



**JOHN
DOLAN**

**JIM FOSSE'S
EXPENSE CLAIM**

*"Twisted ... in a good way"
~ Diane Strong, author of
The Running Suspense Series*

**TENTION
BOOKS**

**JIM FOSSE'S
EXPENSE CLAIM**

by

John Dolan



TENTION BOOKS

All characters in this entertainment are entirely fictitious

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EPIGRAPH

“As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality.”

Albert Einstein, Geometry and Experience

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager

To: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager

Date: July 14, 2001

Subject: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

Dear Ramon

I gather you're the guy I need to send this e-mail to.

My business expenses for the month of June were \$11,000.

Of this, \$4,000 was for the IIFDC meeting in Manila, \$3,000 for the acquisition negotiations in Jakarta, and a further \$4,000 for the conference in Houston.

Of course, the Company paid the air fares, so I won't be claiming for those!

Please remit the \$11,000 to my account at your earliest convenience.

Kindest regards,

Jim

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager
To: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager
Date: July 16, 2001
Subject: RE: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

Dear Jim

I recognize that you are new to the Company and therefore you have perhaps not yet had the opportunity to read your Employee Manual, which you should have been given during your induction.

I should like to draw your attention to Section 6 which deals with the topic of employee expense claims. You will see that we have a standard form for claims (available from the HR Department), which you will need to complete, sign and date. You will also need to attach receipts for all the business expenditures for which you are claiming.

If you then send all this to me, I will ensure that your claim is processed promptly.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any assistance.

Best wishes,

Ramon

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager

To: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager

Date: July 17, 2001

Subject: RE: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

Dear Ramon

OK, why don't we just call it a round \$10,000 and save some trees, shall we?

Kindest regards,

Jim

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager
To: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager
Date: July 20, 2001
Subject: RE: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

Dear Jim

It's a tempting idea, isn't it!

However, all joking aside, if you do need any help filling in the claim form let me know.

Best wishes,

Ramon

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager

To: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager

Date: July 21, 2001

Subject: RE: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

Dear Ramon

I wasn't joking.

Jim

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager
To: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager
Date: July 22, 2001
Subject: RE: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

Dear Jim

I'm afraid I have no authority to authorize lump sum payments without any supporting receipts.

I note also that the amounts you mention in your earlier e-mail look like round sum figures. No doubt when you have had the opportunity to go through your receipts in detail, the numbers will be a bit less 'round'.

Unfortunately Prieq Power's Governance Policy brings with it a certain amount of bureaucracy which we all have to put up with in the wider interests of the business.

Best,

Ramon

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager

To: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager

Date: July 23, 2001

Subject: RE: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

Ramon

I've got a pretty shrewd idea that when your wetback ancestors were swimming across the Rio Grande trying to avoid the border patrols THEY weren't too concerned about the bureaucracy!

Anyway, to make sure you can cover your ass I've started sorting through the mountain of papers I brought back from all my business trips in June. So far I've only found the hotel bill from the *Carlsson Sharifah* in Jakarta which was for \$761.67. I've sent this to you in the internal post. The \$65.00 charge for the porn movies was a computer glitch but the sonofabitch on the checkout refused point blank to remove it from the bill, so I'm afraid that Prieq Power is just going to have to suck it up.

Jim

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager
To: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager
Date: July 27, 2001
Subject: RE: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

Jim

I realize that in your e-mail of July 23, you are trying to be amusing, but I should be grateful if you would not use language which could be construed as being overtly anti-Hispanic and therefore in contravention of our Equal Opportunities Policy – as well as several state and federal statutes, I might add.

I am afraid that so far as the movie channel charge is concerned, Prieq Power will be unable to 'suck it up' (which I note, somewhat coincidentally, also happens to be the title of one of the itemized films). I see there is, in addition, \$85.00 charge for a 'four hands massage' in your room, which is also not allowed to be claimed.

I look forward to receiving the rest of your receipts in due course, along with the completed claim form.

Ramon

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager

To: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager

Date: July 30, 2001

Subject: RE: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

Ramon

Look buddy, man to man here, I need to level with you.

I realize you're a backroom boy in HR and you're probably still a little wet behind the ears (that's not a reference to your ancestors BTW), so let me tell you a few facts of life about business development.

Doing business in emerging market places like Manila and Jakarta carries with it responsibilities for entertaining the decision-makers. To oil the deal, as we say. And most of the entertaining we have to do doesn't come with tax receipts, if you get my drift.

