

## **TRAIN MURDER**

**Cape Times**

**Wednesday February 11<sup>th</sup> 2011**

### **TRAIN MURDER**

#### **BODY OF NAKED WOMAN FOUND IN COAL TRUCK**

Workers at a mine in Piketburg were unloading a coal train when they discovered the naked body of a woman in one of the railway trucks. A spokesman for the mine said . . . .

## **CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA**

Detective Inspector Nel lowered the newspaper, "These newspapers. So much for them listening to our request to keep this out of the news for a while. And naked? What about the bikini top tied around her throat? Sergeant, what have you been able to find out about the train?"

"It was loaded at the Mafube coal mine and left Secunda in Mpumalanga on Saturday. It was routed to Cape Town, via Johannesburg and then on to Piketberg arriving there on Tuesday morning. This is a list of the stations through which it travelled. Transnet could not give any information of where it may have been stopped at signals but confirm that the train was held overnight at Matjiesfontein on Monday night due to congestion at the goods yard in Cape Town."

Nel sighed, "Well Sergeant, the next step is to try and find out if any young women around the age of the deceased have been reported missing anywhere from Mafube onwards."

\*\*\*

On Friday morning a Joanne called the Cape Town Traffic Department. "Hi there, I am trying to contact Sheila Botha, the traffic warden. There's no reply from her home."

This news concerned the receptionist, as Sheila had not returned to work on Wednesday. She put the call through to the Chief Traffic Officer.

"Van der Walt."

“Good day Inspector – I wonder if you can tell me what shifts Sheila Botha is working. She is not on her regular beat around the American Embassy area and she’s not answering her home or cell phones – It’s not like her, I’m concerned.”

“Ja, I understand, we are too. She’d put in for two days leave. Was going to Matjiesfontein I heard.”

“This is not like her at all, we had an appointment for this week, and she didn’t pitch nor did she phone me. With all the crime around these days, I’m really worried.”

“Ja, I understand. Leave it to me. And please leave your contact details with the receptionist so that I can keep you posted if I hear anything.”

Remembering the article he had recently read in the Cape Times, a cold chill went through the chief, as he made a call to the police to report a missing employee.

Captain Tshabalala immediately passed this information on to Detective Inspector Nel, with an instruction to treat the matter as urgent.

\*\*\*

A short while later Nel walked into the traffic chief’s office.

After exchanging greetings he asked, “You say she was going to Matjiesfontein?”

“Yes, I hear from my staff that she and a friend had booked into the Lord Milner Hotel for a long weekend.”

\*\*\*

Nel and Sergeant Cele set off to interview the hotel manager at Matjiesfontein.

After the three men had settled in, the Hotel Manager’s office at the Lord Milner, Nel explained, “We are investigating the disappearance of this young woman (and he handed him a photograph of the missing woman ) who may have spent the weekend here on these dates.”

“Yes inspector, I remember her well. She and a young man booked in here on Saturday morning the 7<sup>th</sup> February and planned to leave on Tuesday morning. However, they disappeared without paying. When the cleaning staff entered

the room on Tuesday morning, the bed had not been slept in and all the lady's belongings were still there. When questioning the staff, the barman said that she had been drinking in the bar till closing time. She then told the barman that she was going for a swim. A short while later she passed the front desk clerk wearing a bright red bikini. The clerk told her he was knocking off and showed her how to get back in."

"How did they get here?" Nel asked

"They arrived by car. When I began investigating, the front desk clerk told me the young man had carried out a suitcase on Monday afternoon and had driven off in a car. When I questioned other staff they said that the couple had had a furious argument and that she had shouted, *"Pack your things and fuck off. Like now!"*

When he challenged her with, "And how will you get home?" she yelled, *"That's got fuck all to do with you, now fuck off"*

We have tried the contact details they left but without success. They owe the hotel over ten thousand Rand."

"We're working on the assumption that she may have been murdered"

"What? No. Where did this happen?"

"It could have been here. It appears that the murderer dumped - if it was her - the body in a coal train that overnighted here."

