merle's suggestion that he ask Father Caraquiri to help with his education simply floored him. Thomas said that he was unsure about seeking the church's help but the woman just brushed aside his misgivings and said it was only right for the parish to take an interest in his welfare since he was a baptised Roman Catholic. It seemed a strange suggestion to make. The church had never "touched" his life before and he had never regarded it in that light at all. You just didn't go up to a priest, even if he were your friend, and say it was the church's duty to educate a parishioner? It had never been done before in Thomas' memory and, as far as he was concerned one "gave" to the Church, not "take" from it!

To his utter delight and amazement, when Merle and Jerry inquired, Father Caraquiri was all for helping the teenager. He even told them of a school for overaged students in Muar in Johore State, Malaya. It was run by an Malacca-Portuguese Catholic priest called Father Cordeiro, and was known as the St Andrew's Continuation School. Father Caraquiri would write to inquire whether a place would be available for Thomas. A week later the Basque priest confirmed that one had been reserved for him. He could journey to Muar immediately to be in time for the first term and sit the examinations in March, since it was only mid-February then.

Merle, Joan, Jeremy, Maurice and Thomas set out in Jeremy's battered Morris Minor for the over hundred-mile trip up the Malay peninsula, on the Friday of the week that they had heard from Father Caraquiri. Before they set out for the riverine-town close to the state-border between Johore and Malacca, the party called on the priest to collect a letter of introduction to Father Cordeiro. As they began their journey toward Johore Bahru, Merle prised open Father Caraquiri's letter and found that it was written in French.

Since Jeremy knew a smattering of the language he attempted to translate what the Frenchman had written to the Eurasian priest in Muar. The Basque priest had described Thomas as a "bright spirit" who had never allowed "adversity" to get him down. So, Thomas thought to himself, Father Caraquiri had been more aware of him than he had ever let on.

Thomas found himself viewing his impending changeover from young "working" adult to schoolboy, with mixed feelings. He had not gone to see his mother to tell her that he was leaving Singapore to return to school in Malaya because he felt that since she had told him to leave her life, she didn't "deserve" to know of the "good fortune" in his life. By ten that morning they had crossed the causeway linking their island with the Malay peninsula and were in Johore Bahru. Thomas immediately recalled his childhood at Melrose when the home used to regularly visit the Johore main town on the southernmost tip of Malaya for Sunday picnics, visits to the Johore Zoo and swimming in the straits between Johore and Singapore, where the beaches on the Johore-side were covered in mangrove then. It was such a long time ago and a totally-different existence he thought, recalling the atmosphere of his childhood colonial-world.

Just after the causeway checkpoint, to verify that their party was not bringing anything 'unauthorized' into Malaya, they turned left from there and headed north along the coast-road flanking the Johore Straits on their left. Once they had gone past the similar-looking Chinese-type shophouses, (to that of Singapore), they came upon stately-looking and grand colonial-genre bungalows with wide-open lawns and high hedges. The houses kept getting grander and larger as they moved further away from the state capital. Then they were speeding on the narrow main "highway", built by the British, and heading inland. Thomas began to notice the dilapidated state of the houses of the small towns along the highway now. They passed through various villages and small "towns" sprouting in between rubber-estates and Nippa-palm plantations.

He overheard the adults, Jerry, Joan and Merle, discuss the "black-spots", which were known Communist-guerilla concentrations, and the "white areas" which had been "mopped-up" of Communist infiltration. He took note of the massive "curfew-gates" on opposite-ends of the towns and villages that they passed through. Jerry said they were shut every evening at six and weren't opened until light the following morning, and that during the curfew no one was allowed in or out of a village or town in that part of the Malay peninsula because it was classified as a "black spot", meaning that it had a high concentration of Communist terrorists hiding in the jungles close by. It was a measure by the British to keep the mainly Chinese

residents locked-up during nightfall to prevent them "co-operating" with the Communist bandits who were mainly Chinese. What a totally-different way of life from Singapore, thought Thomas. Were those living on his island, especially the Chinese, aware of the difference in life-styles?

Stopping every thirty miles or so, because Jerry's Morris Minor was too far gone to make the trip to Muar in one go, they would pull into petrol stations to top-up, sometimes getting out of the cramped vehicle to stretch their stiffened limbs, visit the bathroom or grab a drink from a roadside stall manned by a scruffy-looking Malay or Chinese. At a "town" comprised of roughly-made shacks, called Ayer Hitam, about mid-way between Johore Bahru and Malacca, they stopped for lunch in one of the "pit-stop" town's Chinese-owned "coffeeshops", made of lean-to, hastily put-up planks, whose structures looked almost as if they would topple over in the first strong gust of wind.

The wooden structures had been set up by enterprising Chinese, decades previously, to primarily cater for the hungry hordes who tumbled out of their respective modes of transport — bus, taxi or car — to satiate their appetites for food, slake a thirst for a drink, a visit to the lavatory or to catch another taxi or bus to another part of the peninsula. The place itself resembled a border-town, with its air of impermanence, because all the buildings contained enterprises which catered only for the "passing through" trade, there didn't appear to be any places of abode for those providing the various services. It seemed to Thomas that everyone who arrived at Ayer Hitam just headed for the nearest or "favourite" place to grab a bite and go to the toilet because the next stop would be miles away. He was surprised that Merle ate with them though she didn't take the chillies, which, like Singapore, were already cut-up and/or pounded and floating in vinegar, and placed in bottles on the dinning-tables for customers' convenience, and which was "free" for diners.

Thomas had been intrigued that everyone that they had come across on their way up the peninsula, spoke Malay, including the Chinese and Indians. Across the various communities. In comparison Singapore's population, although a majority spoke a "bazaar-Malay", (a pidgen), in Thomas' memory everyone would only use it to speak "across", from one non-Malay community to another, because one side could not speak the other's language, or when speaking with a Malay. He also noted that in all the small towns and villages that they passed through, all the houses seemed run-down, as if they were older than his island's. Though there were numerous trees, rubber and nippa plantations, the people appeared deeper-tanned than Singapore-islanders, and Thomas could why this was so. The Malayan sun

beat down mercilessly on everyone because in the villages and towns there didn't seem to be as much shade in the shophouses, unlike Singapore where the shophouses provided adequate cover from the tropic-sunlight for pedestrians. Everyone in Malaya it seemed went about on bicycles while the women covered their heads with large scarves that blocked the side of their faces, permitting them to see only from the front and not at the sides, which seemed dangerous because the women wouldn't be able to know of the approach of a heavy vehicle from behind on the narrow highways.

Thomas, Merle, Joan, Jerry and Maurice arrived in Muar around four in the afternoon and drove around the cramped, narrow streets of the riverine-town for thirty minutes looking for the St Andrew's hostel-site. No one that they spoke to seemed to know exactly what they were searching for and everyone in the car in exasperation decided to try and discover the school's location "by instinct". Finally after driving around some more they discovered it just outside the town proper. Through their questioning of the various townspeople that they met, during the time they were trying to seek the location of the hostel, Thomas had begun to realise that the townspeople marked the locations of "important" or "necessary" places by their proximity to the various canals or *parits*, (Malay), within the town.

Father Cordeiro, the school's founder, met them at the entrance to the hostel and school, and proudly conducted them through his establishment to show off how he had created the school "out of nothing but God's grace." Inwardly Thomas was appalled at the dilapidated condition of the hostel but remained silent, reminding himself that he had chosen to return to school to finish his education. He had to take the rough with the smooth. He caught sight of Merle's look of dismay and felt comforted. At last she had shown that she was shocked by the state of things in the place.

Finally it came time for his friends to depart for Singapore and Thomas couldn't stem the tears streaming down his cheeks. He leaned toward the car after everyone had clambered into Jerry's Morris Minor, sad that he was being left behind and anxious that the other hostel-boys, who were all standing around and staring at the Singapore-party, didn't see him weeping. But he caught sight of Merle sobbing profusely and felt comforted that she knew that he was being left in a dump. But Joan, Jerry and Maurice wore cherry, bright looks, which, to him, was disconcerting. He put it down to their being "Asian", not showing how they really felt inside. He fervently hoped that they too were sorry to be leaving him behind. Mentally he pulled himself up. His morose emotions were a weakness he couldn't afford to nurture. As the car sped off he quickly brushed away the wetness from his face and turned to the school with dry eyes. The assembly-bell rang and he

instinctively joined his fellow-hostellites for his evening shower. Oh god, he was in boarding school again! He prayed that it wouldn't turn out to be just like St Patrick's.

The following morning, after waking at six, dressing up, following everyone to mass in the church next door in the school-compound, and having breakfast, he reported to the Brother Director of the day-school. He was admitted into form four. The school was run by the De La Salle Order, similar to the schools he had attended as a boy in Singapore. He found it disconcerting when the school principal instructed him to return to his quarters to change his trousers for short pants. After two years of wearing regular "long-pants" like an adult, he was now expected to don "schoolboy clothes" again. He was aware, as soon as he got to his class, that he was a "novelty" to the teachers and his classmates because they all knew that he was from Singapore and that he had joined the institution for overaged pupils because he was, like them, too old to be in "regular" school. He grew tired of politely explaining to everyone what had made him decide to return to school. It was torture all over again to get used to afternoon study sessions after morning school and having to get permission of the head-boy of their hostel to go to the loo during those times. He decided to keep to himself and carried out his respective school routines like a robot. Daily he wrote Merle, Maurice and Jeremy. His one consolation, his poetry-writing, had become prolific. Merle sometimes replied. Maurice and Jerry never did.

But after a fortnight of this existence he finally came out of his shell to 'discover' the hostel and his day-school. The grounds lay by the Muar River from which the river-town took its name. In ancient times, he was told by his friendly hostel-mates, Muar was called "*Bandar Maharani*", reflecting her former Hindu 'connection'. They told him that it had also been the "royal town" of *Sultan Ali* in 1885 when Ali, the eldest son of *Sultan Hussein*, (the Malay prince originally "crowned" the Sultan of Singapore by Stamford Raffles in 1819), after his father, (*Hussein*), had died intestate and penniless in Malacca, with subtle British pressure, had agreed to acknowledge that *Temenggong Ibrahim*, the son of Singapore's chieftain, *Temenggong Daeng Abdul Rahman*, (*Sultan Hussein's* uncle), was the actual ruler of Johor (on the Malay peninsula), and that upon the demise of *Sultan Ali*, *Temenggong Ibrahim* and his descendants would "inherit" Johor. On reaching this accord *Sultan Ali* was recognised as the *Sultan of Johor* for as long as he lived, with a fixed pension, and that his "royal town" was Muar. Thomas also learned of "*Johor Lama*", the historical Malay sultanate that succeeded Malay-Malacca after her invasion and conquest by the Portuguese in 1511, which had come into existence on the Johor River on the Malay



peninsula, when the defeated *Sultan Mahmud Shah* first established a new site for his sultanate there and continued his battle with the colonising Portuguese. Finally because of consistent and prolonged Malacca-Malay attacks from the Sultanate of Johor, (*Johor Lama*), the enraged Portuguese attacked *Johor* and razed it to the ground. Siddon was told its original site was on the south-east coast of modern Johore State, not far from the well-known holiday spot of *Kota Tinggi*. He was told that over the centuries the *Johor Lama Sultanate* was moved to various towns within the *sultanate* which was still a large, active and thriving Malay maritime empire, and that the only difference was that its original base, Malacca, had been lost to the colonising Portuguese. Hearing that, Thomas Siddon decided that he would one day learn all he could about this aspect of Malay history, which he had never known about. Prior to his hostellite friends relating this aspect of Malay history to him, the only thing that he had known about Malacca was that it was his Malacca-Portuguese-Dutch-Malay mother's once-Malay home-town which had first been colonised by the Portuguese, then the Dutch, and finally the British.

The school and hostel, St Andrew's, was just outside the town-proper, near a *surau*, (a Malay-Muslim "prayer house"). There was a church in the hostel-grounds as well. Thomas was surprised to learn from the other boys that the river-bank was reclaimed "land" made entirely of sawdust packed-down hard and tight, and mixed with sand. Whenever he absentmindedly kicked the edges of the river-bank, close to the water's edge, the sides would crumble and fall away into the swift-flowing waters of the river. He was told that the hostel-site had been a saw-mill which had been abandoned, and Father Cordeiro had purchased it cheap to build "his" church, hostel and school in.

The schoolboy from Singapore whiled away many hours by the river-bank, looking at the smooth and fast-flowing water that meandered and sped past the hostel toward a cape that jutted into the Malacca Straits, about three miles away. Everyone called the cape by its generic Malay name: *tanjong*. Spending time-by the river-side helped ease the feelings of loneliness for Thomas. He missed the freedom of being able to do as he pleased and being treated like an adult, like when he was in Singapore. Here it was the "grind" of school and hostel discipline and being again told what to do on command of a silly whistle. His close friend became a Cantonese named Chan, who was an orphan and seemed just as alone as well. Every evening after study the two young men would sneak out of the grounds of the hostel for a secretive drink of cheap, local coffee and smokes at a clap-board lean-to stall on the main Muar-Pago trunk-road, just outside the

hostel but out-of-sight of the others in the hostel. It was their only "relief" from the boredom of hostel routine.

In early March Father Cordeiro was summoned to Rome for an audience with His Holiness the Pope to receive an honour for his years of dedication in providing education to needy students in Malaya. A Father Blurel, a Frenchman, took over at the St Andrew's Hostel. He was short, nervy and rode a powerful motorbike that seemed too massive for someone of his slight frame. The first thing Thomas noticed about the new priest was his aggressiveness. On his first day, upon taking up his duties, the new priest invited each boy of the hostel to throw him a punch, saying that he wanted to see whether they were strong enough. Each luckless lad who fell for his trap found his attempted blow at the Frenchman swiftly parried as his body sailed through the air from a judo-throw the priest had delivered on the unsuspecting, innocent boy, as he crashed in an undignified heap on the ground, stunned from the impact and feeling foolish because of the loud guffaw of the Frenchman. Thomas categorically turned down the priest's invitation, disliking him instinctively and sensing immediately that the feeling was being reciprocated. He felt that the Frenchman had an "inner madness".

But with the new priest in charge discipline became relaxed. After evening prayers everyday Father Blurel, cassock removed and dressed in civvies would ride toward town on his motorbike, leaving running of the St Andrew's Hostel to the "head-boy", an Indian rubber-tapper's son. The Frenchman would return around eleven each night, which was considered tardy in such a small town, roaring-drunk and singing bawdy French Army songs in French, at the top of his voice. He must have felt secure, Thomas thought, that no one spoke his language, because he really shouted out certain words but his tone and the gusto with which he stressed them told all.

But before Father Blurel clumped his way upstairs in his heavy boots to his own quarters on the first floor of the hostel, he would first barge into the hostel dormitory on the ground floor and yell to see whether any of the younger lads in the lower classes were still awake. It got so even they remained up studying until the "mad" priest had returned from his evening-carousings in the town before they went to bed. It was a topic of much speculation among the senior boys whether Father Blurel patronised the cozy "nooks" in the town's only amusement park. This park had a cinema, a ferris wheel and several game stalls offering games of chance. But its main "draw" were the lean-to shacks tucked away in a darkened corner of the park, away from families' eyes, where village-girls, both Chinese and

Malay, were only too pleased to serve customers beer and sit on their laps. For a tip of one dollar. Or something more for "other services".

A week after his arrival at the hostel Father Blurel summoned Thomas upstairs to his private quarters.

"What's this I hear you don't believe in religion, especially Christianity!" demanded the incredulous priest.

The young man knew he couldn't brush-off the man's indignation with a flip-reply. The Frenchman enraged easily and had already demonstrated his violent streak on the day he first arrived at St Andrew's. Thomas' mind harked back to his previous "discussion" with Father Cordeiro not long after his arrival in Muar. He had told the other priest then that he didn't practice his religion but Father Cordeiro had ordered him to follow the rules of the hostel and attend Mass and regular church services, or be dismissed. And he had chosen the former. Obviously he had wised-up his French substitute. Thomas chose his words carefully as he began his "explanation" for his conclusions.

"Father, since you ask I'll say what's been on my mind for as long as I can remember." Apprehensively Thomas looked at the priest, then drew a deep breath and carried on.

"We, as Roman Catholics make light of the religions of others, their various concepts of divinity and the many manifestations of 'god'. To me Christianity, especially Roman Catholicism, expects me to ignore my mind and reason, and accept that a 'one' god had a 'son' whom he 'sent' down to Earth as a 'sacrifice' to 'save' me, and now that he has died on a cross I am 'saved' but still I must repent and be ever watchful that I don't commit sin, because if I do I'll go straight to 'hell', which, to me, is barbaric and *my* God will not be barbaric," Thomas concluded, ending his sentence in almost one breath, pausing only to catch his wind, feeling fearful that the French priest would react angrily. But the man just waved him on impatiently. And the young man pressed on:

"I am told that there is 'one' god and that there are 'three persons' in that same god — how can that be so?"

"I think that the religion of the Jews appealed to the Romans of old — they wanted it for themselves but didn't want to appear to be "borrowing" a religion from a subject people, so they made the Jews the 'killers of Christ', produced a modified concept of the 'one' god, painted the face of Jesus Christ white to produce a Caucasian-looking 'god', and ignored the fact that Christ was a Jew, born in Palestine, Arabia, and therefore an Asian and coloured.

"To me there once was a man, known today by the Latin equivalent of his Jewish name, which really was Jacob, who was given the scornful Roman

label: 'King of the Jews' at his execution on the cross, which was the death-penalty in those times for major crimes committed in the ancient Roman Empire.

"He never was a god and that is why I do not believe in Christianity as a religion — as a philosophy or a guideline for our personal behaviours. Christianity is a wonderful concept but as a religion with Jesus Christ as its God Incarnate it is humbug! I also do not think a 'god' exists the way mankind has conceived him to be."

Thomas Siddon was done with his 'rationalisation' and furtively glanced at Father Blurel under his eyebrows, feeling slightly apprehensive. The priest spoke:

"Have you discussed these so-called 'thoughts' of yours with anyone in the hostel?" he asked.

"No."

"Good, because you must never repeat what you have just told me to anyone, here or anywhere, until you are an adult and still feel as you do and know the right kind of arguments to substantiate your wild theories, otherwise people will think you are mad, no?"

"I will not insist that you go to Confession or receive Holy Communion any more — it would be a mockery of my religion — but you will still attend Mass like the others, otherwise they would wonder."

"Now go," he commanded tersely.

Easter was round the corner and the school was closed for two weeks in March after the first term examinations, and everyone at the hostel was to return to his respective home-town. Thomas found that he had to make his own way to Singapore. It felt almost like the old days in St Patrick's when he was a boy and his mother never came or responded to his many letters. He had written several to Singapore this time, warning Jerry, Merle and Maurice of his impending return but had drawn no replies. So with his last five dollars pocket-money which Merle sent him like clockwork every month, he purchased a ticket on the Malacca-Singapore Express Bus Service which stopped at Muar on its way to Singapore. He arrived at Beach Road, the terminus of the service, and walked the relative short distance to the "Catholic Centre" in Bras Basah Road. He ordered a coffee even though he hadn't a cent. He knew either Maurice or Jerry would turn up eventually because no one had told him that they had stopped going there.

He was right. The two friends strolled in an hour later, surprised to see him because they had never expected it. Both hugged him warmly, bringing back, for Thomas, pleasant memories of the days before he had gone up to Muar on his "Malayan sojourn". He told them proudly that he had passed

his first term exams and that he was down for the short Easter holidays. No one said anything about his coming back on his own or whether he had had sufficient to pay for his fare. Later Jeremy drove him 'home' to his old room at Dafne Street in Opera Estate. Thomas noticed that the suburban middle class housing estate had "swelled" with the recent influx of new British military family arrivals. They seemed practically in all the terraced-houses on Opera Estate.

He slipped smoothly back into his old routine — having early breakfasts with the de Cunhas, accompanying them into town, and spending the whole day with Maurice at the "Centre". He was surprised to learn that both his friends had stopped going to Merle's office, though he didn't say a word. Two days later, after he had satisfied himself renewing acquaintanceships with old friends he hadn't seen since going to Muar, and visiting favourite haunts, he phoned Merle to let her know he was back in town. He was surprised and not a little guilty at her hurt tone when she discovered that he had been back two whole days before letting her know. Merle, he realised, had begun to take on a motherly concern for him even though she was a mere twelve years older at twenty-seven. Thomas was contrite and rushed over to her office in Amber Road. She immediately put him to work on the menial tasks around her office. He spent the remainder of his school holidays at "Amber Road", as everyone who knew Merle, called it. He felt it was the least he could do for what she had achieved for him.

On his return and arrival at the St Andrew's Continuation School and Hostel in Muar, after the holidays, he found that he was late because everyone was in the study-hall listening to Father Blurel who was addressing them. As Thomas approached the hall he thought he overheard the French priest conducting an election. He quietly slipped in, unnoticed, at the back of the study-hall at an empty desk. He was right. There was an election being conducted. It was to elect the new "head-boy" who would be in charge of the hostellites during the priest's absence. The previous fellow of the last term had already departed the hostel as he had passed his Senior Cambridge Examinations. Father Blurel, Thomas saw, had been pulling voting slips from a box and marking a 'tick' against the names of "seniors" who were eligible to stand for the position. When he had walked into the room he had overheard the priest coaxing the hostel-boys to "reconsider" their choice as to who they had wanted in charge when Father Blurel wasn't around. Then he saw why. His name, which was included among the list of seniors eligible to be nominated as "head-boy", had everyone's ticks against it! He 'sussed' that the wily Frenchman had hoped to change the outcome of the elections before his arrival by getting the others to 're-consider' their decision! The

young man from Singapore laughed silently at the priest's next words when he spied Thomas sitting at the back of the room:

"Siddon, the boys, not I, have chosen you 'head-boy' — you will run this establishment in my place when I am visiting the other parishes," he growled as he stormed away muttering incoherently in French. Thomas had been chosen by his fellow-hostellites to run their lives when Father Blurel was away. What a way to return to Muar!

The first thing that Thomas did as 'head-boy' was to appoint Chan, his best friend in the hostel, his deputy, and which he was entitled to do. Both young men realised that they could no longer "skive" by sneaking out of the hostel-grounds to drink their 'forbidden' cups of coffee, and smoke, at their coffeestall hangout in the evenings. But it was good knowing that one was in charge for a change, instead of doing all the obeying, like a donkey. Since discipline now was in his hands whenever the French priest was away, Thomas decided to relax some of the regulations he considered stifling. His memories of St Patrick's boarding-life were still stark in his mind and he could guess how some of the younger boys must have felt with all the rules and regulations of the hostel, and the school, being imposed all the time. *He* had a reason for returning to study again, whereas he knew some, if not most of the others, were there only because their parents had put them there in the hope that somehow, they would finish school with some kind of an 'education'. All of them, he knew, found the school a "drudge", being a little older than the usual school-going age and having had a taste of being an adult before returning to St Andrew's for a chance at obtaining an education again, and life in the hostel with its strict imposition of rules, was really too much to bear. A slight relaxation of the rules, he thought, would do everyone a world of good.

He knew that Father Blurel spent the greater part of each day, after breakfast when all the hostellites were in school, in the outlying districts surrounding Muar which didn't have a parish priest, offering the several Catholic congregations in those areas whatever service that was required, and that he would only return to St Andrew's when it was dark and everyone at the hostel had had dinner and was studying. So he felt that he could allow everyone some "freedom", if they co-operated with him. He first allowed the "seniors" to visit the town in the evenings after study and tea, which was around five. "Juniors", if they were accompanied by a "senior" who agreed to "chaperone" them, were permitted to go along as well. Everyone had to be back at the hostel by six-thirty sharp. Boys with families in Muar were allowed to visit so long as their families didn't complain to Father Blurel. If there was any abuse of these "privileges" the new setup would be

scrapped, Siddon told his fellow-hostellites. As the days sped by the atmosphere within the hostel grew relaxed, and spontaneous laughter could even be heard within its grounds, which had never happened before.

Meanwhile in Singapore an all-party delegation of Singapore politicians, led by the Labour Front Chief Minister, Mr Lim Yew Hock, left for London, arriving there on 12th May 1958 to discuss with the Colonial Secretary, Mr Lennox-Boyd, about Singapore's constitutional future, and the terms of the Order-in-Council. The delegation comprised Chew Swee Kee, (Minister for Education), Lim Choon Mong, (Liberal-Socialist Party), Lee Kuan Yew, (People's Action Party), and Abdul Hamid bin Haji Jumaat, (United Malays National Organisation). The following main points, (there were several others), arising out of the draft constitution, were settled at the talks, which ended on 27th May:

*Protection of Malay and other Minority Rights & Privileges*

The Minorities Clause in the first draft of the Constitution was to be re-drafted to emphasize the duties and responsibilities imposed on the Singapore Government to foster, and further the interests of all Minorities, "in particular those of the *indigenous* Malays".

*Temporary Restriction on Subversive Elements*

Persons detained in Singapore for subversive activities to be barred from participating in the first Assembly. Lee Kuan Yew attacked this proviso, accusing Mr Lennox-Boyd of putting forward the condition as a "political gambit".

On his return to Singapore on 15th June, the Chief Minister, Mr Lim Yew Hock, reported to the Assembly that all political parties which had been represented in London by their respective delegates, saw the future of Singapore in three stages. The first was self-government, the second merger with the Federation of Malaya, and the final stage after merger, complete independence. The "new" Constitution of the island was to be reviewed after four years in the light of the experience gained.

The State of Singapore Bill, creating the State of Singapore, was given the first Royal Assent on 1st August 1958. The Act represented the final outcome of the Singapore Constitutional Conference which was held in London during March and April 1957, when the substance of the new constitutional provisions for the new island-state had been agreed to.

On 6th August Dr Chuang Chu Lin, the former principal of the Chung Cheng High School, who, together with forty-eight pupils from his and other Singapore schools, had been detained under the Banishment Ordinance, since 26th September 1957, for participation in subversive activities, was released.

The Singapore Legislative Assembly on 11th August 1958 passed a Bill authorising the detention of any person *without* a warrant, if the police deemed it necessary to do so in the interest of public safety and security. The actual detention orders, (known colloquially as the PPSO), were:

- (i) The detention of any person "in the interests of public safety, peace and good order" for a period not exceeding six months, at the Order of the Chief Secretary;
- (ii) The extension of the above detention period, from six months, to a maximum of two years, at the discretion of the Governor; and
- (iii) The arrest by any police officer of "any persons who he believes should be detained under the ordinance "without a warrant, until inquiries have been made."

The Bill was passed following outbreaks of street-gang warfare which had culminated in the arrest of seventy-nine suspects during 11th and 12th August. All those arrested were under twenty-one. There were an estimated three hundred and sixty-eight known criminal secret societies, and the Chief Secretary, Mr E.B. David, said the Government was particularly concerned at the nature of the weapon most commonly used in the street clashes — bulbs or bottles charged with acid. There had been one hundred and fifty gang fights during 1957, and one hundred and fifty-seven during the first half of 1958, as against only twenty-five in 1956 and twenty-four in 1955. Since 1st July, that year, there had been fifty-one fights and six murders.

Thomas passed his second-term examinations in mid-August, achieving second-place in the overall examination results for his standard, (of which there were five classes), in the school. To add to his feelings of achievement Jerry turned up from Singapore bringing wondrous news that a place had been "found" for him in a Singapore school. He would begin classes in his home-town in the third term of secondary school, beginning in September. He breathed a silent prayer that it was good that Singapore and Malayan schools, (in those days), followed a similar syllabus and term periods. He was a little sad though, to be leaving the school in the riverine town which had been home for six months and where he had become "somebody" and had brought some measure of happiness to boys in a similar "plight" as he. But he still looked forward to returning to Singapore and a familiar way of life. He departed Muar with Jerry that day, since the school holidays had already begun. Chan, his best friend, bade him farewell with a desolate look on his face.



Back in Singapore the morning after, he went down to the "Catholic Centre" to meet up with Maurice Dupon. His eyes lighted up, catching sight of his pal's familiar form hunched over a perennial cup of coffee at one of the canteen's tables. As he sauntered over he instinctively sensed the alien-hostility emanating from his friend but said nothing, hoping that he had been mistaken. Dupon looked up at him with hard, unfriendly eyes — there was none of the startled, pleasant flash-of-welcome reaction that he had been anticipating. Just a barked, startling probe, confirming to his dismay his original instinctive feeling that something was terribly amiss.

"Are you still associating with that damned Merle Jordon any more?" he snapped.

Perplexed, a little relieved somewhat that the ill-feeling wasn't directed his way, Thomas countered with a query of his own, demanding the reason for Dupon's sudden unfriendly attitude. His friend's vehement response sliced through him like a blade:

"I've nothing more to do with that crazy bitch, you can tell her that from me — if you're going to associate with her and that bloody Jerry I want nothing to do with you too!"

The full significance of what his friend had just said hadn't quite sunk in yet. Maurice was joking again, Thomas thought quickly to himself. He was always like that, pulling a fast one to see the kind of a reaction he would get. This time he was going too far, it wasn't funny. He looked into his friend's eyes. But Dupon hadn't been joking. If there was something the matter among his three friends it would be necessary to enlighten Maurice about his position. You just did not cut off ties with someone who had been instrumental in helping you get a secondary school education. Friendship was one thing, life was another.

"Listen buddy I've now got a chance to finish my schooling, and a decent home with Jerry and Joan, do I disassociate myself from Merle and Jerry *and* achieve my goals?" he asked the other sarcastically.

"Well buddy I want nothing more to do with that crazy American, and since you must, we part company from today — we'll remain friends but I want nothing more to do with you as well. Don't ask me why," Dupon said coldly, and with that got up and walked over to another empty table. To Thomas his countenance was ugly. The young man was completely shocked and hurt by his friend's weird conduct and departed the "Centre" with the intention to "trash it out" with Merle and Jerry. It was only right, he felt, that they tell him what had transpired among the three of them since he had been in Muar. Jerry hadn't said a word coming down from Johore the previous day, and neither during breakfast that morning.

When he got to "Amber Road" Jerry, who happened to be there, expressed astonishment on hearing about Dupon's outburst. He said that he was totally unaware of Maurice's antagonism. Merle seemed unaffected and said that his pal was acting stupid, he would come to his senses when he realised what his "duty" in life was. Though he didn't say anything to contradict them, Thomas found the diffident attitude of the two adults highly suspicious. Whatever Maurice was he wasn't irrational, he knew him too well for that. He decided to pass the whole thing from his mind. He hadn't been "involved" but his pal had chosen to sever their relationship. There were more important things in life to worry about. If Dupon valued their friendship so paltrily, so be it.

The "Straits Times" reported that pending the retirement of Sir John Whyatt, the last colonial Chief Justice, Mr Justice Tan Ah Tah would be sworn in on 18th August 1958 as Singapore's first Asian acting Chief Judge.

With the passing of the detention laws, known colloquially as the "PPSO", the Singapore Police began cracking down on known and suspected secret society members, detaining the more hardened ones for several days in an endeavour to instil the fear of god in them, and to stem the alarming growth of Chinese tong rivalry in the city streets.

One August evening during the school holidays before he would begin at his new school in Singapore since returning from Muar, Thomas and a former classmate friend from St Joseph's Institution, which he had attended in 1956 when he lived with his mother in Bencoolen Street, decided to catch the musical film, "King and I" at the "Odeon Katong" Cinema, not far from where he worked at Merle's, doing odd jobs for her. Winston Lim, the friend, had phoned to invite him and since the American woman was away in Malaya on one of her periodic research trips and he was relatively free from any pressing work, he accepted. Queuing for his ticket together with Winston who was just behind him, Thomas suddenly heard a despairing yell, and swivelled just in time to see his friend in the firm grasp of two burly Gurkha policemen, the mercenaries from Nepal that the British had brought to the colony to maintain law and order whenever things got out of hand and went beyond the control of the local police force. A "new generation" Chinese police inspector, (one who had completed his Senior Cambridge Examinations, instead of the "old school" mata-mata who had risen up through the ranks), dressed in "dark-blues" rather than khaki, was interrogating Winston.

Reacting instinctively Thomas went up to the three policemen who had his friend firmly in their grip and told them that their "captive" was a "decent" schoolboy and that the both of them had only been queuing up for

tickets to watch the film at the cinema hall. As he raised his arm in gesticulation his sleeve fell away to expose a tattoo on *his* forearm, which didn't escape the gimlet-eye of the police inspector who instructed him to accompany the arresting party and his friend to the Joo Chiat Police Station on East Coast Road, next-door to the "Roxy Cinema".

Both Thomas and Winston Lim were questioned separately. Siddon wasn't nervous because he had nothing more to do with the chap kapak gang and he wasn't worried that the policemen in the station would try to make out that his tattoos were triad-inspired. And he knew that the police hadn't anything on him. He didn't have a "record" because he had been wise in the past and had listened to Ahmad, his secret society 'tutor' who had warned him never to get himself on police files by acting in a such a way as to get the "cops" attention. But the look of stark terror on his Chinese friend's face prompted him to utilise one of Merle's contacts he had met at one of her regular meetings at the St Andrew's Cathedral. This was a senior British Criminal Investigation Department officer. Despite his look of disbelief when Thomas explained in impeccable English who he had wanted to get in touch with, the Chinese inspector put the call through to the Englishman's residence. The CID officer, a Mr Henry Goodman, came on the line immediately and Thomas explained the "situation" to him. To the Chinese inspector's amazement and chagrin both youths were ordered released though they were to report to the Englishman's offices at Robinson Road on the following morning, to "sort out the hiccup". Siddon was pleased at the way the inspector looked at him as he departed the police station.

When school re-opened in September Thomas found himself admitted to the government-owned Siglap Secondary School in Frankel Estate in Siglap. He looked forward to finishing the remainder of the school-year with flying colours. The American woman, in the meantime and unknown to him, had successfully submitted some of his poems to the editors of several prestigious overseas magazines. This spurred him on to write more poetry. And he had been only seventeen when he had written the poem which was eventually selected and published in one of these overseas magazines. Merle said it was a confirmation of his 'writing talent'.

He tried showing his appreciation of Merle's involvement in his life by taking an interest in some of her personal activities. Apart from helping her after school-hours, he would sometimes accompany her to the weekly meetings at the St Andrew's Cathedral, the Anglican church, which was held by several senior executives of the colonial administration. His ears always pricked up at the mention of some of the names of the "VIPs" there. These were colonial administrators, including colonial headmasters of

senior schools, semi-government officers as well as senior police officers. Everybody was White. And his mind boggled at the nature of some of the topics discussed.

He was the only schoolboy yet everyone treated him with respect and friendliness, though, of course they didn't include him in their actual discussions. He overheard such things as Singapore's educational policy after self-government, and the long-term educational needs of the island. The group of Whites even discussed how they saw Singapore evolving after colonialism, taking cognizance of the fact that it was a Malay island. Thomas thought it odd that an American like Merle would sit and talk about post-British colonialism when her own country had fought and won its independence without any "outside" group sitting down to discuss the merits of the "freedom" the Americans had obtained. Years later, after Singapore's independence and he was a grown man, Thomas would realise that the projections of the Whites at those meetings at the cathedral never took into consideration the stark reality of the one major community, (the Chinese), swamping the other communities by sheer weight of numbers and a government, (comprised of Chinese in the main), so totally in control because of a massive majority in parliament, that only the major culture, (because of its sheer weight of numbers), dominated, and which set out to ignore the historical Malay ties of the island, totally changing Singapore's unique multi-racial "national character" and aspirations in all directions. And being able to do so by making it illegal to discuss "communal topics" in public because the Chinese-dominant government controlled parliament in toto as there was no opposition.

The Legislative Assembly on 7th December 1958 renewed for a further year the Preservation of Public Security Ordinance. Lee Kuan Yew of the People's Action Party had voted against the Bill as, he said, the party had no mandate to change the stand it had adopted when the measure was first introduced in May 1955. However, because of deep concern for the Federation of Malaya, he said, that if the PAP came to power it would *retain the ordinance so long as emergency laws were necessary in Malaya*, and the party would "take no steps which would undermine the interests of the Federation". In the meanwhile, on 22nd September, the Singapore Chief Minister, Mr Lim Yew Hock, sent back to the Colonial Office in London a third draft of the Order-in-Council dealing with the island's self-government because, the Chief Minister declared "...political leaders in Singapore were not satisfied with the proposed wording..." and that changes had to be made to remove ambiguity.

One Saturday afternoon in October, seated in the "Catholic Centre" drinking coffee with a companion Thomas noticed a "Chinese-looking" girl standing by herself under the porchway of the building. There seemed to be a worried look on her face, as if she were unsure about something. On impulse he went over and introduced himself, inquiring at the same time whether he could be of assistance as she seemed to have something on her mind. She was a pretty thing he thought. The girl looked about to decline then blurted out that the person she was meeting seemed late or might have forgotten their appointment. Her accent wasn't Sino so she wasn't Chinese, Thomas thought to himself. He chatted her up for a bit and finally persuaded her to join him inside the canteen for a coffee pending the arrival of her "date". She quickly protested that she wasn't meeting a "date", which brought a hidden smile to Thomas because, to him, it was an admittance that she liked him and wanted to re-assure him that she didn't have a "steady". The young man was curious who her date was anyway, because she didn't seem like she was from Singapore since she seemed so unsure of her bearings and appeared "lost".

He got to the point as soon as she was seated, with a steaming cup of coffee before her. Wasn't she really meeting her "steady"? No she said flatly. The person she was supposed to meet was taking her to the Roman Catholic Novena Church in Thomson Road because she didn't know the way. Thomas was quietly amazed that someone from Singapore didn't know how to get to the well-known church. Run by the Redemptorist Fathers, the locally-famous church drew massive crowds every Saturday afternoon because of the reputed "miracles" which happened for those who attended its Saturday services to beg help from Jesus through the intercession of his mother, Mary. Catholics, Christians of other denominations, as well as non-Christians, thronged the tiny chapel built on a slight rise off the rural-like Thomson Road of those days, to send begging letters asking for employment, accommodation, the passing of exams or courses, the 'problems' of living or any other venal aspiration. Thomas kept up a steady barrage of "rabbit", (English slang: talk), hoping to discover more about the unusual-looking girl. He could see that she had taken in his avid interest. The girl seemed to suddenly make up her mind about something and told him in a gush that she was Japanese, though she had been born in Ipoh, Perak, in Malaya. Inwardly the young man reeled on hearing this, though he made no indication that he had been affected by her announcement. His mind jumped from thought to thought — she wasn't from Singapore and that was why she hadn't known where the Novena Church was, he didn't feel animosity toward her even though his father had perished at the hands

of the Japanese during the war because it was some seventeen years ago, too long to hold *any* grudge and she hadn't been personally involved, and you didn't judge a person by their ethnic origin anyway. He could see the girl had sensed that he wasn't antagonistic. She smiled and said her name was Mariko Yamamoto.

He persuaded her to let him accompany her to the church in Thomson Road since her "friend" wasn't apparently turning up and she immediately agreed. At the crowded chapel Thomas amusedly noted that the much-lauded "unusual" prayer service included reading selected letters from those begging "favours" of Jesus through his mother, Mary, as well as those who had had their petitions for help "answered". He saw that the church was called the "Mother of Perpetual Succour". Later, glancing through Mariko's prayer-book which was dispensed by the chapel, Thomas was intrigued to discover that Hymn 19 on page 35 was in the Malay language. The hymn went on:

*Hati Jesu, sumber dan kaseh,  
 Aku datang memohon berkatmu;  
 Gerakkan hati yang dingin dan  
 durhaka,  
 Jadikannya milikmu s' lamanya.*

*Hati yang manis, aku mohon,  
 Tambah selalu chintaku.*

*Hati Jesu kumau kenal dan chinta  
 Perlihatkanlah harta rahmatmu,  
 Agar hatiku dari dunia terpalang,  
 Akan rindu memandang wajahmu.*

Coming across the hymn in the prayer-book made him remember that a long time ago the people of Malay-Portuguese marriages in Malacca in 1511 had prayed to their god, Jesus, in the Malay language, and that the hymn in the "Novena Book" probably had to be from that era. It was a bit of living history as far as he was concerned.

After the service the Japanese girl agreed to a drink and a meal of Malay satay, (a dish of beef, chicken or mutton pieces skewered on a stick and roasted over open charcoal embers and eaten with a spicy, nutty sauce, accompanied with cucumber slices and/or freshly-cut onions, and rice cooked in coconut leaves which had been weaved into square packets, so as to flavour the rice with the aroma of the coconut-leaves), at the

Esplanade. He brought her home around nine that evening. She lived with her mother close to the international airport at Paya Lebar. He was surprised that her mother dressed in sarong and spoke only Malay and Japanese. Mariko told him that she studied book-keeping and typing at a convent near Tanglin. She travelled to school from her attap-and-wooden-hut by bus every morning. She also didn't go out on dates during schooldays.

The following weekend he picked her up and they went back to his room in Opera Estate and were intimate. She complained about his condom because it hurt and he removed it. From then on they were intimate every weekend. Thomas was proud that he had "hooked" a Japanese girl because all his friends at the "Catholic Centre" were envious. They told him that Japanese girls made the best wives because they looked after their husbands meticulously and were forever faithful, that if a man went screwing around his Japanese wife wouldn't, so he needn't worry while he was out doing the town on his own. Thomas found that last bit comical. Mariko's mother even welcomed him to her home and he began spending weekends at the Yammamoto place. He and Mariko were intimate every weekend as soon as Mrs Yammamoto was away doing the marketing for their mid-day and evening meals.

He learned from Mariko that Furiko, her mother, had been born in Honshu, Japan in 1916 and that her parents had been poor and simple fisher-folk who went by the name of Suzuki. They had died around 1930 when Furiko Suzuki had been barely sixteen and she had been "adopted" by a couple considered 'wealthy' by their village, and who were well-known for their "philanthropy" in adopting orphan-girls. They travelled a lot, especially to South-east Asia, and, sometimes, took some of their charges with them on holiday. About six months after the death of her parents Furiko Suzuki joined other girls, orphans like herself, from other villages in the surrounding region of their part of Honshu, to accompany "uncle" and "aunt" for a short holiday abroad. All the girls, of approximately the same age, were thrilled. So soon after losing their parents they were going abroad. To the young maidens who had never before been outside their own respective villages in their lives, their "luck" seemed to be changing. It was unthinkable in the feudal Japan of those days for the poverty-stricken class to journey abroad.

The party joined ship in Osaka and left their homeland in 1931. Once the steamer was out of port, in a private cabin all to themselves, the young girls' "uncle" cold-bloodedly deflowered each of his terrified "wards", with the acquiescence of his "wife" who willingly held down each protesting, terrified virgin. The outraged girls finally discovered that they were destined for the notorious "doll-houses" of South-east Asia, from the stray

conversations of their captors. Some girls were fated for Singapore, some for Malaya, and others for Batavia, (Jakarta), in the Dutch East Indies, after their "guardians" had struck requisite deals with the respective brothel-keepers of their acquaintance.

The shocked and scared "yokels" were secretly off-loaded in Singapore and smuggled to the "Sun-Sun Hotel" in Middle Road. Terrified, feeling alienated because they were in a strange, foreign land of dark-complexioned people, they were further threatened with punishment if they ever tried escaping. The "Sun-Sun" was a popular hangout of Japanese businessmen in those days, and under the threat of further physical "treatment" and surrendering them to the mercies of the White foreign "monkeys" who controlled the island and who would first ravish, kill and eat them, the girls were bullied into "entertaining" the Japanese "friends" of their captors. The girls took the threat of being killed and eaten by the British very seriously because back home in Japan certain quarters still practised cannibalism. Being illegal immigrants they were also warned to remain indoors otherwise the White "monkeys" would get them. Finally, satisfied that the latest "crop" of "dolls" had been successfully broken-in, the Japanese couple began selling-off their "spring-chickens" to the respective bidders among the brothel-keepers who had come to the "Sun-Sun" to "view" and "sample" the latest arrival of "goods".

In the thirties brothels in South-east Asia were mainly in the hands of Chinese and Japanese pimps who ran elegant segregated "houses" for Whites, Japanese and "natives". There was a constant demand for fresh "supplies" and these were gladly provided by operators such as the couple who had tricked Furiko Suzuki from her small Japanese village to South-east Asia. And there were plentiful fresh, young and penniless damsels in China and Japan to be had. Those from Japan were highly-prized by the Japanese businessmen scattered throughout the whole of the Far East, from "the Malays" right up to the Philippines, while Chinese maidens from China went to *Nanyang*. (Chinese: the 'southseas'), legally, because of a British immigration policy which curbed the influx of Chinese males to Malaya, (which then included Singapore), but allowed the flow of Chinese women, mainly Cantonese, unchecked. There were tremendous fortunes to be made through the smuggling and bartering of women for the "pleasure houses" of "the Malays", because most of the foreign men in the colonies had left their own womenfolk behind in their own countries.

A month after her arrival in Singapore Furiko was smuggled into Malaya and taken first to Ipoh in the north, and later, still further north to Haadyai in southern Siam, (Thailand). She spent eight years in a brothel in



Haadyai before finally being sold to an elderly Japanese "regular", named Yammamoto. She was barely twenty-four when they were married in a Thai Buddhist temple in the small Siamese village. After the wedding ceremony her husband brought her back to his rubber estate in Ipoh. There he introduced her to a life of respectability and dignity. Yammamoto had been a bachelor all his life and had specifically chosen a Japanese girl from a "doll-house" because he felt such a girl wouldn't be fussy or demand too much as would a girl coming directly from his native land. His countrywomen had a "peculiar" attitude toward their own nationals who had lived abroad for too long. They regarded persons like Yammamoto as "tainted" with the same "strange" customs, attitudes and habits of foreigners and no self-respecting Japanese mother would tolerate her daughter marrying someone such as he. His marriage to Furiko Suzuki had been a sound decision, Yammamoto thought. She had gotten used to living in the tropics and knew how to treat her husband, who was "tropicalised", in the 'correct' manner.

They had two daughters. One died in infancy and Mariko was born in 1941, a few months after her own father, Yammamoto, had died of a heart attack. Her mother, finding herself alone in the world again but being of a strong, determined disposition, even though still young, opened a bar with the money left by her late spouse. It was the only "trade" Furiko knew, selling liquor, though, this time, without having to purvey her body as well.

When World War Two began in British Malaya in 1941, British Administration interned Furiko Yammamoto along with the other Japanese caught in the Malay peninsula who had either been unaware or unable to depart the country before the conflict. The detained Japanese were sent to India for the duration. Furiko's daughter, Mariko, was left behind in the care of a Tamil labour leader of plantation workers, called Euraphim Fernandez. After the war on repatriation to Ipoh, the Japanese woman decided to make Malaya her home and with the help of Fernandez and a Malay leader called Dato Onn, was allowed to remain in the country. Virtually penniless she became *amah*, (servant), to the Fernandez household. Mariko grew up speaking Cantonese, Tamil, English and Japanese. After some five years scrimping and saving, Furiko resigned her position as servant to the Fernandez family, and mother and daughter journeyed to Singapore where the now middleaged woman obtained a job as a sales supervisor in a Chinese-owned grocery specialising in Japanese foodstuffs, and whose only customers then were the newly-arrived Japanese businessmen and their families who had come to conduct business on the island. When Thomas Siddon first met Mariko Yammamoto at the "Catholic Centre", she had only been in Singapore for three months.

When Thomas sat his form four exams in November Mariko told him that her "period" was "overdue". On his further probing she said she was sixty days "late". The full import of what that would mean to both their lives resoundly hit home for Siddon. The couple desperately tried every kind of "old wives" remedy to get Mariko to abort, but without success. In the midst of all this mental anguish he received the glad tidings that he had passed his examinations with flying colours. Despite the anxiety of Mariko's "condition" Thomas experienced a sense of satisfied achievement. He had successfully spanned the "lost" years of his missed education. Blithely he and Mariko crossed their fingers and continued trying out further "old wives remedies" believing that they could somehow, overcome their "predicament" through sheer "luck".

Christmas came and went and one Saturday afternoon in January 1959, when he and his girl lay in bed in his room in Dafne Street, Jerry de Cunha tapped on his shut window to invite Thomas out for a coffee. As he got into his friend's car after telling Mariko to wait until he returned from his appointment, his "guardian" inquired after the "girl who seemed to spend most of the time" in his room. Thomas realised that his Indian widow landlady had complained. Almost in relief the worried teenager blurted out that his girl was pregnant, and that she was waiting for him inside his room. De Cunha immediately drove both young people to Merle Jordon's office "...to sort the whole mess out..."

Thomas was grateful that neither Merle nor Jerry came on strong about morality, instead the two adults wanted to know what he and Mariko intended "doing" about the forthcoming baby. Though he was plainly scared of getting married Thomas replied that he was prepared to marry Mariko if that was what she wanted: Merle tried to point out the "dangers" the both of them were in. Abortion, she said, was out of the question. First it was illegal, and, secondly, Joan, Jerry's wife, a staunch Roman Catholic, wouldn't hear of it when her husband told her about the situation over the phone. Siddon had realised that marriage was a serious matter to contemplate and somehow, in his heart of hearts hoped that Mariko would indicate that she didn't want to get married or have the baby. But he did see there was no way out of his predicament. She was barely seventeen and seemed to look upon him for an "answer" to their "problem". Though he liked his girl Thomas knew he didn't feel the kind of love that he should have felt to make him want to marry her. But he knew he had to face up to his deed, even though it might entail relinquishing any opportunity to go to university.

Merle asked Mariko what she felt about the situation, since abortion was out. She replied that it would be up to Thomas. The American turned to him

again and asked him whether he was prepared to marry his girl or prefer that the child, when it was born, be sent for adoption. Thomas looked across at Mariko, realising suddenly that she was a schoolgirl. He could not leave her to face the "consequences" alone. They were both responsible for their "predicament" but he had seduced her. To him then, she looked so alone, lost and uncomfortable. He quietly said that he would marry Mariko.

Having settled that question everyone then drove over to the Japanese girl's home in Paya Lebar to break the shocking news to her mother. Furiko Yamamoto was adamant. Thomas and Mariko would have to be married right away. Her family honour was at stake. Joan and Jerry agreed to arrange everything. Merle insisted that Thomas would still continue his studies and even try for university. Everyone would "pitch in" to help look after his new "family". Merle also insisted that the young couple practice birth-control immediately after the baby was born. They couldn't afford to feed another mouth if Mariko were to become pregnant again, especially with the depressed state of Singapore's economy, jobs being scarce and Thomas unqualified.

They were married at the Singapore Registry in February 1959. His mother came along as a guest. Being a legal minor Thomas had needed her written approval to get married and so he had reluctantly gone to seek her permission, and get her to sign the relevant legal documents. He had not seen his mother since she had turned him out of her home in 1957, and going to meet her to obtain her consent felt somewhat strange but he did it.

After the wedding Mariko moved in with him at Dafne Street. From the word go the marriage began on the wrong foot. Thomas felt trapped and Mariko longed for the comfort of her mother. She was still a schoolgirl at seventeen, and with a young girl's mind. She missed going to the "pictures" with her former schoolmates every week and doing the "normal" things girls of her age liked doing, like maintaining her hobbies such as cutting out and pasting film stars' pictures from magazines in a 'special' book, dressing up in the 'latest' looks and keeping up with whatever trend was "in". Her young husband's interest in studying diminished though he still attended school. Because it gave him something to do instead of remaining home after school to face his young wife. Most times, when the school 'day' was over, rather than return to Dafne Street he would go over to Merle's to help out with office tasks, returning home late to find Mariko waiting up for him, foregoing dinner until he had put in an appearance. Their arguments were frequent but he didn't care or bother.

He felt trapped. Fate had dealt him an "unfair" hand. Marriage to Mariko had become a "millstone", and he was missing out on life. His adolescent

wife was just as "lost" and expected him to be the provider of their mental and fiscal stability. And he couldn't. Thomas felt that Mariko was pulling him down and felt cheated, though she was carrying his baby. Exciting things were on the brink of happening in Singapore and he wanted to be at the core of what was then transpiring on his island.

The first general elections under the new Constitution, which would see Singapore as a self-governing state, was held on 30th May 1959. Speaking at a People's Action Party rally on 20th May, ten days before the polls, Lee Kuan Yew gave a warning that any "foreign-owned" newspapers which tried to "sour and strain" relationships between Singapore and Malaya would be "dealt with under the subversive law", if the PAP came to power. The law, a Public Security Ordinance, empowered the government to detain persons suspected of subversion for up to two years without trial. Mr Lee accused the "Straits Times", then colonial-owned and managed, of playing up "the difference between the PAP and Tengku Abdul Rahman", (the first prime minister of the Federation of Malaya) and addressed himself specifically to the "four White men who control the Straits Times. In our definition, subversion is any political activity designed to further the aims and interests, not of our own people, but of foreign powers — and by foreign powers we mean not only Russia and China but also America, Formosa, (Taiwan), and the Western Bloc ..."

The "Straits Times" gave full coverage to the warning by the political party, and "answered" by giving extensive coverage to the activities of the other political parties in the electioneering. The newspaper carried its own criticism of Lee Kuan Yew in its editorial. In a Singapore whose mentality was still steeped in the colonial era, no one paid any attention to a "local" warning the British. But everyone in the Administration had misjudged the mood of the population, and the newspaper's local reporters were either too scared to file more accurate reports of the "pulse" of the island's society or they didn't really have a true "feel" of the islanders who would be nationals.

But the tiny Malay island at the tip of the Malaya was on its way toward the first stage to full independence — self-government. The mood on Singapore, especially among the non-English-speaking groups, was one of hopeful expectancy. With a "say" on how their lives should be managed, they saw a chance to improve the "unequal" lot, between them and the British, and with the English-educated. Within the English-speaking groups, Europeans, Eurasians, English-educated Straits-born Chinese, Malays and Indians, as well as the Babas (the mixed Malay-Chinese community), many felt that the status quo would revert to "normal" after the bro-haha was over. They were totally wrong.

Polling for the people's support was fast and furious, with political parties utilising "moving platforms" built over the backs of lorries, which took their candidates touring round their respective constituencies to appeal directly to potential supporters over loud-hailers.

In the elections on 30th May 1959, the People's Action Party, led by Mr Lee Kuan Yew, its Secretary-general, swept into power on the island with an overwhelming majority, despite the bulk of the electorate staying away due to apathy. Of the fifty-one seats for the Assembly, the PAP won forty-three, the Singapore People's Alliance, led by Lim Yew Hock, the outgoing Chief Minister, (who had been the main player in the negotiations during the Constitutional talks with Britain, leading up to the granting of self-government, and who had been in power since June 1956), took four seats, the United Malays National Organisation took three, with one seat won by an Independent. David Marshall, Singapore's original chief minister, who had begun the move toward independence in 1955, was defeated by his former lieutenant and successor to the head of the Labour Front, Lim Yew Hock.

During the months and weeks leading up to the general elections, the opposition parties had attempted to weaken the strong "pull" and growing admiration of the island's younger population, especially the Chinese-educated "alien-Chinese who were either first-or-second-generation immigrants and who ardently supported the PAP and its dynamic, outspoken and "multi-lingual" leader, Lee Kuan Yew. Mr Lee had addressed his constituents in three of Singapore's recognised languages — Malay, Mandarin Chinese and English — flooring the island's various Asian communities as well as the colonial English present on Singapore, with his grasp and command of all three, and opened their eyes that learning a "foreign" language well was possible, if one set one's mind to it. But unknown to many, especially the non-Mandarin-speaking Chinese as well as the non-Chinese communities of Singapore, when Lee Kuan Yew spoke in Mandarin he was speaking mainly to the Chinese-educated, 'alien' Chinese, some of whom still had not committed themselves to identifying with the island.

The petty squabbling among the various personalities in the rival political parties, played up in the press, appeared all the more ridiculous in the aftermath of the PAP's sweeping polls success.

One of the first questions put to the newly-elected leader by foreign journalists who had no inkling of the kind of man Mr Lee Kuan Yew was, concerned the PAP's attitude to Communism. Mr Lee replied that the long-term challenge of Communism could best be overcome by enlisting the

support for a non-Communist democratic socialist Malaya. That the ultimate "pull" of Communism depended on whether the "politically active" section of Singapore could be convinced that the democratic way of life could work.

Mr Lim Yew Hock, the out-going chief minister, formally submitted his resignation on 1st June, and the Governor of Singapore, Sir William Goode, asked Mr Lee Kuan Yew to form the Government. The party leader, instead, informed the Governor he would only assume office after several PAP members who had been detained for alleged complicity in the 1956 October riots, were first released. After hasty consultations with the British Government in London, Sir William announced on 2nd June 1959 that all eight detainees, among whom were Lim Chin Siong, Fong Swee Suan and Sydney Woodhull, an Indian, were set free in agreement with the British Government "in order to achieve a swift and smooth introduction of the new Constitution".

At midnight on 2nd June 1959, the self-governing State of Singapore came officially into existence under its new Constitution, which came into force under a proclamation issued by Sir William Goode — his last act as Governor of Singapore. On the following day Sir William was sworn in as Singapore's first *Yang di-Pertuan Negara*, the title, in Malay, borne by the local Head of State representing the Queen of Britain.

The first government of the State of Singapore, headed by Mr Lee Kuan Yew as Chief Minister, then thirty-five, a third-generation Straits-born, Hakka-speaking Chinese, whose mother was a Baba-Nonya, was sworn in on 5th June 1959. Departing from the "normal" dress-code of lounge suit and tie for formal occasions, as exemplified by previous Colonial British civil functions, the entire PAP Cabinet and its elected Members of the Legislative Assembly appeared on a raised dias on the City Hall steps, in the government "clerical mufti" of white long-sleeved shirts and trousers, with no ties — to symbolise the "new social order" in Singapore.

The new Chief Minister promised the people a government free of corruption, and a country that had a place "... for the Malay, the Chinese, the Indian, the Eurasian ... and others ..." He attacked the colonial British for never getting to know the people that they had colonised, preferring to speak to them only in English, and expecting a reply in that tongue. The British, he said, had never realised what was said by those in the population who only spoke in their own mother-tongues, or what they said among themselves. The PAP promised a new era ... of bonding the people together, despite their racial origins, into a single nation. The British on Singapore smarted at his words, felt all the more, because the island's "own-rule" from British administration was only days' old.

The action of Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the new political leader of Singapore, in forcing the British to release his political party's members detained by the administration for alleged complicity in the October 1956 riots, as well as his strong words directed at the Colonial British, were awe-inspiring to young Thomas Siddon. He identified with every single concept espoused by Lee Kuan Yew. From that day on he cast aside his "Englishness", and became "Singaporean" in outlook. He had always regarded the Malay, Chinese and Indian as his friends anyway.

As its first action on taking office the PAP Government, on 8th June banned six Chinese and two English language publications. Mr Ong Pang Boon, the Minister for Home Affairs, said that Singapore was becoming "culturally devastated by rock-and-roll music, strip-tease shows and sexy songs", with the consequent deterioration of moral standards, particularly among young persons. Young Thomas, an ardent, "silent" supporter of the new government, felt somewhat disappointed by the surprising attack on a life-style he and most English-educated "Singaporeans" had always identified with. But he accepted the official "frown" as part of the "change" promised by the newly-installed Chief Minister. If it somehow contributed to the improvement of the country, though he didn't see how, so be it. Knowing poverty and a lack of opportunity ever since he could remember, if "change" meant a different life-style that led to better opportunities, it was welcome.

His first-born, a son, was delivered on 1st July at the Kandang Kerbau Maternity Hospital. Thomas was just nineteen, and his wife eighteen. He named him Kean Siew Jordon to commemorate Merle Jordon's involvement with his child's birth and his own commitment to being a multi-racial Singaporean by giving his child a Chinese name. He looked forward to being able to look after his boy since the American woman had assured him of her financial support until he completed university.

But glad as he was with the arrival of Kean Siew he grew despondent over his own situation, especially when he knew that he really did not love his wife. He began to feel sorry for himself turned lethargic, ate excessively and began to grow obese. He next lost interest in making it to university and kept attending school just to keep up appearances. Forty-five days before the preliminary exams which were a gage to test whether a student was ready for the final school leaving examinations, finding himself suddenly Thomas put on a spurt and "mugged", and on sitting the papers found the questions relatively easy. Two weeks later, to his relief, he had passed and was confirmed as ready to sit for the final school-leaving exams. He took the all-important, (to Siddon who had missed the opportunity as a schoolboy

years ago), Cambridge School Leaving Examinations in early December. Pending the results which would only be known in March the following year as the papers had to be sent to London for marking, Merle arranged with an Ismaili business friend of hers to employ him as a salesman. He was hired to promote a ship's fuel-additive at a salary of one hundred dollars a month which was considered a pittance even in those days of the island's backward economy. The company was located in Malacca Street off Raffles Place, the business centre of those days. He decided there wasn't any prospects in the Ismaili man's company and resigned after thirty days without informing anyone.

On 3rd December 1959 Inche Yusof bin Ishak, a brother of the Malayan Minister of Agriculture, was installed as Singapore's first Malayan-born *Yang di-Pertuan Negara*. A former journalist, in 1939 he had helped found the "Utusan Melayu", a Malay language newspaper published in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaya. He was an ardent Malay nationalist and during World War Two had regarded the Japanese as "liberators" of his British-colonised land. He and a young Lee Kuan Yew had both worked as cable editors for the "Hodobu" propaganda department of the Japanese occupation forces which had been located in the former YMCA Building on Stamford Road, and which had detention cells built in its basement. This pre-war structure has since been demolished and a new YMCA Building erected on the same site, ostensibly for the sake of "progress". The former YMCA Building holds painfully-vivid memories for many Singapore-islanders, especially the Eurasians who were regarded as "enemy aliens" by the enemy and many of them were detained on the slightest pretext, brought to the detention cells by the feared Kempeitai, and tortured to death.

When Jerry de Cunha questioned Thomas about his job at the company in Malacca Street the young schoolboy father lied that he was doing "fine". In fact he really felt trapped. He had put on a bright cherry look to disguise his fears and hide his panic from de Cunha and was fearful that the other had seen through his charade. But apparently he hadn't. A week later Jerry politely asked him again. Just when Thomas started to ponder the motive behind the none too subtle probing, the other came right out and told him that he and his wife, Joan, had decided to be on their own again since Thomas had completed his final school leaving examinations and was "gainfully" employed. His "guardian" wondered whether both he and Mariko could fend for themselves. Foolishly Siddon said they could. Inwardly he was quailing. He realised he couldn't support a wife because he didn't have a job. What had happened to the promises Joan and Jerry had made when they had insisted that he marry Mariko? They were now



ditching him before he had even a chance to find his own feet! But he wasn't going to crawl. In the West they married at nineteen and he would show everyone that he too could make it on his own.

In the last days before Mariko and Thomas were due to move out of the de Cunha home in Opera Estate, Siddon spoke with his mother-in-law, admitting to the one person in their lives who wasn't really "involved" and who he felt he could speak to, that he and his wife didn't know what to do. Mrs Yamamoto suggested that they all live together but to save "face" with her neighbours, because they would know that her daughter had a child so soon after marriage, they would all move to a new rented room in another part of the island, and live together as one family. He found one for forty dollars a month in a flat on East Coast Road, adjacent to the Telok Kurau junction. The landlord was a clerk for an insurance company owning the block of flats they were moving into. The Siddons together with Mrs Yamamoto were crammed into the tiny servant's quarters at the back. His mother-in-law said that she would be able to pay the rent for the first three months but Thomas would have to get a job quickly to support them all, especially as the baby would need milk because Mariko couldn't breastfeed it.

But finding work wasn't as easy as Thomas had thought. In desperation he sought out de Cunha at his home, thinking that the man would be sympathetic. He was shocked and dismayed when Jerry reprimanded him for missing out on the opportunities that had come his way before, and summarily ordered him out of his home and not come "crawling" to him again. Humiliated and wordlessly enraged, he stumbled from de Cunha's house, his mind in a whirl. He remembered that when Mariko had been found to be pregnant it was the de Cunhas who had insisted that he and Mariko marry and that his "guardian" and his wife, Joan, would support them and their child until he had completed his university. But after cleverly getting rid of him from their lives de Cunha was relinquishing all responsibility. Thomas didn't have a family to fall back on, nor a community, and he didn't have a job. The one couple he had thought would have given him a "leg up" had turned their back on him, he felt.

Shocked, depressed, feeling betrayed, he knew there was only one avenue left, and one which he had always been avoiding. It was the American girl, Merle. She would be harsh and she would demand her "ounce of flesh" by way of getting him to slog long hours with her for a pittance but he couldn't afford the time to walk the streets in the hope of getting work. He needed steady employment in a hurry and straightaway, otherwise his family would starve and be kicked out of their miserable

cramped quarters. He had put off seeking help from Merle for so long but he knew she would extend her hand. It was her nature. At least she wouldn't turn from him. He would visit her at her new offices at Shaw House in Orchard Road where she had gone since moving out of the Jewish millionaire's house in Amber Road.

Merle Jordon listened to his tale of woe, then told him that she couldn't afford to take on a fully-paid employee. Thomas realised immediately that she was purposely making it "difficult" for him. She would not be offering him anything until he ate humble pie. He was in a tight spot. Mentally he envisioned his world crumbling. His baby going hungry, his family kicked out of their home. He knew that if he insisted on a "properly-paid" job his chance for employment would go out the window. He tried begging for help as his brain shrieked that it was Merle and the de Cunhas who had promised to look after his family while he completed his education, forgetting that he had wilfully chucked a job obtained for him by the American girl. He wondered why she didn't say anything about how Jerry had cunningly got rid of him from his life. He had to convince Merle that he wasn't "taking the easy way out" again — he needed employment to feed his baby. He was banking on her feelings of compassion for Kean Siew Jordon, his son.

After listening to him in silence, the American girl seemed to have reached a decision. She said the only thing going was the *peon's*, (Malay: meaning "office boy's"), position. It was twenty-five dollars a week and there would be no Central Provident Fund contributions for his retirement in future because her "Institute" didn't have the proper funds. As far as the government was concerned, if there was any inquiry, he was only a casual worker.

But, if she employed him, she said, he had to give his word to remain until her project was concluded. Her "Institute" had grown, and had been registered as a legal organisation with its own board of directors and she was its secretary. Thomas would help in the "donkey work" and all menial tasks in the project, which was to research into how Islam came to Malaya, which differed from the way to it had spread to other Muslim countries. In Malaya, she said, it had arrived via trade rather than by the sword.

Thomas Siddon knew that Merle had "sussed" that he was in a jam. Feeling forlorn, dejected, rejected and desperate, to him her offer seemed a godsend that day. There was no time to hold out for more or to look elsewhere for something better. There was the immediate problem of the baby's milk and the rent, which none of his previous benefactors had seemed bothered about. If Merle gave him the blessed position his family would be able to struggle along. He mutely nodded his head in acceptance

of what he knew was her outlandish demands. He would work for the pittance of one hundred dollars a month until her "project" was concluded before attempting to look elsewhere for "something better". God only knew how long that would be. Anyway, she had said that he "might grow" with the "project", though she didn't see how as he didn't have the requisite academic qualifications. But she would train him. Thomas didn't care. Merle had given him a job and he could feed his baby son.

For some unearthly reason normal work opportunities seemed to elude him and Merle was exploiting his situation but he would pull through. Somehow. Hadn't he survived the war and the gangster-ridden streets of his adolescence? He would not falter at this stage of his life. It was February 1960. He would be twenty in the following month and his son was already seven months old. But he would make it because he believed in himself.

## Indian Sojourn

### *Chapter Nine*

Work at Merle Jordon's was anything and everything. Thomas Siddon discovered on his first day of work. He doubled up as peon and general delivery clerk, also made and served coffee to visitors, swept and cleaned the office, washed all the drinking and food utensils whenever they had been used, and delivered festive greeting cards to interested individuals and organisations, including bookshops, as well as the Muslim-Tamil-owned 'hole-in-the-wall' corner-shops, scattered all over the city, which had a 'knack' of stocking-up on all sorts of unbelievable "odds and ends" that companies and individuals in the surrounding offices of their vicinity might just be on the look-out for urgently.

The festive greeting cards, in all the four 'main languages', (Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English), carried the standardised felicitations that were "good" for any of the major festive seasons celebrated by the four main communities. There were four designs, each featuring a reproduction in full colour of an original painting by a local, up-and-coming artist. In those days, for Singapore, this use of an artist's original work as a greeting card was considered 'sophisticated', and Merle's concept was regarded as "original and "revolutionary". Sales from the cards, which were well-received, went toward raising funds for her research projects but her main source of revenue came from the donations of well-wishers, and large corporations whom she was always badgering for money.

A month after starting at Merle's, Siddon was "shown the ropes" in basic book-keeping so that he could make the daily entries and "ease" the workload of the part-time Chinese accountant. All for twenty-five dollars a week.

Slogging beside Merle Jordon everyday Thomas saw a facet to her that he had never previously realised. She worked long, hard hours and pushed him just as harshly though, it appeared to him, she seemed to be undertaking the dreary routine for her own perverse sense of masochistic pleasure. To him it seemed she unnecessarily worked the long hours and pushed him to put in just as much dog-tired time because, though it was an addiction on her part, she still needed someone to keep her company. Each time she caught his abject look of misery she would angrily remind him that she didn't need his services. *He* had come a-begging and she had given him work out of concern for his child. Once, he had talked back, saying that since she didn't really *need* him, he would quit as soon as alternative employment came his way. She flew off the handle then and called him an "ingrate". He had given his word to stay and work until her project was completed and he couldn't go back on his 'commitment'. She was in the habit of using such terms, "bullying" everyone who came in contact with her to do her bidding by brow-beating them to her will.

He began each work-day at nine in the morning and carried on straight until three the following morning when she would drop him, in her car, on East Coast Road where he and his family rented the servant's room in a ground-floor flat. He was still expected to turn up at the office at nine the next morning. Thomas thought it unfair that she came in after ten, by car, and would reprimand him for any "forgetful act", due to the near state of exhaustion he constantly was in.

The woman's "project" had become a legalised institution which researched the Malay World surrounding Singapore. One of the Institute's main preoccupations was the undertaking of studies into the phenomenon of how Islam came to Malaya. In the past, he had heard her say to visitors to the office, religions, were "normally" introduced into a country after conquest by an invading army which also forced its own religion, customs and culture on the vanquished nation. But in Malaya Islam had come via peaceful trade with Muslim merchants, over centuries. The American woman was also researching the effect of Islam on Malay society in Malaya and Singapore, ethnic Malay customs (*adat*), the collection of the Islamic taxes of *zakat* and *fitrah* in Malaya and what was done with the sums collected, and the structure and mores of the *Malayo-Polynesian* region. This "area", he had heard her say, comprised southern Thailand, Malaya, Singapore, Borneo, Indonesia, the Philippines, New Guinea, Fiji, Polynesia, Taiwan, (its indigenous tribes), the Hawaiian Islands and Polynesia. It was a "revelation" to him. He had never realised that Merle had been involved in research of such a nature. Thomas was amazed that a White would even

be interested in such a subject. The British, he knew, had been totally bored with anything "local".

The woman never discussed anything with him, treating him as if it were all "beyond" his comprehension. But she did talk about her work with her evening visitors who were mainly local and who frequently dropped by to offer moral support, revelling in the pleasure of being able to converse with a White who didn't behave superior with them. Because even though the island had already 'obtained' self-rule from Britain, the British that had remained on the island still continued to act aloof. Merle always got her visitors to provide the "extra hands" needed for the menial tasks of cutting and pasting press clippings on sheets of paper for filing, or cyclostyling study papers for discussion by her group of scholars and researchers. It was from such stray conversations that he gleaned a lot about what she was attempting to do. He was truly impressed by the scholarly people who visited the office, and who treated her with respect and honour. He was "unseen", taken for the low-paid minion who only did the dull routine slog of an office-boy. And he resented it.

It was depressing, working the long, dreary hours, to find his family fast asleep on his return in the wee hours. To waken at the crack of dawn while his mother-in-law, who no longer worked at the Chinese-owned Japanese grocer's because the business had declined and she had been retrenched, brewed him strong, black coffee and fed him two slices of unbuttered bread for breakfast. Mariko, his wife, would be fast asleep, exhausted from looking after their baby, Kean Siew. Thomas had chosen to give his first-born a Chinese name, among his other Christian ones, as his manifestation of "support" for the multi-racial society the newly-elected Singapore government had promised it would develop. He had felt it was the least he could do as a forthcoming "citizen" of the rapidly-approaching independent country of his birth. If there was going to be a "multi-racial" society both in Singapore and Malaya, it had to start with a free interchange of names "borrowed" from the various communities that made up the "fabric" of the intended "new" society the PAP government in Singapore had promised to nurture, by the learning of one another's language and becoming familiar with each community's culture and religion. The island's Chinese Chief Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, had dramatically demonstrated the reaching out to a multi-racial "ideal" by his ability to speak "book" Malay, English and Mandarin-Chinese, (which wasn't his language, he spoke the Hakka dialect and the *peranakan* or "native-born" Malay of his mother's *Baba-Nyonya* Community). The Government had also said that Malay was the national language. It was a calculated assurance to the Malays on Singapore, as well

as the surrounding Malay countries, that the strong Chinese majority on Singapore would not attempt to make alarming radical changes within the island, especially conversion of the former Malay island-kingdom into a complete "Sino-society".

Even though her mother had offered to look after Kean Siew, while she looked for work, Mariko, his wife flatly refused because, she said, she didn't feel confident obtaining a job because she was Japanese. She was fearful that she would be discriminated against. Her husband silently seethed because if she had somehow overcome her imagined fears and obtained employment, they could have had an easier life. But he remained silent, still feeling guilty because he had got her pregnant. He concentrated on his job, getting to his bus-stop by seven each morning to reach the office on time. The buses of those days were always over-crowded and ran late. He could only afford the thirty-five cents fare to town, paying twenty-five cents for the trip to Stamford Road, from home, and another ten cents from the "Capitol Cinema" to Shaw House in Orchard Road, where his office was. He never had money for lunch because his meagre wage was barely sufficient to cover the room-rent, milk for the baby and basic food for his wife and mother-in-law.

On the odd day when he could leave the office "early", meaning the normal end-of-office-day-time of five-thirty, because Merle had to suddenly rush to Kuala Lumpur by air for a day-trip, for something relating to her research-work, and would only return to Singapore the following morning, he would walk the seven-odd miles to Telok Kurau and home, because he didn't have bus-fare. Despite being tired during these times he could at least look forward to a hot, but simple meal, that would be prepared for him by his mother-in-law from the cheap cuts of meat which he would buy on Sundays from the Tamil meat-vendor at the "wet market" at Siglap. He did the marketing as his wife and mother-in-law were too embarrassed to do it themselves because on the pittance that he brought home each month that was all they could afford. At work, when Merle was in town, on "lucky" days she would take him to lunch or the part-time Chinese clerk, who was also the accountant, would offer him part of his lunch-packet. Sometimes in the evenings, when "volunteers" turned up to help in cutting and pasting press clippings and the other odds and ends of the institute's "donkey work", Merle would send him out to get cakes for everybody and he would have his share. He was completely cut off from his friends.

On those rare occasions when Merle was in Malaya doing actual research, looking up references in long-forgotten tomes, which entailed her being away for several weeks at a time, he would be able to get home at the

"normal" office closing time of five-thirty in the evening. But he would always take the opportunity to "dawdle" at the "Catholic Centre" in Bras Basah Road and while away time with former cronies before getting home. It was depressing to listen to those whom he knew, with lesser education, boast of shorter working hours and for more take-home pay, and who even found life enjoyable. But he wouldn't let on about his own problems. He had promised Merle that he wouldn't resign until her project was completed and he was "lumped" with his situation, and telling so-called "friends" your woes just made them laugh at you behind your back, he felt.

But he really felt despondent and cheated when the Senior Cambridge Examination results, which were marked in London, and which he had taken in the previous year, were published in March 1960, and he saw that he had come through with flying colours! But always his scruples were too strong for him. He had given his word to Merle Jordon and would keep it until her bloody project was over. He had just turned twenty and Mariko was pregnant again.

On 19th April 1960 the Malayan Government announced that the twelve-year "Emergency" against the Communists would officially come to an end on 31st July.

"Malaya," said Tengku Abdul Raham, the Malayan Prime Minister, "can claim to have been the only country to have fought and conquered...the...forces of evil..."

That year Thomas discovered that he could write "stuff" other than poetry, and knowing that helped console and make him more determined to better his lot, despite feeling that life had handed him a raw deal. The opportunity came when the Institute launched an "open" play-writing contest sometime in May on the subject of nurturing a multi-racial society, the "in-topic" of those times. There was going to be separate cash-prizes for the top Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English language entries. As the deadline for the play-attempts drew nearer, the Institute's panel of judges discovered to its dismay that the number of English-language plays were not only a mere trickle but those that had already been submitted were sub-standard. There were "volumes" of exceptional plays in the vernacular languages though. It looked as if the English language section of the play-writing contest was about to be doomed.

Thomas had all along fantasized about making a play-attempt for the Malaya-Singapore-wide contest but had realised that it would have been considered unethical because he was an employee of the Institute. But when he overheard the judges' misgivings about the standard of the English language entries and that not many had been received, he began to hope that



his wild day-dream could become a reality. Three days before the closing deadline, as the judges hastily convened an emergency meeting to discuss the lack of original plays in the English-language section of the contest, to Merle Jordon's amazement he approached the group of eminent scholars seated at the "conference section" of the Institute's office and boldly inquired whether he could submit an entry. Despite the frowning disapproval of the American woman, a quick discussion ensued among the other judges. It was finally agreed that if the young man could come up with "something" by the evening of the closing date, three days away, and if there were no more entries of "worth", Thomas' play would be considered. But there was one proviso, if he won there would be no prize because in that way no one could accuse the Institute of any underhandedness. Thomas agreed. Winning the island-and-peninsula-wide contest, if he did win at all, would be honour and reward enough, he thought. With all the publicity in the newspapers about the dearth of good local writing, his winning such a contest, thrown open to the so-called "literati" would make everyone sit up and take note that he could write, he thought to himself.

Merle allowed him home "early" that evening so that he could begin work on his play. But he still had to work the remaining two days to the play-contest as normal, during "office-hours". Whatever time he put into writing, she said, had to be his own. Thomas knew what that meant as far as Merle was concerned but not to the others who mistakenly thought that he kept "regular" working hours. He knew that Merle would still make him slog into the wee hours. It was none of the judges' business, anyway, she told him later.

He wrote his one-act play from three in the morning till five, foregoing sleep for two days to get it done. He chose an excerpt from the "southseas" voyages of Admiral Cheng Hoe, the Chinese Muslim eunuch who was an emissary of the Ming Court of China in the fifteenth century. The Chinese admiral had chanced upon an island in "the Malays" where everyone had claimed to be "the king". Utilising that incident he argued the cause for the then "strange" concept of "multi-racialism". He had his script typed and handed in by the evening of the closing date. Merle Jordon accepted it wordlessly and Thomas felt peeved by what he considered her "peculiar" disapproving quiet. He wondered whether she just considered him too stupid to write because he had never gone to university or that he had been 'insolent' in approaching the judges to allow him to compete. She was ignorant, he felt, you either had a writing talent or you didn't.

On 19th June 1960 the press reported that a conference of the ruling People's Action Party had recommended the expulsion from the party of

Ong Eng Guan, Singapore's first and only mayor before he had been promoted Minister of National Development. There were accusations that he allegedly attempted to disrupt party unity and destroy the collective leadership. The former mayor, previously, had put forward sixteen demands which, he said, were aimed at consolidating the PAP. These included talks with Britain for a revision of the Singapore Constitution, the release of all persons detained for security reasons before the PAP came to power, increased taxation of the rich, the appointment of a party committee to approve cabinet measures, and a mass rally to condemn apartheid in South Africa. It was the first time a surprised former colonial population heard the racist term: "apartheid". The English-owned-and-controlled "The Straits Times" sheepishly "explained" its meaning and significance. Before that no one among the local population had ever been aware of what South Africa had practised against its African peoples.

The following day on 20th June, the Executive Committee of the PAP announced the suspension of Ong Eng Guan from the Government. He and two party supporters were expelled from the People's Action Party on 27th July. Ong next resigned from the Assembly, contested a by-election at Hong Lim in chinatown, won, and became a member of the Opposition. He immediately began an attack on the PAP and party personalities, especially the Chief Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

In October the judges of the Malaya-Singapore-wide play-writing contest organised by Merle's Institute announced that Thomas Siddon's play, *Aku Raja*, (Malay: "I am King"), had been adjudged "best play" not only for the English language-section but over those entered in the vernacular. It was chosen, the judges announced, because it had been well-written, and the subject matter, the core of the story, had been deemed an original attempt. Merle Jordon received the verdict wordlessly. She handed the judges' slip containing their decision to Thomas without a congratulatory word but chose that moment to announce that she would be returning to the United States of America for a much-needed "break". She said she wouldn't be in Singapore to help organise the prize-giving ceremony for his winning the play-writing contest. Though Thomas wouldn't be receiving *any* prize, he could still see to the production of his play since there was no one else to do it, she said. The elated playwright thought her attitude strange as well as antagonistic. It pained him to witness her open disinterest in his surprising and unexpected honour, and in helping with the production of his play.