If I hadn't got the IIFDC guys drugged up so I could get some incriminating pictures of them with local prostitutes, there is NO WAY we'd be getting finance for our Philippines and Indonesian projects.

The only reason I don't have a receipt for the Manila hotel is that the manager took exception to our photo shoots and I had to sprinkle some dollars around and high-tail it out of there before I

ended up in some Filipino slammer. Although to be absolutely fair, the manager was also a bit pissed that I put some moves on his wife.

Anyway, the good news is that I've found the Houston hotel bill and a couple of taxi receipts – all of which totals \$357.83 – so I'll drop that to you in the internal post.

On reflection, I estimate the total 'unreceiptable' expenditure at about \$9,000. So with the Houston bills, and the allowable Jakarta stuff, I make that \$9,969.50. So my initial guess wasn't that far out.

Looking forward to seeing that in my bank account soon!

Jim

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager
To: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager
Date: July 30, 2001
Subject: RE: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

Are you telling me that on behalf of Prieq Power you spent \$9,000
on prostitutes?

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager

To: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager

Date: July 30, 2001

Subject: RE: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

Not just on prostitutes. That includes the photographers too. In South East Asia the photographers are more expensive than the hookers, but in Houston it's the other way round.

Oh, and don't forget the cost of the Rohypnol. That ain't cheap to get hold of, not even in Manila.

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager

To: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager

Date: July 30, 2001

Subject: RE: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

I can only reimburse legitimate business expenses on the basis of proper, legal receipts.

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager

To: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager

Date: July 30, 2001

Subject: RE: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

Hookers don't give receipts, dumbass. Look, I've seen you, right? You've got ginger hair and a face that looks like it was hit by a fire truck. You must use hookers. You KNOW they don't give receipts.

Just pay my expenses, and we'll say no more about it.

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager
To: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager
Date: July 30, 2001
Subject: RE: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

I'm sorry, Jim, but I'm going to have to refer this to Senior Management. I can't imagine how many laws have been broken from what you say, but this is a very serious matter.

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager

To: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager

Date: July 30, 2001

Subject: RE: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

Pay my fucking expenses

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager

To: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager

Date: July 30, 2001

Subject: RE: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

It's not possible.

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager

To: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager

Date: July 30, 2001

Subject: RE: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

Pay my fucking expenses you ginger bastard

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Ramon Ortiz, Expense Claims Manager

To: Jim Fosse, Business Development Manager

Date: July 30, 2001

Subject: RE: Jim Fosse's June Expense Claim

No fucking way

PRIEQ POWER INC INTRANET

From: Cynthia Tucker, VP Human Resources
To: Chester Tesman, Chief Operating Officer
Date: August 5, 2001
Subject: Temporary Suspension of James Fosse

Dear Chester

Following our meeting the other day, and the temporary suspension of Mr James Fosse, I have had the opportunity to review the e-mail correspondence between Mr Fosse and Mr Ortiz.

I have also taken the opportunity to speak to Mr Fosse's colleagues in the Business Development Department, particularly Mr O'Connell who was present at the Houston Power Conference which Mr Fosse attended.

So far as Mr Fosse's travels to the Philippines and Indonesia are concerned, he was of course, travelling alone, so I have asked Mr O'Connell to contact the various parties he met while there and to make some discreet enquiries as to events and conversations during his visits. He has yet to respond to me on this.

I also took the opportunity to talk to Mr Fosse's previous employer, Dyselxia Industries Corporation, who had a few stories to tell, and which I will brief you on separately. On this point I need to stress the urgency of our reinstating our previous practice

of taking up references for potential employees. We might have saved ourselves a lot of problems if we had taken up references on Mr Fosse.

What I have unearthed so far certainly points towards Gross Misconduct on the part of Mr Fosse, and I believe we need to invoke our disciplinary procedures immediately.

On a side note, I was not personally involved in the hiring of Mr Fosse. On his first day with us when I met him, I was a little taken aback at the disparaging comments he made about my red lipstick and the fact that I reminded him of a waitress he had ravished in an alley in Greensboro, North Carolina. He also asked for my private phone number and inquired as to whether I 'liked to party'. I was inclined to dismiss this as new starter's nerves, but I wonder now whether this should not have set the alarm bells ringing earlier.

One rather puzzling codicil is that as Mr Fosse left the building, he is reported to have taken with him a box of our expense claims forms. For what purpose he would want these, I cannot guess.