"That's terrible. That's not good publicity for the hotel or for Matjiesfontein. Can I do anything to help?" **What about the poor girl?**

A brief knock was followed by the door opening, "Excuse me, but I have just received an urgent e-mail for Detective Nel."

"Thank you," he said and by way of explanation, "I asked my office to send any news on to me here."

After reading he lowered the document, "That is the pathologist's report. It states that death was due to strangulation. The item used was the top of a bright red bikini, still tight around her neck. It contained a blood type different

from hers. What's more, most of the deceased's finger nails were broken but the remaining ones held traces of skin, flesh and blood. There were some bruises on the body and these injuries plus the presence of semen suggest rape and a violent death which probably occurred around between midnight and three in the morning. The rest of the message says they have been unable to trace the young man who booked in to the hotel with her. He left false information – and he used a fake ID.”

“In the light of that you may well be able to assist. As you have just heard that a major clue is that there were traces of flesh and blood under her fingernails. She must have scratched her attacker's hands or face quite badly. Did you notice anyone around here with marks to the face or hands?”

“Yes, yes. Hang on a minute, the barman told me that one of our occasional drinkers came in on the Wednesday night with bandages on his hands. When questioned he said that he had rescued a stray cat that he found in his house and that in the process the poor creature had scratched him quite badly. He said he was annoyed and would cheerfully have strangled the animal. That was the wrong thing to say to our barman, a cat lover. They got into quite an argument about it.”

“Who is he?”

“It's a person called Hanson. Apparently he stays in a cottage on the van Reenen Farm. I don't know if they employ him or if he just squats there.”

“Have you seen him since?”

“Strangely, I don't recall seeing him again. Hang on let me check with the bar.”

He put the phone down, “No. He hasn't been back since.”

“Right, we need to pay him a visit, how do we get there?”

\*\*\*

They set off on the dirt road leading from the junction of the N1 and the R354 to Sutherland. Their destination was a few kilometres up the road.

Soon a dust cloud in the distance heralded an approaching car. Briefly Nel thought that perhaps someone had warned Hanson but his cellphone distracted him and he handed it to sergeant Cele.

Cele responded in Xhosa before turning to Nel, “Inspector they could not find any family members so they asked the traffic chief to identify the body and it is not the missing traffic warden.”

Nel uttered an expletive.

\*\*\*

They parked outside Hanson’s cottage, walked up to the cottage door and knocked.

The door opened, “Good afternoon.”

“Mr Hanson?”

“Yes.”

Detective Nel, we’d like to chat to you.”

“Come in gentlemen.”

After a full explanation of their visit, Hanson said, “Inspector I’m ashamed to admit that I can’t share space with a cat, a family thing. I caught the creature to put it out and, as you can see got scratched quite badly.”

Mr Hanson, as I explained we are investigating a murder. Will you be prepared to give a blood sample?”

“Of course inspector, of course.”

\*\*\*

A week later a dejected Nel spoke to Cele, “Sergeant, we have come up against a blank wall. It isn’t Hanson’s blood on the bikini top and the district surgeon has confirmed that a cat’s claws inflicted the wounds on his hands and . . .”

He was interrupted by his cellphone, “Hallo, Nel.”

“Good morning Inspector, its Logan from the hotel?”

“Morning Mr Logan. Have you got any more information? ”

“Yes, Inspector, a gardener has found a red bikini behind some bushes next to the swimming pool.”

“The bottom?”

“No inspector, a top and a bottom.”

Nel cursed softly, “Thank you. We’ll come and collect them for forensic testing.”

\*\*\*

## **PARIS, FRANCE**

Two men and a woman sat outside a Paris café, well away from other patrons.

The older one smiled and asked in a Southern drawl, “Well Agent O’Malley I haven’t had a chance to ask you what was it like being Sheila Botha?”

“It was a long, long drag sir, but I believe it resulted in a few important renditions.”

“It certainly did,” he replied and turned to the young man. “The body in the train? What? How?”

“Serendipity sir. It afforded us the perfect exit strategy. The train Engineer and his assistant had apparently picked up a prostitute along the track somewhere, as these crews sometimes do. She must have cut up rough about something so they strangled her and dumped her body in a wagon.”

**Ray Hattingh**