After the sudden announcement of her impending return to her "homeland", after a gap of some ten years to visit her parents, Merle

promoted him to running the office in her absence at an increment of a hundred dollars, which meant that he would be earning two hundred a month. So, he thought to himself, the Institute could have afforded him a raise before. It was she who had chosen not to let him have one, he thought. A new "boy", a Malay from Johore, Malaya, would take over his office-cleaning, coffee-making, delivery and other general chores. She even held out a promise, on her return, of getting the Institute's directors to approve a more substantial raise. He would be trained for more important work as he had shown by his ability to write that he had "something", she said. But already Thomas had begun to mistrust her.

Merle told him she had been aware that he had been inadequately paid but the finances of the Institute were strained when he had first joined. My god, he thought to himself, she had still lived the life of the *ang moh*, (Chinese: "red devil", Chinese derogatory for Whites like the British colonialists, who lived the 'good' life at the expense of the locals), living and eating in the "manner she was accustomed to" when he had been barely subsisting on less than a coolie's breakfast, and the chance meal coming his way from her at mid-day. Merle told him that if he were stuck for cash during her absence he could help himself to the money coming in from the Institute's various projects like the card-selling aspect of their fund-raising. But he was to keep an accounting of it so that she could make good the "necessary sums", on her return. Thomas nodded his understanding and appreciation, his initial disappointment over her weird behaviour toward his winning the play-writing contest fading away with the realisation that he would be able to obtain money, since she had given him permission to advance himself sums for his family, should the urgent need ever arise.

Things speeded up as the day to her departure drew near and everyone involved beavered away at a hectic pace to have everything just the way she liked it. It was inevitable that frayed emotions, exhaustion and the strain of keeping to deadlines, would tell. On the eve of Merle's departure in early October, over a trifling matter, both he and she exploded at one another in front of a crowd of shocked well-wishers. She sacked him on the spot and Thomas spun on his heels and stormed out of the office. Shocked, angry, yet relieved that he had finally broken free of her "hold" on him, he took the bus to Bras Basah Road and spent his first full day in months chewing the fat with former cronies at the "Catholic Centre". He got home around nine, as the actual state of his position finally began to sink in. He was out-of-work. Then he spied Mariko, his wife, and his mother-in-law, standing on the pavement outside their flat, looking sick with worry as Merle's fiance' a Chinese politician from Penang, and several other of her friends stood

alongside them. He noticed that the American girl wasn't there. Everyone began persuading him to return to work and he, inwardly relieved that he still had a job, though he didn't indicate it, made a show of being persuaded. When he felt he had made the necessary show of being reluctant, finally assured everyone that he would be back at the Institute on the following morning. But he decided not to turn up at the Paya Lebar International Airport to see Merle off, before he went to office the next morning.

Realising that he was solely in charge, he began work with a vengeance. He looked forward to locating a producer to stage his play at the Cultural Centre in Fort Canning, as well. He was a budding playwright. Maurice Dupon somehow, heard of his achievement, and to Thomas' pleasant surprise turned up at the Institute to offer felicitations and help in producing the play. Sidon was overjoyed. On top of recognition for his writing ability his best friend had returned into his life once more. It was cream on top of his cake. Inwardly he was pleased that he had beaten his pal to being first, between them, to write a play that would be produced.

Mariko's contractions came suddenly on the early morning of 1st November. His mother-in-law, in the meanwhile had gone to visit friends in Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, taking young Kean Siew, already a year old, with her. It was to be Thomas' pay day that morning but in that early dawn when the first signs that his wife was about to give birth manifest itself, all he had in his pocket was fifteen dollars. He had yet to get to office by nine that morning, collect his pay-cheque which had already been pre-signed by Merle before she had departed for America, get it endorsed by the other authorised co-signatory of the Institute, before cashing it. And that was some six hours away. It was the system that had been arranged by Jordon. But his need was in the present moment at two in the morning, with an anxious wife about to deliver. He bundled the groaning Mariko into a passing cab and successfully had her admitted into the third class "free" ward of the Kandang Kerbau Maternity Hospital in "Little India" off Serangoon Road. Afterward he walked in the early dawn, from the hospital to Orchard Road, to spend what was left of the night on the office-floor of the Institute. At ten in the morning the hospital rang, as he had left them his office-number, to say that he had a son. It was his second.

He got to Mariko's side by noon that day. He hadn't yet been able to cash his cheque because the other signatory wasn't available but he still had a few dollars remaining from his original fifteen, after paying for the taxi to the hospital that morning. Thomas didn't have a clue about ante-natal care but knew that his wife needed sustenance, and on the way to her had dropped by a Chinese "chicken-rice" stall at Bencoolen Street, got a take-away

packet of the dish as well as a bottle of chicken-essence from a nearby grocer's, and "borrowed" a spoon from the "chicken-rice" hawker who had known him from his secret society days in Bencoolen Street. Mariko was famished and scoffed the lot. Then she was thirsty, and as there didn't seem to be any mugs or cups handy in the third class ward where she was, he used the empty chicken-essence bottle to fetch water several times from the taps in the bathroom until she was quenched. Both youngsters knew that they made quite a spectacle to the other patients and their respective families, all of whom were Chinese, and who acted superior and aloof as all of them had brought along mouth-watering meals for the newly-become mothers in their respective families. If they were so superior, thought Thomas, they shouldn't have been in the third class "free" ward, anyway. But at that moment Mariko and Thomas didn't care as they fondly gazed down on the new addition to their family. It would seem to him though, that the Chinese, that day, had forgotten what it was like to want or to be in need.

Prior to the birth of their new baby Mariko and Thomas had already agreed on his various names, if he was a boy, and immediately after visiting hours, Thomas went downstairs to the birth registration sub-office in the hospital and filed the names of his second son. Apart from his Christian names, Thomas gave him the name "Rahman", after the Prime Minister of Malaya. He and Mariko had agreed not to baptise their children as they preferred that each of them would choose their own religion when they became adults. He and Mariko would only teach them the difference between right and wrong. They felt that as parents they had no "right" to push their offspring toward any particular religion which they might later reject in life. Anyway if they had chosen to baptise their kids in the Roman Catholic faith the priests would have insisted that father and mother get married in the church first, and Thomas didn't want that. Not a religion that wouldn't allow divorce.

When he returned to the hospital later that evening he was properly armed with adequate food and appeared like any other "normal" husband conveying a tempting, tasty meal to his spouse. He had managed to cash his pay-cheque. When he arrived at Mariko's side he was informed by the ward-sister that she could return home on the following morning since it was a third class ward and her bed was needed for the next poor woman who would be giving birth. Furiko Suzuki, Mariko's mother, and Kean Siew returned from Kuala Lumpur the following evening. Thomas had succeeded in tracking his mother-in-law down by phone at the Institute's office, the day of his second son's birth, to give her the glad tidings.

Mariko didn't attend his play on opening night as she was still recuperating from her "confinement". The play was well received by the enthusiastic multi-racial audience who found its theme in keeping with the going "trend" of those days. Though he was disappointed that no reporters from any of the press had turned up. Afterward, finding only Maurice Dupon remaining to offer him congratulations, (the actors, producer and volunteer-helpers had all gone home as soon as the play ended), the two friends went out for a few "celebration beers". Even though their friendship had warmed to almost their previous level before their parting of the ways, brought on by Dupon's insistence, Thomas hadn't told his pal of the recent addition to his family. It had nothing to do with their friendship as far as Sidon was concerned.

From an evening of celebration they began to reminisce over their almost-forgotten youthful dreams and aspirations of old, and their futures. Thomas admitted to being dissatisfied over his involvement in Merle Jordan's projects. He felt trapped, he said, because he had given his word to remain at the Institute until her projects were completed. While Maurice confessed that he hadn't yet landed a steady job since leaving his radio job two years previously when the two of them had gone on their skin-diving "jaunt". Dupon said that the job market was depressed. He was living on his family and earning "pocket-money" writing articles for several overseas magazines. He then touched on his former relationship with the American girl and how he had severed it because he had seen what she had been up to, trying to make everyone feel obligated to her and her so-called "ideals". Thomas was "mad" to allow her to exploit his feelings of gratitude just because she had helped in his education. She was now "using" him for her own ends — her projects would never end, they were on-going and she would have a "smart-guy" for a song. Hers was scholarly work, not geared to profit-making as "normal" companies were. He kept persuading Sidon not to feel obligated to the "Yank" but the other defended his position. Merle had taken him out of his "bad situation", had helped him complete secondary school, and he was beholden to her for that, and in offering him work even though it was the "dregs" as far as he was concerned. Somehow better work opportunities eluded him, but with Merle at least he had a job.

Their conversation next turned to prospects abroad and they both agreed that England held better prospects for them because they were both English-educated and spoke English perfectly, but it wasn't an advantage in Singapore any more. England was booming with plenty of work opportunities though getting there was the problem. Maurice had been out of work for so long, while Thomas already had a family of his own to support. They couldn't "move" without money. Gradually the topic of

hitch-hiking crept into their discussion. It seemed as if the two of them had been avoiding the obvious answer to their "travel-dilemma" all along. The idea seemed overwhelming and they agreed to shelve further discussion on it until after Christmas, which was 'round the corner', to give them both time to ponder what they were already considering, Dupon said.

On 29th December 1960, seventeen minutes before he was expected to appear before the Legislative Assembly, meeting in committee to substantiate serious allegations that he had made of corruption and nepotism against Chief Minister Lee Kuan Yew, Ong Eng Guan, the former mayor of Singapore City, who had been expelled from the People's Action Party and Government in July, resigned his seat. The assembly thereupon voted to set up a Commission of Inquiry, which met and found the accusations levelled at the Chief Minister "...untrue, groundless and reckless..." and that Ong Eng Guan was a person "...not to be believed..." The Opposition decided not to vote on the Government-motion to condemn Ong, and Chief Minister Lee Kuan Yew accused them of having no principles, or fixed beliefs.

When Thomas and Maurice met again in the new year, Siddon was silently amazed when his friend brought up the question of their hitch-hiking to England again. He had thought that their "chin-wag" of the previous year had been all "beer-talk". No, Dupon insisted, he had been in deadly earnest — there was nothing keeping him in Singapore. It was an island of depression, without opportunity for the likes of both of them. Maurice would get to England with or without Thomas. His two elder sisters would take care of his mother while he was hitch-hiking, got to England and landed work so that she could eventually join him. If Thomas had developed "cold feet", it was "okay". But Dupon preferred him to come along as a "partner". They would take ship to Calcutta, travel overland from there, hitch-hiking through India into Pakistan, Persia, the Middle East and Europe.

It sounded so cut and dried when Dupon put it that way. But the question of his "deserting" his family plagued his mind and he could not reconcile himself to the fact that if he went he would be deserting his wife and children. Thomas brought it up with the other, and after further discussion both agreed that in the long run, if he succeeded in getting to London and finding work, Thomas would be better able to look after his family. Anyway, they both agreed, "achieving" their destination "justified" the trip. Right then his family was practically living from hand-to-mouth, he admitted. Thomas, there and then decided that he would accompany Dupon. They agreed not to let Mariko know in case she let the cat out of the bag by writing about their plans to Merle. It would be safer, and more

'sensible', they both agreed, for him to write his wife after they had put "enough water" between themselves and Singapore. Then no one could stop them.

Thomas was in two minds even though he threw himself into planning for the trip that he thought would finally change his and Maurice's "luck". But he still tried hard to appease his conscience that it was "legitimate" to desert his family rather than to remain in Singapore and see them starve on the pittance Merle was paying him. He rationalised that since he couldn't "make it" in Singapore he might as well try England. He probably could do better because he had a basic education, spoke good English fluently, and British bosses weren't sticklers for "higher qualifications", preferring workers with common sense. And he knew he had the residential qualifications because his father was English, though Siddon had forgone the "invitation", (through not fault of his own), as little child to settle in Britain when the offer had been made by the British to his mother, and she had refused because she dreaded the idea of having to live in a cold climate. But he knew that if he did finally make it to Britain, with their social services he would be better able to support his family and even get to university. Arriving at that conclusion he was content to proceed with his hitchhiking plans once more.

Things in Singapore, he reasoned, were one-sided. The jobs were going to the English-educated as well as the Chinese-educated Chinese because they were the majority community. Somehow the Brits seemed to prefer giving them the jobs. He pondered over the lop-sided favouritism. And some of the Chinese weren't even born in Singapore. He was, and had even been interned as a baby, with his mother, in the Japanese-run Sime Road Civilian Concentration Camp during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. If the British felt a responsibility for their immigrant workers' children, shouldn't they have been just as concerned about their own first-and-second-generation half-caste descendants like him? The "half-British" children's "connection" was a "blood-tie" to the mother-country! And on those progeny, through their respective maternal forebears, was a direct link to the indigenous Malay on whose land everyone had come to settle. Where was the British sense of fair play? He wasn't anti-Chinese because it was they who had befriended him after he had left the "succour" of Melrose to enter St Patrick's Boys' School, and had even showed him how to "survive" the lawless streets for a time. But he had learned their dialect and knew that they didn't regard any non-Chinese as part of the island-community, despite what Mr Lee Kuan Yew and his cohorts said. Because the Chinese only believed in the superiority of their own race over all the other "devils".



Even Lee's party said "people's action" in their name — and this could only mean one thing, because the character 'ren' in Chinese was usually written and spoken to mean the Chinese race by the Chinese themselves.

On 11th January 1961 the Singapore Minister of Culture, Mr Sinnathamby Rajaratnam, who was married to a European, announced in the Singapore Legislative Assembly that the Government on 6th January had foiled a communal plot by an extremist organisation known as "the soldiers of the Muslim Revolution" to bring about murderous conflict between the Chinese and Malays on the island. In an unoccupied attap hut in the Jalan Eunus Malay district, in the eastern sector of Singapore, jungle-green military uniforms with shoulder-badges bearing a white crescent-and-star on a green background, and flags with Arabic inscriptions, had been unearthed. The minister said that the danger had been averted because all the key figures involved in the plot had been apprehended. The group's failure had been due to the speedy action of the Government and the assistance of members of the Muslim Advisory Board, leaders of the United Malays National Organisation, (UMNO), and other political and religious bodies. Many Singapore residents treated the announcement with scepticism. The older generation had forgotten the pre-war "troubles" between the racial communities, and the young, since the war, had yet to "experience" the spectacle of one community slaughtering another community out of sheer hatred and intolerance. The Malays, publicly dormant, in fact really regarded the Chinese and Indians as unwelcome "intruders" brought in by the colonising British, even though a majority of their own community had been attracted to the British-held island since 1819, from different parts of the Malay World themselves.

As Merle Jordon had told him that he could "advance" himself sums of money from the office should he be "short", Thomas withdrew five hundred dollars, three hundred was his pay and the other two hundred he regarded as a "loan". He knew the Institute could afford it. He put the three hundred in an envelope for Mariko, together with a brief note explaining his motive for "disappearing". The money should last three months since his family had been living so long on just a hundred a month, and he prayed his wife would pull through, especially since his family wouldn't have his expenses to contend with. He still felt himself a bastard and pacified his growing sense of shame that he had at least been able to give his family what they had always been used to. A hundred a month for three months, during which time he hoped to be in London. And he hadn't taken advantage of his position at the Institute to cheat it of large sums, which he could have. He had taken just what had been his wages, and a "loan". For his passport and

a deck-passage ticket to Calcutta. Maybe during his absence Mariko would "grow up" and get a job, and stand on her own feet.

He became conscious of his racial background again when the Chinese clerk at the passport office in Empress Place, close to the mouth of the Singapore River, told him that he needed a British passport issued by the British High Commission in Collyer Quay. (He had been surprised to hear her Sino-accented English, which was different from the English spoken by the English-educated Chinese of Singapore, and realised that since the PAP had come to power, "graduates" of the Mandarin-medium Nanyang University in Jalan Bahar in Jurong, set up by the China-born Chinese, and "recognised" only by Singapore, had been taken on in the civil service). He reflected on the Chinese woman's assumption that he was entitled to a "pure" British passport just because it said his father was English on his birth certificate. Did she "naturally" assume, because the Chinese take their ethnicity from their fathers, that since his father was English, he had to be one as well? The Chinese, on their own were beginning to regard the "half-caste" as an outsider in Singapore, he felt. In the end however, he decided to get the more "valuable" travel document since he would be journeying through some strange, foreign lands and would need all the "clout" he could get, which, he felt, he might have, with a Brit passport.

Maurice and Thomas met everyday to go over their plans and make sure they hadn't overlooked anything. Each would take care of his own ticket, after they felt sure that every detail had been seen to and any situation anticipated. Dupon got him to agree to not meet further until sailing day at the dock, a few weeks hence. Thomas found it peculiar that his friend insisted on such secrecy, and immediately, as a 'precaution' against anything "unforeseen" that Dupon might "pull", said that should either of them, for any reason decide against making the trip, since they had come this far, the one not "making it" would give to the other all his cash resources, as a "penalty". Dupon seemed to look at him in surprise for a moment before nodding his agreement.

Just as Thomas suspected on the eve of their departure Dupon phoned him in the afternoon at the Institute's office in Shaw House to say that he wouldn't be accompanying Siddon as his mother had suddenly taken ill. To Siddon it was the typical "Indian's excuse", begging to be let off a prior commitment by claiming that a close relative was ill when one, for any reason, couldn't fulfil a prior agreement or appointment. He immediately felt cheated and betrayed. Heart sinking and his suspicions aroused, he remembered the young, attractive Filipina they had both got to know recently. Maurice had seemed very taken up with her. *She* must have been

the true reason for his shocking change of heart, otherwise why would Dupon suddenly change his mind? As if sensing Thomas' misgivings Maurice assured him that he would embark ship a week later, as soon as his mother was on her feet again. He would arrive in Calcutta ten days later than planned, and, if Thomas would wait in that city, they both could set out together after his arrival. Thomas reluctantly agreed. He had no other option anyway. Intent on getting everything ready, he had made no provision for such a set-back as was presented to him by Dupon that day. If he remained in Singapore until Maurice was ready he would first have to change the date on his ticket, which was already too late to do, since it was the eve of departure, and he had psyched himself up to go. He knew that if he stayed back he would change his mind and remain in Singapore for the rest of his life. He was relieved though, that he had previously obtained Dupon's commitment to forward him his own "grub-stake" money if, for any reason the other had decided not to make the trip. He reminded his friend of their previous commitment to one another. The other merely grunted. Thomas realised that he was making the trip alone and felt saddened. Dupon was once again pulling the carpet from under his feet. He began to feel tinges of guilt again when he realised that he was about to desert his family, as feelings of being let-down overcame him. He cursorily broke off the telephone conversation.

Thomas tried spending his last day in Singapore by getting home early that afternoon on the eve of his departure but Mariko grew agitated with his unfamiliar presence. She seemed unused to having a housebound husband underfoot, and he reluctantly left before he unwittingly let on that something was about to 'happen'. Kissing his family a fond goodbye he fled to the office and spent his last night in Singapore sleeping on the carpet on the floor. He felt that Mariko had looked at him strangely, when he had left their room, though she had not said a thing, as was her wont. He got to the harbour at eight-thirty the following morning and spied Maurice Dupon with several of their friends waiting at the dock-side. Thomas was surprised that he had come with others as they had both agreed that no one would know of their "escapade" until they had made it to London. It would seem he had purposely brought along witnesses to verify, in case Thomas were to ever accuse him in future of going back on his word, that he had been at the dock to see him off, and thus convey the impression that he had never been "involved" in the "escapade". The young man ignored his friend's silent signal with his eyes not to let-on about their original joint hitch-hiking sojourn. He cursorily made his goodbyes at the gang-plank and trudged up the slopping gangway into the bowels of the Indian vessel, away from

everyone's sight. Catching sight of Dupon's face that morning had confirmed his crooked ruse in Siddon's eyes. Heart sinking Thomas knew he had again been tricked by his "friend". What was Dupon's *reason* for making sure that he wasn't in Singapore?

Siddon's was the cheapest type of ticket— deck passage — and he discovered that it literally meant finding his "own spot" on the floor of the ship, which was the deck below the top-deck, and plonked his personal things on it to "mark" his personal "space". He saw that all the best available areas on the deck-floor had already been "booked" by the scores of Indian families from Singapore, Malaya, Indonesia and Hong Kong who were returning to their homeland for a visit. They had placed their personal things to ear-mark their occupancy of a particular spot on the deck-floor for the duration of the trip to India. He took over an unoccupied table and dumped his haversack and guitar, the one Dick and Vincent Alexandro had first "lent" him when they were forming their combo as teenagers and had never asked the return of, on it. He became conscious of the drawing up of the gangplank and realised the ship was about to hoist anchor. Thomas excitedly looked forward to his first overseas trip from Singapore, expectant that he would be changing his "luck" when he eventually arrived in London.

That evening the ship's carpenter, an ethnic-Indian who had been adopted as a baby by a Chinese couple in Calcutta's "chinatown" and raised as a Chinese, befriended him. Though he looked Indian the man spoke his English in a Sino-accent. He told Thomas his name was Cheng. He seemed to have all the mannerisms and gestures of a Chinese, which Thomas found familiar but catching sight everytime of Cheng's "Indian-complexion" always caught him by surprise. Cheng explained that a ship's carpenter held officer-rank and was served western-type meals which he found unappetising, and wondered whether the other would "help" by finishing his evening meal so that the ship's cook wouldn't be "upset", while he prepared and ate his own Chinese food which he cooked in his cabin. Since he could only look forward to eating deck-passage "Indian-grub" throughout his journey, Thomas readily accepted. Things seemed to be looking up, he felt. Maybe the trip might turn out to be alright after all.

Throughout their passage to Calcutta, whenever he had free time, Cheng would seek out Thomas for a chat. He seemed to delight in practising his English on the Eurasian. They grew to be fast friends in a matter of days. The "Chinese" even became a valuable source of information and gossip. Thomas heard about the rampant smuggling carried out by the Indians returning home, and the profits they reaped. Many of Cheng's countrymen sneaked in European and American-made luxury items which were sold on

the sub-continent's "black-market" at exorbitant prices. India, he told Siddon, had her own industries, with an official policy of discouraging the import of foreign-made products and this caused foreign-manufactured goods to be scarce in India, which were more preferred by the wealthy, and, as a result, the prices for foreign-made goods were jacked up, Cheng said. It struck Thomas that the Indians from Singapore really didn't regard Singapore as their home, just a place to make money, like the Chinese who had come to his island before and after the Second World War, and that each respective community regarded either India or China as their mother-land.

When Cheng was on duty Thomas would spend his time with a group of Punjabis, all Sikhs from Indonesia. They were returning to the Punjab to either visit their womenfolk or to get married. Everyone kept boasting about the number of Indonesian women he had slept with, especially the girls from the island of Madura who were taught from young to do "fantastic" things with their "pussies" from their own mothers because it was part of the culture of the island, his new friends told him, for the women, when they got married to be able to keep their husbands "happy and satisfied". Not to be outdone Thomas raved about his "score" among the Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian girls on his island. One thing did strike him about the Punjabis from Indonesia, he was never made to feel that he was an "outsider". He wondered whether the feelings of "race" in Singapore were *unique* to the island because of the Chinese, who were in the majority, and who were forever putting an ethnic-label on everyone else?

All the while that they were "shooting the breeze" Thomas noticed that though they were out to sea, the ship never strayed too far from the coastline on their right, as they headed northward. After Penang Island a day later, he saw large, dense, black clouds moving slowly across the sky and was amazed to learn from his "shipmates" that the "clouds" were in fact large flocks of Indian crows "sailing" toward Burma, Thailand and Vietnam to scavenge. They became a common sight after this. Eight days after passing Penang the ship arrived at the mouth of the Irrawaddy River in Burma and sailed up it toward Rangoon, the capital. Twenty-four hours before this Burmese immigration officers had already boarded their ship to check passports and issue visas to those wanting them. Thomas was glad that he had taken the precaution of obtaining his at Singapore prior to sailing as it had only cost him two "Straits" dollars. In Burma the immigration officials were demanding ten "Straits" dollars for ten Burmese "kyats", a visa. The official rate of exchange at Singapore was one "Straits" dollar to ten "kyats"!

It was high tide at Rangoon Harbour when they docked at ten in the morning, as their ship towered over the wharfs. By two that afternoon the tide had gone so low the second-deck where Thomas slept looked up at the docks. Navigating the river when they had first arrived in Burmese waters, he realised, had to be tricky because the river had many bends and shoals, and the captain had to bring his ship up-river at Rangoon quickly otherwise they could all have been "caught" stranded in mid-stream at ebb-tide because the river rose and fell swiftly in a matter of hours.

Before their arrival at the Burmese capital the ship's captain had advised his passengers against visiting the opposite side of the river from where they would be berthed because, he said, it was the "bad side" of town. The Irrawaddy divided the city in two, and the "other side" was the slums with the brothels and gangsters. Anyone straying into that area, who wasn't Burmese, could consider himself lucky if he ever returned with just a sheet of newspaper to cover himself. The prostitutes were notorious for yelling "rape!" whenever they had foreign clients, which was the signal for their gangster "protectors" to barge in and rob their naked, hapless victims blind.

Thomas learned too that a constant guard had to be kept on one's personal belongings on board ship, especially at ebb-tide because the river-boatmen were agile in climbing on deck to quickly fling overboard any unattended property into the swiftly-flowing waters below, before making good their escape by diving into the river and swimming away while the flung-out things from the ship quickly floated downstream, to be collected by waiting cohorts, before the "stash" could sink into the swirling, muddy river-water.

When the ship weighed anchor, three days later, Thomas found that some passengers had disembarked while new ones had come aboard. There were ten heavily-painted Indian women, dressed in gaudy sarees, reeking of heady, cheap perfume. Cheng, ever the fountain of information, said they were whores, and professional smugglers to boot. When the ship docked at Calcutta, he said, the women would be thoroughly searched but somehow, would get ninety percent of their contraband "booty" past the gimlet-eyed Indian customs. The tarts were coarse, spoke boldly with the male passengers, apparently oblivious of the open, hateful, disdainful and disapproving glares of the men's wives who were accompanying their men back home to India.

Twenty-four hours later the ship reached the open waters of the Bay of Bengal and sailed in the direction of Calcutta. Thomas, feeling the need to visit the toilet after breakfast, went amidships to the nearest "men's" and discovered a long queue outside the male-latrines. He decided to try his

"luck" at the other bog-house in the stern. Here he found it absolutely free! Intrigued by the strange occurrence amidships, after "spending a penny", he strolled over to the long row of impatient and agitated men at the other toilet. As he joined the line to discover what had "drawn" everyone to that particular lavatory, he noticed that it had grown longer since his earlier departure. He noticed that there weren't any womenfolk about when normally there would have been a whole gaggle of them chattering away a dime a dozen, close-by.

When at last he stepped inside he was shocked to discover that the place had been "converted" into a floating "stand-up brothel"! The ten prostitutes who had boarded at Rangoon were each occupying a water-closet, and his fellow male-passengers, husbands of the womenfolk who had fled to different parts of the ship because of acute embarrassment over their respective husbands' "preoccupation", were either about to depart or enter a "room" occupied by one of the "Rangoon whores". He caught sight of darkened female thighs or grasping hands demanding payment before permitting an eager, would-be "client" inside. Those leaving came out with sheepish grins, adjusting dhotis disarranged from the all-too-quick tryst. A woman caught sight of Thomas and squawked a coaxing welcome. He shook his head and walked out of the latrines, ears ringing with the derisive scorn of ship-board acquaintances and the bold challenge of the tarts to "see him right". It was all yelled in Hindi but he caught the import. It struck him that Cheng had "diplomatically" omitted the information about the women's "preoccupation" on board the ship between Rangoon and Calcutta!

Five days out they reached the mouth of the Hoogli River in India. The ship waited outside the river-mouth because the tide was out and no vessel could pass over its waters. Around one the following morning, the water rose and they sailed toward Calcutta, arriving and docking about ten that morning. Cheng said he would arrange a place for Thomas to stay in his city, free-of-charge. It was called a "Hindu Musafiq Khanna", a Hindu "travellers' lodge" where one could stay the night at no cost. But no food was provided. Cheng said it was a common amenity provided by Hindu temples in India.

They arranged to meet outside the main harbour-gate after each of them had cleared through customs and immigration. When Thomas was finally finished with all the disembarking formalities it was already three in the afternoon, and there was still a large crowd waiting to be 'processed'. Without warning his mind suddenly harked back to his family in Singapore and the first pangs of guilt hit home. He prayed fervently that what he was undertaking was the "right" course for them all eventually. He silently promised his wife and children that he would make it in life. As he walked

toward Calcutta's main harbour-gate he spied Cheng waiting patiently for him, just outside it. He was a good bloke, Thomas felt. The 'Chinese' hailed a horse-and-carriage, calling it a "gharry", and after much haggling and hand-waving between his friend and the "gharry-driver", they loaded their respective baggage into the creaky vehicle. Exhausted by the long wait and the clearance through customs they wearily settled into the gharry-seat.

As Cheng proudly began relating something of his country's history, Thomas' eye took in the squalid street-scene — the tumble-down houses, the innumerable flies, the stench of dung in the air about them, the reeling, wheeling and squawking crows, and the general squalor everywhere. He had thought Singapore run-down. Calcutta was ever more so. He fervently hoped that when his island eventually obtained independence from the British it wouldn't go the way India had. Cheng suddenly yelled, jolting Thomas out of his reverie, startling him. His unbelieving eyes spied their "gharry-driver" squatting at a nearby street-vendor's, noisily sipping scalding-hot tea between pursed lips oblivious of his surroundings and the two fares sitting in his vehicle! No wonder his friend had let out such an enraged bellow!

The man turned, waved his hand nonchalantly, quickly finished sipping his tea and, oblivious of Cheng's admonishment, clambered aboard his vehicle and "clicked" his horse into motion. The look on his features said that he had considered Cheng "rude" for having "interrupted" his "tea-break"! They plodded on and headed toward the Howrah, a gigantic steel-bridge spanning the Hoogli River. It was the first such bridge Thomas had ever seen, and it looked awesome. Cheng called it the "Chowringe". Thomas got the usual "touristy" run-down on the city's places of interest. He took in the numerous statues and memorials on every street corner, and the stained first three feet of everything — British monarchs, stately imperial lions, soldiers who had seen glory in nameless battles lost in history — from the ground up, covered in dried betel-nut spittle — a dull reddish tinge.

At the "Hindu Musafiq Khanna" a wayside-rest, Thomas noticed his previous shipmates attempting to locate buyers for the myriad goods they had somehow clandestinely slipped through the watchful eyes of the Indian customs officers. There were watches, cameras, tape-recorders, binoculars, sun-glasses, even fountain-pens. All were "luxury items", either European or American in origin. The era of high-quality Japanese-made consumer-products had not yet dawned on the world. Nippon-made goods then were still regarded as inferior in quality and finish, and cheap. Someone offered him seven rupees for his cheap pair of 'clip-on' sun-glasses, purchased in



Singapore's *Change Alley* for a dollar-fifty Straits-currency. Despite not knowing Hindi, the Indian national language, nor having contacts, Thomas cottoned-on that all an enterprising person needed to do to earn money was to "arrange" to put buyer and purveyor together, to claim a "commission" for any successful deal struck between parties that he had put together. He had already become aware that potential buyers as well as aspiring "sellers" seemed highly nervous of the customs officers who seemed to be all over the place at the "Hindu Musafiq Khanna". The Indians seemed terrified of getting caught. The fines were too great, and there was the threat of being barred from either leaving or ever entering India again. And they didn't want that. He approached acquaintances to act on their behalf, and who relievedly agreed to his acting as "go-between" for them.

He sought out genuine buyers from a nearby bazaar and organized meetings between the respective two parties. Within two days he had earned six hundred and fifty rupees. Just like that. There was enough for travelling. He had left Singapore with barely sufficient to take him the first ten miles in Indian territory, now he had sufficient to travel in relative, 'style'. And he would make it to Britain. He had heard from the Indians he had got to know, that there was a cheap chartered coach service from Bombay to London for four hundred rupees. It went overland through Pakistan, Persia, (Iran), the Middle East and Europe. He would make it despite Maurice Dupon's failure to keep in touch. There had been no letter waiting for him at the American Express travel office at Calcutta city. He had quickly dashed off a letter to Mariko, his Japanese wife, telling her why he had "disappeared", where he was, his plans for them all, and that she was not to worry for him. He could take care of himself. It was a cheap shot but he told her he was doing it for the family. Singapore, he wrote her, held no hope for the future for the likes of him.

Cheng came by, as promised on the third day to invite Thomas over to his home in Calcutta's "chinatown". His friend's wife had prepared a typical Chinese meal in honour of the occasion. On the way to the Chengs' he stopped at a grocer's and purchased a bottle of cordial to present to his host's wife as a mark of his appreciation for her efforts in preparing a meal for him. He was glad that he had done so because, from the way her eyes glowed when he presented his gift to her, assured him that he had kept up the fine Oriental tradition of never calling on a host empty-handed. Husband and wife seemed disappointed that he would be leaving for Bombay within a few days. He made a final check with the American Express office, just to make sure there was no note from Dupon, and arranged for any mail that arrived after his departure from Calcutta to be forwarded to the travel agency's Bombay office.

Cheng had forewarned him to pre-book his seat, even though he was travelling third class, as the carriages on the trains would be chock-a-block with passengers who would "fight" for any empty seat. For a little 'extra' he wouldn't need to worry that he had a seat, his friend had advised. Thomas was especially glad that he had heeded Cheng's tip when he got to his carriage on the evening of his departure. As he settled into his seat, after making preparations for his long overland journey to Bombay, a near-riot broke out among those in his carriage who hadn't booked seat-tickets, as a free-for-all erupted but which was quickly halted by the arrival of the station-police who were used to such things, it seemed. After the train had begun its onward trip Thomas would begin to realise that if he hadn't heeded Cheng's advice and obtained his confirmed seat-booking, he would have had to stand for hundreds of miles unless he sat down on the carriage's filth floor, as some poor souls did.

That night he discovered how uncomfortable it was to travel third class on an Indian train. There was no proper bathroom to have a shower and a good scrub, just a wash-basin for a wipe with a small-towel, and a change of underwear. In the morning he discovered that his under-things which he had hung to dry from the "bathroom's" carriage window, thoroughly black with soot. And he had to nod off sitting upright.

Each time the train stopped at a station, vendors surged forward offering all sorts of refreshment, thrusting whatever was on offer through any carriage-window that had been inadvertently left open. But for the first three hundred miles no one in Thomas' carriage left his window open because the other stations along the way had also sold tickets on the same train for the very same carriages that everyone had embarked on at Calcutta! So those within barricaded themselves by blocking all possible ingress into their carriage — doors, windows, even air-vents in the carriage-roof — with chairs and anything else that would reinforce the barriers, while those with tickets at these stations would try to prise-open or breakdown the blocked-up apertures in a vain attempt to affect entry. Sometimes the odd would-be passenger in a final last-ditch attempt would strenuously force his way in, and succeed! And once inside would first of all be accepted by everyone else as having a perfect right to be with them, and who would then assist everyone else in keeping out any other person outside trying to get in! It was a wild scene for Thomas.

About five hundred miles from Calcutta there were no more anxious passengers waiting at stations hoping to clamber aboard, and Thomas followed his fellow-passengers' lead and opened his window for much-needed 'fresh' air. This time at the stations they stopped, he discovered

hawkers with mud pots strung on string tied round their waists, and on their heads, perching precariously, were earthen stoves glowing red-hot from fiery charcoal burning merrily, and whose sole means of "protection" from the tremendous heat being generated were the thick pads of insulating cloth which separated their scalps from the fiery stoves, on which they rested. These hawkers offered mud-cups of boiling-hot tea mixed with fresh buffalo's milk for ten nya-paisa, (about three Singapore cents in those days). The roughly-shaped cups which Siddon considered well-made, were discarded by customers after use. He thought it a wasteful shame. Thomas also discovered the expedient, straightforward meal arrangements on his train. All he had to do was place his order for breakfast, lunch and dinner with the conductor at any stop before a "meal-stop", and be served his "grub" at the appropriate "meal-station". The generous three-course meals served were a mere three rupees each. Unbelievable.

On the third night, as the train travelled through Central India, almost to the town of Jabalpur, three rough-looking men boarded his carriage and sat down opposite him. The trio stared at him silently, studying his appearance openly, then began chattering animatedly among themselves. Thomas pretended not to be aware of their obvious interest and gazed out his window, appearing to lose interest in them but with his ear cocked for any indication that they were about to "do" something. Despite not understanding their language he still knew that they were talking about him. And whatever it was, he knew it brooked no good. Just when he started to despair and began anticipating his soon-to-be first violent encounter in a strange, alien land, the benign-looking elderly Indian gentleman he'd become friendly with earlier that day, slowly and without drawing attention to himself withdrew a breast-wallet from his coat, smoothly slipped-off the top and drew out a pocket-sized snub-nose pistol which was inside it. Thrusting the weapon at the three sinister-looking men, he barked at them harshly in Hindi. The would-be assailants meekly got to their feet and trooped to the far end of the carriage. The relieved and amazed Thomas profusely thanked his benefactor. His benign friend, speaking in English, instructed him to remain vigilant until the evil-looking triad had disembarked at the next station-stop. The other passengers, to Thomas, also seemed to regard the evil-trio with disdain but he wondered whether they would have gone to his aid if he had been attacked.

As the young hitch-hiker from Singapore thanked his "rescuer", the elderly man "educated" him into the "system" of Indian train-robbers. They always chose a likely-looking prospect, he said, who, in their estimation would offer the least amount of "trouble", and would attempt to steal from

him or her at the first opportune moment. If they found it "tricky", for whatever reason, they would "sell" their intended victim to the next group of miscreants further up the track, and should that group prove to be just as unsuccessful, they would again "dispose" of their "prize" to yet another group for a price higher than what they had originally paid for their victim. Thus the price of the intended victim kept on rising, and by the time the unknowing victim was nearing his ultimate destination, and with each successive mile ticking away on the last-leg of his journey, his life wouldn't be worth a 'tick'. He would only know he had been ear-marked for death when the first blade-thrust was struck between his ribs as the final group of train-robbers contented themselves with killing him and grabbing whatever they could lay their hands on before making good their escape. That was why, the kindly man explained, experienced train-travellers always hid their money and valuables all over their bodies except in their wallets. But most train-robbers knew of this 'tendency' of the passengers and would, after killing their victim, first "ransack" his lifeless body before making off with his goods.

The elderly man hoped that Thomas had had the good sense to take a similar precaution. The young man nodded. He told his friend that he only had two hundred rupees tucked in a small "neck-wallet" about his throat, the remainder of his "stash" was safely tucked away in his haversack. The older man smiled approvingly. At first light the sinister trio of train-robbers got off at a minor station. They bade him "farewell" from outside with a smart salute. Thomas "replied" with a typical Chinese obscene hand-gesture as he breathed a sigh of relief for having got through the night safely.

Just before the train arrived at Jabalpur, the train's lunch-stop, Thomas' eye 'caught' the English-language headlines of several newspapers suspended outside the news-vendors' shops at passing sub-stations that communal riots had broken out in the town that they were headed to. His friend of the night before, bought a vernacular paper at a minor stop and explained that the riots were due to a Hindu young man and his Muslim girlfriend committing suicide because their respective parents had opposed the relationship.

Passengers were told not to leave their respective carriages at Jabalpur but should anyone feel the need to "stretch" his legs, he was to do it close to his own particular carriage. When finally the train arrived at the riot-torn town there were no vendors about and everybody had to order their meals from the train's buffet-wagon. Thomas was curious about the communal flare-up because in Singapore the various communities lived peaceably. He hadn't yet learned that in the past there had been communal troubles in his island-home.

The race-riots in Singapore were things of the past. These would be the stories he would hear, much later, when his "travels" were over, of the early days of the island-colony when the British colonisers had allowed in the Hokkein and Teochew-speaking Chinese from the Riau Archipelago in 1819 who had fought bitterly among themselves, and later, when the indentured workers from China and India were allowed into Singapore Colony, these 'recent' immigrants had also fought among themselves because of differences in language, dialect, skin-colour, customs and beliefs, and "currying-favour" with the British to obtain further advantage over one-another's community. But since World War Two, and his birth, there had never been a communal flare-up except for the "Maria Hertogh Riots". And he badly wanted to see what a "racial disturbance" was like in reality.

So after his meal, he asked his new Indian pal, his "saviour" of the night before, to keep an eye on his few possessions while he went out for a quick look-see. He had noticed the columns of thick smoke rising from the burning houses of the town as their train swung into the station, and the police with their lathes chasing people. And he wanted to get a better view. His friend nodded his agreement and Thomas scrambled out of the train. He waited by the station-entrance and watched the scene from there as the policemen in the vicinity would not allow him to go any closer to the "action". He was so engrossed in the unruly scenes unfolding before his eyes he didn't hear the first salvo of the train's whistle, warning that it was about to chug-off. He barely made it to his carriage and scampered on board just as the locomotive began gliding on the tracks.

Eagerly he made his way to his seat and a waiting disappointment. All his possessions were gone, and so was his "friend" of the previous night. His benefactor had been a bloody train-thief himself! As carriages on Indian trains were self-enclosed he had to simmer and wait until they stopped a hundred miles down the track, and two hours later. The train officials were none too pleased with his report. It would mean the filing of papers, an inquiry and a delay at Bombay before they could return home when they finally got to their destination. The stupid boy was a nuisance, as far as the train's personnel were concerned. Thomas was curtly told to return to his carriage. There was nothing that could be done, he was told, until they arrived at Bombay. From the way the personnel "explained" the procedure, Thomas knew that there *was* nothing to be done and returned to his carriage despondent. All his money was gone except for the almost two hundred rupees round his "neck-wallet". He would not be able to afford the coach-trip to London.

As if that were not enough, to add insult to injury, after the train had begun, a wet, smelly clod of cow-dung came flying through his open carriage-window and hit him square in the face! His fellow-passengers burst out in glee at his predicament while he sat looking down glumly at the filthy muck slowly streaking down his shirt onto his trousers. Some "kind soul" explained that it was "Holi", the Hindu festival when everybody flung coloured water or wet mud, or even cow-dung, on unwary persons who had to take it all in good fun. So that was why all the other damned carriage-windows in his wagon had been shut as soon as they began passing through padi-fields. No one had forewarned him! Thomas stumbled to the bathroom to wash off the muck from his clothes. He wasn't able to change his filthy togs because the bloody train-thief had got away with his haversack, so had to content himself with washing everything in the basin in the bathroom, wringing them 'dry' and putting the clothes on damp.

The train arrived at Victoria Station in Bombay on the following morning and he had to retell his complaint of the theft once more to the officials at Bombay Station. His statement was taken down, forms were filled, and that was that. As soon as the "formalities" were over Thomas made his way, unnoticed, to the first class "rest rooms" for a rest. A German hitch-hiker he had befriended on the train had told him that station officials normally treated anyone in them with tremendous respect, and unless other passengers complained, he would be able to "kip" in the place free-of-charge. He left his scant possessions with the "bearer", the railway employee whose duty it was to look after the wants of passengers who used the upstairs "rest rooms". He sought directions to the American Express offices. There were two letters waiting for him. One was from Maurice Dupon, and the other was from an Ismaili male friend of Merle's, who was the Singapore representative of India's national shipping line. Dupon's was as he had dreaded — his erstwhile friend had let him down again. Dupon wasn't making the journey because "something had come up". Another bloody euphemism for a cop-out. Dupon had written to say that he would "unfold" the "circumstances" one day, should their paths "ever cross again". So, the bloody Ceylonese didn't think they would ever meet again. Thomas finally realised that Dupon had all along no intention of making the overland trip to Britain with him. The bastard had conveniently ditched the whole plan as easily as chucking a stone sometime while the two of them were still making their plans, and had been stringing him along all the time in Singapore. Why did Dupon want him out of Singapore? There had to be a reason but he just didn't know what it was. And he was really sore to be cheated by Maurice again. Dupon was aware that he was travelling on a

"shoe-string" but had conveniently 'forgotten' to include his share of "travelling expenses" in his letter. It had been their pact, before he had departed Singapore, that whoever couldn't make the trip for one reason or another, would give the other his own share of personal funds. It had been their "gesture" of sincerity that each of them would not let the other down. And Thomas needed money badly. He dashed off a letter to Singapore imploring Maurice to forward him money, as was their pact. His next stop would be Karachi in Pakistan, and he hoped that Dupon would forward the vital wherewithal by the time he eventually arrived there.

The second letter, from Merle's friend, informed Thomas that the man had obtained his forwarding address from Mariko, his wife. The man had written inviting Thomas to phone a Bombay number to ask for him. Siddon called and was invited to meet the Ismaili at an address close to the train station, for the following afternoon. Hoping that he would be able to get some form of "help" from the man, Thomas put on his only "good outfit", which was a long-sleeved shirt and tie with matching slacks, and a good pair of leather shoes, to create a "good impression". He took a taxi to the address given and was surprised that it was a masonic hall. He went in, made inquiries and was directed to where the man was seated in the "reading room". Polite by nature he greeted the man but was curtly told that he was in an "auspicious place", and that he was to behave "with decorum". Thomas thought the man pompous. He wasn't invited to sit though the man, reclining in his seat, addressed him. Enraged now, Siddon pulled out a chair from under a nearby table and sat down. The man ignored that. He next became officious and informed Thomas that he had come to India on "official business" but was utilising his "business trip" to help the Institute. He told Thomas that since his departure from Singapore "...more than ten thousand dollars of Institute-money had gone missing and everyone was blaming..." him. Heart sinking because he knew he would get no help from the man, he replied that if he had taken such a large sum he wouldn't be hitch-hiking and living on a shoe-string, he would have flown to London direct. The money probably was in "one of the many accounts of the Institute" and if the Institute's accountant sat down and worked back meticulously he would be able to trace the sums to one of the Institute's many bank accounts. The man next inquired whether Thomas would return to Singapore to "show everyone where the money is..." At that point Siddon knew that the man was treating him as if he were an imbecile and decided that the meeting was over. He rose from his chair, wished the man "good afternoon" and departed the masonic hall. Thomas had heard and read that Freemasons were supposed to be intelligent and well-placed in society but

the man who had met him at the masonic hall that afternoon had only done so to "show-off". He was a pompous jackass. He may have been a friend of Merle's but he was a cheap showoff as far as he was concerned. He needn't have arranged their meeting at the masonic hall just to demonstrate how "well-connected" he was. From the man's attitude Thomas knew he had to make it to London on his own steam. There would be no other way.

Two Anglo-Indian, (Eurasian), boys he befriended outside Victoria Station told him about the trucks that transported goods to Persia, (Iran), by way of the Punjab. They said that the Salvation Army waste-paper factory at Byculla, a Bombay suburb, sent a truck every week to Poona, another town, to deliver waste-paper to a pulp mill there. Poona was on the truck driver's route from south and east India, going to Persia. Thomas felt that if he could befriend the Salvation Army driver he would be able to "cadge" a lift to Poona. To Sidon knowing something was tantamount to handing him "gold". Instead he decided to ask the Salvation Army direct for assistance, obtained the address of the factory at Byculla from the two Anglo-Indians, and walked the seven-odd miles from Victoria Station to the factory. When he arrived at the waste-paper factory he marched up to the administrator's office, told him his tale and was pleasantly surprised and grateful when a Major Robinson fixed him a ride on the following morning's trip to Poona, all of a hundred and twenty miles away. He could leave after a good night's rest at the SA Hostel, he was told. He was also invited to partake of the Salvation Army's evening meal for destitute inmates, which he gratefully accepted.

At Poona the following afternoon the driver of the Salvation Army truck, a Sikh, put him in touch with other drivers of his own Sikh community who were doing the Poona to Punjab run. He managed to hitch a ride to Armritsa. Exactly fifteen days later he was in Karachi, Pakistan. There was a letter from Mariko, his wife. It had been re-directed from Calcutta and Bombay before arriving at the Pakistani city. Thomas was surprised that she hadn't mentioned *anything* of Maurice Dupon. His "friend" had given "his word", before Thomas had left, that he would look in on his family from time to time during his absence, "just in case..." It was another failing Thomas had come to expect from Dupon. Anticipating a strong reprimand from Mariko he was mollified to read that she had obtained employment and was praying for him to succeed in his quest. At least his going away without a word had forced his timid wife to get out and get a job! Thomas had written to Mariko from Bombay, before his departure for Poona and Karachi, and he was heartened by her support, and determined that he would make it to Britain as quickly as possible so that they could all be together



again. He walked back to the Karachi train station, bought a platform ticket, and, when no one was looking, hid in a goods carriage of a train going north.

Gradually he travelled northwards, finally arriving at Jaheddan, a border-town between Persia, (Iran), and the former West Pakistan. His twenty-first birthday had come and gone unnoticed. It had been like any other day. Ordinary, and with the all-too-familiar empty-belly. There had been no "change" crossing the "shadow-line" from adolescence to legal adulthood. Just emptiness in his gut like when he was a teenager living with his mother in the Bencoolen Street garret-like room.

The border-guards at the frontier town wouldn't grant him the requisite visa to cross into Persia because there was a Smallpox epidemic in that country, and, since he had a British passport they were wary about his inadvertently contracting the disease, and that a "stink" would be raised by the "authorities". Detained on the Pakistani-side of Jaheddan for a week, Thomas watched in frustration at the Persian lorries conveying goods from the border-town, on the Persian-side, to Teheran, the Persian capital. He slept on the ground, under the stars. There were no modern amenities and the only drinking water available freely came from a nearby river, which was the colour of dirty tea. He became violently ill and decided that he stood a better chance surviving in Bombay. He hadn't liked Karachi.

He sweated it out for another week at the frontier town, and when his fever and loose bowels were under some measure of control, began the "trek" back to Bombay. Returning to India, luck wasn't on his side any more. For some reason there seemed fewer trucks on the northern highways and he was forced to revert to his tried and tested method of "stealing" free rides on trains, first buying a platform ticket, then hiding in a convenient goods wagon when he thought no one was looking. He was discovered on three separate occasions in different towns. After receiving cuffs about his ears and a week's detention in jail, he had been released, five rupees richer from the labour he was made to do during detention. And he always returned to the nearby train station of each town that he had been apprehended in, and "hitched" another free ride on the first train travelling south. After a month and a half he finally got to Bombay's Victoria Station.

He again took to sleeping in the station's luxurious first class "rest rooms", making sure he wasn't noticed by station officials by getting up early each morning and disappearing before the "rest room" bearer reported for his stint of day-shift duty. He barely subsisted on his rapidly-dwindling horde of rupees, still kept in relative safety in his "neck-wallet", eating a cheap vegetarian meal every other day. A week after his return to Bombay he became violently sick again. Strong gripping pains hit his belly at the

oddest moments, followed by racking chills. He discovered to his horror that he couldn't control his bowels and would defecate in public. No one stared at him. His plight was common in India. Even so, he was still embarrassed and ashamed. He had been taught that such things weren't ever done, no matter what the circumstance. What would the late Miss Marguerite Looker have thought? A week later the "discomfort" vanished as suddenly as it had appeared. A passenger complained to a station guard about him and he was turfed out of the Victoria Station. Experienced now, he took to sleeping on Bombay's pavements on a piece of old canvas he'd found, kipping down together with the other homeless poverty-stricken.

He became familiar with a bunch of petty street gangsters who "dabbled" in practically everything crooked. The "king" agreed to Thomas joining his group. When they "tried him out" they found that he wasn't good at pickpocketing or hand-bag snatching because he couldn't run fast enough to escape capture, or knew the Bombay back-streets well-enough to make an effective getaway, so they "allowed" him to "run" their illegally-distilled "moonshine" to their various distribution-points around the city. Alcohol was totally banned in Bombay as Maharastra was a "dry" state, and liquor, no matter what its origin, fetched a small fortune. The gang-leader knew, even though Thomas was now darkened by the Indian sun, that he was still "foreign" in Indian eyes, and could easily pass through Police "traps". He also had the added "advantage" of owning a foreign passport and could make legitimate purchases of good quality hard-booze which could be sold at tremendous profit. Being part of the gang, he received his daily share of "takings" — a slap-up main evening meal, and, on a "good" day, several rupees to spend as he liked.

In South Vietnam on 11th May 1961, United States Vice President, Lyndon B. Johnson of the Kennedy Administration held a two-day discussion with Saigon's President Ngo Dinh Diem, and addressed the South Vietnamese National Assembly. A joint communique was issued on 13th May which said the US would "...provide military assistance for the Vietnamese Civil Guard Force..." against its fight with the Communist Vietcong.

On 27th May 1961, in Singapore, the Malayan prime minister, Tengku Abdul Rahman, in a speech, initially touched on a proposal for the formation of a federation of "countries" he called "Malaysia". The proposed federation was to consist of Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo, (Sabah), Sarawak and Brunei. Planning, in fact, for the fruition of the proposed political entity had begun years before the independence of Malaya. Lee Kuan Yew, then had pointed out to the British Government that if Singapore was not in Malaya, both territories would eventually fall to the Communists.

In the meantime Thomas had begun to realise that his position in India was precarious. He was a foreigner and mixed up in street crime, albeit for his own survival. His various letters to Maurice Dupon exhorting him to send his share of the money that Dupon would have had to spend if he had gone on the trip, had drawn no response, so he couldn't use that "route" to buy a ticket out of the sub-continent. He decided to do something for himself and walked back to the Salvation Army factory at Byculla to ask for work and a bed to sleep at night in the destitutes' hostel. He was taken on at five rupees a week, with food and lodging thrown in free. He hoped, with careful saving, to set aside sufficient for a boat-trip up the Straits of Hormuz, and make his way to Basra in Iraq, and from there to Europe.

There were two dormitories at the factory. One was for paying office-workers who came from all over India to work in the "big city", and who paid a mere fifteen rupees a month for a bed and a locker but without meals. The other dormitory was for destitutes like Thomas. They were given work at the waste-paper factory sorting out the different grades of paper to be made into bales which were then sold to the pulp mills at Poona.

In a speech in Malaya on 11th July 1961, Tengku Abdul Rahman, the prime minister of Malaya proposed the unification of Malaya with the three Borneo territories — British North Borneo, (Sabah), Sarawak and Brunei. The proposed unification would be advantageous to Britain, as well as Malaya, and the three Borneo territories, he said. The Malayan premier said the Malays and the Dyaks of Borneo had close ethnic and linguistic ties.

In Singapore, at this time, it was the death of the People's Action Party assemblyman, Inche Baharuddin bin Mohamed Ariff, that the forming of lines between opposing forces within the ruling party, shot into focus. In the ensuing by-election the PAP candidate was an Inche Mahmud bin Awang. David Marshall, a previous chief minister, had re-entered the political fray under the banner of "The Workers' Party", while the left-wing extremists within the ruling PAP promised the support of the trade unions for the PAP candidate, which was never forthcoming. Marshall won by a slight majority on 14th July. Chief Minister Lee Kuan Yew immediately demanded a vote of confidence from the Assembly on 21st July. All 51 assembly members were present — 27 voted for the motion, eight from the Opposition voted against, while 16 abstained, among them 13 PAP dissidents. In August the 13 "rebels" broke away from the PAP and formed the Barisan Sosialis Party, (Malay: "Socialist Front"), its logo: a red star. The new political party was dead-set against merger with Malaya as a means to gaining independence for Singapore, and openly opposed it. Malaya, the Philippines and Thailand established the Association of South East Asia, (ASA), on 31st July 1961.

Thomas had been at the factory in Byculla for slightly over a month when he was summoned in the middle of the morning's work-routine to receive a telephone call. He remembered that he had left the factory's number with the American Express receptionist, just "in case" something "unexpected" cropped up. The friendly, attractive Australian-Sikh girl had agreed to give it to anyone who inquired after him. As he sprinted toward the factory-office he instinctively knew that the call would be from Merle Jordon. He was right. She was enroute to Singapore from her recent visit to the United States and had stopped in India to call on friends, and see whether she could persuade him to return to the land of his birth.

At their meeting in her hotel-room the American girl told him that since his 'disappearance' almost ten thousand dollars had gone missing, and everyone at the Institute was accusing him of misappropriating it. The young man, old, sad memories of former days in Singapore crowding his mind, calmly pointed out that if he had embezzled such a large sum of money he wouldn't be working in a pulp factory in India, eeking out a frugal living as a destitute. He'd be already in London. The two of them continued to argue until finally, she convinced him that the best "solution" lay in his returning to Singapore to show everyone that the "lost" sums of money were in fact in one of the Institute's many bank accounts which only she and he knew about and were familiar with. He knew she was banking on his sense of pride and 'shame', and that he didn't like being held in contempt. Thomas at the same time knew that he had reached an impasse as far as his plans to make it to London were concerned, and he reluctantly agreed to her proposal. The woman immediately made arrangements through the same Ismaili friend in Singapore who was the Singapore-agent for the national shipping line of India, who he had met in Bombay when he had first arrived in India, for him to collect his sea-ticket home at the shipping line's offices at Madras. He did not tell her that he had met the man in Bombay previously.

He got to Madras City by the "Janata Express", the all-third class air-conditioned train which had been instituted in memory of the late Mahatma Gandhi who had always travelled third class during his lifetime. There had been a slight "hiccup" at the shipping line's Madras office because the clerk on duty claimed that no "advice" had been received from Singapore. Thomas suspected that Merle's friend had conveniently "forgotten" the travel arrangements. He spent his precious last rupees putting a call through to Singapore to set things straight and found that his suspicions were confirmed. The bloody man had not done a thing until his phone-call from Madras. Two German hitch-hikers who had witnessed the fracas in the shipping lines' offices "sussed" that he was without pocket and invited him

to share their room at the YMCA at Broadway, a district in Madras City proper. There he met fellow-travellers from all over India to whom he "exchanged" his tale of travels and travails with theirs. The following morning, one of the Indian acquaintances of the previous day requested his assistance to help lug his heavy baggage to the train station. Just as the train was about to chug-off, the young Indian man shoved an envelope into his surprised hand as he hopped aboard. Inside the amazed and touched Thomas Siddon discovered twenty rupees and a note which read: "...I hope this in some way makes up for what happened at Jabalpur, not all of us from there are thieves. I beg your forgiveness for what happened to you..."

Finally setting foot on Singapore-soil after a week's quarantine on St John's Island, the Quarantine Station set up by the Colonial Government previous to Singapore's self-rule, he made his way, on foot, to the "Catholic Centre" in Bras Basah Road, the scene of many an adventure for him. It was the only place he knew where he could make a free phone-call and maybe run into someone he could cadge a loan of a dollar because he was flat-broke. When he got to the "Centre's" canteen on the ground-floor he was astonished that everyone that he knew hadn't been aware that he had been abroad for almost six months. So, Dupon hadn't said a thing to anyone it seemed.

He found the place literally transformed from the "Centre" he had always known and had been comfortable in. There seemed a new "type" of customer, more Sino, and a thinning-out of the familiar Eurasians and the English-educated and English-speaking "Straits-born" and *Baba* Chinese who were all Roman Catholics. It seemed that the new "type" Chinese weren't even Christian, let alone Roman Catholic. They ate noisily, spoke loudly, ordered the canteen-staff around, (and he was amazed that they didn't appear to mind!), and slouched in their chairs, literally transforming the once-sedate surroundings of the Catholic meeting-spot into a local coffeeshop "atmosphere". Much later he would learn that the newly-elected PAP Government had decreed there was to be no "communal segregation" of public places or clubs. There was to be a free "interchange" of the communities, and that all public places bearing communal names would need to be changed. Thomas would wonder what that had to do with a meeting spot organised for people of the same religion, and later, would question why the Chinese Swimming Club's name was **never** changed and was still being referred to by its ethnic name.

He phoned Mariko at her work-place in chinatown as she had given him her number in a previous letter. He was surprised and not a little disturbed to discover that she worked as a receptionist in a kind of club for Japanese

seamen. He was shocked that the Singapore Government had even allowed the Japs to set up a club in Singapore. His memories of hunger and strife during the last war, when he had been a baby, had not yet diminished.

When he got to Mariko's work-place he found that all the girls working there were Eurasian, with the exception of his Japanese wife. The manager was a Chinese who spoke ungrammatical English. Thomas didn't kiss his wife because they were "in public", and he knew she was bashful about such things. Their exchanges of affection would be later when they would be alone. In his eyes it seemed right that the different races appeared to be working side by side without any feelings of rancour. He returned to the "Catholic Centre" to wait for Mariko to finish her "shift" at ten that evening.

He picked her up at the appointed time and they travelled by bus to Serangoon, which was in the north-eastern part of the island. His family had moved from East Coast Road to Kovan Road in Upper Serangoon, the "rural" district. He was surprised to find that his mother also lived in the same premises but in a separate room in the back of the house, away from his family. The place was a rambling old house owned by a Sikh widow who rented out rooms. She had ten sons and a daughter. His mother wore a stern expression when she saw him but said nothing. Thomas decided to ignore her. He saw his two sons asleep on a large doublebed but didn't wake them, leaving the prospect of being united with his boys for the following morning. Furiko Suzuki, his mother-in-law, told him that he had done a "shameful" thing but it was over. There was nothing to be gained by harping on it. It was time to look to the future, to sort out his life. Thomas received the woman's reprimand in silence, he knew that he deserved it. Only he was surprised that she had been so lenient.

The following morning he awakened while his wife and mother-in-law still slept, to find his two sons, wide awake from where they had been asleep in their doublebed, gazing curiously at him lying on a mat on the floor. His eldest, Kean Siew, had a vague recollection of his father, and after a while got off the bed and went to him. His youngest, Rahman, didn't know him at all, and Thomas knew that it was his own fault because he had left his family when Rahman had still been a baby. Mariko awoke just then, and seeing him playing with his children, chose that moment to complain that during his absence his mother had run her down by telling all their friends that he had left her because she had been "running around". He told Mariko that he would look into it later, making mental note to have it out with his mother at the first opportune time. In the meanwhile he relished the feeling of being home among his own and looked forward to some fourteen days rest and three squares a day until Merle returned and he commenced work

again at the Institute. For the time being the nightmare of being perpetually hungry and going without, when he was hitch-hiking, was over.

Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the Chief Minister, visited Kuala Lumpur, the Malayan capital, on 23rd and 24th August 1961 at the invitation of Malayan Prime Minister Tengku Abdul Rahman, for talks on the possible merger of Singapore with Malaya. Singapore, a former island of the *Riau-Lingga-Johor Sultanate*, ceded to Britain in 1819, politically separated from Malaya by the British when the colonial Straits Settlements ceased to exist constitutionally, and then "grouped" with the Christmas and Cocos-Keeling Islands to form a separate Crown Colony in April 1946, had become self-governing on 5th June 1959. The possibility of merger with Malaya was viewed as a way to achieve full independence from Britain.

When Merle returned from India after her trip "back home" to the United States, Thomas went to work for her again. The both of them had already agreed in Bombay that he would return to the Institute to clear his name and to show the other directors where the so-called "missing funds" of the corporation were located in the Institute's various bank accounts, and that he had not stolen anything. To his utter dismay she reinstated him at a salary of one hundred and fifty a month, fifty dollars less than what she had offered him before she had gone to America, and insisted that a hundred dollars be deducted from his monthly salary, every month until he had settled all the money he had advanced himself for his Indian sojourn. Despite his protests she insisted that he could afford it since his wife was already working. He argued that part of the money he had taken had been his own salary which he had already earned before departing Singapore, and that she wasn't leaving him anything to contribute to his family. She retorted that since his wife was employed he had to make "amends". This time he really looked at the American and realised that she was in fact "punishing" him. He began to suspect that she had a "peculiar" attitude, bordering on religious mania. He began to hate her again for what she was doing to him and his family. And there was nothing he could do because she controlled all the Institute's finances. He was stuck with it again!

Two days after returning to work the Malay peon disappeared. It was soon discovered that he had stolen money and some valuable reference books which he had sold at the second-hand bookshops along Bras Basah Road. He had done the bunk when he realised that with Thomas' return, investigations into the Institute's finances would bring to light his fiscal misdeeds. Thomas Siddon began to feel guilty for being the "cause" of what had transpired during his absence. He tried making up for it by working the long, dreary hours the American girl always insisted on, though he still

burned that the Institute's directors had thought him crooked when the petty-thefts of money had been undertaken practically under everyone's noses by the Malay peon, during his time in India.

At home things were not so peaceful as well. His mother-in-law thought it criminal that more than half his wage-packet was being taken from him to make restitution for the sums of money he had taken as an "advance" and which Merle Jordon had given him permission to do. His family, his mother-in-law said, still had only a pittance to live on and Thomas had two sons to feed. Merle Jordon, as far as she was concerned, was a criminal. Things at home got so bad that one day, after three months of being constantly reprimanded by Merle everytime she found him not doing things to her liking, and the grumbles coming his way from his family, he lost his temper, threw the office keys at Jordon's feet, quit his job and stalked out.

A second round of talks between Malaya and Singapore was held from 14th to 16th September, in which a joint communique stated that a "working party" had been set up to work out details of a possible merger "... with a view to bringing about the integration of the two territories on or before June 1963..." On his return to the island-state, Mr Lee Kuan Yew said a "merger... was historically inevitable..."

When Thomas informed his family that he was done with Merle Jordon, his mother-in-law told him that their next-door neighbour, a Malayalee Indian from Kerala, India, had promised to "fix him up" with a job in the Royal Air Force at Changi Base if he were interested. Thomas was, and the Japanese woman breathed a sigh of relief. At last her daughter's husband had freed himself of the clutches of the American woman.



## Rude Awakening

### *Chapter Ten*

The RAF Police Auxiliary was a locally-mustered police force of the British Royal Air Force used for guard-duty and the patrolling of its various air bases and installations on Singapore. Its strength of constables and Non-Commissioned Officers was 'traditionally' made up of Malays in the main, as well as several local and India-born Indians, and a 'smattering' of Chinese. The auxiliary policemen patrolled the areas assigned to them on foot or bicycle, or manned key search-lights in 'sensitive' areas, which the British airman found 'boring' to do, armed with a baton and sometimes, a 303-rifle of World War Two-vintage. The RAF categorised them as "civilian local staff in uniform".

Britain was already beginning to feel the cost of maintaining its overseas bases in its colonies, and to cut down on the expense of bringing and maintaining trained RAF Provost Dog Handlers and their families from Britain to Singapore for the so-called 'specialised job' of guarding key installations, the RAF local administration had decided to employ non-Malay locals in their Provost Dog Section, since the Malays, being Muslim, wouldn't want coming in contact with the animals. These jobs were offered to the fluently English-speaking Eurasians whom the British found easier to communicate with than the Malays, Indians and Chinese, already employed as constables who didn't seem to understand what was being said to them by the British Other Ranks or BORs, as they were called, most of the time.

Previously, openings in the RAF Police Auxiliary had always attracted the Malays who mainly came from Malacca, local and India-born Indians comprising Sikhs from the Punjab, southern Tamils from Tamil Nadu and Malayalees from Kerala, all holding British passports, and who preferred working for the British instead of for the local firms in the city, and semi-educated, and English-speaking Chinese who had been "recommended" by relatives already working for the RAF as civilian clerical staff. But with the establishment of the local Provost Dog Section on all the air bases on Singapore, English-speaking-and-educated Eurasians and several Chinese had been taken on.

The panel of interviewers at the Royal Air Force base in Changi, who interviewed Thomas Siddon, when he went for his interview, comprised the Provost Marshal, a wing-commander, the Station Provost Officer, a flight-lieutenant, and the RAF Police Auxiliary Chief-Inspector who was a civilian Englishman formerly with the Singapore Police Force. They were surprised that someone with Siddon's education would even consider a job as an auxiliary constable doing dog-patrol duty guarding installations on their air-bases, when he could have had a "cushy" job in "civvy street". Siddon was definitely a different kettle of fish from the usual run of police-applicants that they had come across, so far. He had a "good" Senior Cambridge Certificate and it seemed unusual for someone such as him to be seeking work in the RAF Police Auxiliary. They wondered about it and questioned him.

Thomas knew he had a job to convince the interviewing officers, because in a month of Sundays they would never have had the slightest inkling that ever since leaving school, almost two years previously, he had been unable to land a 'decent' job. He had just been "stuck" at Merle's. With all the earnestness that he could muster, he told the panel that he liked dogs, and that decent work in "civvy street" had been hard to come by because of the 'state of the economy'. They looked at him in surprise, for a moment, when he mouthed those words, but didn't say anything. His not being able to get a 'proper' job had been the truth as far as as he was concerned. He *knew* how hard it had been for him to land *any* kind of work previously.

He breathed a silent prayer of thanks to an unknown "god" when he was told to report the following day for eye-sight tests and a "physical". He sailed through that and was instructed to report to Changi Base for seven weeks' basic training before he would be posted to a particular camp on Singapore. There were three, one at Changi, another in Seletar, and a third at Tengah. He began recruit-training on 1st November 1961 and would be earning two hundred dollars a month plus allowances — more money than

he had ever earned in his life, so far.

After his enlistment and training, Siddon would discover to his amazement that there were others in the auxiliary police force with lower educational qualifications than he, earning the same amount. And that they had been doing this during the years he had been struggling to survive! He wondered what was it about himself that he had only been able to slog for a pittance for so long, when he was considered suitably educated for those days?

With Mariko, his wife, working at the Japanese club in chinatown, and he in the RAF, his family would be earning more than he had ever done previously when he had worked for Merle Jordon. His mother-in-law, Furiko, who had already lost her job at the Chinese-owned 'Japanese-grocers', due to lack of business, was already looking after their two sons, Kean Siew and Rahman, so he and Mariko didn't need to worry about hiring a baby-sitter.

Around this time press reports stated that talks between the British and Malayan Governments for the establishment of a Malaysian Federation comprising Malaya, Singapore, Brunei, Sarawak and British North Borneo, (which would be renamed "Sabah" eventually), was put forward by Malaya and Singapore, and held at London from 20th to 22nd November 1961.

Thomas was assigned to Seletar Camp in north-eastern Singapore island on completion of his basic training. He had put in for the posting because it was close to home. As it was already two days before Christmas his squad was told to report for duty on 2nd January in the following year. In the meantime they were all on "unofficial" paid leave. Siddon was surprised. After slogging at Merle Jordon's "grindstone-of-a-job" he just couldn't believe that an employer as large as the British RAF would allow him so much free time and even pay him for it! He resolved that he would not dwell on the past and would immerse himself in his job, after spending the first worry-free festive holiday of his life since marriage.

It gladdened his heart to see his family enjoying the seasonal festive food and the presents that he had purchased for them all. His mother, who, in the meantime had moved out of their Kovan Road premises, paid them a visit and even cooked some of the traditional Malacca-Portuguese Christmas-fare like *Kari Diablo*, (Malacca-Portuguese patois: "Develled Curry" — a chilli-and-mustard-hot, spicy, "happy-blend" of Chinese roast-pork and diced chicken cooked in a "dry" marinade of chillies and mustard, mixed with lots of cabbage and tomato), *Feng*, (Malacca-Portuguese: diced pork innards stewed in a light, mild "curry"), and *Vindaloo*, (the Malacca-Portuguese version of this traditionally-hot Pakistani curry brought to

Malacca by the Portuguese several centuries previously). His mother had never done this for him when he had been a child living with her, and it surprised him to learn that she could not only cook but in the 'traditional' Malacca-Portuguese "way".

That Christmas he decided that he would forget the dreams of his childhood and youth and concentrate on looking after his job and his family. He wasn't a creative writer, it had all been a young man's fancy. It would be more down-to-earth to concentrate on earning a living and caring for his family whom he had once deserted in a vain attempt to carve a future for them in Britain. For the present he was earning sufficient. His family wouldn't want for anything. At least, for the time being, since their needs and expectations weren't that sophisticated as to look to more than three meals a day, a roof over their heads, toys at Christmas and birthdays, and the odd "picture-show" treat. With the combined income of Mariko's and his, the nightmare years of living in almost abject poverty were gradually receding from his immediate bitter memory.

As he came out of his previous feelings of anxiety over the future and began mixing with the other local dog-handlers Siddon discovered to his surprise that he was just as good as them. He just couldn't believe that he had been so stupid as to have accepted the American girl inducing feelings of inferiority and inadequateness in him when he had worked for her. Why he was just as "smart", if not more so than some of the other "Singaporeans". (It was a term he had begun to use consciously, though everyone else didn't.). Remembering Merle Jordon it also dawned on him that he was earning more than he had ever done with her, and with time for leisure, (with her there had been none). He could plan for his family, for himself, for the future, even though by others' standards his monthly income really wasn't handsome to say the least.

The rambling old bungalow in Kovan Road in which they lived was filled with South Indian, mainly Malayalee, families, whose menfolk worked for the British forces on the various military camps on Singapore. He had noticed a sign on the main Upper Serangoon Road, just past Hillside Drive which led from Upper Serangoon Road past Kovan Road, outside the St Gabriel's School, designating their district a "rural area".

His was the only "Eurasian" family, (he found it amusing that their neighbours considered his family "Eurasian" when his wife and mother-in-law were full-blooded Japanese), ever since his mother, Luci, had moved out.

To make sure that his boys didn't "pick-up" the heavily South Indian-accented English spoken by his Indian neighbours, he took pains to speak

with his children in his clearly-enunciated English. He even encouraged Furiko his mother-in-law, to speak with her grandchildren in Japanese since it was part of their heritage as well.

In the meanwhile he awaited the day his family could move out of their rented room in the old bungalow to a spanking-new government-built flat. Since coming to power in 1959 the People's Action Party Government had re-named the former colonial British housing authority, the Singapore Improvement Trust, the Housing and Development Board, and had begun a mass public housing programme which it promised would one day eventually provide homes for all of the island's population who did not live in 'proper' homes but were crammed in rented rooms too small for whole families, or lived in squalid, squatter-like conditions in rural areas, and on farms. The HDB had been established in February 1960. Siddon in the meantime had decided to apply for a housing Board flat as soon as he had time to get down to the HDB offices at Pickering Street, not far from chinatown. He worked hard at his job in the hope of securing a promotion as quickly as possible. It wouldn't be too long before his boys were ready for school and he hoped that they would make it to university eventually.

He immersed himself in "square-bashing", dog-training and kennel-duties. It was physical, sweaty, slogging but in comparison to his previous job at the Institute, it was "chicken-feed". After day-time duties at the dog section he would go on patrol in the evenings, and though he would feel physically tired after each week's routine of dog-handling and patrol-duty, he felt contented.

Dr Albert Winsemius, a Dutch economist who had been chosen by the United Nations to lead an economic advisory team to Singapore in 1960, had just taken on a separate, additional "job" in 1961 as economic adviser to the Singapore Government to help in its economic planning for the future. Thomas Siddon, reading about it in the papers wondered just how much this would prove of benefit to him personally, one day.

The Maruzen Toyo Oil Company of Japan opened its oil refinery on 21st March 1962. Located at Pasir Panjang Road, it cost the then staggering sum of \$21 million. The refinery would process fifteen thousand barrels of oil a day.

The Philippines House of Representatives passed a resolution on 30th April 1962 asserting that the Republic of the Philippines had a "legal and valid" claim to British North Borneo, (Sabah), and requested their President Macapagal to formulate the government's official policy on the matter. On 22nd June the Philippines sent a Note to Britain asking for talks on the question of the Philippines claim to British North Borneo, (Sabah), and

expressed hope that disputes between the two countries would be settled peacefully and in an atmosphere of goodwill. (The first British trading post in the Far East, (East Asia), was set up in the earlier period of the British East India Company's history, sometime in the 1730's, on Balambangan Island about 60 miles offshore from Kadut in North Borneo, (Sabah today), leased from the Sultan of Sulu to take advantage of the trade between the Spice Islands and China. The territory known as "North Borneo" had always been in dispute between the Sultanate of Sulu and the Sultanate of pre-colonial Brunei. In 1881 the Sultan of Sulu leased that portion of land then known as Northern Borneo, (Sabah today), to European traders, after which it was made a British protectorate. What today is known as Sabah used to be part of the domain of the Sultan of Sulu, which is now in the Republic of the Philippines and some 200 descendants of the Sultan had laid a proprietary claim to the territory, (Sabah) at the time of the proposal to include British North Borneo in Malaysia).

Reading newspaper reports about the Filipino claim to British North Borneo, (Sabah), and discovering, subsequently, through his own research at the Raffles Library in Stamford Road that historically that part of Borneo had once been a part of the sovereign domain of the Sultan of Sulu which had been leased to the British, hit Thomas Siddon like a ton of bricks. The "Malay World" around his island-home, as he had begun to understand it after working for Merle Jordon, began to take on a new significance with his "newly-acquired" knowledge. The status quo had been totally different in a bygone era, he realised.

At a news conference on 27th July 1962 President Macapagal of the Philippines proposed the formation of a "Greater Malaysia" consisting of the Philippines, Malaya, Singapore, British North Borneo, (Sabah), Sarawak and Brunei, and superseding the "British-sponsored Federation of Malaysia". "The great arc of islands consisting of the Philippines Archipelago, North Borneo, Singapore and the Malayan Peninsula would form a formidable geographical unity that would be a powerful force for freedom, progress and peace," he said.

Following the London talks between Britain and Malaya on the proposed Malaysian Federation, in which Britain and Malaya agreed in principle that North Borneo, (Sabah), would accede to the proposed Federation of Malaysia, Britain sent a Note to the Philippines on 7th August agreeing to talks between the two countries while reiterating the British Government's view that the status of North Borneo, (Sabah), was not in dispute.

In the meantime Siddon who had just completed his eighth month of dog-handling in the RAF Police Auxiliary, had been nominated for a

promotion to corporal. He was sent to Changi Base for the promotion-interview. The British had suddenly decided to promote "locals" to "senior" positions in a relatively shorter time than they used to. Previously auxiliary police privates in the "normal" foot-patrol guard-duty unit would be in service for years before they were even considered for a single stripe. Thomas was one of the three "new-generation" dog-handler policemen selected. The others came from Changi and Tengah respectively. It seemed a foregone conclusion among his local "mates" that Siddon would make corporal. (Provost had decided that the local dog-handlers would be given two stripes instead of the one, to follow the British Other Ranks manner of promotion). In the interim he was appointed "senior-man" by the section flight-sergeant, pending the outcome of the promotion-interview, and was to be the "link" between the "Singapore dog-handlers" and RAF Provost, bringing any "matters" concerning the locals with Provost through the section flight-sergeant.

The dog section at Seletar Camp comprised British servicemen, (who were referred to as BORs — British Other Ranks), and the locals, the majority of whom were Eurasians such as Siddon, two Tamils and three English-educated and English-speaking Chinese. From the day he assumed the "rank" of "senior man" Thomas almost immediately became aware of the disparity in shift-duties between the "locals", (the term the BORs politely used when referring to the local dog handlers), and the British servicemen from the United Kingdom. Previous to his "promotion" Siddon used to report for his stint of duty, checked his dog in and out, and "disappeared" off home once his shift was over. He hadn't "mixed" with his mates, (the "Singapore crowd"), as most of them were bachelors, and he preferred to get home straightaway rather than dawdle on camp. The last bus from Seletar Camp to "Ow-kang", (the Hokkein Chinese name for the Tampines District—"tampines" is the Malay name for a wild fruit that used to grow in profusion in the area), left sharp at a quarter past midnight and he had to catch it in order to get home, otherwise he would have to stay the night on camp on a creaky canvas bunk in a dank room reserved as his billet.

On his first day as "senior man", after initial hesitation, because his local "mates" were unsure of his "loyalties", the "Singapore crowd" decided that Thomas wouldn't "rat" on them and reeled off their list of "beefs" about their working conditions, glad to be able to tell "someone" about their problems. They "bitched" about the disparity in the shift-duties between themselves and the BORs, (and Thomas was shocked to learn, eventually, that previously he had been regarded as a "ball-carrier" by the locals), because he and the BORs didn't get the same frequent "graveyard" shifts

which lasted from midnight to six in the morning, and which were then followed immediately after coming off duty with either day-time kennel-slogs cleaning out the dogs' kennels, preparing the animals' meals and exercising them or evening patrol from six in the evening till midnight. He began to realise that the "dirty" work was being done by the local dog handlers.

As he listened to their gripes it struck him that he hadn't really been involved in the "routine" of the dog section before. This time, studying the duty roster he discovered that he had been getting the "better" shift duties over his "mates" even though his weren't as good as the BORs. He took it up with Flight-Sergeant Waller, the senior NCO of the section, and was told to "go easy" on "shit-stirring", otherwise he would get a "right-proper bollocking", (English slang: a telling off). He decided to shelve his complaints until the "right" opportunity presented itself again.

As the "locals" realised that Siddon was really championing their "beefs" and wasn't a "hantu", (Malay slang for "spy"), they began pouring out an "avalanche" of complaints. Anxious as he was to "help" Siddon made sure that he didn't become too embroiled in "sorting out" his "mates" problems to his own detriment. He knew that a lot of the so-called unfairness was imagined or "cooked up" but he did try to ease a lot of the injustice in the dog section, much to the chagrin of the British servicemen.