With your concurrence, I will contact Mr Fosse and request he attend the office for a formal discussion about his behavior. At such meeting, he will be reminded of our disciplinary procedure, and we will proceed from there in line with said procedure.

I have already given Mr Ortiz a verbal reprimand for his use of the 'f' word in one of his e-mails, although in his defence I would have to say he was severely provoked. Ramon has always been sensitive about his illegitimacy and his carrot-top.

Best regards,

Cynthia

PRIEQ POWER INC

Floor 82, 1 World Trade Center
Liberty Street and Church Street
New York, NY 10006

Mr James Fosse
128 Desade Street
Hicksville, NY 11801

September 4, 2001

Dear Mr Fosse

In spite of our repeated efforts over the last four weeks to reach you by phone, e-mail and personal visits to your last known address (above), we have been unable to make contact with you.

In view of the serious nature of the events leading to your temporary suspension, it is imperative that we meet for a face-to-face discussion.

Please attend our offices at 8.30am on Friday, September 11 to meet with myself and Mr Driscoll, one of our senior managers.

You may, if you so wish, be accompanied by another work colleague or other representative.

We are hand-delivering this letter to your home address in the hope that you will collect it there, all other avenues of contact with you having been exhausted.

Cynthia Tucker, Vice President Human Resources

THE NEW YORK BUGLE

Wednesday, October 14, 2001

Mysterious Death in Sunnyside, Queens

By Philip Janus

Police are investigating an unusual homicide in Queens.

On Monday morning the body of Ramon Ortiz, 32, was discovered by his cleaning lady in his fifth-floor apartment on 49th Street. The deceased was the acting Vice President, Human Resources, of Prieq Power Inc, who had recently come into the position after 9/11 when a large number of his colleagues had been killed in his company's offices in the North Tower. By an extraordinary stroke of good fortune Mr Ortiz was not at work that day owing to an allergic reaction to some black hair dye he had applied the previous evening.

This week, however, his luck ran out.

The cause of death was strangulation by a long strand of thick red tape. His apartment safe was open and empty. According to the dead man's brother, Raul (28), Mr Ortiz had kept all his savings, amounting to some \$10,000, in the safe because he 'mistrusted banks'. Police are citing robbery as being the most likely motive for the killing.

What makes the case bizarre, however, was the fact that the body was found with an expenses form paper-knifed to the back, and with the words 'CLAIM PAID IN FULL' scrawled on the paper. \$30.50 was discovered in the dead man's left hand.

A new neighbor of Mr Ortiz – who asked to be named as ‘Jim’ – said that he had only met Mr Ortiz on a few occasions, but that he seemed like an ordinary, hard-working man. “I’m from Greensboro, where we have our problems,” Jim added, “But nothing like what you guys have here. New York is a dangerous place, brother. It’s full of crazy people.”

AFTERWORDS

We hope you enjoyed this short story.

Tention Books would be very grateful if you would stop by the book's Amazon page and give it a 'LIKED'. If you are feeling especially generous, happy or disgruntled why not give *Jim Fosse's Expense Claim* a review?

Just click [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or [Amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk) and we'll take you straight there.

John Dolan's novel, *Everyone Burns*, is also published by Tention Books, and is available on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and [Amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk) as an ebook or paperback. Our teaser is set out below and Chapter One is included in the following pages by way of a taster.

It is January 2005 and the charred remains of two Europeans have been discovered on the Thai island of Samui.

Local Police Chief Charoenkul, sidelined by his superiors, enlists the reluctant David Braddock, a burnt-out private detective, to assist in an 'unofficial' investigation.

But Braddock has problems of his own, including an affair with the same Police Chief's wife ...

Peppered with irreverent humour and some pithy observations on everyday life in the Land of Smiles, EVERYONE BURNS is much more than a crime novel. It is also a carefully-crafted psychological study of an anti-hero for our time.

EVERYONE BURNS, CHAPTER ONE

“One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”

Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus

Oh, bugger. I had been hoping for a quiet evening.

As the broken cue spins up off the pool table, the jagged end just misses my left eye, cutting a gash in the skin below. I duck as a ferrety-looking drunk in an *I Love Thailand* tee-shirt takes a clumsy swing at my head. Swivelling to the side I bring my right fist in hard towards his stomach, but my timing is off and I hit his lower ribs.

