

## SYDNEY

By Keith Fisher

The *Psychedelia* is a trendy nightclub on the first floor of a renovated Edwardian building in Lower Loop Street, Cape Town. Its clientele is drawn from a select variety of beautiful people from all levels of Cape Town society; from the *dahleeengs* of Constantia to the *gamats* of Woodstock and all stations in between.

The ready availability of all manner of trance-inducing substances gave rise to its name, although the *gamats* called it 'Heinz's': d'jy kry daar *fifty-seven varieties of the best, ek sê ...*

Everyone knew Meisie Philander. Her official job description was 'hostess'. In reality, she was open to suggestions provided she took a liking to you, but she had her own strict principles. There was a trio of hefty resident bouncers who despatched any client who tried to take advantage of Meisie's friendliness or that of any of her assistant hostesses.

"You got to take a liking to them and they must first show you the dollars, and then you uses your discretion like," she advised her protégées. "You soon learn."

When off duty, Meisie lived in a small house she bought in Bishop Lavis Estate. She supported her aging mother and elder sister, Sandra, who had been run down by a car five years ago leaving her with a shattered hip and brain damage that made her unemployable.

One of the *Psychedelia* clients Meisie took a liking to was a leading city attorney who looked after Meisie and Sandra and extracted damages of R300 000 from the Road Accident Fund before it almost went belly-up – for the first time.

Meisie had been keeping a matronly eye on the interesting stranger in the corner – he was a new face. She guessed he was a visitor from ‘up country’ who had been told about Cape Town’s nightlife and had decided to investigate. A place with a good reputation is always busy.

“Good evening, stranger! Are my girls looking after you? No, they’re not; that glass is nearly empty. Veronica, my girl. Look at the customer’s glass. I’ll have to keep my eye on you, my girl.

“Sorry about that, my dear. Good help is hard to find. So, you’re visiting are you?”

“Yes, I’m here from Calvinia on business. A friend told me to look in here but I’m afraid I don’t quite fit in.”

He looked friendly enough, Meisie decided, and had the craggy face of a Northern Cape farmer.

“Ag, nonsense, my dear! We’re just one big happy family at Psychedelia. What’s your name, love?”

“Sydney.”

“Well now, Sydney, you must obey the house rules. You’re not allowed to sit with an empty glass looking like the blue bird of happiness has shitted in your eye. You’ll chase my clients away. What’ll you drink?”

“Gin, lime and ginger ale please.”

“Did you hear, Veronica? Now, while she’s getting it, let me get you out of that jacket and tie. You look like an *ouderling* at *nagmaal*.”

He started and looked at her with wide eyes.

Not far off the mark, Meisie thought to herself.

“I’m going to have a nice quiet drink with you, Sydney. Everyone calls me Meisie.”

Meisie was enjoying her chat with Sydney although she was disappointed to find out he wasn't really an *ouderling*. He told her about the happenings in Calvinia and his job at the Sheep Producers' Co-operative.

He also described the famous art deco Synagogue in Calvinia which now served as a museum because it closed its doors as a synagogue when Sammy Goldblatt went to live with his son, Selwyn, in Johannesburg. He'd liked old Sammy and they always joked about pork and calamari rings.

After his third gin (Meisie was on neat ginger ale), she realised Sydney was one of a dying breed: a conservative, church-going man with a quiet wife somewhere in the background, no doubt. Meisie never raised the subject of families with patrons she 'took a liking to'. Everyone was entitled to a change of scenery once in a while. In fact, she believed a breakaway was good for a man and that her establishment provided a sort of social service in that regard.

Meisie would occasionally adopt what she called a 'charity case': someone she really 'took a liking to' and who appreciated her dedicated attention. She never took her work home with her but was quite prepared to retire to her charity's hotel to tend to him in a neutral environment.

She found her clients usually let their hair down in their own hotel room once they'd got past the reception desk. Meisie was a professional and was known to the desk staff of the better class hotels, so no questions were ever asked when she arrived as a guest of a resident and taken to his room. When they arrived at the Metropole at 11 p.m., the two clerks on duty were chatting at the coffee machine in the fax office and didn't even notice them.

