

## [Transcript] Strangeland / Ep 11 of 14: The Friend

The Nara's neighbor, Crystal White, just dropped a bombshell revelation. There was a third person at the crime scene with her and Hanu, a woman. Crystal doesn't know her name, Hanu introduced her simply as a friend. I took her as what he said to me, she's a friend. That's the way he betrayed her. But I just thought that's a bizarre friend because if I was a friend I'd be like I don't need to see the dead body, she wanted to see it. I asked Crystal to backtrack and she starts from the beginning. She's outside getting groceries from her car when she sees Hanu on the phone acting strangely. He says his wife and son are not breathing. So Crystal says she tells Hanu to end his phone call and dial 911. Minutes later a mysterious woman shows up. She gets out the car and she starts speaking to him in their language and she was like, well, let me see. That's what she said to him. I said, okay, so I went in there too. I was like, well, you don't really want to see it. She didn't really talk to me. She like ignored me. She was still having a conversation with him the entire time. At this point, Crystal had already been inside the apartment. She quickly exited the first time after she realized Sasi and Anish were beyond saving. But then Crystal went back into the apartment a second time, following behind Hanu and his friend. She walked in the apartment like she's been there before. She was in front of us. She was first. She went straight to the back. I stood in the doorway. He stood on my right hand side. She went around the bed and said, wow. She didn't get emotional. She didn't scream like I did. She didn't do anything. When she said, wow, what was she looking at? Was she looking at the wife or was she looking at the young boy? She was looking at the wife's head. The wife was sitting in front of the bed. She walked in the room. She were all the way around the bed and she said, wow. Then she said, oh my god. And that was it. And started speaking their language and they were talking. I just thought whole demeanor was off.

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I was like, what?

Did she go closer to the bodies at all?

Did she kind of go closer and look at them?

Yeah, she did.

She did go closer and look at them.

The little boy was laying down.

She was looking at his eyes.

She bent over like this and just was looking at his face, his neck.

And this was with no expression on her face

or any kind of fear in her eyes.

None.

I found that very unusual for a person.

The way she went and she looked at the back of the woman's head,

the way she looked at the, walked around the bed and said, wow.

Oh my god.

She showed no emotion and it made me look at her in a different light.

Like, did you do this?

I'm Tinku Ray.

And I'm Ben Adair.

This is Strangeland, Season 2, Murder in Maple Shade.

Crystal says she went into shock at the sight of the victims.

She remembers being so overcome by emotion, she felt sick to her stomach.

But when Crystal started to process what she'd just seen,

the aftermath of a double murder, she turned to Hanu to question him.

I was talking to him to make sure he was okay, but also to get information.

I said, well, did you call your wife?

What was the last time you called her?

He said, oh, I speak to her, you know, in the morning before I left for work.

I said, do you haven't called home?

Because it was late.

I said, do you haven't called her since early this morning?

He said, no.

I was like, does anyone else have a key to your door?

He said, no.

You can actually hear part of this exchange on the 911 call.

Who has keys to your home?

Crystal asked.

Who lives next door to you?

Was the door already open?

She was searching for clues about who could have done this horrendous act.

But Crystal couldn't get much out of Hanu.

He was having a side conversation with the other woman.

Crystal's not sure exactly what was said because they were speaking in another language, but she believes the woman instructed Hanu to stop answering her questions.

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Because after that, he went quiet.

The female interjected and wouldn't allow him to talk to me no more.

Because I was asking questions and he would look at her and communicate and he would stop talking to me.

Hanu then asked the woman to borrow her phone to call Ravi Patlori.

Remember, Ravi Patlori was Sasi's cousin, though he seems to have been much closer to Hanu.

So Hanu asked for the woman's phone to call Ravi and she responds.

It's a bit hard to make out because of the crosstalk, but it sounds like she says, I left my phone inside the car.

The dispatcher asked Hanu who he's talking to.

Right now, my neighbor came.

Hanu could mean Crystal, but maybe he means this other woman.

Was she also a neighbor?

Crystal thinks this woman was the same person Hanu was speaking to on the phone when she first arrived before he called 911.

And that given her quick arrival, she probably lived nearby.

Why do you think that?

Because when she got there, you know, it's like she just ran out the house.

She had no coat this March.

It was freezing.

So to me, it was like she was in a rush.

