

Birthday celebration goes up in flames

It was meant to be a celebration. But it all went horribly wrong.

The woman had intended to celebrate her husband's birthday with a cake and some candles, but ended up setting their hotel room on fire.

About 200 guests were evacuated from The Gallery Hotel at Robertson

Quay at about 8pm yesterday.

Fortunately, no one was hurt, said a Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) spokesman.

The New Paper understands that the couple, who are in their 20s, along with some friends, had taken a cake and candles to a room on the 10th

level of the hotel.

It is unclear how the fire started. The SCDF spokesman said it received a call at 7.55pm and dispatched three fire engines, a Red Rhino, two fire bikes, an ambulance and two supporting vehicles.

Firefighters extinguished the fire

within five minutes, he added.

The bed, its headboard and carpet were burnt, while the walls and ceilings were stained with soot.

The hotel's general manager told TNP that everything was okay after the fire was put out. He declined to comment further. — RONALD LOH

No heir to \$1 million condo unit?

Chuan Park flat has been vacant since 2009 after owner's death. But no one has come forward to claim it

Reports by ZUL OTHMAN
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The padlock on the main gate is dusty.

The hallway to the unit – located on the 19th storey of the Chuan Park condominium – looks unkempt.

Parts of its white pillars are turning black. Along the corridors, dirt and stains have been gathering. Bulky items also litter the pathway from the gate to the front door, raising concerns from neighbours that it may become a breeding ground for mosquitoes, flies and rodents.

Most residents at the private residential development, located off Lorong Chuan, do not know how long the unit has been left unoccupied.

But a check with the condominium management revealed that the owner of the 1,173 sq ft unit, Ms Tang Yook Chan, died five years ago. Her unit has been unoccupied since then.

The 55-year-old woman is believed to have lived alone at Chuan Park since 2000 and had no known relatives, said Ms Rachel Teo, Chuan Park's assistant condominium manager.

No bank or company has come forward to claim the unit – which is now valued at \$1 million – she said. This has led them to believe that the unit has been fully paid for, said Ms Teo.

But there is another issue: Because Ms Tang was still listed as the unit's owner, she still owed the management committee \$24,000 in maintenance fees.

When asked why the management committee has not taken steps to locate Ms Tang's next-of-kin or to recover the debt, Ms Teo said: "We did engage a lawyer to recover the outstanding debt, but the legal fees are high. It doesn't make economic sense."

It would cost the management "over \$20,000" to recover the debt, she explained.

It is also not clear if anyone has been paying the property tax for the unit all these years.

But according to the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore (Iras), if the tax and penalty are not paid by the due date, Iras may – without prior notice – recover the overdue tax by appointing the person's bank, employer, tenant or lawyer as agent to pay the money.

Iras may also sell a property whose tax is unpaid through a public auction.

WHO IS OWNER?

That aside, no one The New Paper spoke to at Chuan Park could answer this question: Who exactly is Ms Tang?

Residents said she kept mostly to herself.

TNP also learnt that Ms Tang died of endometrial cancer, which affects the lining of the uterus or womb, at Assisi Home & Hospice on Aug 6, 2009.

It is not known how long she had stayed at the home. A Mr Tommy Yu was listed as the informant on Ms Tang's death certificate.

When contacted, he said he only helped arrange the funeral on behalf of Assisi Home.

Mr Yu is an undertaker who volunteers at the home.

He said in Mandarin: "I did not know her. I heard from another patient that she had only one known relative living overseas and the person wasn't willing to come back."

Mr Yu said he did not know if there were any attempts to contact Ms Tang's relative.

After reporting the death, he arranged for the body to be cremated for free.

Her ashes are in a niche at the Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery at Bright Hill Road, he said.

Mr Yu also said that some time last year, he received a call from a National Environment Agency



Govt gets property if no beneficiaries

A claim need not be made before the Public Trustee's Office is able to look into whether a person's estate is considered "bona vacantia".

An estate will be treated as bona vacantia – which means "goods without an apparent owner" – if a person dies without leaving a will and without any surviving entitled next-of-kin.

Replying to queries, a spokesman for the Public Trustee's Office said it would normally not step in unless there is evidence that the estate is likely to be bona vacantia.

But the spokesman added: "The Public Trustee does not have any information regarding Ms Tang Yook Chan's estate at the present time, and is therefore unable to comment specifically on this case."

Lawyer Raphael Louis of Ray Louis Law Corporation, who has handled property cases, told The New Paper that it is "not common for a person to leave behind a substantial asset without a will or next-of-kin to make a claim."

