

Stranger in Paradise  
and other Short Stories

Jordan Dean

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Published by JDT Desktop Publishing

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ISBN: 1537267647

ISBN-13: 978-1537267647

## DEDICATION

Dedicated to my parents, brothers, sisters and my family at Iyaupolo Village, Fergusson Island, Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea.

To my dad who always reminded me there is always good in this world and that there are equal patches of sunshine and rain in life.



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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## PROLOGUE

'Stranger in Paradise' is a collection of extraordinary stories about life in contemporary Papua New Guinea; our experiences, struggles, fears, dreams and successes.

The stories are diverse and ambitious in their exploration and social observations of the multifaceted nature of modernity and although some examine the darker aspects of contemporary reality, all the stories have a predominant motif - 'tears', that is pain and struggle.

They are 'silent tears' or unheard stories of an incredible spirit of resilience, voices of hope and dreams that have emerged from corruption, moral break-down, inequality, injustice, poverty and struggle.

Some of the stories are based on my real life experiences.

May these stories give you some insight and perspective of our world. May our tears be seen and may our voices be heard!

I hope you enjoy this collection of short stories.

**Jordan Dean**

***'Silent Tears'.***

*Without stories,  
There is silence.*

*Without stories told,  
We are voiceless.*

*Without our stories heard,  
We are invisible.*

*It is even harder,  
When the stories are  
Hard to bear  
And impossible to imagine'*

*-Belinda Mason*

## ***STRANGER IN PARADISE***

The nineteen-foot fiberglass dinghy rocked from side to side, as its forty horsepower Yamaha engine heaved it on full throttle through the rough seas. The sky was clear with scattered white clouds. A few seagulls skirted above the ocean. Boko gripped the side of the dinghy tightly but his mind was elsewhere. He was absorbed in daydreaming about his village, Iyaupolo, which took him back to his early childhood days.

The thought of going home to Iyaupolo filled him with enthusiasm. Iyaupolo, his native village, is a small, coastal village on the west coast of Ferguson Island. It was blessed with the greenery of coconut groves, white sandy beaches, crystal clear sea, cascading waterfalls and tropical rainforests. Going back home for Christmas holidays was something he looked forward to when he was a child growing up in Alotau. It had been a long time since he'd been to the village. After graduating from the University of Papua New Guinea about ten years ago, he had

lived and worked in the big city of Port Moresby.

Boko had flown into Alotau from Port Moresby that morning. After a two-hour ride on a PMV, he arrived at East Cape and then boarded the family dinghy. The dinghy ride would take another two to three hours before he would arrive at his village. The sun beat down mercilessly but a cool breeze blew from the east from Normanby Island made it bearable. He squinted his eyes against the sunlight to see Fergusson Island. He could only make out a distant blue outline in the horizon.

*"Home, sweet home!"* he smiled.

There was no electricity, just the kerosene lanterns that lit up the sago-thatched roof houses at night. Boko frequently visited grandpa and grandma and savored the tapioca cake that grandma baked and the smell of smoked tuna fish floating around their small kitchen. Most of the time, Boko and his cousins would play along the white sandy beach. They would chase crabs, collect seashells, go diving on the coral reefs or just paddle their canoes around the mangroves. They would crack okari nuts and play three-lip card game or go diving for prawns in the river. They would have picnics at the waterfall.

Grandma would cook delicious yams and fish with tulip greens, cooked in a clay pot. Television was a distant dream and computer was an unheard thing those days. Life was so simple and carefree back then. Yet those heavenly memories seemed like a fairy tale to Boko.

A wave hit the side of the dinghy making it veer a little. Boko snapped out from his daydreaming. The sea was a relentless monster.

His uncle, Saulo was the skipper of the dinghy. Saulo was his

mother's younger brother. A sailor all his life, Saulo skillfully maneuvered the dinghy through the rough sea in a zigzag pattern.

“Uncle Saulo, if the sea is too rough we should go across to Sewa Bay and follow the coast to Yo’o and then cut across to Nade or Fayayana,” Boko said feeling afraid of the waves.

“Don’t worry son. These are small waves,” he smiled. “We’ll just go direct to Waleta Point to save fuel.”

Uncle Saulo had sailed through cyclone warnings when the monsoon winds blew at thirty-five to forty knots an hour and the waves were sometimes higher than five meters. Although uncle Saulo never attended any maritime college, he knew the sea like the back of his palm. He was not afraid of the waves and Boko trusted him.

Some two and a half hours later, they arrived at Kukuya village to drop off two passengers who were also uncle Saulo’s in-laws. When they passed Mapamiowa station, Boko observed the place with curiosity. There were several new permanent houses erected for the public servants working there, a new police rural outpost and a Digicel tower but the old market place still looked the same. He was glad that the station had seen some form of development. Villagers’ lives would become easier with the provision of basic services such as health, education and communication.

*“The Member for Esa’ala was delivering services,”* he thought.

It was getting late when they finally arrived at Iyaupolo. Several uncles, aunties and cousins were all waiting at the beach to greet him. Boko shook hands and hugged all of them. Some of the aunties cried with joy.

Uncle Saulo organized the boys to carry Boko's cargo up to the village. They were mainly rice bags, sugar, coffee, teabags, flour bags and soap that Boko bought while transiting Alotau town. Boko had spent over a thousand kina on the groceries so he could give everyone at home at least a packet of rice. He didn't want anyone to be upset or think that he favored only few people.

Boko heaved a sigh of relief that the amiability of the village folks, hadn't changed.

'Come. Let's go up to the village and you should rest. It's been a rough trip,' uncle Manoa said and led the way up to the village. 'Your parents are still at their garden. I'll send your cousin, Gafo to let them know that you have arrived.'

Boko followed him up to the village. Manoa was his mother's last-born brother after Saulo. Both of them had supported his parents to pay for his school fees in high school and tuition fees at university by diving for sea cucumbers.

Boko's parents were retired civil servants. They had worked at the hospital in Alotau for over thirty years. His dad, Tamagu was a carpenter and his mother, Sinagu was a seamstress. Upon retirement five years ago, they had built a permanent three bedroom high-post house with timber and corrugated iron roof in the village. It was the only modern structure with solar powered lights. All the houses in the village were made of materials from the forest and covered with sago thatched roofs.

The sun had almost disappeared over the horizon when Boko's parents arrived at the village. He rushed to greet his parents, threw his arms around them and held them for a long time. The harsh village life had made them age quickly. Sinagu couldn't control her tears while his father, Tamagu gave him a dazed

look. He didn't seem happy and there was pain in the way he looked at Boko.

*"Something doesn't look right!"* He suspected.

"What's wrong dad? Are you sick? I brought some tablets with me," Boko asked looking worried.

Tamagu shook his head slowly still giving a blank and empty look.

"Your mum and I will talk to you after dinner," he said walked over to the house.

"Mum?" Boko insisted but his mother just kept quiet.

Boko felt alarmed by their secrecy but knew his parents too well. It was for his own good and they would eventually tell him whatever it was. He sighed loudly.

The night crept in. It was pleasantly cool with a light breeze coming from the sea. Up in the sky, the moon was almost full and the stars flickered gently as though touched by a whiff of cold air. After dinner, Boko distributed the groceries to each family in the village. He had bought clothes from the secondhand shops in Port Moresby for his cousins as well.

Boko's uncles gathered at his parents' house to drink coffee. It was typical of his uncles' back at home. Whenever someone returned from town, they would hang around and make small talk just to have a cup or two of the coffee or tea. The kettle never left the fireplace. It would be refilled instantly and placed back on the fire while the conversation continued unabated. When they ran out of betel nuts, uncle Saulo sent his son Nelson to climb a betel nut tree with a torch. They asked about Boko's job, the city, his overseas travels, his wife and daughter

and he filled them in with the details.

When the chickens' sleeping in the nearby mango tree crowed, they decided to call it a night. Boko's eyelids felt so heavy with exhaustion but his parents were still up waiting for him to discuss what was on their mind. He chewed a betel nut and it made him sweat profusely. After finishing a cigarette, Boko went up to the house and sat near his parents.