He'd become popular with his "Singapore mates" and some of them got together for a "boys' night out" to celebrate his forthcoming promotion. He literally bumped into Maurice Dupon in Albert Street, which, in those days was the well-known "gluttons' corner" both Singapore residents and British servicemen patronised for evening meals which were available until the wee hours. The boys from the Seletar Camp had congregated at "Fatty's", the popular stall-cum-shop, famous for the best-tasting Cantonese "hawker-food", and were boisterously enjoying their meal of Chinese roast-pork-and-rice washed down with room-temperature bottled beer "on-the-rocks", (beer poured over an ice-cube-filled glass to almost 'instantly' chill the contents), when the Ceylonese walked in with a group of Chinese men. Dupon's crowd unknowingly sat down at a table alongside the "boys" from the Seletar Camp. Though the RAF police dog-handler hadn't made contact with his former "buddy" since his return from India in the previous year, he had learned, through the local grapevine at the "Catholic Centre" that Maurice had first joined Rediffusion, the private British-owned cable radio station, and then had resigned in a huff, over "union matters", to go full-time into trade union work. He had become an "industrial relations officer" with the Government-controlled National Trades Union Congress,



whose offices then were in Queen Street, and he would appear at Industrial Arbitration Court hearings representing a union when its "labour matters", between it and the company employing the union-members, could not reach an agreement and the "problem" was handed over to the Court to "arbitrate" on. The Chinese with him had to be union cohorts as well as People's Action Party supporters because the Government then was in the midst of wresting control of the trade unions from the Communist-controlled Singapore Association of Trade Unions. So, his erstwhile "buddy" had to have gone over to the government-side, Siddon thought to himself.

Both men eyed one another unobtrusively without their respective groups being any wiser. As the evening wore on the Ceylonese suddenly looked up in open surprise when he overheard everyone at Siddon's table address him as "corp". Intrigued, he leaned over and inquired from someone close-at-hand at Thomas' table whether indeed he was a corporal. He seemed surprised, much to Siddon's annoyance, as he overheard the query. Siddon's "mate" proudly confirmed that their "leader" would be making "history" by being among the first three "locals" to make the rank of corporal in the RAF Police Dog Section. Hearing that Dupon rose from his seat and extended his hand in silent congratulations. Everyone, Dupon's table included, thought that the Ceylonese was just being a "friendly Singaporean". Siddon looked at the extended hand for a moment, then got up and shook it. The respective tables of the two groups were pushed together as invitations were extended from both sides to buy one another more beer. The party finally thinned out around four in the morning at Bugis Street.

Only Maurice and Thomas were left. Siddon immediately seized the chance which had eluded him all evening, ever since Dupon had first joined his party with his own crowd, and demanded the other's reason for failing to communicate with him in India or to send any money during his time of desperate need, when he had been in a tight spot. The memory of that time was still fresh in his mind and rankled. Plausibly the other explained that his mother had discovered his intention to "migrate", through his girlfriend. (Thomas noted that Dupon had omitted mentioning that he had since married the same girl, and which he had heard about from the gossip at the "Catholic Centre"), and she had forbidden him to go overseas because he was her only child, and he always bided by her wishes. It was very plain to Siddon that Dupon was being "slippery" again. Angrily he retorted that he knew the other was lying because he was aware that the Ceylonese had married the pretty Filipino girl they both had met prior to Siddon's departure from Singapore in the previous year. He told Dupon that he knew

that Dupon had obtained his job at Rediffusion within a week of Thomas going abroad, and that Dupon had in fact been negotiating with his future employers while he, Thomas, was still making preparations for their proposed hitch-hiking trip. And *that* was the sole reason why Dupon hadn't made the journey to India. But what was really "shifty" was his failure to forward any money to Siddon when he had needed it badly. And the two of them had agreed that whoever failed to make the trip, for whatever reason, would let the other one have all his share of funds "...just in case..." At this juncture Dupon bowed his head. Thomas could see that he had no comeback. Having rid himself of all his rancour and animosity, Siddon grew calm and decided to forget the past. There was nothing else he could have done anyway.

What was left of that beer-sodden evening began a new phase in their love-hate relationship. Over subsequent weeks whenever he was off-duty and had time to spare from his family, Thomas would meet Maurice, close to his office in Queen Street for quiet chats over drinks. It was good, once again, to discuss with a kindred spirit, subjects they had both left behind in their callow youth. Siddon noticed though, that his friend didn't drink his beer but "guzzled" it as if dying from thirst. He realised that Dupon had become what was colloquially-known as a "toper".

The talk in coffeeshops and bars, in those days, was the impending merger-referendum which the PAP Government had proposed to hold, to gauge whether the Singapore-population favoured "joining-up" with the Malayan mainland in the proposed formation of "Malaysia" as a way to gaining independence from Britain, and, if so, what form would the merger take. There were political parties who were dead set against the merger-idea, and among these were the so-called "Communist-front" groups like the Barisan Sosialis. For Thomas it was a good feeling to see that he and Dupon had once again differing views. Maurice claimed that merger was "inevitable" while Thomas contended that there was another "solution" — Singapore "going it alone", especially if with merger the "multi-racial flavour" of Singapore, a concept dear to his heart, was jeopardized. He had always regarded the island as his home, and a country for *all* who were *born on it*. Every Singapore-born, irrespective of ethnic-origin, had equal claim to being *son of the soil*, and **no particular community** had an exclusive right over the other races, no matter what its strength. But he still did think that Singapore's Malay *heritage* had to be acknowledged and preserved. He had his own personal thoughts about the formation of Malaysia, and the ramifications thereafter, but kept them to himself. He had seen his friend with PAP cadres, and didn't know what his loyalties were. Maurice Dupon had already demonstrated what he was capable of, in the past.

But Siddon put aside his personal misgivings and examined with Dupon the plausibility of their Chinese-dominated island merging with the Malay mainland where Islam and the rule of the sultans were dominant factors. He recalled his youthful attendances at those meetings at the St Andrew's Cathedral with Merle Jordon, when White men discussed his island and had agreed that the Chinese "would not dare" to impose their majority views. Those men had been naive, he felt, because already there was a creeping "sinoism" in certain aspects of the society. Thomas felt uneasy about Dupon's apparent lack of interest in "multi-racialism", whenever he brought it up, especially since Maurice had married out of his own race to a Filipina. It appeared that the other seemed more like the majority of the Chinese in Singapore, even though he wasn't one, clinging tenaciously to their own "communal world", fit only for their own kind. Did Maurice, like the Chinese, follow the precept of *jas sanguinis*, of racial descent only through one's male-line, that even though the mother of his yet-to-be-born offspring was a Filipino, his children would only be Ceylonese? Because if this was how the Chinese felt toward their children, irrespective of who the mothers of their children were, then he, Thomas Siddon was Anglo because of his own English father.

Siddon sensed that his concept of "multi-racialism" differed greatly from many. Feeling an onus to "voice" his thoughts just to ensure that the other didn't misunderstand him, Thomas said, as far as the PAP Government was concerned it appeared that it wanted a multiracial society where all the communities were "equal" and tolerated one another but in fact, there would be no encouragement of the "exchange" of cultures, no intermingling, by way of marriage, with other communities. There would be no racial-integration because, according to the PAP, the leaders of each Singapore community preferred to keep their particular strains "pure". For Siddon, personally, that would be an "unsatisfactory multi-racial Singapore" because everyone wouldn't face nor accept the eventual reality of an ethnic-mixing of blood, just "down the road". It had to come, unless Lee Kuan Yew and his cohorts could somehow come up with a Singapore-version of "apartheid". But in the meantime he would live in Singapore's version of a "multi-racial society" rather than in one where all the other communities were "over-powered" by the one, single dominant group, like in Malaya. If Singapore went that way he would leave. (He again omitted telling Dupon that his aunt in England had told him that he had a "patril right" to British nationality.).

It had already been accepted that *everyone* was on *Malay land* which had been colonised, and that other racial groups had made their homes on Singapore. But they were all in the *Malay World* and all should be able to

speaking Malay, just like Lee Kuan Yew who was part-*Baba-Nynonya* through his own mother. In Britain the British expected everyone who lived in their island for a period, *any* period, to be able to speak *some* English, why was it so strange then to accept that one needed to speak Malay in a Malay country, he inquired. Thomas watched Dupon as he said all that he had to say, trying to gauge the other's reactions but there was nary a sign, and he continued:

"It's important that the non-Malay communities realise the history behind the founding of Singapore, that in fact Stamford Raffles bequeathed an illegal 'fait accompli' — the two European powers at the time, the Dutch and the English, divided the *Riau-Lingga Sultanate*, which was the successor to the Malacca Sultanate, and in the process created the 'new' country' of Singapore. But despite whatever happened in history Singapore is still in the *Malay World* and cognizance of this must take that into effect," he said.

Thomas had left out his personal thoughts on the forthcoming merger proposals. Present-day Singapore was a British creation and the island had never really been part of the Malay peninsula in history. It had "grown" on its own. And what was being planned through the proposed merger with Malaya was an independence that went beyond a movement for freedom from colonial domination. The island at the end of the Malay peninsula, in the modern era was about to "do" something which no Malay sultan had ever achieved — the joining of Singapore with the Malay peninsula as a "political entity" — and the new peoples, the Chinese, Indians, including the Eurasians of the "first epoch", who were of part-Malay stock from Malacca — everyone — had to accept this crucial point as well as accept that it was all happening in the *Malay World*. Even the Malays, and the *other Malayo-Polynesian tribes* of the *Malay World* who had arrived in Singapore at different times, since Raffles, had to realise this. Witnessing Maurice Dupon's 'strange' silence when he said what he had to say, confirmed in Siddon's mind that the former buddy of his "salad days" was a PAP-supporter who could prove 'dangerous' to him in future, and he decided that he would no longer regard him as a friend or make any more contact. That phase of his life was over, he would see Dupon no more.

The merger referendum was held in Singapore on 1st September 1962. It disclosed that some 71 percent of the population was in favour of Singapore merging with Malaya to form Malaysia but giving the island autonomy in labour, education and the other agreed-upon matters set out in Command paper No:33 of 1961, with Singapore Citizens automatically becoming Citizens of Malaya. It was a personal victory for Chief Minister

Lee Kuan Yew who had strongly advocated this. The Communist-dominated Barisan Sosialis, (Socialist Front), political party had vociferously opposed the merger.

In early September Thomas was invited to attend an education course which normally was only available to British servicemen. Apparently his section-sergeant, Bob Waller, had obtained approval for the young man to attend the Part One "Education Course" which eventually would qualify him to take the "Ordinary" level, General Certificate of Education examinations that were set in Britain. It would take two years, he was told, for him to complete Part One of the Exam before he could qualify to sit the actual G.C.E. examination. When he turned up with his Cambridge School Certificate at the station's Education Wing, the education officer, a wing commander, told him he was "over-qualified". The officer helpfully suggested that the auxiliary constable try for the University of London entrance examinations which would enable him to take an external degree, if he passed. Over the moon, not really believing his good luck, Thomas accepted with celerity before the man changed his mind. The officer would write London and get back to the policeman on receiving word. As Thomas took leave of the officer he dreaded to eventually meet up with his section-sergeant. He knew that his senior NCO was still on his Part One course and it would be another two years before he could qualify to sit the GCE exams. It was going to be embarrassing to tell his superior that he was educationally "over-qualified" and had been recommended an external university course. It was unprecedented for anyone in the local force to be selected for university education!

The first indication that Sergeant Waller was displeased, was when Thomas saw his name on the duty-roster. It was a long stint of midnight shifts, immediate kennel "slogs", more "midnights" and some "evenings" before he had a day off. The pattern of duties, if sustained over a period, would keep him away from education class, should London be at all forthcoming.

While this was happening to Thomas Siddon a large-scale revolt broke out on 8th September 1962 in the British-protected Sultanate of Brunei as well as in the adjoining territories of Sarawak and British North Borneo, (Sabah), and which under existing plans with the Sultanate of Brunei was going to form part of the proposed "Malaysian Federation", together with Malaya and Singapore. The remainder of "Borneo", about three-quarters of the large island, between the Philippines and Indonesia, was part of the Republic of Indonesia who called her territory "Kalimantan". The rebellion was carried out by the so-called "North Borneo Liberation Army", an

organisation linked with the Brunei People's Party, headed by an A.M. Azahari, which strongly opposed Brunei's proposed entry into the Malaysian Federation. The tiny Sultanate of Brunei, (2226 square miles), then had a population of 85,000, of whom 45,000 were Malays, 21,000 Chinese, and the remainder indigenous peoples. A state of emergency was declared, a 24-hour curfew imposed, the Brunei People's Party banned, several hundreds of its members arrested and a warrant of arrest for Azahari was issued by the Sultan of Brunei, Sir Omar Ali Saifuddin.

Apart from mopping-up operations the revolt was quelled after ten days' fighting during which all rebel-held localities in Brunei and the adjacent Sarawak and British North Borneo, (Sabah), were retaken by British and Gurkha troops rushed over from Singapore. By 18th December 1962 all major towns in Sarawak and Brunei were free of rebel activity and operations were being carried out to hunt down rebel units that had fled into the jungles. In a statement on 11th December, in the Malayan House of Representatives, Tengku Abdul Rahman, the Federation of Malaya Prime Minister, said that Malaya had known several days beforehand of the plot, and had informed Britain.

On 12th December the British Government asked the Indonesian Ambassador to London, Mr Burhanuddin Muhammad Diah, for an assurance that his Government wouldn't support the rebels in Brunei, to which there was no immediate reply. The Indonesian Government on 14th December issued a statement describing the Malayan Prime Minister's statement of 11th December as "very provocative" and denied that Indonesia was implicated in the Brunei revolt. The Indonesian foreign minister, Dr Subandrio, who had been visiting Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, issued a statement on 16th December, in Singapore, accusing Tengku Abdul Rahman of a "...persistently unfriendly ..." attitude toward Indonesia. He declared that his country had no territorial claims on northern Borneo.

The collapse of the Brunei rebellion was announced on 17th December 1962 by the United Kingdom Commissioner-General for South East Asia, (the Earl of Selkirk), who was based in Singapore. The Malayan Prime Minister's office in Kuala Lumpur on 18th December made a formal protest to Indonesia about Dr Subandrio's statement in Singapore, which it took great exception to. In Brunei on 19th December a military spokesman stated that operations were continuing against a thousand rebels concentrated in jungle-hideouts near the Brunei-Sarawak border. In Indonesia, on the same day, President Soekarno declared in a Jakarta broadcast that "...we, the people of Indonesia, feel great sympathy for the struggle of the people of North Borneo who are fighting for their independence. Whoever does not

sympathise with the just struggle of the people of North Borneo is a traitor to himself. Let us march forward supporting those who oppose colonialism, imperialism and oppression..."

The Sultan of Brunei, Sir Omar Ali Saifuddin, suspended the Constitution on 28th December 1962, dissolved the Legislative Council and appointed a 14-man Emergency Council, presided over by himself, to hold power until the State of Emergency was lifted.

In Singapore Thomas Siddon went on duty all the more alert with the heightened tension due to the state of preparedness all British military stations were put on, which almost equalled a war-footing. Dog-handlers like himself were armed with pistols and instructed to treat all incursions into their respective patrolling areas as "for real". Previous to the "troubles" he had only patrolled "security" areas where bombs and high-tech hardware were stored or the aerodrome, with his dog and no side-arm, but with the Indonesian 'hiccup' all areas on camp became top-security installations, including the civilian offices which he had never patrolled before. In the Administration Block, when he was assigned to the civilian area, he was shocked to read signs on the common "public" loos segregating those for use by British servicemen-and-women, and for local civilian and military personnel. Some toilets bore the legend: "BORs Only", while for locals a sign over the respective doors read: "Asians". He just couldn't believe his eyes, nor would he accept that the local Asian clerical staff on camp would stomach such blatant racial segregation! But the signs were in front of him, and they spoke audibly. It made a mockery of all that Lee Kuan Yew and his PAP cohorts had been proselytizing about racial equality and how they would put a stop to British colonial snobbery. Why hadn't the Chinese, Indians, Malays, and Eurasians for that matter, who worked for the British, not brought the matter up with their respective Members of Parliament through the People's Action Party "Meet the People" sessions held in each PAP constituency? Lee had openly criticized the British for their unfair attitude and treatment of the locals in the past, and an instance such as the discriminatory signs was good grist for his political mill. Thomas wouldn't heed the thought buzzing in his head — that the Chinese, Indians, Malays and Eurasians "took it" from the British because instinctively they accepted their own "inferiority".

He brought up the matter with Sergeant Waller, his section-NCO, the following morning after his duty, still seething with the memory of the blatant racialistic signs. His NCO accused him of "shit-stirring again" but suddenly looked hard at his complaining constable and quietly began "explaining" that the lavatories were so marked because many "Asians",

especially the "wog-labourers", and those who didn't speak English "so-good", had "nasty toilet habits". As an after-thought, still looking Siddon in the eye, the sergeant explained that all "Blacks" and "Asians" were "wogs" or "golliwogs", or "A-rabs". "Wogs", "Golliwogs" and "Niggers" came from Africa, and the other "Blacks" were the "Asians", and that was how they were classified in South Africa. In Singapore and Hong Kong the Chinese were classified as "Cho-gies". Anyway Siddon, he said, had no need to "get all het up" over "nothing" as he wasn't regarded as "Asian" or "Black" his NCO growled as he dismissed him from his office. Spinning sharply on his heels as he realised he could go no further with Sergeant Waller, it struck Siddon that either Lee Kuan Yew wasn't too smart or that he had chosen to ignore the little bit of White racialism being practised under his nose. And knowing the Chief Minister, and that he had "spies" throughout the island, Siddon knew that Lee had been aware of the racial discrimination all along but had chosen to do nothing.

President Soekarno's speech of 19th December 1962 in Jakarta had caused concern in London, and the British Ambassador in Indonesia, Sir Leslie Fry, held two meetings with Dr Subandrio, the Indonesian foreign minister, on Christmas Eve, and on 1st January 1963. No statements were issued. On 3rd January 1963, the Indonesian Foreign Ministry announced that it had rejected and returned to the British Embassy, a British Note which contained "abusive words". The British Foreign Office expressed surprise at the Indonesian statement, and said that as far as was known, no British Note had been delivered to Indonesia.

The United Kingdom and the Philippines Governments on 1st January 1963 issued a joint statement which said that the security and stability of South-east Asia were of "vital concern" to both countries as members of the South East Asia Treaty Organisation, (SEATO). It made no direct reference to the Philippine-claim to North Borneo, (Sabah), nor to the Brunei rebellion. The Philippine Vice-President and Foreign Minister, Mr Emmanuel Pelaez, arrived in London on 22nd January 1963 for talks with British ministers on questions affecting the security, stability and defence of South-east Asia, and on Anglo-Philippine relations generally. The talks at London had come about because of the Philippine claim to "rights" over British North Borneo. Vice-President Pelaez for the Philippines and Lord Home for Britain, held discussions until 1st February and ended the talks with a communique stating that the two Governmen had exchanged views on the problems of stability, security, and defence of South-east Asia, as well as the Philippines' claim to British North Borneo, that there would be an exchange of documents relating to the legal position of the territory in



question, and that when the "Federation of Malaysia" had been established it would be possible for Britain and the Philippines to reach an agreement. Just three days before the joint British-Philippine communique in London, President Macapagal issued a statement in the Philippines describing North Borneo, (Sabah), as essential to "...Philippine national security in the light of the continuing Communist danger in South East Asia." The Philippines, he said, recognised the principle of self-determination, and urged that the peoples of the territory concerned be allowed to say, preferably in a referendum under United Nations' auspices, whether they wanted to be independent, part of the Philippines or "part of another state".

Also on 28th January 1963 an infantry brigade of the United Kingdom Strategic Reserve, of about 2000 troops, was standing to move to the Far East at 72 hours' notice. The official view was that the "campaign to put down the rebellion" wasn't near its end and that the rebels who had begun the rebellion at Brunei would continue to cause trouble and tie-up British forces for a long time, especially if they could count on help from outside. A recent message from Indonesia had spoken of "volunteers" ready to "help liberate" British North Borneo from colonialism.

The Indonesian Vice-Chief of Staff, Major-General Achmad Jani, visiting the Indonesian 12th Military Region in Kalimantan, (Indonesian Borneo), which bordered British Borneo, on a "routine tour" at the end of January, was quoted by "Antara", the Indonesian news agency, as saying in Pontianak, (in Kalimantan), that the Indonesian Army was waiting the order to move in support of the "...peoples' struggle for independence" in northern Borneo.

In Singapore police arrested one hundred and eleven left-wing trade unionists and politicians on 2nd February, with a further two on 4th February. Mr Lee Kuan Yew stated that the action had been taken on a joint decision of the British, Malayan and Singapore Governments in the Internal Security Council. (It struck Thomas Siddon that the PAP was using the very same instrument of detention it had criticized and had vowed to erase, when it was struggling to get to power, just a few years previously). Those arrested included the leaders of the Barisan Sosialis, the Partai Ra'ayat, (Malay: "People's Party"), and the left-wing Singapore Association of Trade Unions, (SATU). Among those taken into custody were Lim Chin Siong, Fong Swee Suan and Sydney Woodhull, an Indian. All three had previously been imprisoned by the British while Singapore was still a colony, for alleged complicity in the 1956 October riots but had been released when the People's Action Party had first come to power in 1959. No members of the Singapore Legislative Assembly had been detained.

A statement issued on the day of the arrests said the Singapore Internal Security Council had met in Kuala Lumpur to consider the internal security situation in Singapore in the context of the threat to the territories of the proposed "Federation of Malaysia" following the outbreak of violence in Brunei. A document issued on 3rd February 1963, on the authority of the Internal Security Council, and headed "Communist Conspiracy" said that those arrested had intended to use Singapore as a "cuban-style" base for a political offensive against Malaya. Referring to a "last desperate attempt" by Singapore Communists to capture control of the People's Action Party, in view of the latter's support for a Malaysian Federation, the document said that the Communists should "welcome Malaysia as fulfilling their own proclaimed aims of national unity and independence. But their calculations were ...based on the premise of an isolated Singapore where they could make a bid for political control at the next elections and secure self-government and the abolition of the Internal Security Council...that Singapore would become the 'cuba' of Malaysia...the springboard of the Communist revolution..."

Reading the statement in the newspapers, Thomas Siddon was perturbed by the startling and to him alarming descriptions of the way Singapore had been described by the Communists. He had never been impressed by their performance — he still remembered the days of his callow youth in Middle Road and how they used to "organise" themselves in the union premises in the pre-war shophouses. The British, it was true, hadn't done much for Singapore when they had been in control, and the PAP had begun to "do" things, but the situation wasn't so bad that Singapore had to become a "cuba"! There wasn't any need for any "Havanna-style" revolution!

Official Indonesian opposition to the proposed "Malaysian Federation" was expressed by Dr Subandrio, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, on 11th February 1963. At a Jakarta press conference he again accused the Malayan Prime Minister, Tengku Abdul Rahman, of "incurable hostility" toward Indonesia, and added: "You can imagine what will happen if we have a common land frontier with a federation that is hostile toward us. The possibility of physical conflict would be difficult to avoid."

An immediate expansion of the Malayan armed forces was announced on 13th February 1963 in consequence of Indonesia's antagonistic statements and open hostility toward the proposed "Federation of Malaysia". On the same day the Malayan Government announced the arrest of Ahmad Boestaman, leader of the Socialist Front Group in the Malayan Parliament. Boestaman was accused of forming a secret underground movement in Malaya for subversive purposes; was closely connected with those who had

planned the Brunei revolt; had claimed to have enrolled 300 volunteers in Malaya who were prepared to go to Brunei to assist the rebels; and was in communication with the Indonesian Communist Party.

On 15th February 1963 the official Indonesian news agency, "Antara", quoted Dr Subandrio, the foreign minister, as saying that Indonesia would give "full assistance" to the Brunei rebels to prevent the northern Borneo territories from entering the proposed Malaysian Federation.

In Singapore despite the political upheavals taking place in the region, 'development' under the PAP Government was steadily taking place. On 15th February, the same day as Indonesia's announcement that it would assist the Brunei rebels, a totally-different occurrence took place on the self-governing island. Its much-vaunted television service was telecast "live" at an inaugural ceremony where strategically-placed monitor sets in the main city area enabled the population to catch a glimpse of the new communication "tool" that would ultimately effect all their lives in time to come. Thomas had become involved in an argument with several British RAF dog-handlers who had derided the Government's bold venture, when he pointed out, to them, that they had all already purchased their TV sets well before the service which was being implemented that day. He had decided not to "rub it in" by reminding them that all the equipment for the new TV station was Japanese-made. (The era of superior Japanese consumer products sweeping the world had modestly begun in Singapore). Later that evening he went down to the city to witness the launch of the pilot-service at Empress Place, near the Singapore River.

A one-year detention order was served on 20th February on 113 persons detained in Singapore in early February, to safeguard the defence and security of the island and of the territories of the proposed "Federation of Malaysia". Ten extreme left-wing publications had been banned a fortnight earlier under the Undesirable Publications Ordinance.

On 22nd February the Indonesian Ambassador to London returned to the British capital from Jakarta and delivered to Lord Home a personal letter from Dr Subandrio, the contents of which were not made public.

Without warning Thomas Siddon was transferred to Tengah, the RAF base in the northwestern part of the island. He was told of his transfer a day before, and after completing his midnight shift-duty, travelled the fifteen miles to report to his new camp. He was informed that it was an "important" posting because the base had the latest tactical aircraft, including the "V-Bomber", which was capable of nuclear armament. It was a "classified" station. But Siddon knew he had been removed from Seletar because his promotion was due and it wouldn't do to have a "senior" among the "locals"

who always got on the "goat" of the BORs. Thomas realised that his "trait" to get under the skin by word, deed or omission of those in authority who seemed to take advantage of their particular "better" position over others less fortunate, had cost him dearly. He knew he would automatically be passed over for promotion at the new station because there already was a man due for corporal rank ahead of him. But he was all the more disappointed because it would mean the end of the chance to continue his education. It seemed, to him, that life kept dealing him stacked chips too frequently. Tengah would be too far away to "commute" to, between Seletar for education class, home and work, from his new base. There already was a high state of alert on all camps on Singapore, and he had to be available to go on duty at short notice at any time.

Within weeks of his transfer he came across the first indication of discrimination against the locals. The first thing he was told was that local RAF Police Auxiliary men could only report to the one civilian Asian doctor on camp who had been specifically hired by the camp's authority to provide a medical service to civilians. He thought nothing of it, accepting the availability of the doctor as just another service provided by the RAF for its employees.

From the first day of going on duty at Tengah he was assigned to the "sensitive" radar facility on Bukit Gombak. After two weeks of continuous dog-patrol duty at the Radar Station Thomas started to feel tingles in his finger-joints, though he did not associate his 'problem' with his being stationed on the radar facility. But, gradually, Siddon grew conscious of the discomfort in his fingers when the "tingle" became continuous. He started worrying about it, though he had no idea why he got the 'tingle-attacks'. One night at the radar station as he patrolled his "beat" and the tingles persisted, he irritably uncovered a draped-over sign along his patrol-path, and to his horror read a warning sign that cautioned against being exposed to the radiation emanating from the radar installation he was guarding. The sign stated that "anyone" could only be "exposed" in the area for no longer than thirty minutes at a time. He had been patrolling the damned place every night, non-stop, for six hours for the past fourteen nights!

Siddon brought the matter up with his new section-sergeant the following morning after reporting off-duty, and was told that the warning only applied to civilian clerical workers, not uniformed staff. Thomas sardonically inquired whether the radar "could tell" the difference between those in and out of uniform. He was curtly told to put a "sock in it" and he turned on his heel and stalked off. His mind made up, he visited the station "doctor" for the "locals" and discovered further horror when he found that the man was

only a Dresser trained in India, and whose qualifications, weren't even recognised in Singapore. Despite his misgivings, the police constable sought the man's service and was informed that there was nothing wrong with him. Another Indian *for* the bloody British! Knowing he wouldn't get justice at the air force base, he saw a local doctor of his own choosing in civvy-street, and who gave him a week's rest from duties. The local doctor felt that it wouldn't do to intervene in British Military matters, though he did indicate that what Thomas was "suffering" from could become serious if he continued to be exposed to the radiation from the radar facility over a prolonged period.

Thomas phoned his camp to say that he had been given a week's rest from duties, and handed in his medical "chitty" when he reported back after the due expiry of his medical leave. And found himself on the serious charge of being absent from duty without leave during a time of serious military alert. He would face a tribunal, headed by the Station Commandant within seven days. Armed with his previous experience at Seletar where he had fought and won the right for local policemen to consult private medical practitioners of their own choosing, he wrote in his "reply" to the charge as the filing of his defence, his "answer" containing the grounds for his rejection of the charges laid against him. And he requested for a civilian union official to "represent" him at the forthcoming hearing before the Station Commandant. Siddon realised that the charge against him was deadly serious, especially in view of the "Indonesian hiccup", RAF Tengah being a "classified" camp, and that his previous "performance" at RAF Seletar had had a bearing on the way he was being treated at Tengah but he wasn't going to take being discriminated against lying down.

Siddon's action caused an immediate uproar within the air force when he filed his defence papers at the station's Guardroom. No civilian, let alone an auxiliary policeman, a local, had ever "taken on" the camp administration. It grew even more "sensational" when the Tribunal found the charge totally without warrant. His success against the unfair action initiated by his section-sergeant and the Provost Officer of Tengah, opened the flood-gates of medical-leave by practically all the local dog-handlers. The BOR corporals in the police dog section began regarding Siddon with rancour as they were now assigned to the radar facility on Bukit Gombak. Of course the effect of his 'success' was that the majority of the local boys began abusing their "privilege", until one evening only Siddon and the BOR corporals turned up for guard-duty with their respective patrol-dogs. The rest of the local dog-handlers had all taken "medical-breaks". The camp-administration held him responsible for the sorry state of affairs.

All British bases on Singapore were on round-the-clock vigil as the "Indonesian-hiccup" deepened, and despite feeling euphoria at outsmarting his section-sergeant and his unfair practices against the local dog-handlers, Siddon realised that Singapore was going through a crucial phase, although, from appearances the local people didn't seem to give a hoot or care, or even want to talk about the startling events taking place in and around their island-home. The local dog-handlers, when they were first issued with side-arms, even though they were already "armed" with ferocious dogs, eventually began to realise the seriousness of the times when they were given strict orders to shoot "on-sight" any "encroachments" onto their guard-area. They were warned, every time they went on duty, that military intelligence had "advised" to anticipate a sneak "Indon" raid on Singapore which, "in all probability" would commence at a military base. The nightly warnings kept everyone on his toes. The station was almost on a "war-footing", with a squadron of quick-takeoff jet aircraft stationed at one end of the main runway to streak into the skies at the first warning of an approach of unidentified aircraft approaching Singapore airspace.

It amazed him that the British seemed more alert and treated the "Brunei Rebellion" and the "Indonesian hiccup" as real threats against the security of Singapore, while the mainly adult Chinese civilian population, most of whom were the survivors of the "fairly recent" Japanese Occupation", appeared oblivious to the Indonesian threat and the arrests of Communists in their own "backyard". But he recalled the old days of his childhood during colonial times, the people then hadn't seemed at all bothered by the unrest or stray shootings of persons in the streets by the disgruntled Communists. To him eighteen years later, it appeared that most Singapore "citizens" were only preoccupied with earning a livelihood, making money or enjoying themselves at the cinema, nightclubs, eating, gambling, shopping or fornicating outside their marriages with bar-and-cabaret girls.

Much later when Indonesian Confrontation was officially declared on Malaysia, which then also included Singapore, it didn't fail to 'amuse' him to hear complaints by "fellow-citizens" as well as personal friends, about the "inconvenience" of police-stops, and searches. No one, it appeared, seemed to grasp the seriousness of the events unfolding throughout South-east Asia. He thought the Malay, Chinese, Indian and Eurasian communities, especially the English-educated, infantile. They all behaved so unaffected by it all. He wondered how it was that the Chinese-educated, Mandarin-speaking students, descendants of those who had come from China, before and after World War Two, were more aware of their political rights. He didn't like them though, because they were racial bigots who only thought

in terms of their own Chinese race, weren't interested in being part of the peoples of "the Malays", and regarded everyone else as "outsiders" and inferior.

In view of the growing alertness at his base, Thomas decided to purchase a second-hand motor bike from Sungei Road, the former "thieves market" where one could buy all manner of goods of a second-hand or dubious nature. He bought his British "Norton" for a song at thirty dollars. It still went. It was the era in Singapore then where all one had to do, on purchasing a motorcycle, was apply for a provisional driving licence, stick "L" plates on each end of the bike, and be "in business". He made the nightly trip to Tengah from Kovan Road in record time and at less money if he had gone the "usual" way — by bus, which in those days was unreliable and lackadaisical. He wished he had thought about getting a bike when he had first been transferred to Tengah. He could have attended education classes for the University of London entrance exam then. But now the idea had come too late for him to take advantage of, as the offer for free education had been withdrawn.

With the vital installation on camp, and the high state of preparedness, in case of emergency and public transport failing, he would be mobile. His two boys, Kean Siew and Rahman were still infants and hadn't yet begun school. He was glad to be able to see them everyday. In his mind he had begun the move out of their dilapidated room in the rambling old house to a spanking-new flat the Government's Housing and Development Board must be building for them. Thomas had always nagged his own mother, when young, about applying for a colonial-built flat, and she had always disagreed, and he had always sworn to himself that when it came to his own family he wouldn't be content living in a rented room. He couldn't go through life not taking his own "advice". He knew there was a flat being built for him and his family by the HDB, and he had to get down to Pickering Street, the HDB offices just outside chinatown, to make an application for it. Mariko his wife, whose offices were close to the housing authority's, was reluctant to make inquires on their behalf because she still wasn't a Singapore Citizen and felt apprehensive that she would be discriminated against because she was Japanese. He decided to bide his time until it was opportune to go down to the city. In the meantime he made sure not to communicate his feelings of unease about the Indonesian "troubles" to his family.

His mother-in-law, Furiko, arranged for him to give Japanese businessmen friends of hers English conversation lessons at their homes. Japanese companies had gone into joint-venture projects with ethnic-

Chinese in Singapore and the Japanese had found it difficult to operate because of their own poor standard of spoken English. He had a total of ten pupils, each paying him fifty dollars a month for tuition, and was earning an extra five hundred dollars monthly, travelling to their respective houses twice-weekly to give instruction. It was more than what he earned as an auxiliary policeman! He hoped, somehow, that he would be able to obtain a "suitable position" with one of the Japanese entrepreneurs eventually, since he seemed to be involved in "interpreting" Singapore's labour laws for them and that they seemed to rely heavily on his thorough explaining of their various implications. His mother-in-law, by then had also become employed at a Japanese supermarket in Orchard Road, the first of many that would eventually be established on the island as time went by.

The Siddon family now hired a Malay girl "minder" to see to the children which was an ideal arrangement as Thomas would be home during office-hours, sleeping-off his previous night's duty at RAF Tengah, with the exception of his giving English-language lessons to the Japanese businessmen, and by the time he was about ready to return to camp for another stint of duty, either his wife or mother-in-law would be home before the Malay "minder" clocked-off.

While the steady moves toward the creation of "Malaysia" were going their relentless way, opposing plans were moving in tandem to see that this would not come about. A three-day conference on the financial and defence implications of the proposed federation was held in London from 13th to 15th May 1963 under the chairmanship of Mr Duncan Sandys, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations and the Colonies. The Malayan side was represented by Tun Abdul Razak, the Malayan Deputy Prime Minister, and Mr Tan Siew Sin, the Minister of Finance. It was agreed that the then existing Anglo-Malayan Defence Agreement would be extended to cover the whole of "Malaysia" when it came into existence. In the meanwhile the Prime Minister of Malaya, Tengku Abdul Rahman, visited Tokyo on 31st May and 1st June 1963 for discussions with President Soekarno of Indonesia who was then on an unofficial visit to Japan. For many months previously and particularly since the rebellion in Brunei, the proposal for the formation of "Malaysia" had been strongly attacked by Indonesian political and military leaders, especially Dr Soekarno himself. On arrival at Tokyo the tengku said that there would be no modifying of the programme for the establishment of the Federation of Malaysia which was scheduled for 31st August 1963, the date on which Malaya celebrated her independence. Commenting on the Indonesian attacks on "Malaysia", the tengku said: "How on earth a people of ten million can encircle a people of a hundred



million?" (The territories that were to comprise "Malaysia" would have a total of 10,000,000 while Indonesia's population numbered 90,000,000). The tengku added that he had gone to Tokyo to talk "peace", and that the proposed federation desired peaceful relations with all its neighbours.

To most inhabitants of the various territories that would eventually constitute "Malaysia", Thomas Siddon included, the Indonesian stance seemed unreasonably unfriendly, especially with subsequent independence for all, the *Malay World* could once again resume its own affairs, to make alliances of its own choosing with the departure of the last of the major colonising powers.

But it would only be years later that he would seek to understand more about his region and learn of the former "status quo" in the "south seas" before the coming of the invading colonial powers from Europe, and the Asian immigrants from China and India. The Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, French and English had "carved up" the region according to their respective military strengths and whatever political alliances among themselves affected in Europe. And these colonisers had brought in indentured labour, mainly from China, and some from India, to "man" the projects in their new colonies. The subsequent generations of those who had come or were brought in to the "south seas", as well as the offspring of the indigenous who had been born after colonisation, could only perceive "their country" after it had come into existence with border changes and the carving up of their "country" which had been redrawn according to how each invaded country had been "divided up" by the European colonising powers. There had been no written, nor public records documented, as to what had transpired, of what had been whose, or of what had been a specific ethnic group's homeland, as at the time of the colonial conquests many of the colonised were in their own state of war with another group in the region. And only the era of White colonialism had brought the parochial wars in these territories to a halt. "New" countries like "Indonesia" and the "Philippines", in the era of independence in *modern times*, after World War Two, sought to reclaim "lost" territory which had been part of former sultanates in a by-gone era, and which no longer existed, except in folklore which kept memories alive.

But despite moving into the new era of post-colonialism and future centuries, thought had to be spared for the ethnic rights, claims and heritages of those whose lands had been rudely taken away from them, often through illegal imperialistic manoeuvres. A single constitutional stroke of the pen ought not to wipe out the ultimate rights of an indigenous people, thought Siddon.

The tengku and Dr Soekarno held two meetings at the private residence of Mr Ohira, the Japanese Foreign Minister, who emphasized that Japan was completely neutral on the question of "Malaysia". A joint statement after the meeting stated that Tengku Abdul Rahman and Dr Soekarno had "decided that their respective governments would take every possible measure to refrain from making acrimonious remarks on, and disparaging references to each other". No specific mention was made of "Malaysia".

In Kuala Lumpur on 10th June, negotiations commenced on the conditions of Brunei's entry into the proposed Malaysian Federation. The Brunei team was headed by His Highness Sir Omar Ali Saifuddin, the Sultan of Brunei, and comprised Dato Setia Marsal bin Maun, the Brunei Chief Minister, and the country's constitutional adviser, Mr Neil Lawson, Q.C. The talks broke down on 21st June on the question of the future disposal of Brunei's oil revenues. It was understood that while Brunei wished to retain all her oil revenues indefinitely, for internal development, Malaya insisted that they should be paid into Central Government funds, ten years after the creation of "Malaysia". In view of the impasse at Kuala Lumpur the discussions were continued in London as part of the negotiations for the establishment of "Malaysia", however no agreement was reached, and, as a result Brunei was not a signatory to the Federation Agreement of 9th July 1963.

Thomas became friendly with an Eurasian called Dick Sherman, who was about his own age, and whose mother, a private nurse, was part-Japanese and had introduced herself to Furiko, his mother-in-law, one day when she was marketing at the local wet-market that everyone who lived in the area frequented. Sherman's father had been a Scottish doctor who had been killed during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. Dick told him that he and his mother were planning to eventually emigrate to Australia as there didn't seem to be much scope for "mixed-bloods" in Singapore. He invited Thomas to do the same but Siddon declined politely. He hadn't explained his reasons to Dick, but after his return from India, from his "hitch-hiking jaunt", he had made up his mind to give himself another "go" in Singapore. He wanted to believe in what Lee Kuan Yew and his party were saying to the population, because, somehow, he felt included in the exhorting.

Elections were held in Sarawak in June 1963 and previously in British North Borneo, (Sabah), in December 1962, at which parties or independent candidates supporting the formation of "Malaysia" had obtained large majorities. Sarawak had a ministerial system of government and an almost completely representative legislature before the creation of "Malaysia".

A conference was held in Manila from 7th to 11th June 1963 between Tun Abdul Razak, the deputy prime minister and foreign minister of Malaya, Senor Emmanuel Pelaez, the vice-president and foreign minister of the Philippines, and Dr Subandrio, the foreign minister of Indonesia, on the regional problems arising from the forthcoming creation of the Malaysian Federation. The Philippines urged the conference to accept its President Macapagal's July 1962 proposal for a confederation of the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaya, Singapore and the North Borneo territories. A joint communique issued on 11th June stated that the three foreign ministers had examined the Philippine proposal aimed at bringing their countries into closer association and agreed to recommend to a meeting of the three heads of Government, slated to be held at Manila not later than the end of July, "the establishment of machinery for regular consultations among their governments at all levels on all problems of common concern, such as security, stability, and economic, social and cultural development, and that the three countries shared responsibilities for maintaining peace and stability in the South-east Asia area...." "The three Ministers...succeeded in reaching common understanding and complete agreement on how to resolve problems of common concern arising out of the proposals to establish a Federation of Malaysia..."

There was no confirmation of press reports that Malaya had agreed to the holding of a referendum or plebiscite in the Borneo territories to enable their inhabitants to decide whether or not they wished to join the federation.

In Kuala Lumpur differences of opinion persisted between Malaya and Singapore on the terms of the latter's entry into the Federation, notably over the percentage of the national income paid by Singapore for federal services, the amount of Singapore's contribution to the development of the Borneo territories, and the terms of the proposed "common market" with "Malaysia". After several weeks of abortive negotiations in Kuala Lumpur, a Malayan ministerial delegation, headed by Tun Abdul Razak, flew on 24th June to London, in an attempt to solve the deadlock by direct discussions with British ministers, and with the Chief Minister of Singapore, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, who had flown to the British capital as well.

A fortnight's intensive negotiations began on 26th June during which Mr Duncan Sandys and Lord Landsdowne, (Minister of State), had numerous meetings, separately and collectively, with Tun Abdul Razak and Mr Lee Kuan Yew. The Malayan and Singapore sides also had, from time to time, meetings with each other. On 7th July it was announced that the main dispute over financial arrangements between Malaya and Singapore had been solved and that no further obstacles existed to Singapore's entry into

the proposed Federation of Malaysia by the specified date of 31st August.

After protracted negotiations in Malaya and Britain, an agreement was signed on 9th July, providing for the creation from 31st August 1963, of the "Federation of Malaysia", consisting of the Malayan Federation, Singapore, Sarawak, and British North Borneo, the last-named territory officially taking the name: Sabah. The Agreement was signed by the Governments of the United Kingdom, Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah. It consisted of eleven Articles and numerous Annexes, and was contained in a 234-page Blue Book, published on 11th July 1963, which also set out in full, the detailed arrangements which had been negotiated in the previous 18 months at conferences in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and London.

As set out in Article Six of the London Agreement, Britain retained the right to maintain bases on Singapore for the defence of Malaysia, the Commonwealth, and the South-east Asia region. Among the many Annexes to the Agreement, particular importance attached to the Malaya-Singapore agreement on a "common-market", and financial arrangements, which, *inter alia*, safeguarded the position of Singapore as an entrepot port... which "...for a period of five years from Malaysia Day, the Singapore Government shall have the right to require a delay not exceeding 12 months in the imposition in Singapore of any protective duty...that would significantly prejudice the entrepot trade... and that the entrepot trade would be protected by guarantees administered by a specially-created Tariff Advisory Board..."

The financial questions previously in dispute between Singapore and Malaya were settled in the following manner:

- (1) sixty percent of federal revenues collected in Singapore would be paid to the Singapore Government, and forty percent to the Federal Government;
- (2) to assist development in the Borneo territories Singapore would make available to the Federal Government a 15-year loan of one hundred million Malayan dollars, interest-free for the first five years, and a 15-year loan of fifty million Malayan dollars at the then market rate in the Federation of Malaysia mainland, (i.e. one hundred and fifty million Malayan dollars, in all, which, then, was equivalent to seventeen million, five hundred thousand sterling).

President Soekarno of Indonesia on 11th July issued a strongly-worded statement which accused the Malayan Prime Minister, Tengku Abdul Rahman, of having broken his word by signing the London Agreement for the creation of "Malaysia". The statement asserted that it had been agreed at the Manila meeting of foreign ministers on 7th June, that the Malaysian Federation would not come into existence until the people of Sarawak and North Borneo, (Sabah), had been given the opportunity of expressing their

views regarding their respective countries joining "Malaysia". The Indonesian president said the "... the Indonesian people ... will oppose Malaysia at all costs..." It was categorically denied in Kuala Lumpur and London that the Foreign Ministers' meeting at Manila on 7th June had agreed to the holding of a plebiscite or referendum in Sarawak and North Borneo, (Sabah), to ascertain local feeling on the Malaysia question.

In a statement on 18th July, to the British House of Commons, Mr Duncan Sandys announced that Britain would make available to Malaysia a total of approximately thirty million pounds sterling in defence and other aid, over three years from 1963 to 1965, and an additional sum of about thirteen million pounds sterling beyond 1965, when there would be a review of defence aid "in the light of the political, military and financial conditions of that time." The British Government would also continue to make available to the Singapore Government certain grants and loans, amounting to five million, seven hundred and eighty thousand pounds sterling, which had been previously promised to Singapore, release certain lands occupied by the British forces, and bear the cost of providing alternative facilities where this was necessary; pay the cost of raising and equipping the 2nd Battalion Singapore Infantry Regiment, up to Malaysia Day, and relinquish certain claims for services rendered, and goods supplied to the Singapore Government prior to the formation of "Malaysia".

The "Malaysia Bill" was given an unopposed second reading in the British House of Commons on 19th July 1963, passed through all its stages the same day, and was subsequently enacted. It provided, *inter alia*, for the relinquishment of British sovereignty over Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah, preparatory to the formation of "Malaysia".

In the meanwhile President Macapagal of the Philippines issued an invitation to President Soekarno of Indonesia and Tengku Abdul Rahman of Malaya to attend a "summit" conference in Manila on 31st July as had been agreed to by their respective foreign ministers. Both Heads of State accepted the invitation although the Indonesian president only agreed to attend after a last-minute appeal by Mr Macapagal. Prior to his departure for Manila on 27th July the Indonesian president had addressed a mass rally in Jakarta at which anti-British slogans and posters were prominently displayed. He had expressed Indonesia's determination to "crush Malaysia" and described the proposed federation as a "British project" aimed at destroying the Indonesian revolution. He had also added "... we cannot talk sweetly to the imperialists..." Before leaving the Malayan capital for Manila Tengku Abdul Rahman declared that "there will be no talk, as far as we are concerned, of a plebiscite or referendum...in Sarawak and North Borneo,

(Sabah), ..." He added that the territories involved in coming together to form the entity of "Malaysia" had decided to leave it "to the United Nations' Secretary-General to assess the views of the people in the Borneo territories. "I will stick to my word and I hope President Soekarno will stick to his." Tengku Abdul Rahman did not elaborate on his statement, at the time, but its significance became clear by the end of the "summit", when it was disclosed that the respective foreign ministers had agreed, in June, "to invite the UN Secretary-General, or his representative "to ascertain the wishes" of the people of the Borneo territories.

After the first day's "summit" session a joint letter was sent to the UN Secretary-General requesting him or his representative, to ascertain the opinion of the people of the Borneo territories.

Reading the newspaper reports about the Indonesian president's comments, Thomas Siddon found it incredible that anyone would openly "criticise" the British. They had been the dominant power in the region ever since the Dutch had been kicked out of Indonesia by the Indonesians themselves, and he wondered who would dare question the British motive in helping the formation of the new "nation". His reaction was typical of many who had no inkling of what "the Malays" had been before the onslaught of White colonialism. They had never known a "free" and "independent" existence in their lives before, but with Siddon there was also his English upbringing and an English attitude he had still not gotten rid of.

The London Agreement was approved by the Singapore Legislative Assembly on 1st August 1963, by 25 votes to 17, with eight abstentions; by the Malayan Parliament in Kuala Lumpur on 14th August by 67 votes to 18; and by Sarawak's first elected State Legislature on 4th September by 31 votes to five.

On 2nd August U Thant, the UN Secretary-General, informed the heads of Government of Malaya, Indonesia and the Philippines that he would not need the prior consent of the UN General Assembly to hold an "assessment" of the popular feeling in Sarawak and North Borneo, (Sabah), and expressed confidence that the inquiry would be completed in about six weeks.

The Manila "summit" ended on 5th August with the adoption of the three principles of (1) a "Manila Declaration" setting out the basic principles for the eventual formation of "Maphilindo", (the hybridism for the proposed confederation of Malaya, the Philippines and Indonesia), (2) a joint statement on matters of common concern, and, inter alia, that the UN would send teams to the Borneo territories to appraise the wishes of the inhabitants, and that Malaya, Indonesia and the Philippines would send "observers" to

those teams; that Malaya would seek a "just and expeditious" settlement to the Philippines' territorial claim to North Borneo, and (3) the report and recommendation of the Foreign Ministers' meeting held in June 1963, in which Indonesia and the Philippines stated that they would welcome the formation of "Malaysia", provided the support of the Borneo territories were ascertained by an independent and impartial authority, and that Malaya would consult the British Government and the Governments of the Borneo territories with a view to inviting the UN Secretary-General, or his representative, to ascertain the wishes of the people of those territories.

*The Manila Agreement meant that the proposed Malaysian Federation could not be inaugurated on 31st August 1963, as had been agreed to in London on 9th July, that year.* Tengku Abdul Rahman stated in Manila that the actual date would depend on how soon the UN team completed its work and reported to U Thant.

The postponement of "Malaysia Day" beyond 31st August aroused great indignation in Singapore and the Borneo territories, where political leaders declared they would regard Malaysia as having come into existence at the end of August irrespective of what had been agreed to at Manila.

The foreign ministers of Malaya, Indonesia and the Philippines sent a joint letter on 5th August to U Thant requesting him to send teams to Sarawak and North Borneo, (Sabah), to ascertain whether the elections in those territories had been properly conducted and whether this had taken into account the wishes of the inhabitants regarding Malaysia.

In Brunei on 6th August, after the return of the Sultan from Britain where he had discussed the extension of the UK-Brunei Defence Treaty, it was stated that Brunei's entry into the Malaysian Federation had not been raised.

On 8th August U Thant informed the respective foreign ministers concerned that he would appoint a representative to carry out the task of ascertaining the wishes of the peoples of northern Borneo. That the UN Mission would be "directly and exclusively" responsible to himself alone, and that he would communicate his "final conclusions" to the three Governments concerned in due course.

In Singapore, on the same day, the Singapore Chief Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, said:

"We represented Singapore in London, signed the Agreement which said Malaysia would come into being on August 31st. We are not parties to the Manila Agreement, therefore, as far as we are concerned August 31 is Malaysia Day."

Mr Lee said the proposed ascertainment of the wishes of the Borneo

territories was an attempt by President Soekarno, whom he described as an "international blackmailer", to wreck the Malaysian Federation before it could be constituted.

The UN Mission which would ascertain the wishes of the populations of both Sarawak and British North Borneo, (Sabah), with regard to their wanting to be a part of the new state of "Malaysia", arrived in Kuching, Sarawak on 16th August, where it split up into two teams — one remaining in Sarawak, while the other went on to North Borneo, (Sabah). Indonesia tried a last-minute demand on 19th August, to be allowed 30 observers. Britain counter-proposed that each of the three interested countries should have four representatives with each of the UN teams. The Indonesians then demanded landing rights at Sarawak and North Borneo, (Sabah), to fly in their observers in but Britain rejected it out of hand.

On 22nd August Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the Chief Minister of Singapore, and the Chief Ministers-designate of Sarawak and North Borneo, (Sabah), Mr Stephen Kalong Ningkan, and Mr Donald Stephens, respectively, all flew to Kuala Lumpur for talks with the Malayan Government, after expressing opposition to the postponement of Malaysia Day and announcing that they would regard it as coming into force in their respective territories on 31st August 1963, as had been agreed in London.

Mr Duncan Sandys also flew from London to the Malayan capital on 23rd August, in view of what the Commonwealth Relations Office described as "the complicated situation" developing in connection with the inquiry being conducted by the UN Secretary-General. From 24th to 28th August lengthy discussions took place, both in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, between Mr Sandys, Tengku Abdul Rahman, Mr Lee, Mr Ningkan and Mr Stephens. No statements were issued, but it was understood that a definitive date had been agreed for the inauguration of the Federation of Malaysia.

On 29th August the Malayan Head of State, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, issued a Royal Proclamation announcing that the "Federation of Malaysia" would come into existence on 16th September 1963, and not on 31st August. The Indonesian and Philippines Ambassadors in Kuala Lumpur had been handed Notes informing them of the decision.

Several thousand Chinese demonstrators, nearly all youths and teenagers, staged anti-Malaysia demonstrations when the UN team in Sarawak visited Sibu on 27th August, and Miri on 30th August. No Malays or indigenous Borneo peoples took part in the disorders in Sibu and Miri, both of which have large ethnic-Chinese communities. In Jesselton, (Kota Kinabalu today), the capital of North Borneo, (Sabah), the UN team was enthusiastically welcomed by a crowd of 10,000, demonstrating in favour of Malaysia.



But it was not until 31st August that agreement was finally reached by Britain, Indonesia and the Philippines on the nomination of their respective observers and assistants to oversee the work of the United Nations Mission.

Simultaneously on that same date, which was to have been the original "Malaysia Day", (and which was Malaya's own "Merdeka Day"), a mass rally, entitled "Malaysia Solidarity Day" was held in Singapore at which Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the "Prime Minister", proclaimed Singapore's sovereignty in foreign relations and defence, (hitherto reserved to Britain), until the Malaysian Federation had been inaugurated. Mr Lee announced that powers in the two spheres would be temporarily vested in the Singapore Head of State, the Yang di-Pertuan Negara, Inche Yusof bin Ishak, until 16th September, when they would finally vest in the Malaysian Federal Government. Lord Selkirk, the United Kingdom Commissioner of Singapore and Chairman of the Internal Security Council was invited to the Padang to attend the celebrations. As the British Secretary for Commonwealth Relations, Mr Duncan Sandys, was away on a cruise in a police launch off the east coast of Malaya, Lord Selkirk decided to ignore the illegality of the Singapore Government's move and attended the function.

Ceremonies also took place in Sarawak and North Borneo which officially became Sabah from that date. In Kuala Lumpur the last Merdeka, (Freedom), Day, celebrations were also held. It was the sixth anniversary of Malayan independence.

The Malayan Government took strong objection to Mr Lee Kuan Yew's proclaiming the *de facto* independence of Singapore before Malaysia Day, an action described as "neither legal nor constitutional". Thomas Siddon reading about it had a premonition that the Singapore "prime minister" was preparing the ground-work to some "future development", not yet apparent to anyone. It was something he had always been arguing with Maurice Dupon about — Singapore would, one day go it alone!

Indonesian and Filipino observers eventually joined the UN teams in Sarawak and Sabah on 1st September. The UN teams had already commenced work on 26th August, with Malayan observers present, in the absence of the Filipinos and the Indonesians. The mission finally left Sarawak on 5th September, after three weeks in the Borneo territories, taking evidence from numerous organisations, political groups and individuals.

After a Cabinet meeting on 2nd September, the Malayan Government announced that "strong representations" would be made to Britain, "which still ..." (had) "... jurisdiction in Singapore..." at the island "...arrogating to itself powers over defence and external affairs."

In Singapore, on the same day, Mr Lee Kuan Yew said it was a "matter

of regret that the Federal Government ... instead of welcoming the step forward in Singapore on 31st August, has expressed concern over legal and constitutional niceties, especially as it was clear that this action was taken not to oppose Malaysia but in order to consolidate Malaysia."

Reading the "Prime Minister's" statement in the press, the following day, it struck Siddon that Lee Kuan Yew could "bend" the rules when it was in his own favour.

The following statement was issued on 3rd September, after a meeting between Mr Duncan Sandys and Tengku Abdul Rahman "...any transfer of power from the British Government to the Government of Singapore require(s) an order in Council by the Queen, and ... no such Order in Council ha(s) been signed."

Mr Lee Kuan Yew on 4th September, announced a snap general election for 21st September. Nominations closed on 12th September, the legal minimum of nine days having been given. The People's Action Party put up 51 candidates, the Barisan Sosialis 46, the Singapore Alliance, (without Lim Yew Hock, who had withdrawn), 42, and the United People's Party 46 candidates.

The State Government of Kelantan in Malaya, which was governed by the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party, filed suit in the Kuala Lumpur High Court on 10th September, seeking an injunction to restrain the Malayan Government from bringing the Malaysia Act into effect on 16th September.

A delegation from the ruling Sarawak Alliance Party, headed by the Chief Minister, Mr Stephen Kalong Ningkan, arrived in Kuala Lumpur on 11th September for talks with the Malayan Government and Mr Duncan Sandys, the Commonwealth Relations Secretary, on the question of the appointment of the Governor of Sarawak. On 13th September it was announced that Temenggong Jugah Anak Bareng, (Paramount Chieftain of the Sea Dyaks of Sarawak), would become the Federal Minister for Sarawak Affairs, resident in Sarawak, and Dato Mustapha bin Dato Harun would become the Yang di-Pertuan Negara, (Head of State), of Sabah, for two years from Malaysia Day. In Singapore, on the same date, after talks with Mr Sandys, Mr Lee Kuan Yew announced that all outstanding issues over Singapore's entry into the Federation of Malaysia had been "satisfactorily resolved".

The suit by the State Government of Kelantan against the Malayan Government, filed on 10th September, was dismissed on 14th September by Chief Justice Sir James Thomson, who said the Malaysia Agreement had been signed for the Federation of Malaya by the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and four other members of the Cabinet and that nothing in

the Malayan Constitution required consultation with any state, or the ruler of any state.

The UN Mission's findings on Sarawak and Sabah were published on 14th September, and fully endorsed, on the same day, by U Thant. The Secretary-General found that the elections in both territories had been properly conducted and held in a free atmosphere, that the electors had had full opportunity to express their attitude towards "Malaysia", and that a majority of them had shown their desire to join the Malaysian Federation. U Thant emphasized that he had taken into consideration *historical, cultural and political* considerations, and that he had formulated his conclusions within the context of the General Assembly's declaration on the granting of independence to colonial peoples.

The new nation of Malaysia, comprising 14 states, and with a population of about ten million, came into existence at one minute past midnight on 16th September 1963, the date set by Royal Proclamation, and two days after U Thant had endorsed the report of the UN Mission. The "new" country in South-east Asia, raised the Malaysian flag — 14 red-and-white horizontal stripes with a blue canton in the hoist, bearing a gold crescent and a 14-pointed star — ceremoniously in Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Kuching and Jesselton.

In Singapore 114 years of British rule came to an end as Mr Lee Kuan Yew spoke at ceremonies outside City Hall at which declarations were read in Malay, Mandarin, (Chinese), Tamil and English.

In Jakarta "Malaysia Day" was accompanied by massive demonstrations outside the Malaysian and British embassies. "Crush Malaysia!" was the shrill, repetitive chant of the crowd. A "terrible confrontation" with the new Federation was announced by President Soekarno. Malaysia, he said, was a "neo-colonialist" plot. Subsequent hostilities took the form of widespread anti-British riots in which frenzied mobs burned and sacked the British Embassy in Jakarta and the homes and property of British nationals, several of whom were molested. British business concerns were taken over in many parts of Indonesia. Malaysia recalled her Ambassador and embassy staff, and closed down her consulate in Medan. Large crowds of demonstrators in Malaysia stormed the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, and burned a picture of President Soekarno outside the embassy-gates. It was also announced in Kuala Lumpur that Malaysia was breaking off diplomatic relations with the Philippines as well, because the Philippines Government wished to reduce its embassy in Malaysia to consulate level. Whilst great disappointment had been expressed in Manila at the inclusion of Sabah, (North Borneo), in Malaysia, in view of the Philippine territorial claim to

that part of the Island of Borneo, official comment was restrained and there were no wild scenes of hooliganism and mob violence as had occurred in Indonesia.

With the inauguration of Malaysia the once-extensive British Empire in the *Malay World* was reduced to the British-protected Sultanate of Brunei. The Malaysian Federation, consisting of 14 states, comprised nearly 130,000 square miles extending around the South China Sea, south from Thailand in the west, to the Sulu Sea in the east, near the Philippines. The heterogeneous population then approximating ten millions, broke down to four million Chinese, nearly four million Malays, almost one million Indians, Pakistanis, Ceylonese, Eurasians, (a majority of whom were of part-Malay origins), and "others" — and over half-a-million indigenous Borneo peoples.

In Singapore Mr Devan Nair, a PAP member, (who was to become the third President of Singapore in 1981), told a pre-election rally that the Barisan Sosialis had openly expressed support for the anti-Malaysia policies of Indonesia. On the eve of the country's elections held during that time, Mr Lee Kuan Yew warned the population that it would be the country's last election if the Communists could not be controlled. He had been referring to the Barisan Sosialis.

General elections held in Singapore on 21st September, five days after the inauguration of Malaysia, resulted in the return of the ruling People's Action Party, led by Lee Kuan Yew. The party romped home with 37 seats, the Barisan Sosialis had 13, and the United People's Party, one. Since the 1959 elections when the PAP first came to power, there had been two significant political developments in Singapore, namely the formation in 1961 of the left-wing, pro-Communist Barisan Sosialis, which had strongly opposed the creation of Malaysia; and the formation in the same year, of the pro-Malaysia Alliance Party, grouping the Singapore People's Alliance, the United Malays National Organisation, the Malayan Chinese Association and the Malayan Indian Congress.

Lim Yew Hock, Singapore's former chief minister who had negotiated the island's self-government with the British, resigned from his party, crossed over into Peninsula-Malaysia where he later took up Malaysian citizenship.

Immediately after the elections the Singapore Government announced that it would start proceedings to cancel the citizenship of one Tan Lark Sye, a Chinese rubber magnate and founder of the Chinese-medium Nanyang University, which was only 'recognised' by Singapore, on the ground that he had "actively and persistently collaborated" with a group of Communists at the university, and had "openly and blatantly intervened" in the elections

by "signing statements drafted by (those) Communists standing as Barisan Sosialis candidates". The Singapore Association of Trade Unions called for a general strike for 8th and 9th October 1963. Following this 14 trade union leaders were arrested in the early hours of 8th October, among them, three members of the Singapore Legislative Assembly — S.T.Bani, (Chairman of the SATU), Lee Tee Tong and Miss Low Liaw Gong — all members of the Barisan Sosialis. A statement by the Singapore Internal Security Department stated that the detained persons had been "responsible for the drawing up of plans involving workers, rural folk, and students in acts of violence against the Government in furtherance of their plot to seize power by creating widespread disorder and chaos; that the leaders had planned to march on the state-palace to force the Yang di-Pertuan Negara, (Malay: "Head of State"), to cancel an order threatening the de-registration of the seven-member unions of SATU ..." Cancellation of the seven unions, said to represent 60,000 workers — was announced by the Singapore Registrar of Trade Unions on 31st October. Notices had been served on the respective trade unions on 28th August, to show that they had not taken part in Communist "united front" activities but the unions had failed to satisfy the Registrar.

In South Vietnam conflicts between President Ngo Dinh Diem's Christian-dominated government and the South Vietnamese Buddhist community led to a major political crisis, and bloodshed. A military coup overthrew the government on 1st and 2nd November 1963 after Christians and Buddhists began attacking one another. The president and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu were brutally murdered on 6th November. The wife of the president's brother, Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu, who had wielded tremendous influence in the country, was on a visit to the United States of America at the time, and requested and obtained political asylum. Before the coup she had laws passed which forbade divorce except with the president's assent, adultery punishable by imprisonment, banned polygamy, concubinage, prostitution, abortion, contraception, boxing, jazz, western dances and beauty contests. With that first crisis, from 1963, South Vietnam saw the emergence of the power of the Vietcong. General Doung Van Minh became the first of several heads of state during that era.

In the meantime, for Thomas Siddon still working at the Royal Air Force Police Auxiliary, things began to "hot up" as he found himself facing charges nearly every week. Senior British NCOs in the RAF Provost began "cooking up" offences he was purported to have committed, with the sole purpose of getting him dismissed and he found himself missing "dire consequences" by the skin of his teeth. Finally in March 1964 the Malayalee

Secretary-general of the civilian employees union advised him to "get out" of the RAF before he was trapped on a charge he couldn't "extricate" himself from. The young man realised that the authorities on camp at Tengah had finally got around the union official to get him to advise Siddon to leave the service, and he agreed to resign as he was already earning much more as a private-teacher to Japanese businessmen who had come to the country to set up their businesses.

Thomas resigned from the Royal Air Force Police Auxiliary, glad, just as they were, to see the last of each other. He concentrated on his private Japanese students, now that he could spend more time teaching them the English language. Through Dick Sherman he got to know an Indian named Vas who 'employed' him to sell insurance on commission basis. He heard of an advertising course being conducted at a private college in town and decided that since he wouldn't be able to make it to university he might as well take up something "professional". If he passed it would help take him out of the "rut" he was in, and maybe even "elevate" him from the lower-rungs of the working class, he thought. He sought admission and was accepted since he had the minimum educational qualifications. Vas readily sponsored his enrolment as his 'employer'. Apparently it was a prerequisite as individuals could not apply to enrol on their own.

Lee Kuan Yew led a delegation from Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah, the three former British colonial territories which had obtained their independence since becoming a part of "Malaysia", to seventeen African states to convince them that Malaysia was not a "neo-colonialist" plot. Lee returned from his highly successful tour on 26th February 1964. While he had been away the PAP Executive Committee had decided "as a non-communal Malaysian party" to play a "token" part in forthcoming Malaysian parliamentary elections in order to "co-operate with the United Malays National Organisation in fighting anti-Malaysia parties". Dr Toh Chin Chye, the PAP Chairman, announced on 1st March that the PAP had played an important role in the establishment of Malaysia and should show itself to be a national party. The PAP put up eleven candidates and in its election manifesto declared its aims were to assist in the "building of a united democratic and socialist Malaysia..."

Tengku Abdul Rahman, the Malaysian Prime Minister, on 13th March 1964 announced the postponement of a mission to the United States of America which was to be led by Mr Lee Kuan Yew, to "...place the facts of Malaysia before American leaders..." because the PAP was contesting the Malaysian elections against the Alliance Party, and "... it would be inconsistent politically for the PAP to represent the (Malaysian) Government abroad..." In response Mr Lee Kuan Yew accepted that in such matters he

took the tengku's instructions. A few days later though, in a speech, he emphasized that while the tengku and Tun Abdul Razak were vital to the survival and success of Malaysia within the Malay leadership, the Chinese leadership in the Malaysian Alliance Party as represented by the Malaysian Chinese Association, was replaceable. Lee had feared that the "protest vote" against the MCA leadership would go to the pro-Communist Socialist Front of Malaysia.

The effect of Lee Kuan Yew's opinion of the political situation in the Malaysian mainland was misunderstood and a great deal of communal tension, in consequence, was generated by Malay extremists. The United Malays National Organisation, (UMNO), a political party run on communal lines, accused the PAP Government of deliberately plotting against the Malays. The Secretary-general of UMNO, Syed Jaafa Albar publicly declared that there was enough evidence to send Lee Kuan Yew to prison for oppressing and suppressing the Malays in Singapore.

On 11th June 1964 Thich Quang Dae, a 73-year-old South Vietnamese Buddhist monk in Saigon, soaked his saffron robes in petrol and ignited them, committing suicide by self-immolation. The South Vietnamese police was prevented from dousing the flames, to prevent his death, by a 500-strong crowd of monks and nuns who surrounded him in a thick "human shield".

In Singapore things were heading toward an 'open' confrontation between the political leaders on the Malaysian "mainland", (Malaya), and the Singapore Government. On 12th July 1964 an UMNO-sponsored convention of about 150 Malay organisations assembled at the "New Star" Theatre in Pasir Panjang Road, on the western side of Singapore, which then, traditionally, was a "very Malay" region due to it being the historical "royal town" of Temenggong Daeng Abdul Rahman, the Malay royal who had allowed Stamford Raffles to set up his station on Singapore in 1819, and his son and grandson afterward. The crowd which assembled there heard Syed Jaafa Albar, the Secretary-general of UMNO, express dissatisfaction over the "fate" that had befallen the Malays in Singapore.

"Malays in Singapore have long been oppressed. First there were the British whom the Malays gave their trust, then there were the Japanese with cruel oppression. This served to open the eyes of the Malays. Singapore is now independent with her entry into Malaysia but the plight of the Malays remains... If we are united no force can break us. Not even a thousand Lee Kuan Yews..."

The convention passed resolutions regretting the "unfair treatment" of the Malays and called on the Government to deal only with their 23-man "People's Action Committee".

On 17th July the Singapore "Prime Minister's" Office in a written statement said the Government had the right and duty to solve all problems of all communities, including the Malay community. The "Prime Minister" took the opportunity at the opening of a school the following day, to warn of the growing danger of Malay chauvinism.

"Three years ago...we put down Chinese chauvinism using Chinese sentiments for Communist ends...now...Malay chauvinists play on Malay sentiments for equally dangerous ends...we must be prepared to fight both extremes or Malaysia will perish."

Two mornings later, on 19th July, in the Victoria Theatre in Empress Place, (which had been so named to commemorate the coronation of Queen Victoria of Britain during colonial times), Lee Kuan Yew addressed a thousand Singapore Malays who were representing 103 Malay cultural, sports, social and other non-political associations, together with 300 ketuas, (Malay; "seniors"), and pengulus, (Malay: "village chiefs"), from the various Malay kampongs, (villages) throughout the island.

"In the past nine months since Malaysia, there has been intensive propaganda by Indonesia directed at Malaysia, intended to cause friction and conflict between the Malays and the Chinese, and Singapore, as the largest city with the largest number of Chinese in South East Asia, has become the target of the Indonesian fire in their anti-Chinese propaganda. They have tried to present their 'confrontation', which is an aggression by Indonesia against Malaysia, as a policy by which they are trying to help the Malays take over the wealth and position of the Chinese as represented in Singapore.

"On 5th June, Radio Indonesia, in a broadcast to Malaysia said the Chinese Government of Lee Kuan Yew is deliberately forcing the Malays out of the city so that the Chinese can be in control." (The Indonesian radio statement also referred to the Singapore Government getting some 200 Malay families, but which, in reality included ethnic Chinese and Indian families as well, to move out of the traditional, historical Malay areas of Crawford, Kampong Glam and Rochore in order that a future "golden mile" of office-blocks, shops and schools would be erected in place of previous dilapidated buildings. The first the English-speaking public knew of these occurrences was when "The Straits Times" 'covered' the "Prime Minister's" speech at the Victoria Memorial Theatre.

After a five-hour discussion, that day, the Singapore "Prime Minister" informed the group of assembled Malays that every effort to train Malays for top positions would be made by the Government but it would never allow a quota system in employment opportunities for Malays. Special licences and land reservations for Malays were also out of the question before Singapore joined Malaysia.



"We will provide all the training facilities, all the education necessary to compete with non-Malays, but we cannot go back on what has already been agreed upon in constitutional talks," he said. Lee confirmed he would meet the UMNO "action committee", as well as the "racists and Indonesian agents", on 19th July.

Reading press reports of the Singapore leader's speech, Thomas Siddon realised there was more to the Chinese politician's "defence" and the Indonesian attack on the PAP's promise to convert the Beach Road area into a "golden mile", than was apparent to most of the population. The original "Kota Raja", (Malay: "Royal Town"), of "Sultan" Hussein, illegally-installed by Stamford Raffles in 1819 to effect the cessation of Singapore from the "Old Johor" Sultanate at Riau, and Dutch control and influence, is within the "modern" constituencies of Kampong Glam and Crawford, with the "sultan's" palace located at Sultan Gate, a side-street off Beach Road, in the heart of Kampong Glam, (the village of 'Sultan' Hussein of Singapore). By ear-marking the area for "development" and moving out ethnic Malays and Bugis, (whose ancestors had lived in the area long before the British had arrived to set up their station in 1819), Lee Kuan Yew had uprooted the descendants of Singapore's indigenous population to make way for the future sinonization of Singapore, Thomas Siddon felt. The only other building apart from the palace of "Sultan" Hussein, not demolished in the Beach Road area is the Fatimah Mosque built for a wealthy Malay woman in the past.

On 20th July 1964 an UMNO state leader and head of the "action committee", Senator Ahmad Haji Taff, claimed that Lee's meeting with the Malay organisations at the Victoria Theatre was an "insult to Malays". The "Work Brigade", (a force of semi-schooled youths, mainly Malay, organised by the Singapore Government, which offered employment in manual labour and public car-park tolls collection for scores of unemployed young men and women in the days of job-scarcity), he alleged, had been made to fill vacant seats at the meeting and carry placards denouncing Malay leaders.

"Our campaign has been directed at Mr Lee Kuan Yew and his government for not implementing the *special rights clause* in the Constitution, not a campaign against the Chinese," he said.

On 21st July 1964 about 25,000 Muslims, Malays in the majority, assembled in the early afternoon on the Padang, (the large green in front of City Hall), in a mass rally to celebrate the birthday of the Prophet Mohammad, and wound their way toward Geylang in the eastern part of the island. According to the late Tun Abdul Razak, then acting Prime Minister of

Malaysia, since Tengku Abdul Rahman was abroad in the United States of America, "... a mischief-maker flung a bottle, (which was supposed to have contained pig-waste — anathema to all Muslims), at the procession as it passed through the Kallang area...and racial conflagration erupted..." Mr Lee Kuan Yew described the incident differently in a radio broadcast after racial riots had broken out. He said that a member of the Federal Reserve Unit, (mainland Malaysia's crack, elite police tactical force which had been stationed on the island ever since the formation of Malaysia), had asked a group of stragglers to catch up and rejoin the mainstream of the procession but instead of being obeyed he was set upon by them. Thereafter mass groups became unruly and attacked passers-by and spectators. The "disturbances" spread rapidly throughout the predominantly-Malay Geylang district, between Kallang and Geylang Serai.

A curfew was imposed until the following morning but as the violence continued in several areas of the island, it was re-imposed. It was progressively lifted over eleven days during which 21 persons had been killed and 460 injured. There were fears that communal tensions would lead to further outbreaks of violence in the other Malaysian states on the "mainland" and all Malaysian State Governments were instructed to form goodwill committees.

Lee Kuan Yew was of the opinion that the violence had been started by a small group of extremists. He referred to them as "ultras", (a description given to Frenchmen who had wanted Algeria to become part of France) — persons who had never accepted Malaysia in its present form. They would have preferred Malaysia to have been part of 'Indonesia Raya'. Tun Abdul Razak, a day after the clashes said, "as yet" *there were no indications of Indonesian involvement* in the crisis.

Lee Kuan Yew's view was that the violence had been started by a majority group of extremists "but things took advantage and created more trouble". Among the lessons learned, he said, "were that no amount of troops would be able to stop the trouble between the different communities". The decisive factor was "when Malays in their kampongs protected the Chinese and the Chinese in their areas protected the Malays". He expressed hope that the tengku, on his return from the United States would keep the extremists in Malaya under control. "...We will help him to handle the extremists and chauvinists in Malaya...Singapore has seen the Chinese extremists and chauvinists and we have been able to put them down..." He sympathised with the tengku's problem in dealing with elements which were helping Indonesia break up Malaysia, (to) deal with them in such a way that he did not...lose Malay support...

"...Everyday the Indonesians accuse him to his own Malay-following of having sold out the Malays to the Chinese and Indian merchants in Malaysia..."

Thomas Siddon, listening to the Singapore "Premier's" 'explanation' of the cause of the troubles, over the radio, took it with a pinch of salt. He knew that in no way would an ethnic-Malay attack his own kind in public, especially on the day celebrating the Prophet Mohammad's birthday, a holy day, or make any kind of untoward violence against the much-feared and respected Federal Reserve Unit. The "trouble" had been communal in nature and for a Muslim to have turned *amok*. (Malay: "berserk"), he was more inclined to accept Tun Abdul Razak's version for the true cause of the riots.

On 19th August 1964, shortly after the tengku's return to Malaysia from a trip to Washington, Mr Lee Kuan Yew accompanied him on a tour of Singapore where the racial disturbances had taken place. The Singapore leader told the crowd that had gathered that the Singapore Government had confidence in the Malay leader's leadership and trust in his ability to see that justice was done to all.

The racial disturbances had a deep, unsettling effect on Thomas Siddon. It tore him apart to witness Chinese and Malay Singapore-islanders openly show their hatred and mistrust of one another. He took note that the young men in the Boyanese, (a tribal-group coming originally from an island in the Indonesian archipelago), "settlement" on Hillside Drive had all disappeared from their communal homes at the height of the "troubles". Being Eurasian he hadn't been open to attack from either of the conflicting communities, who recognised him as an "outsider", and he had utilised that "dubious protection" to offer unsolicited free rides home on his motorcycle to any Chinese or Malay he had come across stranded on the streets. And those that he had come across, had had the look of fear on their faces. Thomas had gone out with the intent to help his fellow-islanders, because he knew that not everyone who had been in the streets had been out looking for trouble. The people of Singapore had had no pre-conceived plan to ferment trouble, as Lee Kuan Yew had claimed. They had just been trapped on the streets, by accident.

But the racial ugliness of old, which he heard had happened in the past, hadn't really disappeared — it just "bubbled quietly" under the surface of Singapore-society until 21st July 1964 when "something" had set it off again. What it was could have been the "bickering" of the politicians on both sides of the Causeway. The realisation that things could suddenly go wrong in his society, if someone were to foolishly "play with fire", had been traumatic.

## *New Horizons*

### *Chapter Eleven*

From mid-August 1964 onwards, Indonesia's military operations against Malaysia under President Soekarno's *Konfrontasi* policy, increasingly took the form of sea-borne infiltrations on the east coast of Peninsula Malaysia, (Malaya), and in one case on 2nd September, a large-scale parachute drop by paratroopers on Labis in Johore, an important centre of the rubber and oil-palm industries, about a hundred miles north of Singapore. In the meanwhile the state of tension in Singapore, at official level, had reached almost war-like proportions but as far as the island's population was concerned this didn't appear to affect their lives. All the military "skirmishes" reported in the press had, so far, taken place in isolated, remote out-of-the-way locales situated in the under-developed outer-reaches of the other states of Malaysia, away from urbanised centres like Singapore, and reports of bombings and deaths deep in the jungles, "elsewhere" in East Malaysia, (Sabah and Sarawak), seemed to be taking place in another existence as far as the Singapore man-in-the-street was concerned. It just didn't seem to affect or touch him as the incidents occurred in places he was not familiar with or knew anything about. He either carried on with his job, or made money in business or hawking, and enjoyed himself as usual in the nightclubs, bars or brothels of the city-state.

Between August 1964 and January 1965, bands of Indonesian regulars and guerrillas, varying in number from about a hundred men to small groups of ten or a dozen, landed at different points on the south-western Malaysian, (Peninsula), coast, notably in the Pontian district of Johore State. In nearly

all cases infiltrators were rounded up by the combined security force of British, Malaysian, Australian and New Zealand servicemen. The bulk of the enemy's sea-borne infiltrations were effected from the Riau Archipelago, the group of Indonesian islets just three to four miles south of Singapore, as well as from islands off the coast of Sumatra facing Johore across the Malacca Straits. It was believed that centres for sabotage and guerrilla training had been set up by the enemy at these two "jumping-off" points, and that warfare tactics were being given there to Indonesians as well as Singapore and Malayan collaborators, mostly ethnic Chinese who, it was planned, would one day return to Malaysia, which then included Singapore, to act as "fifth columnists".

A State of Emergency was first declared in the Johore, Malacca and Negri Sembilan States in Peninsula Malaysia, after the first sea-borne landing in the Pontian district in Johore. Following the dropping of Indonesian troops at Labis, a State of Emergency was proclaimed throughout the whole of Malaysia under a Royal Proclamation issued by the Malaysian King, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, on 3rd September 1964. The entire territory of Malaysia — Peninsula Malaysia, including Singapore, and Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia, (Borneo), — became a security area under the State of Emergency, with death being imposed for such offences as firearms, explosives or ammunition possession and the consorting with armed terrorists and subversives. All persons above the age of twelve were required to carry an identity-card bearing their photograph and thumbprint but for Singapore this wasn't necessary as identity-cards had been instituted on the island ever since colonial days.

But whilst this was happening, in Singapore from 2nd to 6th September, some 10,000 police and military troops were once more called out to deal with further extensive communal rioting between the Chinese and Malay communities. A year after independence from Britain, obtained through a merger with Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak to form the "new" nation of Malaysia, the tiny island of Singapore, formerly part of the ancient Malay kingdom of "Old Johor", which had then been located at Riau-Lingga when Stamford Raffles had first come to negotiate with the sultanate's Bugis and Malay rulers the setting up of a trading station on her in 1819, faced her second major Chinese-Malay communal flare-up since World War Two. The first racial-riots since the second world war, (21-24 July 1964), Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the Chief Minister, had attributed to the "ultras", (a term he had 'borrowed' from the French, to describe what he termed as Malay chauvinists) but this second spate of troubles he laid squarely on the Indonesian government, which, he said, had a "orchestrated" the ethnic mayhem

through its agents in Singapore who used the island's Chinese secret societies to ignite racial-tensions.

