

# O . P . M

## I

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The detective enters his office and closes the door behind him. He holds the package in one hand, and massages the bridge of his nose with the other and exhales –  
*These bodies in the rice fields are drops in the ocean of the dead. Here, it is death and only death.*

The detective has a daughter who is the same age, with the same name. The detective opens his eyes –  
*No more games. No more fights. No more love...  
Here, death and only death.*

The detective spits into his handkerchief and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. He throws the letter and photographs into the bin –  
*The world's ugliness is bottomless...only death is certain.*

The detective opens the door and goes back to work.

Chk-chk. Amma is breaking off tea leaves to fill her sack. Chk-chk. Her hands are rough and her face is covered in sunspots. Chk-chk. The sun is setting.  
Chk-chk. She will lay under a mosquito net and then the soldier with red teeth will come. Chk-chk. He will move over her and leave five hundred rupees.  
The mattress coils squeak. Chk-chk. His underpants hang over the lamp and cast their shadow across the room.  
I will take a knife out of his shoe. I will use that knife, I will keep it and use it to cut the tails off lizards.

Hirani and Ruangi Perera, two sisters dead in a well near the road between Kankasanturai and Jaffna. Tamil girls who slept in trees to avoid the LTTE by night. *Hindi or Christian?*  
Sold lollies to passing traffic. *Bon-bon girls*. Contaminated the water supply. Father investigated. No charges though. The country is at war with itself, the police are tired. *Young boy found dead in Tea Estate*. Gihan Rathnayake. Not a snake bite? Definitely not.

It is July, 2009.

## II

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Nittewa comes down from the mountains into Yala National Park to hunt deer. Half-man, half-ape. *Not like the demon who disguises himself as a black dog, Mahasona*. He is the link between the past and present. He carries a sword and sack.

These are the stories mothers tell their children – *myths*.

The boy sits on the classroom floor in his white uniform. He wants to impress the teacher, to be taken under her wing. Half-child, half-man. He puts his hand up. *Malformed*. He wets the bed. A bad son, a curse. These are the names parents call their children.

*The school bell rings. The child-mice tumble out with their little white uniforms on their little mice-backs. One little mouse has to walk a different way home to her friends. She wears a little yellow ribbon in her little mouse hair. She walks on the edge of the road, weaving between potholes and tuk-tuk drivers. The little mouse-girl comes to a crossroads. She steps into thick traffic and holds up her little mouse-hand to be let past. A white car doesn't stop until the last moment, horn blaring. A mouse-soldier steps in to escort her across. She thanks the mouse-Uncle and then walks away from the main streets bouncing a yo-yo up and down. The little mouse-girl stops for a minute in front of a poster pasted on a lamp-post:*

*Missing Mouse-girl: 100,000 Mice-Marks reward!*  
*Eight year old Varuni Herath has been missing since the 10th of July. She was last seen leaving tutoring class in Jaffna city centre, Cathedral Road. She was wearing a St Mary's Uniform.*

*A shadow of a mouse in a hat falls across the poster. What a nice yo-yo, says the Shadow-Uncle. The mouse-girl stops playing with the yo-yo and turns around. The mouse-Uncle is carrying a package. He bends down – 'What's your name, little mouse?'*

*Good morning Sri Lanka. Anniversary of Black July massacre threatens to re-ignite riots, army fears. Jaffna Public Library closed today. UN report estimates female child soldiers worse off than males. Michael Jackson death was murder. LTTE leader captured and held in Capital. Postal system will soon service Jaffna peninsula. And it's raining all the time, monsoon season.*

### III

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A man-boy sits on a mat in the centre of his mother's bedroom. The room is empty, apart from a small dressing table. He wraps clothing in old newspapers. He writes in his childish scrawl:

*Girl who sold cashews by the side of Main Road. Left between church and temple – O P M.* He wraps everything in brown paper and addresses it to the police.

*A mouse in a sarong and a little mouse-girl pass a beggar-mouse in the street. The beggar-mouse is holding his palms open and is saying that he lost his family to a bus bombing. He lost his foot, lost his job as a driver. The little girl puts change in his hands, and walks away. The mouse-man in the sarong is holding a package. The beggar-mouse then whispers into a microphone in his collar and mobilizes another begger-mouse, who follows the mouse-girl and mouse-man at a distance. The mouse-man kisses the mouse-girl and leaves her at the gate of a Piano school. The beggar-mouse whispers into his sleeve and pushes through a crowd of people in front of a mobile-phone store. On the top step sits the murderer, a package in his hand.*

This package is tied in twine and brown string. Amma's wrapping paper, stamps lifted off old letters with kettle steam. My mother. Beetel stains. Someone's school badge. Not mine. Blood, boiling water, that old knife. Last seen on Main Road? O P M = Opportunism –  
*The postage system is now running, but is still unreliable in many parts of Jaffna...*

*'When I grow up, I want to buy a car and drive to the capital. I'll stop for cashews on the way. Maybe visit my father's relatives...'*

The letter is sent – last seen on main road.

*The Minister of Mouse-Justice sits at his desk. He holds the newspaper in one hand, the headline of which reads: MOUSE-CHILD MURDERER AT LARGE IN JAFFNA. The subtitle states that the police have no leads.*

*The Detective stands in front of the Minister's desk.*

*"This is very serious. This will have a very serious effect on public opinion of the Government's leadership."*

*"But Minister, we have nothing to go on. No one knows anything. It is impossible to separate the murder victims from the victims of war. Children are going missing all the time. Whole families disappear."*

*"I know this Detective. But we are gentle-mice! A murder in a war-zone is still a murder. We need results! Arrests!"*

*The Detective nods his head and bows out of the room.*

## IV

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The detective sits on a cane chair and drinks a shot of whiskey. He was given this whiskey by a businessman he did a favour for. He is waiting for a girl to come. She will tell him that he is not old, not bald, that his stomach is not big. He will pay 2000 rupees for this.

*The same age, the same name...*

He will vomit before he gets to work. He throws away the package.

*A lolly shop. A little mouse-girl is buying lemon puff biscuits. A hand reaches over her and pays for them.*

*'Thank you very much,' says the mouse-girl.*

*They come out of the shop and on to the street. The little mouse-girl offers the murderer a lolly. He smiles and shakes his head. They turn into an alley between two large buildings. He then gets out a guava and a knife. The murderer smiles at the mouse-girl and starts to peel the fruit. An old mouse-woman suddenly comes out of a side door and knocks the knife out of his hand.*

*The little mouse-girl bends down to pick up the murderer's knife –*

*'There you go, Uncle'.*

Anusha Kenny

September 2009