"Son, you know your mum and I are not very educated. But we managed to raise you and your brothers and sisters' well." His father, Tamagu said. His expression was bleak. "Now, you and your brothers and sisters have gone to universities and colleges and have good jobs in towns and cities. A lot of people in the neighboring villages are jealous of our success. None of their children have made it that far."

"Well, they should work hard too. Nothing comes easy in life," Boko retorted somewhat amused. "This is so absurd!"

"No son. People still live in the dark here. When I built this house, the first house with timber and an iron roof in the village, your brother Manulele was taken away from us," Tamagu took a deep breath and continued.

Boko felt the pain in Tamagu's voice. Boko missed his younger brother too. He felt a lump in his throat and tried to swallow it.

"Our family in the subject of jealousy. And since you're the eldest, you're the next in line to be the chief of the village and inherit the land when your grandfather is gone, your life is in danger," Tamagu paused and looked at Boko sadly.

Boko sat up, stretched and yawned. He bowed his head looking at the floor in submission. Those words stunned him.

“Why? I don’t understand why people keep practicing sorcery when they should be working for money? And this is my land! I was born here. No one will take it away from me!” Boko retorted, feeling his temper rising.

“Son, your life is in danger here in the village,” Sinagu cut in to explain.

“Look mum and dad, we have a new law on superstition passed by the parliament and I’ll take whoever is practicing witchcraft or sorcery to court!” Boko said defensively looking at his mother.

“Listen to me please son! Just buy a land and live in Port Moresby. Don’t return home. If you try to fight for your land, you will die early. So many people have died over this land. The land will always be here. People just come and go.” Tamagu said with a cold face.

Boko tried to control the seething anger that was building up inside him. But he slowly understood the wisdom in his father’s words. He kept quiet for a long time contemplating on everything that was said. So many questions popped up in his mind and he needed answers but sleep took over him.

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Boko woke up screaming in bed, sweat streaming from his body. Swearing under his breath, he kicked the blanket away from his legs and swung out of bed. His heart was still pounding, and he was breathing like he’d run a marathon.

“Boko?” Sinagu called from the other room. “You okay?”

“Just a bad dream mum,” he mumbled trying to control his trembling body.

The dream had been so real, but the real horror of it was that it was likely to happen to him. He paced back and forth the room trying to clear his mind. The dream was horrific and he felt a chill run down his spine. He saw his own dead body lying on the ground and vultures ate away at his eyes, heart, and intestines. The image was so obscene. In the dark truth of the night, he realized that what his parents said was true.

“What did you see?” she asked.

“I don’t want to talk about it at this time of the night mum,” Boko said still shaking with fear.

“Okay, you know God is more powerful than the devil so pray for His protection before you go back to sleep son,” she reminded him.

Boko’s parents were dedicated Christians and they constantly reminded them when they were kids to always pray to God for his guidance, wisdom, protection and everything. After saying a short prayer, Boko sat for some time thinking before going back to sleep.

++++

Boko woke up early the next day, still startled by the dream he had. He related it to his parents over breakfast. His parents looked gravely concerned.

“You have to leave the village quickly,” Tamagu reiterated. “You’re not safe here. Evil people won’t stop until they get rid of all of us so they can have the land to themselves.”

“You know, I thought I was coming home to have a wonderful Christmas with you and mum but it turns out to be the worst,” Boko murmured.

Boko spent the remainder of the day at the beach. The ocean had a hypnotic effect. Boko gave in to it without a struggle, peacefully watching the waves roll onto the sparkling white sand. In the distance, white seagulls swooped in and out of his vision, their high pitch added to the symphony of wind and water. He took out his mobile phone and took several photographs. Boko felt at peace. Nothing else mattered at that moment.

As darkness approached, Boko felt uneasy again. From his childhood, Boko has heard scary stories about ghosts, spirits, witchcrafts, sorcerers, dwarfs, black magic and the supernatural world from his grandpa. The village people feared sorcerers and witches. Villagers rarely ventured into the thick foliage at night as they feared for their dear lives. He lit a cigarette and started puffing it, biding his time and waited patiently for dinner. Sinagu cooked a delicious meal creamed with coconut milk and Boko enjoyed it very much.

“Thanks mum. You’re the best chef,” he thanked Sinagu when he finished dinner.

That night the sky was clear, the stars bright, and the full moon illuminated the ocean. The silence was broken occasionally by a bat fluttering aimlessly in the sky. The village was peacefully asleep as the smoke from their houses drifted towards the nearby mountain. Fireflies glowed in the darkness like disco lights. Boko was tired and dozed off to sleep early.

The dogs began to bark loudly, then growled menacingly, then barked loudly again at something lurking at the back of house in the darkness.

++++

Out of the darkness, a very old lady appeared and stood by the window staring at Boko. Her hair was uncombed and covered half of her face. She had long, pointed fingernails, and her bulging eyes were bloodshot. She wore a grass skirt and her body was covered in mud. Her ears protruded like a wild boar's ears and her long tongue hissed like a snake, falling out of her mouth and onto the floor towards him.

Boko tried to run but his body was numb. He tried to scream for help but his mouth felt like it was stitched up. Boko watched helplessly as the old lady approached him. Her mouth opened wide showing sharp vampire teeth and was about to devour him.

“Boko!!!”

A loud familiar voice woke him up. It was his mother, Sinagu.

“Wake up! You were screaming in your sleep,” she said.

Boko's eyes snapped open, his entire body was trembling and sweat dripped down his face. He laid in silence, staring at the ceiling and wall for some time.

*“I couldn't have slept for more than ten minutes,”* he took a deep breath.

“Something is in the room. I saw an old lady trying to swallow me,” he said to Sinagu feeling the hair on his body stand up. “I'll have to leave the village in the morning. It's not safe for me here.”

He had made his decision. He was afraid of the nightmares and knew that he must give up and leave the village. But leaving his homeland and losing his life were two different things. Just the thought of leaving home and never returning was painful

enough for him.

“That’s the only way, they’ll leave you alone son,” she said in a concerned tone. “I’ll go see your uncle Saulo to let him know. Both of you have to leave before everyone in the village wakes up.”

She walked off and Boko sat on his bed feeling his heartbeat slow down. The cold night breeze blew into his face. He looked out at the night sky from his window and watched the thin layer of clouds slowly drift by. It had a calming effect.

Why can’t people work hard to improve their living standard instead of ruining other people’s lives through sorcery? Why are they after his life? Should he get the police to arrest the sorcerers? All those questions and more raced through his mind, but none as terrifying as the most apparent fact; he had to leave the place he called home!

*“I can’t stand all the horrible nightmares. Something terrible might happen to me,”* he thought.

Boko laid his head back on the pillow and slowly slid into the blanket again. The fears he had slowly drifted off as he dozed off.

++++

It was quite early in the morning and most of the villagers were still asleep when Boko left the village. No one knew of his departure except his parents and his uncles, Saulo and Manoa. He felt as if his heart was torn to a thousand brittle pieces but he managed to hide the pain and smiled when he hugged his parents and uncle Manoa goodbye before boarding the dinghy with uncle Saulo.

The sun rose quickly, dispelling all the pain, hurt and fears he had. There wasn't a ripple on the ocean as the dinghy sped away at full throttle. He watched the waves created by the powerful engine. Boko turned back to look at the familiar landmarks of the place he once called home. It was a distant blue outline now. All that was left in his mind was the nostalgic memories of the beautiful village which once bustled with activities and echoed with laughter and play a few years back. The ocean breeze brushed against his face and he found some solace from the bitter realities that plagued his world.

That place would always have a special place in his heart. That was his birthplace and home no matter what.

*"I will return one day,"* he promised himself.

Deep down, he didn't know when and whether he will return or if that was even possible.

## ***BUAI SELLER***

The afternoon air was dry and humid as the scorching sun beat down mercilessly on old Kurabi's head. Another week of business not going well but he was hoping to make more today than the previous days. It was two o'clock, and traffic filled the small street from Lamana Hotel down to Holiday Inn — cars, buses, and people were everywhere. He watched elegantly dressed men and women in suits walk in and out of their offices.

Kurabi was in his early fifties and had spent over twenty years in the betel nut trade, saving every little profit he made, making provision for the future. He always dreamt of the day he would purchase a Toyota Coaster bus and start his own registered PMV business. One day, his son would be a lawyer. Sweat beaded on his forehead. Kurabi wiped the sweat with his palms. Kurabi's back suffered the most as he had to spend the whole day sitting under the neem trees opposite the Aopi Building which housed the National Department of Health office with a

carton of betel nut in front of him. He could feel the tiredness in his body but his mind was far away.