The flare-up had first begun when word spread on 2nd September, that an elderly Chinese trishaw-rider had been stabbed to death in his three-wheeled vehicle, at around ten that evening, opposite the Geylang Serai Market, then the predominantly-Malay area on the eastern-part of the island, (just behind this district is Joo Chiat, a former "enclave" of the Baba-Nynonya, Chinese-Malay mixed community). Earlier that day, a driver of a car, in the same area, had been set upon by a stone-throwing mob. More 'incidents' followed until communal violence broke out in the open. Two days later the toll was eight persons killed and 60 injured in what "The Straits Times" described as "sporadic Indonesian-inspired clashes". A "State of Danger" was declared, and a curfew imposed. By 9th September, when the curfew was eventually eased, 13 were dead and 103 injured. Some 240 "political agitators" had also been arrested.

The Criminal Investigation Department of the Singapore Police Force said that key groups of Chinese gangsters were paid by Indonesian agents to keep racial tensions on Singapore high. The Combined Security Forces Intelligence Unit believed that the Indonesians first made contact with the Singapore Chinese secret societies during the time of General Gusti Djatikusuno, the Indonesian Consul-General in Singapore in 1959. The Malaysian Central Government had publicly said that he was the organiser of an extensive espionage network throughout Singapore and Malaya during his term of service.

Tun Abdul Razak, the Malaysian Deputy Premier and Minister of Defence, on 8th September, revealed that the Central Government in Kuala Lumpur had also foiled an Indonesian plot to land paratroopers in Johore while attention was being diverted by the communal riots on Singapore. Earlier in the day, before the racial conflicts on Singapore had first erupted, the Malaysian Central Government had made known its intention to set up a Commission of Inquiry into the July 1964 "disturbances" in Singapore. Its composition was announced on 9th October, three days after the second "bout" of communal clashes on the island. (The Commission never published its findings, and, upon Singapore's subsequent separation from Malaysia in 1965, it ceased to exist.).

Chief Minister Lee Kuan Yew, (the island's news media had taken to appending the title "prime minister" to Lee Kuan Yew when reporting on his activities and there had been no official edict to either to get them to stop or to continue to do so), was in Brussels taking part in the debate on East-West relations at the Socialist International Conference on 3rd September

1964, when the riots broke out on Singapore. Malay politicians in Malaysia, (the Malay peninsula), in the meanwhile made known that they were upset by the "honour" accorded to the Singapore leader, as Lee Kuan Yew was only a chief minister of the "Malaysian state of Singapore". On 10th September the Singapore leader flew to London and made a speech to Singapore and Malayan students studying there. He was reported by a news agency as having said that Malaysia's future depended on *whether eventually a Malaysian or a Malay nation was created*. It was unofficially "leaked" that the agency report was not "accurate", but the first moves toward creating mistrust among the respective politicians of Singapore and Malaya, had been set in motion.

The second "bout" of racial clashes had caught Thomas Siddon by surprise. The previous July 1964 "disturbances", he would've thought, should have been enough to convince *anyone* there was nothing to be gained in trying to annihilate one another. The first wind that trouble had broken out again was the sudden news-flash over TV, late on the evening of 2nd September: curfew was again being imposed throughout Singapore due to "disturbances" and the stoning of vehicles in the Malay-majority Geylang Serai district. It was a disquieting, uneasy feeling to realise that the two major communities on Singapore had not forgotten, nor forgiven the clashes that had taken place not even two months previously. As the days went by the Singapore Government gradually eased up on the island's total-curfew to allow housewives to market for their families, while the small-time Chinese-owned provision shops opened just one "slat" of their many-panelled fronts to admit their harried-looking, anxious regulars, to make other essential purchases.

Easily recognisable by the Chinese and Malays as being mixed, Thomas was able to move about his neighbourhood in relative safety. There had been public warnings over radio and TV that the police would shoot curfew-breakers on sight, and he always made sure he was home in good time. He was glad that his family's rented-room was in a large house in its own fenced-in compound because the police weren't too stringent, and allowed those living in fenced-in premises to "stretch" their legs within the perimeters of their particular households. The Chinese-owned provision shop in their area even allowed regular customers in during curfew-hours, so long as the customers knew it was they and not the shop who was taking the risks by their being out in the open.

A Malayalee reporter friend "invited" him to act as his "rider" on the reporter's motor-cycle so that they could both go over to the riot area to photograph the scenes of mayhem for a "scoop" the reporter was planning

to obtain, which he thought he could sell to the international news agencies and make a name for himself. He promised Thomas to share the money earned but Mariko, Siddon's wife, would have none of it. Out of earshot of Subhas the Malayalee, his wife threatened to leave him if he went out on the foolhardy "mission". She and her mother had seen sufficient race-riots in Malaya when they had lived there.

The following morning, reading "The Straits Times", Siddon gratefully hugged his wife and showed her the headlined story of that day's edition: Subhas had been decapitated where he had stood astride his bike, thick in the melee of battle-locked communalists. He had been so engrossed snapping close-ups of Chinese and Malays killing one another that he hadn't seen the murderous blade that had loped his head off. He should've realised that *no one* had wanted to be identified by his incriminating pictures. His camera had been smashed and thrown onto the burning inferno which had been him and his motorbike.

As the curfew-hours eased up day by day, Dick Sherman, the part-Japanese Eurasian, requested Thomas to "do him a favour" and transport his mother, who was a private nurse, to her job at the Singapore General Hospital in Sepoy Lines, since Thomas had a motorbike. Dick's mother had a private patient in the first class ward of the hospital. Part of the route to the hospital went through chinatown and the Japanese-Eurasian young man knew, somehow, that Thomas was sufficiently known in the chinatown area, though Siddon had never bothered to "explain" how he had come by the obvious gangster-connection in the Chinese "stronghold" of those days. Siddon agreed and after doing his family's daily marketing, conveyed Mrs Sherman to the hospital everyday. He would return via Robinson Road and Collyer Quay — "the city" — each time, and was always moved by the anxious looks of those office-workers who had dared to turn up for work. Even the local coffeeshops and the hawker-stalls in the area were deserted. No one was doing business for fear of being attacked by mobs of unruly, rampaging secret society toughs under the guise of communalists looking for the "other side".

As he rode through the business district of those days, Thomas promised himself that he would, one day, "make it" into the city. Even though the streets were forlornly empty, he could still feel the atmosphere of the bustle that normally would have been there in the day-time if there had been no racial-strife and an early curfew imposed. Lessons at his advertising class had been suspended but they would resume once the "troubles" were over and the curfew lifted completely. The exams, set in London, were due in December and there was less than four months left but he looked forward



to taking them, even though his island-home, then, was in the tight-grip of fear and uncertainty. Because he had always been sure of Singapore: it was his home and he was a part of it, *and he belonged*.

Finally the riots were quelled, things became "normal" by the end of September, and Thomas returned to his advertising classes.

There was probably as much disunity within the Malay community as there was between Chinese and Malay during this period. Three groups of political "direction" among the Malays ranged from those who believed that Malaya belongs to the Malays and no one else; to some who argued that since the Malays originally surrendered authority to the British, the Malays must inherit the power relinquished by the British; and those who spoke of tolerance and progress, of a Malaysian citizenship which embraced those qualified by birth or residence to call themselves Malaysian. Most Chinese accepted the "Malaysian" concept at face-value — a willingness to share and support the principle that the Malay needed "help" to enable him to compete in a materialistic world. Tengku Abdul Rahman of Malaysia had been reported as saying that the Malays and Chinese, on the whole, were content in their respective roles "...politics, administration, and ...the armed forces, the Malays are unrivalled...the Chinese and others do not aspire to giddy heights in politics, administrative and the armed forces because in these fields the opportunity to make money is limited...try to force one side to give up their place in favour of the other...(and you are)...bound to meet with trouble..."

But this outlook and argument did not seem acceptable to Lee Kuan Yew who felt that Malays holding political power and the non-Malay possessing the nation's wealth and facing pressure from the Malays to share it with them, was a matter of grave concern which would brook no good for the fledgling nation in the ultimate end.

Armed clashes on the border between Malaysian Borneo and Indonesian Kalimantan continued during the second-half of 1964, during which Indonesian patrols in varying strengths periodically infiltrated into Sabah and Sarawak. A leaflet drop, the first of its kind over Indonesia, warning them not to engage in further raids on the Malay peninsula, was carried out by British and Malaysian aircraft on 2nd November 1964.

Lim Yew Hock, a former chief minister of Singapore, was conferred a "tunship", (an honorific Malay title), by the Malaysian king in 1964, and posted to Canberra, Australia, as the Malaysian High Commissioner.

Siddon was surprised to read in "The "Straits Times" of 2nd January 1965 of Lee Kuan Yew's warning of 1st January, that Malaysia "... might well break, not through external aggression but through internal

disintegration. The previous year had been turbulent, with race riots, a crisis in Sabah, and closure of the barter-trade, (with Indonesian-islanders from the surrounding Riau islands just outside Singapore waters).

"...The experience of the first fifteen months of Malaysia, if nothing else, should teach us that if the different leaderships in the different territories of Malaysia persist in wanting to get their own way as they are accustomed to doing in the old Malaya, Singapore, Sabah or Sarawak, then there is a danger of collision, not just of the political leadership, but of their followers in the different communities throughout Malaysia..."

On 27th January 1965, for the first time in thirty years, the Malays and Chinese celebrated their respective festivals on the same date — Hari Raya Puasa, (the day that marks the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan), and the Chinese New Year, (the lunar new year which is also celebrated by several other East Asian countries). In the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, Tengku Abdul Rahman, using innuendo, took a broadside at the Singapore leader:

"There are some politicians whose minds are so obviously distorted, polluted — their thoughts and talk appear to be so. They talk about Malaysia with gloomy forebodings. They talk of strife and strain, of trouble and bloodshed, they talk of calamities — yet they are the ones who wanted Malaysia...and I say shame on them..."

Lee Kuan Yew in his Hari Raya and Chinese New Year message reminded everyone in Singapore that provided the foundation of Malaysia's economic well-being was never shaken "...we shall be lucky to be eating as well as the Indonesians, (which wasn't too well)..." It was a subtle warning to Malay extremists as to what could happen to their standard of living if there was conflict with the Chinese who then mainly controlled Malaysia's economy.

On 29th January the Malaysian Central Government officially announced that three Opposition leaders, allegedly involved in an Indonesian plot to raise armed rebellion in Malaysia and set up a "government-in-exile", had been arrested. Among the three was an Abdul Aziz bin Ishak, a former Malayan Minister of Agriculture who had been expelled from the United Malays National Organisation, (UMNO), and who was the younger brother of Singapore's then Head of State, Yusuf bin Ishak.

To his joyous surprise Thomas Siddon learned in early February that he had passed his all-important advertising exams. At last he was "professionally-qualified" and could join the other job-hunting hopefuls in Singapore with greater confidence. And he had done it on his own, without help from the Singapore Government who seemed, to him, only interested

in helping the Malays and their own Chinese "countrymen". He hadn't behaved like the other "Singaporeans", forever demanding favours as if it were a "birth-right" — just to "make it" in life. He had been one of two Eurasians taking the exams. The other, a French-Eurasian, came from a wealthy family which had its own advertising agency which was located on Clemenceau Avenue. This young man had been studying to enter a Melbourne university but was recalled to Singapore by his family when he failed his matriculation, and had joined the family-business as an account executive. It struck Thomas that while the other had enjoyed a life of relative ease before taking the advertising exams, he, Thomas Siddon, had been struggling through life just to make it on his own. The other students who had taken the professional advertising exams with the two of them, and had passed as well, had been some 70 Chinese young men and women who already held jobs in various fields of advertising, and whose respective advertising agencies had paid their fees. They had taken the tests in order to move up a niche in their respective organisations. He found that though they didn't speak grammatical English, they, somehow, had obtained well-paying jobs in the advertising industry. To Thomas it was "obvious" from their results that they had "mugged", learned their notes by rote, which was the 'usual' Chinese way, and had come out of the exams with "flying colours". Thomas felt that the English markers in London must have "bent" the rules for them but with his very English surname and command of the language, he must have been assessed stringently, even though his marks had also been excellent.

He rushed home with his good news after he had phoned Mariko at work. His Japanese mother-in-law, who remained home those days after the racial clashes in the previous year to look after her grandchildren instead of leaving them to the "tender mercies" of the Malay "minder", congratulated him warmly. His two boys, she said, should grow up exactly like their father and never allow adversity to be the "excuse" for not trying in life.

Speaking at a Symposium on Scientific and Technological Research in Malaysia, organised by the University of Malaya in Singapore on 10th February 1965, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, as a Malaysian, declared that nations, like men, could be divided broadly into two groups: the elite, consisting of workers by brain, possessing the scientific and technological skills which gave them in return, high standards of living; and second, the hewers of wood and drawers of water who obtain satisfaction of an active physical existence without the same high standards.

"A country that has...trained and disciplined men of quality in abundance cannot be kept down, as West Germany and Japan have proved in the twenty

years since the Second World War...if you have human resources, the skills, the disciplines and the techniques of modern science and technology you can overcome whatever lack of natural resources your nation suffers from...we have the capacity first, to acquire knowledge which the industrial nations have and next, having assimilated it, to generate new ideas and techniques of our own..."

Reading the Singapore leader's comments in the following day's "The Straits Times", Thomas Siddon thought long and hard on the implications of what that would mean for him. It finally dawned on him that Lee Kuan Yew had been spelling out the 'direction' of the island's future development and how one would "qualify" to "fit" into that "mould". It was to be based on the very Chinese philosophy of *going up through the ranks via the securing of 'paper qualifications'*. There was to be **no room** for those, such as he, who were born *gifted*, but who, because life dealt out the cards, the way they fell for him, did not allow him to acquire the "requisite" 'paper qualifications'. He felt that Singapore under Lee Kuan Yew was heading into the remainder of the twentieth century on the *wings of Chinese culture*.

Thomas Siddon felt this policy was aimed at benefiting the Chinese majority within the Chinese community who were either China-born or offspring or grandchildren of China-born grand-parents, who, by virtue of the Chinese culture which these Chinese young men-and-women's parents, and/or grandparents, had brought with them from China, would make them more attuned to studying and attaining the appropriate educational qualifications rather than to use commonsense and logic to get a job done. But he would still "make it" into the ranks of the "elite" through his own efforts despite not having a community to fall back on. He felt that he deserved to succeed because he had struggled to make it on his own without getting help from *anyone*.

On 15th February the Housing and Development Board, Singapore's public housing authority, informed the young man that his application for a public flat had been approved. He and his family could move into their new three-roomed accommodation on payment of the requisite fees. The monthly rentals were sixty-six dollars, just twenty-six dollars more than what he had been paying for a one-room "home" in someone else's house, for the previous six years. He 'found' a friendly Chinese contractor to install a shower in the bathroom-cum-squat lavatory, and put up protective grills on the flat's windows and the back-balcony. All for two hundred dollars. His sons, Kean Siew and Rahman, had become boisterous, fun-loving youngsters, and he had to set his mind at ease that they would be safe, some nine-stories high, when he was away at work.

The government-built flat had two bedrooms, a living room, a separate kitchen, a back-balcony and its own bathroom and toilet. Thank goodness it was a flush-toilet and not the stinking "bucket-type" that he had been using ever since leaving St Patrick's School, living first with his late father's friend, "Uncle" Willy, then with his mother in Bencoolen Street, when he had been a teenager, and finally at Kovan Road, in the Sikh widow's house. The flat seemed like a palace to him, and he hoped that his boys would be happy living in a "proper" home of their own at last. When he was born in 1940, he had lived a well-appointed life in a colonial bungalow but ever since the Japanese Occupation, which had come when he was not quite one, he had first been in a concentration camp, in several educational institutions, then in pokey, shabby rooms rented by his mother, and even after his marriage, their first first two dwellings had been stuffy "cubicles".

The Siddons moved into their flat at the end of February. It was located in the "MacPherson Estate", which was off Aljunied Road. Thomas had kept his word to himself. He had, at last, obtained a "decent" home for his family. He would be twenty-five in twenty-four days' time.

Commenting on Tengku Abdul Rahman's inferences in his joint Hari Raya Puasa and Chinese New Year message in Kuala Lumpur on 27th January, the Singapore Government leader said that a fundamental decision had to be made by Malay leaders to write-off any hope of winning-over large urban areas like Singapore, (which had sizeable Chinese majorities). The Malaysian Alliance should hold on to its rural base in Malaysia, he said.

Beginning a tour of mainland Malaysia, (Malaya), at Seremban in Negri Sembilan on 2nd March, Lee Kuan Yew warned of the growing danger of communal isolation. Would a multiracial Malaysia be achieved more quickly and better through communal bodies meeting at the top or through inter-racial political organisations meeting at all levels? Lee said he believed in *multiracialism at all levels*. The Malaysian Alliance Party, he said, had successfully maintained a privileged and powerful position through the support of the three separate racial unities within the party: the United Malays National Organisation, the Malayan Chinese Association and the Malayan Indian Congress.

"The formula cannot work...in Singapore, Sabah or Sarawak. And in the long run it will not work in Malaysia as a whole...if...the Chinese, Indians, Pakistanis, Ceylonese, Eurasians, Dyaks, Kadazans and *others*, and most of all, the Malays, get together...the majority of the people, the majority of the have-nots, which will include the majority of the Malays, Chinese, Indians and others, (Thomas noticed that Lee had "lumped" the Eurasians under this tag for the first time, and resented it because it somehow seemed to imply

that the Eurasian was no longer a part of the *main* fabric of the society of Malaysia), will all win..."

Lee had discoursed about the haves and have-nots, and about racial isolation in his speech at Negri Sembilan, yet there had seemed to Siddon another tenor to his "political spiel", which had been implied rather than stated. And that "something" was how the Singapore leader really regarded the Eurasian. His lumping the Eurasian under the 'convenient' tag of "others" had indicated to Siddon, that Lee did not regard the Eurasian as an important "cog" within the machinery of the newly-formed nation that they were all supposed to belong to. Siddon felt it wasn't fair as his 'community', which had originated in *the Malays*, since the first Europeans had come to colonise the region, marked its origins from Malacca which had been a vital society in the 1500s! And as descendants of the Malay and Javanese women who had married first the Portuguese, and then the Dutch coloniser, through their maternal forebears, they had an ethnic foot in-the-door of Malaysia. They weren't *descendants* of immigrants but part of the soil! He did realise though, that the Eurasian as a "community" was a minority, and in the early days of Singapore's colonisation had come from Malacca.

He had learned from his mother, as a child, that as far back as two hundred years ago Malacca had attracted Europeans and mixed-bloods from the surrounding regions who had come looking for prospective brides from among the Malacca-Portuguese girls. That even the Malacca Baba-Nynonya as well as the Malacca-Chitty had inter-married with the Malacca-Portuguese. His mother had also told him that he even had French and Scandinavian blood coursing through his veins because of the marriages of his maternal ancestors from Malacca with Europeans who had come a-courting, and marrying them in the sea-town's Roman Catholic churches. And that proper-records of these marriages were kept by the ancient Roman Catholic churches of Malacca, which still existed.

But how to tell 'someone' all this? Because the "mixed-bloods" of his 'community' were, among themselves divided by virtue of their different European forefathers, Portuguese, Dutch, Spanish or French, though this apparently was not common knowledge among the other communities of Singapore. The English first-generation looked down upon the Malacca-Portuguese because the Malacca-Portuguese were many generations away from their original European roots. And the Eurasian, regardless of his origins, was looked down upon by the Asian, whatever *his* origins. And there were the Malays, especially those from Malacca, who still retained their ancestral 'hatred' of the Portuguese of Malacca who had belittled their sultan and drove him from his kingdom to set up their own colony. The

Chinese considered the "mixed-race" inferior and lumped them together as "ten-bloods", and the Indian regarded the Eurasian as beneath contempt because the original mixed-races of their society in India had "evolved" from marriages and liaisons between the lower-caste women of their society in India with White colonials. And Thomas knew that the Chinese of his society in Singapore regarded all Eurasians with "Malay" in their veins as inferior, which was ridiculous because they accepted their own Baba-Nynonyas as Chinese, even though the Babas were part-Malay and Andaman-Indian as well.

Siddon resented being made to feel inferior as well as an outsider in the society he had been born into and had spent his infancy in a Japanese concentration camp for. He felt he had a background to be proud of, and, as the Chinese were wont to measure a man by his family, they should know that he came from sound English-stock who had "contributed" to Singapore. He knew from the verbal-history of his family, through his mother, on the Siddon-side his English grandfather had been a master-mariner, ( a "distinction" for 1800s England because only the English well-placed or well-to-do could afford to have their offspring suitably-trained or educated). His grandfather had come to South-east Asia as a ship's captain. And his own English father had been a ships' engineer in the Royal Navy, and his grand-aunt had been one of the pioneers of an educational institution that had "evolved" into one of Singapore's premier girls' schools. He was proud that his ancestors had made "contributions" to his island-home.

Thomas replied to a classified ad in "The Straits Times" in late February, for the job of assistant to the editor of a monthly showbiz magazine and was called for an interview in early March. He had tried for it because the advertised salary was low, which meant that the company was "small-time". He was also curious whether his newly-acquired advertising-qualifications would stand him in good stead. He knew he had to "start" somewhere, and it might as well be in publishing, he thought. The offices were located in the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Building in Beach Road, which was opposite the Beach Road Police Station. He took a *pai hong-chia*, (Hokkein Chinese: "pirate taxi"), from his new flat in Persiaran Keliling, (which means "circuit" in Malay), in the MacPherson Estate to the Aljunied Road-Geylang Road junction, for twenty cents a ride per seat, and another "shared ride" in another "pirate" or "running taxi" from there to North Bridge Road, this time for the "princely sum" of thirty cents a seat.

In Singapore at that time, there were many unemployed busmen due to the almost never-ending bus-strikes and the smaller Chinese-owned bus companies folding up, and many unemployed bus-drivers and conductors

took to running a "pirate taxi" as a means of earning an honest income. The Government seemed to "close an eye" to this enterprising, though illegal form of self-employment. Thomas had wished that he too had a qualified driver's licence so that he too could have attempted the "trade" himself as it seemed lucrative because it was well-utilised. The mainly Chinese-operated "pirate-taxi" operation seemed a more reliable alternative to the jaded and worn-out public bus service left behind by the British, because the illegally-operated taxis plied their specific routes with greater regularity than the public transport system.

Thank goodness for the ingenuity of the Chinese "Singaporeans", Thomas thought to himself as he got off at Tan Quee Lan Street on North Bridge Road, opposite the entrance to Bugis Street. He turned into shabby-looking, dirty Tan Quee Lan Street toward Beach Road. His eyes hadn't consciously taken in the filth and run-down look of everything in the side-street: the old houses, the ramshackle lean-tos that served as convenient stalls for the Chinese hawkers who sold *kong bak*. (Hokkein-Chinese: pork stewed in soy-sauce gravy, considered good for sexual "strength", — the same word is local Chinese-smut for a woman's pubic area), from the late evening into the wee-hours. Thomas had lived too long in poverty to have really *seen* the difference. And who was he to think he was socially-better anyway?

When he got to the company's offices, he was interviewed by a swarthy-looking Malayalee called Kharthi Dharan who was a Muslim and claimed to be wed to a "begum" from Pakistan. For the life of him Siddon didn't know why the man had told him this. Though the young man had got the impression that the Indian had seemed rather proud of this fact. As if that *mattered*. The Indian sported a goatee and wore reflective dark glasses, making it impossible to discern what was going on in his head because one couldn't see his eyes. Thomas was inwardly chagrined when the man waved away his Cambridge School Certificate as well as his advertising diploma from London which he had recently received from the college where he had taken his advertising exams at. Instead Dharan told the young man that he would be making his own assessment of him from their conversation that morning. As the man spoke Thomas noted the almost arrogant air about him which, normally, he would have found irritating — to him such behaviour always denoted insecurity in someone. The Malayalee, in turn, studied his interviewee's face intently behind his dark, reflecting lenses. Thomas could see that the man kept darting furtive glances toward his palms whenever he accidentally happened to leave either one of them exposed upward. To Siddon it seemed as if Dharan was trying to read the lines on his palms.



After what seemed an eternity Dharan asked a few more seemingly, (to Siddon), unimportant questions like his birthdate, the place and time of his birth, and nodded his head as if seeming to confirm what he already seemed to know. The young man was amazed that at no time did the man ask to see his educational qualifications. So much for Lee Kuan Yew harping on the importance of getting educated. Thomas was told that the job was his. It paid a hundred and thirty dollars a month. Chicken-feed, as far as he was concerned but he accepted it because he thought it would give him the "break" into the "professional" field that he had been aiming for all along, ever since passing his advertising exams. Anyway it was better than just relying on teaching English to the Japanese businessmen who only remained his students long enough to be able to hold a semblance of a "conversation" with locals.

Kharthi Dharan told Siddon that he could write well and Thomas jerked his head up almost in shock, practically demanding to know how his new "boss" could tell as the Indian hadn't bothered to even glance at his papers. The Malayalee smiled condescendingly, and said it was 'written' on his face and palms. He then boasted to the young man seated across the desk from him that he had the "gift" to "see" into a person's character and destiny because he was an astrologer who came from a long line of distinguished clairvoyants. It was clearly "denoted" that Thomas was a "gifted writer". The man then peremptorily held up a palm preventing further questions from his now-startled new employee. He next told the young man to report for work the following morning, sharp at eight-thirty. He would be writing, "subing", and assisting with the 'advertising-side'. As he departed the offices Thomas wondered why had he ever bothered to take and pass the advertising exams when, on a whim, another had decided to employ him. Why hadn't such an "unique" opportunity come his way before?

He began his first stint in journalism by collecting advertisement-blocks from the various advertising agencies whose clients had "booked" ad-space in specific issues of the showbiz magazine. It was then the era of letterpress-printing, and all ads, texts and photographs had to be "set" then "converted" onto metal-plates which were nailed to blocks of wood which had been cut to size and mounted on a metal "stone" for printing. He quickly became familiar, as well, working with hot-lead typesetters and "stonemen" who "laid-out" the pages according to what he and Kharthi Dharan had "designed" in the "editing room", (which was the company's offices).

Two attractive, glamorously-dressed women, an Eurasian everyone called "Johnnie", who drove her own Mercedes Benz, and a Chinese named Nellie, worked as a team "persuading" would-be advertisers to book ad-

space in the company's publication, and for which they earned a flat twenty-five percent commission for every ad they managed to "sell". They worked for rival publications as well, as they weren't really employees of the publishing company that Siddon worked for, and Thomas quietly admired them for their resourcefulness. It was the first time he had come across those, and female too, who earned their living by their wits, and of course, their looks.

As a further stage in her *Konfrontasi* against Malaysia, Indonesia now turned her attention to Singapore. Already there had been random bombings at several important buildings in the city, with crudely-made bombs, haphazardly placed, almost hurriedly, near unnoticed outside corners of well-known structures, to demonstrate to the population the ease with which the enemy could take their lives. Suspicion was directed toward the same Chinese secret societies that had been responsible for the Chinese-Malay racial clashes in the previous year. Most of the bombs that had gone off had done almost negligible damage to many of the installations chosen for sabotage, and the public didn't seem to be unduly alarmed, when they should have been. There had been a small blast on the Bras Basah Road-side of the world-famous Raffles Hotel on Beach Road, not far from where Thomas worked, but the damage had been slight and hadn't really affected the hotel's foundations. All over Singapore, especially at night, the Singapore police were stopping and searching vehicles, especially those packed and travelling routes along the Pasir Panjang Road, which was along the island's west coast, and was close to Indonesian waters; and the Sembawang and Admiralty Roads stretch, near the British Naval Base in the north of the island. This action was to prevent "collaborators" transporting saboteurs from the islands of the Indonesian Riau Archipelago who could pass for Singapore islanders as they were "Malay" but who wouldn't be carrying the all-important Singapore identity-card which said they were citizens and not Indonesian enemy-agents.

On 10th March 1965, at ten in the morning, Thomas, who had just concluded picking up advertisement "blocks" from the French-Eurasian-owned ad agency whose son had taken the advertising diploma exams with him, walked out of Penang Lane, where the agency was located, and took the short-cut through the side-street alongside Amber Mansions, (which has since been demolished to make way for a subway station), crossed over Orchard Road, near the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in MacDonald House, and turned into Dhoby Ghaut toward the Cathay Building. He picked up his pace as it suddenly began to drizzle. Just as he neared the "Modern Confectionery", a bakery and confectioner's, which used to be on

the corner, and which has also been demolished, the ground underneath him shuddered, followed almost immediately by a deep, sharp, barked roar. He looked up and around, surprised at the strange report, thinking that it must have come from one of the old, worn-out, pre-war, colonial British-laid underground pipes conveying domestic-gas to households in the neighbourhood, due to an accident, as workmen, using acetylene-torches may have ignited some inadvertently-escaped gas underground. His mind harked back to the press reports that the newly-named Public Utilities Board had announced it was replacing gas-pipes which were corroded and hadn't been seen to since colonial times, (the new Government was using every opportunity that came its way to belittle the former British Colonial Administration). But Siddon was puzzled as there was nothing to be seen anywhere as to what had caused the unusual noise.

When he had first crossed over from the Amber Mansions on Orchard Road to the Malayan Motors showrooms, closeby to MacDonald House, he had been in a hurry because of the drizzle to get under shelter before it turned into a downpour. He remembered that that part of Orchard Road, normally "busy", even by that time of morning, had seemed unusually quiet. Sensing that there might have been more to the strange "report" he had just heard, as well as the tremor, he swivelled on his heels and hurried in the direction of the sound which seemed to have come from the MacDonald House. His eyes peered through the swiftly-falling droplets of rainwater as he scurried toward the building, a sixth sense forewarning him that 'something' was amiss. For no rhyme or reason his mind recalled the Jap-bombings of the Second World War. He had been a baby then. Just as he got to within twenty yards of the bank his nostrils caught the familiar smell of burnt-cordite, reminding him of arms practice when he had been a policeman at the RAF. Then his eyes caught sight of the "untidy mess" of vehicles seemingly scattered, helter-skelter in front of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, next door to the entrance to the MacDonald House. The realisation hit him like a ton of bricks — he had just heard an Indonesian bomb go-off just up the road, before he had arrived at the place he was then standing! That was the reason for the garbled-display of cars and a station-wagon in front of the British-owned bank! The Indonesians had selected a British bank to show the Singapore population that their "quarrel" was with the "neo-colonialists" and not so much the locals. But death had been meted out to Singapore-islanders — in the building, the bank, and passersby outside!

Thomas raced toward the scene of bedlam greeting his eyes. He spied several Singapore-islanders in front of him, on the pavement immediately in front of MacDonald House, slowly recovering from the first direct bomb-

blast of their lives. He had "experienced" several as a baby during the war and sympathised with how the present-day victims must have been feeling. Some 'innocent' passersby, were bleeding from their foreheads and wandering about aimlessly, not even aware that they were in fact hurt and bleeding. He lent a hand comforting the more distressed, as a Roman Catholic priest on his way to a personal destination joined in. Moments later a fire-brigade truck filled with Malay firemen, (they were the only community in those days who would risk their lives in such work, for the paltry pay of those times, in what was considered a "dead-end" job), and a police squad-car, similarly filled with Malays, drove up and began taking over. The first Chinese on the scene were the reporters from the various Chinese newspapers and the English language "The Straits Times" which in those days had a majority of Britons as editors, and Eurasians and Indians in the main as reporters, with a small number of Chinese. All the local newsmen immediately began to bicker with the senior Malay police officer in charge. Apparently he had allowed some foreign White journalists into the bomb-blasted MacDonald House to assess the extent of the bomb-damage but would not give the local "newshounds" the same opportunity.

Thomas had already noticed that not a single Chinese, Indian or the bunch of Portuguese-Eurasians, (in those days the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation employed them in the main), who worked for the British bank, and even the British bank officers, for that matter, poked a head out of the bank offices to see what the scene was like outside their premises. In fact even the Chinese shopkeepers in the vicinity had not come out to offer assistance to the injured. Thomas went into a nearby bar to "borrow" the use of its phone, (in those days phones in shops, cafes or bars were readily available to anyone who asked politely because the phone-owner only paid an annual fee to install his instrument and did not pay for each call made, as is done today), to inform his office that he would be delayed because of the Indon bomb-blast. Once inside the premises he felt distaste when he spied the Chinese proprietor who had "converted" his bar into a lunch "stop" for office-workers, too busy selling his meals to a lunch-time crowd of Chinese office-girls, and to add insult to injury, all of them were tucking into the popular Indonesian-style "Nasi Padang", (a style of Indonesian cooking originating in Padang, Sumatra). Apparently there still wasn't any "nationalistic pride or anger" in Singapore then to motivate the women to boycott the kind of food being purveyed there, which was the cuisine of the enemy.

Mr Dharan, his "boss", wasn't at all concerned about the senseless bombing as well. He told his young employee to return to the office

immediately, unless, of course, he was "detained" by the police for any questioning. Thomas' disbelief in the apathetic attitude of everyone at the scene of the Indonesian bombing, since the police had arrived on the scene, as well as his employer, knew no bounds. These were the new "citizens" of an independent country that was being sabotaged by an unfeeling enemy who seemed to have "matched" their "targets" with the same, callous, couldn't care less attitude, as far as Siddon was concerned.

Siddon dithered at the scene, imagining himself a reporter "covering" the incident. If he *had* been one he would have been up the MacDonald House stairway, quick-as-a-flash before anyone "in authority" had seen fit to bar him access. He thought it infantile of the local journalists to try to get their "story" from the police officer first instead of going directly to the scene of the "crime", to obtain a first-hand impression before checking out further facts and other details with the police afterwards. Later on he overheard two police officers telling a foreign reporter that the Indon bomb had been placed near the building's lift-shaft and timed to go off just as the MacDonald House's two lifts would be chock-full of hungry office-workers going down to lunch. But the crude booby-trap had gone off prematurely, killing two female clerks, while some 33 others had been injured. Thomas recalled the callous attitude of the office-workers in the bar on Orchard Road that he had just come from. Didn't they realise that they were all under attack, that the Indonesians considered *them* the enemy? When would Singapore-islanders regard one another as being of the same nation and not separate ethnic-cogs in a wheel? There had been no open anger within the bar or even outside the MacDonald House, directed at the Indons, nor open concern for the killed and injured. This was the "new" nation of Singapore?

Lee Kuan Yew, in the meantime, visited New Zealand and Australia in the second week of March. In Australia he told his audience at the National Press Club "...the more Malay leadership in Malaysia talks in terms of Malay nationalism the more the non-Malays will be in doubt as to their future.

"Theoretically there are three possibilities if disintegration were to set in: the conquest or absorption by a third power, the supremacy of one community over the others in Malaysia, or a drift towards segregation and ultimately the *partition of Malaysia* ... (the) leaders must use the time they are given to consolidate the economy...and a political system...to make resistance to subversion and infiltration an enduring one..."

It would appear that Lee had no inkling that his "loaded" words would be carried by the news agencies and "wired" to the countries of South-east

Asia, especially Malaysia. If he had, then it had been calculated to stir, even pave the way for his ultimate motive — separation from Malaysia. At the press club he described Malaysia as an "accident of history", of the activities of Portuguese, Dutch and British navigators in the *eighteenth century* and the merchants who followed them, and the subsequent colonial administrators who followed in the wake of the merchants to establish political structures under which the exploitation of the natural resources which the metropolitan powers lacked, could be carried out with the least interference possible from the local inhabitants.

"...The Malays and the Indonesians...a *leisurely* people...but for the impact of western civilisation which brought Chinese and Indians into their milieu. The indigenous people...principally the Malays and a few original tribes...*never took to the regimentation of the plantations and the tin mines...fishing, farming, was their way of life...therefore considerable numbers of Chinese and Indians came in first as workers and plantation workers, later to become the shopkeepers, the bankers, the entrepreneurs, the technicians and the professional men, and now the politicians in the area...*

"So...a curious imbalance in economic and social development between the original communities and the people of immigrant stock...power was never in the hands of the immigrant...it was handed over from the colonial raj...back...to the people of the indigenous stock...

"...All political groups in Indonesia...believe in Greater Indonesia or Indonesia Raya...and (in fact), ...when the Japanese were still in occupation of Indonesia...(the Indonesians)...seriously contemplated proclaiming independence over the whole of the, (Malay), archipelago...for whoever controls Malaya and Sumatra controls the Straits of Malacca...

"...One of the biggest mistakes, (the British), made, not with malice, was to divide Singapore from (their colony of), Malaya and allow(ed) the development to go on in the two territories, one more or less Malay, in which Malays were predominant, and the other with a Chinese predominance. For eighteen years it went on — 1945 to 1963 — until the two territories were brought together again. And the problem we are facing today...*need never have arisen* if that artificial political division had never taken place..."

Lee's words, finally carried to all the states of Malaysia by the press and radio, had the effect of an "uncontrolled" heated chain-reaction among Malay political leaders. Lee, they said, had intentionally described their race as being backward. Many resented his inference that the Malay was inferior to the Chinese and the Indian and was incapable of handling the 'sophisticated' activity of business, high finance and political statesmanship.

They pointed out that he had intentionally got his historical dates mixed-up and placed everything in a wrong time-frame. Several Malay leaders referred to Lee's speech as a student in London when he had addressed the Malayan Forum on "The Returned Student" and had stated "...that anthropologists are unable to prove any innate superiority of one race over another...what the individual returning home chooses to do is a question of personal inclination, economic circumstances, and political convictions..." And that was exactly what Lee had set out to do.

In mid-March Joan de Cunha, the wife of Jeremy, Thomas' former "guardian", sent word through her employer's office, to get him to call at her private ward in the *Kandang Kerbau Maternity Hospital*, where she had been admitted. Thomas was amazed to have heard from her because, ever since Joan and her husband, Jeremy, had got him to leave their home in Aida Street, six years previously in December 1959, he had had no contact with the de Cunhas. He wondered about her motives as he and Mariko curiously went to the hospital to pay her a visit.

Joan impatiently waved away his "mandatory" gift of a bouquet of flowers and, instead, just kept inquiring after his welfare. She pointedly ignored Mariko and even requested that she leave the room toward the end of the visit so that she could have a private word with him. Thomas was truly surprised because it just wasn't "Asian" for one to be so blatantly forthright with another. But when they were alone and Joan kept on asking him, over and over, whether he was "alright", he realised that she was seeking reassurance that he was "making it" in life. Thomas told her about having passed his all-important advertising exams, and that he had become a "journalist" with a minor publication. She seemed to smile faintly hearing that, and appeared pleased. When he finally said his farewell he was perturbed when she said that he needn't visit again. He gazed at her speechlessly for a second, then slipped out of the ward. Mariko, by some quirk, hadn't seemed curious about what had transpired between him and Joan during her absence, and he wondered whether she did realise that Joan hadn't really liked her.

Several days later she passed away due to complications arising out of her pregnancy. It was a great shock to everyone who knew her, especially Thomas Siddon who only had fond memories of the lady. He sadly followed the cortege from her home in Katong to the Upper Aljunied Crematorium, as memories of her flooded back. Jeremy, her husband delivered a personal, powerful and moving eulogy to his beloved Joan who had stood by him through all his ups and downs, and "whimsies". At the crematorium, as her coffin was being consumed by the flames, he realised that their meeting in

the hospital had been Joan's "final farewell". She must have felt a sense of responsibility toward him, he thought.

Surprised and even annoyed that Merle Jordon hadn't put in an appearance at Joan's funeral, he phoned her the following day and practically demanded to know her reason for keeping away. Merle claimed to have been in Kuala Lumpur. Anyway, she said, she couldn't bear to attend wakes, especially for someone as special as Joan because she would have gone "berserk" with grief. Mollified, he inquired into her well-being and she invited him to her flat in Oxley Rise to meet her mother who'd come from the 'States for a visit. After dinner that evening, the American girl took him aside, out of hearing of her mother, and begged him to "undertake a personal favour" which only he could do. Because Thomas she could trust and he wasn't a "blabber-mouth". Upon his nodded assent she handed over an envelope, thick with money. He was to turn up at the Clifford Pier in Collyer Quay at noon the following day and hand it over to a Sikh whom he would immediately recognise as the one had been very much in the news of late, and who was in trouble with the law and the Government. After handing over the money-filled envelope Thomas was to depart the "scene". He was not to communicate with the man whatsoever, all he had to do was hand over the envelope. The American girl said that he would be "doing his country a great favour" because the man was a "real benefactor" of the "masses". Siddon didn't like the sound of her last few words because they smacked of "Communism" as far as he was concerned, but he had given his word to the woman and it was the least he could do for the kindness she had shown him as a teenager when he had been hoping for "luck" to help him complete his secondary education and change the course of his life.

He recognised the "Singh" the minute he caught sight of him at the Clifford Pier on the following day. He was a well-known Singapore Harbour Board trade unionist, a Barisan Sosialis party-member, at "logger-heads" with "prime minister" Lee Kuan Yew over the Government's plan to bring all trade unions under one huge umbrella which would be under the 'leadership' of the PAP, and he was awaiting trial for the misuse of union funds as a result of having been 'exposed' by Lee. The Barisan stance in the 'trade union quarrel' had been that the PAP Government's attempt to create a huge union for all workers, to be called the "National Trades Union Congress", under their auspices, was "government control" which the workers didn't want. The battle between the two men had become a "ding-dong" one and everyone on the island wondered who would eventually come out tops. Lee Kuan Yew was a Chinese who then had the support of the "more conservative" Chinese adults. But the Barisan Sosialis Sikh had



the hearts and minds of the younger, radical Chinese and most other communities, and appeared to have "swayed" a majority of the population over to his side. What was not generally known to the public-at-large but an "open-secret" to the trade union officials of the Singapore Harbour Board Union was that the Sikh had "loaned" unsecured sums of money from union funds to various harbour-coolies who had gone to him with their "hard-luck stories" and which they had never made any attempt to re-pay. The man himself hadn't taken any money for his own personal use or gain but he had utilised the money from the union illegally.

Even though sympathising with the man's outlook, Thomas there and then decided that his "favour" to Merle Jordon would be his first and last. He was too young and didn't understand the full implications his own and the man's actions but he did know that he was treading thin ice as far as his country's Government was concerned. He decided to stop seeing Merle Jordon. Weeks later, Lee Kuan Yew used his "trump-card" at the subsequent court trial against the Sikh and disclosed that the man had "illegally" used union funds without obtaining due prior-approval from the "proper channels". Almost overnight public support for the man vanished as he waited to attend court on criminal charges. The Government-sponsored and controlled National Trades Union Congress ultimately became the sole "umbrella" federation for all trades unions on the island, while all former trades unions, not in the NTUC and accused by the Government of being under the Communist-controlled Singapore Association of Trade Unions, (SATU), were shut down and outlawed.

On 17th April 1965 Tengku Abdul Rahman, the Malaysian Prime Minister, formally opened a convention in Singapore of the Singapore Alliance, a political "union" of the Singapore People's Alliance, the United Malays National Organisation, the Malayan Chinese Association and the Malayan Indian Congress. The Singapore political party was renamed the Malaysian Alliance Party of Singapore. It contained a provision for direct membership without one having to pass through any of the four constituent parties in the "alliance" to gain admission into it. In his opening speech the tengku said:

"We had hoped that the PAP would give us the co-operation necessary to make the whole of Malaysia a safe place for its people, unfortunately the indications are that Mr Lee Kuan Yew took our refusal to let him have a share in the running of the Central Government as a challenge...it must be clear that we must abide by the Constitution of this country..."

Malay leaders, ("ultras", Lee Kuan Yew had described them, indicating, in his opinion, that they were racial extremists), in mainland Malaysia

began attacking the Singapore leader for the speeches Lee had recently delivered in New Zealand and Australia, and his acquiescence to being described as "prime minister" of Singapore. They accused him and the PAP of being "...out to destroy the Malay race..." that the PAP was spreading teachings contrary to Islam.

Thomas Siddon felt that these Malay leaders saw Malaysia and the granting of independence to Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak as the fulfilment of their own dream of a return to the "status quo" before the era of the White man. In the view of these Malays the Chinese, Indians and "others" were the "outsiders" who had been suffered during colonial times and now that independence had been achieved the "outsiders" had to "return" to whichever place their ancestors originated from, as far as these Malays were concerned. If what Lee Kuan Yew had said and described about these people was accurate then Thomas too would regard them as a danger to his existence, Siddon felt.

On his return from Australia, at the launch of the sixth annual National Language Month on 23rd April 1965, which was to encourage the population to learn to speak and use Malay, which the PAP Government, when it was first elected to power, had made the national language of Singapore, (Singapore had "borrowed a leaf" from the Japanese, who, during the war used to run regular propaganda campaigns to 'educate' the surrendered population into accepting whatever the enemy had wanted them to believe or practice, by way of half-truths and blatant lies. The PAP had "borrowed" the idea but was utilising regular, annual, hard-hitting publicity drives based on its policy-aims to "educate" the population, through an on-going series of campaigns, each year, aimed at getting it to accept whatever current objective the authorities felt was good for it), Lee Kuan Yew said: "Although we have escaped from the excesses of language fanatics in getting Malay accepted as our national language six years ago, *and before the establishment of Malaysia*, we must be careful that we are practical in the way it is gradually implemented...

"...If Malaysia is to progress a common language is necessary, but equally necessary for our progress is the acquisition of knowledge to be able to build a modern industrial society...we will only acquire these skills and techniques if we keep on seeking knowledge of the languages that will open up this scientific and technological data in the applied sciences..."

Thomas in the meantime discovered to his disappointment that his employer was a bad paymaster. He felt that it only confirmed the stereotyped ethnic-joke that all Indians were crafty about fiscal matters, and he disliked thinking that way. He bided his time until the fifth of the month before

finally demanding his pay. He was reluctantly given a crossed cheque that evening, too late to cash as the banks were already closed for the day. The two female advertising canvassers, "Johnnie" and Nellie, warned him that it would be repeated every month. The trick, they told him, was to begin hinting about household debts and assorted "problems" around the twenty-eighth of each month, and, if he were lucky, he'd be paid around the first or second of the following month. To Siddon what the girls described appeared to be a demeaning exercise as far as he was concerned, because he had been raised as a White when young, to honour all his commitments. He resolved that he would "never" lower himself or his integrity by aping the girls' advice. He would just remind Dharan toward the end of each month that his "pay-day" was almost due. He had noticed, as well, that he wasn't being paid Central Provident Fund contributions but decided not to "push" his luck as jobs in those days weren't that easy to come by. Thomas felt that he was "lucky" to have a job.

On 27th April Dr Toh Chin Chye, the PAP chairman, announced that a convention was to be held in Singapore to form a group of like-minded politicians from the other Malaysian parties to support the policy of *non-communalism*. The words: "Malaysian Malaysia" were used openly for the first time.

"...The purpose of this convention (is) to...subscribe to the ideals of a truly Malaysian Malaysian...(the 'united' Opposition "front")...is not to oppose the Constitution of Malaysia; *not to be against the use of Malay as the National Language*; and not to make an attack on Malay privilege..."

Syed Jaafa Albar, the UMNO Secretary-general, welcomed the convention but said:

"We know Lee Kuan Yew...has been to Australia and New Zealand to create a bad image of the Malaysian leaders...this is not the way to establish a united Malaysian Malaysia..."

Sifting through the mass of disjointed news reports from the English language "The Straits Times", and tuning to the BBC, Thomas realised that there was in fact a verbal "war" being waged between Malay nationalists who wanted a "Malay Malaysia" and the non-Malay communities, the Chinese being in the forefront of the 'battle', who were looking to create a Malaysia that would recognise everyone born in it as having a right to the land and its privileges. Agreeing with Lee Kuan Yew and his host of supporters that Malaysia should be for everyone born in the country who regarded it as their home, Thomas still felt that recognition was forthcoming from the other 'immigrant' communities that Malaysia "first belonged" to the Malays and the other indigenous races, and the Malays, being the

predominant indigenous group, it was right that Malay be the culture. Even the *Malacca-Chitty*, the *Baba-Nynonya* and the *Malacca-Portuguese* had 'Malay' as a segment of their respective cultures without any of these communities ever feeling that they had 'lost' "something"!

In a fighting rejoinder to Syed Jaafa Albar's words, Lee Kuan Yew at a May Day rally at the Jalan Besar Stadium declared that Singapore "...need never be cowed nor submissive, no harm could be done to the island-state without equally-grievous harm being done to all throughout the whole of Malaysia...try and enforce the advantage of one group whether the group is based on ideology or on race or on language, then...the whole basis of the prosperity and well-being of Malaysia will collapse..."

There was little doubt what the Singapore leader had meant. Rumours were rife in Singapore that 'rabid' Malays, (from the Malaysian mainland), were planning to assassinate him. One "favourite" idea going the rounds was the getting of a hand-picked 'trusted' Malay to go up to "garland", (the very Hindu custom of honouring a person by draping a wreath of flowers about his shoulders to honour him is common to both Malaysia and Singapore), Lee Kuan Yew, whenever he attended any one of numerous functions, and hidden among the flowers would be a dagger to plunge into his heart. The possibility of his own arrest was also being mooted and Lee Kuan Yew later admitted that a possible Singapore Government-in-exile was being prepared to be installed at Cambodia, after a discussion with Prince Norodom Sihanuk, if peace in Malaysia, (i.e. Singapore), broke down.

The "Malaysian Solidarity Convention" met in Singapore on 9th May, where four political parties — the People's Action Party, the United Democratic Party, the Progressive Party and the Machinda Party from Sarawak — assembled. A joint declaration explained that its purpose was to rally the people, (of Malaysia), to meet the "twin threats" — menace from without, (Indonesia), and the "mounting signs" of disruption through cultural dissension. It was the *transgression of the London Agreement for merger*, (9th July 1963), rather than Indonesian "confrontation" and pro-Communist subversion which presented "...the threat to the country..." The declaration also defined that a "Malaysian Malaysia" meant that the nation and the state would not be identified with the supremacy, well-being and the interests of any one particular community or race; that it was the antithesis of a Malay Malaysia, a Chinese Malaysia, a Dyak Malaysia, an Indian Malaysia or Kadazan Malaysia...the special legitimate rights of different communities had to be secured and promoted within the framework of the collective rights, interests and responsibilities of *all* races..."

Thomas Siddon fully agreed with the convention's declaration on what Malaysia should mean to every citizen of the new nation but still felt that a "rider" should have been included on the "role" of Malay culture on the society. He was native-born, (Malay: "peranakan"), and had native-born "rights", equal with the Malay and the other Malayo-Polynesian tribes, including the Chinese, Indians, Pakistanis and 'others' who had all been born in Malaysian territory. As an Eurasian whose *Asian roots* through his mother were Malay, he had a "blood-connection" with his country which was smack-dab in the middle of the *Malay World*. And there were the other *peranakans* — the Baba-Nynonya Chinese and the "Baba" Chittys of Malacca who all had "Malay" in their veins through intermarriage with the Malay over centuries and whose cuisines and unique cultures were Malay-influenced. If there was talk of priorities — the English-Malay "mix", the Dutch-Malay "mix" and the Portuguese-Malay "mix" Eurasians had as much "right" after the indigenous Malaysian because they were part-indigenous. He wondered what Lee Kuan Yew and the other Chinese in Singapore thought about Hong Kong returning to China after 1997 — would Lee extend an invitation to his ethnic-countrymen in Hong Kong to settle in Singapore, because even though Singapore had a Chinese-majority, the island-republic's "culture" or "mores" weren't really purely "Sino" because Malay and Indian influences had crept in through time? What would happen should Indonesia start claiming her "ownership" of Singapore via the Riau-Lingga 'Old Johor' Malay Empire?

At the United Malays National Organisation's 18th General Assembly on 15th May 1965, a resolution was unanimously passed demanding the arrest and detention of Lee Kuan Yew. Tengku Abdul Rahman, the Malaysian Prime Minister, called upon delegates to "play down" the exchanges that had passed between leaders of the Malaysian Alliance Party and the People's Action Party. He said that Lee, couldn't influence the minds of the Chinese in Malaysia, (meaning Peninsula Malaya), because they were "practical-minded."

Sometime in May, one afternoon, Kharthi Dharan, Siddon's "boss", surprisingly invited his young "assistant" to lunch. He promised the young man a "treat" of "Indian banana-leaf curry". It was an unusual gesture for Dharan to make as he seldom spoke to Siddon except to give instructions or point out an "error" Siddon had made in subing. Since joining the publishing firm some two months previously, Thomas had been gradually eased into reporting, writing brief snippets of showbiz "news" and doing the occasional page layout. He had been surprised that his writing attempts had gone through with the barest of changes, because his layouts were constantly

criticized. Thomas decided that the sudden lunch-invite signalled a new "assignment" or, maybe, having a "mistake" discreetly pointed out without the others in the office overhearing. It was the "Asian way" of giving "face", he thought.

Thomas grew amused and rather sceptical about his "boss's" intelligence when the Malayalee, after they had sat down and ordered their meal in the coffeeshop close-by to their offices in Beach Road, began boasting about his own descent from a "great race" of astounding Kerala astrologers, that "in fact" he was a "psychic" who could "tune-in" to invisible forces to catch a "glimpse" of the future. The young man listened politely since he was the guest and was being given a meal by the other, but his boredom was barely concealed. Dharan suddenly changed the topic and told his young employee that "great things" would take place in the world over the next thirty years, that an actor would become president of a "great country"; that Indians would one day "take their place" in the West just as the Jews had done, and this was "right" because Indians were Aryan, just like the Germans, and when the Indians were "exposed" to the milder climate of Europe they would become "white". Thomas realised at that moment that Dharan was making two predictions and was in fact showing-off. (In 1971, many Indians who had gone to Africa during the hey-day of British colonialism, would be kicked out of the former African colonies and be allowed to settle in Britain; and Mr Ronald Reagan, the former B-movie filmstar, would become the President of the United States of America). Siddon was well aware of the prehistoric "Indo-Europeans" who had spread out from central Asia to different areas of the eurasian land mass of Asia and Europe, though he wasn't sure whether these peoples were related, ethnically, with the Germanic tribes of Europe. Barely concealing his mirth at what, in his eyes were his host's vain and outrageous assumptions, and with the impetuosity of his youth, Siddon blurted out that it had taken the Jews some two thousand years of settlement in the West and intermarriage with Caucasians before they were regarded as being "white", because the original Hebrew "strain" had been "watered down" through cross-breeding with the White races. He told his "boss", Dharan, that the Indians had driven out their own Romany people from their own subcontinent, and the Romanies had become the "gypsies" of the West, and while some of them had intermarried with the Jews, most parts of Europe still considered them "coloured". And the gypsies had been in the West for some 700 years! It would take the Indians of India at least two thousand years of settlement in the West, and intermarriage with Whites, before their descendants could be looked upon as being "white". But he didn't think Indian fathers would like the idea of

their virginal daughters marrying "great White hulks". Should that come to pass the children from such unions would be "cross-breeds", like him, which, Thomas was sure most Indians and other Asians, didn't quite favour.

Somehow sensing the anger seething from the Indian before him at the banana-leaf makan-shop, (foodshop), even though he couldn't see behind the man's darkened glasses, Thomas stopped abruptly and nervously gulped down some water from the glass the fish-head curry vendor customarily placed at every of his customers' sides, near his "banana-plate". Siddon wondered about the "true" motive behind the man's invitation for him to gormandize on hot Madras fish-head curry and the assortment of other curries, with rice and *rasam*, (Tamil: "pepper-water", a seasoning that adds relish to the meal).

Appearing to Thomas to have second-guessed the young man's unspoken query to himself, the Malayalee editor said that Siddon would be leaving his employ "pretty soon". Oh my god, thought Thomas, I've cut him to the quick and he's giving me the boot. But the man's next words reassured him that his "services" weren't being arbitrarily terminated that day. Dharan said that he hoped that when his young employee's "luck" changed for the better, he wouldn't think too badly of how he had obtained his "first start" at the man's magazine. Siddon would be leaving his employ soon, of his own accord, and his life, from then, would go through several dramatic changes. He would even become fairly well-known in Singapore, "after a fashion", and reach the "very pinnacle" of his career. But he would suddenly "throw it all away"... and return to the "land of his forefathers".

It was the "fault" of Aries, the star he was born under, Dharan said. Thomas would eventually die in a strange land. And throughout his life he would have to strive for all that he gained. And there would be envy for whatever he accomplished because there would be many lesser than he who would turn jealous by what they saw as the apparent "ease" with which he accomplished things. No matter how hard he would try he would not go "above" a certain stature until well past his forties. As the Indian ranted on, "revealing" his future to him, Siddon decided that if what the man was foretelling that afternoon did come to pass, (he told himself that he didn't believe in the man's "mambo-jumbo"), but being born in Asia he wasn't going to take any "chances", he would work extra hard so as to "overcome" any "adverse effect" of his "star". Both men finally returned to work after the meal, without Siddon being any the wiser about his "boss's" intentions that day.

Lee Kuan Yew's mood had changed by the time he had returned from the Asian Socialist Leaders' Conference at Bombay, India. On 21st May,

addressing a large crowd that had come to meet him at the Paya Lebar International Airport, Singapore's former major civilian aerodrome, after his visit to the Indian city, and a subsequent stopover at Laos for a brief meeting, he called on all political leaders throughout Malaysia to accept the realities of the situation in the country.

"If we must have trouble, let us have it now instead of waiting for another five years. If we find Malaysia cannot work now, then we can make alternative arrangements..."

Tan Siew Sin, the Chinese Malaysian Minister for Finance, angrily warned Lee Kuan Yew of the "futility" of Singapore seceding from Malaysia because it could not exist by itself.

"Secession...cannot eliminate the fact that less than 1.5 million Chinese, (in Singapore)...are surrounded by over 100 million people of the Malay race in *their part of the world...*"

Replying, Lee agreed that Singapore would not secede from Malaysia. "Any change must be a step forward and not backward...if Malaysia does not belong to you and me why should we fight for it? We must make some other arrangements, these are the fundamental issues on which we cannot give way..."

Relations between Singapore and Kuala Lumpur had, by now, reached an ultra-fragile state. On the occasion of the second session of Malaysian Parliament, the parliamentary group of the pro-Malaysian parties known as the Malaysian Solidarity Convention, met on 26th May to discuss debating tactics following the speech from the Malaysian throne. The Singapore leader had announced to his allies that he would be suggesting during the debate in the House that the Federal Constitution, specifically Article 153, pertaining to quotas in respect of services, permits and other matters reserved for the Malays, be referred to the Privy Council in London should there be any doubt about its interpretation and that this did not invalidate the principle of a Malaysian Malaysia.

On 28th May Lee Kuan Yew spoke in the Malaysian Parliament on the motion of thanks to the Malaysian *Yang di-Pertuan Agong*. (Malay: "Paramount Ruler"), for his speech from the throne:

"With the formal opening of this second session of the Parliament of Malaysia we open a new chapter in the drama of Malaysia...It is with special significance...that we listened to the Address of His Majesty the Yang di-Pertuan Agong...in particular I would like to read to the House first the last paragraph of this Address" 'We', (said His Majesty), 'are now facing threats to our security from outside,' (and he defined it, that is from Indonesia), 'in addition we are also facing threats from within the country,'



(there's no definition of where this threat from within the country is coming), 'but both these threats are designed to create trouble', (the Agong said), 'if those concerned achieve their objective it will mean chaos for us and an end to democracy.'

"And it ends with an injunction to Almighty God to give us 'strength and determination to face these threats'."

The Singapore leader submitted to the House that no useful purpose was served by pretending "that we do not know what was intended". What Lee feared was the hint in the Agong's speech that there would be an end to democracy, that the (Malaysian) Constitution might be suspended or brushed aside. The king, he said, had not re-assured the nation that Malaysia would continue to progress in accord with its democratic Constitution toward a Malaysian Malaysia but...on the contrary the Address had added...doubts over the intentions of the Alliance Government and...the measure it would adopt when faced with loss of majority popular support... "Loyalty to Malaysia is not equal to and not the same as loyalty to the Alliance Party or the Alliance Government. I am under no constitutional obligation to be loyal to the Alliance Party or the Government but I must be loyal to the Constitution of Malaysia and I must obey the dicta of a democratically-elected government of Malaysia: I accept...we know that time is on our side Mr Speaker, that we will always be loyal, always act in accordance with the rules of the Constitution and with the decisions of the Government which are made and taken constitutionally."

May was not yet over when Syed Jaafar Albar the UMNO Secretary-general made a speech in which he urged the Malays to unite and never forget they were Malays. Lee Kuan Yew questioned the other's motives and spoke out bluntly:

"What's this all about? Are we Malaysian or are we Malays? I thought the Constitution said we were all Malaysians.. I say we had better decide now. Because I cannot be a Malay. I can be a Malaysian and sixty-one percent of the people of Malaysia can be Malaysians, can be loyal to Malaysia, accept the concept of Malaysia.

"...When we joined Malaysia we *never agreed to Malay rule*; never Malay rule. This is all bunkum. Somebody has made a grave error of judgement if they believe that we agreed to Malay rule...The Constitution means democratic rule by representatives of the people on the basis of adult franchise; one man one vote, one citizen one vote, which means Malaysia is ruled by Malaysians...that is the only kind of rule that we will agree to..."

Three days after Lee Kuan Yew had spoken the Alliance Whip in the Malaysian Senate, Dato T.H. Tan, (an ethnic- Chinese), urged the Central

Government to take constitutional measures to exclude Singapore from Malaysia, (which was not constitutionally possible *without Singapore's consent*), or to put Lee Kuan Yew away to "sober him up".

On 6th June representatives from Malaya, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak attended the Malaysian Solidarity Convention in Singapore, a gathering in effect which became a mostly ethnic-Chinese protest against what the gathering in Singapore saw as a definite and deliberate tendency to move away from the original multiracial concept of Malaysia. Dr Toh Chin Chye, then Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the People's Action Party described the occasion as the "...beginning of a new tide in the affairs of the people of Malaysia...there is no doubt that it took us a long time to reach the inevitable conclusion that these people were up to no good...the growing truculence with a heavy racist accent...if this goes on Malaysia will not belong to the Malaysians...they speak on two different wave-lengths—one for multi-lingual, multiracial consumption, the other meant for their own followers."

In the midst of the "gathering storm", Ong Eng Guan, leader of Singapore's United People's Party, a former PAP-appointed mayor who had been sacked from the ruling party in July 1960, dramatically resigned his seat in the Singapore Legislative Assembly. On 16th June he publicly announced that he would "renounce politics forever" because the Assembly "served no useful purpose". On the following day he put himself up for election again. He said that the, (PAP), Government should find no excuse to delay a by-election in the Hong Lim Constituency of which Ong had already been its duly-elected representative in the Assembly.

Tengku Abdul Rahman, in the meantime, had gone to London to attend the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference on 11th June, where he had been "delayed" due to an indisposition requiring hospital treatment. On 29th June Lee Kuan Yew and Tun Abdul Razak, the Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister, held talks in Kuala Lumpur for a "sober appraisal" of the country's problems. It was reported subsequently, that while that meeting was taking place, Tengku Abdul Rahman "...finally concluded that for the well-being and security of Malaysia and Singapore it was best that the two territories should part..."

On 1st July in Singapore the Hong Lim by-election, which had come about because of Ong Eng Guan's resignation from the Legislative Assembly, was held. Ong had stood down at the last minute and the contest was a straight one between the PAP and the Barisan Sosialis. The PAP candidate, a K.C. Lee, who had been born and bred in Penang, Malaya, won by a majority of 2052 votes. On the same day in London, Tengku Abdul Rahman

wrote to Tun Abdul Razak and told him his thoughts about Singapore leaving the Federation of Malaysia. He instructed the Tun to hold discussions with Dato, (Dr), Ismail bin Dato Abdul Rahman, (Malaysian Minister for Home Affairs), Mr Tan Siew Sin, (Malaysian Minister for Finance), and Dato V. T. Sambandan, (Malaysian Minister for Works, Posts and Telecommunications), the "seniors" within the Malaysian Cabinet. It was a time fraught with crisis and mounting peril which seemed not to have "sieved down" to the population in Singapore. Everyone on the island appeared to be carrying on "as usual". No one discussed the "troubles" with "Malaysia" with co-workers in public. It would seem that the many years under colonial rule, as well as the "normal" Asian attitude to "keep one's mouth shut in public" had instilled a reluctance to discuss "government matters" in public. What was being said within various groups in private was anyone's guess. The Chinese on Singapore unquestionably fully supported Lee Kuan Yew and his party. What he had said publicly hit very close to home for all sectors within the ethnic-Chinese community — those who were Baba-Nynonya, the "straits-born" Chinese as well as those who were first, second or third generation Chinese who had "recently" arrived from the Chinese mainland before, since, and after the Second World War. On the other hand the Malays were confused as were the Indians, the Eurasians and the "Others", because firstly they all accepted that they were all on Malay land, that some of them had come as immigrants, and that some had "evolved" in "the Malays" through inter-marriage. And all felt that they "belonged".

But Thomas Siddon also identified with the PAP's rallying-call for a multiracial society. The "communal winds" wafting down from mainland Malaysia, (Peninsula Malaya), were frightening, if one chose to ponder the implications.

Tun Abdul Razak cabled Tengku Abdul Rahman who was then convalescing in France from his operation in London, that his senior ministers were in full agreement that Singapore *should go her own way*. The Malaysian Prime Minister instructed his deputy, in his absence, to "proceed with the necessary legal chores and the amendments to the Constitution". Tun Abdul Razak replied that he would be convening the Malaysian Parliament on 9th August 1965, to go through the reading of an amending Bill on a Certificate of Urgency.

Thomas Siddon's life, on a personal level, was also taking a dramatic turn around this time. At the end of July, in the middle of planning his strategy to get his "boss" Kharthi Dharan, to pay his salary, on time, the two female advertising canvassers stormed into the publishing firm's offices

and demanded their "commission cheque" from him. The editor, Dharan, they said, had handed it to him for them, on the previous evening before he had returned home for the day. Completely taken aback because it wasn't true, Thomas could only sit and glower speechlessly. How dare they even consider him dishonest without even first verifying whether Dharan's words were factual? Hadn't they witnessed the "boss's" many attempts at avoiding his many business debtors so many times before? The women, taking his silence as confirmation of their unfounded suspicions, angrily warned him not to be "funny" because they would report him to the police station opposite their office as an "embezzler". A three-way shouting-match then ensued with the young man finally jumping from his seat and storming out of the office. He remembered that he hadn't yet been paid for July and decided that he would come in the following morning to collect it from the Indian, and then he would resign. He decided that he wouldn't work for the wily Dharan any longer. In the split-instant that he had made up his mind to quit his job Thomas realised that he would again be unemployed and dreaded having to again tell his family that he had "chucked" his job and that he somehow hoped to again be employed very quickly. But he was never going to work for the dishonest Dharan who had used him as a scapegoat, or in a company where his colleagues thought so lowly of him when he had never at any time shown that he had ever been short of cash or had any inclination to be dishonest. Why were people always regarding him in a bad light?

When he turned up at the office to "deal" with Dharan the following morning his soon-to-be "ex-boss" surprisingly handed-over his pay-cheque as he walked through the door. Thomas could read no indication of the previous day's furore on the Indian's face. The two women who had created all the fuss were at another desk preparing their sales plan for the day. He studied all three for a moment then decided that he wasn't going through life allowing others to harbour distorted views of him, especially since he had never given anyone cause to regard him as untrustworthy. Dharan had used him as a convenient scapegoat. He had never ever stolen or cheated, not even when he had been a street-thug as a teenager or when he was struggling to get an education. And he wouldn't work for a company where the "boss" thought it expedient to blame him for any "lack" on the company's part to upkeep its payments to others. After accepting the proffered cheque from the Indian, he went downstairs to cash it at the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank on the ground-floor, and returned to give Dharan and the two women a piece of his mind before swivelling on his heels and leaving the place for good.

His weary steps took him to the "Catholic Centre" in Bras Basah Road, the scene of his many triumphs and disappointments. He needed to sit and think before mapping out what next to do with his life. As he sat glumly mulling over his situation with a cup of coffee in front of him, he spied "Johnnie's", (the woman who had been his recent "colleague", some thirty minutes ago), Mercedes Benz pull up outside the canteen. It had been she who had been his main "accuser" at Dharan's office on the previous day and Thomas was in two minds whether to give her some more of his venom, the way he was still feeling toward her. She had stepped into the "Catholic Centre" in the meantime and strode up to his table. Smiling sheepishly she told him that the "Nanyang Siang Pau", a Chinese-language newspaper, was "experimenting" with an English-language "weekly" and was on the look-out for experienced reporters. If he were interested she could fix for him to see the editor. At a low-ebb mentally, Thomas nodded mutely as hope began to well-up anew in his breast. Maybe he *could* get a new job that day before facing his family with the sorry truth of his being unemployed again. "Johnnie" walked over to the "Centre's" phone for the use of the customers, and dialled. She returned to Thomas' table and told him to go immediately to the Chinese newspaper's offices in Robinson Road to meet the editor. His name was Jim Neoh, she said, and his office was on the first floor of the newspaper's building, he was expecting him. "Johnnie's" look said that she had sufficiently discharged her "debt" to him.

Though Thomas hadn't indicated it to the Eurasian woman, he had met Jim Neoh previously at Merle Jordon's. His heart sank as he recalled the shabby treatment he used to receive at her hands in front of so many of her friends and well-wishers, in the past. Would Neoh regard him as "stupid" because of Merle's attitude toward him? But when he got to Jim Neoh's, to his surprise the interview was brief and there was no mention of what had transpired in his youth. Jim said that he had seen some of Thomas' "stuff" at Merle's Institute "yonks ago". It had made "pretty good" reading, he was told. Neoh even remembered Siddon's play which he had "caught" at the Cultural Centre in the Fort Canning Theatre. Jim offered him a job as a reporter in his weekly for three hundred and fifty dollars a month, plus transport and entertainment costs. He even apologized for the "low" wage-packet, saying it was due to his "tight-budget"! Keeping his counsel, the young man silently revelled at his fantastic luck! He had been out-of-work that morning and now, barely sixty minutes later and a mile-an-a-half away from the "Catholic Centre", he was again employed and at more than twice his former income. Maybe his "fortunes" were changing after all, otherwise where had all the "good" job-opportunities been all these years? When he

got home that evening with his new letter of appointment, his family was overjoyed for him. Kean Siew, his eldest boy, would be seven in the following year, in July, and would be entering school for the first time in January 1966 at six-and-a-half. Thomas' employment "enhancement" had come at just the right time. His eldest would be able to travel to school by the school-bus instead of public transport because his father could now afford it.

In the meanwhile the *saga* of Lee Kuan Yew and the never-ending *differences* between the Singapore and Malaysian governments took a significant turn. Tengku Abdul Rahman returned to Kuala Lumpur from Europe on 5th August. On the following morning he met with his senior ministers and heard that there was no way of "patching up" the differences between the Singapore and Malaysian political groups. That evening Dr Goh Keng Swee and other Singapore leaders were informed of the tengku's decision to get Singapore to "withdraw" from Malaysia. Mr Lee Kuan Yew hurried to Kuala Lumpur from the Cameron Highlands mountain "holiday station" to be briefed by Goh. At 12.30 pm on Saturday 7th August 1965, Mr Lee and Mr Goh drove to the Residency where the tengku and his senior ministers were waiting. The Malay prince informed the Singapore political leaders that he thought it too late to try and smooth-over the "disagreements" between Malaya and Singapore "...there is absolutely no other way out..." Singapore would "leave" Malaysia. The leaders of Singapore and Malaya had *entirely different concepts of what Malaysia was to mean...* and there was no other way to avoid bloodshed between the two "main" communities — the Malay and the Chinese — except that the two territories separate and each go its "own way".

At noon on 9th August 1965 Lee Kuan Yew met the international press and was televised weeping in anguish for the collapse of a "Malaysia" which had included the island of Singapore. After collecting himself he issued a proclamation which began:

*"...Whereas it is the inalienable right of a people to be free and independent...now I, Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore, do hereby proclaim and declare on behalf of the people and the Government of Singapore that as from today the ninth day of August in the year one thousand nine hundred and sixty-five Singapore shall be forever a sovereign democratic and independent nation, founded upon the principles of liberty and justice and ever seeking the welfare and happiness of her peoples in a more **just and equal society**... Everytime we look back to the moment we signed this document is for us a moment of anguish. All my life, my whole adult life, I have believed in merger and unity of the two territories. We are connected by geography, the economy, the ties of kinship..."*

After the conference Lee Kuan Yew said he wept for the Chinese left behind in Malaysia.

In Kuala Lumpur at 9.30 am of the same day Alliance Party members gathered at the House of Representatives and were told that all should vote for the Bill to sever connections with the State Government of Singapore. Everyone would vote to ensure the two-thirds majority necessary to get the constitutional amendment passed. At five that evening, at a press conference in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, the tengku issued a statement stating that the "...only answer lies in allowing Mr Lee Kuan Yew what he wants to be, Prime Minister of an independent Singapore...we wish him well and will continue to assist and co-operate with him whenever possible, (and will)...sponsor Singapore's entry into the United Nations and the Commonwealth..."

The festival of the "Nine Emperor Gods", (Hokkein Chinese: Kau Ong-yeh), was just around the corner. Maybe this annual festival of the deities, treated by some Chinese as second only to Chinese New Year, would be a "propitious omen" for the infant-nation. When the Siddon family had lived in Kovan Road in Tampines, Thomas used to avoid walking past the "9 Emperor Gods" Temple at the 6th kilometre Upper Serangoon Road, during this time, for fear of bumping into former Chinese secret society cronies visiting the place in the hope of welcoming in good fortune and to driveaway the "bad spirits".

Public reaction to Singapore's "breakaway" from Malaysia was subdued. Thomas was surprised that his brand-new colleagues in the new English-language weekly as well as the Chinese daily, the "Nanyang Siang Pau", hadn't an opinion to offer. But he could discern an unspoken sense of relief prevailing which was never articulated openly, at least not in English. Maybe everyone was just being "Asian", and, by habit, would not openly talk of "governmental things" for fear of landing in "hot soup" inadvertently. Siddon concentrated on his job, pleased that his news editor, a Kenneth Jollie, found him a "natural" as far as writing and reporting were concerned. Within forty days he was more than a match for the more experienced "hands" of ten years or more. And he was only twenty-five. It seemed to him that most of the "matured" reporters, (they wouldn't refer to themselves as journalists because, they told him, only reporters from abroad, i.e. Europeans, were "qualified" to be "journalists"), wrote their stories according to a "formula". There didn't seem to be any creativity to their writing-style. The standard of English they used was "grammatical" but there was no attempt at creating "verbal-pictures" or to using language to add "colour" or "life" to their stories. He was amazed that the more westernized expressions and

"slang" were totally taboo as far as the weekly was concerned! He became painfully aware that his "Singaporean" colleagues spoke a "squarish" book-English which didn't give them much leeway for flair and verve, or to attempt idiomatic expressions. The colourful slangs peculiar to the "native-speakers" of Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand or the United States of America were totally foreign and seemed to be unheard of. The 'worst' examples of local-writing, as far as Thomas was concerned, came from the local "horse-racing reporters" who wrote horse-stories to formula with set "horsey-expressions" down pat.

The new Singapore Parliament passed a resolution whereby a simple majority in the House was all that was necessary to make changes to the country's Constitution. Crucial parts of the Constitution, such as the surrendering of sovereignty, were still protected by making a public referendum compulsory before any proposed amendment could be tabled and passed in the House.

An abortive Communist-led coup was attempted in Indonesia on 30th September 1965. Seven Indonesian generals, a colonel and a captain were slain by insurgents. The generals, which included Indonesian Army Commander, General Achmed Yani, were abducted from their respective homes, killed during the night, and their bodies dumped in a deep, unused well at "Lubang Baya", (Indonesian: "Crocodile Hole"), in east Jakarta. Major-General Suharto, (President of Indonesia today), then commander of the elite Army Strategic Corps, swiftly regained control of all armed troops on 1st October and suppressed the would-be uprising. The "aftermath" of the stalemated coup-attempt was to herald a new mentality in this largest of Malay republics in South-east Asia. The Indonesian government imposed an almost total ban on anything written in Chinese after the coup-attempt which was blamed on Beijing-backed Communists. About three percent of Indonesia's 178 million peoples are ethnic-Chinese.

As Thomas Siddon became conversant with writing for a living and the daily "grind" of being a reporter, he felt a sense of personal fulfilment. Toward November, relaxing at a bar, he ran into several former school-pals and they all sat together to reminisce over old times. One of them, out-of-the-blue, suddenly brought up the subject of a Japanese girl going out with small-time gangster. Thomas smiled to himself, thinking that his old schoolmates had some catching up to do, as far as he was concerned, as they didn't know that he too was married to a Japanese girl. All the same he politely nodded and listened to the story spun by the one who had brought up the topic of a Japanese girl in the first place. But his polite disinterest transformed into alertness when the fellow said that the woman worked at



a club for Japanese seamen in chinatown. She was seen frequently, he said, at the "Golden Venus" nightclub in Orange Grove Road. Siddon grew cold with apprehension. He hadn't any proof that his old school chum was talking about Mariko but he knew it had to be her. Because she worked for a club for Japanese seamen in chinatown. Thomas realized that he had been spending long hours at his new job searching out "stories" to scoop the daily papers, making valuable contacts that would help him in his quest for "stories", and always returned home late when his family would be fast asleep. He hadn't any inkling, until that evening that Mariko had been "misbehaving". Usually quiet and secretive, she had betrayed nothing that would have indicated that anything was "amiss" in her life. Thomas knew he should have spent more time with Mariko and his boys. He wondered whether Furiko, his mother-in-law, had any idea of her daughter's nocturnal activities. He decided to bide his time until opportunity presented itself. He couldn't go half-cocked accusing Mariko without any proof.

The weekly's managing editor, Jim Neoh, was a get-up-and-go promoter who sought every chance to "push" circulation and create more awareness for his tabloid. Despite the "breakaway" from Malaysia the publication still produced its weekly "National Language" column. In fact all of Singapore's publicity media, including radio and TV, still carried daily Malay lessons. An indication to Siddon that the Government was still encouraging the learning of Malay which was the lingua franca of Singapore, Malaya and Indonesia in those days.

Several weeks later Thomas was roped in as "ghost-writer" for an English company director, a skin-diving enthusiast who wanted to popularise the sport as well as sell the associated relevant equipment which was used in the activity, and for which he had the agency for a certain brand. In exchange for placing a series of ads in the tabloid Jim, Thomas' editor, had "given" the man a regular column to "write". The man knew his "stuff" but couldn't put it down "journalistically" so Siddon was assigned to help him. The young reporter would see the man every week to collect all the "bumph", which, at most times were articles "lifted" from overseas publications which the Englishman, Patrick Duxton, had collated. It amused Thomas no end, though he never spoke his thoughts out loud, that Duxton got all the credit and even a bye-line for the "stuff" which he, Siddon, re-wrote for him. The two appeared to get on famously and Duxton frequently invited Siddon over to his palatial home at the end of Holland Road for "drinkies", and to meet his new wife and ever-widening circle of English-expatriate friends, who, to the local reporter, appeared to live high off the hog as if Singapore were still a British colony.

At one regular evening at Duxton's, as the place "bubbled" with too much drink and sodden acquaintances who seemed to drop by at the man's place with regularity to have still more booze, Siddon's "friend" in a sudden wave of camaraderie, put his arm about his shoulders and suggested to everyone present that Siddon was "more than half-White" because his late father had been English and his mother of Dutch-Portuguese 'extraction'. Siddon gently disagreed and insisted on identifying himself with Asia and Singapore. He was Eurasian, he said with finality, and the others present appeared to accept his 'leaning'. Several evenings later at a similar get-together, when everyone had had one drink too many Duxton, for no rhyme or reason suddenly called him "Kaffir" and Thomas exploded, much to the shock of everybody, especially Duxton's new wife. Though practically everyone was in his cups, Siddon would not tolerate use of the racist term, especially from a "White" who should have been, as far as the Eurasian, Siddon, was concerned, a "coloured" just like him because he knew that Duxton the "Englishman" was a Jew and had come originally from South Africa several years previously, after his father had established a business on Singapore. Duxton being Jewish, Thomas thought to himself, should not have used the derogatory racial term which, in South Africa was an insulting label which the Boers and the other Whites used on the African Black. In a Singapore preening itself on newly-acquired independence, an Englishman using racial-abuse was anathema. A Jew acting White, *and* insulting him in such derogative terms was adding insult to injury! At least he, Thomas Siddon, was the first-born son of a "pure" Englishman, not a so-called "White"-Jew, because Jews came originally from Asia and were considered Asian by Asians. He told the assembly present that evening what he thought of them and stalked out. He seemed to be making a habit of telling people off and leaving but he was gradually awakening to the world and what he would "allow" it to do to him.

Tae Kwon-do, the Korean martial art had just been introduced on the island. Regular training was being conducted in the compound of the home of an Indian police officer in McNair Road. Before this the only known Asian martial arts on Singapore were Chinese, Malay or Indian, and were regarded as "treasures" that "belonged" to a particular community or racial clan. Knowledge of each fighting art's techniques of defence were guarded against "outsiders" ever acquiring them. When the Koreans introduced their form of unarmed combat, residents on the island flocked to learn the "deadly" techniques as the Koreans welcomed all. Even British servicemen still serving on military camps on the island became "students", an Asian "viewpoint" of those who aspired to learn an Asian martial art style, which

the Whites found unusual coming from a culture which regarded all trainers in boxing as just paid lackeys who had nothing at all to do with their own personal-prowess. No one on the island ever realised that it was a South Korean "campaign" to spread the "art" to the West through the British and other Whites before their former colonial masters, the Japanese, awoke to the use of karate to the strengthening of relations with former military enemies.