All hell is now breaking loose. On Koh Samui, bar fights are pretty rare. They are usually sparked by jealousy, a racist remark, or some sexual insult. Fists, bottles and bar furniture then start to fly, fuelled by cheap alcohol. Tonight is typical. Some overly-lubricated European had mistaken one of the pool-playing *katoeys* for a bona fide female, and had reacted violently when he realised his error. In fairness May, the *katoey* in question, is rather gorgeous, especially tonight in her red figure-hugging dress. However, when bad-mouthed by an inebriated *farang*, she is not averse to striking out with pool cues, glasses, bottles or any other

suitable object that presents itself to her beautifully-manicured hand. So it had proved this evening, and with a shower of glass and loud oaths, the more macho patrons of the bar began wading into each other. The less oiled customers and the (inevitably more sensible) females meantime disappeared quicker than a Scotsman's generosity.

How do people pick which individual they are going to punch at such times? Interesting question. Maybe a Chaos Theory specialist could explain it. Something to do with the fluttering of a butterfly's wings perhaps, or maybe in this case the fluttering of false eyelashes. Suffice to say, however, that as I bring my elbow in hard contact with the side of the ferrety-one's jaw and he goes crashing off over a table, this action is not going to endear me to his drinking companions.

Two of the more overweight of them rush at me, although one is slowed down momentarily by an airborne bar stool. The first one – whose face bears an uncanny resemblance to the actor Geoffrey Rush (and in fact he swears at me in an Australian accent) – manages to pin me against the wall, dislodging a framed portrait of King Rama IX of Thailand, which promptly shatters on the tiled floor. Out of the corner of my eye I see the second charmer – a bearded, Jerry-Garcia-Grateful-Dead-type – break the neck off a bottle as he works his way through the flailing bodies towards me.

“You’re screwed, mate,” says Geoffrey Rush.

But apparently I am not. For at that moment help arrives in the unlikely form of a gigantic shaven-headed Russian, who flattens Jerry Garcia with a single punch to the jaw, before grinning widely at me. I notice two other pulped guys at the Russian’s feet. My Australian assailant gulps and his face turns a fetching shade of corpse.

“Need some help?” asks the jolly giant.

“No, I’m fine, thanks,” I reply, freeing myself with a sneaky knee to Geoffrey Rush’s privates, and a rabbit-punch to the nose.

Surveying the human and non-human debris, I see the bar fight is effectively over. It’s ended as quickly as it began. Clearly, the bruising and bone-cracking having ceased, it is now the appropriate time for the local police to arrive.

The Thai Boys in Blue are represented on this occasion by ‘PC’ and his sidekick ‘DTs’. PC (real name: Preechap Chaldrakun) has the build of a Maori rugby player – his neck being the thickness of a local girl’s waist – and the humanitarian features of a Japanese prison guard. His nickname is somewhat ironic since he is about as un-PC as anyone I’ve ever met, and he views every *farang* with suspicion. On the other hand, I suppose ‘PC’ has a certain ring to it as a policeman’s moniker.

His partner, DTs (real name: Daeng Tathip) is a snake of a man with darting eyes, bad skin and a serious drink problem. PC does

the physical stuff and I imagine DTs does the paperwork, assuming he can keep his shaking hand still long enough to wield the pen.

PC looks at me sullenly. He would probably like to arrest me, but he knows I'm friendly with his boss. Then his shark's eyes fix on the shattered picture of His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadej.

"Who did this?" he demands.

The big Russian waggles a thumb in the direction of the Australian who is still lying on the floor with his hands to his crotch and a pained expression on his sweaty features. My earlier dancing partner, ferret-face, has vanished, so I point to the ex Grateful Dead member propped against a wall and spitting out what looks like a tooth.

"These two," I say.

This decides PC. For him, busting up a bar is one thing, but disrespecting the Thai Royal Family is on an altogether different scale. He uses his cuffs on the temporary eunuch and snatches DT's cuffs for use on Jerry Garcia. Then with hands like bunches of bananas he hauls the miscreants up and out of the bar.

I light the Russian and myself a cigarette, and we follow the circus outside to the waiting police car. While DTs stands twitching, PC bundles the two protesting *farangs* into the back of the vehicle. With a final glowering look at me, PC barks "Get in!" to DTs and his partner hastily complies. The car speeds off, rather faster than this crowded street of Chaweng warrants.

I turn to the Russian. "The name's Braddock, by the way," I say proffering my hand.

"Vladimir. Vlad," he answers, grasping my hand with a tattooed bear's paw. "Our police friends will now play with the rubber hoses, yes?"