Kurabi remembered coming to Port Moresby in the 1980's as a young man in search of opportunities to find employment and help his parents back at home in the cold mountains of Ialibu in the Southern Highlands province. An uncle of his who lived in the city had told him stories of all the high-rise buildings, lots of cars, people, Asian companies and lots of opportunities to be employed. He sold enough coffee and bought a one-way plane ticket to Port Moresby to live with his relatives at Tete squatter settlement on the outskirts of Gerehu suburb. Tete settlement was a no-go zone for most city residents because of the high rate of criminal activities but for the highlanders living there, it was home.

For the next five years he knocked from office to office, asking for employment as a cleaner, gardener or even as a casual laborer. But fortune never smiled on someone like Kurabi who couldn't read and write and had no formal education.

Kurabi fell in love with a lady from Simbu who also lived at the settlement with her family. After some fooling around they had their first child, a boy. Three years later, a daughter followed. That was when he started selling betel nuts to make ends meet for his impoverished family.

On favorable days, he would make over two hundred kina. He would use a hundred kina to buy new stock from the Mekeo and Kerema suppliers who usually sell a ten-kilogram bag of betel nut for twenty kina. The remaining money would be used for food and sustenance. He managed to pay for his children's school fees with the little money he made.

That was how Kurabi survived in Port Moresby until the

Governor for the National Capital District introduced the Betel Nut Control Law in 2013. Although, the ban was effective, people in Port Moresby still loved chewing betel nut.

*“Why stop the trading of buai when the Government can’t create jobs for everyone,”* he thought bitterly.

“How much for your buai?”

Someone disturbed Kurabi from his reverie. He looked up to see a pretty Papuan lady with a very shapely figure. She was young, probably early twenties he judged and smartly dressed as if for an office job.

“Only one kina. Meaty buai,” he replied.

She pulled out a two kina note and bent over to pick up two betel nuts and mustard from the carton that Kurabi placed in front him. His eyes got focused on her cleavage and firm breasts. The view was phenomenal. She chewed one betel nut and stood for a while before walking off.

Her short, tight black skirt gave a perfect outline of her big, fine assets. Kurabi watched her ass swaying side to side with every step she took. He felt himself getting aroused.

*“This old thing is still kicking,”* he thought with a mischievous smile.

“Damn! Such a hottie”, a young man standing nearby said to his friends.

It seemed like Kurabi was not the only one that got distracted with the Papuan lady’s ass. He was with a group of men, all smartly dressed too, probably on their afternoon break. They all came over and handed over a twenty kina note and collected ten

betel nuts.

“Is she married?” the same young man asked. He looked like he was from Sepik.

“I wouldn’t know. Why don’t you ask her yourself?” his friend replied and all of them started laughing.

Kurabi could understand a little English and joined in the conversation.

“Sorry son, that’s for businessmen only” he laughed.

“True story paps”, the Sepik bloke said but didn’t look pleased.

Kurabi found a ten kina in his waist bag and gave the young men their change.

Judging from the weight of the waist bag, Kurabi probably made over two hundred kina. There were only two other betel nut sellers to compete with so he was lucky. He thought of buying a packet of lamb flaps and some vegetables from the market to take home for dinner tonight. His children would have some pocket money for school tomorrow. His wife also wanted to buy more wool to complete her bilums to sell.

What more could he ask for? So long as he had a roof over his head, a happy family and children attending school, life wasn’t so bad after all. Today was one of his good days. He smiled, feeling somewhat happy with a sense of satisfaction at the day’s earnings.

He wiped more sweat on his forehead with his shirt and shielded his eyes from the sun. It was only an hour to go before four o’clock when the Government employees would finish work and Kurabi would be on his way home.

Suddenly, out of the corner of his eyes, he saw a blue Toyota Land Cruiser speeding down from the Lamana Hotel road heading towards him. That would definitely be the Police or National Capital District Commission law enforcers! Kurabi quickly poured all the betel nut from the carton into his bilum and tried to escape up the small hill. The vehicle was already very close and several policemen jumped out from the back and started running after me.

“Catch him!” a policeman’s voice yelled.

Kurabi had witnessed how the police beat up betel nut sellers when caught and ran with all speed his old legs could carry him. The other two betel nut sellers were younger than him so they were already at the top of the hill.

Turning his head slightly, he looked back to see if the policemen were catching up.

*“Please Lord, I don’t want to be caught,”* he prayed and ran with all his might.

One of the newly recruited policemen caught up with Kurabi and grabbed him by the shirt. The new recruit was young and very athletic with long hands.

“Stop right there!” He roared and landed a fist on the side of Kurabi’s eyes.

Kurabi’s hands flew up to block more punches to his face but was too late. Another punch on his head made him momentarily unconscious and he fell backwards to the ground. Kurabi blinked hard as his vision slowly returned.

“Please stop beating me”, Kurabi cried and rolled over to protect his face. His head was thumping.

Another stocky built policeman kicked him in the stomach with his boots. He looked very aggressive and probably from the highlands.

“How many times will we stop you people from selling betel nut in public areas?” The stocky built policeman shouted angrily and kicked Kurabi again in the ribs.

“Aiyo, please that’s enough,” Kurabi begged the policemen to stop.

He felt a sharp pain on his side. One of his ribs might have snapped.

“Get his bilum and destroy all the buai!” the Senior Police Officer commanded. “Get the waist bag too!”

The Senior Police Officer was bulky. He was fat and had a potbelly. He was the last one to catch up with the other two policemen.

“No! Please don’t take my money!” Kurabi protested in pain and tried to stagger on his feet but couldn’t.

Another fist smashed into Kurabi’s face and he flopped onto his side. He didn’t move. An explosion of pain shot up through his body. He lay there crying as the policemen ripped the waist bag and bilum off him. They poured out all the betel nuts and bystanders rushed for the scattered betel nuts. The waist bag containing the days taking also disappeared.

“Go home now and don’t ever sell buai again!” the senior police officer snapped. “We catch you again, you’ll be thrown in jail!”

The policemen returned to their vehicle and drove off laughing at the old man. The confiscated money would be used to buy

their beer.

Kurabi slowly rolled onto his hands to push himself up onto his feet and gasped. His was a little dizzy and felt like he couldn't breathe. He stumbled and blinked hard. It was like lightning bolts were shooting down his back. Slowly, he moved his legs, trying to figure out if it was broken or not. It hurt, but he could still move.

A coastal looking young man felt sorry and helped Kurabi to his feet. He bought a bottle of water and gave it to Kurabi to drink.

"Thank you," Kurabi said quietly.

"Bloody Grade 10 dropouts who think they're above the law!" the young man swore at the police.

His face and knees were covered in bruises and his whole body sore. He couldn't stop shaking. Tears ran down Kurabi's cheeks. All his hard work that day was in vain. What would his family have for dinner tonight? Such ruthless and selfish people! Where is the humanity in all this? Cursing silently, he rubbed the tears and blood on his face with his shirt.

Kurabi poured some water on his face and drank the rest. It felt amazing and relieving on his face. He sat down under the tree for a long time. His mind was numb. He couldn't focus on anything. He just sat there, trying to feel better.

He had dreams and ambitions just like everyone else. Why is the world so cruel? He sat thinking.

More tears started to form in his eyes.

## **OFFICE AFFAIR**

Dr. Meri Pes rubbed his eyes tiredly and then returned to the stack of reports before him.

*"I'm tired, can Lucy hurry up?"* he muttered to himself.

He checked his watch; it was a little after six o'clock. Dr. Meri Pes sat down on his desk thinking of Lucy Tuks, the Senior Executive Assistant for the Secretary. They had planned to go out for dinner after all the staff had left the office. It would be the office gossip if other staff knew, and even taint his reputation and cost his job too. He'd had a number of extramarital affairs, enough that the prospect of another woman in his bed produced only anticipation, but the way he felt would not be described as mild.