Kean Siew, the Siddons' eldest boy, began school in January 1966 at the St Michael's Boys' School, the Christian Brothers' school at Moulmein Road. His father had arranged for the school-bus to take him to and from home every day.

In his Hari Raya Puasa speech on 21st January 1966 the Singapore Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, reminded the Malays on the island that in an independent Singapore all men were brothers.

"...No community will be allowed by virtue of its larger number to *impose its way of life* on the others, either in matters of religion, language or culture...slowly...we must raise and equalize the opportunities of education and employment so that all will have an equal chance for a good job and a decent life..." To Thomas it was an assurance that the *Chinese majority would not try to dominate the other Singapore communities.*

Chinese New Year was celebrated shortly afterwards. Speaking in Chinese Lee Kuan Yew said:

"...This Year of the Horse...we must instil into our children that sense of endeavour to greater purpose which alone can secure *our* place in South East Asia. Let us remember our friends and relatives...struggling to achieve the ideals of human quality and justice which guide *our* society. For, in the end, *our destinies cannot be separated...*"

February started on a wrong note. A dispute arose in a Singapore Government base when Malaysian Army troops who were stationed there refused to vacate barracks required by the Singapore military returning from service in Sabah, East Malaysia. There was a riot with strong racial undertones at the military camp, sparked off by a misunderstanding over an order. The Singapore Prime Minister arrested the danger. But more tension was created when Tengku Abdul Rahman, the Malaysian prime minister, refused to remove his troops from the barracks. He insisted that under the Independence of Singapore Agreement the Malaysian Government was to maintain military bases and "other facilities" on Singapore as a matter of "right". That the Malaysian Government was responsible for the defence of the island and thus had a right to station troops in the Republic. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew disagreed and offered to take the issue to an

independent Commonwealth or international tribunal for a ruling. The offer was declined and Lee Kuan Yew found the Malaysians alternative accommodation on Singapore.

The Regulation of Employment Act came into force in February 1966, requiring non-citizens in Singapore, (then mainly Malaysians), to apply for Work Permits. Full fees were also charged in schools for children of non-citizens.

At a seminar on the role of universities in economic and social development at the University of Singapore, (which had been renamed since the "Separation"), on 7th February the Singapore Premier told his audience that education had to serve the people in their plans and hopes to develop the nation's economy.

"...The university degree is only a proof that a certain amount of knowledge had been imbibed...our industrial chemists, our technocrats are missing...(in China)...there are fifteen universities for arts and sciences and 125 engineering, technological, medical, agricultural and other specialised institutes or colleges. Surely the key to their industrial growth and their determination to emerge as an industrial power is the 125 engineering, technological, and other specialised institutes or colleges?"

Thomas Siddon thought hard about the Prime Minister's speech when he read it in the papers the following day. The sudden switch to highlighting China was startling to him because all during the colonial era China was a 'forbidden' public topic, frowned down upon by the British, and during the short period as part of Malaysia, that country had also never been publicly held up as a model to emulate. Now with independence after "Separation", China was being "offered" to the people of Singapore as a "shinning light"! China still had a negative image as far as the non-Chinese and the "straits-born" Chinese of several generations were concerned, and Lee's use of it as an example to emulate was startling. Was this an indication of a new trend in governmental thinking? Mentally Siddon decided that when in the future he ever recognised a definite "leaning" toward China, or Taiwan for that matter, and *Chineseness* creeping into the culture of his island-home, it would be time for him to begin regarding Britain as "home". The realisation was disturbing, as far as he was concerned. He had embraced being "Singaporean" wholeheartedly and regarded the Chinese, Malay, Tamils, the other Eurasians in his society as well as the other minorities, as fellow-nationals. Equal. It was wrong to "remind" the various communities that made up the "fabric" of Singapore-society of their or their ancestors' countries of origin. It was not conducive to building up and nurturing a "Singaporean mentality". His sons had not been told of their father's

"English past", instead he had related to them stories of Singapore's Malay history, the presence of the Chinese before Raffles and their coming after, as well as the Indian Hindu and Buddhist phases in Malay history *before* the coming of the Chinese, and the advent of the Indians with Singapore's modern founding, since Raffles' days. He had taught them to be proud of their "Malayness" which they had inherited from his mother who hailed from Malacca originally. He also pondered on the absence of any announcement by the Singapore Government that Singapore-Eurasians who had English, Scottish, Welsh or Irish fathers were entitled to emigrate to Britain. He had learned, when he had been hitch-hiking through India, that the British had offered this "right" to the Anglo-Indian in India and he was sure a similar thing was available to the British half-caste offspring who had been born in Singapore. Was it in Lee's interest to keep the Eurasian in Singapore by not telling him of this "right"?

Five days later on 12th February Lee Kuan Yew made a speech in Mandarin to Nanyang University graduates, (and, as far as Thomas Siddon was concerned, this was another "paradox" where Lee Kuan Yew was concerned—several years before this he had had taken away the citizenship of one Tan Lark Sye, a China-born Chinese who was regarded by the China-born nationals of Singapore as a philanthropist and a benefactor of Chinese education, and who had contributed a vast amount of money for the setting up of the Nanyang University in Singapore Colony, especially when the British had openly denied the China-born Chinese who had come to the colony as indentured servants, the benefit of a formal education because they were considered foreigners, and had only allowed the straits-born Chinese, the baba-nynonya Chinese mixed-bloods, and the others born in Singapore government-subsidised education, and Lee had labelled Tan Lark Sye, a man the China-born Chinese in Singapore positively identified with their Nanyang University, a Chinese chauvinist, a Communist, a Barisan Sosialis supporter, and a man to be held in contempt, and had banished him to China), and here was Lee addressing a group of students from the self-same sole Chinese-language institution of higher learning outside China which he had indirectly cast aspirations on by his singling out and punishing Tan Lark Sye for "wrong-doing", and whose notoriety, as a result of Lee's action, had "rubbed off" on the university through Tan Lark Sye's association with it!

Lee began his speech by examining Singapore's position in relation to the rest of South-east Asia. In many places it was critical: the war in Vietnam was worrying the whole world, the Chinese in Indonesia *had been made to change their names to Indonesian*, but what else was happening

was unclear. Developments in Malaysia were not easily foreseen. Singapore, it would appear, could ensure its own survival and consolidation. But how could this be maintained.

"Let us suppose the British decided to pull out from South-east Asia and from Singapore...what will happen to us then with our present defence capacity?...We must calculate carefully, taking everything into consideration...this is no longer a matter of survival of the individual, but a matter of survival — of millions! (The Chinese). *What* are the prospects of *our* survival?

"First of all we must understand that whether the Chinese in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia or Vietnam can or cannot be, have or have not been *completely assimilated* with the indigenous peoples in Singapore, Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak and Indonesia, the *descendants of the Chinese* will be identifiable from the other races even a hundred years from now. They will find it *very, very difficult to be assimilated completely* with the indigenous peoples. This is not because of language and culture, but more because of religion, a very important factor. And this will give rise in the future to a very grave problem for the several *millions of Chinese descendants* in the region because there are many people who think that because you are Chinese you will one day become an agent of China or subversive element.

"How can the few millions of Chinese in this part of South-east Asia survive, regarded as they are with suspicion by various quarters...? **Establish** a multiracial society where one community helps and respects the other...we must firmly hold on to *our*, (the Singapore Chinese), corner of South-east Asia. It is not negotiable. But we must try our best to establish a model, multiracial society based on the principle of equality..."

To Thomas, having gotten to read the translation of the speech in his office, it was an outright blatant racial clarion-call to the Chinese who had settled in the region for centuries that Singapore would become the "Sino-haven" for them all. Lee knew that his words would be picked up and published in the Chinese-language media of the region. And not a single non-Chinese or non Chinese-speaking Chinese, for that matter, seemed aware of Lee's proud claim and reminder.

Siddon was truly troubled by Lee Kuan Yew's words. He carefully read and re-read "The Straits Times' 'tame' translation of the PM's speech in which it was stated that he was justifying the creation of a self-defence force, and the 'interpretation' given by the Chinese translators of the "Nanyang Siang Pau" who had disseminated "explanations" of it to the Chinese staff of the English-language weekly who didn't read Chinese. From the almost proud flourish the translations were handed out, he was

sufficiently intrigued to "cadge" a copy for himself. After reading it he felt that the subject-matter smacked too much of ethnocentrism, it was too communal. The call to remind the Chinese that they would still be recognisable as Chinese a hundred years hence was Lee's blatant reminder to them of their culture of *jas sanguinis* — of descent through the male line, to always have a "Chinese-child" irrespective of the ethnic-origin of the child's mother. The Singapore leader said one thing in English and an entirely different thing in his own tongue. Eventually Lee would nurture Chinese parvenu which, as far as he was concerned, was just as ugly as English colonial snobbery. But he desperately clung on to the multiracial ideal still being flouted by the Singapore leader when he spoke in the English-language. Siddon pacified himself that the "call" was to "justify" the creation of a Singapore Defence Force, as had been stated in "The Straits Times". It just had to be...

Suddenly, without warning, Thomas' world came crashing down about his ears. The staff at the weekly was told that the publication was closing down at the end of February. Jim Neoh, the weekly's managing editor, had been paid-off by the Chinese newspaper group's directors and had 'disappeared' to the United States where he had obtained a job as a reporter with a San Francisco newspaper. Siddon would be out of work again barely six months into his new job. Just when all hope seemed gone Kenneth Jollie, the Eurasian news editor of the weekly, who claimed to be Javanese on his "Asian" side, told his "favourites", Siddon being one of them, that he had received a "fantastic" offer to "start-up" a national daily in the British Protectorate of Brunei in Borneo. All the reporters from the weekly were to be employed enbloc for the new venture which had the "blessings" of the Brunei Government. Thomas would remain in Singapore as the new paper's Correspondent. He just couldn't believe his good fortune! He was going to be a foreign correspondent with effect from March.

A few days before Jollie and the rest of "his boys" were due to leave for Brunei, a going away "bash" was thrown, with everyone chipping-in for the festivities at a seafood restaurant at Bedok on east coast Singapore, the then in-place for freshly-caught seafood, cooked Chinese-and-Malay style, with lots of chilli. Thomas met an attractive Chinese widow, (he was told by Jollie that she was a "nynonya"), elegant in the attractive sarong and kebaya "garb" of her community, which, originally was the mode of apparel of the better-dressed Malay. The woman was a friend of Ken's wife, Joan, and Thomas found out later that her name was June Chen. She was also a lot older than he. But she was ravishingly beautiful. He had "heard" that she had been a nurse before "switching" to being a beautician. He found her

alluring and was drawn to the "way" she participated in their conversations without uttering a single word, except to just smile and nod in an attentive manner at whoever spoke. She appeared "sharp" but she hadn't looked at him all evening and he knew that she was attracted to him.

The following morning on his way through the old "Arcade", (which has since been demolished and a new building bearing the same name erected in its place), on Collyer Quay to his new offices in Clifford House, he was pleasantly surprised to discover her standing behind the cosmetics counter near the sea-front entrance of the shopping alleyway. It seemed a 'happy' encounter for the two. In the months since he had heard that his Japanese wife, Mariko, had been seen with a man at the "Golden Venus" nightclub, he hadn't been able to get an inkling as to whether the story was true. Whenever he was at home he had behaved "normally" by playing with his children and, if they were asleep because he had returned late, he would busy himself writing poetry or watching tv. He had felt sad and alone because he couldn't confide in anyone about how he felt, and the chance meeting with June Chen, he hoped, would bring some "sunshine" into his life again.

There was one other person in the Singapore office of "The Daily Star", Brunei. This was the Chinese owner's younger brother, Tony Seng, who was in charge of selling advertising-space for the paper in Singapore, while it was Thomas' responsibility to get the news, especially if it pertained to Brunei, the Malay Muslim sultanate. Neither man got on with the other, and Thomas found it even more trying after Tony's elder brother, the "boss", instructed him to "keep an eye" on the young Seng. Another English-language newspaper, to be called "The Eastern Sun", was being planned for Singapore. Did Ken Jollie and the others rush off to Brunei prematurely, Siddon wondered.

Ever since he had first met June Chen, Thomas would sometimes stop and chat with her whenever he happened to pass through the "Arcade", and he tried having a "legitimate" reason to need to go through the shopping alleyway at least twice a day — early in the morning on his way to work, and in the evening on his way home. On one occasion an Eurasian salesman called Campbell, who worked for an adjoining shop which sold watches and cameras, came over and introduced himself. The slim-looking fellow appeared successful with his smartly-tailored long-sleeved shirt and well-cut trousers, with stylish tie to match, and boasting that he dealt mainly with European tourists. (Around this time the Government had announced plans to "attract" tourists to the island and, despite the disparaging comments of the "European bosses" — the British managers of firms on the island — the



outmoded Singapore Tourist Association was being revamped into a statutory board with wide-spread powers to control development of the business being planned). Siddon had an instinctive dislike of Campbell and it was confirmed when the stupid fellow asked him whether he was acquainted with a Japanese girl named Mariko. Her husband, Campbell said, was a "foreign correspondent" as well. The annoyed Siddon countered with a query of his own and the odious character told him that the Japanese girl he was talking of was a "good friend", (a local way of ascribing a "more important" aspect to any chance acquaintance with another party), of his sister, Moiera, who was a "professional" singer at the "Golden Venus" nightclub in Orange Grove Road. Siddon was aware that the skunk was "wising him up" to the nocturnal activities of his wife. He realised at that moment, that of late he hadn't seen much of Mariko since starting on his new job. He would only catch sight of her fast asleep in bed when he returned home late after a hard day's slog "chasing" stories, and she was up and out of their flat to her own job before he had even pried-open an eye the following morning, so deep was his slumber. Without tipping his hand he decided to pay the "Golden Venus" a visit one free evening.

In mid-April Joan Jollie, his editor's wife, flew to Singapore from Brunei on the first of what would become a regular "shopping spree" everytime she grew bored with life in the Malay sultanate. She warned her husband's Singapore Correspondent that Tony, Siddon's colleague, (and "boss", since he was the younger brother of the "big boss"), had been phoning his elder brother's partner almost daily to get him to persuade his elder brother to sack Thomas. Apparently Seng had been telling his brother's partner that it wasn't necessary to employ a full-time reporter in Singapore since there were more than adequate "free-lancers" who'd be too happy to "string" for them. Seeing the anxious look on his face, Joan hastily laid his worry to rest by reminding him that he was not to "fret" so long as her husband, Ken, was still the editor. She inquired after June Chen and to his pleasant surprise she 'revealed' that the attractive widow had indicated her interest in him. At his look of astonishment, she laughingly derided Siddon for his lack of knowledge in "tackling" local girls — didn't he realise that the more a girl liked a man she'd just met, the more she wouldn't give him a hint. Thomas was so silly. Anyway she would 'arrange' for June to go out with him, she promised.

Several days later, out of curiosity he stopped by June's counter at the "Arcade", and to test Joan's 'promise', invited her to a film show. He was pleasantly surprised when she graciously accepted. Obviously Joan Jollie had done as she had promised. They took in a film, had a hawker's meal at

the Esplanade, something he hadn't done in a long while as he always ate at home out of habit, and to save money. When he took her back to her place in Tanjong Katong he brazenly kissed her goodnight on the lips and was pleasantly flattered when she didn't demur. It was not the "done" thing with a local girl in those days, especially on a first-date and when the relationship had not yet "begun". Locals, especially the Babas and Nynonyas, preferred "long, drawn-out" courting before 'anything happened'. From that first evening they began seeing one another regularly. There had been an unspoken, tacit agreement not to talk of Thomas' marriage. Steadily the attraction between them deepened.

One evening at a loose end, Thomas visited the "Golden Venus" nightclub to seek out Moiera Campbell, the Eurasian singer who, Thomas had discovered, was married to one of the Malay "band-boys" in the nightclub. The woman's jaw literally dropped on catching sight of him. He was surprised that she had even known who he was, Singapore really was a small place, he thought to himself. It was still early and the nightclub hadn't yet begun for the evening. He strode up to where she was standing by the microphone on the bandstand, waiting to go on. Thomas demanded the name of Mariko's "boyfriend" and the startled woman was so flustered she blurted out that it was a Gus Minto. Thomas knew the name, it belonged to an illiterate local thug who was of Portuguese-Eurasian-Malay-Chinese descent, and a known pick-pocket who had done "time". Thomas was painfully shocked that his attractive Japanese wife would 'go' for an ex-jailbird who spent his time at the "Golden Venus" forever picking fights with drunk British servicemen and trying to pick the pockets of patrons who were too boozed-up to know what was happening. Obviously Mariko had been impressed by Minto's so-called macho tactics.

There would be a "reckoning" with Mariko but out of deference to Furiko, his mother-in-law, he would have it out with his wife away from their home in the MacPherson Estate. Faced with Thomas' accusation Mariko tearfully admitted her affair but begged him not to reveal it to her mother. Thomas told his wife that he would be moving out of their home immediately and would consult his lawyer about divorce proceedings. He told her that since she was waiting for her Singapore Citizenship on the ground of her marriage to him, he would wait until that was effected first. His heart bled when he realised that he had to leave his children behind.

Soon after Singapore had separated from Malaysia, Indonesia began making friendly moves toward the Republic, and which only raised Malaysia's suspicions about the PAP Government. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew had then made strong public statements to reassure Kuala

Lumpur that nothing would be done that would be harmful to Malaysia's security or interests.

The first definitive move toward ending the Indonesian *Konfrontasi* with Malaysia took place on 27th May 1966 when eight senior officers of the Indonesian "Crush Malaysia" Command paid a seven-hour visit to West Malaysia, (Malaya), during which they had meetings with Tengku Abdul Rahman at Alor Star, and with Tun Abdul Razak at Kuala Lumpur.

Indonesia-Malaysia peace talks opened at the home of the Thai Foreign Minister, Mr Thanat Khoman on 29th May 1966 in Bangkok, where Mr Adam Malik for Indonesia and Tun Abdul Razak for Malaysia began their discussions. Thailand had been attempting to mediate between Indonesia and Malaysia for some time before this, with a view to restoring normal relations between the two South-east Asian nations and thus remove a source of tension in the region. On 1st June Malaysia and Indonesia signed an agreement to end *Konfrontasi*. There had already been de facto Indonesian cessation of aggression with Singapore but Lee Kuan Yew had not accepted the formal recognition of Indonesia until Jakarta had simultaneously recognised Malaysia. At a press conference in Kuala Lumpur on 2nd June, upon his return from Bangkok, Tun Abdul Razak announced that the Indonesian-Malaysian confrontation was over "for good".

"With the signing of the peace pact the peoples of the two countries, who are of the *same race and religion* will come together again."

The end of *Konfrontasi* was welcomed by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew but, at the same time, he was disturbed by the news presentation of the ethnical jubilation of the two former "warring" nations with the emphasis on their common racial links, which, he felt, would create a certain amount of nervousness among the non-indigenous communities.

"...Because people...(would)...doubt and question the possibilities and problems that may arise in this new situation..."

The Singapore leader had "conveniently" forgotten his recent call to the ethnic-Chinese, both in and out of Singapore, about how impossible it would be for them, (the Chinese), to become assimilated with the indigenous peoples of South-east Asia, despite living and intermarrying with them, for over a hundred years.

It was also announced in Kuala Lumpur on 31st May that Malaysia and the Philippines had resumed full diplomatic relations after a three-year break. The resumption of ties took effect from 3rd June 1966. It in fact closely followed the agreement signed between Indonesia and Malaysia for the ending of *Konfrontasi*.

Lim Yew Hock, Singapore's former chief minister who had been appointed Malaysia's High Commissioner to Australia in 1964, went missing from his Canberra home for nine days in June 1966. There was speculation linking his disappearance with a "stripper" from Sydney's King's Cross, (a red-light district). He was returned to a desk job in Kuala Lumpur.

Thomas Siddon dropped by his home in Circuit Road, (its former Malay name of *Pesiaran Keliling* had been changed since "Separation" from Malaysia), in the MacPherson Estate on 1st July, the seventh birthday of his eldest boy, Kean Siew. He was given a tongue-lashing by Furiko, his mother-in-law, who accused him of being a "deserter" and an inconsiderate father. He had walked out on his family just because he was 'making it' in the world. It was obvious that his erstwhile wife, Mariko, had said nothing to her mother about the true reason for their breaking-up, except, maybe, to accuse him unjustifiably of doing the 'wrong thing'. It was obvious to him that the older Japanese woman was under the impression that he had left his family because he didn't care for them all. And it hurt. He decided it would be too trying to explain to her the true circumstances of his walking out on his family, and remained silent. After he had given Kean Siew his birthday present, Thomas sat both his sons on his knees and whispered softly into their ears that he would come see them whenever they needed him. He gave them his office number to call, should they ever need to. He removed his sons off his knee, stood up and walked out of the flat without a second glance. He had told his mother-in-law that he would be posting the monthly maintenance cheques for his two boys to their mother at her office.

On 9th August Mr Sinnathamby Rajaratnam, the Singapore Foreign Minister, spelling out Singapore's "new attitude" to history, said that with full independence all ties with the past were severed. Singapore was a "republic" whose head of state was appointed. All links with the historical past were gone. Thomas wondered why the people of his island had not been "consulted" on this very important aspect of Singapore's "historical direction". The new Parliament had made it mandatory that a referendum had to be called if any future government of Singapore wanted a "new" merger with a third country, why hadn't this *cut with the past* also been made part of a referendum *before* the action was implemented?

Indonesian *Konfrontasi* was formally brought to an end between Singapore and Indonesia, on 12th August 1966. Full diplomatic relations between the two countries were to be resumed on 7th November 1966.

At the end of a two-day goodwill visit by the Japanese foreign minister, Mr Shiina, to Singapore, during which he had talks with his counterpart, Mr

S. Rajaratnam, it was announced on 26th October that Japan would give the island fifty million Straits dollars as compensation for wartime atrocities committed during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore in the Second World War. Half the compensation was to be an outright grant and the other half would be a loan on special terms. Thomas felt it unfair, when it was eventually announced, that the Japanese "grant" would go toward erecting a memorial only to the Chinese who had been killed as a result of Japanese Occupation atrocities, that the Singapore Government would build. The other communities of Singapore too had perished at the the cruel hand of rampaging hordes of Japanese soldiers, and they too deserved to be "honoured" as well. His own father had been a victim, and so had he. Hadn't he too been a prisoner of the Japanese when only a two-year-old, because he had to accompany and live with his mother in the Sime Road Civilian Concentration Camp off MacRitchie Reservoir?

Previously in 1963, during house-building excavations on the island, a cache of human-bones had been unearthed, evidence of yet another massacre of Singapore-islanders by Nippon soldiers during World War Two. It had awakened strong determination on the island that Japan should atone for the war-crimes of her military personnel. And subsequently on 21st April 1963 a meeting of Chinese businessmen from the Chinese Chamber of Commerce had called for the building of a memorial "...to an unhappy incident in which many tens of thousands of *all* races died at the hands of a brutal invading army..." The PAP Government then had thrown its weight behind the campaign to convince the Japanese government that some gesture of atonement was forthcoming and which finally resulted in the compensation in 1966. The Barisan Sosialis too had given their support to the Chinese businessmen who had been upset by the PAP Government previously coming out to say that compensation was for *all* who had died during the war and not just the Chinese. The Sino community could only see the "compensation" in terms of their own race and the PAP and the Barisan Sosialis were vying for their support in any future election since the Chinese were the majority community on the island. To Thomas Siddon it was clear that no matter what the "political colour" the Chinese in the opposing parties were, *all* Chinese are bound by a strong emotional bond. There would be no thought for "the others" in such an instance.

The Malaysian Yang di-Pertuan Agong "cancelled and annulled" former Singapore chief minister Lim Yew Hock's "tunship" for the scandal of his "disappearance" at Canberra, Australia, (during the time of the latter's tenure as Malaysia's High Commissioner) in November 1966.

When June came to know of her boyfriend, Thomas' "separation" from his family, she began being seen with him openly. They had already become lovers by then, and she persuaded him to move in with her at her flat in Tanjong Katong. It would be cheaper she reasoned, then were he to live in a rooming house, and he could be closer to his boys since her flat was close to Circuit Road.

At the end of November Thomas discovered, by accident, that Mariko and her family had moved out of his flat in the MacPherson Estate to a private one in Kim Yan Place, off the River Valley Road and closer to the city. As the Housing and Development Board accommodation was still in his name and he was continuing to pay the rent, he and June decided to live in it as it was a lot cheaper to maintain than her privately-rented flat. They moved in together around early December. June's mother, he subsequently learned, because his "girl" told him, lived with a younger brother and his wife three blocks away. He gradually learned of the antagonism of her family toward him when he realised that June always visited her mother on her own, choosing the time whenever he was "busy" at work on an "assignment". He put it to her and she finally admitted that her mother and several brothers considered him an "outsider", a *chap cheng*, (Hokkein Chinese: a "mixed-blood"), which he thought funny as they were Baba-Nynonya, which meant that they too were "mixed" with Malay-blood in their veins. June's mother had reminded her daughter that her father had been the Chinese consul in Singapore, and would "have turned in his grave" if he knew that she had 'fallen' for someone like him. Her father, her mother told her, would have much preferred that she were the second or third "concubine" of a wealthy Chinese rather than the "darling" of a poor *serani*, (a Malay word supposed to have originated in southern Thailand which has a large Malay population, which means Portuguese-Eurasian, and which, by inference, proves that the colonial Portuguese had spent time in old Siam, as well as Malacca). But the bond between June and Thomas was strong.

In December Thomas received an urgent call from Kenneth Jollie, his editor in Brunei, telling him that the Singapore office of the newspaper was being shut down at year's end due to the advertising revenue from Singapore "being disappointing". The closing of the office would also mean that Thomas would be out of work, Jollie said. Ken was "advising him" of the boss's surprise-decision so that he would have the time to begin looking for alternative employment. Apart from an additional month's wages he wouldn't be receiving anything else by way of compensation. That was what he got for relying on someone like Jollie, Sidon thought

bitterly to himself. During all the time that he had worked for the Brunei newspaper he had never been paid Central Provident Fund contributions. And that was how he was going to face his old-age — stoney-broke! But June Chen was a pillar of strength. He *would* pull through. June said she would take on the “burden” of paying the maintenance for his two children to Mariko. She even bought them their Christmas presents and the family’s traditional turkey which she helped roast in the Circuit Road flat, that year. The Chinese widow found the taste of the bird unusual as it was the first time that she had tried it. The Chinese, she told him, normally didn’t eat turkey to celebrate Christmas anyway, and most didn’t celebrate the festival as the majority of Chinese in Singapore weren’t Christian she told him.

June’s mother suddenly insisted that Thomas ‘marry’ her daughter the “traditional” way, and on New Year’s Eve he offered his “new” mother-in-law the obligatory cup of Chinese tea which she graciously accepted. His June had finally convinced her mother that he was a “good” man. His Baba wife told him that he had been accepted into her family.

On the second day of 1967, June came home with the startling news that the assistant to the editor-in-chief of the “Nanyang Siang Pau”, the Chinese-language daily, had stopped by her counter at the “Arcade” to get him to call his office urgently, (Thomas had long ceased to wonder how *everyone* that he had ever met in his life on the island always seemed to know where to get hold of him!). Thomas did so the following morning and was summoned to see the “big-boss”. The Chinese newspaper was attempting a “dry-run” of an English-language edition of the Chinese newspaper, and Mr Sze, the editor-in-chief, had been particularly impressed with his reporting and writing skills during his time with the former English-language weekly that had been closed down, and had wanted him to work for the organisation again. He would be one of two English language “experts” and would begin immediately as a sub-editor doing layouts and rewriting the English-language versions of the Chinese news translated by the Chinese paper’s translator.

At about that same time he heard that Kenneth Jollie and all the “Singapore boys” who had followed him to Brunei to work at “The Daily Star” had lost their jobs because the sultan had withdrawn his support for the paper as it hadn’t been up to his expectations, and it was closed down. He subsequently learned from his disappointed newly-returned former cronies, who called on him at his new place of work, that Jollie had in fact already landed the job of editor-in-chief of a major newspaper in Hong Kong, some six months previously and had told no one about it. They all blamed him for letting standards slide in the former Brunei newspaper

because he had grown disinterested as he had already obtained his new position and didn't care about them any more. They had all forlornly returned to Singapore to look for work because, they said, Jollie could not be trusted any more. After landing his job in Hong Kong he told no one until the day everyone was preparing to leave the sultanate for good. He only then announced that he was flying to Hong Kong that same day to take up his new position instead of returning to Singapore. Thomas realized then that while Jollie had been "advising" him about his former Brunei newspaper boss's intention to do away with his services, his former editor had in fact already been negotiating with his new Hong Kong employers about his own job, at the same time. And he had not let him in on it. Because Jollie had had no intention to help him either. Another person in his life who had "ditched" him, although he had not been aware of it at the time!



## Commitment

### *Chapter 12*

Thomas Siddon was one of two English language "experts" involved in the ethnic-Chinese-owned Nanyang Publications' experiment in early 1967 to publish an English-language version of its Chinese daily, the "Nanyang Siang Pau". The "Nanyang Siang Pau" and the "Sin Chew Jit Poh", (which was owned by the powerful and well-known-throughout-the-Far-East ethnic-Chinese Aw family of "Tiger Balm" fame, who were mainly based in Hong Kong), were Chinese-language newspapers both published and distributed in Singapore and Malaysia ever since colonial times, (until 1st January 1973 when the Singapore Government would first introduce stringent controls prohibiting the publication of articles "...likely to cause ill-will or misunderstanding between the peoples or Governments of Malaysia and Singapore...", and then on 29th January of that same year setting up the Press Council "...which would lay down guide-lines and scrutinize key staff appointments... in order to deter any foreign power which might try to subvert the country through its papers..." This would be the prelude to the eventual registering of the one and only publishing group in Singapore which would be responsible for the publication of all English-language, Chinese-language and Malay-language newspapers in the country.).

Both the "Nanyang Siang Pau" and the "Sin Chew Jit Poh" in 1967, had their administrative and editorial offices opposite one another, across the road in Robinson Road. The new paper's publishers had decided that when it was ready to go "public", the English-language version of the "Nanyang

Siang Pau" would be distributed within the pages of its sister-Chinese paper, in order to enjoy an 'instant' broad-based circulation, though, of course, this would only be among the Chinese daily's Chinese-educated readers, some of whom were bi-lingual.

The other "expert" in the new paper's project was a Scotsman called Charles Buchan, a rubber "dealer" who had once enjoyed dubious "fame" both in Malaya and Singapore, when his engagement and impending marriage to a leading, attractive and much-adored Malay film star among the Malay population in both territories, had been announced in the Malay and English press of both territories. She was a star with the Cathay Keris Film Studios, one of two local Chinese-owned "movie-stables" churning out popular Malay-language films for cinemas up-and-down Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia in those days. The wedding announcement, when it came, had been an overnight sensation for Singapore and Malaysia, because, for those days, the fact that the popular Malay film-star, would be the first actress of her race to wed an Englishman, one of the "colonial elite", who had even announced that he would become a Muslim, had come as a resounding shock to the Malay populations of both territories, in the light of the 'fairly-recent' "Maria Hertogh Riots", just after the Second World War, when the British had displayed their biases against the Malay.

The Scots wasn't a journalist but he had been hired nonetheless to go over the English-language translations of each day's Chinese editorial in the "Nanyang Siang Pau" to put it all down in "Queen's English". The Chinese translator hired to do the translating had a penchant for writing in a form of "Chinese-English" which even the newspaper's Chinese owners shied away from. Thomas was mainly involved in re-hashing the other news stories translated from the Chinese newspaper as well as the stories written by a Chinese "old-timer" sub-editor whose main responsibility was page layout, though he was weak in headlines and couldn't check for grammar because his English "wasn't too good". This "elder" journalist confessed to not being able to cope as his only previous writing experience had been in "bashing-out" stories on the "gees-gees" which he had learnt to "write" by "formula".

Thomas' day began at three in the afternoon and ended well past ten in the evening. Buchan the Scot only came in after five in the late afternoon, after the stock exchange had shut for the day, and would depart around eight in the evening every night, except Sundays, because everyone didn't work on that day.

The young sub-editor first noticed the tall white columns rising on the tiny green near the mouth of the Stamford Canal, opposite the site of the

former Raffles Boys' School, (which had been established by Stamford Raffles to provide an education for the offspring of Malay royalty then in Singapore, and where the Westin Stamford Hotel stands today), in late January, on his way to work in Robinson Road, as his bus circumvented the patch of grass to get to Connaught Drive before proceeding along Collyer Quay. Adjacent to it today is the new Marina Centre, a recently-established major business, commercial, hotel and residential district developed on prime land reclaimed from the sea, next to Queen Elizabeth Walk on the Esplanade, which once overlooked what used to be Singapore's southern shore.

Subsequently as the columns took shape as a memorial he gleaned from newspaper reports that it was being constructed and dedicated to the Chinese civilians who had perished in Singapore as a result of Japanese brutality during World War Two when the Japanese had occupied the island. The press blurbs spelled out very clearly that it was going to be a "Chinese memorial" for the Chinese on Singapore, and the Eurasian, Siddon, felt anger welling in his breast though he dared not utter a word in indignation out loud. He knew it wouldn't do to voice his innermost thoughts on the *proper* reasons for the memorial, especially since he was now working for a Chinese company whose staff openly supported the whole "exercise".

On 15th February 1967 Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew unveiled the tall concrete memorial, dedicating it to the men and women who "...were the hapless victims of one of the fires of history..." The English language newspapers in the city proudly proclaimed that the bones of "...thousands of unidentified Chinese were buried at the base of the columns..." The whole press "angle" to the stories slanted toward the memorial being a "Chinese affair". Thomas Siddon scoured the following day's newspapers looking for something, *anything*, about the roles that the other communities had played during the war but there was nothing. It had all been a Chinese Chamber of Commerce "exercise" for the sake of appeasing and flattering their own, and by their *own* Thomas knew this meant the descendants of those Chinese who had come directly from China, and who had even been responsible for the setting up of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, in the first place, earlier in the century. (He felt that the general public, apart from the China-borns and their offspring, had never realised the *role* the Chinese Chamber of Commerce had played in Singapore's history and that it had fanned and kept alive Chinese chauvinism, and that it had, in the past, even acted as a *de facto* Chinese government for the Chinese nationals who had come to Singapore only to seek their fortunes before returning home to

China, and Lee Kuan Yew had been aware of this all along. Why had Lee allowed the *Chamber* to operate as it did or was he afraid of it?). Siddon felt that he would have gladly dug-up his own late father's bones, if he knew where they were interred, and placed them together with the remains of the other Singapore residents, also not Chinese and who had also not been included in the shrine. Hadn't Cecil Siddon, his father, too perished as a result of Japanese bestiality? The "contribution" hadn't all been Chinese and the *motive* for building the war-memorial was morally-wrong. The Chinese among the population who had insisted that the memorial be dedicated to their ilk had been the descendants of the *China-born* who had died during the war, it was clear to him now. They seemed to him to have a "separate" mentality from that of the other Chinese on Singapore — the Straits-borns and the *Baba-Nynonyas*, and the Singapore Premier, or was Lee's own act a sham as well?

On 22nd February the local English language papers reported that the "PM" had told a group of young boys and girls that though they learned English they were not Englishmen. They had to keep a part of themselves that would lead them back to "...their histories, cultures, and civilisations from where they all came, and from out of that, the past... together (all would)...create a present and a future worthy of a people who (had) come from very ancient cultures and civilisations..." (Thomas Siddon felt that the Prime Minister's very invitation had left out and alienated the Eurasian in the society). After touching on making Singapore one of the cleanest and most beautiful cities in Asia, with flowers and shrubs in all public places, Lee talked about the Government's plan to introduce national service in the country, which caught everyone by surprise.

"...Every boy and every girl...(will)...learn to stand up and be able to acquit himself or herself, if ever it became necessary, with honour and valour. Not all of you will have the opportunity or will have the privilege of serving in our army, navy or air force, because we only want a small force.

"For those selected — the ten percent chosen for full-time duty for two years, would be those who would be an elite", he said.

There were open grumblings about the Prime Minister's proposed conscription and many Chinese parents, especially, frowned upon their pampered sons being inducted into military service, while some openly defied the Government where their daughters were concerned — *they* would not be inducted into military service! Thomas waited to see the outcome of the "agitation".

As a result of the unhappiness of the mainly Chinese parents of those young men and women the Government had been contemplating to induct

into national service, on 25th February it was announced that there would only be national service for all young men who had reached the age of 18 on 1st January that year. Ten percent would be called up for full-time training on two years service and ten years in the reserve. The remainder would be called up for part-time service with the People's Defence Force, the Special Constabulary and the Vigilante Corps, (wasn't "vigilante" a word with "rightist-extremist" racial connotations used in the United States of America's deep-south? Siddon thought to himself. The Government's choice of words was curious, to say the least.). The nation was told that national service would build a more "integrated" society in which opportunities and responsibilities would be more equally shared. After full-time military service civilian employment would be guaranteed by legislation, which was a re-assuring factor to most, as jobs were still hard to come by. The National Service Bill was passed by Singapore Parliament on 14th March 1967.

A day before, on 13th March, the Singapore Parliament had approved the Singapore Currency Bill providing for the establishment of a Board of Commissioners of Currency and the issue of a new "Singapore dollar" — when the Board of Commissioners of Currency, Malaya and British Borneo ceased to be the currency-issuing authority for Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei on 12th June 1967. The Singapore dollar, divided into 100 cents, would have a par value of 0.290299 grammes of gold — the same as the then existing "Straits dollar" — and would be fully backed and automatically convertible into sterling. The separate Singapore dollar and Malaysian "ringgit" would be interchangeable. The move to "split" the common currency of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei had been announced on 17th August 1966 a day after a double-taxation agreement between the two countries had also been signed.

At about this time rumours were flying all over town that the newly-launched English language "Eastern Sun", which was owned by the Chinese language "Sin Chew Jit Poh", was "shakey" and a majority of its reporters with any kind of experience was heading toward Hong Kong because there were attractive opportunities there. Siddon wished that he too could just take off for the British colony off China but he had a wife and two children to think about. He reflected on his advertising qualifications which he had obtained through his own initiative in 1965 and which he hadn't yet had an opportunity to put to use. When would the "big break" into advertising he had been hoping for ever since passing the exams, come his way?

On 31st May 1967 the Singapore Prime Minister addressed the recently-formed Singapore Employers Federation and talked about the "...lean and rugged society..." which the government wanted to create. (And again Lee had coined a fresh, current "catch-phrase" for everyone on the island). He said that the Administration wanted to dispel the belief that "...the world owes us a living..." and that after two years since "independence" through "Separation" from Malaysia the people were "...in the mood of grim determination with a keenness to adjust..." themselves to the new situation. He did "...not wish to exonerate..." himself "...from the many aberrations which were inevitable in the early stages of the trade union movement...it was so tied up and rolled up with the whole anti-colonial movement..." "...Now we have to re-educate not only our trade union leaders but, even more important, the workers, that this can no longer be...I would like to believe that employers on their part are able to recognise this new mood and...respond in a creative way..."

Siddon wondered about the Prime Minister's crediting the Communist-led trade union movement of the fifties with anti-colonialism. He had done his own reading, and he had come to know the Chinese in his youth because he had lived among them in Bencoolen Street, not far from the Communist-led trade unions along Middle Road where their members used to bang away on drums and cymbals every evening. It hadn't been so much an anti-colonial "movement" but an anti-British protest by China-born Chinese against the British for depriving them the privileges of the Straits-born and the Baba-Nynonya Chinese, and the other Singapore-borns. And Lee Kuan Yew had also been particularly vociferous in his condemnation of the Singapore Association of Trade Unions, (SATU), and its member-organisations during the time when he was "struggling" to come to power and even afterward. Siddon had lived close to the Chinese in the former "kampong" of his youth in Bencoolen Street and was treated as one of the kampong, (Malay: "village", here meaning of the same neighbourhood), and at no time had his neighbourhood ever talked about being "anti-colonial". He had even helped several Chinese "buddies" in official "difficulties" with British soldiers and the police during the riots, and even helped rescue his Hainanese, (a Chinese dialect), grocer-friend's sister, Geok, a student of the China-born Chinese-inspired Nanyang University, who had been trapped in the institution during the sit-ins then. He and Guan had driven to a pre-arranged spot outside the perimeter-wall of the then China-born Chinese-owned institution of higher learning, and Geok had scrambled over to join them in the front seat of their family's grocer's van. The trio had gotten through the police and military cordon because he and

Geok had pretended to be a courting couple getting a lift from Guan, her elder brother. Thomas wasn't Chinese, looked older than his years, and had worn one of Guan's trousers because he hadn't any of his own and only wore short-pants. Brother and sister had been anti-PAP and pro-Barisan Sosialis, yet had never regarded him as an 'enemy'. So what was Lee Kuan Yew on about? *He* seemed to be putting his own 'interpretation' to things in the past to "suit" his re-telling of history, as far as Siddon was concerned.

The young Eurasian was at his sub's desk in the "Nanyang Siang Pau" on 5th June 1967 when the news wires hummed with the sensational disclosure that open warfare had broken out again between Israelis and Arabs in the Middle East. That the Jews were intent on "owning" the whole of that region the world had come to know as Palestine. By 9th June the total war on land, sea and air had seen the Israelis "re-take", (as was reported by the news wires), the West Bank of the River Jordan, the Gaza Strip as well as East Jerusalem, and by 11th June the Sinai Peninsula up to the Suez Canal, the Golan Heights and the Sea of Galilee. All the news via the western-owned news agencies subtly gave out the line that the Israelis were "re-taking territory, described as theirs in the Old Testament of the Bible..." Siddon's colleagues, both the Scot, Buchan, and the Chinese, strongly cheered the Israeli victories, and knowing that the Chinese in his country only "openly-supported" that which the Government gave its backing to, Siddon realised where the official leaning lay.

He didn't agree with his colleagues "partisan" attitude. As a journalist he knew he had to be objective and get the facts right. Palestine, he knew, had been known since ancient times as the "land of Canaan", and the descendants of the Canaanites were the Palestinians and other Semetic tribes. It was through the Canaanites that the renowned Semetic civilisations of the Acadean, the Babylonian, the Assyrian, the Chaldean, and the present-day Arab owed their origins. Various peoples had "briefly" occupied the "land of Canaan" even before the first Hebrew kingdom was first set up in 1050 B.C. right up to 63 B.C. , when the Romans conquered the "land of Canaan" and named it Palestine. They had also driven out the Jews from the "land of Canaan". European Jews had been allowed in only after World War One, after the effective lobbying of powerful, prominent and wealthy Jews, like the Rothschilds of Switzerland, which had allowed large-scale Jewish immigration from East Europe into modern-day Palestine from 1922.

With the subsequent establishment of Israel in 1948 more than 800,000 Palestinians had been made refugees in neighbouring countries, while the remaining 22 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank of Jordan, and the Gaza Strip, came respectively under Jordanian and Egyptian administrations.

After the war of 1967 a further 500,00 Palestinians were made refugees in neighbouring Arab countries, while some 1.5 million others who remained in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip came under Israeli military occupation.

Without warning all the staff of the "trial" English-language edition of the "Nanyang Siang Pau" were summoned, to the editor-in-chief's office on the morning of 15th June and summarily informed that they would become unemployed at the end of the month because it had been decided not to go ahead with the planned English-language version of the Chinese paper. It had been scrapped because the newspaper's owner had died and his surviving children had disagreed among themselves about their father's pet-project. The shocked and dismayed employees would be paid an additional month's salary in lieu of notice, and that would be all.

Though he once again found himself out-of-work, Thomas thanked his lucky stars that June Chen, 'his woman', had re-assured him of her moral and fiscal support. He was sad though to have to be out-of-work so soon. The job at the "Nanyang" had been the first that had paid him Central Provident Fund contributions for his retirement in the future.

On 18th June the British Government announced that by the mid-seventies they intended pulling-out of their bases "east of Suez", and that this included Singapore and Malaysia. The precise timing of their military withdrawal would depend on "circumstances". Dr Goh Keng Swee, Singapore's then Minister for Finance, estimated that 18,000 additional new jobs a year would have to be created to absorb the British military bases redundancies, in addition to the need to create 25,000 new jobs a year for school-leavers. Coincidentally on that same day 114 officer-cadets, the first graduates of the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute, (SAFTI), the "elite" of the military, passed out.

At a school's cadet corps parade on 26th July, Lee Kuan Yew spoke of what the content, purpose and direction of Singapore's education and training was supposed to do for them. He told the students that they did not live in an agricultural society but in a centre of trading...the world in which they, ten years on, would be in would have a greater reliance on technological and industrial skills.

Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand met in Bangkok on 7th August 1967 to form the Association of South East Asian Nations, (ASEAN), to apply to the new grouping's problems the idea of regionalism. ASEAN in effect expanded and superseded the Association of South-East Asia, (ASA), established by Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand on 31st July 1961. This body was dissolved on 29th August 1967.

On the eve of Singapore's National Day, (9th August 1967), Lee Kuan Yew, addressing the nation over television warned about the impending



withdrawal of British troops from Singapore and what the implications were for those employed on British bases on the island. He made the problem "larger than life" and at last brought home to the nation the troubles looming ahead.

"As we solve old problems — new ones, however, have appeared. The British Government has decided to cut down their force in the Singapore-Malaysia area by half...by 1971. By the middle seventies...between 1973 and 1977...(they)...will leave their bases...this presents us with a grave challenge...(and)...will also create immediate problems. Fifteen thousand civilian employees will lose their jobs by 1971. About half will be our citizens...about 5,000 women earning their keep as domestic helps will also lose their jobs...While we can and will maintain our economic growth, we have not been able, and may not for some time be able, to solve the problem of unemployment. We must create between 7,000 to 10,000 jobs in the manufacturing industry every year...I say we have the capacity to make the grade, if we gird ourselves to meet these problems."

For Thomas the Prime Minister's message held no revelations, he was already out-of-work and it wasn't because of the impending British withdrawal from the island. He noticed a classified ad in the Singapore-edition of "The Straits Times", (the original newspaper that had once served Malaya, Singapore, Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei as a single edition for all these territories had been "split" into two separate editions since "Separation" — with the "Singapore edition" selling in Singapore and Brunei, and the "Malaysian edition" in Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak), inviting the public-at-large to register for instruction in the then relatively-unknown Japanese martial art of "karate". It was what he had been keeping an eye out for ever since the introduction of "tae kwon-do", the Korean martial art in 1965. He hadn't been interested in the Korean martial art with its emphasis on the use of the feet and legs in self-defence but he was dead-keen on "karate" since it was "closer" to the Chinese-style pugilism in its use of both hands and feet for self-defence. He was glad the Japanese had finally come to teach their martial art on his island because his Chinese "co-nationals" still jealously guarded against allowing non-Chinese getting to know their self-defence styles. June advanced him the enrolment fee. He would repay her when he was employed again.

On 15th August 1967, at a dinner for national day celebrants, mainly People's Action Party supporters, the Prime Minister asked his audience about the kind of future they would give to the young they would bring into the world.

"What will happen in 1975? What kind of Asia will it be, what kind of world will it be in 1985...?"

"Nobody knows because there are too many factors, too many imponderables. "...There are very few countries in Asia and probably fewer in Africa that have got independence since the War who, as a people have done better than they were doing before, when they were governed by the white man...why is this so? There are many reasons. The simplest one is this: because somebody with a superior organisation structure, a superior civilisation, a superior technology came...and built up the apparatus of a modern state — it does not mean that therefore you can automatically just takeover, that when the colonial government goes out you can walk in and put on all the plumes and uniforms and this will go on just as before. It is not true.

"First the people together must have a will to be a nation...in some countries there is no such thing as the will of a people because it is confused...In an established country...Japan, China, Britain, France, Russia or America...there is always a hard core of people who represent that will, people whose instinctive reflexes are those of the national interests. This is the first thing we must have..."

Siddon fleetingly took note of the Prime Minister's words, mulling over the invitation to "get involved", and wondered who would make up the "nucleus", that would have the interest of the nation at heart. Was the call directed at those such as he or was it just to the politician's own ethnic-crowd within the PAP-elite? Only time would tell, Siddon felt.

Ever since losing his job at the "Nanyang Siang Pau" Chinese newspaper, he had made it a point to write and post at least five to ten job-applications a day. He had never relied on anyone in his life, ever since getting married, and he wasn't going to do so just yet. Siddon was just past twenty-seven and didn't scare easily. He would "make it" in life. June was a tower of strength, encouraging and ever-disdainful of any potential employer who didn't employ him after he had gone for a job-interview. One the days that he went for an interview she always made sure that he had a clean shirt and tie, and would place ten dollars in his pocket "...because a man cannot go out feeling cowed, being stoney-broke..." Her late father had impressed that on her as a child, she had told him.

He responded to an ad inviting those with the requisite advertising qualifications and experience to apply for the position of copywriter with an "international" advertising agency. He went along to the interview a month later and was terribly surprised to discover, when he got to the offices of the advertising agency, that nearly all its employees were Chinese, with the "odd exception" of a Malay *peon*, and several Indians. He was also curious to "discover" that all the local staff spoke in a "quaint" Chinese-accent and in an almost Sino-English "pidgen", (this "pidgen" would

eventually 'evolve' into what would euphemistically be termed "Singlish"; the "slang" of Singapore, one day in the not too distant future). It was somewhat similar to that spoken by the Chinese employees at the "Nanyang Siang Pau" but of a better standard of English because those working in the agency, (he was to discover eventually), had either been educated in Irish Christian Brothers' schools or at French convents. But somehow this English was still all wrong because the people speaking it either dropped word-endings or seemed to "swallow" verbs, adjectives or nouns as if it were "understood" on the part of the listener. It seemed as if they merely "translated" from the vernacular into English, dispensing with "unnecessary" words "in-between". Thomas was told by the Australian creative director that he would be given another interview at a later date, and that he would be informed by post.

Speaking at the first dinner held in his Tanjong Pagar constituency to "see-off", (Thomas thought the practice "peculiar"), the first batch of young men called up for National Service on 29th August 1967, Lee Kuan Yew said: "...Now we have to look after ourselves. We have no tradition to guide us...(but)...we must inculcate the qualities of valour, comradeship, discipline, common social purpose, pride in...ourselves and our community...soldiers and uniforms...used to have unhappy memories for us. We were a people governed by others, the British, then the Japanese...there was never a sense of being at one with those in uniform who held the bayonet and enforced compliance. These memories coupled with the *Chinese tradition* that good sons do not become soldiers, plus the factor that most of the Indian community are from non-warrior castes, are a disadvantage. This means that a special effort must be made to honour and respect those of our citizens in uniform..." Lee Kuan Yew had chosen to forget that Indian men and women in Singapore had volunteered to fight in Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army during World War Two against the British. Siddon sardonically remembered his days in the RAF, a job he had taken out of desperation and pure necessity. He too was local, on par with the others, striving to make a living in "his" society and feeling the throes of non-acceptance from the Chinese, Malays, Indians and even other Eurasians. Because he was a "first-generation" half-caste.

He became aware that their next-door neighbour to the left of them at their block in Circuit Road, the Malay family whose husband was a peon, had moved out of their own rented flat. Several weeks later the fifth-generation Indian-British Eurasian family on their right was gone as well. Both flats on either side of Thomas and June were then taken by a Hokkein-speaking Chinese fisherman, his wife and single daughter on one side, and

his elder married school-teacher son, on the other. Thomas realised that his was the only "Eurasian" family on their floor as well as the block, everyone else was Chinese. When he had first moved in there had been Malay, Indian and Eurasian families "scattered" throughout their block and the other blocks in the MacPherson Estate as well. Where had the *other* non-Chinese families gone to? Was he still there because he was married to a Chinese?

The second interview for the copywriter's position came in October. The Australian creative director who had first interviewed him in September, after leafing through all his "by-lined" press stories during his stint in journalism, gave him two "bits" of "copy" to write over the weekend. He was finished writing both on the evening of his interview and had to control his impatience over the weekend to wait for Monday to see the man again. He phoned on Monday morning, after waiting a "reasonable" time for the agency to "settle down", and was told to leave the pieces with the man's secretary. It was a damned anti-climax, as far as he was concerned. Just when he thought that he wouldn't hear from the agency ever again, a letter arrived the following day summoning him to yet another interview. The meeting, this time was brief. He would join the international advertising agency as a "trainee copywriter". The creative director's secretary took him along to the company's manager, a Malayalee named Fernandez to take his personal particulars. He was told that he would receive his letter of appointment when he began work in the following month. He would also know what he would earn when he began work, the manager said with finality, dismissing him with his voice. Thomas looked at the Indian quizzically. He had always been curious about Indians with Portuguese or Spanish surnames who weren't even of Portuguese or Spanish descent. When he got home later that day there was a letter telling him to begin training in "karate" at the end of October.

When Thomas began at the advertising agency in November he discovered that he would be starting at a salary of five hundred and fifty dollars a month. On "confirmation" at the end of six months he would get an increment of a hundred dollars. Unbelievable. He had obtained his fantastic job on his own, on the strength of his advertising qualifications and an ability to express himself in English fluently in writing, in the "spoken word". During lunch that day he ran all the way from the Asia Insurance Building in Finlayson Green, where his office was, to the Robinson's Department Store in Raffles Place to tell June the good news. She was then stationed at the cosmetics counter of the British-owned store. Though he did feel piqued by her usual Chinese manner which didn't allow for the public display of emotions, when he told her the good news, he could see by her

sparkling eyes and radiant smile that she was pleased and proud. His starting pay was now a hundred more than what she earned.

Thomas' boys, Kean Siew and Rahman, moved in with him and June at the end of November after Rahman, who'd entered school that year, had sat for his first-ever primary one tests. June had agreed to the two boys joining them as their father now had a well-paying job. They could even afford an amah, (a household servant), to clean house, cook meals and ensure that both youngsters clambered aboard their schoolbus in safety every school day. Furiko, his Japanese mother-in-law, had finally persuaded her daughter, Mariko, his legally-married wife, to release the children in their father's care. The older Japanese woman had grudgingly conceded that her daughter hadn't seemed interested in bringing up her own children, preferring instead, the "night-life". Everyone agreed that Kean Siew and Rahman could visit with their mother and grandmother on weekends whenever prior arrangement had been made with him. In the meantime the boys took to June like a house on fire, after an initial shyness which stemmed from not being used to having a "strange" woman see to their welfare. They found that they loved her nyonya cakes and food, (the unique blend of Chinese-Malay cooking), and that she always took them with her to market on weekends, stuffing them silly with local titbits while she shopped.

The United Kingdom Government toward the latter-half of 1967 announced that drastic cuts in government expenditure, affecting both civil and defence expenditure, were to be brought forward by three years because of economic problems associated with the devaluation of the sterling pound. British forces were going to be withdrawn from the far east, (East Asia), with the exception of Hong Kong, by the end of 1971 instead of the mid-1970s. Strongest opposition to the British plans was expressed by the Singapore Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, in Singapore. In a radio broadcast on 8th January 1968 he said it was open to the republic to "...retaliate by withdrawing a substantial part of her sterling balances from London, inviting Japan to take over the dock-yard and placing shipping, insurance and banking services in countries other than Britain". He flew to London on 13th January 1968, and had discussions on the following day with the British Government, as well as Mr Edward Heath, the Leader of the Opposition, and a number of Labour and Conservative backbenchers. On his return to Singapore on 19th January he announced that Britain would leave behind a radar air defence centre, together with communications and reporting systems, and qualified staff to train local personnel; that an offer had been made of a squadron of "Lightning" fighters, and that Singapore was considering acquiring a missile system, possibly based on the "Rapier" or "Bloodhound".

The Singapore Prime Minister advised President Yusof bin Ishak to dissolve Parliament on 8th February 1968 to get a fresh mandate from the people. Under Article 50 of the Constitution a general election became necessary within three months but since there was no other way to solve the serious problem of the impending British cuts in defence expenditure, which also affected Singapore, only eight weeks would be set aside for polling. "Election Day" was to be on 13th April. There were fifty-eight seats in the new Parliament and fifty-one were immediately returned unopposed. Late on the evening of 13th April the results of the seven seats contested in the elections saw the PAP winning all. In a subsequent speech Lee Kuan Yew promised to "clean-up" the Singapore River..." one day in the future..." so that the waterway would become a symbol of pride of the city of Singapore. All the expatriates at Thomas' advertising agency scoffed at the Singapore leader's promise. How could a stagnant waterway containing pollution from the drains, indiscriminate hawkers and unthinking "bum-boat" operators who had been living their own way of life for "over a hundred years", be transformed into a sparkling body of water? But Thomas knew that Lee Kuan Yew never said *anything* that he didn't mean. He knew that Lee would keep his word one day.

Siddon noticed that he and an Eurasian woman who hailed from Malacca in West Malaysia, were the only two of their kind in the whole advertising agency. With the exception of the Malayalee office manager, Fernandez, the two Malay peons, a Sindhi production manager and his Tamil assistant, the remainder of the staff, some twenty-five in all, were Chinese. And the majority of them had negligible educational qualifications yet they had been in the "game", (advertising), for all the years that he had spent eeking out a living first for Merle Jordon, and then in the RAF. As far as he was concerned it was another indication of British, and even Australian, (because he was in an "Aussie" agency), favouritism of the Chinese and the other Asian races over the "mixed-bloods". Why did the Asian "Singaporean" speak of racial discrimination practised by the Whites against them when it was the Eurasian who ended up with the "poor-end" of the job-stick? The only two places where a majority of Eurasians had been employed by the British were the two colonial banks — the Chartered Bank and the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. The "others", especially the Chinese, should not have grudged the mixed races that "luck, since the "others" were well-placed in all the other better European companies, like advertising for instance, and their own respective communities' various companies to which the Eurasian was not welcomed. Thomas had never before "bitched" about employment "unfairness" but seeing that the Chinese

and Indians in his agency had been enjoying a "plush" life while he had struggled to change his destiny and that they had obviously ensured that their own respective kind were employed before those such as himself got work, made him very disgruntled.

His colleague in the creative department, a Chinese girl, had worked for a short period in a woman's magazine in Singapore before going to London for two years for secretarial training. She had returned to the island and had been "recommended" the copywriting job by her own "countrywoman". Within a month of his joining another London secretarial-school "graduate", a woman, quit in a huff, and he learned through the "office grapevine" that she had been the married English "boss's girlfriend, and had threatened to resign unless Thomas was fired and replaced by her cousin. (Was this how the Chinese "got on so well" with the Whites", through their own women? he thought to himself). But the English managing director had called her bluff and she had been forced to leave the company through loss of face.

A Chinese account executive of about Thomas' own age, named Alan Yung, took to cultivating him, passing helpful "hints" by way of blatant warnings of dire consequences if he ever got "caught" committing a "boo-boo" at work by the White "bosses", (three Australians and two Englishmen who had all married local Chinese girls), and he wondered why everyone seemed fearful of the "bosses" and yet seemed to want to work for them. He got caught up in inter-office gossip, agreeing that the Whites in all the advertising agencies in Singapore only used Caucasian models in their ads because they preferred to, and not because use of Whites endorsing products lent credibility to the claims of the companies marketing them. To himself Thomas hoped that one day in the future when the Chinese, (and only because they were in the majority), succeeded in the Whites' place, they wouldn't go the same "route" and use only Chinese or Chinese-looking models for advertising endorsement.

June Chen, his "wife", for no apparent reason began to suspect his fidelity even though he had never yet given her cause to think otherwise. Maybe, he thought, it was because he was now in an advertising agency and came in regular contact with the demanded-for attractive-looking girls who wanted to be models. But to his surprise she accused him of meeting Mariko, his Japanese wife on the sly because he hadn't yet divorced her and "probably" regretted it. He patiently explained, all over again, that he and Mariko were waiting for her to "qualify" for Singapore Citizenship through her marriage to him, and that they were waiting for the mandatory seven-year separation period before instituting proceedings without having to cite her adultery as a ground for divorce, because he had wanted to save his

children from future embarrassment. His Baba "wife" appeared to accept his explanation and Thomas breathed easier again. But he still wasn't too sure.

In mid-April the advertising agency's leading airline client requested the company to provide it a public relations consultancy service, and since Thomas was the only copywriter with a journalistic background, he was "transferred" to another room within the agency-premises to set up the new department. He became the agency's "public relations officer". It was a "promotion", he was told, but he was placed on a further six months probation "...to prove himself..." or lose his job. He silently boiled over at being placed in a position where he could become unemployed again if he wasn't successful but consoled himself that the new job-title and responsibility meant an increase in his income to one thousand dollars a month, an expense account, a company loan to buy a car and a promise of "professional training" in London when the "time was right". He was also a head of department, on par with the Whites, and he was the first local to assume such a position in the agency. June was ecstatic, it seemed as if her misgivings over his "kind" of work, and the late hours he kept, vanished overnight. She told him she would continue working until year's end and then would stay home to look after Kean Siew and Rahman full-time.

With the new promotion the Siddons' way of life began to transform. They could now afford a telephone. At work his expatriate colleagues began inviting him to join them in the evening, after work, for "drinkies" but he would only go on those days when he didn't attend "karate" training.

Mariko, his Japanese wife, called in early May to say that she had qualified for Singapore Citizenship and arranged with Thomas to meet her by the citizenship registration offices near the Singapore River on Empress Place. She became a citizen that day after he had produced their marriage certificate, she had signed the requisite forms, paid the citizenship registration fee and taken her oath of allegiance to Singapore. He had been slightly irritated by the Chinese-educated, (obviously a recent Nanyang University graduate, from her Sino-accent), registering clerk who had made some adverse comment about his racial origins in Mandarin-Chinese to her colleague seated next to her. It was not so much what she had said, as he didn't understand Mandarin, but more her tone and the side-long glances she kept giving Mariko and him, that gave him that impression.

The British Government on 30th May 1968 offered Singapore £50,000,000 sterling, over the following five years, to help the Republic overcome the economic effects caused by the rapid deployment of British forces from the island to the United Kingdom by 1971. A separate amount,



half that of Singapore's, was offered to Malaysia since the British withdrawal would not affect that country so adversely.

On 31st May 1968 Mr C.V. Devan Nair resigned his elected seat of Bungsar in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to return to Singapore. He had been one of several Malayan-born Singapore politicians who had "crossed over" to Malaysia before "Separation" in 1965, when Singapore was a part of Malaysia, to help found the Democratic Action Party of Malaysia, and who had remained as a "Malaysian" to take part in the political life there. Prior to his leaving Singapore Nair had first vacated his duly-elected seat in the Singapore Legislative Assembly to "return" to Malaya as a "Malaysian", and his Singapore-born Indian wife had stood in his place in the subsequent by-election and won his Singapore ward. She was still a PAP Member in the Singapore Parliament when her husband chose to return to the island. In an open-letter to his Bungsar constituents in Kuala Lumpur, he explained that he had to resign, apart from domestic commitments in Singapore, because his close personal links of friendship with the PAP Government had been and would be used by Malaysian Alliance politicians to confuse some Malaysians into believing that the DAP was a Singapore-controlled party. Devan Nair as well as several prominent members of Singapore's "inner-core" PAP stalwarts who were Malaya-born, had first come to Singapore during British Colonial times. He had been marked as a Communist by British intelligence, according to PAP publicity blurbs, but had since renounced all Communist leanings.

On the first day of his "new career" as a public relations consultant in his advertising agency, in June, Thomas was called upon to act as spokesman for the company because Alan Yung, the Chinese account executive who had befriended him when he had been newly-joined, had thrown himself off a Housing and Development Board block of flats in Aljunied Road, not far from where Siddon lived with his family. It eventually came out in the inquest that Yung had been depressed over his attractive fiancee, a Chinese girl, "carrying on" a clandestine affair with the English creative director of the international advertising agency where she worked as art director. Thomas' managing director had been reluctant to answer press inquiries and had fobbed the responsibility onto to him.

A fortnight later two young Chinese males joined the agency as trainee account executives. Siddon was taken aback at their envious, almost insolent attitude toward him, since he was their senior, both in job responsibility and service in the agency. Both of them had prior work experience in unrelated fields, one as a trainee accountant and the other as a car salesman, and had only been attracted to change occupations because

the positions advertised by the agency had held out the promise of being able to sit for the UK advertising exams which Thomas had taken on his own, years ago. The ex-car salesman kept boasting that his first-cousin was a senior "ad-rep" in "The Straits Times".

Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew posed the question of what it took to be a "Singaporean" and spelled it out at a reunion dinner of the St Andrew's Old Boys' Association on 7th September 1968. He said that all new countries faced the grave problem of identity for they invariably embraced more than one race or tribe within the boundaries which they had inherited from a colonial power. In Singapore, in the first place, he said, everyone didn't want to be "Singaporean", instead they wanted to be Malaysians. Then the idea was extended and everyone became Malaysians. But twenty-three months of Malaysia ended abruptly with everyone in Singapore becoming Singaporean.

By legal definition the "Singaporean" is a citizen of Singapore. Under the citizenship legislation there...(are)...various categories by which one became a citizen. In pre-Malaysia days a person born on the island automatically became a Singapore citizen...but...since then it had changed. Why was this so, he asked. Because there were so many non-citizens living and working in the Republic who might or might not belong, or would want to. The acid-test of those who were Singaporean was whether a person was so committed to Singapore he was prepared to stand up and fight for Singapore. The emotive definition, not a qualitative test of a Singaporean was: a person who either by birth or upbringing or residence in Singapore felt committed to upholding the society as it is — multiracial, tolerant, accommodating, forward-looking — and prepared to stake his life for the community. One of the reasons for Singapore's relative success was that there had been no pretence that there were no differences in ethnic, linguistic or religious pulls and loyalties. But, thought Thomas Siddon, it was all well-and-good that there were individuals who had been attracted to the island for differing reasons and who might want to become citizens but the "Singapore-born" was a *son of the soil* why was it that he did not have a *native-born right* to always retain his citizenship should he, for any reason give it up to live and work in another country, and then decide that 'home is best' and decide to return? What was the *difference* between a native-born and a citizen who had acquired his by an ability to "fulfil" pre-set conditions?

The White expatriates in Siddon's advertising agency on the following day after the Prime minister's speech which was reported in "The Straits Times", derisively observed that there were no "Singaporeans" — just a

collection of Chinese, Malays, Indians and Eurasians. It was too soon, they said, to begin regarding everyone born on the island as being part of a single nation. Because it was very apparent that none of the various communities on the island regarded the *other* communities within the island as being part of the same nation. There were too many conflicts and inter-racial jealousies. To himself Thomas felt that so long as his "place in the sun" was not taken away from him he would always regard himself as "Singaporean". He harked back to Lee Kuan Yew's words to a group of Nanyang University students on 12th February 1966 when he had said the descendants of the Chinese would be indentifiable from the other races within South East Asia a hundred years on, and had called on the Chinese to establish a "Chinese" multiracial society and "Chinese corner" in South-east Asia to ensure Chinese survival. Siddon reflected on the unfriendly attitude of the two newly-employed Chinese executives in the agency. It had been their obvious dislike of him, which he had been aware of, because he was not of their race, that they had been chagrined to discover that he was in a "better" position than they. That was what Lee Kuan Yew bred when he thought he spoke only to his own kind. Where did everyone get off thinking that Singapore was only for the Chinese just because they were in the majority?

The life-style of the Siddons, since Thomas' promotion, had changed dramatically. He had purchased a car with a company loan, drove it to work every morning and would park it in the parking-lot allotted to him as an executive of the agency. The family had also become used to weekend drives along Singapore's outlying roads in the rural districts to get to know their island better, and which invariably ended up in some well-known eating-spot. Siddon's favourite was a chicken-farm in Bukit Timah where he would settle into an easy-chair as the farmer's wife lovingly roasted two freshly-slaughtered fowl for the family to part-take of. It was a delightful feast of freshly-roasted chicken and boiled-rice, washed-down with ice-cold beer, while his boys gambolled about the farmyard. He could now "fearlessly" walk into any top international hotel or restaurant in the Orchard Road-Tanglin Road district to wine-and-dine his family and clients.

There was talk of developing a "tourist belt" of hotels, restaurants and shopping centres in the "metropolitan" Orchard Road area which already seemed to attract the foreign-visitor. Where once he had eaten at hawker-stalls and local coffeeshops, Thomas now ate "a little better" in the Chinese-imitation of the western-type cafe and restaurant. His conscience plagued him slightly that there were some islanders who still seemed unemployed and would not be able to afford the new life-style which he was enjoying,

and that there would soon be a whole new crowd out-of-work at the RAF and other British military bases as the British pulled out completely. He remembered that his mother worked at the RAF but eased his fears for her welfare, rationalising that she had only herself to think about ever since she had turned him out in 1956, when he had been sixteen, and that she would receive a gratuity when the base she worked at finally shut down.

Lim Yew Hock, a former chief minister of Singapore, who had disgraced himself while he was the Malaysian High Commissioner to Australia in 1966, resigned from the Malaysian government service in August 1968, and retired to Malacca. In future years he would again remarry, this time to a Muslim-Chinese girl, become Muslim himself, taking the name Omar, and work for the World Islamic Development Bank in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Diplomatic relations between Malaysia and the Philippines were suspended from July to September 1968 over the "dispute" of Sabah in East Malaysia. The Filipinos were still pressing their claims through "historical connections" via the former sultanate of Sulu which had become part of Philippine territory.

The British naval dockyard at Sembawang in the north of Singapore was formally handed over to the Singapore Government as a "gift" on 8th December 1968 by Mr Gerald Reynolds, the British Minister of Defence, (Administration), to Mr S. Rajaratnam, the Singapore Foreign Minister. Mr Rajaratnam, after formally accepting the transfer, handed the dockyard over to Mr Hon Sui Sen, the chairman of the Sembawang Shipyard, the Singapore Government company taking over the yard for commercial repair with the Swan Hunter International, (a subsidiary of the British shipbuilding and ship-repairing concern), as managing agents.

In the same month the Malayan National Liberation Front, (MNLF), the main Communist Party of Malaya underground satellite, was formed. It would prove to be the biggest threat posed by the Communists in Singapore for the next decade. It acquired the reputation among security forces as being the most active and militant of all the underground satellites of the outlawed CPM, and would chiefly be responsible for terrorist acts in the Republic.

On 30th January 1969 Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew spoke out against port workers and labour-gangs deliberately using "go-slow" tactics to work with contract-labour on the third late or "grave-yard" shift because it paid the best per hour. He stressed that Singapore was beginning to do well economically and that employment figures had gone upward but that did not mean that everyone could afford to slacken in productivity. With the support of the union he instructed the chairman of the Port of Singapore

Authority to discipline whole work-gangs by dismissals if necessary, where they were caught out engaged in such malpractices. They were "sabotaging" Singapore's rating as the fourth-largest, and one of the most-efficient ports in the world, he said. He considered such activities as "high treason".

On 6th February 1969, exactly 150 years after the founding of modern Singapore by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, the 133-year-old Singapore International Chamber of Commerce organised a banquet "to celebrate and commemorate" the historic occasion. The Prime Minister was the guest of honour. Mr R.C. Bennett, chairman of the ICC, in a toast to the memory of Raffles said that his most outstanding characteristic was his appreciation not only of the needs of his day, but also the possibilities of tomorrow. To an extraordinary degree he had grasped and shaped the opportunities of the future for Singapore. Mr Bennett then went on to say that Mr Lee Kuan Yew possessed the vision of what Singapore could be, to a sharper degree than anyone else "...who has since walked the island in the past 150 years". The Singapore Premier replied that he was flattered, if a little apprehensive, by the generous comparison of the qualities of Sir Stamford Raffles with the attributes he was supposed to have. *For no judgement could be fair and as final, or as cruel as that of history,* he said.

"Second-language" study had been introduced into Singapore schools when Thomas Siddon was in school, (in 1954, during colonial times), though most pupils of the day had not made any real attempt to "come to grips" with the learning of another language. In 1969, in the "modern era", the PAP Government made an effort, and stressed the importance of citizens getting to know at least one "second" language apart from their mother-tongue. For the Chinese, Malays and Tamils the obvious choice was the learning of English. For the Eurasian, Siddon felt that the Government had not really thought the situation out through. He was first-descent English-Eurasian and *his language* was English, so his children could choose to learn to speak Malay, Mandarin-Chinese or Tamil. But *not all* Eurasians were of English-descent, a majority were Malacca-Portuguese whose parents or grandparents came originally from Malacca, whose language was Malacca-Portuguese patois, and there were Dutch-descent Eurasians as well as a smaller group of French and German Eurasians. (Though the other communities could not tell the *difference* ). But being born and bred in Singapore and mixing with the other Eurasians, *everyone* within the *Eurasian Community* spoke a certain-kind of "Singapore-English" *peculiar* to the community as a whole, but which was not "Singlish" because they spoke their English grammatically, except that their sentences would be interspersed with Malay, sometimes with Chinese

words, and they *always* ended their sentences with the word *not?* in a question-mark. Siddon "steered" his children toward learning Malay because, he said, it was "easier" since they could learn to read and write it in its Romanised form, whereas the other two — Mandarin Chinese and Tamil — had their own specific scripts which one had to "wrestle" with while memorising the sounds of the respective two languages. He explained as well, that it was "right" that they learned to speak Malay because their paternal grandmother, Luci Mansvelt, was of Dutch-Portuguese-Malay descent. And Malay was the *lingua-franca* of the region, including Singapore, and it was used in varying forms in Malaysia and Indonesia. Siddon still upheld the multiracial ideal and hoped that his view of this concept was similar to that of Lee Kuan Yew and his followers. Thomas was "married" to a Chinese *Baba-Nyonya* and she had introduced her "native-born" or *peranakan*, (Malaya-born), lifestyle to their home. His boys enjoyed the subtle blend of Malay spices merged with Chinese-style dishes that she prepared for them. June was also teaching them some of the courtesies of her culture, to "call", (invite) him or her first to "join" them in their meals *before* they partook of it themselves, and to even be silent and not talk-back in defence whenever they had a telling-off from either him or her for something they had done or had forgotten to do.

In May while Lee Kuan Yew was in England, the Malaysian prime minister, Tengku Abdul Rahman on 5th May, in the midst of election campaigning alleged that the People's Action Party was trying to destroy Malaysia, and that it was "...pouring in money to help opposition parties..." in his country. He said that the Singapore Government was "...working hand-in-glove with traitors..." of Malaysia bent upon destroying the Malays. A spokesman accompanying the Singapore leader in Britain said that the suggestion was too extravagant for any comment, and to emphasize Lee Kuan Yew's disinterest in destroying the Malays of Malaysia, the spokesman added that the Singapore Prime Minister would be out of the region until after the impending Malaysian elections and wouldn't return to Singapore until 20th May, long after the Malaysian elections were over.

The May 1969 Malaysian elections were charged with emotion since they hinged upon the political position of the non-Malays and the fate of their languages and cultures. The election-results came as shock. The ruling Alliance coalition of Tengku Abdul Rahman won but their overall vote tally had fallen by ten percent, depriving them of their two-thirds majority in Parliament. The Party's campaign relied on its past record and achievements, projecting itself as the only party capable of maintaining secular, multiracial government. The opposition's colours were as varied as the "forces" they

paid obeisance to. To the right, the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party stood for strengthening Islam and promoting Malay interests and culture. To the left, the Gerakan Party adopted a platform of social reform, economic progress and the submerging of communal issues. The People's Progressive Party and the Democratic Action Party called for racial equality, for English, Chinese and Tamil to be recognised as official languages alongside Malay, and for equal treatment for all four education streams.

The United Malays National Organisation, the main force in the Alliance coalition, lost some ground to the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party in north Malaya, (West Malaysia), while the Malayan Chinese Association, the other party in the "national" coalition, lost half its parliamentary seats to radical rivals and withdrew from the Malaysian cabinet and from State executive councils. (It would seem as if Lee Kuan Yew's prophetic warning of 28th May 1965, of the 'haves' and have-nots' within the different communities of the country, where one community was seen to be benefiting "more" than the other races, by "special privileges", would lead to "problems", made in Malaysian Parliament when Singapore still a part of Malaysia, had come to pass — but no dared predict the resultant aftermath.).

Victorious opposition rallies provoked Malay counter-demonstrations which led to violence in Kuala Lumpur, the Malaysian capital, from 13th May. In two days of rioting hundreds, mainly non-Malays, were killed, with widespread devastation of property. The army was called in and the Malaysian government declared a state of national emergency, suspended the constitution, disbanded parliament, and called off the elections in Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia which had been scheduled for late May.

The rioting and bloodshed exposed the deep-seated tensions within Malaysian society and came as a personal blow to Tengku Abdul Rahman, long-regarded as the father-figure and "architect" of Malaysian independence. But the Malay prince was quick to recognise that the government had to satisfy the aspirations and still the fears of the indigenous Malay masses, that they would not "lose out" to the Chinese and Indian "new-comers" to *their* native-land. There was a dramatic change in the direction of state policy based upon ideology and a new economic policy in which the government took a more positive role in re-developing the society with the aim of improving the condition of the Malays rapidly while at the same time maintaining national unity and tolerance in an attempt to eliminate racial differences within the next generation. A National Operations Council, most members of whom were Malays, took over the Malaysian government.

Lee Kuan Yew was in Washington for talks with President Nixon when the riots broke out in Kuala Lumpur. He told the press in the United States that he was concerned over the reports of the communal clashes in West Malaysia.

"Malaysian is our closest neighbour, her well-being or otherwise must effect us all in Singapore," he said.

On 20th May 1969, when he returned to Singapore, a Malay had been shot and killed by a group of Chinese secret society thugs. Back at his old school, Raffles Institution, on 8th June, on Speech Day, he spoke out:

"...We talk about goodwill, love, fraternity in one community...do not take the law into...(your own)...hands...those who take the law into their own hands...(because they)...believe that for reasons of sentiment, (here the Prime Minister was referring to ethnic-Chinese in Singapore seeking "revenge" for the deaths of fellow-Chinese in Malaysia during the communal clashes there), they ought to beat another person because of his race...is a very foolish thing to do in Singapore...(they)...will be smacked down firmly and where evidence justifies it, a criminal prosecution will go right through to the end..."

It was an outright warning to the would-be Chinese communalists to refrain from further acts of violence against the Malay community in Singapore. He was brooking no nonsense.

The extent of the communal "trauma" in Malaysia sank deep into Siddon's consciousness. He weighed the words of his Prime Minister and decided that the Singapore leader really conceived of a multiracial society that was similar to the one in his own thoughts, that being "tolerant" did not mean a "Chinese" tolerant society. The Eurasian's belief in a truly "Singapore" society was a living, dynamic and sincerely-felt force and not the lip-service he suspected everyone else he had come across in his short life, of having. Reading the premier's comments in "The Straits Times" on 21st May, convinced him of the sincerity of the politician's words, and he put aside all his personal misgivings of the man's motives and "chucked-in" his "two-cents-worth" toward the plural society the Government seemed intent on developing on his island-home.

When at the office he tried talking about the recent racial clashes in Kuala Lumpur an ethnic-Chinese female colleague, to his shocked amazement unleashed a tirade of hysterical abuse, coupled with a shocking, (to him), outburst of male-type expletives directed at the Malay race in general, reminding him resoundingly that hers was the generic outlook of her race toward the Malay throughout the entire Malay region. But Siddon had made up his mind to "co-operate" and co-operate he would, even



though there were still Chinese, like the woman in his agency, who thought only as Chinese, with Sino emotions. He began to hear stories of Eurasians departing the island to settle in Australia, gaining entry into that country purely on their White racial backgrounds but he pushed such thoughts for himself and his family to the far corners of his mind. He hadn't yet forgotten his vainly-attempted trip as a young man in 1961 to "emigrate" to England and how he had failed, and that he had decided to believe in Lee Kuan Yew.

The Singapore Finance Ministry on 21st May 1969 announced that the Singapore branch of the Bank of China was being suspended with immediate effect from the clearing house. No other bank in Singapore was to honour cheques drawn on the bank, while its customers could only withdraw monies at the bank itself. The Government's actions arose directly from a court judgement on 15th May when the bank, which had not attended the court hearings, was convicted of failing to maintain the legal minimum of 20 percent to total deposits in liquid assets. A Government statement said that by that action, the Bank of China, (with headquarters in Beijing), "...regards itself as exempt from the laws of the Republic of Singapore", and accused it of claiming "extra-territorial rights which foreign business enjoyed before World War Two in certain treaty ports in China".

Since the Government's intentions had become known a few days earlier, the bank claimed to have acquired thousands of new customers. The Singapore Finance Ministry admitted on 21st May that "a large number of new accounts" had been opened at the bank, but claimed that the deposits averaged only five to ten Singapore dollars and that most of the new deposits were by teenagers. In a further move by the Government on 27th May, the Bank of China's account with the clearing house was debited with \$128,000, representing the amount of the fine imposed on the bank by the court on 15th May but which the bank had refused to pay. Government sources said that it, (the Government), had already obtained the money, having access to the bank's funds.

New regulations aimed at limiting the Bank of China's activities in financing Chinese imports into Singapore were promulgated on 27th May, and required all importers to obtain a special licence before importing goods from Communist countries. The step was in reply to a Peking, (Beijing), announcement that only the Singapore branch of the Bank of China could issue letters of credit for the import of goods from mainland China — described by the Singapore Finance Ministry as "a blatant attempt to monopolise the financing trade".