So I think she was talking to the girl on the phone and she ran out the house just the way she was.

Do you know where she lived?

No, I don't, I don't, I don't know where she lived.

But she must have lived quite close by Fox Meadow, if not within the complex.

Correct.

Did you tell all of this to the police?

Yeah, I did.

Well, I didn't talk in detail about how she went in the second time.

They really didn't want to know that.

He just wanted to know if I touched the bodies.

Crystal asked the police if they'd questioned the other woman about touching the bodies because she'd had such a peculiar interest in them.

And they were like, oh, she's just a family friend.

She, she's not important.

She's a friend.

That's what they said.

According to Crystal, investigators weren't interested in hearing about the woman or details about the crime scene.

She said they asked very basic procedural questions, dismissed what she said, and didn't write much of it down.

We have no way of knowing if detectives ever followed up on any of the information Crystal shared.

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But we're going to.

That's coming up after the break.

There were a lot of things about the crime scene that didn't add up for Crystal.

Like what was that white powder all over the floor  
and on Anisha's body?

Whenever it was coming out of the vents, it covered me.

I was walking and my whole shoe was covered with this white powdery substance.

It's such a curious detail and might offer some insight into the murders.

We've mulled it over and over and come up with some theories.

Theory number one, it could be a kind of bleaching agent.

Bleaching agents degrade blood samples.

Making it hard to extract traceable DNA.

So it could be that the murderer used a bleach powder to cover his or her tracks  
and make sure they didn't leave behind any DNA evidence.

This seems plausible, given that Crystal says there was a suspicious lack of blood at the crime scene.

She says there was one large pool of blood near Sasi, but that's it.

No blood on the bed or on Anish.

Instead, Crystal said that Anish was covered with this white substance.

So maybe the murderer cleaned up the bloodstains and then, for good measure,  
covered certain areas of the crime scene with an extra layer of this white powder.

But Crystal also said the white powder was coming out of the air vents in the apartment.

So here's theory number two.

White powder around air vents can be a sign of carbon monoxide buildup  
inside the ventilation system.

Carbon monoxide is the byproduct of a gas heater and can accumulate inside a residence  
if it's not properly vented.

And breathing in these fumes can cause people to become weak and disoriented,  
lose consciousness and even die.

What if the murderer blocked an exhaust vent in order to poison Sasi and Anish and immobilize  
them?

It sounds outlandish, but this might explain why neighbors didn't hear any screaming during the  
stabbings.

We also know from a housing inspection report that a lot of the apartments in Fox Meadow  
were missing carbon monoxide detectors.

And Crystal says that it was unbearably hot inside the Nara's apartment,  
like the heat had been on full blast.

So when I walked in there, it was very, very hot.

It was so hot, I felt like I couldn't breathe.

The only way to prove this theory would be to test a sample of the white powder  
or to check the level of carbon monoxide in Sasi and Anish's blood,

in which case we'll need to see a copy of their toxicology reports, usually part of an autopsy.

So we submit a public records request for their autopsies to the Burlington County Prosecutor's  
Office.

We go there and check the status of our request.