"They don't use rubber hoses here."

"What do they use?"

"You don't want to know."

We wander back into the much quieter *Mosquito Bar*, where the barman is already clearing up. He shrugs, indicates his despoiled kingdom with a weary gesture, and offers us beers on the house. We gracefully accept. May and a couple of other *katoeys*, are attending to their makeup, but their faces radiate happiness at the sight of Vlad and myself. There is much *wai*-ing, smiling, hugging and general congratulatory behaviour, along with offers of obscene acts of gratitude. My companion takes this in good part. The cheerleaders dispersing, we find a couple of undamaged stools and sit at the bar.

"I saw you kick-boxing in Lamai last week," I venture to the behemoth sitting beside me. "You kicked the crap out of some local guy."

Vlad laughs and claps me on the shoulder, rather harder than necessary. "What can I say? Everyone needs a hobby, yes?" His smile, which includes two gold teeth, is slightly insane, and I

notice the dilation of his pupils which suggests a recent acquaintance with some illegal substance.

I sip my beer. "Thanks for the intervention."

"Is no problem, my friend. I am Russian. When there is a fight I always choose side of right," he says, rather morally. "Those other men disrespect May. May is a friend of some of my girls here, so whether he is man or woman, it makes no difference to me. I do not like disrespect." He spits. "So I join you." He laughs again.

"That's a very, um, refreshing attitude," I say, wondering how many girls he has here, and whether his relationship with them is of a social or a business nature.

"Incidentally," whispers the Russian stubbing out his cigarette, "You might want to know that your face is bleeding."

* * * * *

Such is the reality, and now for the idealising and philosophising. Some stock-taking would appear to be in order.

David Braddock. A fortysomething educated Englishman. Well-built (allegedly), with a full head of dark, flecked-grey hair (certainly), and a slightly crooked nose from a rugby-playing youth. Hiding out, if you will, on a small island in the Gulf of Thailand. Living off the proceeds of earlier capitalist days and inherited money. Vacillating between poetry and profanity.

Running a barely-viable Agency whose dual nature is difficult to describe. In short, me.

To some – mainly local Thais – I am perceived as an advisor and solver of personal problems. To others – mainly Europeans and North Americans – I am a private investigator primarily employed in the tracking of possibly-unfaithful girlfriends.

In my first capacity, I am usually to be found in a comfortable consulting room dispensing empathy and the occasional tissue to an emotionally-affected client. In my second capacity, I either sit in an adjacent office taking businesslike notes and making pithy remarks to my predominantly white clientele; or else I hang around in bars and alleys observing the antics of young Thai women. Hence my recent presence in the *Mosquito Bar* and accidental participation in tonight's fracas.

To summarise, my life is one of split personality. I am in two minds about it myself.

Nevertheless, down these narrow streets a man must walk, even if it is in flip-flops. But I am no Philip Marlowe, and Koh Samui is not film-noir USA. There is nothing of Hollywood's black and white morality on this most colourful of Thailand's islands. And long overcoats just make you sweat in the sun. Here the Postman Never Rings Twice, simply because he never rings at all. He has better things to do. Lamai's and Chaweng's adventurers generally pack a condom, not a gun.

Some of the streets are, however, genuinely narrow. These same streets may not be filled with machine-gun fire and the dramatic screech of violins, but they overflow with the invisible and innumerable longings of the human heart. Love continues to minister here, but betrayal still wears its perfidious face, hatred hollows out the weak man's breast, revenge pursues its self-defeating course; and the unfulfilled dreams of the multitude haunt the island like so many hungry ghosts.

Accordingly there is work to be done: often trivial and meaningless, sometimes absurd, but on occasion a difference can be made. *Occasionally* Sisyphus can push the rock to the top of the hill without its rolling back down.

Meantime, my bleeding cheek is throbbing, my shirt is ruined, and I must repair home to be myself repaired.

* * * * *

My weatherworn house is just outside Chaweng, at a sufficient distance from the tourist madness, towards the hills. It used to be in a cul-de-sac but developers eager to offer affordable chunks of the island dream extended and improved the route so that it now loops back on itself to Samui's Ring Road. It is still quiet however, and most of the surrounding coconut groves survive intact. Fortunately most of my immediate neighbours are Thai.

When my battered jeep pulls onto the drive around midnight, my wife, Claire, is nowhere to be found. Wayan however has been waiting up for me, and her brown Balinese eyes react with horror at the sight of my damaged face.