It appeared to Thomas that the Singapore Government was making it clear to the other ethnic communities on the island that there would be no

"favoured dealings" with China, just because of the island-republic's ethnic-Chinese majority, which, to him, was a significant gesture.

June Chen, Thomas' "wife", announced proudly that she was expecting his child, their first. The young executive and proud father-to-be had already made up his mind that all his children, irrespective of who their mothers were, would be taught to regard one another as full-brothers, or sister, as it might turn out to be, in the case of June's child from him.

Considerable interest was generated in the republic when the Government announced its intention to abolish the jury system in the law courts of the island. The Prime Minister, a practising and successful lawyer before he had ventured into politics, spoke on the issue in Parliament on 12th June. He stressed that the business of Government was to ensure that the rule of law must be seen to prevail and not thwarted. That the administration of justice had to be carried out fairly and justly, and that the law *did take its course*. If, he added, three High Court judges could not decide the question of fact better than seven random jurymen, then grievous harm was being done everyday. The Law abolishing the jury system in Singapore was eventually passed in the country in early 1970. From that day two judges would decide murder cases.

Speaking mainly in Malay at a PAP branch meeting on 22nd May 1969, Lee Kuan Yew said it was necessary, particularly after the recent racial disturbances in May and June, to reaffirm that the Singapore Government "...will, and must, ensure security and fair play to all, regardless of race, religion or language..." That if the Government had not "...acted with complete impartiality, but had allowed some vicious hooligans and gangsters of ethnic-Chinese descent, for their own reasons, to get away with bullying and murdering some Malays, because Malays are a minority in Singapore, then today it would have become a different Singapore.

"We meet tonight in a secure and relaxed atmosphere because people of all ethnic groups understand that the rule of law will be upheld. It will protect you, whether you are *Malay, Indian, Ceylonese, Eurasian or Chinese*...we in Singapore will continue on the path of sanity, a fair deal for everyone, and a fair share for all..."

Siddon's public relations activity concentrated on his maintaining a good working relationship with the reporters and editors of the main news media in the four main languages of Singapore — English, Mandarin-Chinese, Malay and Tamil — so that he could prevail on them to utilise his news releases whenever he had cause to obtain publicity for his ad agency's clients. In order to do this he found himself frequenting the newsrooms of the English-language "The Straits Times" and the "Malay Mail"; the then

two major Chinese-language dailies, the "Nanyang Siang Pau" and the "Sin Chew Jit Poh", (which have since closed down), the Malay-language "Berita Harian" and the Tamil-language "Tamil Murasu", almost every other day during the work-week, just to be on a "good-buddy" basis with key journalists.

In the Chinese newspapers' respective offices and print-shops, all the workers — reporters, cameramen, printers, typesetters and executives — were ethnic-Chinese except for the Indian janitors and the Malay company drivers for the various vehicles which were mainly used for ferrying reporters to work-assignments. This seemed logical to Thomas since the two papers dealt in the Chinese language for a Chinese readership. But at "The Straits Times" and the "Malay Mail", both papers belonging to the same organisation, (which was started by British-interests over a hundred years ago), there were Eurasians of various European origins, though on their maternal-side more than a majority were part-Malay through their Malacca-Portuguese mothers who had either come from the former sea-town themselves or whose parents had come to Singapore to seek "greener pastures". These Eurasians could speak the sixteenth-century Portuguese-Malay patois of Malacca, (though they were shy to admit it in public), but English was still "natural" since it was the language of the former British colonisers of both Singapore and Malacca, learnt in school, and as these Eurasians themselves were "European-oriented" it was the language spoken at home and was regarded as the mother-tongue. There were Indians and Ceylonese as well as "Anglo-Indians", (the Eurasian of India), and "Ceylon Burghers", (the Eurasian of Sri Lanka) — all of whom spoke English fluently. Thomas also took note that *all* — Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian — spoke in the ubiquitous *Sino-accent peculiar* to the island and which no one seemed to realise that they had. At "The Straits Times" offices the Eurasian public relations consultant also came across Chinese trainee-reporters fresh from the University of Singapore, with their "BAs", who spoke in the familiar pidgen everyone now euphemistically termed "Singlish", and which jarred his ears. He wondered to himself how they had come to be employed in an English-language newspaper, which it was logical to assume, would require that all employees who wrote in the English language would be able to at least speak and write grammatical English. Then he grew aware of the several ethnic-English "senior subs", employed from Britain, who would "rehash" all submitted stories into readable English "prose". What was the use of someone such as he being able to write good idiomatic "style" when one could be an "unfluent" Asian with a university degree, and still work in an English-language newspaper

as a reporter, whose badly-written stories would be corrected and "polished-up" by English "native-speakers", as the Government had described the Englishmen?

History is valuable as a guide to the future," declared Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew on 9th August, (National Day), "it provides insights into nature and potential of various peoples, because both the innate qualities and the cultural characteristics of a people do not change easily or quickly. A hundred and fifty years ago Raffles could not have prophesied what Singapore would be today, an independent nation-state, a busy centre of trade, servicing and manufacturing. But he, (Raffles), had foresight and knew the value of Singapore's strategic location for trade and communication...he attracted the adventurers, the resourceful and the industrious, in less than three years a few thousand traders had left Bencoolen, (where Raffles was the governor and the town was a British colony in what today is Indonesia), Malacca and Penang, (both British colonies then, as well), to establish their businesses in Singapore...the ingredients for success were present almost from the beginning...Four great civilisations have met in confluence here. The British, Malay, Indian and Chinese came and they built a metropolis out of a fishing village, (it was a pirates' lair), near the equator. Eventually, perhaps after several generations, a separate, distinct Singapore identity will emerge in which the differences of race, culture and religion will be more than made up by similarities in values, attitudes, and a feeling of belonging to one whole..." Thomas Siddon mentally included his English grandfather who had come to Singapore in 1890 to seek his fortune, as one of the European pioneers of his island. His own links with Singapore, through his grandfather, spanned two generations. He thought about Lee's hopes that a separate, distinct *Singapore identity* could evolve but would it be a Sino identity, he asked himself?

The last major Chinese triad society "gang-clash" on Singapore-streets took place in front of the former "Odeon Cinema" in North Bridge Road between the "Skeleton Tong" (*Tze-tong*), and the "White Golden Dragon Tong" on 24th October 1969. Two gangsters were killed while several secret society members who had survived the bloody conflict escaped to Europe. Their plan was to set up a gang-nucleus in the Scandinavian countries in preparation for the penetration of London's "chinatown" in Gerrard Street, Soho, eventually.

In a plea for gracious living Lee Kuan Yew in a public speech on 25th October said that while people were busy striving to achieve greater economic growth to offset the loss of British military expenditure, (due to

the impending British pullout), which would be reduced to zero in 1972, and to create more rewarding jobs, sight must not be lost of social and cultural goals that were nearly as important. The agency "boys" in Thomas' company "jumped" on the PM's words, selling his gracious living "line" to their clients as a creative approach to marketing their products. Siddon was sure that the Singapore leader would never realise that his frequent calls to the nation to take heed of a specific area of endeavour or a "problem", would become grist for advertising agency creative heads' "advertising-mills".

The Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, of ASEAN, held their meeting at the Cameron Highlands, Malaysia, from 16th to 18th December 1969. The function was attended by Mr Tran Van Lam, the South Vietnamese Foreign Minister, as an observer. The admission of South Vietnam as a member of ASEAN was, however, opposed by Mr S. Rajaratnam, the Singapore Foreign Minister. Malaysia and the Philippines agreed to resume diplomatic relations which had been suspended between July and November 1969 as a result of the two countries' dispute over territorial claims over Sabah in East Malaysia by the Philippines. (In 1762 a British fleet under the command of a Sir William Draper had captured Manila from the Spaniards and found the Sultan of Sulu imprisoned there. The British freed him and restored him to his throne and in gratitude he gave them Balembangan, an island north of Borneo, and a section of the northern coast of Borneo. All of this was ceded to the British East India Company. As the East India Company had no outpost in the Far East at that time, it could not take immediate possession of the land. It took years of persuasion by one Alexander Dalrymple, one of the company's officers who had been instrumental in securing the cession, to secure sufficient funding, and in 1768 the East India Company's court of directors gave orders to Bombay to send an armed vessel to take possession of the island and the adjoining land. Dalrymple's demands for remuneration to be the administrator of the new outpost were considered exorbitant, and following a wrangle he was dismissed from the company's service. One John Herbert was selected to head the settlement. He took his time travelling from England to Balembangan and conducted much personal trade in opium on the way, arriving in the territory in December 1773. But by this time the sultan had passed away and his successor was pro-Spanish. The atmosphere of gratitude to the English had vanished. Although Herbert invited the Sulus to settle on his island he treated them harshly and he committed the greatest error when he put Datu Tating, the brother of the reigning sultan, into the stockade for misbehaviour. On his release Tating, his pride irretrievably damaged, left the island for neighbouring Banggi

where he and his cousin, Dacula, planned a revenge raid on Balembangan. In the ensuing fighting Herbert managed to slip away, made quickly for the brig *Endeavour*, and escaped. The outpost of Balembangan was no more, with the total loss in goods, gold and silver estimated at £500,000 but Herbert had somehow managed to make his way to South Africa even though orders were issued for his arrest. And that was the end of Balembangan.).

In the 29th December 1969 Parliamentary debate on the Abortion Bill which the Government was seeking to pass, the Prime Minister said that in all societies there were the more intelligent and the less intelligent. Quoting a Professor Richard Lyon of the Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin, he said that geneticists had come to the conclusion that *intelligence was principally determined by heredity*.

"Until such time when moral inhibitions disappear and legislative and administrative measures can be taken to regulate the size of families, we must try to induce people to limit their families and give their children a better chance...every person, genius or moron, has a right to reproduce himself, so we assume a married pair will want to be allowed two children to replace them...In Singapore we will still allow three for good measure. Beyond three...the costs of subsidized housing, socialized medicine and free education should be transferred to the parents..."

Thomas knew that the new measure to control the sizes of families was being wielded with the "soft" big stick. Those who had more than the mandatory three kids would lose the benefits of free education and hospitalization, and subsidized housing.

A Presidential Council was set up by the Constitution (Amendment) Act 1969, to ensure that Parliament did not pass any Bill that would discriminate against any racial or religious group. The Council also had to examine most Bills passed by Parliament before being sent for the President's assent. The exceptions were the Money Bills, Urgent Bills deemed to be so by the Prime Minister, and Bills affecting defence and security or which concerned "public safety, peace or good order". In all the years since the inception of the Presidential Council it has *never* given an adverse report on any Bill sent to it.

The start of 1970 saw Thomas personal esteem sink low when he realised how he *really* was regarded by his Caucasian "bosses" in the agency. An Australian hitch-hiker named Saul Dwight was taken on as joint-head of his public relations department. Siddon was sore because he had built it up from scratch, increasing manpower by a secretary and a trainee solely on the amount of business he had "drummed-up" ever since

first being placed on a second six-month probationary period to "prove" himself, some three years previously. And here was this hitch-hiker "walking in" without having to "prove" himself! It was quietly pointed out by a Chinese colleague that his was the only department within the agency without a White, until Saul arrived.

He resignedly accepted the change in the status quo though he was doubly mad when he subsequently discovered that his new "colleague" really hadn't any experience in public relations. He had once been, for a short spell, a junior advertising copywriter in a Melbourne advertising agency before going on a two-year "jaunt" to London. He had only stopped in Singapore because his father had set up a branch of his Melbourne company on the island and had written him of the "marvellous" job opportunities in Singapore and that he knew a "Straits Times" advertising senior-rep who would be able to put him in touch "with the right people" in the "advertising game" in Singapore. On his further delving, Thomas discovered that his Chinese trainee account executive colleague's cousin who worked for "The Straits Times" had recommended Saul to his Australian general manager. He had been diddled by two Australians working in concert, Thomas thought.

Ken Siew and Rahman, his two sons from Mariko, his Japanese wife, were now grown lads and June was due to have his first child in February. Thomas and June had made arrangements for her to be admitted into a private nursing home since they now could afford it. June delivered their baby, a boy on 28th February, and they named him Chong-lok, after her diplomat father, and since it was still the Chinese New Year season and she felt "Chinese". The prime minister, in the meantime, had spoken out against the indiscriminate firing of fire-crackers during the festive period which had led to large-scale fires all over the island, massive conflagration of property and loss of lives. It was madness, he said, that "...people who could have been productive for ten, twenty or thirty years..." had died for no rhyme or reason. He warned the public to change their foolhardy ways and promised that the Government would pass legislation banning the firing of fire-crackers at any time.

Despite his disgruntlement at having a rival to contend with Thomas was mollified when his airline client indicated that he was to go to London in June that year for a three-month course on airline public relations. But the trip had come at an inopportune time because he was in the midst of intensive-training at his "karate" class, preparatory to taking part in his first-ever "karate" contest since becoming a black belt. Nevertheless his Japanese

"karate" instructor assured him of his standard of proficiency and that he would be able to regain his "form" in good time on his return to Singapore in September. There would still be sixty days left before the actual competition in November. June, Kean Siew, Rahman and Chong-lok, a babe-in-arms, went to the Paya Lebar International Airport to see him off. Revealing a little of his English upbringing he promised his boys to bring them back "genuine" English yo-yos carved from wood, and they curiously looked forward to his return with the, to them, strange new toys.

By the time he returned from London in September Thomas had decided to scout around for another job, the first opportunity he got. He wouldn't work for a company that had simply employed a White just for the sake of having one to head a department. He had earned his position in the agency by "sweat" and he didn't see the taking on of a "half-baked" expatriate just because he happened to be Caucasian. It smacked of the "old colonial days" when Singapore had been British. He was more that half-White and had been raised as one as a child, and he resented being made to feel inferior thrust upon him. He had never been cowed by Whites in his life and he wouldn't accept the shoddy treatment lying down.

New hotels were being developed on the island in anticipation of the "tourist-boom" just round the corner, which was also happening all over the world. The Government was encouraging developers to build an ever-increasing number of luxury hotels so as to attract the more-affluent traveller, apart from those who travelled on a budget. Thomas knew that he stood more than an even chance of landing a position in one of the newer "international class" hotels because he had the "right" work background and had established himself in his field. He initiated discreet inquiries and was rewarded with his first interview in early September. After a series of protracted meetings over seven days with his potential employers he was told to report for work in November. It was one of Singapore's premier hotels and he would be fifth in line in the management hierarchy, with a "grand" salary of two thousand dollars a month. His only regret was that he would be missing the opportunity to participate in the inaugural national "karate" contest, which was also being staged that month. He was going to be too busy organising the hotel's grand opening in the following year and would be too preoccupied with that to spend time in training.

Tengku Abdul Rahman, the prime minister of Malaysia, the man who had negotiated the independence for Malaya from Britain, retired from politics in September 1970. He was succeeded by his deputy, Tun Abdul Razak.



On 23rd December 1970 the Republic of Singapore suffered the loss of President Yusof bin Ishak, 60, who passed away at dawn. During his 11-year term of office he had been both liked and respected by all Singaporeans. Over 7,000 citizens filed past City Hall, in front of the Padang, to pay their last respects during the final four hours before he was buried with full state honours at the Kranji National Cemetery.

The Malayan National Liberation Front, (MNLF), the main Communist Party of Malaya underground satellite formed in 1968, planted a booby-trap bomb at Changi, the long-traditional "home" of scores of British service families. It killed a six-year-old schoolgirl called Katty Salter. It seemed as if the underground group was making a last desperate bid to hit out at the departing Brits before they were gone forever, as an occupying colonial force, after the British pullout. A CPM flag and MNLF pamphlets commemorating the 40th anniversary of the outlawed CPM were found nearby.

## Taking Stock

### Chapter 13

Thomas Siddon's new public relations job began full-pace from the moment he joined the American-managed 'international-class' hotel. Apart from his 'normal' duties of drumming up adequate media publicity for the hotel, locally and internationally, and taking care of the specific wants or problems of staying-in guests, it was also his responsibility to assist in selling its various attractions to specific relevant groups as well as make the "island-crowd", meaning the Singapore-population, aware of *its* role in establishing Singapore as an attractive tourist stopover in the minds of holidaying-visitors once they had arrived on the island, to complement the Government's own promotional efforts by ensuring that the media understood what he was attempting to do and thus convey this through their coverage of the hotel's activities.

It had been during the series of long, drawn-out interviews in the previous year with his then potential American "bosses" that Siddon had learned that the hotel, which was in Orange Grove Road, was owned by a Chinese family long-entrenched in the mercantile trade in Malaysia, Singapore and the rest of South-east Asia. Hearing the family's surname for the first time, when his immediate American "boss", the marketing director, told him, Siddon recognised it as one regarded by the region's "Straits Chinese" in the know, as being a "Riau Hakka-Chinese" name. The family had had its start in Singapore, importing and selling market-produce in Carpenter Street, on the fringe of chinatown, after 1819, but its *true* beginnings were in the *Old Johor Sultanate* in the Riau Archipelago where

the family's "most important" ancestor to have arrived in *the Malays* had eventually gone to after the original one from China had first come to the *Malay World* in the 1300s with *Kublai Khan's* invading Chinese army which had been defeated by the forces of the Javanese Majapahit Empire. The vanquished Chinese left behind became the coolie-slaves of Malay royalty and soon learned of the wealth of the "south seas". Subsequently, after this period, many other Chinese from Imperial China chose to come to *the Malays* as *coolies* to make their fortune, rather than live in abject-poverty back home. The *most important ancestor* of the Riau Hakka-Chinese family whose descendants became the owners and developers of the hotel Siddon was working in, after his arrival in the Malays, chose the *Old Johor Sultanate* at Riau-Lingga to make his fortune, first as a coolie for the Malay royalty of the sultanate and, after a period of time growing wealthy himself through thriftiness and being astute in investments. And because of his generous support of the sultanate's Malay ruler's various "projects", earned the patronage of *Temenggong Daeng Abdul Rahman*, the original temenggong who had been instrumental in aiding Stamford Raffles establish a British Station on the Island of Singapore in 1819. So when *Temenggong Abu Bakar*, the grandson of the late *Temenggong Daeng Abdul Rahman*, inherited "Johor", meaning the state at the tip of the Malay peninsula, from his own father, *Temenggong Ibrahim*, in 1866, it was this original Hakka-Chinese ancestor of the *Old Johor*, (Riau) Court, now grown old, who followed *Temenggong Abu Bakar* to Johor, (on the Malay peninsula), from Singapore where the family had already established its mercantile trade, to help the Malay ruler open up his new state because *his connection* with *Temenggong Abu Bakar* had its roots in *Old Johor in Riau-Lingga*.

In the modern era of Siddon's time, though this Chinese family didn't have the necessary "know-how" of hotel-keeping, it did have a surfeit of the vital "Vitamin M" — money — than it knew what to do with, and the eldest son already a magnate, decided to invest a little of it in the hotel-industry. Thomas had been told that the family's eventual plan was to replace all "key" foreign staff with their *own*, and, as a first step, a younger daughter was studying hotel-keeping and marketing in Hawaii. Siddon had felt a twinge of unease, hearing that, because he understood what *their own* meant — the immediate family-members and their own ethnic-crowd, which would mean that he too, one day, would become 'expendable'.

But that would be in the future, in the meantime his first priority was planning and organising the hotel-opening, for which he had been employed in the first place. He willed himself to cast aside his personal misgivings about the future for *his kind*, (the Eurasian) in Singapore, and concentrated

on the task at hand — marketing and promoting the hotel locally and internationally.

The slated date of the hotel's grand-opening had been fixed for April 1971 but work to get the travel-trade, tourists, and the general public who would become the first users of the hotel's public facilities, aware, had to commence immediately. There were other international-type hotels springing up in the Orchard Road "tourist belt" as well, and it was his task to ensure that he obtained the better, and lion's share of media publicity for his hotel.

Dr Benjamin Sheares, an Eurasian, and a former Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the former University of Malaya, (in Singapore, which had been re-named the University of Singapore after the "Separation" of 1965), was installed as the island-republic's second President on 2nd January 1971 to succeed the late President Yusof. He was married to a Chinese.

Singapore's burgeoning economy, the result of a fillip through rapid industrialisation — a stroke of genius by Dr Goh Keng Swee, the Finance Minister, who had set up low-cost, manpower-heavy industries at Jurong, — was enhanced by liberal advantages allowed to foreign concerns to set up base on the island. Its large trading deficit was more than compensated for by receipts from sources other than trade, and the currency was stable. Introduction at the end of 1968 of an Asian Currency Unit, (ACU), similar to the Eurodollar, with a market restricted to US\$3,000 million, was designed to make the island-republic the foremost banking centre in South-east Asia. Its recognition as a "safe" place for foreigners to reside and do business in was further boosted by its being chosen as one of the "rest and recreation" centres in Asia for US servicemen involved in the Vietnam War. In fact American military personnel — soldiers, sailors and airmen — had been "holidaying" on the island since 1969. There was talk though of "Vietnam Rose", the hybrid strain of venereal disease, becoming prevalent via the presence of the visiting Yanks. Even *decent* women who had fallen for the blonde, blue-eyed "GIs" and promised marriage which never materialised, became unwitting carriers.

Under the strong leadership of Lee Kuan Yew and his People's Action Party Government, the island's status within South-east Asia was being acknowledged by both friend and foe. The Government-promise to transform the country into an off-shore financial centre in the region had already seen well-known international banking institutions being set up. Quiet Shenton Way, then a traffic "backwater" for the Telok Ayer Basin's cargo-lorries which conveyed the goods off-loaded by the basin's flotilla of barges and launches from the steamers anchored in the "Outer Roads" beyond the

Mole, which could clearly be seen from the Clifford Pier, was being earmarked for transformation into the island's "Wall Street". Though most Singapore-islanders, and foreign businessmen working in the republic, referred to it as such, tongue-in-cheek. Nobody could yet envision what Shenton Way would become a relative short way into the future.

When the first British Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference to be held in Asia was staged at Singapore from 14th to 22nd January 1971, the republic came under the scrutiny of leading international political journalists from the major news media who had come to cover the event and size-up Lee Kuan Yew up close. A sizeable cosmopolitan "colony" of foreign journalists and business investors sprang up almost overnight, transforming the island into an international metropolis. The island's own business community, especially those in the tourism industry, suddenly awakened to the beneficial implications of attracting foreigners to Singapore as holiday-makers. (There were those, of course, who derided the tourism idea and its "repercussions" — prostitution, touting, inflated prices and the temptation of the population to live beyond its means once exposed to the life-styles of affluent foreigners, and endeavouring to emulate them.). Sex in Asia has always been a lure and even Singaporean executives, already showing off new-found affluence, were boasting of "sex-trips" to Taiwan and southern Thailand while pretending similar goings-on never happened on their island. In fact social escort agencies, fronts for thinly-disguised prostitution-dens, were already sprouting up along the Orchard Road-strip, the Government's designated "tourist-belt".

Realisation nevertheless hit home that a high-powered meeting like the Commonwealth Heads of Government, with 32 presidents, prime ministers and representatives of heads of governments making decisions in one tiny corner of the globe, could do much for the nation hosting it. The resultant publicity "triggered" interest in that country and brought in its wake potential new business opportunities.

News that Dr Milton Obote, the head of Uganda, who had attended the conference and remained in Singapore for a few days afterwards, had been deposed on 25th January 1971 by a Major-General Idi Amin of the Ugandan Army, quietly filtered through the pages of "The Straits Times" even though the BBC had already announced it in its regular news broadcasts. To Thomas Siddon "The Straits Times" coverage seemed subdued, as if an "invisible" instruction had been issued to play-down the political "incident". It struck him then that the Singapore Government *did* control the local press. Had he been wearing blinkers all his life before this realisation hit home?

He was very conscious of the envy coming his way from friends and acquaintances because of his new, "glamorous" job in the hotel. It seemed that everyone he knew was making out that it was more than what it seemed. Just because the media publicity he had drummed up for the hotel had created a wondrous image for it in everyone's mind and *everybody* was under the impression that he had "arrived". Not a single person of the envious crowd would ever dream that he was in fact facing "turbulence", and that this emanated from "high places". This hit home, for him, when his immediate American superior, the marketing director, in early March, let slip that the Johore-Chinese chairman of the company which owned majority shares in the hotel, had queried his being taken on as the public relations manager instead of an ethnic-Chinese. To Siddon it was the first glimmer that racism did exist on his island and that it had only manifest itself for him because of the "category" of work he had "risen" to. Previously, when he had been a "mere" public relations manager in an advertising agency he hadn't been "noticeable" but his new job in the glamorous hotel had caused *everyone*, it seemed, to behave as if he had risen above himself. It was especially disturbing because he read it as the first manifestation of bias because he was Eurasian. But he was local-born, supposedly one of the *local crowd*, wasn't he?

Several days later the same American "boss" told him that a couple of Chinese travel agents who had called on him to discuss potential business, had *actually* complained about Thomas' character, and even queried his suitability for such a "prestigious" job! They had intimated that he had been mixed up in the Chinese secret societies when young, had "even" been a "mere" policeman before, and still lived in a Housing and Development Board flat. (Many Singaporeans then were "shy" to acknowledge that they lived in a government-built flat, as if it were something to be ashamed of.) Thomas decided not to grace the allegations with an acknowledgement or denial.

The hotel's official opening was a gala event attended by Singaporean and Malaysian government ministers, attesting to the "clout" the owners had in both territories. It was amazing for Siddon to witness the lengths to which VIP "gatecrashers" would go just to gain entry to the party. He had never imagined the envy prevalent in the tone of the high-and-mighty who had been "inadvertently" left out. June Chen, his "wife", in the meantime, had grown suspicious of him again because the count-down to the hotel's grand opening had taken him away from home for long hours. Home-life had become strained and their conjugal relationship had ceased altogether.

Ministerial representatives of Singapore, Malaysia, New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom met in London on 15th and 16th April 1971 to consider matters of common interest to all five countries concerning the external defence of Singapore and Malaysia. Both Singapore and Malaysia welcomed the decision of the Governments of Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom to continue to station forces in both territories after the end of 1971, after the "total" withdrawal of British forces east of Suez.

"Coffeshop criticism" of the Government's strict control and curbs on public dissension of its policies seemed to be confirmed when the authorities took surprising action against three "independent", (i.e. of the Straits Times Group, which was the oldest, and the largest in staff, subsidiary companies and turnover), newspapers. During the years of rapid economic growth the Government had increasingly reduced the influence of political opponents, especially among the ethnic-Chinese who constituted 75.5 percent of the Singapore population, and some of whom might be thought to have sympathy for Communist China. It would appear that the PAP was anxious to get the ethnic-Chinese majority on the island to regard themselves as *different* from their homogeneous "brethren" of the Chinese mainland. The Government first took action against the newspaper it considered to be foreign-dominated by arresting on 2nd May 1971, four executives of the "Nanyang Siang Pau", a leading Chinese-language daily, published both in Singapore and Malaysia, who were detained for allegedly "stirring up Chinese racial emotions" and adopting a "pro-Communist line", under the Internal Security Act, (which empowered the Government to detain persons indefinitely without trial). Although three of the four executives were later released, the fourth, Lee Mau Seng, (the paper's general manager), was still in detention on 26th January 1973, when his brother, Lee Eu Seng, the managing director, was arrested as well.

On 8th May 1971 Lee Kuan Yew accused the English-language "Singapore Herald" of being "hostile to the Government". The tabloid had previously been restricted in various ways for alleged violations of the Government's strict censorship, and on 7th May three of its foreign employees — two Malaysians and an Australian — were expelled from the country. Despite international appeals to the Singapore Government to respect the newspaper's integrity, it was forced to close down on 28th May 1971, when its printing licence was withdrawn without any reason being given. On 16th May 1971 the English-language "Eastern Sun" ceased publication. Its last issue hit the newsstands on 14th May 1971. Its managing director had been accused by the Government of accepting \$3

million from Communist intelligence agents, and this accusation led to the resignation of its editorial staff. The Government subsequently issued a statement to substantiate its allegations but which didn't really convince a majority of the population of the accuracy of the accusations. With the passing of time, as with all things human, the 'incident' faded from public memory.

The Singapore Prime Minister issued a statement that the Government would not tolerate "interference" with the country's news media by foreign owners who acted behind "front men", which caused surprise as no one had ever regarded the news "rags" as adverse commentators of the island's political life. The "Singapore Herald", Thomas Siddon knew, had given publicity when no other paper had dared, to the barring of American, Merle Jordon in July 1970 when she had tried to cross the Johore-Singapore Causeway from Malaysia into Singapore after being declared *persona non grata* by the Singapore authorities. There had been talk of her suspected Communist sympathies because of her reported presence at an anti-American demonstration at the Clarke Air Base in the Philippines but Thomas knew that she had been prevented from re-entering the republic, which had been her home for over 12 years, because of her growing influence with the Malays on Singapore, the indigenous community of the island. She had been organising them to be self-supporting within themselves; that they could "progress" and benefit from supporting purely Muslim-run organisations on the island which could provide the facilities and amenities for their educational and livelihood needs without their having to "depend" on the predominantly-Chinese Singapore Government. It wasn't to Lee Kuan Yew's liking, Thomas reasoned to himself, that a foreigner could wield so much influence and "power" within a "Singapore-community". To the "PM" she must have posed a "dangerous threat". Lee's party machine had wanted the American girl's idea under their control but she had stubbornly and unflinchingly refused to be kept in rein, because, being Muslim, she wouldn't allow "outsiders" to control "her" community, (the Malay-Muslims).

Thomas had known about the incident because Merle had phoned him a few days before the 'incident', and implored him to use his press-connections to get the political reporters of all the media, both local and foreign, to be at the Singapore-Malaysia border at the Causeway, to "witness" her "trek to destiny". That evening, after she had been prevented from returning to the republic since her trip to Manila, the offices of those newspapers and press agencies that had sent newsmen to "cover" the event were raided by Singapore's Special Branch officers who took away every



scrap of paper pertaining to the "story" as well as all the negatives and photographs "shot" of her being man-handled and literally carried by two hefty-looking, burly Singapore policewomen across the Singapore-Malaysian "border" and deposited on the Malaysian-side of the Causeway. Despite the intimidation of the authorities the "Singapore Herald" had defiantly run the "story" entitling it "Incident at the Causeway", which had sealed the paper's fate.

Wives of American servicemen fighting in the South Vietnam War began checking into Thomas' hotel in May 1971. They had been flown in by their own government to await the arrival of their respective spouses who were winging to Singapore for their "rest and recreation". It amazed the young hotel executive no end that several of the very attractive women, all Caucasian, sought "one-night stands" with his hotel's young Malay bell-hops, who themselves didn't know better by getting caught *flagrante delicto*, (because the men had gone 'missing' from duty), by their own White superiors in the respective women's guest-rooms. Afterward it seemed hilarious to Siddon, though he never said anything out loud, to overhear his senior American and European colleagues' outrage in the senior staffs' cafeteria, where they could talk openly without being overheard by the juniors, over the women's preference for the younger-looking Malay youths over their own "more manly" charms.

A Chinese girl from Hong Kong, the owner of one of the British colony's many hotel-training "schools", who was staying at another Singapore hotel, rang to request a tour of Thomas' hotel. As he conducted Miss Loon Yim-sheung about his resort-hotel's many "splendours" he grew exceedingly aware of her singular-attractiveness and the way she seemed to be drawn to him. It was flattering. Afterwards, when the tour was over, she suggested a drink for his "troubles" and he brought her to his favourite "watering-hole" in the hotel, the continental-bar, to which she readily agreed. By the time they had downed their first orders it was obvious to Thomas that she seemed loathe to take her leave. Cynically Siddon thought that she would "switch" feelings the moment one of his White expatriate colleagues joined them. He had noticed that Singapore girls, especially the Chinese ones, preferred full-Whites over Eurasians such as he, if they ever were interested in non-Chinese males. But he was re-assured of Yim-sheung's single-minded interest, moments later, when several of his American, German and Swiss colleagues came over to discover who the attractive Chinese girl with him was. But Yim-sheung quickly grew bored with their obvious, open curiosity and fawning attention, and begged to be excused. He reluctantly escorted her out of the hotel with a twinge of regret.

He was immersed dictating letters to his secretary, an hour later, when his phone rang. It was the "Hong Kong girl", Loon Yim-sheung, and she wanted him to join her for dinner. Thomas laughingly replied that he would first have to inform his family that he would be returning home late that evening and she immediately agreed without expressing surprise that he was married and had a family. When he got to her hotel that evening and rang her room to let her know that he was downstairs at the reception, she invited him up.

They didn't go out to eat until it was very late, around one in the morning, because, in the meantime, they had become lovers. The whole thing had happened so smoothly he just couldn't believe that he would be welcomed in bed by the extremely-attractive Yim-sheung, whom he had only met that afternoon, within fifteen minutes of his arrival at her hotel-room. He wasn't too sure whether it was he who had done the seducing, or the alluring Yim-sheung who had already made up her mind that they would be lovers. Despite being married and having children he experienced no pangs of guilt. It just felt right. And it wasn't because he and June, his "wife", had grown estranged. He reluctantly took his leave of the beautiful Yim-sheung around four in the morning:

Strangely, and to his great relief, June wasn't awake to give him a hard time for getting back so late. The following day the "Hong Kong girl" checked into the Orange Grove Road-hotel just to be near to him. Both now felt they were deeply in love with each other. But despite not feeling any guilt Thomas knew the relationship had to be temporary because he would not jeopardise his "marriage" with June Chen, and breathed a sigh of relief when Yim-sheung checked out to return to Hong Kong the following Saturday. Thomas decided that it had all been "a fling", and that even she would forget him, once she arrived in Hong Kong.

Her telephone calls from the British colony started coming thrice-a-day from the Monday after the weekend of her departure. It was an exciting, warm feeling to feel in love a-new, and to conduct the relationship in such a "sophisticated" manner — via overseas telephone-calls. She returned to Singapore in July, unable to be away from him, and Thomas knew that he had reached the point of no return in his love-affair. He wondered how long he would be able to skilfully tread the "treacherous stepping-stones" of a clandestine relationship and still maintain his "marriage" to the faithful June Chen. But fate took a direct hand when a mystery caller blurted all to his "wife" and she confronted him with it. Instinctively Thomas denied involvement with anyone, immediately feeling an utter coward, yet thanking his lucky stars that June hadn't been given Yim-sheung's name or knew that

she was staying at his hotel. June skilfully left the matter in abeyance, hoping to catch him out at a later date. In the meantime Thomas persuaded his love to return to Hong Kong.

Singapore's National Day, (9th August 1971), that year, was especially significant for the island because the official pull-out of British forces from Singapore would be taking place toward year's-end. As the national holiday had fallen on a Saturday, the following Monday was declared a public holiday, in lieu, and everyone working in Singapore was in a celebratory mood because of the long weekend ahead. The bulk of the British forces slated to leave Singapore was already "paying the last nostalgic" visits to their many "watering-holes", which included all the hotels in the Orchard Road-strip. On the evening of 9th August a group of British servicemen who had been drinking at one of the bars in Thomas' hotel, was prevented from leaving the hotel-premises by the hotel-security because the servicemen had wanted to "walk away" with a dining-room chair from the restaurant. The resident manager, a Swiss-German, had already summoned the British Military Police who were on their way to arrest the men. Siddon, going to another part of the hotel, came across the group of confronting parties by chance, and the large crowd of Singapore families, regular, frequent sightseers of the fabulous resort, eyeing the threatening scene with alarm. Acting swiftly to diffuse the tense situation which he realised could erupt into open violence at any moment, he stepped into the "hiccup" and escorted the embarrassed British servicemen to their own military Landrover which had by then pulled up at the hotel-entrance. He smilingly informed the arresting officer that there would be no formal complaint by the hotel, and hoped that in the few remaining weeks to the "pull-out" the "boys" would continue to enjoy themselves at the hotel without creating any unwelcome "ruckus". Every British soldier in the Landrover thanked him, promising to "pass the word", and the military vehicle sped away.

As Siddon turned from the scene the hotel's Swiss-German resident manager strode up to where he was and demanded his reason for "overstepping" his authority. The British servicemen, he said angrily, were to have been arrested and charged. Siddon explained that the soldiers had admitted that they had been "horsing around" because of "one too many", that they had realised that they had gone "overboard" and had apologized, so he had let them go to avoid "an embarrassing situation" with so many Singaporeans milling about the place, admiring the hotel, but becoming increasingly aware of an "unbecoming scene" that was about to develop. But Thomas' explanation seemed to instil even greater indignation in the resident manager who curtly told his public relations manager that he would

be officially reprimanded at the following morning's management committee meeting. This was held around seven each weekday morning to review the previous day's activities and to analyse any "problem" that might have cropped up. The meeting, of which Siddon was a member, sometimes would "pull up" an employee for any shortcoming, a manager felt he or she had been responsible for, especially if the "mistake" had involved a guest or a user of the hotel's public facilities. Siddon explained to the resident manager that his reason for letting the British soldiers go was because he had felt that it wouldn't have been in the hotel's interest to become the focus of unruly attention by the departing British because, if they were so inclined, twice their number would return to the hotel in the near future to display their "displeasure", and this would drive away the Singapore families who were flocking to the hotel in droves every day on "sight-seeing trips". He informed the Swiss-German that he would state this as his reason for "overstepping his authority" that evening to the management committee.

Thomas' words appeared to induce still greater rage in the resident manager who then called his junior a "misbegotten half-caste" and accused him of being insolent. In that split-second Siddon saw no condoning the European's use of the insulting, blatant racist term, especially since the Swiss-German was married to a Hong Kong Chinese and had his own half-caste child by her, and had obtained employment in his, Thomas' country, which was multiracial. Barely controlling his by now own raging-temper, he reached into the breast-pocket of his lounge-suit, grasped his calling-cards, withdrew them and flung the lot at the feet of the insulting European, telling him loudly that he wouldn't continue to work in an establishment which employed racists such as him. Warning the man that he would see to it that he would be told to leave Singapore, he turned on his heels, walked to his car in the employees' parking lot and drove home, his mind in turmoil because he knew he had done the unthinkable by chucking his job, but at the same time he reminded himself that being born in an island which practised multi-racialism he couldn't "allow" a bigot like the Swiss-German to think he could ride rough-shod over someone such as him just because the resident manager was White and he, Siddon, was of White-and-Asian ancestry. It made a mockery of his being born in a racially-tolerant society which had unwittingly allowed in the racist Swiss-German to work with impunity despite his racialistic-bent. The following Tuesday, after the public holiday on Monday due to National Day being on the previous Saturday, he handed in his resignation, giving the management a month's notice. Yim-sheung rang from Hong Kong later in the day, as was a her 'usual' habit, and he related to her what had transpired. Her immediate

response was to invite him to the British colony to head her hotel's training school. Surprised, Siddon said he would think about it, buying for time as he didn't want to be "obligated" to her, but she insisted that he pay Hong Kong a visit to gauge the "possibilities" for himself at first hand.

Yim-sheung's open-dated return air-ticket arrived at his hotel within a week of their talking on the phone. It came with a scribbled ungrammatical note begging him to consider her offer seriously. He recalled Kharthi Dharan's garbled prediction years ago in 1965, that he would "chuck" his job suddenly. It had happened. Was the invitation to go to Hong Kong part of the cock-eyed "prophesy"? But the Chinese island wasn't the land of his forefathers, Britain was. Brushing aside his thoughts he concentrated on the deteriorating situation he also found at home. Thomas had never acknowledged his infidelity with the "Hong Kong girl" to June, his "wife", but she had abruptly and without warning demanded that he move out of "her" Circuit Road flat. It "never rains but it pours", he thought to himself. First he had quit his job suddenly, now June was demanding that he leave the flat that they had both purchased together from the Housing and Development Board years ago. He felt that she could have been a little more "understanding" but she hadn't been. And he now he had to take care of Kean Siew and Rahman, his two sons by Mariko, his Japanese wife, since June wanted him out of her life. He visited his Japanese mother-in-law, Furiko Yamamoto, and explained his "situation" to her. She said she would be glad to look after her two grandchildren so long as Thomas took care of the costs, to which he agreed wholeheartedly, and made arrangements to pick his boys up from June Chen's to be with their Japanese grandmother in her bedsitter in Tampines. Though confused at first the two boys nonetheless were pleased that they were going to live with their Japanese grandmother whom they had not seen for several years, though they were sad to be leaving their youngest brother, Chong-lok, behind. In the meantime Siddon checked into a cheap hotel to save costs, and furiously wrote out letters of application to other hotels that were still to come on the scene, as well as advertising agencies and public relations consultancies. But with no immediate replies forthcoming after several weeks he decided it was best to take up his "Hong Kong girl's" offer in the British colony. Siddon was confident he would be able to do a "good job" of it.

Yim-sheung was at the Kai-tak Airport in Hong Kong when he flew in from Singapore. Her car was expensive, elegant, spacious and airconditioned. So was her entire flat on Kennedy Road at the foot of the "Peak" on Hong Kong Island. She had two amahs, one to cook and serve, the other to do the housework. He wondered why the attractive and glamorous Yim-sheung

would fall for someone like him when she could have had her pick of "suitable" eligible bachelors, both in Hong Kong and Singapore, or anywhere else for that matter. Siddon knew there were numerous doting Chinese mothers who would have given their eye-teeth to "catch" such a glamorous-looking and obviously wealthy daughter-in-law. It just didn't make sense. The couple remained indoors making love for three whole days, appearing at the dining room only when the amah called out that a meal was ready at specific times of the day. On the fourth day Yim-sheung took him to her hotel-training school which was on another part of the island. It was crammed with hopeful, young Cantonese students, all banking on the chance to break into the "hotel-keeping line" by passing the course that her school offered. Both he and Yim-sheung hadn't talked salary yet but Thomas guessed that it would be "substantial" since he would be heading the school, he thought. And since they were presently living together, they would continue to do so after the "formalities" were over, he hoped as well.

He was slightly apprehensive several days later when she prepared him to meet her father and the rest of the family. He remembered her telling him in Singapore that theirs was a conservative, tradition-bound Chinese family. Her parents had fled China in the forties, at the end of the civil war, for Taiwan before ending up in the British colony of Hong Kong. She had also told him that her father had been a colonel in the Nationalist Chinese Army. And Thomas still had to come up against that least-liked condition before he could marry Yim-sheung, and stay and work in Hong Kong — meet Colonel Loon and somehow obtain his approval to marry his daughter.

He felt his love's warmth turn visibly cool and impersonal as her car neared her father's well-guarded villa set much higher up the "Peak". It was a veritable fortress surrounded by spacious grounds which were encased by a high wall. Thomas saw fierce-looking dogs being walked and discreetly-placed Chinese "sentinels" lounging about at advantageous points throughout the grounds, which gave them a good view of the whole property and advanced notice as to who was approaching the mansion above and below the road leading to it. Some men were reading Chinese newspapers or periodicals, some played card-games with a "friend". It smacked of a movie-set to him. But his long-forgotten triad hackles had been immediately re-awakened. He knew he had entered the lair of a powerful criminal-type.

Yim-sheung had forewarned him before they had left her flat that day, about speaking out-of-turn in front of her father. Thomas was not to say anything unless spoken to and not to "volunteer" that they were living together. Catching sight of his harried look she reassuringly squeezed his

hand and broke into a radiant smile, and in that instant rather than his worries about his "future father-in-law" melting away, Siddon began to feel cold, extremely alone and vulnerable instead.

He was ushered into Colonel Loon's study by Yim-sheung who vanished before he had noticed, leaving him with a close-cropped, bullish-looking chinaman who glowered balefully. Without taking his goldfish eyes off the young Eurasian who had just been introduced to him by his daughter, Colonel Loon shouted out an unfamiliar Chinese word, not Cantonese which Thomas recognised, (Siddon would learn later from his love that her father only spoke "Shanghainese"), and a young Chinese male, looking strikingly like Yim-sheung, stepped in. As the young man's father barked a terse-sounding question, and his son translated, Thomas immediately knew that his relationship with Yim-sheung had long been regarded as a foregone conclusion. What Colonel Loon was looking for was an assurance that he wasn't "losing" his daughter to a foreigner who would take her away from him and Hong Kong. Thomas was "acceptable" so long as he was prepared to live and make the British colony his home. Siddon realised that there wasn't time to spell out niceties, he was in the lion's den, and mutely nodded his agreement to his future father-in-law's stipulation that he and Yim-sheung would live on the island after their marriage. That evening at a dinner, hastily-convened at a Chinese restaurant, and which included several of the colonel's powerful "friends", the impending marriage was announced. It then dawned on Thomas that being the eldest and obviously the brightest of the Loon siblings, his girl was regarded as "heir-apparent" to her father. Even her mother, younger brother and sister paid her quiet deference.

The following morning over breakfast at "their" flat on Kennedy Road, he broached the subject of his children in Singapore. He was quietly perturbed when Yim-sheung suggested that they remain where they were with their grandmother. Thomas, she said, could well support them from Hong Kong with regular monthly cheques. She "preferred" that he didn't see his children any more. Thomas would have a new life in Hong Kong with a new wife and "new" children eventually. Concealing his inner turmoil at her words, Thomas patted the attractive Chinese girl's cheeks and changed the subject to his salary. The Hong Kong girl gazed at her lover in consternation all "troublesome" thoughts about his children swept from her mind by his question about money. Wasn't he marrying her, living in "their" flat, driving "their" car, and had a powerful and wealthy father-in-law? He wouldn't *need* a fixed salary, all he needed to do, whenever he wanted cash, was to tell her and she would "give" it to him from the school's petty cash. Thomas realised he was about to be "cornered" by the wily girl.

Much as he was attracted to the ravishingly-beautiful Yim-sheung Thomas Siddon had no inclination to be kept a virtual "love-prisoner", to be at her beck-and-call whenever she felt inclined. He still had the return-portion of the air-ticket that she had sent him in Singapore, before he had joined her, and if he could validate it without her knowing, he would be able to return to Singapore before she had an inkling. He decided to play along until the first opportunity to make good his escape presented itself. His children in Singapore were more important to him than all the romantic entanglements that he could possibly get into. The only reason he had come to Hong Kong had been to secure his livelihood so that he could provide for them, and the fact that there was Yim-sheung, had just made the prospect of life in the British colony a "bonus". Her attraction had "faded" the moment she had displayed callousness toward the "fate" of his boys in Singapore, growing up without their father. Thomas had been without one as a child and he wasn't going to let his children become "fatherless" like him. He faced his girl with his decision once he had his air-ticket confirmed and hidden away, and it had been a traumatic "confrontation", with her driving him from her flat into the street. But he had already been prepared and checked into a hotel, remaining out of sight until his departure date for Singapore in October.

A farewell parade was held in Singapore in November 1971 at the Kangaw Barracks in Sembawang, in the north of Singapore Island, which saw the Union Jack come down officially for the last time. It marked the end of British Military Command in Singapore since the first British soldier, Major William Farquhar, arrived in Singapore with Sir Stamford Raffles on 19th January 1819. A "residual force" of 4,500 men was left behind after the pullout.

The Foreign Ministers of ASEAN at their meeting from 25th to 27th November 1971, discussed the Malaysian proposal first made by Tun Abdul Razak, the Malaysian Prime Minister, in September 1970, for a guaranteed neutralized zone in South-east Asia. The Ministers agreed to issue a declaration calling for recognition of South-east Asia as "a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality", and appealed to the United States, the Soviet Union and China to guarantee the ASEAN member-countries' neutrality.

Since Siddon still had no permanent abode upon his return to Singapore from Hong Kong, he continued to put up in cheap, run-down "boarding houses", better-known for their "extracurricular" activity — the running of third-rate brothels. He would "crash" several nights in one sleazy room after another until the stench of stale piss and dried vomit would drive him out to the next doss-house. He was living off his savings, ensuring there was



enough to pay for the upkeep of his two sons with Furiko, his Japanese mother-in-law, and his other son with June Chen, the monthly payment on his car, and his own living expenses. Most times he took to sleeping in his car because it smelt cleaner to him than the sordid hotel rooms he was forced to rent just to get a shower. But no matter where he spent his nights he would be in front of his mother-in-law's early each school morning to convey her and his two boys to school. He made it a routine to pick up Chong-lok his youngest son, from his mother, June Chen's place, every Sunday after breakfast, to spend the whole day with him and his two elder brothers, Kean Siew and Rahman.

He still continued to write out job-applications and phone his "contacts" in the hotel industry in the hope that they would put him in touch with any hotel general manager on the look out for a "hot-shot" PR man. But he found that the "friends" he had known in the "good old days" now mysteriously didn't happen to be in whenever he called. And the international ad agencies and PR consultancies were looking for younger men. Siddon knew he was being black-balled and that there was nothing he could do about it. He had made the big mistake to quit his job before he had landed anything, and now, those who had been envious of his former position could ensure that he would never return to a similar position again.

An Indian, Sunil Bhatia, who was an editor of a newly-launched afternoon paper jointly-owned by The Straits Times Group and an Australian publishing house, whom he knew through being a public relations professional, surprisingly suggested that they go into the public relations business together, when they ran into each other at a cocktail reception in November. The Indian had made the offer toward the end of the evening, when everyone present was into his cups, and Siddon sceptically thought that Bhatia had had one too many though he had remained politely interested.

The following morning Bhatia phoned and Siddon was pleasantly surprised to find that the man had remembered their conversation of the previous evening and had been deadly serious about getting into the PR business. Sunil would remain at his job in the press while Thomas ran the show. The proposed new consultancy would begin on a "shoe-string" but there would be enough to pay the "company head", meaning Siddon, a "pittance" of two hundred dollars a month, until "things got better". Siddon's investment, it was agreed, would be his car which would become company-property and would be comprehensively insured. Both he and Sunil would be its authorized drivers. The proposed new company would continue to pay the remaining monthly instalments on Siddon's rear-

engined Renault as well as the insurance-cover, which would be arranged by Sunil's father who ran a gentlemen's tailors as well as an insurance sub-agency in Tanglin Road, opposite the soon-to-be-completed Tanglin Shopping Centre. The older Bhatia had started as tailor to the British military, specialising in making uniforms for officers. It was agreed between them that the proposed new partnership would commence from January 1972 in the following year.

After the insurance cover had been arranged Sunil suggested that the two of them each sign a blank insurance claim form as a "precaution" in case either of them was ever involved in a serious accident, the "surviving" partner would then be able to file a claim on the other's behalf to "protect their respective interests", he said. It was standard business practice, Sunil assured him, saying that he had already done a similar thing with his own car, and that the form was with his father. Thomas nodded his agreement but a sixth sense held him back, and as a "precaution" instead of putting down his driver's licence number in the appropriate box in the form, he substituted it with his birth certificate serial number.

Despite having the proposed business venture "all sewn up", and being able to see his two elder children everyday, and Chong-lok on Sundays, Thomas now found himself cut-off from the mainstream of his professional life and fraternisation with fellow-professionals, especially after office-hours. By nature a loner, he normally wouldn't have felt anything about not mixing with known acquaintances but the sudden wrenching of ties with Yim-sheung, the lack of family-life and finding that his fellow-professionals seemed to be keeping out of his way, caused him to feel utterly desolate. A few days before Christmas, walking into the bar of an Orchard Road hotel for a self-congratulatory drink because he had managed to buy his children's 'traditional' X'mas presents despite being skint, (stony-broke), he "bumped" into an ethnic-Chinese print-salesman that he vaguely knew, and waved a good-natured hello in the "usual" Singapore-manner. He knew that Cheng Hin hailed originally from Penang but had been attracted to make his home in Singapore because of its more "Sino" atmosphere. The Chinese was standing at the far-end of the bar and waved back. Thomas had instantly noticed the miserable look about the printer the moment he had stepped into the place, though he hadn't indicated it to save the other any embarrassment. And he had his own problems. He ordered a beer and when it arrived downed it in a single uninterrupted swig. As he placed the emptied glass on the counter before him, he spied a fresh one gleaming back at him, and which the barman indicated had come from Cheng Hin. Groaning inwardly because he knew that he would have to "return" the compliment, he raised

the full glass in a gesture of thanks. Thomas' heart was sinking because he didn't have enough cash to keep on "returning" every round that the other might want to buy him that evening. He hadn't been using his credit card ever since returning from Hong Kong because it was only for emergencies, and, as far as he was concerned that particular evening wasn't one.

Thomas' seemingly appreciative gesture was cue for the Chinese to sidle over. Siddon's first guess about Cheng Hin had been accurate. Now that he was closer the Eurasian could see the thoroughly-wretched look about him. Siddon decided not to "notice" it because he didn't have a shoulder for *anyone* to cry on. Thankfully it began with banalities. Thomas offered to "return" Cheng Hin's first round but the other waved a forceful "no" with a palm, as he indicated to the barman to set up another round for the both of them. Siddon could see that the Chinese was in his cups. He racked his brains, trying to fathom the reason behind the salesman's unwarranted "hospitality". They weren't doing business with each other and he knew he couldn't be instrumental in helping the other gain any advantage in business over a rival, so what gave, he asked himself. He sensed though the other's need to "unload" whatever was on his mind with someone, anyone. As if in answer to his unspoken questions Cheng Hin inquired whether Thomas was "free" that evening. The Eurasian could see the earnest, piteous pleading in the other's eyes and relented. Recognising Siddon's decision to put up with him for the evening, Cheng Hin next invited him to be his "drinking buddy" as it wasn't "fun" drinking alone. Thomas decided that he had done right for himself that evening. He had had nothing planned except to find a place to park his car and sleep before waking up to pick up his boys and their Japanese grandmother to send to school. He might as well drink the booze the other bloke was holding out to him that evening.

Just as the bar in the hotel was closing for the night, around one in the morning, Cheng Hin looked at Thomas and with envy in his voice, sneeringly said that the other would soon be returning to his own wife and family while he, Cheng Hin, would have to spend the night alone. Siddon had heard that the print salesman was married to an attractive Malay teacher and immediately "cottoned on" that it had to be something to do with her that had put his evening's drinking "pal" in such misery. The ethnic-Chinese was a lot older than he was, in his late thirties, and being Chinese he wouldn't "normally" be abrasive with a chance acquaintance, unless something was drastically wrong. To ease the other out of his self-pity Thomas said that he wasn't married any longer, that in fact he had no where to go and would be spending the night sleeping in his car. Cheng Hin eyed him distrustfully and Siddon saw that he was turning antagonistic. The

salesman blurted out that Siddon had known all along that Nakhoda, his Malay wife, had left him for an Australian creative director who worked for an advertising agency his printing company did business with. Thomas had only befriended him to spy for her about his whereabouts. What Cheng Hin had just "revealed" to him had been a complete surprise for Thomas but catching sight of the printer clenching and unclenching his fists, Siddon bade the other follow him to where his car was parked in the hotel grounds. They settled the evening's bill, walked out to Siddon's car and he opened the boot to show Hin his clothes stacked in it. The man's open belligerence instantly vanished in the cool night air.

There was an immediate change of attitude. The paranoid, suspicious moron became the solicitous benefactor who insisted that Siddon put up with him for the remainder of the night. Thomas could "crash" in Hin's rented guesthouse-room in Tanglin. Cheng Hin would sleep on the floor while Thomas had the bed. He vehemently insisted on it. Siddon gratefully nodded his acquiescence. He was tired of sleeping in pokey rooms or the cramped quarters of his car's back-seat. And he was sleepy. Cheng poured out his story the moment they got to his room after each had driven his respective car from Orchard Road and parked it in the guesthouse grounds.

As they lolled sleepily in their respective areas in the room Cheng Hin told him that Nakhoda, his wife, had fallen for the Australian creative director after he had invited the "Aussie" to an advertising awards function and he had fallen for Hin's wife. The "ang-moh kow" (Hokkein Chinese slang: "red-haired dog", meaning Caucasian, "dog" — is one of the greatest insults a Chinese can call another, and they use it frequently on Whites), and his own Australian wife, Hin said, had gone to the function as Hin's guests, and he had thought nothing of the "Aussie" dancing all evening with Nakhoda. He had only got to know something was "transpiring", six months later, a "few weeks ago", when Nakhoda packed up and left their home for good, to "shack-up" with the "Aussie". To distract Cheng Hin who Thomas sensed was becoming agitated again, Siddon related his own marriage breakup. He was now foot-loose and fancy-free, he laughingly said. Hin chuckled as well and appeared to forget his own woes for a minute. They finally dropped off after agreeing to meet for lunch the following afternoon. Hin left for work early and Thomas left slightly later to drive across the island to pick up his children and his mother-in-law to send to school.

During lunch on the following day, when the two men met again, the Chinese printer begged Thomas to share a room with him seeing as they both were "homeless". Hin said he could not stand to live by himself, and his "best buddy", who was also his "boss", hadn't seemed sympathetic

about his marriage breakup. In fact he appeared to side with Nakhoda and her lover instead of with him, Hin complained. Thomas, he said, being almost in the "same boat", (which wasn't true because his wife hadn't left him for another but he wasn't arguing), could empathise. The Eurasian in fact had no opinion, one way or the other as he didn't know the full "background" to all that had transpired between Hin and his wife, whom he had never met, and he had his own share of worries to think about. He was prepared to "lend a friendly ear" but he found it weak on the other's part to want to share his personal problems with a total stranger. But Siddon needed a place to call his own and Hin's invitation to share a room seemed a godsend. He insisted though that they find a "more spacious", and cheaper room. Several days later they moved into one off Clemenceau Avenue rented out by a Chinese divorcee with a son. Both he and Hin would each contribute half toward the monthly rent of sixty dollars.

The new year started off with Thomas' and Sunil's public relations consultancy being set up, and which Siddon ran. He slugged hard, confident that with time it would become a "money-spinner". The "offices" were located in a room above the Bhatia "sewing factory" whose Indian girls prepared ready-cut and pre-cut pieces for the outfits the master-tailor "designed" for his customers who called at his tailorshop in Tanglin Road. The "Bhatia factory" was a "typical" shophouse in the *Tek-kah* district. (Hokkein Chinese: "pig's legs", this name, which was familiar to *everyone*, was given to a market where, in the newly-colonised Singapore of old, pigs were slaughtered and sold, mainly for the consumption of the Chinese on the then British-held island — the original market which had this name has been needlessly levelled and still remains a vacant plot of land, and a new, modern market built on the ground and lower-level of a new block of flats, opposite this original site, has now been given a similar name in Mandarin-Chinese but which the non-Chinese find difficult to pronounce and regard as *alien-sounding*, especially in a district which had been traditionally Indian), on Norris Road in *Little India*, (this area was set aside by Stamford Raffles for the original Indians who had come with him, and for those who came after, to reside and do business in).

There was worrying news that a world-wide increase in oil prices by the Middle East Arab oil-cartel would set-off a global depression and mass unemployment in the West. Singapore itself was in the early stages of transformation into a modern metropolis. Whole blocks of offices and flats in the older sections of the city-area were being torn down for "urban renewal" and many a Singapore businessman wished that he could lay his hands on the Government's purported "Master Plan" for the island. On his

part Thomas thought the willy-nilly pulling down of some of the "more historical" structures, which were still in relative good condition despite the passage of time, extremely short-sighted on the building owners' part. It appeared to him that the Government was encouraging the tearing down of the buildings because it was in a hurry to clear away as swiftly as possible all vestiges of the island's poverty-stricken past when many a Singapore-born had lived in near pig-like conditions. Some of these buildings, he felt, should have been retained to remind those who would come later how their forefathers had lived and had been treated by the colonising British.

Itinerant hawkers were also gradually being taken off traditional "age-old" street-corners and placed in strategically-located "hawker-centres", and for which they had to pay rents for the first time in their lives. The population complained that "wet markets" and hawkers were increasing prices each time the news agencies and local papers like "The Straits Times", the "Nanyang Siang Pau" and the "Sin Chew Jit Poh" reported any impending hike in petroleum market-costs. Even petrol, already bought and paid for by the petroleum companies before the world-wide price increases, had their retail prices jacked up for the motorist.

To help Cheng Hin, his new friend, forget his marriage breakup, Thomas persuaded him to take up "karate" at his club in McNair Road. Siddon, a black belt, normally trained in the club's later evening session, after seven-thirty but to accommodate Cheng Hin he changed to the earlier five-thirty class. He was pleasantly surprised to come across an attractive English "beginner", a young woman named Cilla Harp, who, he discovered later, worked as an editor at a large publishers in Thomson Road, which was part of The Straits Times Group. She told him she had taken up "karate" to lose the "spare-tire" round her middle. Cilla seemed awed by his prowess and kept asking for "pointers" every opportunity she got. She suggested a drink after class but he somehow forgot about it until he and Hin were half-way back to their rented room in Clemenceau Avenue.

He met Hin's "buddy" and immediate employer, "Fred" Wong-foo, several days later. Hin said he was the eldest son of the family printing firm where he worked. It was on Bukit Timah Road and did jobs mainly for a major tobacco company, printing its packs, as well as the needs of the "sophisticated" international advertising agencies which demanded a high quality finish for their print jobs. Sizing up Wong, Thomas decided that the Chinese, who was American-educated, had no "buddy" in life — just himself. Siddon was intrigued by Wong-foo's acquisition of a Christian name since he wasn't baptised, and decided he was just following the "traditional Chinese habit" on the island of taking on a Christian name to

appear "westernised" or "anglicized", since Singapore had been a British colony once, without understanding that one only took on a Christian name after being baptised a Christian. He chalked up one for Cheng Hin, though he thought the man should have used his Muslim name, which was Hamzah, after he had converted to Islam when he married Nakhoda, his Malay wife, who was Muslim. But he knew that Cheng Hin was embarrassed of his Malay-Muslim name. Thomas wondered about Hin's moral outlook and why he had married a Muslim girl in the first place because everyone in Asia knew that Muslims always insisted that "outsiders" become Muslim first before allowing them to marry one of their own. Obviously Hin wasn't bothered by his "conversion" because he still ate pork with the same gusto as when he had not been one of the "Faithful". Probably this was also one of the reasons why he had settled in Singapore rather than return to Malaysia, his land of birth, which was a Muslim country, and he would have had to toe the religious line being a Muslim-convert.

Nakhoda, Hin's wife, moved out of her husband's home in June to live with her lover and Cheng Hin moved back in together with his "boss", Fred Wong-foo. Thomas was a little hurt that he hadn't been included in the invitation that Cheng Hin had extended to Wong-foo but he was still glad to now have their jointly-rented room all for himself. He wondered though why Wong-foo kept inviting him to his and Cheng Hin's almost nightly "bashes" at one top night-spot or another in the Orchard Road-strip, when they were out entertaining business contacts.

Siddon's public relations business was "creeping along" satisfactorily, as far as he was concerned, though he did feel disgruntled with Sunil Bhatia's "performance" ever since their partnership had been formed. It seemed that after his initial investment in the venture Sunil was content to remain a largely "silent" partner and wouldn't lift a finger to either bring in new business or pass on "leads". Siddon was dissatisfied to be doing all the "slogging" and being without, while his "partner" lived the merry-life of the gainfully-employed. Cilla Harp, the English girl, came into his life once again when he met her, when she turned up as a reporter, at a press conference that he had organised for a new airline client. She had "disappeared" from the "karate" class, and, apparently had stopped attending after their initial meeting due to a lack of interest. He was glad to run into her again and told her so. Sometime during the press conference she slipped him her private number and he blushinglly remembered their missed "date" due to his "oversight". Seeming to understand his awkward predicament she dawdled until the press conference was over and suggested that they go to her flat for drinks. She lived on Orange Grove Road in a "typical" rented-

flat the larger European companies provided for their expatriates. By the time the evening ended and he departed her place, they had agreed to meet regularly because it appeared that they shared similar "outlooks".

Several evenings later as he prepared to go for his nightly quick-bite at the Newton Hawker Centre off Bukit Timah Road, from his room on Clemenceau Avenue, he heard his name being called from just outside his room-window. Peering into the gloom he discerned a female figure but could not make out who it was, though the female voice had been Anglo-Saxon. It had to be Cilla Harp, he knew. She had found her way to his place with the aid of a street-directory and told him that she was feeling out-of-sorts and hoped he would help "chase-away the cob-webs". They walked to the nearby hawker centre for a few beers and a Chinese hawker-meal. Cilla used her chop-sticks with such dexterity and aplomb he was pleased that a White had taken the bother to learn how to use them so well. Later, as he got to know her better, he would discover her ability to read and write Mandarin-Chinese which she had learned in university in London of all places, rather than in Asia. After their meal that evening he walked her back to her flat, two-and-a-half miles away, much to her chagrin. Thomas sensed that Cilla had half-expected that he would attempt a seduction in his room but he wasn't having any. He had a regular air-stewardess girlfriend flying the Singapore to Auckland route, and, even though they had not yet agreed to go steady, he knew she wouldn't have understood his infidelity.

A new client who dealt in Malaccan antiques and wished to introduce her business to the tourists visiting Singapore, asked Siddon to come up with an idea that would attract them to visit Malacca and her antique shop which was located two miles outside the old Malay sea-town. He suggested organising a regular monthly pageant of Malacca "historianna" — a pot-pourri of costumed dances and songs put up by the various ethnic groups which made up the "fabric" of the historical former Malay, Chinese, Portuguese, Dutch and British sea-town, together with a "spread" of the variety of food prepared by the different communities, which had evolved in Malacca, and to which the tourists would buy tickets for in Singapore, before they arrived at the place. Air-conditioned coaches would convey the tourists from Singapore to Malacca, and, along the way, would stop at various places of interest on the Malaysian peninsula as well. The pageant and Malacca-buffet spread would be laid on at the client's Malacca property where her antiques for sale would be on display. The client agreed with Siddon that the tourists would definitely be tempted to make purchases prior to their return to Singapore, once they had an opportunity to assess the "prizes" she was offering for a "song". Thomas next found himself driving



the one-hundred-and-fifty-mile route on the Malaysian trunk road to Malacca every other fortnight to co-ordinate details with the Malacca Tourist Association.

Around this time Thomas learned that Sunil Bhatia, his partner, had resigned his editor's job in the afternoon newspaper, prior to taking up the post of public relations executive at an American off-shore bank. He was furious when discovered this because Bhatia hadn't said word about it when the sneaky bastard had kept coming to Siddon's office about two weeks before his interview to "learn the ropes" and to know how to make the "right noises" to impress his potential employer, from him. Bhatia hadn't said a word when he had "dropped by to keep in touch" and had ended up going through some of Thomas' previous PR proposals to potential clients, sitting at a desk in their joint-partnership offices, and asking a lot of questions. He had obviously learned his lessons well because he had succeeded. But what really was infuriating afterward, was Bhatia going on immediate long-leave to his father's home-town in India after he had finished with the newspaper, instead of helping drum up business for their consultancy before he began his new job. Thomas felt used and exploited.

Within days of discovering Sunil's sneaky and opportunistic attitude the consultancy was commissioned to organise the opening of a Chinese-owned motor showroom in Goldhill Plaza, which was off Thomson Road. The job was a "one-off-er". At the initial briefing with his new client Thomas was pleasantly surprised to meet up with a former classmate, Tan Siew Lou, whose agency handled the advertising for the motor company. By the time the opening was successfully launched, his ex-schoolmate had begun suggesting that Thomas would be better-off teaming up with him, instead of sticking with his Indian partner who didn't seem at all committed to running a viable business. Siew Lou had seemed to sense Siddon's dissatisfaction with his venture with Sunil Bhatia, and clinched his argument by underscoring the "pittance" Thomas was drawing from the partnership, for his efforts. With him, Tan said, Siddon would draw twice what he was getting as well as have an expense account. It got Thomas pondering.

He wrote a lengthy letter to Sunil in India, spelling out their problems, the other's lack of commitment, and outlining Tan Siew Lou's offer. When he didn't receive a reply after three weeks he phoned Bhatia's father at his shop in Tanglin. The old master-tailor said that although he got a letter from his son nearly every other day, he hadn't received any word to pass on to Siddon. That decided it for Thomas. Tan Siew Lou had been on his back practically every day since their initial conversation, and in total frustration Siddon informed his soon-to-be-ex-partner's father he was pulling out of

the partnership with his son, Sunil. The older man was silent and Siddon knew that he disagreed with the move.

He joined Siew Lou in July 1972 at an "honorarium" of four hundred dollars a month plus expenses. He would now be taking home two hundred dollars more than what he had earned with Bhatia, and he still had a share of the proposed new partnership with Tan Siew Lou, to boot. He and the Chinese counter-signed an intention-to-form-a-company document, which gave both parties ninety days to set up the formalised "machinery" after which the deal would fall through but Siddon had felt no qualms or second thoughts about this proviso. Thomas decided to retain his Malacca antiques client from his former partnership with Bhatia as it had been obtained entirely through his own efforts and as tourism promotion was a "pet" project of his. Ever since working in the international advertising agency where he had been involved in the government tourism promotion body, and in the hotel, tourism-promotion had become his forte, and he was anxious that his "edge" in the field wouldn't become blunted through lack of use. Since leaving his hotel-job he had never been able to get back into his former "line", and though it seemed to him as if unforeseen "forces" were ensuring that he never would, he had put his feelings down to paranoia.

Siew Lou, his impending new partner, suggested that Thomas purchase a Datsun from their mutual new client, the Chinese motor showroom in Goldhill Plaza, to "support" the client's product as it was a "done thing" with local advertising agencies. But for Siddon this meant getting rid of his airconditioned rear-engined Renault. Cilla Harp professed an interest when he told her what he was hoping to do, but wanted to try the car out first. She felt unsure about her driving ability she said, as she hadn't been driving for two years ever since coming to work in Singapore from Hong Kong where she had previously been employed. She knew that he went up to Malacca regularly and suggested that she accompany him to try out the car on the Malaysian trunk-roads which were less congested than Singapore's and she'd feel more confident about driving again. Unknown to the English girl he was reluctant that she accompany him but made a pretence of agreeing as he badly wanted to sell his car. Thomas' hesitance stemmed from his relationship with his client's Malay secretary Salma, in Malacca. He knew she would not be "reasonable" the moment she clapped eyes on Cilla. Oblivious of the emotions going through him the English girl, in the meantime, told Thomas that she would convert her Hong Kong driving licence to a Singapore one before they went up to Malacca and would apply for a company-loan from the Straits Times should she find the car "suitable".

Several days later, on 11th August, a Friday, they set off. Cilla took over the wheel from Thomas once they were well out of Johore Bahru, the southernmost town at the tip of the Malaysian peninsula, and drove quiet steadily and confidently all the way until they arrived at Malacca, where she confirmed she had found the French rear-engined car "suitable" and would purchase it from Siddon. She would apply for a "company loan" from The Straits Times Group, where she was working, on their return to Singapore. The couple had dinner at the Malacca Esplanade, by the sea-front, and drove, with Cilla at the wheel again, to his client's bungalow some two miles from the outskirts of the sea-town, around ten in the evening. Though he and the English girl hadn't discussed it both knew they would be sharing his client's master-bedroom that night. The Malay secretary, Salma, who looked after the business while her "boss", Thomas' client, remained in Singapore, had her own separate quarters across the courtyard from where he and Cilla would be spending the night.

As soon as Salma let them in and they had checked into his client's bedroom, Thomas knew Cilla would drop-off almost immediately from exhaustion as she had done most of the driving since Johore. Once he felt that she had, after they had turned in, he stole across the moon-lit quadrangle at the back of the house to where Salma's bedroom was in the servants' quarters. He had anticipated a locked door and it was, but scratching it gently to tell her he was there, he persuaded the Malay girl to let him into her bedchamber. Even though she was angry and jealous at his bringing the White girl, Salma was more nervous that he had chosen to leave Cilla in her "boss's" master bedroom to join her instead. But he re-assured his lover of his ardent affection and that he hadn't any "choice" in bringing the girl with him because she was a friend of Salma's "boss" and wanted to visit Malacca. Salma reluctantly "relented". He left her around four that morning to join Cilla under the bedclothes in the airconditioned bedroom. Thinking that the English girl would be dead to the world, he was intrigued to discover her wide-awake, stark-naked, aroused and insistent that she too be served.

Thomas and Cilla set off for Singapore on the evening of Sunday 13th August, after spending the previous Saturday tying-up the loose-ends of Siddon's Malacca-pageant project. Before they departed for Johore and Singapore the English girl again confirmed that she would be buying Thomas' car. Her decision came as a relief for him because it would mean an acquisition of five thousand dollars from the sale, that would go toward his investment in the proposed new company he was planning to set up with Tan Siew Lou, as well as his initial down-payment for the new Datsun that he would purchase from their new client. With Cilla driving they wended

their way south until Ayer Hitam and after a refreshment-break at the traditional half-way stop between Malacca and Johore Bahru, around nine that evening, Cilla continued driving for the relative shorter journey toward "JB", as it is more commonly known. Though it was dark and she needed to wear her glasses, the English girl assured Siddon that she could manage as she felt confident in handling the vehicle.

Some forty-five minutes later, going round a "blind" corner just past Kulai, a small township, she drove smack-dab into an on-coming car on the opposite side of the road, sending both careening down a slope into a jungle-clad ditch. Thomas had lost consciousness when both vehicles made impact. Very much later, when he had "recovered" from the accident, he would discover from police and medical reports that the front of their car had buckled upward sending the steering-wheel toward the ceiling of the car and straight into the face of whoever was driving it. The occupants of the other car had managed to crawl out of their wreck to summon help from Kulai which was relatively close by.

Thomas finally came to on 26th August, some two weeks after the collision on the Kulai/Ayer Hitam/Johore trunk-road. There was pain all over his body, a constant buzzing in his head and ears, and an ache on the right side of his jaw and right upper arm where he had instinctively "cushioned" himself against the impending impact of the two cars. He vaguely remembered that he had tried to "soften" the collision by quickly placing his face along his right upper arm which he had instinctively rested on the top of the car's dashboard on his side, which was the passenger's-side, to get an "anchor", as he swung to his left and buttressed his right side snugly against the air-conditioning unit which was fitted in front of where he was sitting. (He would also learn much later, that due to this he had severed his right tricep-muscle and suffered a compound-fracture of his right femur on collision). But at the moment of his first regaining awareness all Siddon felt was an almighty hunger and that he couldn't talk for some reason. His dazed eyes lighted incredulously on June Chen and he wasn't sure whether she had been there when he first awoke or whether more time had passed. Chong-lok, his youngest, proffered a packet of rice-and-curry and he grabbed it, wolfing down everything without a please or thank you. He stared around the ward, realising that he was in a hospital but didn't know why. And it confused him. June told him that his passport was missing but this didn't mean anything either. A nurse overheard them and told June that a "Mr Tan" had taken it away and left a contact number in Singapore in case anyone came looking for Siddon. June spoke to "Tan" on the phone from the hospital, and returned to say that "Tan" was returning the passport

that day. Thomas' former "wife", an ex-nurse, told him that his right femur was completely shattered, due to a "comminuted fracture", and that he had been in a coma for more than ten days. The hospital, which was the Sultanah Aminah Hospital in Johore Bahru, had told her that they hadn't been able to attend to his severely-injured thigh because it was "too-complicated". In fact, she told Thomas, the hospital authorities had been considering the possibility of amputating the thigh since it was so badly damaged, but since no one from Singapore had come forward to take over the responsibility for his welfare, they had stayed their hand, until someone had. June Chen told him that she had immediately instructed the hospital not to "touch" his leg. She told them that she would transport him to the Singapore General Hospital herself that day after "Tan" arrived with Thomas' passport. When "Tan" arrived she obtained a letter from the Johore hospital authorities, hired a taxi from outside the premises and transported him to Singapore, first clearing Johore customs and immigration with him lying in the back of the taxi, before driving to the Singapore-end of the causeway, going through the immigration formalities there and getting him cleared, and finally admitting him to the Singapore General Hospital some seventeen miles away in the south. She told him, much later when he was discharged from the Singapore hospital that "Tan" had made no offer in "JB" to transport him but had, after handing over his passport, turned on his heels and left the hospital without a word.

Much later, in Singapore, when he was aware of his surroundings and began to understand that he had been "injured" in a motor-car accident, June told him that she had only discovered him in the Johore hospital bed, after she had made frantic calls to *all* the hospitals in Singapore because he hadn't turned up, as usual, to pick up their son, Chong-lok, and had not called, and finally, after drawing blanks in the Singapore hospitals had tried Johore Bahru in desperation. She was then told that they had 'someone' from Singapore who had been in a serious accident but there hadn't been *anyone*, including the European girl who had been involved in the collision with him, to assume responsibility for him. On a hunch June had gone up to the Johore hospital by taxi and discovered, to her utter horror, him lying in a third class hospital bed staring up at the ceiling with "empty" eyes. The doctor on duty that day, that she had had a word with, had told her that he was seriously weak from malnutrition because he was always "out", due to his being in a coma and missed the usual meal-times for the ward. And since he was in the third class no provision had been made for anyone to feed him when he was conscious, the doctor had told her, she said.

Thomas was operated on in the Singapore General Hospital on the day following his admission. It took the surgical team six hours to piece together the bone-fragments of his right thigh, first fitting them together like a jigsaw, then binding everything together with three steel-belts to ensure that they would "fix", and finally placing a "K-nail" alongside the injured thigh to buttress the bone as it mended. But though Thomas' injuries were finally seen to he was still suffering from retrograde amnesia and didn't recognise the many friends who came to see him in the Singapore hospital or that he had been in an accident.

He was discharged from the General Hospital around 26th September, still feeling weak and disoriented. The right part of his chin, where a deep gash was mending from the impact his face had with the car's dashboard, the back of his right upper arm, and his mended right thigh, still ached horribly, and the doctor prescribed pain-killing tablets. He was also given crutches and told to attend regular fortnightly outpatient "checks" at the hospital. A few days prior to his discharge June Chen had asked him whether he would like to recuperate at her home in Circuit Road and he had nodded his thanks. He found it weird that no one, not even June, had said anything about how he had come by his injuries. But despite feeling befuddled he had noticed that Hin and "Fred" Wong-foo, his two "buddies" who had dropped in to see him ever since he had been admitted to the Singapore hospital, covertly studying him whenever they thought he wasn't looking. And he was puzzled. His memory began returning in stages about a week after his discharge from hospital.

Cilla Harp finally came a-calling at Circuit Road a day after, (she hadn't put in an appearance during all the time he had been in the Singapore hospital, at least not in his recollection), and fled in panic when June questioned her about her failure to inform his family about his accident when he was still in the Johore hospital. Defensively Cilla at first claimed not to have known that he had a family, otherwise she would have phoned the day she had been discharged from the Johore hospital. But Thomas' "ex-wife" contradicted her by reminding the English woman that she had in fact phoned the Circuit Road flat several weeks before the accident to remind Thomas about a prior engagement, and when she had discovered that it was his wife who was answering her call, had told June that she had obtained Thomas' number from the phone-book, and June had then told her, that though Thomas didn't live at Circuit Road any longer because they were separated, he still came by every weekend to pick up his son to spend Saturday and Sunday with him, and that she would pass on her message, which she had done. Caught in a lie Cilla Harp had immediately turned on

her heels in panic and bolted from the Circuit Road flat. June told him, after the woman had gone, that her face appeared as if it was healing from a lot of cuts.

Thomas had also become increasingly aware of the brusque manner of both Hin and "Fred" Wong-foo, his erstwhile friends, whenever they came visiting, which was every evening after work. Finally he asked them outright about their attitude, within June's earshot, and Wong-foo exploded, accusing him outright of pretending amnesia, that he had in fact "engineered" the accident because he knew that the English girl couldn't drive properly so that she would have an accident and that Thomas could claim the insurance money for his business. Thomas sardonically remarked whether it was logical for the "engineer" who had done the "manipulating", as Wong-foo claimed he did, to end up practically incapacitated and almost dead, while the "victim" of his machinations got off scot-free, with minimal injuries. And if Cilla Harp hadn't been driving his car, how did she end up with face and chest injuries? Without replying both Chinese men left his flat and never returned again.

Siddon's brain, in the meanwhile was reeling with the newly-acquired information obtained from Fred's involuntary outburst. He now knew that he had been in a motor accident involving his car. So that was why everybody, including June, had been behaving queerly toward him all along, he thought to himself. Everyone had been waiting to see whether he would "give anything away" before he became aware of what really had happened in Malaysia! And, despite the two Chinese blokes' unfriendly attitude which had suddenly manifest itself before they had walked off in a huff, he had gleaned enough from "Fred's" outburst to write a letter to the Malaysian police at Kulai to get the "facts" of the case. Ten days later a reply from the Kulai Police informed him that he was being charged in a Johore court with driving without due care.

Singapore's general elections in September that year, again saw the People's Action Party completely dominate Singapore Parliament when the ruling party was returned unopposed in a majority of wards and won all contested seats. Once more fully in control of Parliament, (the PAP had been returned on similar lines in the 13th April 1968 elections), the "right" to decide the future "direction" of the nation was safe-guarded in a major constitutional change — no future government of Singapore, irrespective of whichever political party formed it, could decide to surrender the island's sovereignty or *merge* with another country unless it had the agreement of the people and at least two-thirds of the voters agreed to any proposed "merger" before the move could be made. Giving up control of the police

force and the armed forces, which normally would take place in any proposed merger, had to be the basis of a referendum. To make sure that the safeguard was not easily removed by any future government, that part of the Constitution pertaining to merger could only be amended through a separate merger as well. With the PAP solidly in power it had made sure that no future party, however successful in wresting control of the government in future elections, would ever be able to remove those clauses from the Singapore Constitution. The Ministry of the Environment was created on 15th September.