Whatever it was about Lucy, he wanted her. He thought of the way she walked, her petite built and slender hips moving in a way that made sweat pop out on his forehead. Lucy was in her

early fifties but still looked good. It would take a while for him to tire of her.

Although in his late fifties, Dr. Meri Pes still maintained a solid figure and still had hair on his head. Most men his age were already bald. He was also tall with eyes that made women his age go a little crazy.

Dr. Meri Pes had just joined the Department of Higher Education as the Deputy Secretary a few months ago. Before that he was senior lecturer at the University of Technology in Lae. The Department of Higher Education had arranged for temporary accommodation at the Hodava Hotel for him whilst sorting out his permanent accommodation. Housing in the nation's capital; Port Moresby was a serious problem so it would take a while before a decent house was found. This meant that his wife, children and grandchildren would have to remain in Lae until the housing issue was sorted.

After two broken marriages, Lucy Tuks no longer had so many stars in her eyes. She struggled on her own to raise her four grown up children and one grandchild. She knew the danger she was in but was attracted to his money and wanted a quick promotion in her job.

Dr. Meri Pes glanced at his watch again. It was almost thirty minutes past six. He and Lucy had clicked on the first day he started work with the Department. They have had several dinner dates and she spent some nights with him in his hotel room. He felt a little guilty for doing this behind his wife's back but everything about Lucy felt magical.

His wife for thirty years, Linda was a very loving mother of their children. A homemaker and a Sunday school teacher at their local Lutheran church, Linda was a loving and devoted wife.

But all of that aside, Lucy was a sensual woman and he couldn't resist her charm.

*"This affair must never leak out,"* he thought.

Just as he shut down his laptop and was about to pack up for the day, Lucy entered his office.

"Right on time," Dr. Meri Pes said.

"Sorry to keep you waiting Doctor," she gave an apologetic smile.

"No, it's all good. Let's go." he said and gave her a wicked smile.

His car was a luxurious Hyundai Tucson, the latest model on the market. After helping her into the car, he walked around to the drivers' seat and got behind the wheel.

"I was thinking of dinner at Fugui Restaurant. You okay with that?" he asked.

"Sure," she replied feeling the warmth in his voice.

Lucy thoroughly approved of the restaurant he'd chosen. It was a fancy Japanese restaurant that served delicious seafood. The interior was dim and the diners were discretely isolated. The music was slow sentimental songs playing at a pleasant volume. They were shown to a private room. The dining table was small, and he found that when they were seated their knees touched. Their eyes met across the table, and a slow sleepy smile touched his lips and made his eyelids droop heavily.

Dr. Meri Pes quickly ordered dinner and wine and paid for it. Over a glass of red wine and dinner, he continued staring at her. Inevitably, they talked about work, since that was the common ground for them. He was quite knowledgeable in all aspects

higher education, research and science. He charmed her, making her feel appreciated; something she hadn't felt in a long time.

"We have to be discrete with our relationship," he said with a concern tone.

"Don't worry darling, we'll play it safe," she winked at him.

Every time her dark lashes teased and gave those wicked glint in her eyes, he felt his body tighten with need.

"Finish your food," he said gently.

"I can't." Despite the way he made her feel shaky inside, she smiled at him. "You're staring at me."

"I'm sorry. I can't keep my eyes away from you." His voice was tender and low.

They finished their main courses, and the waiter promptly cleared the dishes away, while they lingered over the wine. Lucy had thought that she wouldn't be able to eat any dessert, but when the waiter brought the dessert cart, she stared at the vanilla ice cream until her mouth was watering.

"I'll have the ice cream. Have some," she offered him.

"It's okay. I'll just have coffee," he declined.

Lucy certainly enjoyed the food. She looked up and caught his gaze, and smiled as she read his thoughts.

"Take it easy with that look. I might faint," she teased and flirted. He laughed with desire in his eyes.

"You ready to leave?" he asked.

"Yes darling. I'm done," she replied.

Dr. Meri Pes took her arm as they walked back out to his car. Lucy quivered. She felt paralyzed, totally unable to move away from him. She was overwhelmed by his manly touch.

He parked the car at the Hodava Hotel car park. Without a word, he bent his head and covered her lips with his mouth no longer able to control his desire. Dr. Meri Pes was too absorbed in the moment and unaware that a security guard who happened to be a cousin brother of his wife was watching them.

“Let’s go to my room,” he ordered.

Lucy quivered against him, well aware of his need. She wanted him too.

Two hours later, he dropped off Lucy at her house at Gerehu Stage 2 and returned back to his hotel room. He jumped straight into bed, but his subconscious mind played the night for him again.

*“What a night!”* he murmured and smiled.

++++

Linda couldn’t believe what her cousin in Port Moresby had told her over the phone. Sweat started forming on her forehead. Her heart was pounding so fast. Linda was hurt before, but this one cut her deep. She sat still and went pale like a statue, feeling a lump in her throat.

The thought of her husband jumping into bed with another woman drove her mad. She wanted to smash all the kitchen utensils but her children were fast asleep and decided against it. She didn’t want to disturb them.

All this years, she was the only person who stood by his side

through thick and thin. She found a part time job to support him when he was away in Australia pursuing further studies for a Masters and PhD at the Australian National University.

*“How could he do that to me?”* she thought angrily.

It felt like a thousand swords stabbing her and the sore would linger with her for the rest of her life. She sat in the chair and cried for a long time, not knowing what to do.

She slowly wiped the tears from her eyes. Her emotions had swung from hurt and pain to raw fury; then the anger changed to a determination to take revenge.

*“No way, I am going to let both of them have a good time. I’ll make sure they end up in court and lose their jobs,”* she thought.

The thought of them fired from work gave Linda a sense of relief. She had to play it cool and catch them unaware. She’d catch the next flight she could get to Port Moresby.

A quick look at the clock told her that it was almost three-thirty in the morning. She forced herself back to sleep, but woke up early, eager to get things moving.

++++

Dr. Meri Pes was at his office table a little early and his Executive Assistant Ranu made him a cup of coffee. He took the coffee gratefully.

“Thanks Ranu,” he sighed. “I missed breakfast this morning.”

His mobile phone rang. He checked to see who was calling and it was his wife Linda. He went back into his office and closed the door.

“Hello honey,” he answered sweetly.

Linda paused for a while. All the pain and anger of betrayal made her entire body shake. She wanted to scream and swear at him but kept her nerves in check.

“Morning, just checking on you,” she said calmly. “The kids miss you.”

“Oh, I miss all of you,” he sounded genuine but deep down he knew it was a lie.

“When is the Department going to sort our accommodation so we can come over to Port Moresby?” she asked.

“Soon. I promise. I’ll talk to the Director for Finance and Administration to sort it out quickly,” he reassured her.

“Okay, I miss you too,” she felt tears form in her eyes. “Hope you’re not doing anything silly there?”

“I am good honey,” he chuckled to hide the guilt.

“Well, you take care of yourself okay,” she said and hung up.

Dr. Meri Pes pondered for a while. He did miss his wife but the taste of another woman’s body delighted him more. She wouldn’t give him the satisfaction that Lucy was giving. He wasn’t in a rush to relocate his wife and children to Port Moresby as yet.

*What you don’t know won’t hurt you!*

The expression popped into his head. It was something he read somewhere. It wasn’t exactly a Biblical scripture but maybe there was some truth to it.

*“Well, Linda doesn't know, so it can't hurt her,”* he thought

He picked his mobile phone again and typed a message before sending it to Lucy's cellphone.

“Lunch at Duffy?” he texted, more like proposed.

A few minutes later, his phone vibrated with a reply.

“Sure darling.”

“I am a ladies man,” he chuckled to himself and smiled.

A sense of elated satisfaction came over him as he thought of lunch with Lucy.

++++

At lunchtime, Dr. Meri Face came out of his office. Lucy was waiting for him at the main door leading to the lift. He entered the lift without even saying a word to her. It was part of their tactic to act normal so colleagues at the office would not be suspicious of anything going on between them.

The Secretary, Professor Save Mahn, joined them in the lift. Professor Save Mahn was a tall man in his early sixties with some grey hair on his head, the country's leading scientist and a respected man. He was always conscious about his diet and maintained a trim built.

The Secretary and Dr. Meri Pes started chatting about the strategic plan that the staffs in Planning Division were working on.