Under the Intestate Succession

Act, the State inherits the whole of the estate of a deceased person if they leave behind no beneficiaries, he explained.

As for the outstanding maintenance fees, corporate lawyer Robson Lee said the condominium's management has the legal right to recover it. To do this, they could hire a lawyer and turn to the Public Trustee's Office for help.

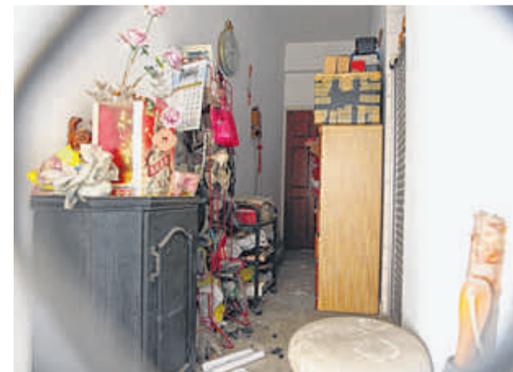
CLAIM

A spokesman for the Public Trustee's Office confirmed this and said: "Once a claim has been determined by the Public Trustee to be a valid moral and equitable claim, depending on the value of the claim vis-a-vis the value of the estate, it is open to the Public Trustee and the successful claimant to determine the best way to administer the bona vacantia estate."

"This could mean that the Public Trustee acting as administrator or the successful claimant being appointed administrator with the Public Trustee's consent."

LOCKED: A dusty padlock on the main gate (left) is the first indication that this condominium unit at Chuan Park (right) is unoccupied. The hallway (below) looks unkempt.

TNP PHOTOS: NICOLE QUEK



officer asking him how he was related to Ms Tang. They said her apartment had been unkept for a while and was a potential mosquito breeding site.

"I told them I didn't have the key because I didn't know her. When I handle such cases, I just take their identity cards and a letter from the doctor so I can report their deaths," said Mr Yu.

"But in this woman's case, I only handled the cremation of the body and the documents. "Usually whatever they have, if it's clothes or a wallet or personal effects, we'll just burn them with the body. But in this case, I didn't take her key, if there even was one."

Meanwhile, Chuan Park's Ms Teo admits the case is "very unusual" and has put the condominium managers in a "dilemma".

She said: "However, our lawyers are still exploring our options and will do whatever they can to recover the debt."



WAITING: A Turkish restaurant is keeping the bill it says was left unpaid by Iraqi Kurdish fighters. The fighters were supposed to enter Syria from Turkey to help fight against Islamic State jihadists there. PHOTO: REUTERS

Kurdish fighters leave eatery 'without paying'

They came, they ate and they left, reportedly without paying the bill.

A Turkish restaurant owner is up in arms after Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga fighters (armed Kurdish fighters), who were set to cross from Turkey to fight jihadists in Kobane, Syria, ate a full meal without paying the bill, the Hurriyet reported yesterday.

The Turkish daily said that some 80 fighters stopped off late Wednesday at the Demirool motorway services restaurant, just outside the city of Sanliurfa, as they travelled through Turkey to the border with Syria.

The party enjoyed the spicy local speciality of urfa kebab, as well as soup,

beans and rice, and worked up a bill of 1,040 Turkish lira (\$\$605), AFP reported.

A restaurant source who was not named told the paper: "The peshmerga group left the restaurant without paying. But we have kept the bills. And we are waiting for the payment."

The group had relaxed at the restaurant for 1½ hours before heading to the Turkish border town of Suruc, where they have been ever since, the source said.

The fighters are supposed to cross into Syria to support Syrian Kurdish fighters, who are battling Islamic State (ISIS) fighters in Kobane, a mainly Kurdish town in Syria.

Boy, 8, stabbed to death in China

An eight-year-old Chinese boy was stabbed to death and two classmates were seriously injured yesterday in the latest attack on schoolchildren in China, state media reported.

A suspect, who was released from jail in April, attacked the children in the eastern province of Jiangxi as they walked home from school.

He then fled to a nearby mountain, the official Xinhua news agency reported. The two injured children were in intensive care in hospital.

Violent crime is rare in China but there have been a series of attacks on

schoolchildren in recent years, Reuters reported.

The incidents have led to much soul-searching and calls for better security at schools in a country where many couples have only one child.

In May, a knife-wielding man stabbed and injured eight students in a primary school in another city in Hubei.

In December 2012, a man barged into a village primary school in the central province of Henan and stabbed and injured 23 children.

School guards in China are often not equipped or trained to stop such attacks.