Malaysia-Singapore Airlines, which had been the national carrier of both Singapore and Malaysia for 25 years before "Separation", was split into two separate companies on 1st October 1972. The new Singapore company was named "Singapore Airlines" and the Malaysian entity became known as the "Malaysian Airline System".

Since hearing from the police in Johore and getting more "facts" about the accident, bits of Thomas' diminished memory began falling into place. By mid-October it had returned sufficiently for him to recall that he hadn't been at the wheel of his car at the time of the collision with the other vehicle. He excitedly told June this, realising also that some kind of conspiracy had been "cooked-up" between Cilla Harp and several of his so-called friends to "fix" him. So that was why Cheng Hin, Fred Wong-foo, "Tan" and Cilla Harp had all been acting so queerly. They *all* had something to hide. His former "wife", June, nodded. She knew Thomas wouldn't shirk responsibility for being the driver of his car if indeed he had been the driver, because it just wasn't in his nature to deny *anything* for which he was responsible, and such things didn't faze him, and his car had been comprehensively insured. June commented that it wasn't logical for the driver of a car, any car, and especially his which had been so badly damaged, to be as seriously injured as he was, while Cilla, the *so-called* "passenger", had gotten away with relatively minor facial and chest injuries and there had been no broken glass on the window of the passenger-side where she was purported to have sat.

On 21st November 1972, Robinson's, a "colonial" departmental store in Raffles Place, a landmark in the then heart of Singapore's commercial sector, was burned down in an inferno that ravaged its entire three floors in the middle of the afternoon while Christmas shoppers packed it for the usual year-end Christmas shopping-rush. Nine were killed.

The first mention of Siddon's and Cilla's traffic-accident case was held in the Johore Court outside Kulai, in December 1972, which fixed the hearing for March in the following year.



The Singapore surgeon who had pieced-together his badly-shattered thigh-bone, assured Thomas that eventually he would be able to walk normally again, once the "K-nail" embedded in his thigh was removed, when his femur had mended and "fixed", though Siddon who felt himself getting stronger with each passing day, was sceptical. It wasn't because he didn't believe the doctor, it was more his sense of feeling weak the like of which he had never experienced in his life before, and for Thomas this was an alien sensation because he had always been fit and strong through regular exercise at "karate" and weight-training. He had always prided himself on being fit as a fiddle. The surgeon guessed as much and tried re-assuring the despondent Siddon that not only would he "heal", he would eventually be able to return to "karate" training again. The doctor knew about his "karate-passion" because that was all that his patient ever talked about during the time he had been in the hospital. But the doctor's assurances had the resultant good effect on him and Siddon began exercising to re-strengthen his body once more.

With effect from 1st January 1973 permits for newspapers published in Singapore or distributed from Malaysia were made subject to stringent new controls. Under the new rules it was prohibited to publish any article "likely to cause ill-will or misunderstanding between the peoples or Governments of Malaysia and Singapore", or likely to cause communal or racial emotions" designed to "glorify or justify" the use of violence in politics.

On 29th January 1973 the Singapore Government announced that it would be setting up a Press Council consisting of Government and local press representatives which would lay down editorial guide-lines and scrutinize key staff appointments in order to "deter any foreign power which might try to subvert the country through its newspapers." Dissenting opinions, if there were any, about this move were never brought to light as the Government, through the newly set-up Press Council now controlled what went in and what stayed out of the news media.

In the same month Dr Goh Keng Swee, the then Minister of Defence, stated that labour-intensive industries would neither be given further incentives nor be allowed to use imported labour, as such industries would be better located in Malaysia.

A cease-fire in the Vietnam War was announced on 27th January 1973.

Singapore's Constitution was further amended, changing the name of the important Presidential Council to the Presidential Council for Minority Rights and reduced its function by *removing the need* to examine Bills for inconsistencies with a person's fundamental liberties. Council meetings would be conducted in private and little would be known of how it

functioned. It would only issue a short annual report on the number of meetings held, and other general information.

On 30th March 1973 diplomatic relations at ambassadorial level were established between North Vietnam and Malaysia, which became the first South-east Asian country to recognise the Hanoi Government. It was stressed by the Malaysian Foreign Ministry in Kuala Lumpur that the decision did not affect Malaysia's relations with Saigon.

As Siddon's health improved his memory also returned with a vengeance, and he began to remember his life before the all-traumatic traffic-accident which had literally transformed his life and which, as a result, had affected the way he was then starting to view his life and the people who had played a part in it, up till then. He remembered Cilla Harp who had been a friend and who had once told him that she "admired" the way he lived his life; he remembered Cheng Hin and "Fred" Wong-foo who had professed "friendship" before, but, since his "prang", had shown clearly that they hadn't really regarded him as a friend. From the very beginning. He remembered Sunil Bhatia and Tan Siew Lou, two Singaporeans like him, of different races, one Indian, the other Chinese, who were both keeping away entirely, for no rhyme or reason. With varying degrees of "friendship" all had professed liking him before but now were keeping their distance as if he were a leper, and he knew it was because they were ensuring that they would not "give anything away" to him unwittingly.

His traffic-accident case in Malaysia came up for hearing in April and he turned up at the Johore Court in Kulai with his Malaysian lawyer, an Indian who practised in Malaysia and Singapore as he had "an audience" in both territories. Thomas was surprised to see Cilla Harp present with her lawyer, a Chinese from a well-known legal firm in Singapore. He knew he was now regarded as an enemy though he didn't feel any animosity toward her when she sat next to him on the defendant's-end of the court-room table. He had not seen Cilla since his discharge from the Singapore General Hospital in the previous year, after she had fled June's home in Circuit Road when his "wife" had caught her out in a bare-faced lie about not knowing whether he had any living relatives in Singapore.

Thomas' own legal counsel had discovered, through his contacts in the Malaysian police, that the English girl had given her own private address as his to the Kulai Police when they had come to take her statement in the Johore hospital the day following the collision, and as a result all the relevant police documents, such as summonses and reports pertaining to the court case for him, had been diverted to Cilla's flat in Orange Grove Road. And that she had known all along, even when she had come calling at June's

flat after his discharge from the Singapore hospital, that the Kulai Police were intending to charge him with responsibility for the accident because she had lodged a false report a day after June, his "wife", had "found" him in the JB hospital and had him discharged and admitted into the Singapore one. His lawyer had also found out that Thomas had been in jeopardy of being arrested because of his "failure" to respond to the several police summonses sent to him at Cilla's address, because he hadn't known about them as the English girl had kept them from him. But his letter to the police at Kulai inquiring into the accident, after Fred Wong-foo's outburst, had prevented the arrest-order from being issued. And that he was being charged by the Malaysian police finally, after more than six months since the accident, because Cilla Harp had suddenly volunteered herself as a material witness to state that he had been driving his car at the time of the collision on the Johore trunk-road.

Looking sideways at the English girl Thomas recognised sitting beside her the same "Mr Tan" — the elder bankrupt brother of Tan Siew Lou — who, he had also learnt from his lawyer, had accompanied her to Kulai to make her false report, and he began to fathom the extent of the conspiracy that had been plotted against him. "Tan", technically, was to have been his and Siew Lou's potential employee in the proposed public relations consultancy that he and Siew Lou had been in the midst of setting up prior to his "prang", and "Tan" had been angry and humiliated that his younger brother had not invited him to be a director of the company even though he knew that Siew Lou could not do so as "Tan" was an undischarged bankrupt.

But the conclusion of the hearing that day took everyone by surprise, including Thomas. His lawyer first began Siddon's defence by questioning the ethics of the Kulai Police in deciding to charge Siddon with the offence after more than the stipulated legal two-week period as laid down by Malaysian statute, when, during that two-week period Thomas had been "available" as a patient at the Johore Bahru hospital and had only been discharged a day after the expiry of the period. It had only been the *fabricated* report, Siddon's lawyer said, of the Englishwoman who had gone to Kulai several months after the accident to lodge a report, that his client, Siddon, was being charged that day. The police prosecutor, an Inspector Padmanathan, jumped up to interrupt and "explain" his "rationale" behind the police action but the Malay magistrate hearing the case suddenly banged his gavel and dismissed it. Thomas Siddon had been cleared on a technicality because the magistrate hadn't believed the "facts" as they had been placed before him by the police.

With the realisation that he was no longer on the "chopping-block", Thomas turned toward Cilla and gave her what he thought was his most eerie and mocking look. She and her cohorts had failed to "fix" him and she had exposed herself as dishonest and stupid in his eyes, to have listened to those so-called "friends" of his who had advised her to place the blame on him even though he had not been the guilty, and she had been. He recalled, for no rhyme or reason at that moment, that she had been discharged from the same hospital that he was in, a day after the accident, and that her Eurasian manager, a Patrick Dowe, had come from Singapore, after she had phoned him to pick her up. And that both of them had not bothered to look in on him or make any arrangements for his welfare before departing the Johore hospital or to worry about him afterward. Cilla had turned her back and forgot about him completely. It had been June Chen, his "wife", who had worried about his non-appearance "as usual" to pick up his son for the weekend that had allowed him to be saved.

Thomas' lawyer advised him that since he no longer was in jeopardy of a traffic charge, that if he wanted to "go after" Cilla Harp for her "moral and criminal negligence", he should do it in a Singapore civil court. The Eurasian was all for raking the Englishwoman over the coals but on his approaching several lawyers in Singapore he discovered them reluctant to take on the case. It seemed that she was too well-known and highly-regarded among the legal and business communities, and, as a senior financial journalist, had powerful and well-placed friends. But he would have thought that truth would have been the criterion for the lawyers deciding whether to take the English girl to court on his behalf. He would soon learn better. After trying several times at several legal firms he resignedly accepted that it had to be because he was "mixed", an Eurasian, and that she was White and English. And "White" was still regarded as being "right" in Singapore despite the island's independence from Britain.

Thomas had already given up use of his crutches by the time of the Kulai court hearing, though he still hobbled markedly. Despite his unsteady gait he had returned to "karate" training to discover that Cheng Hin, whom he had first introduced the Japanese martial art, was six months away from attaining the lowest rank in the brown belt category. He was amazed though, that his "protege" appeared insolent because he was hale and hearty while Siddon was weak and unsteady in gait. Being born on the island and familiar with that aspect of Sino culture pertaining to the learning of the martial arts and the respect a junior rank would give a "senior", he found his former friend's attitude downright rude and insolent because it was he who had been responsible for Cheng Hin going into "karate" in the first place and

helping to "rehabilitate" him from the trauma of his wife, Nakhoda, leaving him. He wondered whether it stemmed from a personal jealousy or because Cheng Hin, a Chinese, thought that he, Thomas, being Eurasian, was an "outsider" in Singapore society. And if that were true it was preposterous because he, Thomas Siddon was Singapore-born-and-raised and the other came from Penang, Malaysia, where he had been born. Did Cheng Hin think *he* belonged "more" in Singapore because he was Chinese in a Chinese-dominant society? Anyway, Siddon thought to himself, for persons such as Cheng Hin, bothering about the so-called "Oriental courtesies" was a waste of time in view of his uncouth character.

Though he couldn't get a lawyer interested in taking his case against Cilla Harp Thomas plodded on preparing for the day when he would, somehow, convince someone. During the time of his partnership with Sunil Bhatia, when his car had been part of his investment in their partnership, Sunil's father had arranged comprehensive insurance "cover" for the two of them to drive his car. Thinking that he could off-set the money spent on his recovery as well as the damage to his car by making a claim on his insurance, he called on the insurance company. He was totally dumbfounded when the clerk at the office told him that the Bhatias had failed to pay the mandatory requisite insurance premium, payable on an application for cover, despite the insurance company issuing him their certificate first, as Sunil's father was a sub-agent of long-standing with them. Thomas then learnt from the clerk that on their discovering through the Bhatias that his vehicle had been involved in a "collision", the insurance company had immediately reduced the "comprehensive cover" to "third party risk" since they had already issued him with a comprehensive cover certificate. Under the new third party "cover" Thomas wasn't entitled to anything, the clerk told him.

The insurance clerk also said that a "Mr Tan", on Thomas' behalf, had submitted an insurance report, purportedly signed by Siddon, acknowledging that he, Siddon, had been driving his own car at the time of the collision on the Johore trunk-road. No wonder, Thomas thought to himself, Cilla Harp had been so confident that her lying report lodged at Kulai would have stood up in court! She and her co-conspirators had been ever so confident that the report submitted by "Tan", and which purportedly bore his signature, though he was at that moment confused that he had actually signed anything in the Johore hospital, would have provided the conclusive "proof" they needed that he had been the actual driver of his car at the time of the crash. The Kulai magistrate giving him a discharge, must have thrown a complete spanner in the works for everybody! He requested for and was shown the

incriminating insurance claim document and *immediately* recognised it as the exact same form he had signed in his and Sunil's company *before* the accident when he and his previous partner, on Sunil's suggestion, had each signed a blank insurance claim form as a "precaution" in case either of them was ever involved in an accident and was badly incapacitated, the "surviving" partner would then be able to file a claim on the other's behalf to "protect" their respective interests. It was standard business practice Sunil had assured him strongly then. But Thomas now recognised the row of numerical digits staring back at him in the form, and which were supposed to have been his driver's licence number. They were his birth certificate serial number, not his driving licence number — the self-same numbers he had inserted in the requisite section of the form, given him by Sunil, as a "precaution" because he had felt uneasy about leaving such a "dangerous" document under the control of another. And he had been proved right! Sunil Bhatia, somehow, had become part of Cilla Harp's conspiracy to "get" him and to even allow her to profit by enabling her to make a claim on his insurance policy. But they had failed to get him incriminated at Kulai and had either been unable to remove the evidence of their misdeed from the insurance office or had completely forgotten about it!

The by now enraged Siddon finally began to understand the extent of the plot to "fix" him. Cilla, somehow, had convinced everyone involved in her mess that he had had an ulterior motive in inviting her up to Malacca and allowing her to drive his car. She more than likely had "failed" to tell them that she had intended buy his Renault and had gone to Malacca with him to "test-drive" it before making a committal. And his "friends", on their own and without checking with him first, had decided to "teach him a lesson" because they had thought him capable of dishonourable motives! Somehow she had won the sympathy of those involved, and *everyone* had chosen to believe her rather than base their judgement of the actual state of affairs because they had not really thought much of his character. He must have been so seriously injured, and his chances of recovery slim, that they had decided to let him take the "rap" as he probably was going to die. Thomas' immediate emotional response to what he felt had really happened was that Asians had ganged-up to ensure that he, a half-caste, would not prosper if he were to survive and took Cilla Harp to court for driving his car. And Cilla, as was her wont, had washed her hands of the whole deal once she had succeeded in getting everyone to believe her lies and become involved with her. Why hadn't *anyone* considered him? Where did everyone fit in this mess?

His attempts at getting Sunil to explain how the insurance claim form that he had signed in their company before the accident had turned up at their insurance company's office via "Tan", drew an outright denial from the Indian that such a form had ever existed.

Tan Siew Lou had yet to get in touch with him since the accident in Johore and he began wondering why he hadn't done so. And "Tan" who had worked for the two of them and had been envious of both him and Siew Lou because they had ended up becoming his employers, while he, "Tan", the elder brother of Siew Lou, had been reduced to being an employee. Where did he fit in the jig-saw puzzle?

Several days later a letter arrived at June Chen's from the Central Provident Board inquiring into whether Siddon still resided at the Circuit Road flat and that if he didn't, would the registered occupant of the address know of his whereabouts. Thomas called the CPF office, remembering that after he had separated from June to live on his own, when he had gone to Hong Kong to be with Yim-sheung, he had forgotten to inform them that he had in fact moved out of June's flat, and, that as far as the Central Provident Fund Board was concerned he was, to all intents and purposes still resident in Circuit Road. The board's letter, that day, was indeed intriguing, to say the least. On his calling and informing the clerk in charge of his file, who he was, the surprised woman informed him that a "Mr Tan" had phoned "some time back", making inquiries into his next-of-kin as he had been badly hurt in a traffic accident in Malaysia, and was expected to die! Though the woman had not stated it, Thomas knew that the board had not "reacted" to "Tan's" story and had waited to see whether there would be a formal report of his death, in the first place, and whether a claim would be filed by anyone. On a hunch he visited Furiko, his mother-in-law, who was still looking after his two elder sons by Mariko, and she told him that a man had come to inform her about his accident, some time back, and had assured the middle-aged woman that he would "take care of all the formalities". The man said his name was "Tan" and that he would be making arrangements to try to get the CPF to release his money, which was compulsorily saved by the government for all employed citizens through the board, should he turn for the worse and pass away. So now Thomas knew the reason for the CPF sending their letter to his last known address at Circuit Road!

There seemed to be so many facets to the "aftermath" of his accident it took his breath away. "Tan", he knew, was a bankrupt so "Tan" probably had hoped to somehow lay his hands on his CPF funds, should he have succumbed to his injuries and his money passed to his surviving children. How could "Tan" have thought that he could do that, appeared to Siddon the mindless action of a desperate person.

Siddon who now realised that he couldn't hope to get Cilla Harp on the criminal negligence charge because no lawyer seemed interested, decided that he would try to get the others who had planned to get him "lumbered" with a civil suit by the Englishwoman for being the driver of his car at the material time of the collision at Kulai because, as far as they were concerned it was a foregone conclusion that the court there would find him guilty.

Collecting his thoughts he sat down and wrote all his suspicions, as clearly as his still-scrambled brain could express them in a letter, and posted it to the Criminal Investigation Department, (CID), of the Singapore Police Force. A Chinese Acting Superintendent of Police called Lum replied several days later, requesting him to call at their offices in Robinson Road for an "interview". He was to bring along all relevant documents in his possession for "scrutiny". When he got to the ASP's room every item of paper that he tendered was examined thoroughly and photocopied. Thomas was careful not to come out and accuse anyone in particular but simply stated his suspicions, the circumstances before and after the accident, its "aftermath" and what he had subsequently unearthed. Lum then got him to write out a formal complaint in the form of a report to add to his initial note of complaint to the CID, which was then all added to the ASP's own copious jottings. Siddon was told, almost in an off-hand manner, that the police would "look into it". If it were necessary he would be "asked" to come for more meetings which might develop into a charge against several "likely characters", or there would be no case at all. It had all been very disappointing for Thomas, and when the ASP also told him that Cilla Harp couldn't be directly charged he could scarcely conceal his dismay but the police officer took no notice. A moment later he appeared to relent and commented that if there was a guilty party it probably was "Tan", the elder brother of his former partner-to-be, Tan Siew Lou. "Tan", the officer said, had been instrumental in first detaining Siddon's passport in Singapore whilst Siddon was still in the Johore hospital, thus preventing anyone who might have gone to see him to be able to get him to Singapore without first getting in touch with "Tan". The man had also submitted the questionable insurance claim form to the insurance company. It would be up to "Tan" to implicate the others, Lum said, to "save his own skin" if he felt "cornered".

The sixth annual conference of Foreign Ministers of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, (ASEAN), consisting of Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, from 16th to 18th April 1973, welcomed the Vietnam cease-fire of 27th January 1973. Mr Sinnathambay Rajaratnam of Singapore issued a warning that, while countries outside the region believed that through the "cease-fire" the war in Vietnam



had ended, what had ended was only "...the American War in Vietnam. Other wars are still going on in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos..."

The Malaysian Government on 8th May 1973 announced that it was terminating the 1967 agreement with Singapore under which the respective currencies of the two countries were freely interchangeable, (at a par equivalent since February 1973, of M\$2.5376 or S\$2.5376 per US dollar). It was proposed to split the existing Stock Exchange of Malaysia and Singapore into two separate exchanges as soon as administrative arrangements could be made. The interchangeability agreement between Brunei and Malaysia, likewise dating from 1967, was also being terminated, effective from 22nd May. The interchangeability agreement between Singapore and Brunei was not affected. On 20th June 1973 the Singapore dollar was allowed to "float" although it would return to fixed parity when the international currency situation (was) stabilized..."

The CID informed Thomas that they were proceeding to charge "Tan" the elder brother of Tan Siew Lou, his former "partner", with intent to fraud. Subsequent questioning of the suspect by the police had brought forth "unsatisfactory explanations as to his unusual behaviour" from about the time of Thomas' accident to just before the court hearing at Kulai in Johore. The police said there was a probability that Siew Lou, the younger brother, might be implicated as well. A week later in June, "Tan" cut both his wrists and threw himself off a high-rise. When the police decided to "go after" Tan Siew Lou, he too threw himself off a tall building.

Further digging into Siew Lou's background revealed that he had suffered a mental breakdown previously while on holiday in Spain, three years before, and had been admitted into a lunatic asylum there. In fact just before his final suicide attempt Siew Lou had been confined to a wheelchair due to a heart-attack. The stress he must have been suffering had to have been so great as to force him to pull himself off his wheelchair to get over the balustrade of the building to throw himself over. The police told Siddon that Siew Lou's family had a record of "mental misfits", with a surviving sister and a younger brother still in Singapore's Woodbridge Mental Hospital off Yio Chu Kang Road. Subsequently, because of the demise of the two "key" figures in his "drama", Siddon was formally informed by the police that the investigation into his complaint had to be closed. There was "nothing" to charge Cilla Harp with because she had "covered her tracks" adequately, the police told him. Thomas burned silently that she had gotten away scot-free.

Ministers of the five member-states of ASEAN meeting at Baguio, the Philippines, from 22nd to 24th June 1973, agreed on joint procedures for the

neutralization of the South-east Asian region, and in particular the conditions under which China, the United States, the Soviet Union and Japan were to be asked to respect the proposed neutral zone. Tun Abdul Razak, the Malaysian prime minister, had been reported on 24th February 1973 as stating that Malaysia's wish was that ASEAN should create a zone of peace, freedom and neutrality in its region and that the South-east Asian nations should not take sides with a few big Powers against the others.

Around this time there was a rapid increase in property-prices in Singapore, which made it impossible for the middle-income groups, (i.e. those not eligible for the subsidized, public low-cost housing built by the Housing and Development Board), to acquire their own homes. According to figures then available, the population, (then about 2,200,000), living in an area of only 580 square kilometres, included a lower-income group of about 42 percent, a lower middle-class of 38 percent and a middle-class of about 13 percent. For three years wages had been "frozen" until they were allowed to float in June that year. The Singapore dollar was also allowed to "float" in June. But the wage increase had been eroded by inflation set off by the steep oil price hikes of the oil-producing countries which hit Singapore in unwarranted increases for basic food commodities like rice, and "runway" hawker prices for the "traditional" 'cheap' meal everyone on the island depended on for at least two of their three main meals a day. There was no control over the hawkers, ethnic-Chinese in the main, who, at the same time constituted the main "working class" support for the People's Action Party through the food purveyors' kith and kin at the polls. The Singapore Government on 10th September 1973 announced that with effect from the following day only Singapore Citizens would be allowed to purchase residential property without any restrictions. Under separate legislation to be introduced to this end, permanent residents, non-citizens and companies, though not disbarred from owning residential property, would require written authority from the Government to purchase such property or vacant land other than that already designated for industrial or commercial use. But the government plan to establish the island as the foremost banking centre in South-east Asia was bearing fruit. Between the end of 1971 and November 1973 the total number of banks and similar institutions grew from 78 to 129, which included 37 foreign banks and 13 foreign merchant banks.

Despite having the steel-bar embedded in his right thigh Thomas, in the meantime, continued with "karate" training, and by December that year, though his "gammy", (English slang: malfunctioning, injured or lame), leg still felt sore, he was regarded a promising "hopeful" to represent his

"karate" club in the eliminations to choose a "national" team to represent the country in the first-ever Asian-Pacific Karatedo Championships which was also being staged on the island. His recently-arrived new "karate" teacher from Japan was full of encouragement and admiration for his determination to better his younger and more adroit club-opponents during free-sparring practice, and kept pointing out to everyone in the class that it was Thomas' own experience in 'karate-craft' and his "fighting-spirit" which was helping him overcome his much faster and "healthier" sparring-partners. But on the new Japanese "karate sensei", (Japanese: "karate teacher"), picking him to be among the representatives of the club for the forthcoming pre-selection qualifying matches against hopefuls from rival clubs, a wail of protest arose from the other fellow-senior-ranking "students" who had not bothered to qualify. His detractors were the same lot of ethnic-Chinese he realised, who had joined the club about the same time as he, some six years previously. Several were his "equal" in proficiency, before his accident, while some others were still below his standard despite his "gammy-leg" and being hindered by a limb that tended to buckle at the oddest moment but which he had somehow managed to "hide" during practice so that no one was the wiser. Thomas mentally shrieked to all of them: haven't we all sweated and strained together to learn our martial art together? Wouldn't our common "passion" have forged a bond among us? Why aren't you happy for me, that I can "come back" despite my serious injuries? Thomas felt that he should have realised that when he first returned to "karate" training after his accident there had been no expression of encouragement forthcoming from any of his club "brethren". Obviously they had disliked the kind of zealotry he had displayed, he thought to himself.

Disregarding his dissenters, among whom he had noticed Cheng Hin, he was adamant that he be on the team because, he insisted, he had earned his place. His Japanese teacher too, was pleased with Siddon's determination because, he told Thomas later, his presence seemed to inspire the younger and inexperienced team-members. Still feeling bitter though about the whole affair, going into the preliminary national-selection rounds at the "Gay World Stadium", he was disqualified for not holding back his blows when he attacked his opponent in his third bout after he had "sailed through" the first two matches against two different opponents. Thomas knew that his disgruntlement with his club detractors had caused him to become reckless, to prove a point, and he had fouled. Though disappointed he was still glad that he had "overcome" his "hurdle", had participated again in his beloved contact-sport, and had proved his enemies wrong. He could still compete in

"karate" and give "good measure" for what it was worth. He hadn't "shamed" his club by being incompetent. But he still smarted with the realisation that his fellow club-members hadn't lent him any moral support. The next "hurdle" for Thomas would be the forthcoming minor surgery to have the "K-nail" removed from his right thigh. He would see to it after the Asia-Pacific Karate Championship which would be staged in March 1974, even though he wouldn't be taking part.

On 31st January 1974 four guerrillas claiming to belong to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, (PFLP), the group of Palestinians fighting for the liberation of Palestine from Israel, and the Sekigun, (Red Army), an extremist Japanese left-wing organisation, made an abortive raid on the Pulau Bukom Shell Oil Refinery, an islet off Singapore. After a "siege" of eight days Singapore law enforcement officers allowed the terrorists to depart Singapore in a Japanese Government-provided aircraft which landed at Singapore, picked them up and transported them first to Kuwait to release Japanese diplomatic staff held to ransom there by the terrorists' cohorts, and finally to South Yemen whose government was willing to receive them.

After the minor surgery to remove the supporting bit of steel buttressing his right thigh-bone, Thomas found that despite a general weakness, and an "odd-feeling" under his knee-cap where the doctors at the Johore hospital had "treaded" a steel-pin through his leg-bone, underneath his knee-cap to keep his damaged thigh-bone stretched internally to prevent further lacerations of muscle-tissue around the badly-shattered thigh — and which the Singapore surgeons had removed when they had performed the "miracle" of restoring his limb to him, the bone had mended beautifully. With time, he knew, it would strengthen and with exercise it would again be "as good as new". Now, in addition to his thrice-weekly "karate" sessions he began early morning jogs around Circuit Road where he was still recuperating at June Chen's place.

Finally in April, returning to "the market" to look for work, he discovered, since his "temporary absence" a totally different outlook among the local companies which hadn't been there before his accident and its "aftermath". Despite there being a strong "presence" of "international" advertising agencies and public relations consultancies, locally-owned agencies were now striking out to obtain and service the traditional Chinese family-type firms which seemed to be "coming out" and aggressively marketing themselves on western lines. It appeared that the old-fashioned, "traditional" ways were "old hat". The mainly Chinese family-firms were more than a match for the foreign-owned ones in terms of wealth, and with their modern

offspring who had been educated and trained abroad mainly in the United States taking over the reins, "new ways" were being tried out. (Though he did find it curious that these offspring affected strong American accents after a mere three to five years in the States when they couldn't speak proper English or even with a British accent after being born and spending a lifetime in Singapore!). Ad agencies and PR consultancies were being appointed to help market the goods of these companies through sophisticated campaigns rather than through the "old boy's", (meaning the father's), cronies and contacts. Thomas at first tried to rationalise that it was because he had been "away" from the "market" recuperating, that he found the "market" changed but as he went from agency to agency looking for an opening he finally was convinced that it wasn't something that he was imagining. He was eventually employed in a Chinese-owned, "local" advertising agency to head its copy department. Within a week he was promoted to creative director because since his joining the managing director had become emboldened sufficiently to attempt to go after the "big fish".

June Chen who had faithfully cared for him during his recuperation began to hint that Thomas should start to look for a place of his own. She told him that she wanted to become a Roman Catholic and her parish priest had advised her that she couldn't live with a man, "under the same roof", who was not her husband. It was "an occasion of sin", she had been told, and Thomas immediately agreed to start looking for his own place.

It was while he was glancing through "The Straits Times" classifieds in his office during the lunch-hour that a junior artist, a singularly-attractive Chinese girl, around nineteen, came into his office to clarify something pertaining to an artwork she was working on. He could see that she was curious about what he was doing with his head deep in the paper, and as soon as she was done with her task disarmingly inquired into his preoccupation prior to her arrival at his desk. He told her, and she volunteered to single-out likely-sounding rooms for him to appraise. Su-mei had never said much to him before and Thomas had been startled by her impulsiveness.

The following morning he found Su-mei's note on his desk. It contained the addresses of the likely rooms she had found "suitable". These were airconditioned, furnished, and within his pocket. It was pleasant to know that she had thought of everything. He tucked away the scrap of paper in his shirt-pocket, thinking to call the advertisers during his lunch-break that day when everyone in the office would be out for their mid-day meal. The Chinese advertising agency, by local standards was large, but it was sufficiently "pint-sized" for everyone in the office to be aware of what

everybody was doing, especially a non-Chinese in their midst. Thomas found this uncomfortable because he preferred his privacy. Su-mei came by before lunch at one to say that she had only found two of the three addresses that she had left him that morning worth looking at because she had called the advertisers and had based her judgement on their responses. She offered to "negotiate" the price and terms of rent for him with the prospective landladies and he nodded his appreciative agreement, as she smilingly walked away.

Su-mei got him an airconditioned room with its own attached bathroom at a ridiculously-low monthly rent, one he knew he never could have negotiated on his own. He marvelled at the commanding manner she had "taken over", hustling the Chinese landlady to agree to her price. Siddon had always been used to doing things on his own but he knew he never would have succeeded like she had. He did feel though as if *he* were a foreigner, by the, to him, surprising, almost hostile attitude of his prospective ethnic-Chinese landlady. He had never previously received such kind of "treatment" from a local in his life and it was disturbing. Thomas wondered whether the ethnic-Chinese citizens of his island, who were in the majority and had always behaved that everyone was "equal", were beginning to demonstrate that they were in fact the dominant ethnic group and everyone else was the "outsider". He was Eurasian, born on the island and a fellow-national, why were the Chinese starting to act as if Singapore only "belonged" to them, he thought to himself. Was it because many of their offspring had gone abroad to the West and had seen how the majority ethnic group in those western countries always behaved as if they were "in charge"? He swiftly wiped the "paranoid" feeling from his heart. He put his strange reactions to his recent accident in Malaysia and the aftermath when he had lain helpless in an "alien" hospital, in a coma, and that when he had come to, realising that he was powerless to even help himself out of his predicament because he was the odd one and no one in that strange hospital would help him, or was even interested.

Despite his feelings he moved into his new room on the following weekend with his son, the little Chong-lok, already four, helping to carry little bits of "stuff" out of his mother's front-room for his father to cart away in his car. His youngest didn't fully comprehend why his father was again leaving him, but brightened up when he heard Thomas say that he would come to pick him up every Sunday for outings with his elder brothers.

Colour television made its debut in Singapore in August 1974. The island was already in the tight grip of the world-wide recession which had spared no country — with sky-rocketing prices for food and petrol, and a

shortage of rice as well. Thomas found it illogical that there had been no public outcry from the "opposition" (there was in fact no "opposition" because the PAP was the sole political party in power in the Singapore Parliament then), or the press, and that the Government could "justify" introducing an improved but expensive communication tool in the face of uncontrolled prices for the basic food-commodities. But of course the press was soundly curtailed by the Press Council, which had been set up on 24th January 1973, and which scrutinized everything that would go into the local media if it pertained to Singapore, and the fear that what the Government had done to the "Eastern Sun" and the "Singapore Herald" could happen to them. But couldn't the "opposition", which hadn't been returned in the previous general elections *do anything*? As if in answer to his many silent, unasked questions the Government announced that it was setting up centres where the public could purchase stocks of rice at "government prices". The controlled commodity would be available through the community centres which were run by the People's Association, which had been set up by the Government when it first came to power in 1959, and the supermarkets that were set up by the National Trades Union Congress whose leaders comprised government ministers.

Lee Kuan Yew had publicly "defended" the Government's switching from black-and-white tv to colour but Thomas wasn't convinced. He had heard of Malay "peons" putting themselves in hock just to lay their hands on a colour tv set, to the detriment of their families.

Though Thomas had "recovered" from his accident, had been instrumental in causing two of the protagonists in his "personal drama" to kill themselves to escape criminal prosecution, and finally finding employment, his mental frame of mind had been badly affected by the accident in Malaysia. His 'usual' confidence was shot and he was in a constant state of insecurity. The money in his pocket seemed to have lost its worth and depression hit him in "waves" everyday, driving him always to the verge of suicide but he always fought back, willing himself to realise that the vile thoughts he had within him would pass, if he held on.

Su-mei who had helped him find a room, became his constant companion despite the outraged warnings of all their colleagues. Thomas was a married man, they reminded her, and had children. The young woman always protested in her mild-mannered way that they were "just good friends". But no one believed her. He was relieved when she finally left the agency to join another in Beach Road.

Singapore won her first-ever gold medal in international athletics when Chee Swee Lee, a Chinese schoolgirl, won the 400 metres event in the Asian

Games held in Teheran, Iran, from 1st to 16th September. She had been trained by Patrick Zehnder, an Eurasian school teacher.

A Tan Wah Piow, a former president of the University of Singapore Student's Union, and a third-year architecture student, came into public light in October when he was arrested for inciting workers of the Pioneer Industries Employees' Union to riot and resort to violence in an industrial dispute. He spent eight months out of a 12-month jail-sentence for organising protests against unemployment. His actions had "revealed" that there was unemployment on the island despite what the Government had claimed and which the national press had never publicised.

In December 1974 a home-made bomb exploded prematurely in a car parked on East Coast Road killing its two occupants, believed to be members of the Malayan National Liberation League, another Communist Party of Malaya underground satellite. Another booby-trap had exploded at an overhead pedestrian bridge in front of the People's Park Complex, a shopping centre in the chinatown district, a few days earlier. No one was hurt. A Malayan National Liberation Front member, an electrical sub-contractor, was arrested on a tip-off and diagrams of the homes of VIPs, and key government buildings were found in his possession. A police statement implied that the drawings were to aid in future terrorist attempts.

Su-mei and Thomas Siddon had been "walking out" for some time and decided that what they felt toward one another was love and sealed their commitment with a celebration-drink on her birthday, Christmas Eve, at a deluxe hotel. In the beginning her father was dead-set against their romance but eventually agreed to an official engagement when his wife convinced him of Siddon's love for their daughter. Thomas was to settle his "private affairs" first, (which meant getting a divorce from Mariko, his Japanese wife, whose marriage he had yet to abjure), before marrying Su-mei. Thomas was pleased that he had had the good sense to tell his beautiful bride-to-be everything about himself until she had come into his life, because she was in a good position to refute all the objections of her father. When her father realised that he couldn't shake his favourite daughter's resolve, he insisted on a long engagement and Siddon guessed that he had hoped that, with time, his lovely young daughter would change her mind about him, since she was still a very young woman.

Around late December 1974 the local news media was filled with the sensational coverage of the progressive occupation of South Vietnam by the Communist forces of North Vietnam. Following this President Gerald Ford on 28th April 1975 decided to evacuate American forces and "high-risk" South Vietnamese from South Vietnam. Two C-130s aircraft were prevented



from landing at Tan Son Nhut Airport due to panic-stricken South Vietnamese crowds and stranded foreigners blocking the runways, anxious to escape the impending Communist invasion. A fleet of 81 helicopters was flown in together with a force of nearly 1,000 marines to protect the evacuation, and aircover was provided by US Navy and Air Force fighter-bombers. The evacuation from Tan Son Nhut began shortly after noon with 395 Americans and 4,475 South Vietnamese being flown out in about four hours while the Communist forces made no attempt to shell the airport while it was in progress. Wild scenes however, occurred at the US Embassy when crowds attempted to storm helicopters flown-in for the "pull-out" from the roof of the embassy-building, where the 'copters had landed, and were driven back by US marines with pistol and rifle butts.

Many South Vietnamese, on their own, fled the country from 20th to 30th April 1975 by whatever means they could devise. Thousands put to sea in small craft and were picked up by American, South Korean, Japanese or Taiwanese ships stationed about two miles off-shore from the South Vietnamese coastline. The evacuation operation concluded just before 8.00 a.m. on 30th April 1975 with the lifting-up of 100 marines who, in the final stages had to use tear-gas to hold back South Vietnamese crowding up the stairs to the roof of the US Embassy building.

The Vietnamese war that had ended, had dragged on since 1956 and simmered to an end on 30th April 1975, and was considered the longest of the 20th Century. Soon after noon of 30th April 1975 Communist troops, after having completed their occupation of the central provinces, east of Saigon, began their entry into the South Vietnamese capital, Saigon. A senior North Vietnamese officer received the surrender of South Vietnamese President Minh and on 29th April the Provisional Revolutionary Government announced that Saigon had been renamed Ho Chi Minh City. Previously on 17th April 1975 Phnom-Penh in Cambodia had fallen to Communist forces.

The Communist victories in Cambodia and South Vietnam forced members of the Association of South-east Asian Nations, (ASEAN), to reassess their foreign policies to these two countries when they had been under US "protection".

After the fall of Saigon a total of 131,399 South Vietnamese refugees entered the United States or its Pacific possessions within the first forty days, of whom 3,756 went on to other countries. Several thousand other refugees had escaped by sea or air to countries in south-east or eastern Asia, including Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, the Philippines and South Korea. Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia refused to allow the landing of refugees who arrived by sea. After Singapore had refused to accept over 8,000 refugees who arrived in the first week of May 1975 in

nearly 60 ships, including five gun-boats, most sailed on to Guam, which is United States territory, but a few returned to South Vietnam. A naval and marine police cordon was placed around Singapore on 16th June to turn back ships from West Malaysia, (the peninsula), with refugees who had not been allowed to land there.

Some 80 percent of the refugees from South Vietnam were "Hoa" or ethnic-Chinese, and middle-class South Vietnamese, many of the latter former soldiers or officials of South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Thieu's regime. The "Hoa" ethnic-Chinese, Thomas had read with incredulous eyes in the British newspapers available at the British Council reading rooms, were "...being persecuted, ostracized, discriminated against, and expelled...from Haiphong, Hongay-Campha, also from Hanoi...successful businessmen, provident with money, *living separate lives in their own cultural environment in which many refused to learn Vietnamese...*" Siddon was immediately reminded of Lee Kuan Yew's boast of 12th February 1968, some four months after "Separation" from Malaysia, to a group of Mandarin-speaking Chinese Nanyang University students that "...*the Chinese in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia or Vietnam, can or cannot be, have or have not been completely assimilated with the indigenous peoples...the descendants of the Chinese will be identifiable from the other races even a hundred years from now...*"

While such dramatic events were unfolding in the northern part of the region, in Singapore life was of a different nature. The Government had just announced that the main city-area was being "cordoned-off" during the peak morning rush-hour to ease the flow of traffic into the city between 7.30 a.m. and 10.15 a.m. Motorists could only enter this "restricted zone", (the Central Business District), during the "restricted times" for a monthly fee of sixty dollars or a daily licence fee of five dollars. It was part of the Government's plan to "persuade" vehicle-owners to give up driving their cars to work and take the bus instead, or form car-pools. The island-city's narrow roads, many dating back to the colonial era, were too choked-up because of the growth of vehicle ownership due to rising affluence. There were many aged cars as well, which broke down frequently due to lack of regular servicing which the authorities were determined to see off the roads for good. But many grumbled that it was just another plan by the PAP Government to make more money, the restricted zone scheme was just a "trap" to get motorists to pay get into a specific area. There was gossip that a "master-plan" had been drawn up designating where the new towns, factories and industrial sites, and the recreational areas would be situated and many a developer dreamed of getting his hands on it.

Land reclamation work had begun on the proposed Changi International Airport, a Singapore billion-dollar venture to transform the former British air base at Changi into a sophisticated new "air-gateway" into the island in anticipation of the forthcoming "jumbo-era" of giant, wide-bodied passenger jets and a greater influx of tourists. Visitor-arrivals annually were reaching the million-mark and the airport project was deemed an important "contribution" to increasing that number even higher. Perennially run-down Changi Village, a collection of ramshackle buildings which had catered to British servicemen stationed at Changi, and which had become still more dilapidated after the British pull-out in 1971, started coming back to life again as work commenced on the new airport, and foreign workers employed on the project began spending money in the village again.

## Chapter 14

### *Toward the Light*

In June 1975, while still with the local advertising agency, the ethnic-Chinese-owned motor company in Newton which had commissioned him to publicize the opening of their new showroom in 1972, before his accident when he had been running his own public relations consultancy, sent feelers to Thomas Siddon through the eldest son of the company's venerable chairman, about the possibility of his joining them as an executive. It was an unusual offer, coming from an ethnic-Chinese family-firm, for those days, and it intrigued Siddon because such ethnic-Chinese family-firms rarely employed non-Chinese except as lower-rung staff. And even ethnic-Chinese non family-members very seldom were employed as executives, unless, of course they had been with the firm for as long as anyone could remember and were regarded as faithful retainers or had somehow either married the boss's daughter or sister! But through conversations with the "boss's" son Thomas gleaned that the motor firm was looking for someone with the "right" connections to help it get the necessary official approval from the relevant government authority to enable it to set up a car-rental division which the company, so-far, had been unsuccessful in accomplishing.

The proposed car-rental division was seen as a viable measure which would enable the company to continue earning a "steady income" from the sale of new cars and light trucks, the mainstay of its business, which it would "sell" to its own car-rental division and thus help maintain the sales quota set by the main agent for the make of Japanese vehicles of which the company was a sub-agent. The new division would lease out the vehicles

to the many foreign multinational conglomerates setting up operations in Singapore, which preferred leasing cars and trucks to outright ownership. It was also regarded as a solution to the alarming new measures the Government had instituted to discourage yet more new cars clogging up the island's already congested roads, by steeply increasing the cost of purchasing a new car by exorbitant new added-on taxes, which was affecting the firm's livelihood.

The motor firm's aged chairman had apparently been impressed with Siddon's handling of their showroom opening in 1972 and felt he was the one who would accomplish what so far had been an impossible task for them. Flattered to be considered in the first place, and to be offered an executive position in the ethnic-Chinese company, which was unusual, Thomas joined them in August. With the new job came a salary higher than what he had been getting at the local advertising agency, a generous expense account and a company car with unlimited weekly petrol supplies. Siddon obtained the all-important official-approval for the car-rental division by November that year and was immediately put in charge of getting it going.

Now with his new, sleek, air-conditioned company car, he would take Su-mei and his sons, Kean Siew and Rahman, for drives around Singapore every Sunday, like they used to do when he ran his own car at the local ad agency. But this time the new car was larger, luxurious, and he needn't worry about the petrol. Driving about the island more widely since he could now "afford" it, Siddon was surprised to discover that since his convalescence after the accident in Johore in 1972, the reclaimed land off the island's east coast, facing the open South China Sea, was in an advanced stage of being developed into an "upper bracket" Housing and Development Board estate and that plans were under way to convert the 'virgin' shore-line on this 'new' land, into the new "swimming point" of the republic as opposed to the former Marine Parade and Katong seashores, which used to have patches of mangrove still growing, which had all literally "disappeared" due to everything being "swallowed-up" by the massive land reclamation which had begun from from Bedok in the east of the island, when he had been a young man of twenty-three in 1963, and had now "swept" past both Marine Parade and Katong toward Collyer Quay in the city-proper. Siddon discovered too that the former "traditional" Tanah Merah and Changi beaches in the north-eastern part of the island, which used to be located in the former RAF Changi area, had had portions "appropriated" for the new Changi International Airport, which was then in the early stages of being developed in the north-east of the island. The skeleton of what would one day become a magnificent bridge to link the almost-completed reclaimed

areas on either-side of the historical Kallang River-mouth, (which used to have the olden and well-known *Bugis Village* since before Stamford Raffles as well as a meeting-point of the *Orang Kallang*, (an Orang Laut tribe), about approximately where Bencoolen Street today crosses it, not far from Sungei Road), was pointing its reinforced-concrete skeletal-beams skywards and was visible from all directions in the city. No name had yet been decided for the structure but by the time of its completion it would be called the "Benjamin Sheares Bridge" after the late second president of Singapore, who had been Eurasian.

Since the British pull-out in 1971 the Government had found itself with a "surplus" of elegant "colonial" houses and flats built by the British colonial and military authorities for their own use previously, and began renting these out at "nominal" rates rather than have them standing unoccupied. Thomas got wind of these colonial "mansions" up-for-grabs at the former British Naval Base in Sembawang, (which used to be called Seletar), put in for one and was successful. When he and Su-mei finally moved into their new Naval Base home, Thomas felt he had finally gone full-circle. He had been born in similar surroundings before the Japanese Occupation, several streets away from where he and Su-mei had now moved to, and in his mid-thirties was "returning". The impressive-looking bungalow had a massive lawn, the size of a football field, and overlooked the dry-dock in Sembawang Harbour, which used to be known as the H.M. Naval Docks where his English father had worked as a naval engineer with the British Navy before World War Two, and as a prisoner-of-war of the enemy during the Japanese Occupation until he had been imprisoned, tortured and executed by the dreaded Japanese *Kempetai* Secret Police in the early days of the Japanese war-time conquest of Singapore.

Kean Siew, his eldest son, was preparing for his General Certificate of Education examinations while Rahman, a year younger at fifteen had indicated that he wanted to go full-time into the Singapore Army. Thomas tried persuading him to bide awhile until he had completed secondary school like his elder brother but from his son's expression Siddon knew that he had not really convinced him and wondered what Rahman would do eventually. The boys' father had been looking forward to both of them moving in with him from their Japanese grandmother's, after he and Su-mei were married at the end of the year, so that he could have a hand in "guiding" their career prospects but his heart sank when he realised that Rahman would go ahead and do what he intended doing despite what his father said. He had always displayed an unnecessary stubborn streak.

Several weeks after Thomas' and Su-mei's marriage in December 1975, Siddon received the unbelievable shocking news that his services with the Chinese motor company was being terminated. "Inflation", "recession", and the yet even newer government-moves to ease still more cars off the already-congested roads were cited for the scandalous decision. The Eurasian felt let-down by the company's cold-blooded heartlessness, especially since it had been they who had persuaded him to leave his secure job in the local ad agency, encouraging him to join them by painting a glowing picture of his future prospects with them. He realised that they had only wanted him to get the requisite approval for the starting up of their car-rental division and, when that had been accomplished, he hadn't been *needed* any longer. It was a blessing that Kean Siew his eldest, had already taken his final school-leaving exams and was awaiting the results before going into national service. Rahman, his other boy, had somehow "disappeared" from his Japanese grandmother's, before Thomas' wedding to Su-mei, and "re-appeared" a few weeks later as an enlisted regular in the Singapore Army. He had somehow "persuaded" his mother, Mariko, to endorse the requisite recruitment-form to enable him to circumvent the army's minimum-age requirement. He had signed on for six years.

Recalling the days of his own callow youth and his exposure to the Chinese secret societies, Siddon decided that it was probably better that Rahman had opted to go into the army than to demonstrate his rebelliousness "hanging-out" with riffraff on the streets. In the meanwhile Siddon's thoughts were full of the unjust way his employment had been terminated. Gradually resentment was building up at the way his life seemed to be shaping. He knew that he hadn't fully recovered from the after-effects of his serious "prang" of 1972, what with a marked limp, a knee that tended to buckle without warning, and recurring depression, but he had consciously fought against his paranoid insecurities to "soldier-on" and Thomas would have thought that those who had known what he had gone through since his "crash" of 1972, especially the Chinese motor company who had been aware all along of what had transpired between him and the late Tan Siew Lou, their former advertising agency man, would have been more sympathetic. But they hadn't been.

He tried getting back into advertising but found his way "blocked", as if there was a conspiracy to prevent him ever making it back into that world. He became even more bitter when he discovered that former students he had trained in advertising, and public relations, in classes organised by the respective controlling associations of the two marketing streams, of which he was a member of both, were now in the kind of jobs he used to hold and

was vainly trying for, because *they* now were preventing him getting in because they knew he would become their senior should he ever succeed. *What had happened to Asian respect for one's mentors?*

Gradually Siddon was starting to feel rejected by the society that he had been born into but which now, to him, seemed to have "miraculously transformed" all the time it had taken for him to recover from his motor accident. And he knew it wasn't something that he *imagined*. It was real. He could discern the new, growing-trend that had never been there before. What he had *feared* years ago, would happen in his island after the British had gone, had now become *reality*. Those such as he, (the Eurasian), were no longer acceptable. With that realisation he began to discern it in everything that came into his life. A successful television programme he had inaugurated as a "part-timer" didn't become the regular series he had been promised it would become, and he was no longer welcome at the government-owned TV station. His five-year-old popular weekly martial arts column in an afternoon paper was suddenly stopped without explanation. And to cap it all his "normal" grading to a higher *Dan* in "karate" was somehow blocked. Junior ranks had been promoted over his head. In all this he read a silent "unseen signal" from "somewhere" to tell those in the "know" the *new lay of the land*.. Exactly like in January 1971 when Milton Obote had been deposed in Uganda while attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference in Singapore — a "strong silent signal" had been transmitted to those in the know in Singapore to play it down. Thomas knew the Government had a "knack" of "filtering" decisions down through its various grass-roots bodies to the "appropriate" groups to carry out. And the latest signal, as far as he was concerned, was that the Eurasian would no longer be regarded an important "cog" in the nation's machinery. Thomas just *sensed* it.

Out-of-the-blue a Tamil member of his "karate" club, rang to forewarn him that a new clique of recently-elected office-bearers were mapping-out moves to have him dismissed because of his previous insistence in taking part in the elimination bouts of the Asia-Pacific Karate-do Championships in 1973, two years previously. They were all ethnic-Chinese. Thomas knew what the motive behind that move was, should they ever succeed. If he were sacked he would no longer be able to join another club by virtue of the recently-invoked new martial arts law. The Government had passed a regulation to control the learning of the martial arts, and one of the new law's conditions was that a martial arts student must not be dismissed from his "school". He could only resign. Siddon swiftly curtailed the conspirators' designs by resigning from the club and joining another, located at Katong,



teaching a different style, before they could institute the move. He was determined to make his "come-back" into competition "karate" and no sneaky group of fellows would prevent him doing so, if he could help it.

The Malaysian prime minister, Tun Haji Abdul Razak bin Dato Hussein, died in London at the age of 53 on 14th January 1976, the eve of his return home to Malaysia after spending nearly a month in Europe for treatment of acute leukaemia. The deputy prime minister, Datuk Hussein Onn, also 53, was sworn in as the new Malaysian prime minister on 15th January; on 17th January he was confirmed as acting president of the United Malays National Organisation, (UMNO), the dominant party in the ruling National Front coalition. Datuk Hussein was the brother-in-law of the late Tun Abdul Razak, and the son of the late Dato Onn bin Ja'afar, the founder-president of the UMNO who had split with UMNO in 1951 following the rejection of his efforts to open the party's membership to non-Malays.

Siddon found his wife, Su-mei, a mountain of strength in those dark, gloomy days of his not being able to land a job. She suggested that they "pool" their respective talents and go into business for themselves as they had nothing to lose. The very idea fired his imagination. It would call for them to strike out on their own without having to depend on the whim of another for their bread-and-butter. If they sank or swam it would purely be because of their own effort. Agreeing whole-heartedly, he arranged with his lawyer to get their joint-venture agency registered. It would take several months to be legally operational and in the meantime they would live on their savings while they scouted for business.

A meeting of the heads of state and government of the five member-countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, (ASEAN), was held at Denpasar, Bali, from 23rd to 24th February 1976. This meeting had been preceded by a conference of ASEAN Foreign Ministers in Pattaya, Thailand on 9th and 10th February, when the ministers agreed to nominate General Hartono Rekso Dharsono as ASEAN's first Secretary-General. The ASEAN heads of state signed a Treaty of Amity and Co-operation in South-East Asia, and a Declaration of Concorde consisting of 20 articles grouped in five chapters; laid down binding principles of mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all nations; the right of every state to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion; non-interference in the internal affairs of one another; settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means, (without threat or use of force); and effective co-operation among their five member-countries. The appointment of General Dharsono as Secretary-General was also confirmed.

The Declaration of Concord also laid down the guide-lines for ASEAN in the political, economic, social and cultural fields. It provided, among other things, for the member-states to take active steps, individually or collectively, towards the early establishment of a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality. It was agreed to set up an ASEAN Secretariat with headquarters in Jakarta. The South-East Asian leaders at their Bali "summit" made it clear that ASEAN was not intended to be a military organization or pact, or to be an association "against any ideology, economic or political".

While awaiting the registration of their company Thomas concentrated on his "karate" training, travelling all the way from Sembawang in the north of the island to the east coast suburb of seaside Katong, where his new club was located. It was tiring, all 25 kilometres by bus each way, especially with his "gammy" leg, but his intensity for "karate" was an all-consuming passion and the journey somehow seemed bearable.

Even before their company had begun operating Thomas and Su-mei picked up the advertising account of the motor firm which was the sole agent for a leading Japanese-make of vehicles of which his previous employers, the ethnic-Chinese-owned company in Newton, was a sub-distributor. Apparently the managing director of the sole agency, an ethnic-Chinese Malaysian from Kuala Lumpur, had felt that Siddon's "treatment" by his previous employers had been shoddy. Since the man had been "shopping" for a new ad agency he decided to award Thomas his advertising account. It was a tremendous boost to the young couple's ego. Before they had even begun they were "leaping" into the local "minor league"! The advertising budget for the account amounted to well over a hundred thousand dollars a year, a tidy sum for those days, and their earnings from agency commission and production costs would be more than adequate for their living expenses. Siddon and Su-mei began operations from their home in the naval base, slogging away into the small hours every day to meet media-demands for deadlines. They estimated that their first month's earnings would amount to well over ten thousand dollars — more than when the both of them had held down separate, well-paying jobs.

Lee Kuan Yew, the Singapore Prime Minister, paid his first official visit to Peking, China, from 10th to 13th May 1976, together with Mr S. Rajaratnam and Mr Hon Sui Sen, two ministers of his cabinet. No decision on the establishment of diplomatic relations between Singapore and China was taken during this visit. But Lee did express hope that the Chinese government would have a "better perception of the Republic of Singapore", where "...Chinese, (constituting more than 75 percent of the population), Malays and Indians..." were "...developing a distinctive way of life..." Lee

emphasized Singapore's association with ASEAN which, he said, "... will increase an ability to avoid outside pressure or manipulation..." Mr Hua kuo-feng, the Chinese prime minister, on 11th May 1976 referred to "...a profound traditional friendship between the peoples of China and Singapore, *sharing a similar historical experience ...*" (And Thomas wondered what *that* was.). Mr Lee also paid a private visit to Taiwan which still maintained a trade mission in Singapore.

But it irked Thomas Siddon to read of Lee Kuan Yew only mentioning the Chinese, Malays and Indians and leaving out the Eurasians, who then constituted the *major* minority community on Singapore, (they make up less than 0.5 percent of the population, and are the fourth largest racial community after the Chinese, Malays and Indians. The Eurasians were among the earliest settlers who came from British Malacca to Singapore after her founding by Stamford Raffles in 1819), with an *ethnic connection* in the region, (*the Malays*), mainly through their maternal ancestors who were of Malay/Portuguese-stock that went back as far as 1511, the year of the establishment of colonial Portuguese-Malacca. Surely the *original Eurasians of Singapore* who had first come down from Malacca, and their descendants after them, had more than an immigrant-right over *newcomers* who had only "recently" been attracted to the island since she had become prosperous? These Eurasians and their offspring who had been born in Singapore, like the other ethnic-groups from Malaya, Indonesia, India and China whose offspring were also born *in Singapore*, had undergone the brutality of the Japanese Occupation as well as British *colonial bias* meted out to *everyone* before and after the Occupation, and the *poverty* of those days, why did their *contribution* to the island count for nought? Fourteen years previously in 1959 when the People's Action Party had first come to power, Lee Kuan Yew had included the Eurasian in his call for support to build the nation and he had then *relied* on the Eurasian civil servants that he had inherited from the British to continue the excellent civil service tradition set up by the colonials. It now seemed to Siddon that in China, in 1979, the community no longer was regarded as the "fourth element" of the nation's population. The Eurasian had been left *by the wayside*.

Meanwhile as Singapore plotted a quiet, steady course of development, though sometimes with the occasional "hiccup" by way of detentions of "subversive elements", startling events were on the brink of bursting forth around the region. Several hundred refugees from Vietnam who had escaped to Thailand in small boats toward the end of the first-quarter of 1976 were not allowed to land there although they were supplied with food and fuel. A South Vietnamese businessman and his family who reached

Brunei after an 800-mile voyage on 19th May were granted asylum but a second boat with 17 on board, which arrived on 8th June, was refused permission to land by the Brunei authorities. In July a number of refugees was picked up by passing ships from boats drifting off the Vietnamese coast and held on board in port in Hong Kong while arrangements were sought for their eventual destinations.

The Singapore Government announced on 27th May 1976 that the Singapore Police had uncovered a Communist attempt to launch a new phase of subversion and terrorism in the country. The Ministry of Home Affairs stated that 50 persons had been arrested under the Internal Security Act since January 1976; that 23 of them had been released after interrogation; 10 had been handed over to the Malaysian authorities and that the remaining 17 continued to be detained. According to the Ministry's statement the Communist activities extended to Sydney in Australia, Bangkok and Hong Kong, where branches of the movement had been established to recruit students from Singapore and Malaysia. Those detained were also said to have links with an organisation in Kuala Lumpur, with training camps in Johore, (the state in the south of the Malaysian peninsula, immediately north of Singapore island), and with guerrilla camps in southern Thailand.

The local press coverage of the Government's action against the Communist "subversion", as contained in its statement of 27th May, assumed the "guilt" on the part of those arrested. No one would question the government-action or that none of the detained were ever brought to trial. Thomas Siddon felt this was due to the fact that the island's majority ethnic-Chinese community "worshipped" the PAP for the way it had "guided" the development of the society on Singapore, that apart from making Singapore stable and prosperous, due to its well-thought-out, long-established policy, (based again on ancient Chinese culture), of encouraging and rewarding those with the requisite higher educational qualifications, (the majority of whom were ethnic-Chinese), had also ensured that *such persons* got the cream of the top-jobs, (a policy similar to ancient China's which was based on the concept of promoting the civil servant, (the mandarin), through the passing of state-exams) and *no one* within the ethnic-Chinese community of Singapore would ever question or challenge the Government. Even television, which should have "naturally" hired English-descent Eurasians for its English-language service, (because they spoke excellent English, naturally), so that diction and accents, and the English spoken would have been more "anglicized", seemed to favour the hiring of ethnic-Chinese Singaporeans, (who were trained to lay on a "BBC-type" speaking-voice), Indians, and expatriate English who didn't seem at all aware, or probably

didn't even care about the *peculiarities* of Singapore's multi-ethnic society.

Action against the so-called Communist-inspired subversive activities, (which had all long been regarded by many as a bogey created by the Government to distract the country away from any criticisms against it), had been taken by the Singapore authorities on various occasions between June 1974 and May 1976. Increasing criticism of the alleged repressive nature of the Singapore Government in left-wing West European circles was indicated by the initiative of the ruling Dutch Labour Party, (PrdA), supported by the British Labour Party, to expel Lee Kuan Yew's People's Action Party, (PAP), from the Socialist International, (the international organisation of labour and social democratic parties of which the PAP had been a member since 1966). There had been allegations that *human rights* were being seriously violated in Singapore, (in 1993 Singapore joined in a chorus with several countries, mainly Asian, China being among them because of her savage repression at Tienanmen Square, that the definition of *human rights* was a subjective thing and that perspectives between the developed world and the developing world had to be viewed in the light of their respective histories, and that the West's *progress and attitude* on human rights was fairly "recent"), and a report published by Amnesty International on 29th February 1976, estimated the number of political detainees then being held without trial on Singapore, (some of them since 1963), to be "at least 40". The PAP forestalled the attempt to expel it by submitting its resignation on grounds of unjustified attacks by other member-parties, to a meeting of the Socialist International's Bureau held in London from 29th to 30th May 1976. The Bureau, however, decided to regard the resignation as being "...on the table..." until its next meeting, and pending further developments.

In the meantime the Government continued with further detentions of alleged subversives. These arrests followed the announcement in May, that the Singapore Police had uncovered a Communist subversion plot. The Home Affairs Ministry disclosed on 4th June 1976 that a Dr Poh Soo Kai, described as a former assistant Secretary-general of the Barisan Sosialis political party, had been detained under the Internal Security Act for positive involvement in "Communist front" activities organized from abroad by the illegal Communist Party of Malaya, (CPM). Dr Poh Soo Kai was said to have first been arrested in 1963 and to have been released in December 1973 under a restriction order partly as "an experiment to test whether hard-core Communist detainees could be safely released"; however "...there was no change in his determination to advance the Communist cause..." the Ministry stated.

In a further statement on 22nd June 1976 the Home Affairs Ministry stated that two Malay journalists — Hussein Jahiddin, editor of the Malay-language daily, the "Berita Harian", and Azmi Mahmud, its former assistant editor — had been arrested on 16th June and accused of trying to foster discontent among Singapore Malays, (who then constituted 15 percent of the island's population), and to influence them toward Communism by undermining their belief in Islam. The statement said that both journalists had admitted deliberate distortions and had disclosed that since 1972 had been involved in a Communist plot directed by an Abdul Samad Ismail, managing director of the "New Straits Times" newspaper group in Malaysia, and an editor of the Malaysian "Berita Harian", belonging to the same group. In a television interview broadcast in Singapore on 28th June, Jahiddin admitted the accusation laid against him by the Singapore Government.

In a simultaneous announcement on 22nd June in Kuala Lumpur the Malaysian government said that Abdul Samad Ismail and Samad Amin, the news editor of the Malaysian "Berita Harian", had been arrested for their alleged "direct involvement in support of the Communist 'struggle' for political power, in particular by directing a Communist plan to subvert the Malays by creating a wide pro-Communist Malay-base in Singapore...as a spring-board for the penetration of the Malay community in Peninsula Malaysia..."

Suddenly the Singapore Government activity switched to a different tack — thoughts of the "struggle" of local Communists were left in the far reaches of everyone's mind when the Government surprisingly announced that workers' average earnings had increased more than three-fold between 1965 and 1975, more than doubling their purchasing power in real terms. Thomas found this amusing because ever since the Government had first begun announcing these "improvements" in workers' incomes, years back, *he* had *never* experienced any *improvement* in his income, ever. In another speech in August that year the Singapore Premier announced a housing programme for the coming five-year period which would ensure modern accommodation for 70 percent of the population by 1980, and for 80 percent by 1985.

But it was back on its "favourite preoccupation" again when on 6th September the Government announced that it had broken up an underground Communist cell and arrested three students and a soldier — all described as members of the Malayan Communist Youth League — acting upon information supplied by the Malaysian Special Branch. Again no public trials took place.

On 24th October the press reported that Tan Wah Piow, a former president of the University of Singapore Students' Union who had been arrested in November 1974 after organising protests against unemployment at a factory in Jurong and subsequently sentenced to a year's imprisonment, was seeking political asylum in Britain. He was said to have somehow escaped from the island after being told on the day of his release from prison that he was being drafted into the Singapore Artillery for his national service stint, although he was reported to suffer from severe myopia.

Singapore Parliament was dissolved by President Sheares on 6th December 1976, some nine months before the expiry of its five-year term, and general elections were to be held on 23rd December. In each of the 53 contested seats the PAP was opposed by one candidate from among the then six opposition parties who had co-operated among themselves to avoid splitting the anti-PAP vote by not standing against one another. Two constituencies were also being contested by independents. The opposition comprised the Workers' Party, (a moderate formation originally founded by Sephardic-Jew, David Marshall, Singapore's first-ever chief minister from 1955-56, who had initiated, together with other "old guard" politicians, [Lee Kuan Yew was then one of several young, up-and-coming politicians waiting in the sidelines], the initial moves toward independence from British colonialism for Singapore, and who eventually retired from politics in disillusionment to return to his law practice. Marshall is now the republic's ambassador to France. The Workers' Party was revived in 1971 under the leadership of J.B. Jeyaretnam, a Tamil lawyer); the "Joint Opposition Council" comprising four parties, among them the Barisan Sosialis, (a "splinter-group" from the PAP which the PAP Government had accused of being pro-Communist), led by a Dr Lee Siew Choh, which had formed the main opposition to the PAP in the early 1960s but which subsequently declined in influence, partly because many of its leaders had been detained or placed under restriction by the Singapore Government as "subversives", and the United People's Front, an amalgamation of several smaller opposition parties originally formed in late 1974.

During the election campaigning the opposition parties alleged that the Lee Kuan Yew Government had become authoritarian and repressive, in particular by restricting individual political liberties, and *press freedom*. They asserted the need for a strong body of opposition MPs to provide a counter-balance to the PAP. They also claimed gross disparities of wealth and income existed in Singapore and that the country's economy had been largely surrendered to the control of foreign companies, contradicting Lee Kuan Yew's "National Day" speech in August that the workers' lot had improved.

To back up the accusations, the Workers' Party Secretary-general, J.B.Jeyaretnam, in an interview with Britain's "Guardian" newspaper's correspondent on 23rd December 1976, (polling day), said that the reality for the people of Singapore was that "...if they go against the PAP they will be in trouble...if you are a businessman the contracts disappear or the tax department starts breathing down your neck. If you are a lawyer suddenly there are no briefs. If you are employed by a big corporation suddenly you are redundant. As for the ordinary people they are taxed and charged for everything, even for social services in a so-called socialist state..." *Thomas saw himself in that statement but he hadn't gone against the Government to warrant discrimination from the Chinese majority, but then he was only Eurasian.*

A few days later, harking back to the opposition accusations that the Government was repressive and totalitarian, Thomas couldn't believe his eyes when he came across a new "official" notice plastered predominantly in all post offices so that it wouldn't be missed — it read: "Those males whose hair reaches their collar would be attended to last...at all government counters..."

The ruling People's Action Party, (PAP), led by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew took all 69 seats in the 23rd December 1976 general elections in an enlarged Singapore Parliament. The party's candidates took 53 seats and were returned, unopposed, in the other 16. The sole ruling party in Singapore for over seventeen and a half years had been returned to power for the fifth consecutive term ever since it had first been voted in by its mass ethnic-Chinese base, (which only Lee and his cohorts had courted successfully because, in the fifties, only they had realised the ultimate power of the China-born Chinese and their descendants who had been regarded as *alien Chinese* in those days of British supremacy), in June 1959, a mere few hours after Singapore Colony had been granted self-government by Britain, an unbelievable accomplishment for those days of supreme British control, that should have been to the credit of true multi-racial politicians like David Marshall, (who had started the ball rolling, in the first place, for independence for *all the people of Singapore* who then still thought and reacted as an island-people under British domination and had not yet begun to regard one another as *separate ethnic-cogs* in a machine, but that would soon begin to *change*), and the late Lim Yew Hock, (a *Baba-Nynonya*), who had taken over the reins from Marshall after his resignation as Chief Minister for failing to achieve independence for Singapore from the British at the initial talks in London, and Lim had continued with the negotiations *together* with other Singapore politicians,



including a young Lee Kuan Yew, until the joint-parties' Singapore Negotiating Team won its hard-fought first-step for full-independence by wresting self-government for Singapore from the British Government. (But it just was not Lim Yew Hock's destiny to be the first chief minister of a self-governing Singapore in June 1959, though he had fought long and hard for it together with all those politicians of yester-year for Singapore to achieve everyone's dream — that fateful honour was handed to Lee Kuan Yew by his mass China-born ethnic-Chinese support who had voted in the People's Action Party resoundingly on the eve of Singapore attaining self-government!). Seventeen years later, on 23rd December 1976 (Polling Day), realising the nature of the election outcome again, Thomas Siddon knew that the predominantly-Chinese population, (which mainly comprised China-born ethnic-Chinese who had taken Lee's "advice" of the past and become Singapore Citizens, and their Singapore-born offspring), had voted in their "heroes" again.

The number of seats in the new Parliament was also increased from 65 to 69 under a Parliamentary Membership Bill which had received parliamentary approval, (in an all-PAP House), in July of that same year, before the general elections. Changes had also provided for the elimination of six central divisions and the creation of 10 new constituencies, as well as the re-delineation of 54 existing divisions on the basis of a minimum of 13,000 electors per constituency and a maximum of 20,000.

Without needing much to 'read' what was behind the re-drawing of constituency-lines and the creation of new constituencies, Siddon recognised the government's move as an astute ploy to ensure that a large Chinese mass was moved into districts where there once had been more of the other ethnic groups. Singapore, ever since its modern founding by Stamford Raffles in 1819, had been "divided-up", by Raffles and his successors, into "ethnic-zones" such as *chinatown* and *Little India*. *Kampong Glam* and *Telok Blangah*, (where the descendants of the followers of "Sultan" Hussein, the 'ruler' of Singapore installed by Raffles, and **Temenggong Daeng Abdul Rahman**, Singapore's island-chief, lived respectively), *Geylang*, (containing the original Malays who had been in Singapore before and during Raffles' time, as well as the new arrivals from the rest of the "Malay World" especially during and after World War Two), *Katong* and *Siglap*, (where the Eurasian descendants of mainly English, Scottish and Welsh and Malacca-Portuguese marriages had settled) *Joo Chiat*, (where the *Baba-Nynonya* Chinese of part-Malay lineage, also originally from Malacca, had made their enclave) and *Sembawang* where the Tamils who had worked for the British in their naval base there, and the Malay village at the end of

Sembawang Road and across the river-mouth from there, the Malay village in the district of *Seletar* in Jalan Kayu, all of whose ancestors were part of the original tribe, known as the *Orang Silitar* who used to live in the area even before Raffles, lived, were some of these former racially-comprised zones which had their ethnic-compositions *transformed* since the 1976 general elections of 23rd December. Under the guise of building new public housing for the "masses" Lee Kuan Yew had craftily moved in large groups of China-minded ethnic-Chinese, (the 'recent' arrivals who had come to Singapore as indentured servants since the turn of the century, before and after World War Two, and since the PAP had come to power in 1959, and their Singapore-born offspring who had been raised as Chinese with *mainland Chinese mores and cultural values and who regarded the non-Chinese in Singapore as foreign*, without the other non-Chinese racial groups or the Singapore-born *Straits Chinese and Baba-Nynonyas* being any the wiser because, in those days, they, [the *Straits Chinese* and the *Baba-Nynonyas* ], generally did not read or write Chinese or *knew* what the Chinese-language newspapers *wrote*, and that in *everyone else's* eyes, physically, *there is no difference in appearance between the Chinese who were Singapore-born for at least two to three generations and who had multi-racial outlooks, and the ethnic-Chinese China-born and their descendants — only their respective mental attitude and cultural outlook differed— and one cannot see into a man's soul!* ) who could trace their lineage from a China-born parent or grandparent, and had once regarded, or still did, that either Peking or Taipeh were the "centres of the universe" and weren't at all bothered that *Singapore is smack-dab in the middle of the Malay World*, to ensure communal support during election-time as well as spread the mainland China "Chinese-influence" into the former "non-Sino" *strongholds* to "balance" and forever change the multi-racial "face" of Singapore beyond recognition from what it used to be since colonial times.

Immediately after the election results were declared three leading figures of the opposition were arrested on 24th December 1976, two on defamation charges, (who subsequently received prison sentences), and one on charges of inciting racial antagonisms. A few days into January 1977 the Singapore correspondent of the Hong Kong-based "Far East Economic Review", a Ho Kwon Ping, was arrested on five charges relating to the possession and dissemination of "sensitive information"; four charges were later dropped however, and at the end of January 1977 he received a heavy fine on one charge of possessing information about a military re-organisation in Singapore. It had been noted in the press that Ho Kwon Ping had written critically about the Lee Kuan Yew Government.

For Thomas and Su-mei Siddon, in the meantime, 1977 had begun promisingly. Their client-list was enlarging as business seemed to "flow-in". They appeared to have established a good reputation for their "creative-work" and this was reflected in existing clients recommending them to others. But their expenses had increased as well. With the enlarged client-list came added-on out-goings and the incurring of heavy trade-debts for media placings. Personally the couple felt put-out by what they felt were the inordinate demands of their clients because their agency was still in its infancy and needed their support to survive. It seemed to them that their clients behaved overbearingly, expecting them to fulfil the 'impossible' deadlines which the established agencies would have balked at, just because they were "small time". But, despite the "irritations", their company had grown, and within weeks of starting had moved from their home in the naval base to larger, "proper" premises in the city. They now even had a staff of three — two Malays and a "wondering" Scots artist passing through to Australia "eventually". It tickled Thomas no end to discern the obvious envy of his peers to see him driving about in their second-hand, open-top sports-car which he and Su-mei had bought with their earnings. His wife felt that they didn't have to be embarrassed about it because they "deserved" what they had since they had worked hard for their 'success'. Siddon's two older boys were now serving in the Singapore Army — one in national service and the other as a regular, and he and Su-mei only had Chong-lok, his youngest boy, to maintain with monthly contributions to his mother. Having the car was handy for Thomas because his "karate" classes were held in the evening and he was able to cut travelling time between Katong in the eastern part of the island, where his club was, and his home in Sembawang, in the north. His new club had already-nominated him as captain for the team-event in the forthcoming "karate" championships which were being staged in August during the annual *Pesta Sukan*, (Malay: "Pesta" from the Portuguese, meaning "festival", and "sukan" from Malay, meaning "sports"), which was staged every year without fail.

G. Raman, a Singaporean Tamil civil rights lawyer arrested on 10th February 1977 for having "pro-Communist" connections, "squealed", and as a result 10 journalists were also arrested on 16th February, that year, for "interrogation on their pro-Communist activities". Among the detained was an Arun Senkuttuvan, Singapore correspondent of the British "Financial Times" and the "Economist", who was also a journalist with Singapore's "The Straits Times".

A second meeting of the heads of state and government of the five member-states of ASEAN was held in Kuala Lumpur, (Malaysia), from 4th

to 5th August 1977. The first such meeting had previously taken place at Bali in Indonesia, in February 1966. The meeting in Kuala Lumpur coincided with the tenth anniversary of ASEAN, and the respective foreign ministers of the member-countries attended as well. Also present were Takeo Fukuda, Malcolm Fraser and Robert Muldoon, the prime ministers respectively of Japan, Australia and New Zealand, while observers from China and the former Soviet Union were in attendance. The government of Vietnam which had been invited to attend by ASEAN had declined, stating that it did not recognise ASEAN, describing it as a "...danger...becoming a regional military alliance which jeopardises the peace, democracy and genuine neutrality of the people in each South-East Asian country..."

The leaders of the ASEAN member-countries in their opening speeches on 4th August 1977 endeavoured to emphasize their peaceful intentions toward the Communist states of "Indochina". President Marcos of the Philippines, in his speech announced that his country intended to renounce its claim to the East Malaysian state of Sabah, (formerly British North Borneo). The Philippines president and his wife paid their first official visit to Sabah from 9th to 10th August 1977.

Thomas Siddon represented his new "karate" club in the team event in the national karate championships in August that year and was instrumental in helping his team capture the silver medal. His cup was full. There was nothing else to "achieve" in the martial art as far as he was concerned. He had made his come-back to competition-karate, despite his accident, had acquitted himself with honour, and proved his point. He *could* participate in the contact-sport. The only thing that had marred his pleasure was that a similar bunch of ethnic-Chinese members of his new club had displayed their displeasure at his "honour" by trying to hide away his medal. But the president of the club, a Parsi, managed to "retrieve" it before the evening was over, and so prevented it being "lost" forever. The incident seemed all too familiar to Thomas' experience with his original club in McNair Road and he guessed their hidden-hand, somehow, in the "incident". He wondered whether the resentment toward him at his new club had been racial, because he was Eurasian. Of late he had become increasingly aware that the ethnic-Chinese in the buses, shops and taxis — everywhere — weren't behaving at all friendly as they used to do before — to him it seemed that the *bonhomie* that used to exist between the predominant ethnic-Chinese Singaporeans and the other communities had vanished. This *new behaviour* by the ethnic-Chinese toward the other communities struck him as their beginning to "come out", to demonstrate that Singapore was *theirs* alone. Had the predominantly-Chinese Government of Singapore sent out a "hidden" signal that the *time was ripe* to make Singapore more *sino* ?

Siddon was by now beginning to feel that ever since his "come-back" into competitive "karate" and winning a silver medal, and having to again undergo the adverse reactions for doing so by the ethnic-Chinese members of his new club, who made him feel that he wasn't much liked, that he was regarded as an *outsider* in his society. It just confirmed his once-vague suspicions of yore that Lee Kuan Yew and his ilk would set out to achieve Lee's private dream and ambition to inexorably "convert" the former Malay island of *Singapura* into a "Chinese haven" for the Chinese in the *Malay World* by introducing *Sino ways* and other things Chinese to Singapore so that *everything* would smack of the one culture. Like what had been "achieved" in the former Spanish/Dutch/Japanese colony of *Formosa* or Taiwan, (which consists today of an *indigenous* island-peoples of original Malayo-Polynesian tribes, native-born, Hokkein-speaking full ethnic-Chinese who had only come to the island since the 17th Century, and a mixed-race community of a Malayo-Polynesian/ethnic-Chinese/Spanish/Dutch and Japanese mix who spoke their own *patois*, and *all* of whom collectively regarded themselves as *Taiwanese*, and who, only since the 17th Century, had first been ruled by the Spaniards, (prior to this time the island had been left on its own, "wild" with jungle and peopled only by its Malayo-Polynesian Aboriginal tribes), then the Dutch, by a Chinese "king", by Manchu China and finally by the Japanese from 1895 to 1945, when upon Japan's defeat in the Second World War, an international conference at Cairo, beside the River Nile, had "given" Formosa to China as territory "stolen" by Japan, when it had not been a territory of China's to begin with!), when *Kuomintang* forces from mainland Communist China first occupied the island in 1947, after the Cairo Conference, and massacred the *indigenous Taiwanese* who had strongly objected to the *mainlanders* coming over from mainland-China and attempting to *transform* Taiwan into mainland-Chinese territory, when it was not, and in 1949, after losing to the Communist forces of Mao tse-tung in China, fleeing to the island and forcibly transforming *Formosa*, (Taiwan), into a "Chinese island". So that gradually and unobtrusively the *influence* in looks, language, culture and religion smacked of just the one mainland community despite what the *indigenous Taiwanese*, (the Malayo-Polynesian, the Hokkein-speaking ethnic-Chinese and the *indigenous-Taiwanese Eurasian* ) might have *wanted*.

But as Thomas Siddon *fought* with himself over what he perceived as a deliberate attempt by the predominant Chinese government of Singapore to *transform* Singapore into a *Chinese island*, step-by-step, startling natural and man-made events in Vietnam were on the brink of exploding throughout

South-East Asia as they steadily gathered momentum and burst upon the region. In the early months of 1978 the rice-crops in Vietnam were affected by a combination of drought and floods, in addition the harvest in the Mekong Delta suffered from an invasion of insect pests, largely because of a lack of insecticides for the padi-farmers' use. In the northern provinces there was fungus disease. The monthly rice ration per household supplied by the government state-shops fell to one kilogram or two days' supply, the rest of the food ration being made up of wheat-flour, potatoes and other foods. The economic situation was further worsened by the fighting on the border with Kampuchea, (Cambodia), which forced many new economic zones and established padi-fields in the border area to be abandoned. The number of Vietnamese refugees arriving in South-East Asian countries, outside "Indochina", by sea, which had averaged about 1,300 a month in 1977 began rising steeply in the second-quarter of 1978. Following Vietnam's nationalization of private trade and the extension of the conscription period from 18 to 25 to 25 to 35 years, and from three to five years, because of the fighting with Cambodia and China's hostile attitude toward it, boat-loads of refugees from Vietnam became larger and more organized. Merchant ships which had picked up Vietnamese refugees at sea began to be barred from Asian ports or kept under guard while in harbour, even when they had cargoes to unload, and their crews prevented from disembarking. In consequence ships at sea often ignored distress signals from refugee-craft. To overcome this the US Administration guaranteed on 5th July 1978 that all refugees picked up by ships under American ownership or registration would be resettled in the United States of America. Similar guarantees were given by the United Kingdom on 20th September, as well as by Norway, the Netherlands and West Germany. The Japanese government's policy was that "boat-people" picked up by Japanese ships were not allowed to land in Japanese ports unless the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, (UNHCR), accepted responsibility for them. Refugees were granted right of permanent residence in Japan only if they were adopted by a Japanese national or a foreigner resident in Japan. *The age-old scourge of high-seas piracy again boldly bared its ugly fangs throughout South-East Asia.*

The Singapore Government did allow refugees picked up at sea by merchant vessels to land but normally refused entry to refugee craft. Instead they were provided with fuel, maps and provisions, and recommended to sail on to Australia.