“Dr. Meri Pes, please follow up with the policy and planning staff and get them to complete the strategic plan. We need to finalize the document and submit to the National Executive

Council in the next Parliament sitting,” the Secretary said with a hint of urgency in his voice.

“I’ll meet with the Director for Policy and Planning after lunch and inform you on the status of the document,” Dr. Meri Pes reassured the Secretary.

At the ground floor exit, Linda paced back and forth at the visitors counter and stood uneasily at the sight of her husband. She figured that the lady among them was none other than Lucy. She had only one hand luggage on her and had caught a taxi straight from the airport to the Department of Higher Education office.

Dr. Meri Pes froze for a while as if he’d seen a ghost. He couldn’t believe his eyes. He held his breath, totally dumbfounded by his wife’s presence.

*Oh My God! I am screwed!*

Linda confronted them. Her eyes were bloodshot and full of rage.

“So, this is the pamuk lady you’ve been screwing around with?” Linda asked her husband Dr. Meri Pes in an angry tone while staring at Lucy.

She was already shaking with anger. Professor Save Mahn gave a quizzical look at Dr. Meri Pes, not knowing what was going on.

“Linda? Calm down please. When did you get here and what’s the matter?” Dr. Meri Pes asked.

He still looked confused.

“This is a small world. You thought you were on another planet and I wouldn’t find out,” Linda remarked sarcastically.

Linda carefully watched her husband's reaction and it was painfully obvious on his face that he was lying and hiding something.

"You and Lucy have been screwing around. People saw you two together and told me so I had to come over. That's the matter!" she shouted at the top of her lungs.

Dr. Meri Pes stood there mute, not knowing what to say or do next. Colleagues on their way out for lunch and employees from other nearby offices started flocking over to watch the commotion. Lucy felt so embarrassed and started to hurry away. Linda instantly grabbed Lucy by the hair and pulled her back.

"Let me go please!" Lucy was trembling in fear and tried to pull away from Linda's grasp.

"Pamuk, shut the fuck up!" Linda punched her in the jaw. "Bloody pamuk! You're a whore who goes opening her legs to bosses! What a shame! Useless lady!"

Linda tore the dress that Lucy was wearing. With her right fist she punched Lucy over and over in her face, tearing her lips and nose. Lucy tried to escape but couldn't.

Dr. Meri Pes quickly grabbed Linda's arms to stop the fight.

"Can we solve this issue as adults please," he begged his wife.

"What's there to solve? I am taking both of you to court for adultery! This old pamuk needs to learn a lesson not to fool around with another lady's husband!" Linda kept screaming.

Lucy finally pulled away with blood dripping from her mouth and nose.

Realizing that it was a marital issue, Professor Save Mahn

walked away and pulled out his cell phone to call the police hotline.

The shouting and cursing from Linda went on and on about Lucy been a whore and gold digger until a police vehicle pulled up at the office car park and they were ordered to get in.

It felt good to finally beat the day lights out of Lucy and boy did it feel good to get that off her chest. Linda had so much she wanted to say but just stood there smirking. She felt proud of herself though at the very least.

“You two ladies and sir, please get in the vehicle now. We’ll sort this out at the Police Station,” a policeman ordered.

++++

Dr. Meri Pes was late for work two days later. He looked tired and wasn’t beaming as usual. He felt somewhat powerless today. He had made a fool of himself and now the whole office was talking about him, he thought bitterly. Even his Executive Assistant Ranu looked at him as if he was a piece of trash.

He logged on to his email account and skimmed through the new emails. An email from the Secretary caught his attention. It contained his termination letter for breaching the Public Service General Orders and his contract of employment. The Secretary requested that he clear his worktable and returned his vehicle keys by close of business today. He was also given a week to vacate the room at the hotel.

Dr. Meri Pes went blank with shock. With his personal life in chaos, that was the final straw. It was too much for him to digest at the moment. Anger clouded his mind and he threw the laptop to the floor. Sweat formed on his forehead and he wiped it away.

*"No, no, no way! I can't be terminated! I've contributed a lot to the Department."* He muttered to himself. *"Damn it!"*

He swallowed heavily, feeling his pulse quickening and his palms began to sweat. Lucy Tuks was terminated too but she was the least of his worries.

*"I have nothing to do with her from now on,"* he vowed to himself with bitterness.

The extramarital affair had landed him in court for adultery, resulted in an imminent divorce and termination from his job!

He started feeling a splitting headache.

Dr. Meri Pes took a deep breath to clear his mind. He decided to put his anger and ego aside and accept the consequences of his stupidity.

*"I need a strong drink,"* he mumbled to himself and started clearing his table.

He sighed deeply. Today was his last day at work as the Deputy Secretary for the Department of Higher Education.

## ***BOAT GIRL***

Daru town was peaceful at this time of the night with just a handful of stars in the sky. There were only a few lights that flickered on and off on the empty street. The sea breeze gently rustled the leaves in the trees, not one prowling house cat was in sight. Jess stood beside the street from her house puffing a cigarette.

She was a twenty-two year old single mother of two kids from different men but she still looked good. She was slim with a wide waist, firm breasts and a to-die-for ass wrapped in tight jeans. Her white top was silky and almost see through. She sprayed herself lightly with her favorite perfume from her hand bag.

To most people, it would have been late, but for her, the night was still young. Her eyes silently scanned the empty street. She wasn't afraid of the darkness.

As a teenager, Jess had dreams of graduating from high school and attending university to become a journalist. But all her dreams were torn to shreds when her father died while she was still in high school. Her family suffered from the constant struggle to make ends meet. At such a harsh time, all their relatives turned their back and closed their doors to Jess and her mother.

As the eldest of three children, Jess assumed the role of the caretaker in her family. She had to support her siblings while her mother eked out a living selling ice blocks and scones. Her mother was a hard-working lady, but her ice block sales didn't generate enough money to pay for school fees, food and other necessities.

Jess's Grade 10 education was not enough to find her a job. Besides there were hardly any major companies in Daru and employment opportunities were scarce. She was left with no choice but to frequent the New Century hotel at night as a prostitute. She fell pregnant to two of her clients, both sailors from the Steamship Shipping company barges that visited Daru occasionally.

Every night she would leave the house with hopes that one day a good man will marry her and take care of her and her children. She wouldn't have to sell her body for money anymore. Every morning when she returned, she would cry quietly. That wasn't the life she wanted. At least, she made enough money to buy food and pay for her siblings school fees.

*"Same shit, different day."* Jess murmured, lit another cigarette and puffed deeply.

The effect of the nicotine made her feel relieved as she strolled towards the New Century hotel down the beachfront. The hotel

was within walking distance from her house. She was a familiar face at the hotel. The security guards at the front gate always let her through without asking any questions. Daru was a small town and everyone knew each other quite well.

Jess drifted in quietly avoiding a group of drunkards who were causing a nuisance. She found a stool at the corner of the bar. A local Tolai song was playing at a pleasant volume. The bar was not too crowded. The only men there were Papua New Guinea Defense Force soldiers from the navy ship that was in port. They were having a good time and making lots of noise. Jess ordered a glass of wine and sipped it slowly to pass time. Several of the soldiers started eyeing her. Noticing them, Jess licked her lips and flicked my hair back over her shoulder provocatively to entice them.

A uniformed soldier in his forties glanced at Jess from the other side of the bar. She returned the glance. After about five minutes, the bartender brought Jess another glass of wine, but Jess had not ordered it. The bartender said it was from the gentleman across the bar. She looked across the bar at the uniformed soldier, smiled and gave a nod of her head to say thank you.

At this point the man got up from his seat, walked across to Jess's side of the bar and sat in the barstool next to her

“Hi pretty lady, you on your own?” he asked politely.

“Yes. Just me, myself and I.” She chuckled with a wry smile and glanced up at him.

He was tall with a muscular, athletic build.

“What are you having?” he asked again.

“Red wine,” she replied

He ordered himself a stubby and red wine for Jess.

“What’s your name pretty?” he continued looking interested in her.

“Jess,” she smiled at him.

He introduced himself to Jess. Peter was his name. He was from East Sepik. Peter was the ship Commander and he was based at Murray Barracks in Port Moresby. Jess and Peter continued chatting for about thirty minutes with several hearty laughs mixed in.