Once in Sydney's room, Meisie poured them each a drink from the mini-bar and suggested they break the ice and get to know each other better by taking a shower together.

"It helps wash away the cobwebs," she giggled.

Everything was progressing well. Sydney was standing behind her massaging her shoulders and fondling her breasts. Meisie lingered over Sydney's muscled body and realised she had chosen well. They became increasingly intimate and Sydney felt the familiar sensation rising within him.

"You're a real gentleman, Sydney."

Meisie never saw what hit her. Sydney had skilfully removed the dagger from his leg sheath while they were undressing and concealed it on top of the tiled shower cubicle partition. Its professionally honed point penetrated Meisie's neck between the third and fourth cervical vertebrae, severing her spinal cord. She dropped dead on the floor of the stall with blood streaming from her mouth and neck, mixing with the shower water and swirling down the drainage outlet.

Very considerate of you, Meisie, Sydney muttered to himself. The shower was a brilliant idea; took the words out of my mouth.

He allowed her body to bleed out while he drank rum and coke and watched patiently. Practice made perfect and he'd planned the logistics of the operation to a T.

He poured himself another rum and coke. He whiled away the hours waiting for the corpse of his victim to exsanguinate. Sydney had tied Meisie's ankles to the taps set high in the wall to facilitate the draining process.

He turned his mind to days and places long ago; days in the boarding school at Upington; other showers where the boys had joked about his large penis and given him the nickname of '*donkie-piel*' accompanied by lusty 'hee-haws'. He knew everyone sniggered at him behind his back; they were jealous, of course. No one looked him in the face but stared at his crotch.

But, that was in the past. He had since discovered his former embarrassment to be a great asset when engaged with a suitable partner.

He sat naked on the hotel bed, sexually aroused. Meisie was now helpless and wouldn't be able to refuse him when he raped her. There were others who would envy her. After a while, he commenced his task.

Still naked but now sexually satisfied, he fetched his *hallaaf* from his suitcase and contemplated the task ahead. The ceremonial knife had been given to him by Sammy Goldblatt as a farewell gift when the synagogue closed down. *Hallaafs* are used in the Jewish ritual slaughtering of animals to meet kosher requirements. Sammy, as religious leader, supervised the ritual.

Sydney smiled as he sharpened the *hallaaf's* cutting edges to ensure a perfect edge. A gift from one butcher to another! He laughed out loud.

It never ceases to amaze me what little difference there is between a human and a Merino, he reflected.

Fortunately, Meisie wasn't a large woman. He first removed and wrapped her head in a plastic bag. There was no need to force her to watch the gruesome proceedings, and he wanted to avoid her accusing gaze that made him feel uncomfortable. He also paid attention to trimming any jagged edges of flesh as he worked. After all, he was a professional.

Meisie's dismembered body fitted nicely into his two expanding suitcases after he'd carefully wrapped each portion in a towel he'd brought with him. He didn't want to be charged with stealing hotel towels.

He showered again to wash her blood from his body. He was strongly aroused as washed her diluted blood over his body and genitals, watching as his guilt and lust flowed away through the shower waste pipe.

Sydney had registered at the hotel under a false name and address. Reception clerks in that part of town weren't unduly concerned with such niceties. He packed his few belongings, double-checking that he'd left nothing behind. He made sure the bathroom was spotless and all surfaces wiped clean of fingerprints; he'd worn latex gloves after he'd killed Meisie and for the rest of his stay in the room.

He left the two suitcases in the room. The cleaning staff would be spared the trauma of seeing a slaughtered body sprawled out in the bathroom and packing the segments of her body in the suitcases simplified its removal by the authorities. He also left payment of his account in cash on the writing desk. These nice touches spoke of his professionalism, he reflected.

He slipped out of the hotel through a back door. He would visit his mother's grave in the Paarl cemetery; she had passed away there ten years ago while living with her sister. He would then return to Calvinia to await his next annual leave.

He realised he'd never been to Port Elizabeth, the 'friendly city', he smiled to himself. He remembered he had the telephone number of a school friend who lived there. Who knows what the future might hold.