From September, after Vietnam's flood disasters and the intensification of the food crisis, the outpourings of Vietnamese "boat-people" rocketed. Over half of them made their way to Malaysia whilst smaller numbers

reached Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and Australia.

The refugees presented a major social problem for the majority of these countries as the rate at which the "boat-people" arrived far outstripped the pace at which they were being resettled in third countries. Many refugees were believed to have drowned at sea as well, or murdered, and women raped and butchered by Thai pirates. This huge increase in the numbers of Vietnamese refugees 'escaping' from Vietnam, beginning in September 1978, was also largely due to the development of an organised international trafficking in refugee-emigrants as well, and who were transported in cargo ships carrying up to 4,000 persons per vessel, or in large fishing junks. This trafficking in human cargo was believed to be organised by an international syndicate of ethnic-Chinese businessmen in Vietnam, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand and the United States of America, and who had among themselves a fleet of 10 freighters for their nefarious activity.

A US State Department spokesman alleged on 17th November 1978 that the Vietnamese government was involved in the "traffic" of emigrants, forcing the Vietnamese ethnic-Chinese, (or Hoa), to "buy their way out". According to press reports Vietnamese exiles in the United States supplied the names and addresses of relatives still in that country to representatives of the syndicate who passed them on to colleagues in Hong Kong. These "colleagues" then made the arrangements for the transportation of the "clientele" by sea, after first passing on the names to ethnic-Chinese cohorts in Ho Chi Minh City, (Saigon), who bribed corrupt local officials there and arranged for small shipping boats to collect the "emigrants" and deliver them to cargo-ships at sea. Ethnic-Chinese or Hoa "emigrants" were said to have paid between S\$5,000 and S\$10,000 in gold, while ethnic-Vietnamese themselves paid 50 percent more. Part of the "fare" was used to bribe Vietnamese officials and the remainder went to the syndicate. The "boat-people" included former high-ranking officers of the South Vietnamese Army, but most were ethnic-Chinese, (Hoa), merchants, businessmen and professionals with close relatives abroad, mainly in the United States of America.

Meanwhile on the "home front" in Singapore on 17th November the Singapore Government announced the release from political detention of Dr Lim Hock Siew and Said Zahari, both of whom had been among those arrested on 2nd February 1963 for alleged "pro-Communist agitation". They were released under a suspension order confining them to the islands of Pulau Tekong Besar and Pulau Ubin, where they were free to work and live with their families but could not leave the islands in question without

official permission. (Pulau Tekong, the Malay name for the biggest of Singapore's off-shore islands, is 17 kilometres wide. The island's Malay name comes from its links with the original Malay refugees who fled the Malayan state of Pahang in Malaya in 1804 during the civil war known in Malay history as "Perang Raja Ahmad", (Raja Ahmad's War). It was latter settled by Bugis and Javanese from the Riau-Lingga-Johor Malay Empire, (which had succeeded historical Malacca, after her conquest by the Portuguese in 1511, as the Malay Sultanate of Johor), whose ancestors came from Suluwesi and Java, and who, in time, became the dreaded piratical-scourge of "the Malays", preying along the Singapore straits between the island of Batam, (in Indonesia), and Pulau Blakang Mati, ("Death From Behind Island" of Singapore, now renamed "Sentosa"), until the era of Stamford Raffles. The island of Pulau Tekong was later settled by pockets of ethnic-Chinese farmers, after Stamford Raffles and his immediate successors had gained possession of the off-shore islands of Singapore in a separate treaty with Temenggong Daeng Abdul Rahman and 'Sultan' Hussein.). The island's present-day indigenous-Malay, and ethnic-Chinese population has since been re-settled on mainland Singapore and the place has been converted for the exclusive use of the Singapore military.

In late 1978 J.B. Jeyaretnam, the Tamil lawyer and leader of the opposition "Workers' Party, was found guilty of "uttering a very grave slander" against Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew on 18th December 1976 while campaigning during the 23rd December 1976 General Elections. The opposition party leader was found guilty by a Singapore court of making allegations of nepotism and corruption against Lee, and was ordered to pay him S\$130,000 in damages as well as the costs for the action. He gave notice of appeal.

By the mid-seventies drug-taking and trafficking had grown to alarming proportions in Singapore, with supplies mainly coming from peninsula-Malaysia via the Singapore-Johore Causeway. "Operation Ferret", a relentless blitz on drug-takers and traffickers was launched in Singapore to combat the user and the supplier.

The Singapore Government also introduced its new *Bi-lingual Policy* in 1978, stressing the benefits of Singaporeans knowing their respective *mother-tongues*, and English as the first-language. Siddon read this as the *first open-move to declassify Malay as the national language*, which it had been ever since self-government in 1959 when the PAP Government had been keen for Singapore to be a part of Malaysia. But this time in 1978, long after *Separation* from Malaysia, Mandarin-Chinese was once again being re-emphasized for the ethnic-Chinese community in a dramatic, strong,



emotional, wide-ranging publicity campaign, speaking forcibly, (in Mandarin and English), and directly to the ethnic-Chinese community, as if they were the only ones on the island and that the other communities could not understand what was being said to the ethnic-Chinese in English! The ethnic-Chinese were also encouraged to change the spelling and sounds of their dialect-names to *hanyu-pinyin*, (the Romanised spelling of Mandarin-Chinese, which the Singapore Government claimed is commonly spoken in mainland China as well as Taiwan, which isn't truly accurate because in the different parts of mainland China they still speak the dialect peculiar to a region, and in Taiwan the ethnic-Chinese *indigenous-Taiwanese* still speak Hokkein, [which is termed *Taiwanese* by the Nationalist government], and their own *patois*, while it is only the mainland-Chinese who had come over from mainland China since 1947-49, and their descendants, who speak Mandarin and their own respective regional native-dialects. After losing the civil war in 1949 and fleeing to Taiwan, [Formosa], the Nationalist Chinese designated Mandarin, mainland China's national tongue, as Taiwan's official language to symbolise its claim of sovereignty over the mainland), to convert their dialect-sounding names to Mandarin-sounds. Singapore schools 'automatically' changed their ethnic-Chinese pupils dialect-sounding names to *hanyu-pinyin* even though the students' names were already legally-recorded in Romanised dialect in their respective Singapore birth certificates. This move by the schools was never publicised. Ethnic-Chinese food hawkers were also 'encouraged' by government health and hawker inspectors to *change* the dialect-sounds of the food they purveyed to *hanyu-pinyin* sounds as well. Under the guise of the new *Bi-lingual Policy* the Government had begun its next open-step to bringing forth a greater *Chinese-consciousness* among the ethnic-Chinese majority by encouraging the increased use of Mandarin-Chinese, and stressing the *importance* of Chinese culture to them, (the ethnic-Chinese), much to the surprise, shock and dismay of the other racial-communities of Singapore, because the *others* on the island still continued to think as *one island-people sharing the same destiny and history* ever since British Colonial Times, (6th February 1819 to 31st August 1963), and the British had *always stressed* that all the non-indigenous communities, (the Indonesians, Chinese, Tamils, Eurasians, Punjabis, etc) whom they had allowed in to make their living on the island with the indigenous Malay, would *sublimate* their respective ethnic-cultures while allowing the apparent Malay culture on Singapore to continue, so much so that the lingua franca of the island then was *Bazaar-Malay*. In 1978, long after independence from Britain, the Chinese-dominant Singapore Government appeared *oblivious* of the *feelings of*

*alienation* its move was inducing among the non-Chinese communities who muttered their misgivings among themselves privately, because *no one* dared utter any protest out loud as a Government-passed law against the bringing up of "communal issues", punishable by imprisonment, saw to that effectively. For Siddon it was the *final proof* that the Lee Kuan Yew Government had begun its *open phase* into the *sinonization of Singapore*, sending a *clear signal* to the *ethnic-Chinese majority*, (comprising of the *China-born and their descendants as well as the straits-born Chinese and the Baba-Nyonya mixed Chinese-Malay community*), that they could make their *presence* on the island *openly-felt*. *No similar 'ethnic-moves' were ever 'recommended' for the Malay and Indian communities during this period.*

*(In fact there was much disquiet among the non-Chinese communities of Singapore but because of the all-pervading ethos of fear in which dissent could be punishable with the deprivation of personal liberty without judicial process, that had always been perpetuated by the Government with the aid of its various "important" officials connected to the Administration — from police officers, immigration officials to civil servants — and with the Press Council in place, over-seeing what went in and/or stayed out of the local news-media, dissenting views or opinions never saw the public light of day, and the law against bring-up 'communal issues' ensured everyone kept mum. (Though no one ever talked about it openly everyone was aware of the political victimisation suffered by opposition politicians, of the unceremonious retiring of loyal old-guard PAP leaders, in the future, such as Fong Sip Chee, Jek Yuen Tong, Ong Pang Boon, Dr Toh Chin Chye, Devan Nair and S. Rajaratnam, and no one wanted to fall victim to the same "treatment", in any way.). But the disquiet simmered below the surface of non-Chinese Singaporean-society until 23rd November 1980 when in an article in the Chinese-language newspaper, Lianhe Zaobao, the ethnic-Chinese opposition member of Parliament, Chiam See Tong, accused the Government of furthering Chinese chauvinism and planning to convert a "Singaporean Singapore" into a "Chinese Singapore". On 20th November of that same year, speaking in Mandarin in Parliament, a PAP member, a Dr Ow Chin Hock, hit back at Chiam stating that he didn't know what Chiam had meant by a 'Chinese Singapore'. Dr Ow said that if Chiam felt that the Chinese should not have their own cultural identity, (shouldn't the cultural identity be Singaporean instead of Chinese? Siddon asked himself), but should, like what Chiam had said in Parliament, be put in a melting-pot together with the other races, then he had confused national loyalty, (what nationality? Siddon asked himself), with cultural identity, (what culture?).*

Chinese Singaporeans, Dr Ow said, had a **right to retain their own language, culture, customs and values**. This was not chauvinism, this was cultural identity. (!) (It was clear that a "strong signal" had been sent that for "Singapore Culture" one should read "Chinese culture" and that the 'ethnic-Chinese of Singapore should remain ethnic-Chinese', to Siddon this also meant that inter-marriage was not to be encouraged.). Seven months later Mr S. Rajaratnam, (who had "retired" from politics), as if in answer to the growing discontent among the non-Chinese communities and to put the overt moves by the Chinese majority to put their strong Sino stamp over everything Singaporean in perspective, in an address to the National University of Singapore Society's forum on Ethnicity and a Singaporean Singapore, reminded the English-speaking population that the celebration of ethnicity and the ancestral past was not the way toward a "Singaporean Singapore". "Our memories before 1819 go back to different lands, different times, different histories and different peoples. These are memories that Singaporeans cannot share collectively. Our common memories are the joys, sorrows, disappointments and achievements since 1819. This is our only and relevant history to shape and guide our future. The history before 1819 is that of ancestral ghosts." Slightly over a fortnight later the Singapore Chinese Teachers' Union (whose main language of communication is Mandarin-Chinese), issued a statement, (which was publicised in the English-language "The Straits Times" which is ethnic-Chinese owned and controlled), which it stated was in reply to recent criticisms that the then current activity of the Chinese community to promote their language and culture was threatening the other cultures. All that the Chinese-speaking community was doing through its various activities was to promote **its** culture, to preserve **their** values and save them from extinction in the context of a rapidly-Westernising society in Singapore. (Siddon read the use of the term "westernisation" and the sudden attack on it, because with the exception of the Eurasian who had a western-cultural background, the Chinese, Indian and Malay had no idea what "westernisation" is all about, as a smoke-screen to hide the **true motive** for the reason behind the increased emphasis on strengthening "Chinese culture" on Singapore by the Government with the strong support of the majority Chinese mass.).

"For the Chinese the most unfilial act is to **forget your roots**. Those who suggest that all that was with the ancestors before 1819 should be forgotten have absolutely **no understanding** of Chinese culture and are insensitive to the feelings of the Chinese." The statement was clearly referring to Mr S. Rajaratnam, the former Senior Minister then attached to the Prime Minister's

*Office, who has since "retired" from political-life and is now a distinguished senior fellow with the Institute of South-east Asian Studies.)*

In the meantime elsewhere, the ferment within the 'indochinese' countries went on swirling. After continued fighting on the Vietnam-Cambodia border throughout the final quarter of 1978, Vietnamese troops invaded Cambodia on 25th December 1978. The Cambodian capital, Phnom-Penh, fell on 7th January 1979, and on the following day a "People's Revolutionary Council", with Heng Samrin as president, was established by the "Cambodian National United Front for National Salvation". This had been formed a month earlier by Cambodian opponents of Pol Pot's "Khmer Rouge" government. The new government was recognised by Vietnam and Laos which subsequently concluded treaties with it, and by the former Soviet Union and its allies.

The overthrow of Pol Pot's government caused great uneasiness in Thailand and the other members of ASEAN. The Thai prime minister, General Kriangsak Chamanan, on 6th January 1979 said his country was "firm in taking a neutral stand" on the matter but was concerned over "the independence and freedom of all countries in South-East Asia, and especially Democratic Kampuchea". The Indonesian foreign minister, Professor Mochtar Kusumaatmadja, in a statement issued on 9th January 1979 in his capacity as chairman of the ASEAN Standing Committee, expressed concern at the expansion of the conflict and its implications for peace, security and stability in South-East Asia.

Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the former Cambodian head of state, left for New York via Peking on 6th January 1979 to present the Cambodian "government's" case at the UN Security Council. A resolution calling for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Cambodia was adopted by the Council on 15th January but which was vetoed by the Soviet Union. The prince returned to Peking, subsequently disassociated himself from the "Khmer Rouge" regime, and proposed that a new Geneva conference should be held to provide for free elections and the neutralization of his country.

The foreign ministers of ASEAN met in Bangkok on 12th and 13th January and issued a statement reaffirming Professor Kusumatmadja's statement of 9th January; deplored the "armed intervention threatening the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Cambodia", and called for "the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Cambodian territory".

The Vietnamese foreign minister, Nguyen Duy Trinh, announced on 12th January 1979 that his government would allow Vietnamese who

wished to leave the country to do so, except those who were of age for compulsory military service, who were in possession of state secrets, who occupied important positions in production or the public service, and those who were awaiting trial on criminal charges.

An international scandal broke out when the 3,506-ton Panamian-registered freighter, the "Skyluck", sailed from Singapore on 12th January 1979 and "turned-up", twenty-five days later at Hong Kong, on 7th February, with its log-book missing and 3,000 Vietnamese on board, for a journey that would "normally" take a mere five days. The vessel was forced to anchor off Lamma Island under Hong Kong Police supervision. The ship's Taiwanese captain claimed that he had been delayed by engine trouble and that the Vietnamese had forced themselves on board while they were carrying out repairs on the high seas. Suspicions increased about the captain's honesty when an inspection of the ships' engines revealed no signs of recent repair, or when his log-book went missing. The Vietnamese on board had appeared too well-dressed to be genuine refugees. After 142 days at Lamma Island the Vietnamese on board ran the ship aground on rocks on 29th June and leapt ashore only to be detained by the British authorities at a refugee-camp. The ship's captain and his crew were arrested.

In Singapore the National Trades Union Congress went through a change of leadership with C.V. Devan Nair moving on to the post of President to make way for a new Secretary-general, Lim Chee Onn, who is married to a Caucasian.

By-elections were held in five parliamentary constituencies in the republic on 10th February 1979, while two new PAP MPs had been returned unopposed in two further constituencies. One vacancy had been caused by the death in June 1978 of a sitting member and the remaining six by the resignation of sitting Members. All seats were retained by the ruling People's Action Party which had won all 69 seats in the previous December 1976 general elections. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew on 7th January 1979 stated that three of the outgoing Members had been asked to resign but he would not say for what reasons. Among those elected on 10th February was C.V. Devan Nair, (who would, in future, first become the republic's 3rd President, and then would be 'removed' from office due to an "illness" and a purported "scandal"), who had recently become the President of the National Trades Union Congress. In each of the contested seats there had been one opposition candidate. The highest opposition vote, (38 percent), went to J.B.Jeyaretnam, the Tamil lawyer and Secretary-general of the Workers' Party, who had previously been found guilty of "grave slander"

in a court action brought by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in 1978 for words the former had uttered during the December 1976 general elections. Jeyaretnam attributed his defeat to the "deep-seated fear the people have for voting against the PAP", the only solution to this would, he said, be the removal of the serial numbers from the ballot-papers so that they became "untraceable".

In the Vietnam-Chinese border, following a series of border-incidents Chinese troops invaded Vietnam on 17th February 1979 and occupied a number of towns in the border area between the two countries. The conflict between the two countries stemmed from disagreement over territorial delineations set in the previous century and this one. The two countries' common border had been outlined under two previous conventions between the French government and the Chinese Manchu empire, signed in Peking in 1887 and 1895 respectively, stones being erected to mark the frontier. A Vietnamese memorandum of 15th March 1979 claimed that as France had wished to sign a trade agreement with China it had conceded some Vietnamese territory to China under the 1887 convention. A New China News Agency, (NCNA), commentary, on the other hand, maintained that the convention had been an "unequal treaty" and that the imperial government had "surrendered to France". The Vietnamese memorandum also alleged that before 1949, (when the Communists came to power in China), Chinese governments had "seized more than 60 places on Vietnamese territory". Both the Chinese and the Vietnamese made it clear that relations between them had also deteriorated after the occupation of the Paracel Islands by China in 1974, and the occupation of six of the Spratly Islands by Vietnamese Communists in 1975. A dispute had arisen, as well, over the two countries' territorial waters in the Gulf of Tongkin, among other things.

While the Chinese invasion of Vietnam was strongly condemned by the Soviet bloc, India and Albania, South-East Asia and the Western countries generally linked appeals for the withdrawal of Chinese forces with similar appeals for the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia.

A Chinese government statement of 5th March announced that the Chinese troops, having "attained the goals set for them", were withdrawing to Chinese territory.

During the recent Chinese invasion of Vietnam a sizeable proportion of Hoa, (the ethnic-Chinese of Vietnam), in the northern frontier areas did act as "fifth columnists" in guiding Chinese attackers along the back-trails to attack Vietnamese defenders in the rear "...those Hoa who had remained without specific "fifth column" instructions were butchered by the (Chinese), invaders...this time, (the Vietnamese began)...discriminating against and

expelling ethnic-Chinese...from Haiphong, Hongay-Campha, also from Hanoi..." The Vietnamese reaction to the Chinese "Hoa" had been the *realisation* that after *centuries* of "settlement" in their country the "Hoa" *still* regarded themselves as loyal citizens of China.

Refugees from Vietnam, in the meantime, continued to flee that country, arriving in the surrounding South-East Asian ports in small boats in growing numbers, and by May and June 1979 the situation had reached crisis proportions when they started arriving at the rate of over 50,000 a month. Vietnamese allegations that the Hoa had been incited to flee by Chinese agents was confirmed in a "Guardian" report of 17th July 1979 that there was "...ample proof of pressures on ethnic-Chinese to flee Vietnam..." because war between China and Vietnam "...is inevitable, if you remain the Vietnamese will treat you as enemies, our troops will deal with you as traitors..."

As the numbers of refugees increased the South-East Asian countries adopted stricter measures to prevent their entry. "Boat-people" were not allowed to land but some evaded naval patrols and succeeded. This had the effect of diverting the flow of refugees to Indonesia, Australia and Hong Kong.

The "kicking-out" of the ethnic-Chinese "Hoa" from Vietnam Thomas Siddon viewed as the natural reaction of an indigenous race getting rid of an immigrant mass "domiciled" in their land but who had never attempted to assimilate or to learn the culture and language of their hosts. The Chinese in South-east Asia, he knew, were notorious for such an attitude, due mainly to their first coming to the region as 'adventurers' who had left a poverty-stricken and politically-confused past back home in China, to "strike it rich" in an *alien land* with the intention of returning home once that had been achieved, and in the era of White colonisation of the region, being brought to South-east Asia by previous colonial "masters" on a "temporary basis". And because of this *attitude* the Chinese had always regarded themselves as "distinct" from the indigenous races of the various colonies they had been brought to and kept to themselves and their own culture, looking down on the "barbarians" in their midst. And that even though the status quo had since transformed and their land of adoption had become home, and that they too must have a change in attitude, the ethnic-Chinese willfully continued to regard themselves as "superior" and *different*. The Chinese in Singapore, he felt, had also been "guilty" of a similar attitude, and he personally could number many Chinese of his own acquaintance who had never "bothered" to learn Malay or to even *understand* that **Singapore is in the Malay World**, and had concentrated instead on helping Lee Kuan

Yew develop a Sino society on the island. He also knew ethnic-Chinese girls who had proudly told him that their parents would not object to their marrying outside their Chinese race so long as they did not marry a Malay!

The annual meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers, held in Bali, Indonesia from 28th to 30th June, issued a joint communique holding Vietnam responsible for the unending exodus of illegal immigrants, and which had a decisive role to play in resolving the problem at source, deploring the fact that it had not taken any effective measures to stop the exodus. The ASEAN countries, as stated in the communique, would send out the illegal immigrants in their existing camps if they were not accepted by resettlement countries or by the "indochinese" countries within a reasonable time and would co-ordinate their efforts to ensure the effectiveness of those measures.

At an international meeting convened by Dr Kurt Waldheim in Geneva on 20th and 21st July, the Vietnamese government undertook to make every effort to prevent further illegal departures, and offers from many countries raised the number of resettlement places available for "indochina" refugees. In consequence the flow of refugees greatly diminished in the second half of 1979.

In Singapore there was a petrol shortage from April to September mainly due to petrol-importing companies on the island "delaying" supplies to petrol pumps in anticipation of another world-wide increase in petroleum prices. This resulted in long queues of taxis and cars waiting outside petrol stations.

Tan Chay Wa, a Singaporean who was down on record as dedicated to the overthrow, by any act of violence, of the governments of Singapore and Malaya, (Peninsula Malaysia), and the establishment of a Communist regime throughout Malaya and Singapore, which the Malayan Communists regarded as inseparable, was arrested in Peninsula Malaysia in possession of a pistol in 1979. A students' body in Britain, the Federation of United Kingdom and Eire Malaysian and Singapore Students' Organisation, (Fuemsso), described as a pro-Communist movement, began an intensive international campaign to pressurise the Malaysian authorities to abolish the security regulation and free Tan Chay Wa. The two "masterminds" behind the Fuemsso campaign were a Tan Wah Piow, wanted in Singapore for evasion of national service duty, and Ho Juan Thai, a Workers' Party candidate in the 1976 general elections in Singapore and on the island-republic's Internal Security Department's wanted-list for accusing the Singapore Government of systematically "killing" the Chinese language and deliberately changing the Chinese-language Nanyang University, (which had been the only Chinese-language university outside mainland



China), into an English-language institution of higher learning, much to the disappointment of the Chinese community in Singapore, (in this Ho was referring to Singapore's China-born Chinese and their offspring. The "Straits-born Chinese" and the "Baba-Nynonya Chinese" weren't bothered). The agitation by the likes of Tan Wah Piow and Ho Juan Thai on parochial-Chinese issues is "natural" as the Malayan Communist movement is a *mainland-Chinese movement*. (Tan Chay Wa would eventually be found guilty under Malaysia's Essential, (Security Cases), Regulations, which carries the mandatory death penalty, and hanged in 1983.).

The two-thirds majority of parliament requirement for any proposed change in the Singapore Constitution was restored by another amendment in 1979. Previously in 1965 it had been changed to a simple majority in order to make changes in the Constitution.

A Government statement at the close of 1979 touched on the "danger" posed by Communist "satellites". That members of the Malayan National Liberation Front, (MNLF), had a "death-list" of Singapore Internal Security Officers as well as senior police officers, that the MNLF was planning to eliminate. Ammunition, maps of Singapore and intelligence data on the Singapore armed forces had also been stolen from various military bases on the island. Another Government statement later stated that the MNLF was the "biggest threat" posed by the Communists in Singapore, in the previous decade, (the seventies), and that it was regarded as the most active and militant of all the underground satellites of the outlawed Communist Party of Malaya.

Thomas Siddon found it highly amusing that in the midst of the dramatic events unfolding around the world and the region at that time, the Singapore Government would issue a statement on 29th December 1979 accusing the Singapore Pork Merchants' Association of "price fixation" and strongly refute the association's claim that the price of pork would have to cost 30 Singapore-cents more because of the official waste-pollution charge at government-run abattoirs. Singapore's Ministry of National Development insisted that with the waste pollution levy "...the retail price of pork should rise by no more than 25 cents, (Singapore), per kilo, or 15 cents per *kati*.

The new Secretary-general of the National Trades Union Congress, Lim Chee Onn, spent time during the Government's "Speak More Mandarin" Campaign in 1979 to encourage the island's ethnic-Chinese hawkers to rely less on their native-dialects. He handed out booklets to boost the "drive". One *side effect* of the "Speak More Mandarin" campaign was a resurgence in Chinese community-pride which manifest itself in a cocky, dismissive attitude of the ethnic-Chinese toward their fellow non-Chinese Singapore-islanders.

A "hint" of things to come was contained in an article on Hong Kong's mass transit railway in the New Year issue of "The Straits Times". The former colonial-owned-and-managed newspaper which, traditionally, used to employ a multi-racial staff until after the colonial era and the onslaught of the Lee Kuan Yew regime, had since, 'transformed' into a majority ethnic-Chinese-owned and managed "rag", employing ethnic-Chinese in the main, with "native-speakers" from Britain as editorial "advisers", and a "smattering" of Indian and Eurasian journalists, but the paper was regarded by *everybody* as the ruling PAP's "party-mouthpiece".

The human rights organization, Amnesty International, published a report on 31st January 1980 severely criticizing the internal security practices of the Lee Kuan Yew Government which was urged to cease *detaining people without trial* and to stop what it alleged to be the use of torture in detention centres. The 60-page document contained about 50 specific allegations of maltreatment of detainees and drew particular attention to the imprisonment without trial of three opposition politicians — Ho Piao, Lee Tze Tong and Dr Poh Soo Kai — the duration of whose detention was described as "almost without parallel in modern history", and the *internal exile* on the island of Pulau Tekong Besar of Dr Lim Hock Siew.

Of those mentioned in the Amnesty International Report Dr Poh Soo Kai had reportedly been released in 1973 under a restriction order but had been re-arrested three years later for involvement in "Communist front" activities", Dr Lim Hock Siew had been released from prison under a suspension order together with a Said Zahari; and Lee Tze Tong was allowed to leave prison on 15th February 1980, (after publication of the Amnesty report), under a suspension order confining him to the island of *Pulau Ubin*.

The Singapore Government officially rejected the "...lurid accounts of torture and assault of political detainees during interrogation as baseless..." asserting that political detention was necessary to combat subversion, there being at the time 34 detainees under the Internal Security Act. An inquiry set up under the chairmanship of Mr Suppiah Dhanabalan, the then Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, to investigate the specific allegations made in the Amnesty International report had, it was stated, found whereas "the Process of interrogation does *involve psychological stress*", no evidence had been found of injury being caused. The admission that there *had been some sort of stress inflicted* took the whole island by complete surprise.

In a Cabinet reshuffle, announced on 1st June 1980, Mr S. Dhanabalan, (whose maternal grandmother hails from South Africa), and hitherto Senior

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, was promoted Minister for Foreign Affairs, while a Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, hitherto Senior Minister of State for National Development, was elevated to Minister for Education. Responsibility for Education had hitherto been held by the Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Goh Keng Swee, 62, who became First Deputy Prime Minister, with a general portfolio, while former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Sinnathamby Rajaratnam, 65, became the Second Deputy Prime Minister in overall charge of Foreign Affairs. Mr Lee Kuan Yew was still the Prime Minister.

Siddon, in the meanwhile was becoming convinced that he wasn't welcome any longer in his society. Otherwise why hadn't his 'achievement' in making it back to the rugged Japanese martial art and winning honours for his new club been cause for at least a congratulatory handshake by his martial arts 'brothers', he asked himself. He felt that somehow word had been passed-down "from above" again, through the various governmental groups until it reached the grass-roots, to "tell" those of his mixed-community that they were no longer looked upon as being part of the "national fabric". Ever since 1978 when the "Bi-lingual Policy" had been instituted, the Chinese community had been acting "more Chinese" and behaving as if Singapore was theirs alone. *Everyone else* was barely tolerated. The *silent majority* within the population, which comprised the lower-and-middle-income ethnic-Chinese, whose culture is Chinese and whose main language is written and spoken Mandarin-Chinese, were solidly behind the Government because it had clearly demonstrated that it was setting out to transform Singapore into a *Sino society* based on precepts as found in Chinese culture, was now *out in the open*, clamouring that things Chinese, like the annual Chinese Moon Cake festival be treated "more importantly", and that street altars during the "Hungry Ghosts" month, which during British colonial times were only permitted to be set up, at appropriate times in the "backward" rural areas of the island, away from the public-eye, be erected right in the middle of smart, busy thoroughfares like Orchard Road and Scotts Road. Creating the *wrong impression* in the mind of the foreign visitor, because these festivals were now given greater prominence, that Singapore-culture is Chinese culture, *when it is not*.

Siddon's *feelings of alienation* were really an accumulation of various factors in his life, over the years, ever since he first began to feel that the ethnic-Chinese majority on his land of birth was behaving "differently". It really all began for him in 1974, two years after his serious accident in 1972 when he had gone to look for employment after recuperating from his accident, and found that he was encountering a "new and disquieting"

mentality among former cronies and contacts in the advertising "game", all of whom were ethnic-Chinese. When he had gone looking for work after his long lay-off, he had been quietly amazed that not one of those "cronies", who had known him for years, had seemed interested to remember that he had been a "main contributor" in his field and much sought after by the leading ad agencies. Instead he had been made to feel almost unqualified. What was worse was his coming across those whom he had trained in advertising and public relations, in courses conducted by him under the auspices of the official controlling bodies of the two communicating "streams", of which he was a member, again all of whom were ethnic-Chinese and who had since become ensconced in senior positions, now intimated that *he* wasn't "sufficiently qualified"! Yet it was these same individuals who had received his instruction to get qualified to be where they now were! But his feelings of alienation had been crystallized when the Chinese motor company in Newton had let him go not long after he had obtained the all-important government-approval to help them start-up their car-rental division. He realised that he had only been employed to get the permit for them and when he had accomplished that, he was no longer needed.

His fears, many years ago when he had finally "broken" into advertising and discovered that the ethnic-Chinese were in the majority in the industry, and that on independence they could imitate the then ruling British who had only used White models in local advertising, and insist on using ethnic-Chinese or Chinese-looking models, had been finally realised to his disappointment. Local press and magazine advertisements now conveyed to foreigners, especially expatriate-types who hadn't a clue about Singapore's population make-up or its historical past, through the media's use of ethnic-Chinese models, that the island and its culture was mainly Sino. But what got his goat was the hypocritical airing of made-in-Malaysia commercials which always featured multi-racial models, over Singapore TV and conveyed to those who didn't know the true state of affairs of the advertising game of the two countries, that the commercials were Singapore-made with multi-racial models, when in fact they were not.

He had even come across *foreign* Chinese from abroad holding senior positions in Singapore's civil service, statutory boards and government-owned enterprises, who behaved arrogantly with non-Chinese like him, like they had nothing to fear because *they were in a Chinese country*. To him this stemmed from their mistaken impression that they were among the "first" in the land, because it was *Chinese*. Without fanfare and unknown to the non-Chinese population the Lee Kuan Yew Government had initiated

an immigration policy, attracting and allowing in ethnic-Chinese from abroad just because they met the Singapore Government Sino-criteria for "qualification" by holding the *requisite* paper qualifications that the Government had all along been emphasizing was the be-all and end-all for obtaining key-employment on the island, a *measure* parallel to what had traditionally been practised in ancient China. These *newcomers* hadn't a clue about the *Malay history* of Singapore or of the region, or of the multiracial nature of Singapore's population which had been the creation of the British as a result of colonial policy, because, to them, they were in a Chinese country and they, (the foreign Chinese), *belonged more than the non-Chinese communities*.

It seemed to Siddon that these *foreign ethnic-Chinese* were either not aware or chose not to know that the ethnic-Chinese *had not belonged* to Singapore, let alone the region, but had come as several "waves" over the centuries since the 1300s — first as would-be invaders in Kublai Khan's army, then as vanquished coolie-slaves to the Malay empires, next as down-trodden refugees in the Ming era, later as marriage-partners before, during and after the time of Cheng-ho, the Muslim emissary of Imperial China, as cheap, indentured labour in the era of White colonialism from the early 1600s right up to just before the Second World War of this century, and finally as ethnic-Chinese permitted to enter, settle and raise families in Singapore by the Lee Kuan Yew Government in the modern era.

It re-confirmed his suspicions that Lee Kuan Yew had set out to "convert" Singapore into a "Chinese haven" because elsewhere in South-East Asia the indigenous of each country in the region were in control in their respective lands and the Chinese in these lands were regarded and treated as settlers and *outsiders*, and couldn't claim fundamental "rights" to what they were not at all entitled. Except in Singapore where the Chinese are in the majority due to the previous Colonial British policy of shipping in poverty-stricken Chinese workers from mainland China as *coolies*, (who had been regarded as outlaws by their own government who had forbade all Chinese to go abroad, by law, but who went anyway, despite the threats, because they were suffering and starving). And the fears of the indigenous in the region, Siddon felt, had to be viewed from what they perceived to be a *Chinese trait* — like what had happened in Taiwan, (which, before World War Two, had been known to the world by its Portuguese name: **Formosa**, and its capital, (Taipeh), as *Taihoku*, in Japanese, (from the time of the Japanese invasion of 1895), when mainland Chinese Nationalist forces, (the Kuomintang), massacred between 18,000 and 28,000 native-born *Taiwanese* on 28th February 1947 in a *Taiwanese* uprising against the

mainlanders trying to impose their mainland-Chinese way-of-life on their island, after clashes between island-natives comprising Formosan Aborigines, half-castes and native-born Chinese, and mainland immigrants who had come to settle on Formosa, (Taiwan), since the First Cairo Conference of 22nd November 1943, which had included US President Theodore Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and General and Mrs Chiang Kai-shek of Nationalist China, who had all agreed that a vanquished Japan should be stripped of all the Pacific islands she had occupied since before the First World War, and that all of the territories *stolen* from China — Manchuria, the Pescadores, ( now called *Peng Hu*, a chain of 64 islands in the Straits of Formosa), and Formosa, (both last-named territories had *never been China's to begin with, except for two hundred years in the case of Formosa, from 1682 to 1895*, and had never been regarded as China's until that First Cairo Conference of 1943) — be returned to China, *without any prior-consultation with the native-Taiwanese themselves*. (In fact in 1943 China had no legal right to the territories of Formosa and the Pescadores, because except for the "brief" two hundred-year occupation, these two places had never ever been Chinese territory. The only legal Chinese claim, in this instance, was the exception of Manchuria on the Chinese mainland, which the Japanese had invaded and taken by force before World War Two.). Prior to Chiang Kai-sek's forces taking over Formosa in 1949, after fleeing the Chinese Communists in the Chinese Civil War on the mainland, and, after the defeat in 1945 of the Japanese in World War Two, China's Kuomintang forces, with the assistance and co-operation of the US, were first stationed on the island by the *Kuomintang* government in 1947. The *Kuomintang* then set out to superimpose their own mainland Chinese culture and way-of-life on *Formosa* which they first re-named *Taiwan*, in Chinese, following the *Kanji* script used by the Japanese, (which the Japanese had 'borrowed' from the Chinese centuries previously), for the Japanese name for the island during the time when it had been colonised by them. The mainland Chinese replaced the Taiwanese dialect, (Hokkein), in the classroom, while the local students were fined and punished if they spoke the local *patois*, and even *Formosan history*, which was *different* from mainland Chinese history, was subsumed by mainland Chinese history. What was not generally known *outside Taiwan* was that the indigenous *Taiwanese* — this includes the island's nine indigenous tribes: *the Ami, Atayal, Saisiyat, Tsou, Sau, Bunun, Puyuma, Paiwan and Yami*, and her mixed-race community, (*which had come into existence ever since the 16th Century and are of Aboriginal/ Spanish/Dutch and Japanese unions, (from 1895 to 1945), with Chinese*),

and the *Hokkein-speaking* ethnic-Chinese— had always been on their *own*, and had never been under mainland Chinese ‘influence’ except in 1682, when they had been governed by the Peking government for two hundred years until Japan defeated China in the war of 1895, involving a “problem” about Korea, and won the right to govern Formosa and which they had renamed. And after the Japanese defeat in World War Two in 1945, the *Formosans* had been *on their own* for two years immediately after war’s end, until the “settlement” by mainland Chinese in 1947 when the mainland Chinese, through sheer force of arms had forcibly imposed their own way-of-life and culture on the island. (There is a native Formosan tradition of resentment and underlying hostility toward the representatives of mainland Chinese authority which stems from the previous 200-year “occupation” by China, from 1682 to 1895. And though there is now a *Kuomintang* Chinese government on Taiwan, (Formosa), the *indigenous Taiwanese people collectively still do not feel* they have *become* mainland Chinese, only the 1949 “immigrants” and their descendants look toward mainland China as the *mother-country*. The *native Taiwanese* themselves comprise about 85 percent of the island’s 21 million people while those of mainland-Chinese descent, most of the remainder. One can start to understand this state of affairs if one was familiar with the historical background as to how Formosa first came into existence, in the first place:

*Pekan* is the original Malayo-Polynesian Aboriginal name for the island the world once knew as “Formosa”. Ancient Cathay had called it “Lesser *Li-ch’iu*” to differentiate it from a chain of islands close-by, and had *always* regarded it as an unwelcome sparsely-settled, jungle-clad, wild island solely populated by fierce non-Chinese barbarians of a southern or Malay origin, long before the Chinese themselves had pushed southward from their homeland in the Yellow River basin to settle along the Fukien coast. Early Chinese sources had referred to Formosa, (Taiwan as it is called today by the Chinese themselves), by various names:

*Tung-fan*

*I-chou*

*Pei-kang*

*Tan-shui &*

*Ta—Liu-chiu*

In fact early Chinese notices had referred to all the islands between Japan and the Philippines as *Liu-ch’iu*. It was very much later, in ‘modern’ recorded history, that the Chinese made a distinction between the *Ryu-kyu Archipelago*, (‘ryu-kyu’ is the Japanese sound for the Chinese characters: *liu-ch’iu*, which the Japanese call their archipelago today, and where the island

of Okinawa is located), which the Chinese had termed *Greater Liu-ch'iu*, and Formosa which they called *Lesser Liu-ch'iu*. Today there are the Ryukyus, Taiwan, (Formosa), and an island in the formerly Portuguese-named Pescadores Archipelago of 64 islands in the Formosan Straits with mainland China, (now renamed by the Chinese as *Peng Hu*), which is called *Liu-ch'iu*. Ever since prehistory, the savages from *Lesser Liu-ch'iu*, (Formosa), from time to time would cross the Formosan Straits to barter, and sometimes plunder the mainland Chinese coastal villages. And sometimes the Chinese would send punitive expeditions to the "uninhabitable wild island" to punish the savages, or to explore its shores. In time a small settlement of Chinese fishermen was established in the Pescadores but there never was any significant attempt by the ancient Chinese to colonise the "wild island", until the way had been prepared by others many centuries later. Japanese merchants and pirates appear to have been the first to have established small emigrant villages on *Lesser Liu-ch'iu*, (Formosa). For centuries they were sailing past *Lesser Liu-ch'iu* for Chinese ports and South-east Asia in the south. The "wild island", to the Japanese, was a safe shelter in times of typhoons and storms and when there was need for supplies like fresh water or game for meat or to effect repairs. Finally a considerable Japanese settlement, which they named Takasago, came into existence at a point not far from today's Tainan. The Europeans began laying the foundations of their South-east Asian and East Asian colonies in the 16th and 17th Centuries, (1500 & 1600). The Portuguese first had a base at Malacca in 1511 in the *Malay World*, and then Macau in China in 1557, the Spaniards took the Philippines in 1571 and the Dutch conquered Java in 1595. Five years previously in 1590 Portuguese navigators chanced upon the "wild, jungle-ridden island" off the Fukien coast of China, inhabited solely by wild Malayo-Polynesian Aborigines, which they named *Ilha Formosa* — the "Beautiful Island". But they made no attempt to colonise it. Then came the Spaniards, and then the Dutch. Then in the late 1500s, Japan's Hideyoshi menaced Luzon in the Philippines and the Spanish Viceroy proposed the occupation of "*Ilha Formosa*" so as to build forts overlooking the sea-lanes that the Japanese used, so that they could be fired upon. In 1626 Spanish forts and missions were established at Keelung and Tamsui, and at a place the Spanish named "Santiago", (San Tiao Ko today). In 1629 they built another fort, set up a colonial government, appointed civil servants and prepared to occupy the island permanently. Meanwhile the Dutch had reached the Pescadores Archipelago and established a naval base there from which to harass the Portuguese trade at Macau and interfere with Spanish shipping outside Philippine waters. The Protestant Dutch even attempted to



evict the Roman Catholic Spaniards from Formosa without success. But finally in 1642 while the Spanish were "distracted" by problems in the Philippines, the Protestant Dutch were able to drive those remaining on Formosa out. They then proceeded to set up their own government, established their own schools for the Aborigines, opened up the "wild" countryside for agriculture and sent the Roman Catholic missionaries brought in by the Spanish far back into the mountains. This was all accomplished in the second quarter of the 17th Century, and opened the way, finally, for the *first wave* of mainland Chinese immigrants from Fukien, where previously there had been no Chinese settlement on Formosa since the dawn of time. But the Dutch as colonialists were harsh masters and demanded licences for hunting and fishing, and imposed taxes on trade and produce, and both Aborigine and Chinese "newcomer" grew restive. During this period Ming China was torn by civil rebellion and pressed hard by enemies in the north, from beyond the Great Wall. Everywhere in China itself local war-lords and imperial agents extorted unreasonable taxes and tribute from the common people in an effort to support the tottering central government. Ignoring strict edicts banning immigration villagers, farmers and fishermen from mainland China began to leave the country. The government considered them traitors, renegades and outlaws. Thousands went to *the Malays* — the Philippines, Java, Riau, Malacca, Sumatra, Borneo, Old Siam, Campuchea and Vietnam — which they had come to know of ever since the failed invasion of the *Madjapahit Empire* by Genghis Khan in early 1300. Tens of thousands had also made their way across the Formosan Straits to Formosa. All these *outlaws* of the 17th Century were the ancestors of the Overseas Chinese of the "2nd Wave" to the south seas, (the "first wave" to the *the Malays* was after the failed invasion of the *Madjapahit Empire* which had been centred on Java), for those headed to "the Malays", and the *first wave* to Formosa. On Formosa the Aborigines contested every advance of the mainland Chinese "newcomers" and the "newcomers" on their part considered them "savages", sub-human or "non-people". At this time on mainland Ming China an Amoy Chinese named Cheng Chih-lung who had married a Japanese woman, sided with the Ming emperor against the Manchus who were threatening the Ming Throne. He went over to the Manchus in 1628 and was placed with two of his three sons under the authority of a Manchu general in Fukien. By a treacherous act he was imprisoned by the Manchus, together with his sons and aides, taken to Peking and executed. A third son, Cheng Cheng-kung remained out of Manchu control and for a decade organised such devastating attacks all along the Chinese coast that all the coastal-towns in Fukien and

Kwangtung had to be evacuated. Calling himself and his family "Ming patriots", (he was known to the Europeans as Koxinga), he boldly assembled a fleet in the Pescadores, (Peng Hu), and drove the Dutch out of Formosa in 1662. He then set himself up in Formosa's European-built forts as the "King of Tung-tu". From this island-base he proposed to conquer the Chinese mainland, vowing to liberate the Chinese from Manchu rule. British "country traders" next set up an agency to supply the "Ming patriots" of Koxinga with arms in return for substantial commercial concessions, once the mainland "liberation" had been accomplished. But after 20 years of independence the island-kingdom of "Tung-tu", (Formosa), was threatened by an overwhelming mainland Chinese force. A truce was negotiated and Koxinga's youngest grandson, the third king of "Tung-tu", was granted a safe-conduct to Peking and a life of ease and plenty. Peking immediately sent a garrison-force, magistrates, and a swarm of civil servants to its newly-acquired island and this "first mainland-Chinese occupation", (the *second wave*), of ineffective rule of Formosa lasted for two centuries, and the island was totally-closed to the outside world. As a result of these two hundred years of ineffective and abusive rule by China there is a native-Formosan tradition of resentment and underlying hostility toward the representatives of mainland Chinese authority. In the 19th century alone there were more than 30 violent outbursts by the Aborigines and the now local-born Chinese against the imperial Chinese authorities on Formosa. And such were the conditions on the island that when it was eventually opened to the Western world after 1800, the island was considered to be one of the most dangerous and unhealthy spots in the Orient with more than half the island completely lawless. And while foreign governments demanded corrective action to make Formosa safe and liveable, Peking smoothly evaded responsibility. England and the United States of America in turn attempted to force the issue. In 1853-1854 US Commodore Perry wanted to annex Formosa, but knowing Washington would not approve, suggested a joint Sino-American economic and administrative programme for the island, indicating that he thought the setting up of a well-established American community on the island, in due course would petition for union with the US, as the Americans on Hawaii were at the time proposing to do. England sent gun-boats to the island and became embroiled in a "Camphor War" in 1886. In 1874 Japan sent an expeditionary force into south Formosa which compelled Peking to finally admit responsibility and to pay a large indemnity for damages. In 1884 France occupied the Pescadores, (Peng Hu), and blockaded Formosa for a year during the Franco-Chinese War in Anam. At last in 1887 the Chinese government raised Formosa from the

status of a dependency to the rank of a province, although two-thirds of the wild island still lay beyond the frontiers of local Chinese control. The changed status and a reform programme came too late. In a totally unrelated quarrel concerning Korea, Japan defeated China in a war in 1895, and Formosa and the Pescadores were *ceded to Japan* "in perpetuity". Japanese rule thereafter ensured the suppression of piracy in Formosan waters, which, before this, was rampant, and no foreign power challenged Japan's sovereign position until the days of the Cairo Meeting beside the Nile in 1943 when US President Theodore Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and General and Mrs Chiang kai-sek agreed that Japan would "return" to China, Formosa and all other territories it had "stolen" from China. This was not true nor accurate — the only territory taken from China by Japan during the Second World War had been Manchuria. The Chinese in 1943 had no legal claim to Formosa or the Pescadores. The *Kuomintang* have since come up with their own *version* of Taiwanese history, and the "image" of Taiwan today is that it has always been a Chinese province, (which isn't true), even though the minority mainland-Chinese are numerically outnumbered by the indigenous *Taiwanese*.

In Singapore Siddon could see that the former Malay island's historical "background" was being re-written to intimate that the Chinese of old had always had a 'connection' with Singapore even as far back as the 1300s, which was a *twist* to actual historical facts. This lie was first begun by the colonial British and continued, after them, by the PAP Government, through its various scholarly/academic-type institutions that the Chinese had been among the first to come to the region and had been in *the Malays* as far back as the 1300s but historically the ancient Indians of the ancient Indian subcontinent were among the first to arrive and spread their influences a thousand years *before anyone else*. Hinduism and Buddhism came to *the Malays* in the first three centuries A.D. The most powerful of the early Malay kingdoms, which was Hindu, was *Srividjaya*, which was centred on Sumatra, and Singapore was one of the three key cities of this kingdom which controlled part of the Malay peninsula and west Java from the late seventh century up until 1290. And the oldest of Malacca's three mixed-Malay communities are the *Malacca-Chitty* Hindu community who were present in the Malay court when Malacca's first sultan, who was originally Hindu before he converted to Islam and took on the name: *Ishkandar Shah*, welcomed the Chinese princesses from *Old Cathay* sent by the Chinese emperor of Imperial China to wed his Malay princes, and whose union begot one of the beginnings of the Chinese-Malay mixed community which has become known as the *Baba-Nynonyas*. *Muar*, the town in today's

modern state of Johore in Malaysia, used to be known as *Maharani* which is a Hindu name. The *Malacca-Chitrys* also witnessed the fiasco when the first would-be Portuguese coloniser to arrive, (1st August 1509), at *the Malays*, Admiral Dom Diego Lopez de Sequeira, insulted Sultan Mahmud Shah of Malacca in his court, unwittingly, by approaching the throne upright and placing about the very sophisticated sultan's neck a string of cheap baubles, (treating him as if he were an ignorant savage), whereupon the sultan's men set upon to kill him but were restrained by Sultan Mahmud himself. The magnificent Buddhist monument at Borobudur in Java is a legacy of the eight-century kingdom of *Kalinga*, which also was of Indian origin. And the greatest of the Malay empires, known throughout the world, was the Hindu Javanese kingdom of *Madjapahit* in the fourteenth century which beat back the invading Chinese forces of Kublai Khan, and even laid waste the island of Singapore, (which then was part of the *Srividjaya Empire*), around 1290. Hinduism and Buddhism gave way to Islam, which was brought in by traders from India, Persia and Arabia from the fourteenth century on, (the 1300s), *before* the arrival of the Chinese from ancient Cathay to *the Malays*. And there has been no move in Singapore to learn about or to discover the exact historical connections that Singapore, (which the ancient Malays used to call "the Navel of the Malay countries"), had with the former Riau Court, of the *Old Johor Sultanate* in the Riau Archipelago where, until today there still are ruins and relics of Hindu and Buddhist stupas, right on the doorstep of Singapore! (Stamford Raffles, the founder of modern Singapore, who landed on the island four and quarter centuries after the ancient settlement had been abandoned by its former Hindu civilisation, had been guilty of a falsehood, committed in a letter to a Colonel Addenbrooke on 10 June 1819 when he wrote that the European and the Indian worlds had been ignorant of the existence of Singapore and that but for his Malay studies he never would have known such a place existed, when Singapore was already well-known by the time Raffles had arrived in *the Malays*. Singapore was listed in the 1813 edition of Milburn's "Oriental Commerce", which was a well-known trade directory used by British traders in the area, at the time, and the island was listed in practically every contemporary map of the region then. And the ruins and ramparts of the former once-great city of *Srividjaya*, [Singapore], were clearly visible to passing vessels along the Batam-Singapore Straits, [and the existence of these ruins was recorded by John Crawford, later to become Resident of Singapore, on 3 and 4 February 1822 in two entries in his Journal.]). But Raffles and those after him, played down *any role* that Singapore might have had in the *Old Johor Court*, because to have done so would have

inadvertently forced Raffles to reveal that his claims that he had "discovered" Singapore were completely false. Subsequently after Raffles, other British Residents made sure that all links with the *Old Johor Court* and other evidence pertaining to the former once-great civilisation of *Srivijaya* were forever destroyed except for an indestructible remnant containing an indecipherable script, probably the ancient *Pali*, (which is evident in the olden Buddhist monuments in Java), that lay at the mouth of the Singapore River and is now in the Singapore Museum. What is of apparent greater attraction to Singaporeans today, as far as the Riau-Lingga Archipelago is concerned, are its cheap brothels, low-priced bars and night-spots, the cheaper-than-Singapore to join golf clubs, the excellent exchange rate of Singapore dollars with Indonesian rupiahs, where one can eat to more than one's fill of Indonesian cooking as well as the indigenous fruit, and that a Singapore Malay man can circumvent the Muslim laws in Singapore to marry another Malay-Muslim bride on Riau.).

The history and culture of the Malays is rich and spans more than a thousand years and it was a *civilisation*. The *myth* first perpetuated by the colonial British, and later by Lee Kuan Yew when he was manoeuvring to get Singapore out of Malaysia, years ago, in a speech delivered in New Zealand and Australia that the Malay is happy-go-lucky and uninterested in striking out on his own, that he was content to fish when he was hungry otherwise he was happy to lie in the sun and take life easy, that he had no idea of how to run a business or to supervise, and that but for the Chinese and the Indian who had come with the British, bringing with them their respective "sophisticated" traditions in running businesses and keeping records and accounts to make the Singapore emerging from colonial rule a "fit" country to be considered by the "more advanced" White countries of those days to do business with, has done immeasurably more harm for the Malay image in his own eyes as well as where the other communities of Singapore are concerned, than *anything else*. In a forgotten era when Malay might was paramount in *the Malays*, the *domain* of the Malay stretched from ancient Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, and Old Siam.(Thailand), [all of these afore-mentioned countries still have ethnic-Malay communities within their populations], Malaysia, Indonesia, (stretching southwards to Irian and New Guinea), Brunei, the Philippines, Formosa, (Taiwan), and the Ryukyu Archipelago. The indigenous inhabitants of the territories in *the Malays* are all of Malayo-Polynesian descent, as are the indigenous people of Formosa, (Taiwan), and the Japanese Ryukyu Archipelago. The Ryukyu Archipelago, of which Okinawa is the largest island, lies 500 kilometres from Kyushu, the southernmost major Japanese island, in its north, 600

kilometres from Formosa, (Taiwan) to its south, where on a clear day Formosa, (Taiwan), can be viewed from the most southern island in the Ryukyus; and 800 kilometres from Foochow on the Chinese mainland. From ancient times Okinawa or *Uchinaa*, (the ancient Ryukyuan name for Okinawa), had been the artistic, cultural and martial heartland of the islands. All of the leading centres of the archipelago are located in its southern part as well; Shuri, the ancient capital, Naha the most important port for international trade, Tomari, the most important domestic transportation centre and the location of a thriving salt-producing industry; and Kumemura which is where the original immigrants from China settled. This last village and the Chinese who used to live there are intimately related to the development of what the world knows today as "karate-do" which was taught in a temple founded there, and was originally known as "Chinese hand", and only in the beginning of this century was the description changed to mean what it does today. The original indigenous peoples of the Ryukyus are comprised of the migrations of peoples from the south, (Malayo-Polynesia), the Mongol, (Japan and China), and the Caucasoid *Ainu* from the north, (Japan). Successive waves of migration from the north, (Japan), the west, (China), and the south, (mainly the Philippines and Melanesia), and cultural elements from the north, west and south, penetrated these islands, one upon the other in the first instance to evolve a culture distinctly *Ryukyuan*. The Ryukyus, in turn, came under the strong influences of both China and Japan, at different times, though they were originally left to develop on their own as both the Chinese and the Japanese regarded them a primitive society. The diverse and heterogeneous functions and characteristics that enter into the formation of a modern homogeneous society would begin to emerge in a period of transition when the nation or race was shaped from the primitive society. In China this was approximately from 1800 B.C. to about 1700, 1600 or 1500 B.C. In Japan it was from about 500 A.D. to 600 A.D. In the Ryukyus it took place from the mid-12th to the 13th and 14th centuries. No culture has come into-being by itself, not even the great and ancient culture of Cathay, (ancient China). The splendid civilisation of the Shang seems to have been influenced by still earlier civilisations of western Asia. Japanese culture was stimulated and influenced by that of ancient China, and the civilisations of China and Japan also had an impact on the Ryukyus, which in the mid-12th century were in a period of transition from an ancient village culture to the more advanced culture of a unified kingdom. Early Chinese notices refer to all the islands between Japan and what is now the Philippines, as *Liu-ch'iu*. Only much later did the Chinese make a distinction between the Ryukyus which they termed

*Greater Liu-ch'iu*, and Formosa, which they called *Lesser Liu-ch'iu*. The first mention of the Ryukyus occurs in the Chinese document known as the *Sui Shu*, which was written in the Chinese dynastic history of the Sui period, (581 - 618 A.D.), which shows that the people of Okinawa, (*Uchinaa*), were already engaging in intercourse with the peoples of other lands in the sixth century. Another Chinese document called the *Yuan-shi Liu-ch'iu Chuan* says that centuries ago it was able to travel by ship from the Ryukyus to Foochow in about six days. In 616 A.D. a group of people from the Ryukyus, (they were called the Yakushima people), brought tribute from the Ryukyus to the Japanese court, and that such voyages continued until the middle of the Nara period, ( 649-794 A.D.). In those times each of the Ryukyu islands was an entity unto itself. The products each island had to offer in trade were fruit and marine products, a small amount of sulphur, abaca cloth and whetstones. Almost devoid of natural minerals in their soil the islanders were forced to turn to other nations in trade for such materials. In 1187 in Okinawa, (*Uchinaa*), the Japanese *Kana* syllabary was introduced from Japan during the reign of one of its rulers, King Shunten. (Okinawa or *Uchinaa* was divided into three kingdoms, by this period — Hokuzen, (northern mountain kingdom), Chuzan, ( middle mountain kingdom), and Namzan, (southern mountain kingdom). In 1267 a Japanese priest, Zenkan, brought Buddhism for the first time. Before this the religion on the Ryukyus was Shinto, (also by way of Japan), which still thrives today on the archipelago. In 1404 a Chinese imperial envoy arrived to grant investiture and to legitimize the Rukyuan dynasty. All of Ryukyu was unified under the leadership of Sho-Hashi of the Chuzan kingdom in 1422. This short-lived Sho dynasty's 7th king, Sho Toku, was replaced by Sho-En, the founder of the second Sho dynasty in 1470. It was about this period, (from 1385 to 1570), that the Golden Age of the Ryukyus came into being when the islanders discovered transoceanic travel. It was while they were on their outward sea-journeys that the people of *Greater Liu-ch'iu* began calling themselves as the 'people from *Liu-ch'iu* ' after the ancient Chinese name for their archipelago. They first established strong trade links with China, Korea and Japan before turning their vessels southward to trade with their ancestral "kinfolk" in the south — the Malayo-Polynesian Philippines, Melanesia, and Java, Malay Patani, Old Siam, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos which were all Malay and Buddhist at that time. (In the Ryukyus today there are the ruins of ancient Buddhist temple courtyards after the Vietnamese and Cambodian styles). In Java they were called *Likwa* or *Likya* but were generally referred to as *Al Ghur*. Early Portuguese-Malacca chronicles, (the 1500s), record the people of *Greater Liu-ch'iu* as the people from

"Lequea" who called themselves "Lequeos" and who traded with China, Korea and Cipangu, (Japan) and who transported products from these three countries to the emporium that was Malacca. "...The Guores were *not* Chinese, Japanese or Koreans, they were some *other* peoples from East Asia who traded with these nations...They brought with them a great deal of gold and boxes of gold-leaf...onions and vegetables...among the Lequios Malacca wine was greatly esteemed... they bought swords worth thirty *cruzades*...The Lequeos were truthful, and gave their merchandise freely on credit, but if they were lied to they collected it sword in hand..." They were described as a fair complexioned people who were mild-mannered but who struck hard bargains which they would adhere to. "...They were idolaters, if they were sailing and found themselves in danger, and if they escaped the danger they would buy a beautiful maiden to be beheaded and sacrificed on the prow of their junk..." But by 1589 the fame and wealth of *Liu-ch'iu*, (the Ryukyus), had grown that Shimazu, the lord of Satsuma in southern Japan cast his covetous eyes on the archipelago, invaded them in 1609 and executed its last king, King Shi-Nei. *Liu-ch'iu* now became *Ryukyu* in Japanese. And all links with the outside world were severed. In 1879 Japan formally annexed the Ryukyus. In 1910 two of Okinawa's foremost *karate-do masters* travelled to mainland Japan to demonstrate, for the first time in Japanese history, their *Okinawan 'empty' hand* martial art, (which had evolved and developed without influence from China since 1609, in secret, after the Ryukyus had been closed off to the outside world by her Japanese conqueror). The *story* of the people of the Ryukyus is recorded in the *Omoro soshi*, a collection of ancient Ryukyuian poems and chants sung by their priestesses in the temples, that tell the tales of their beginnings. We now *know* about the extent of the Malay civilisation, and her influence which extended from as far as European Venice in the west, during the Middle Ages, right up to the Ryukyus in East Asia, since ancient times. We know as well about the Portuguese connection. In the 16th Century the sultan of Aceh in Sumatra, *Sultan Alau' din Ri-ayat Shah al-Kahar*, wrote to the Caliph Rum of Istanbul, which then was part of the Ottoman Turk Empire for help to subdue the Portuguese in Malacca in the name of Islam. The Caliph sent craftsmen skilled in forging guns and cannon to teach their Muslim Malay counterparts. But the rich and diverse culture of *the Malays* is also reflected in some of the stray *foreign* words, and names of food, that seem to have no apparent bearing on Malay culture as far as three seemingly *unrelated* cultures are concerned but which we now realise is incorrect as far as our surmises are concerned, insofar as the "recent" historical connections *the Malays* had with the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Dutch



and the British. Because *the Malays* also had a 'connection' with the Indian of the ancient Indian subcontinent from the first to the third centuries, before anyone else had come to the region, with the Ottoman Turk Empire from the 13th to the 17th Centuries, (and probably this is how the famous Malay satay "evolved" from the original Middle Eastern shish kebab), and from even as late as the 19th Century the Malay courts had adopted the rich lifestyles of the Ottoman courts to show their alliance with a foreign Muslim empire, and with the French from Indochina through the indigenous Malay within these former French colonies. The indigenous Malays were there *before* the coming of the *Kymers* and the *Vietnamese*. Words like *roti chanai*, (the Malay version of the Indian roti perata, which the Malay swears is different from the Indian version and is Malay), *nasi berani*, (the Malay version of this Indian rice dish), *currykorma*, (the Malay version of this Indian curry), (but we now know of the Indian Hindu/Buddhist connection of a bygone age), *sabon*, (French: savon, which means soap, just like the Malay), and *roti peranchis*, (french loaf), and realising that there still are ethnic-Malays in Vietnam and Cambodia, we can surmise how the French *connection* was brought from these former French colonies to the rest of the *Malay World* through social intercourse between these different Malay societies at various times, and how the French has crept into the Malay language.

To the Malay of Singapore his *Malay history and sacred sites* are real, and for him they make his *history, culture and folklore* a living force, which he can relate to. All over Singapore are innumerable historical sites and sacred spots which, for the Singapore Malay keep his history and traditions alive and tangible. During the era of British colonialism even though the British purposely played down the importance of the Malay monuments and sacred sites, to keep the Singapore Malay and Malay royalty in check, to perpetuate their supremacy, they allowed these sacred areas to exist, untouched. Because even they realised that so long as their *natives* on Singapore were happy they could expect the least trouble from them, while they concentrated on developing Singapore as a trading emporium, bringing in Chinese labour from mainland China, since the previous century right up to just before World War Two, to achieve this, and whose interests were safe-guarded through the establishment of a *Chinese Protectorate* which was housed in a magnificent building just outside *chinatown*. But, in this century, under the Lee Kuan Yew regime some of the more important Malay historical places and *kramats*, (holy sites), like the one and only *Orang Laut Cemetery* in *Lorong Three, Geylang*, (which used to be located in the ancient *Orang Laut* village of *Kampong Kuchan*, opposite the amusement park, "The Gay World", which had been sinonised into

"Kampong Kuchai"), the *kramat* at the junction of Changi Road with Chai Chee Avenue, the *Bugis Village* in Kallang, and the Malay villages of *Geylang Serai*, *Jalan Eunus* and *Kampong Ubi* have all been eradicated and new Housing and Development Board blocks of flats have been put up, together with Chinese temples, in which the majority of the new residents are ethnic-Chinese, transforming these former Malay areas into predominantly Chinese ones, while buildings in the Chinese *enclaves* of *chinatown* and *Tanjong Pagar* have been preserved, restored, re-packaged and sold as up-market sites for trendy new businesses, and at the same time allowing the ethnic-Chinese residents who have been living in these two areas for generations to remain in their old-time buildings, and allowing in yet more ethnic-Chinese to live in the newly-built Housing and Development Board flats which have also gone up in the two areas.

Years ago when Singapore first had achieved independence from Britain, Siddon had waited with almost anticipated breathlessness to hear an announcement from the newly-installed PAP Government that British-descent Eurasians were entitled to emigrate to the United Kingdom through patriality, just like what had been granted to the *Anglo-Indian*, (the Eurasian of India as he is known in his country), of the Indian subcontinent, but there had been nary a word and he suspected that Lee Kuan Yew had either stymied this *right* of the British *half-caste* or had kept it from him because Lee then had *need* for the Eurasians then that were part of the administration he had "inherited" from the British colonialists, and he didn't want them departing Singapore for settlement in the West. Since then the Government has replaced the Eurasian with ethnic-Chinese, and who now hold *all* the key appointments in the civil service, including the statutory boards and the military, with the exception of a few *token* Indians. The ethnic-Chinese are the leaders in all the grass-roots organisations like the People's Association, the Community Centres, and the Residents' Committees where they are also in the majority, and where Mandarin-Chinese is the main language of communication, though they do "permit" the "non-Chinese" to participate in functions organised and approved by the majority for the "good of the community". It is at this level that Chinese festivals are organised and celebrated and given prominence, and thus create the *false impression* that Singapore culture is Chinese culture.

Through his "inside contacts" as a former reporter Siddon had also heard that there were moves afoot to give Chinese names to "newly-created" districts on the island which would come about from the "re-development" of rural areas, the displacement and "scattering" of the other non-Chinese ethnic-groups in these former rural areas to ethnic-Chinese predominant

areas and the re-drawing of constituency-lines for electoral purposes, and to bring in ethnic-Chinese from other districts to these "new" districts, to ensure a uniform Chinese look and influence throughout the island. (After 1980 some of these newly-created-and-named districts are: Teck Ghee, Chengsan, Chong Boon, Fengshan, Bishan, Simei and Yishun).

Even the question of the World War Two Japanese-inspired *comfort women* in Singapore have been given the Government's "treatment" — officially, and according to the various stories and plays written on the war in Singapore by ethnic-Chinese Singaporeans, *there were no comfort houses or comfort women in Singapore during World War Two!* Even the international press reports from the news agencies listing the various countries in Asia whose women had been conscripted into the Jap war-time brothels have been edited to leave out any reference to Singapore. But those who remember recall that the Japanese did take away single nurses, teachers, salesgirls, any woman, so long as they were unmarried, in the first instance, to fill up their Singapore comfort houses for their soldiers. Later they took away any woman. And women in the concentration camps were also made *comfort women* as well.

Thomas Siddon felt that he had seen it all happening before his eyes, openly, blatantly, without a murmur from any quarter. The Lee Kuan Yew party-machine, firmly in place, now gave out propaganda that was "lapped-up" by all the local news media to lend it credence and authority. Having dispensed with all opposing foreign-owned newspapers and allowing just the one English-language broadsheet, "The Straits Times" and its "satellite" publications — the afternoon daily, the Malay language "Berita Harian", and the Chinese-language "Shin Min Daily News", and the other Chinese media it had already cowed by arresting and detaining its owners on various charges, and entrenching the Press Council to "vet" what could be published, the Government could now "guide" the media to project a Sino-image for the "education" of the island-population, thus creating a *defacto Chinese colonisation* by brain-washing the non-Chinese into thinking that things Chinese creeping into the life of the island was "alright" because it was *everywhere*. (All of Singapore's newspapers, after 1980, would eventually come under the ownership of the one mammoth holding newspaper group, with the "blessings" of the Singapore Government).

Newly-returned ethnic-Chinese-Singaporeans from universities in the West who had become the "senior-hands" in the various news media, now "churned-out" articles with a strong pro-Sino slant, even to re-writing Singapore's 'recent' history from a Chinese point-of-view, intimating through discoveries of shards of ancient Chinese Ming porcelain and other

Sino artifacts in anthropological digs at historical Malay sites that the Chinese had always been in Singapore and the surrounding region, "forgetting" that in the "recent" bygone era, before European colonialism, through the Chinese being the intrepid tradespeople that they were, Chinese artifacts were used as quid pro quo, and this did not mean that there had been Chinese in some of these places just because Chinese items had been found there, and leaving out, playing down, twisting facts or ignoring that ancient Indian and Malay artifacts, like the *kendi* or water pot, (which used to be used extensively in *the Malays*), whose Sanskrit name is *kundika*, was originally Indian, and had also been discovered in these very same digs but which the Government twisted to say that a majority of them came from "East Asia" as an euphemism for China — to convey that Singapore had always been "Chinese".

And intimating that the original Chinese refugees from mainland China to Singapore, from the late 19th century to just before World War Two, who had come to the *southseas* in the era of White colonialism, had come as "pioneers", when in fact they had fled poverty, the turmoil during the abdication of the child-emperor, Pu-yi, the warring war-lords, the establishment of the Chinese republic, pretenders to the throne, Sun Yat-sen, Chiang kai-sek, Mao tse-tung and the encroaching Japanese invasion of Manchuria and eventually China itself.

The *antagonism* of the ethnic-Chinese in Singapore toward the Japanese then, had been mainland Chinese *reaction* to the invasion of their *motherland*. That though there had been ethnic-Chinese from mainland China in Singapore who had fought or rebelled against Japanese tyranny during the war in Singapore, there had also been *Straits-born* and *Baba-Nyonya Chinese* as well, and Indians and Eurasians who had reacted because *their island*, Singapore, had been invaded by a brutal enemy. And in the modern re-telling of the war-time story of Singapore, from the Lee Kuan Yew point-of-view, the *mainland-Chinese role* during the war in Singapore was played up while the deeds of the other communities were totally *left out or played down*.

That the *only motive* the Chinese from mainland China had to come to Singapore, was to seek their fortune and remit money to improvised relatives "back home", to which place all these ethnic-Chinese would eventually return. *They had not been pioneers* but rightly-described by the British as alien-Chinese whose sojourn in Singapore had been transitory but for the Japanese invasion of China, the Second World War which finally arrived in Singapore in 1942 where they had all been stranded, and who finally couldn't return home after the conflict because the Communists had

won the battle against the *Kuomintang* and *no one wanted to return to China* except the Communist-sympathiser.

To Siddon from what he saw of his "fellow-countrymen", the Overseas Chinese descendants of his island-home, in their mind remain Chinese for always, whether they are from Singapore or from another part of the world — the Singapore Chinese isn't Singaporean unless the word "Singaporean" means "Chinese" as well. He had witnessed on several occasions the *affinity* the Overseas Chinese from other countries felt toward one another, even on meeting for the first time. Race came first, nationality was second as far as the Overseas Chinese are concerned. And this is what they refer to in Singapore as the *Nantah spirit* — ensuring that Chinese culture and language are upheld for the benefit of posterity.

*And the colonial British had actively discouraged their Asian subjects, both Chinese and Indian, to forget their respective motherlands and concentrate on living in Singapore, according to the island's mores.* And that was why after the Communist takeover of mainland China, one of the greatest "jeopardies" for a Chinese in Singapore was to commit a political "no-no" and be banished to the *motherland* by the colonial authorities, (but which Lee Kuan Yew had also done to several ethnic-Chinese "mainlanders", some of whom were well-regarded by the mainland ethnic-Chinese community "stranded" on Singapore).

Karl Marx had once written about the perils facing a government practising total censorship that it hears its own voice, knows that it only hears its own voice, yet acts under the illusion that it hears the voice of the people, and demands from the people that they should accept this illusion as well. Thomas Siddon could see in this a *similarity* to the Malay proverb — *a frog under a coconut-shell* — that an "environment" had been *created* on his island-home that "worked" so long as you lived *within* it — once you removed yourself the *flaws* became so apparent, from without.

The phenomenon of the *Hoa-Chinese* being kicked out of Vietnam, their *land of adoption*, and ending up as flotsam on other shores was an indication to Siddon of what *could happen* to those such as he, should, for some reason or other his *kind* was no longer welcome in Singapore. Those such as *he* would never be regarded as being part of the *greater whole* because Singapore society since the era of the People's Action Party had been segmented into racial blocs, he concluded. Every "achievement" in education, business or even the arts was classified by race. Officially. The only two choices left to him, he felt, was to either *sublimate* his Caucasian origin and identify as an Asian of "dubious" racial-strain or, if lucky to be born "White-looking" and be able to "pass", to claim patriality, return to the

land of his forefathers, claim his birthright and identify with his White-origins. *What a choice to have to make after a lifetime in Asia!*

As an Eurasian he felt he had been left out of Singapore's society which stressed "room only" for the Chinese, the Malay, and the Indian. And as an Eurasian in his youth he had not been included in being considered for "help" — to uplift himself or get an education. He had done it on his own, as if he had been a *foreigner*.

The colonisation of Asia for over 500 years by Britain and Europe, he felt, was a "quirk of history". The ancient Indians of Calicut in India, which was the chief trading port of ancient Asia, had, since the Middle Ages traded with the Europeans of Genoa and Venice, bringing their cargoes of splendid Oriental wealth consisting of rich spices, cloves and nutmegs, pepper and sandalwood, porcelain and tortoise-shell from the various markets of Asia, via the Red Sea to Cairo and Alexandria, to trade with the merchants of Genoa and Venice who were the only Europeans allowed into these two cities with the blessings of the powerful Turks who then controlled them. The Indians had been wise to perpetuate the myth that the world was flat and that one would be in jeopardy of falling off its edge if one did not know the "safe" route, to keep the Europeans away from the *Ancient Civilisations of Asia*, until the onslaught of the first European coloniser, Vasco da Gama, who in 1498 sailed round the Cape of Good Hope in Africa, striking across the Indian Ocean to hit Calicut in India. He used Christianity as the motive for establishing the first European trading post in Asia, attacking the strongholds and pillaging the ships of those ancient Indians, (whom the Europeans called "Moors"), and finally establishing their first port and colony on Goa, India. Europe, one of the world's smaller land-masses, and each country within it, including the British Isles, even smaller still, had produced a belligerent, avaricious race of peoples who had set out to conquer and subjugate the rest of the world for over 500 years, and having "departed", have left behind a legacy of confusion which would mean the wasting of human lives as things "adjusted" to a *previous status quo*. But which could never be achieved because *before the White man came* skin-colour did not separate one person from another, but this *legacy* from White colonialism continues to thrive even after the White has departed, because its *seed* has taken such firm root that being, looking, sounding or behaving White still carries an illusion of appearing superior. And Siddon rejected becoming an *unknown tragedy* in the history of South-East Asia. He did not want to be included among the *expendables* of Singapore before it was too late. Up to 1971 he had always thought of himself as *Singaporean* but incidents in his life since his motor-car accident in 1972 had caused him to

open his eyes and change this outlook. He was not only a first-generation Eurasian through his father being English, he was more than half-White because his mother was Eurasian as well. That made him "three-quarter White". He had always been aware that he was regarded "differently" by the *others* despite taking pains not to "divulge" his English origins and behaving Singaporean. And he would not yield to the *tyranny of the majority*.

Lee Kuan Yew had once used the term *amalgam* to describe the multiracial society he had wanted developed on Singapore. The term itself had always been distasteful to Siddon because it denoted a *mixing* without the "main ingredients" ever *merging*. But the *Eurasian* was a *living blend* that had come about because of White colonialism that Lee and his ilk had chosen to ignore, which was ridiculous because in present-day Singapore ethnic-Chinese girls were choosing to marry Whites and other races, and begetting yet more "mixed-bloods", though the ethnic-Chinese journalists in the media were choosing to describe these *new* half-caste offspring from such unions as *Chinese-English*, *Chinese-French* or *Chinese-German*, instead of *Eurasian*. *And when he had inquired of the journalist concerned his reasons for using such descriptive terms he was informed that in Singapore it was alright!* Siddon had even read in the local press of children of Chinese-Indian, Malay-Indian or Malay-Chinese unions being described as "Eurasian"! What Lee Kuan Yew had succeeded in doing was to make *everybody* conscious of *race* and the polarisation of the different communities in Singapore so much so that being Singaporean was so much lip-service, Siddon felt. It was part of the hypocrisy inherent in the society. The first thing *anyone* asked someone in Singapore, on meeting for the first time, was what his or her race was! This was what Singapore had come to mean to Siddon, and, as far as he was concerned *Lee Kuan Yew had to be held responsible because it was Lee's boast that whatever went on in Singapore, at official level, he knew about, and that he could obtain information on anyone in Singapore by the mere depressing of a few computer-buttons!*

Siddon had always felt that the ethnic-Chinese looked down upon the Malay, considering him "backward", and probably because the *original* European mixed-bloods of Singapore, (and indeed of Malaysia), had been of English-Malay unions, they too had been considered of a lower social order than those of Chinese-White "mix". He felt he couldn't fight the greater mass or change its attitude, so he would *remove* himself by *relinquishing* his Singaporean nationality which was synonymous with being Chinese as far as he was concerned. He had been born on a *multiracial*

island governed by the British who had given it to *all* the races who had then professed a kinship with the Malay island because of historical fact. And he would not accept nationality of an island which had *become* Sino by *transition and deceit and pretended multi-racialism, by hypocrisy*. He had grown aware that as far as the ethnic-Chinese were concerned they felt an affinity to one another, whether they were from Singapore or from a *different part of the world*. And in the Singapore-Chinese mind the term "Singaporean" meant being Chinese! Lee Kuan Yew had set out to create a place for the ethnic-Chinese on Singapore, whose ancestors had arrived on the island, some one or two generations ago, to escape poverty in their *motherland* but who, through Lee's perpetuating of Chinese culture had transformed Sidon's former multi-racial Malay island in *the Malays* into a *Chinese haven*.

His mother's decision to remain in Singapore after World War Two instead of accepting the British offer to repatriate both of them to the United Kingdom, and his being *Asian*, until he had arrived at his conclusion, had been a dreadful mistake. Despite getting deeply-tanned, developing an Asian, (Sino), accent, eating the same food as everybody and living as an Asian, he had never really been *accepted*. It was time for his *mother-country* to accept a "colonial son".

Thomas discussed his thoughts thoroughly with Su-mei over two days to gauge whether she had any independent, (of him), views. He was surprised that she whole-heartedly supported his intention to emigrate to Britain though she did think that he was exaggerating the actual state of affairs. The British High Commission official that he eventually met and discussed his thoughts with, after listening to him and examining his "family documents", confirmed that he could be admitted into the UK on *patrial grounds*. He had a *blood-connection*.

Thomas would have no regrets giving up his Singapore Citizenship and claiming his British *birth-right*. It had taken him *40 years* to realize that. He had helped raise three "Singapore sons" whose respective mothers were Japanese and Chinese, hopefully their common *Mongolian strain* would be to their favour in the "racially-tolerant" Sino society that Singapore had become. He had given them Asian names as well. He would return to the land of his forefathers to discover and understand his English roots. His mother had always accused him of having a "Geordie temper". He would return to Northumberland to confirm the verbal family-history handed down through his grandfather George William, to Cecil his father, who had related everything that he remembered to Luci his mother, who had passed it on to him.



He would visit the riverside town, Tynemouth, whose River Tyne flowed into Whitely Bay, where his grandfather, George William, and his great grandfather, John, had spent their lives in South Shields involved in the sea-going trade.

If the Chinese trace their racial descent through their own fathers then he, Thomas Siddon, would become *English* because Britain recognised his *patrial right* through his own English father.

After making arrangements to depose of their company and purchasing their air-tickets to London, Thomas and Su-mei Siddon made one final attempt to locate the late Cecil Siddon's war-time grave. This time their efforts proved successful. An old Malay cemetery *kebun*, (Malay: "gardener"), pointed out a field of mass war-graves in an overgrown and neglected field of *lallang*, just inside the Biddadari Cemetery grounds, which had no name-plates. The kebun said there was no guarantee that the "grave" reserved in Cecil Siddon's name, should it be in the field of forgotten war-dead, contained his remains. All the corpses that had been conveyed by the Japanese military truck and dumped outside the cemetery-gates for the Malay kebuns to deal with, had been buried without the gardeners matching the burial-tags affixed to the cadavers to the respective plots reserved for each person. Despite what the man had just revealed, Thomas and Su-mei checked the burial-records in the tiny administrative office of the cemetery and discovered Cecil Siddon's name among those executed by the dreaded Japanese *Kempetai* Secret Police, some thirty-six years previously during the dreaded Japanese Occupation of Singapore. The late Cecil Siddon had been buried, together with the other hapless English victims of a brutal oppression, as a pauper, because no one had come forward to claim his body. How could anyone? His son, Thomas, and his wife, Luci, had been detained in the Sime Road Civilian Concentration Camp by the Japanese and were suffering the initial throes of acute starvation. But in 1980 his son, Thomas, found peace and was satisfied. He had finally "discovered" his father's grave. He departed Singapore for London on the following evening. Su-mei, his ethnic-Chinese wife, would follow in November after spending time with her family.

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Clearing through customs at Heathrow Airport, London, Thomas Siddon deposited his heavy baggage at the left-luggage counter at the airport and took the Underground to Victoria Station, (he knew how to do this because he had spent time in London previously). As he anxiously pushed past, (a

Singaporean "*kiasu* habit", [Chinese: "afraid to lose out"], he would definitely have to "discard"), other passengers getting their tickets checked at the ticket-collector's, the man's voice sang out:

"Wot's yer 'urry lad, let's see yer t'ket first then."

Smilingly Thomas Siddon tendered his ticket-stub then walked straight past the collector toward the short flight of stairs leading to the surface and London's bright "Indian summer" sunshine.

*END*