“Hey, your buddies might be wondering what you’re up to? She asked after a while.

“Don’t worry about them. They’re enjoying their beer,” he said and ordered another round of stubby and wine.

Jess could tell by the look in Peter's eyes that he was pretty into her. She was also feeling tipsy from the wine.

*She wasn't an amateur. This was her game and she had to take control.*

Jess stood up from her barstool and moved between Peter's knees and closer to him as he sat in his bar stool.

“I know you want to bang me so bad, don’t you?” Jess whispered in his ear.

“Umm, yes baby!” Peter felt himself getting excited.

She placed her hand on his thigh and smiled. Peter did not seem to object. As she did, it was clear by looking at the bulge in his pants that Peter was enjoying it. Jess then ran her hand down

the length of the bulge, down between his legs and back up. She repeated this several times as she moved her body closer to his.

“Two hundred kina and you can bang me all you want,” she whispered and looked directly into his eyes.

Peter was already in a highly aroused state and couldn't turn down the offer. He stood up and removed his wallet from his back pocket and handed Jess two hundred in notes. She put it into her handbag and they got up and left the bar.

There was a small bed in his tiny cabin on the naval ship. Peter removed his uniform off in an instant. Then ripped away Jess's clothes and forced her to the bed. She'd learnt not to reject any man, but Peter was quite rough. She was used to this kind of man, the kind that wanted to dominate a woman. Jess laid back on the bed and spread her legs for him.

“You better use a condom. I don't want to get pregnant,” she ordered him. She had learn her lesson the hard way and didn't want another fatherless child.

Peter quickly put on a condom and rammed her like a raging bull. Jess closed her eyes and tried to imagine other things to distract her mind. She always kept her emotions under control.

*“This isn't love, just business as usual. It will all be over soon,”* she reminded herself.

He groaned loudly and fastened his pace.

Jess thought about her father. The memories of her late father flashed vividly in her mind, as she remembered his words full of wisdom.

*“Nothing comes easy in life. You just have to work hard, and success will be yours.”*

That was one of the many advices given to her by her father. She missed him dearly.

Peter finally climaxed and laid down beside her in exhaustion. Jess got out of bed and put on her clothes. It was already day break and she needed to get home to shower and rest. She was exhausted too. She pulled out a cigarette from her handbag.

"I need to smoke," she muttered.

"You'll have to go up to the deck to smoke," Peter replied weakly.

"Okay, I've have to be off then. Smoke and head home. Thanks for everything," she said politely and left his cabin.

Arriving home, Jess put her handbag on the old table, the only furniture they had in their run down house. She took out the two hundred kina notes from the bag and held it in her hands. She sighed.

*"Well, that's better than nothing,"* she thought to herself.

Her son Junior woke up and start crying. "Mummy, I am hungry."

"Go eat some scones that bubu baked and let mummy get some rest. I will go to the shop in the afternoon and buy chocolate biscuits for you, I promise." Jess replied impassively.

"I want chocolate biscuits!" Junior glared at her and shouted in a high-pitched voice.

His voice shrilled through the house. He was extremely stubborn and adamant. And needless to say, when he demanded something, that 'something' must be provided to him as soon as possible. Otherwise, he would throw a tantrum.

"Oh God! Junior! Stop that! Enough is enough!" Jess screeched in anger, suddenly losing her calm.

Junior burst out crying. Wearing a pitiful expression, she soothed him.

"Okay baby! Stop crying. You know I'll do anything for you," she gave him a tight hug and walked over to the shop.

For Jess, life was hell. However, she could not run away from the problems life brought. She had to face them.

*'One day, all my struggles will be over and my children will have a better future!'* She prayed with all her heart.

Her children meant the world to her. Jess loved them so much but she had nothing left in her broken body to give them. Her body was exploited and her soul ripped apart long ago. All she had left was a heart that was pure.

A tear roll down her cheek.

## ***PUBLIC SERVANT***

The office was in a mess with papers and files all over the place. Jayden sat at his desk putting things in a proper order, it was not easy but he had nearly completed doing it. He walked over to the wall where a filing cabinet stood with many drawers. Slowly and carefully he picked up each pile and placed it in the corresponding drawer. It took him about thirty minutes and he looked pleased with himself. Jayden looked at the clock and it was eleven fifty-three, almost time for lunch.

He loved his job with the Research Council and looked forward to coming in every day, especially since his appointment as the Director for Project Management division recently. The management had recognized his talents and had promoted him. Jayden was a smart man. With a degree in accounting and management and almost ten years of work experience with the private sector and Australian Aid development programs, he had slowly climbed up the career ladder.

He enjoyed the feeling of being the boss. It was nice having a team who had to listen to him, do as he said, but it came with a price at times. If he didn't step in and make sure the project reports were completed promptly, the Chief Executive Officer would be after him.

Still, he loved his job as a public servant. A government job was better than a job with the private sector because it was stable, secure, fairly paid, and generally flexible. Without it, he'd never been able to give his small family a decent life. And besides, he noted wryly, he wouldn't have had the chance to travel overseas and attend meetings and meet a lot of people from many different walks of life.

Jayden was happy about the fact that it was Wednesday and that the weekend was close. It was also payday for the Government employees. He smiled to himself and looked at the time once more. Twelve o'clock. Lunch time.

"Boss, I completed the project report that you requested," Mary, the Project Officer said to him when he was on his way out of the office.

"Ok, thanks. Leave it on my table. I've have a look at it when I return," he told her.

Jayden had watched Mary at work. She was very efficient and professional in carrying out her duties.

He strolled over to the nearest Bank South Pacific ATM around the corner and stood in the queue for a long time to check his balance. He was disappointed when his salary was not yet credited to his account. Jayden pushed the glass door of the ATM room vehemently and darted out.

*"Probably, some delays in the banking system. It will come in soon,"* he

was positive.

Jayden bought a cigarette from a street vendor and puffed on it before returning to the office. He had lots of work to be completed.

Back in his office, Jayden quickly logged onto his MacBook and checked his emails. He had sent an email to Christine, the Human Resource Officer to provide his pay slip for the current fortnight. She hadn't replied yet. He wanted to confirm the deductions made from his salary. He had two outstanding loans from Moni Plus Limited and Teachers Savings and Loans Society. He calculated that about K 600.00 would be deducted.

As he was doing the mental calculations, his phone rang. It was from none other than his mother. He dreaded the call because he knew that she would request for some money. It was ironic though. None of his family and relatives ever bothered to ring him or send a text message during business week but on government week, his phone was like a hotline. It had become a ritual. The noisy ringtone on his phone kept ringing.

“Yes mum, how are you?” he answered.

“Hello son. We are okay. How's work?” she asked.

“Same old, same old. Plenty reports to complete,” he sighed.

“Son, your uncles are here from the village and there's not enough food in the house. I want them to return home over the weekend. Can you send us K 300.00 please?” she asked kindly.

His parents lived in Alotau. Although they were employed, they would often run short due to the endless visits from relatives from the islands. Jayden was the only son that had a job with a good salary.

“My goodness! I am still repaying my loans mum! I have my rentals to pay too! Can’t you people give me a break?” Jayden was already annoyed.

“Sorry son, but we really need your help please,” she kept pleading.

“Okay, okay, I’ll send it over when pay comes into my account!” he said in an angry tone.

“Thank you son,” she said and hung up.

Jayden found it hard to turn down requests from his family. That often pissed his wife, Carol and they’ve had heated arguments in the past. Carol was half West Papua and West Sepik and although she had the looks of a West Papuan, she was short tempered like the Sepik people.

Who do they think you are? Santa Claus? Or some tycoon? She would argue that everyone had their own burdens to worry about and that they had a daughter to raise. She had a point.

He checked his WhatsApp messages and there was another request from his small sister Leino for some money to buy her shoes for school.

Jayden leaned back in his chair pissed from the phone call and message. His family was a major liability. Every payday, they seemed to have some problem, emergency, burden or so and so for nine years now. He was fed up. They don’t even seem to understand that he has his own family to worry about. Besides, the cost of living in Port Moresby was so high and he often had to borrow money to survive.

*“This wantok system is killing me,”* he grumbled to himself.

He picked up the report that Mary had placed on his table and flipped through quickly. A message tone beeped. He immediately looked at his phone.