“Mr David, what happened to you?”

“I had a disagreement with the wrong end of a pool cue. I’m OK.”

She rushes off to the kitchen, returns with our medical kit and promptly sets about cleaning up my cheek.

Wayan’s role in our household fits the broad category of ‘housekeeper’, but she is much more than that. Claire and I first met her over fifteen years ago during one of our regular holidays to Ubud in Bali, where she was working in a spa. We became friends and stayed in touch. Wayan had never married in spite of being very pretty and kind almost to the point of saintliness. I gathered there had been a romance with a Westerner at some stage in her life which had ended. She has never discussed the details, and I have found it prudent never to ask. She believes her *karma* is to be alone. Periodically I have tried reasoning with her on this point but she remains firm. Now in her early forties, aside from the slightly fuller waist, she still looks to me the same young woman I met in Bali.

Her mother – her only family – died a few years ago, around the time I was decamping to Samui. I asked her to run the house

here and she accepted. Getting her Thai paperwork sorted out was not easy, but I have some influence, a greedy friend in immigration, and cash in my wallet. Generally speaking, I find in South East Asia most bureaucratic problems have a monetary solution.

She looks concerned. "You should have stitches in this," she says.

"No way. The doctor would laugh at me and tell me I was being a baby. Besides, *Scarface Braddock* is a great name for a private detective."

She does not find this funny.

I notice the book she has been reading before I arrived. It is *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

"Why are you reading this?" I ask.

"I need to improve my English."

This is nonsense, of course, as her English is very good, albeit with intermittent confusion of past and present tenses. I may not be able to converse with her on the more abstruse aspects of Quantum Mechanics, but then again why would I want to?

"Today I met a little Thai boy whose father was late collecting him from the English School. I stayed with him until his father arrived, so we started talking. *This* is the book he is studying in English class. He said it was good so I bought a copy."

This is archetypal Wayan as Good Samaritan. "You were lucky

to find a copy of this in the local bookshop.”

“They buy for the school. I find it a difficult book. Is it meant to teach children about not taking drugs? Otherwise I cannot understand why they would give this to children to read.”

She finishes her ministrations and peers at her work critically.

“That is the best I can do.”

“Thank you, Wayan.”

She puts a hand on my arm. “Mr David,” she says, her voice taking on a serious tone, “Last night I had one of those dreams I have sometimes. You know about my dreams?” I nod. “I dreamed I could see you but you could not talk to me. I do not think *this* is the meaning of the dream,” she indicates the cut, “But I think that something bad is coming. Perhaps this is the beginning of something bad.”

I take her hand and squeeze it. I am hardly the superstitious type, but I have learned to take seriously Wayan’s lucid dreaming. My theory is that, being supremely empathetic, she taps into feelings at a subconscious level – usually mine – and reflects back hopes, concerns and fears like a magic mirror. Her explanation is, naturally, quite different, and involves the elemental forces of Balinese gods and demons.

“Wayan,” I say gently, “This dream can have many meanings, not all of them necessarily bad. You mustn’t worry about me, or you will get wrinkles.” Still no smile. “I *am* a fully grown man and I

can look after myself.” She looks doubtful, but is too polite to say anything.

“Anyway, thanks for waiting up. You get off to bed. I’ll be turning in soon.”

“Don’t stay up too late.”

“I won’t, mother, I promise.”

Finally Wayan smiles. She picks up her book and goes. I expect the psychedelic nature of her dreams will intensify the deeper she delves into Alice’s adventures.

I drop my bloody shirt into the laundry basket, change into my dressing-gown and go out onto the upstairs balcony with my saxophone. The night sky being full of stars, my nearest neighbour being sufficiently far away, and my monkey mind being too restless for slumber, I blow some smooth, slow blues out into the still air. By one o’clock I am sufficiently chilled to smoke a final cigarette and turn in. There is still no sign of Claire.

My head hits the pillow and sleep instantly takes me. I dream I have fallen down a rabbit hole where I encounter a pool-playing Red Queen and a bald, grinning Cheshire-Cat with gold teeth.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

“Makes a living by travelling, talking a lot and sometimes writing stuff down. Galericate author, polymath and occasional smarty-pants.”

John Dolan hails from a small town in the North-East of England. Before turning to writing, his career encompassed law and finance. He has run businesses in Europe, South and Central America, Africa and Asia. He and his wife Fiona currently divide their time between the UK, the UAE and Thailand.

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