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Assistant Prosecutor Michael Sullivan says they're working on it.  
You are able to get a copy of the autopsy report?  
Okay, and so the autopsy report will come from you or?  
Yeah, we can get that too.  
Okay, and so we'll get these back to you.  
Soon, we'll uh, I'll do it, I kind of get it, see you in the next couple days.  
Okay, great, thank you so much.  
But they don't follow through or give us any reason why they've decided not to give us a document.  
By not responding to our initial records request,  
the prosecutor's office has violated New Jersey's open public records access law.  
So we file a lawsuit against the office to force it to comply.  
Then six weeks after we were promised the documents, we finally get our hands on the autopsies.  
But still, they don't include a toxicology report.  
So the mysterious white powder remains a mystery.  
We pursued the lead as far as we could, but we're not law enforcement, so our access is limited.  
But a strange substance found at the scene of a double homicide?  
That's a detail that shouldn't be ignored.  
But the biggest lead Crystal's given us is this new mystery woman.  
Crystal says that on the night of the murders, she didn't know anything about her,  
only what Hanra told her that she was a friend.  
But then, one day not long after, Crystal went to a Dunkin' Donuts near Fox Meadow.  
It's a different Dunkin' Donuts than the one we visited in an earlier episode,  
but you know, it's New Jersey, lots of Dunkin' Donuts.  
Anyway, this location is also Indian-owned, and it's something of a local hangout for the Indian  
community. When Crystal stopped in, people started chatting with her about the murders,  
and she says they even knew about her role at the scene.  
They were like, yes, she's the one that went into the apartment and saw the dead bodies.  
Everybody knew. I didn't know how they knew because I didn't tell anybody.  
But anyway, they would start having conversations about how he, the husband,  
and the girl that was with him that night, was working out together next door  
at the Retro Fitness Center every day before they would go to work.  
Remember, Retro Fitness is where Thurman Jennings said he saw Hanu exercising just days after  
the  
murders. So this is the second time we've heard about this particular gym. It's right next door  
to the Dunkin' Donuts, where Crystal says she heard about Hanu and this woman's daily routine.  
They said he would buy her coffee, and then after they would sit there for a little bit,  
drink their coffee and donuts, leave, and they would work out together next door.  
They said they would do it twice. They would come in the morning and in the evening.  
So they would always go to the Dunkin' Donuts and leave the Dunkin' Donuts  
and go next door to work out. Every day. Every day.  
Crystal also heard that Hanu and the woman were co-workers at Comcast.  
How do you know that that woman worked at Comcast?  
One of the gentlemen that was at Dunkin' Donuts told me. They said they worked together.  
Crystal tried to let it go, the odd behavior of that mysterious woman on the night of the murders,

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but it keeps plaguing her, and she comes up with her own theory.

So I brushed it off until, you know, I start putting two of it together, and then I was like, God, I just feel really strange about the woman, the way she walked in the apartment and wanted to go back in and look at the bodies and examine it. I just think that, you know, something's not right here. Now, if I say put two and two together, I say perhaps maybe he could have done it, but I don't think he did it. I think she might have done it.

This is pure speculation on Crystal's part. So I asked her why she thought that.

What would be the motive? I think she wanted to be with him.

That's the only thing I could think of, and that was the only way of him getting out of the relationship is getting rid of her. But instead of sending her back home, they killed her because stabbing someone is a crime of passion, especially in the face.

Crystal signals to me that she's done talking. She's had enough.

Off tape, she says the murders traumatized her, and revisiting those memories, really gruesome memories, has left her emotionally spent. The interview is over. Crystal wishes me luck and we say our goodbyes. Crystal's account of this mystery woman has me thinking back to something we heard

from local reporter Brian Woods, that shortly after the murders, authorities shared an unusual detail. They said that they didn't rule out that it could have been another woman who did it, which was like an interesting thing to hear. Most of these crimes are committed by men, so that kind of stands out. And we're also thinking back to Saase's letter. Could the woman Crystal saw with Hanoi on the night of the murders be the same woman that Saase said Hanoi was having an affair with? Our investigation continues, right after the break.

Everything that Crystal has been telling us seems to track with everything we know about Deepa Ajit,

the woman that Saase says was having an affair with her husband Hanoi. First, according to Crystal, the woman showed up at the crime scene minutes after Hanoi's phone call. And we know Deepa lived in Box Meadow, just a two-minute drive from the Nara's apartment. Second, Crystal heard the woman worked at Comcast, where an anonymous source also told us Deepa was employed. Third, Crystal's description of the woman at the crime scene is similar to Thurman's description of the woman he saw with Hanoi every morning. A tall, thin Indian woman with a light brown complexion. It's a pretty broad description. We need some way to narrow it down.

We look for photos of Deepa Ajit online to see if Crystal and Thurman recognize her.

But there aren't any. We can't find a single one anywhere. Which is a little odd. In fact, the only digital trail we find at all is a LinkedIn page, which doesn't include a profile pic.

So we head to the strip mall near Fox Meadow, where Hanoi and his friend reportedly spent time together.