*“Hope it’s not another relative requesting for money,”* he prayed.

His anger evaporated within split-seconds when he saw that it was a BSP Pay Alert SMS that read:

*Your account XXXXXX1045 was deposited with more than K 50.00.  
Call \*131\*1# to check your account.*

Jayden’s gross pay was a little over K 2, 800.00 but K 700.00 was deducted for tax and superannuation. Then another K 600.00 deducted for his loan repayments leaving him with a net pay of K 1, 500.00.

Jayden had phone banking activated on his phone so he entered his password and transferred K 400.00 to his mother’s account. K 100.00 was for Leino’s shoes. He sent a message via WhatsApp to Leino to inform her that he had transferred the monies to mum’s account. He had K 1, 100.00 left in his account.

He still had his rentals and owed the highlands lady that sold betel nuts next door to his apartment some money. Jayden sighed and returned back to his fortnightly status report that he was working on the previous day. He edited it and added more information. Finally satisfied that his report was complete, he printed it out and signed.

“Can you submit our division’s report to the CEOs office?” he ordered Mary politely.

She nodded in compliance.

Jayden walked over to the staff tearoom and poured himself a cup of coffee. It was three forty-five and he had a quarter of an hour to go before leaving the office. His mind wandered back to his family affairs. They barely survived from fortnight to fortnight. Carol was unemployed and his daughter Jodie was attending Sunny Bunny Kindergarten School, an expensive private school. The loans that he was repaying were for her school fees.

*“My daughter deserves the best education,”* he muttered.

He finished his coffee. It was six past four now and colleagues started leaving the office.

++++

Jayden pulled into the main road towards Boroko, which was quite busy at this time of the day. Everyone wanted to get home quickly from work. Jayden stepped hard on the brakes suddenly and jammed on the horn as a taxi changed lanes sharply in front without any signal almost causing a collision.

“Asshole! Do you know how to drive?” He shouted angrily.

It didn’t make the taxi driver look around, but at least it gave him the chance to vent his frustration.

*“Bloody highlands idiots! They think they own the road,”* he grumbled.

The Pacific Real Estate office closes at five o’clock so Jayden accelerated and overtook the taxi. He was fortunate the Research Council subsidized two-thirds of his apartment rentals. He paid only K 600.00 for rentals every fortnight. Jayden got to the real estate office in the nick of time.

“Last customer before you close for the day please,” he begged

the security guard to get in.

“Ok, make it quick,” the guard ordered.

Jayden used his credit card to pay the rentals and was given a receipt. He drove over to Vision City to use the ATM to withdraw the remaining K500.00 in his account. Traffic was congested from Vision City to the Waigani traffic lights. So many things were running through his mind but mainly he was worried about his wife and daughter. What will he tell Carol? How will they survive until the next fortnight? He sighed and followed the slow moving traffic.

Jayden stopped by the neighbor’s house and repaid the highlands lady with K 300.00. He had borrowed K 200.00 but she charged an interest of fifty percent.

*“Such informal lenders were seriously ripping off working people with their ridiculous interest rates,”* he thought.

With only K 200.00 left in his pocket, he headed home feeling exhausted and bankrupt. For almost a decade, he had lived with the same financial pressure from his family. Does it ever end? He asked himself rhetorically.

*It was said that behind every Papua New Guinea worker is a hundred dependents.*

He contemplated over those words for a moment. It couldn’t be any truer for him. Jayden knew that a nasty argument awaited him at home.

*“Such is life! At least, I survived another day,”* he sighed.

## *GIRLS NIGHT OUT*

Hannah studied herself in the mirror carefully. Her cleavage was showing nicely and she looked really hot. She smiled to herself. Hannah was a twenty-five year old flight attendant with Air Niugini. She wore a tight, black dress with a long slit on the side that revealed her thighs and a shiny black leather heels. To finish off her look, she put on a maroon lipstick. Her curly hair and light brown complexion were the result of her parents mixed background. Her mother was from Central and her father was from Milne Bay. She had noticed several of the male pilots gawking at her ass when she strode through the aisle on the aircrafts. She was sexy and she knew it.

*“Perfect!”* She checked herself out once more and giggled to herself with a weird expression of self-love.

Hannah was excited. It was Friday night and she had planned to hang out with her girlfriend Pauline since Phil was out of the

country. Pauline was a flight attendant too. She picked up her Samsung Galaxy S6 phone and sent a WhatsApp message to Pauline, “Bitch, are you ready?”

“Yeah,” came the reply.

“Come over to my unit then,” Hannah sent a message back.

Five minutes later there was a knock on Hannah’s door. Hannah opened the door to let Pauline in. They lived in different flats at the Air Niugini Village at Korobose.

Pauline was half Sepik and East New Britain, slim built and wore a tight-fitting, short black skirt exposing firm thighs that were nicely tanned with a tall pair of stiletto.

Hannah couldn’t help admiring the way her ass swayed elegantly as she walked. It was obvious what the men at the airport were so keen to turn their heads to catch a glimpse of.

‘What do you think?’ Pauline asked twirling round and smoothing the short skirt over her bum.

“Damn! You look hot bitch. We should take a selfie to post on Facebook,” Hannah winked.

“Oh bitch, we’ll make the guys go crazy,” Pauline laughed.

They twisted in a provocative pose, made fish lips and took several selfies on Hannah’s phone camera. Hannah selected the best photo and posted it on her Facebook wall and tagged Pauline with the status:

*“Girls just wanna have fun.”* She put a wink emoticon after it.

Within minutes, her Facebook status got over fifty likes and some twenty comments from friends. Most were from young

men saying how sexy they looked. One young man even sent her a message and asked for her number.

“Get lost, you loser!” Hannah replied and blocked him.

She was only interested in men with fancy vehicles and money because they could afford to take her out to the expensive hotels for dinner, spoil her with money and all the fine things in life.

Make up done, Hannah sprayed herself with her favorite perfume and they left for the Camry.

“Nice ride,” Pauline exclaimed as she walked to the passenger seat.

It was Pauline’s first time to ride on Hannah’s new car. Hannah unlocked the car with the remote and both of them got on. She turned on the engine and it came on silently. Hannah carefully reversed out and when she entered the main road, she accelerated.

“Wow! Bad ass baby!” Pauline squealed.

Hannah laughed and overtook several vehicles on their way to Waigani. They started chatting about the latest gossip which was a lot.

“So, whose ride is this?” Pauline asked looking curious.

Hannah wasn’t sure about how to bring up the topic of Phil with her friend. She had been going around discretely with a politician but his wife found out and threatened her on Facebook. Hannah was embarrassed after that issue and kept a low profile for a while. Then, she met Phil, an Australian businessman in his late fifties two weeks ago at the Gold Club. One thing quickly led to another that night and she found

herself rubbing her ass up his groin on the dance floor and having sex with him in a hotel suite. She had no idea how it happened. Phil bought her the Toyota Camry a few days ago as a present and had been transferring large sums of money to her account when she asked.

“Boyfee’s ride,” She replied.

She didn’t want to tell Pauline the whole truth, just enough for the moment. Pauline had some experience with older men too. She had gone out with a landowner from the LNG project in Tari once.

“Who is it?” Pauline kept pestering.

“Oh, just a man I met two weeks ago,” Hannah said.

“Must be another politician again?” she teased.

Hannah raised her eyebrows, not wanting to be reminded of her past. She decided to spill the beans.

“Well, he is an expatriate and much older than me.” she blushed

“You are such a slut. He is married, isn’t he?” Pauline kept teasing.

“Most probably, and over fifty.” Hannah sighed.

“Damn! That is fucked up. What are you going to do?” Pauline asked.

“That was what I was hoping you could help me out with.” Hannah looked worried.

“I am done with married men. It’s too much sneaking around, and I don’t like it. As far as the age difference, I guess I could

live with that as long as he is decently fit, and doesn't try to be my dad, or worse, grandfather." Pauline joked.

"No, no, this guy is cool, for his age, I mean." Hannah laughed.

"Okay, then it's your decision if you want to be a home wrecker or not." Pauline quipped.

"Shit!" Hannah frowned looking disappointed.

"My advice is, stay away from him." Pauline cautioned her.