I'm hoping to find someone at the gym or the coffee shop that can tell us more about what Crystal heard. As I get closer to the row of businesses, I notice that the retro fitness is closed for good. The lights are out and it's empty inside. So I go to the Dunkin' Donuts and approach the employee behind the counter. We're doing an investigative story on there was an Indian woman and her son who was murdered. We were told by somebody that you knew the husband

and that he used to come here. That's what we were told. No. Okay. That he used to come to the fitness, the gym next door. Yes, the retro fitness, right? Apparently he and some other

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lady used to come and they used to work out at the gym. We were told this in our investigation. So do you remember any of that? No, I was not here. That's a shame. But who was here at the time? Can we any way we could get hold of them? He passed away last year, massive heart attack. I'm so sorry. He was here for the last 19 years. His wife was also here, but she left for India. Okay, after he passed. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Once again, time is working against us. The six years since the murders have turned another promising lead into a dead end. Retro fitness is closed, the Dunkin' Donuts owner died, and it seems it's no longer the hangout it used to be. We check various private databases of property and employment records, and we do find some good info. We find a Deepa Ajit in a small Pennsylvania town about an hour west of Philly. We reach out to her through an email address we find

and call a cell phone number several times, leave messages, nothing. Then we try calling from a number with a New Jersey area code. This time, someone answers. Hello.

Hi, my name is Tinku. I'm a journalist working on a story, and I believe that you might be able to help me. Okay. Do not ever call this number again. Okay. I'm sorry. Did I get the wrong number? Why do you say that? Yes, don't call this number. If I remember, do not call this number ever again. Okay, but I mean, but why? I mean, I don't understand. I'm doing a story. I don't know you.

I don't really care. Okay, don't call this number. No, I understand. And I'd be happy to tell you exactly what we're trying to find out. This is the last warning before you see a load suit. Okay. I'm telling you, okay, you guys been bothering me so many different ways. Okay, you will feel a load suit. Okay, for disturbing my peace. Okay, you need to stop right now. Please do not call this number ever again. That escalated quickly. We don't know who the man is that answered the phone, but he never said we had the wrong number. He never asked why a journalist would be calling

and threatening a lawsuit over a cold call. Seems like maybe we struck a nerve. But we're undeterred, because we still don't know if Deepa received our message. We need to give her a chance

to speak, given the allegations made by Sasi, and we still need to determine if she's the woman who went into the crime scene with Crystal and Hanu. Our research turns up a property deed with Deepa Ajit's name on it. In August 2018, Deepa purchased a home in Westchester, Pennsylvania. So Betsy and I

drive to the address listed on the document. As we pull into her neighborhood, we discover that this house is a huge upgrade from Fox Meadow. Look at this house. Oh, that's very pretty. Very pretty

house. Just look at how well maintained these gardens are. And the neighborhood is really haly. It feels very rural. Very private. Very private. Some of the homes are just hidden by the trees. You can barely see them. In a quarter mile, your destination will be on the right.

We almost miss the house, because it's surrounded on two sides by tall pine trees.

But then we spot a clearing and a large stone front colonial style house with a Tesla and a Lexus SUV parked in front of the garage. Oh, wow. Okay. So this is where she lives.

It's a grand house, very large, and it's secluded. You can barely see the house from the road. The listing for the property says it's worth close to \$800,000.

We find Deepa's name on the deeds of two other recently purchased properties.

So it seems like her financial status has changed dramatically in the years following the murders.

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We add that to our growing list of questions. Our plan is to approach Deepa outside of her home when she's coming or going. Because if we knock on her front door, she probably won't answer.

Or even worse, the man on the phone might. He was pretty aggressive to us on the phone. We've obviously tried to contact them a few times. And my fear is that he could actually become, I don't know if he'd be physically violent, but definitely I don't see him being friendly, let's say, to say the least.

So we park in a nearby driveway looking for any signs of life in the house. We're waiting and waiting. And then the black SUV pulls out of the driveway and hightails it down the road.

So we've been waiting for Deepa to come out of the house.

Finally, her car move, it is reporting. So finally, we see she pulls out in her black SUV. We are now following her, driving along the road that her houses are.

Let's see where she's going.

She really was gunning it down the road.

Okay, taking right.

She's pulled into a wah-wah.

We follow the car into the parking lot of a wah-wah.

It's a convenience store that's all over Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

If it's Deepa in the car, this is probably our only chance to talk to her.

So we have to move fast. We approach the car.

There's an Indian woman sitting in the driver's seat.

She's tall and thin with light brown skin, just like Crystal and Thurman said.

The woman appears to be in her early to mid 40s.

She's texting on her phone and doesn't see us until we tap on her window.

Hi there. Are you Deepa? Any chance?

Could this be the Deepa we're looking for?

We find out on the next episode of Strangeland, which starts right now.