"Duly noted! We're young, wild and free bitch!" She winked at Pauline.

At the traffic light, Hannah leaned forward and turned on the car stereo. A favorite number was playing and they hummed softly while waiting for the traffic light to turn green already feeling the Friday night party vibes.

++++

The Cosmopolitan Club was filled to capacity that night. The club was brightly lit with strobe lights and a huge reflective ball was suspended over the dance floor and the music was deafening. There were about a dozen people dancing to the pulverizing techno beat. They would dissolve into a white smoke that shot out from the side of the dance floor. Hannah was on her fifth glass of vodka and already feeling the effects of the alcohol.

Hannah walked over to the dance floor pulling Pauline along and started dancing provocatively. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed a white dude. He was sitting at the bar with a drink in his hand and was watching her dance. Hannah's heart skipped a beat.

After the dance, they returned to their table and Hannah whispered to Pauline.

“That white dude there kept staring at me when we were dancing,” she directed Pauline to the expatriate with her eyes.

“Oh My Gosh! He’s so handsome! Go ask him for a dance before I do!” Pauline teased her.

“Nah, forget it,” she felt a little guilty when she thought of Phil and exhaled in regret.

They ordered more glasses of martini and vodka. The night was getting groovier. Hannah took more photographs with her phone to upload on Facebook. The Cosmopolitan was the place where most big shots and businessmen hanged out to celebrate an awesome week or try to forget a miserable one.

++++

Hannah jumped as a hand was placed on her shoulder and she quickly turned. It was the white dude that was staring at her when she was dancing.

“Hi, my name is Brett.” He had an English accent.

“I am Hannah,” she smiled at him.

He was tall and had dark brown eyes. She saw her friend Pauline winking at her in encouragement.

“Would you like to dance with me?” he asked kindly.

“I’d love to,” she accepted.

They made their way through the crowded dance floor until they were in the middle. She pressed her body close to his and kept

rubbing her hips and ass against him and danced passionately. She noticed that half the club was staring at them. She gave a little smile and kept dancing. Hannah loved attention. She was used to all of this, it was a lifestyle she got addicted to. Between music, they would head back to the table where he would buy her drinks from the bar. Hannah was having the time of her life.

++++

Hannah headed for the bar to order more drinks for them. As she was waiting for her drinks she noticed a group of ladies across the bar staring at her. She noticed a somewhat familiar face among them and turned away. Picking up her drinks she quickly made her way back to the table through the crowd. One of the ladies at the bar was the wife of the politician she fooled around with.

*"Damn it!"* she muttered.

Suddenly, she felt someone grab her arm, she spun round and felt a punch in the face.

"So you're the slut that was fucking around with my hubby aye?" The lady yelled.

She punched Hannah several times again in the face viciously. Hannah lost her balance and fell onto the floor. Her nose was bleeding as she tried to get up. Pauline came to her rescue and wrestled the lady to stop.

"Bloody slut! You home wrecker!" The lady kept yelling.

The club bouncers broke up the crowd that gathered around to see what was going on. Brett stood there looking confused about what had just happened.

“You two trouble makers, go home now!” one of the bouncers ordered them.

Pauline helped Hannah up to her feet and gave her some tissue to stop the bleeding. They picked up their handbags before heading towards the door. Hannah sustained a swollen, black eye and her nose was broken. Her nose and mouth were bleeding and the rest of her face was generally beaten up.

Hannah turned back to the lady with a look of anger in her face.

“Fuck you! I am not a home wrecker or a slut! Come anywhere near me again and I will call the Police!” she hissed back.

“That’s enough Hannah! Let’s get you home!” Pauline snapped at her.

## ***FACEBOOK ROMANCE***

Dianne looked at the papers on her desk and sighed. She sorted them out into neat piles and meticulously checked them. There were letters, flyers and invitations to attend some meetings. It took her a while to sort them out in order of priority before sending them over to the General Managers office. She then turned her attention back to the computer to complete the letter to a client that she hadn't completed. It was only ten-thirty am and she'd complete the letter by lunchtime.

There was free Wi-Fi Internet access in the office so she quickly checked her Facebook account and notifications. She used a fake name '*Mummy Boss*' on Facebook. A message notification popped up.

It was from a Facebook friend by the name of *Daddy Boss*.

He sent morning greetings with a picture of a rose in the

message. Dianne smiled.

“Oh, so sweet of you.” She quickly typed him a reply.

*Daddy Boss* seemed to be a magnet for women on Facebook. His real name was William. He was some private lawyer and made lots of money representing politicians in court. He wasn't a George Clooney look-alike but ladies adorned his friend list because he flashed his sports car and cash on Facebook. Not a lot of males but many, many women. It wasn't something Dianne liked, but what could she do? Nothing. She was a married lady with a husband and son.

*“I must be out of my mind!”* she thought.

They had chatted several times. He seemed friendly. However, she never asked him any embarrassing questions about his private life. Was he married? Did he have kids?

“So how's your day going?” Another message appeared.

“Bored here,” she replied.

“Oh, now that's a worry. How can I entertain you?” William teased her.

“I dunno. What type of entertainment do you have in mind?” She typed back with a wink.

“What's your number?” he typed.

Dianne just stared at the screen, feeling a little nervous. Did he just ask for her number? She barely knew him and he already wants her number.

Before she could reply back, he typed again, “Can I have your

number?”

She stared at the words, not knowing how to respond. Finally, she typed.

“Sorry, I can’t give you my number. I mean I don’t give my number to strangers on Facebook.”

She hoped that he would understand and not be hurt by her message.

“So you think I am fake?” He replied back.

Dianne tapped on her desk, thinking what to say next.

“It’s not that. We’re just Facebook friends and let’s keep it that way.” She sighed.

“I am a gentleman who knows how to treat a lady.” He typed

Dianne stared at the message for what seemed like hours, then finally typed in her number. After pressing the send button, she felt her heart beat nervously.

*“Damn it! No!”* She thought to herself. *“I have a husband and a son.”*

A few seconds later, her phone started to buzz. She picked it up nervously. She sighed with relief when she realized that it was just her best friend, Myah. Myah was like a sister to her.

“Hey girl, I was thinking of checking out some clothes at Vision City and lunch after that. You wanna come?” she asked

“Sure,” Dianne replied back.

“Cool! See you in a few minutes time,” she said and hung up.

++++

“Dianne!” Myah cheered as she threw her arms around Dianne.

“Hi Myah,” she said, hugging her back.

They hugged outside the Vision City mall. After they let go, they walked over to the entrance of the mall.

“So, where do you wanna go first?” Myah asked.

It was unusual for her to ask Dianne that because she would always pick the store and never gave Dianne a chance to pick.

“Well, maybe we should go to...”

“Oh!” Myah cut her off. “I know where we should go! Cherish!”

Dianne rolled her eyes as she followed Myah to the first floor of the mall where Cherish was located. It was an expensive clothing and jewelry shop. Dianne wasn’t a huge fan of Cherish. She was more budget conscious and preferred the secondhand clothing shops.

While they were checking out the tops from the rack, Dianne’s phone buzzed. She pulled it out of her pocket and a new number flashed on her screen. Her heart started pounding slowly. She walked away from Myah and answered the call.

“H-hello?” she stammered.

“Hi!” an unfamiliar but friendly male voice said. “Is this Dianne?”

“Uhhh, y-yeah.” Her heart pounded faster.

“Hi Dianne. This is William.” The caller said.

*“Why did you accept the call, you idiot! Hang up!”* Dianne thought to herself.

“Oh h-hi.” She blurted.

“I was hoping we could catch up for lunch. Where are you?” he asked

“Uh...” She pushed her hair back nervously. “I am at Vision City with my girlfriend at Cherish.”

“Oh great! I am heading that way,” he replied.

Dianne blushed and walked back to Cherish. She thought about William and her mind raced, not able to concentrate on what Myah was saying. It was wrong, she was a married lady. What if he husband, Adam found out?

Some good twenty minutes later, her phone vibrated and she snapped out of her reverie. It was William!

“Hi, where are you?” she asked feeling excited.

“I’m outside Cherish. I got you and your friend Big Roster and drinks,” he said.

Dianne paused for a moment. Damn it! She would finally meet her cyber flirt William.

“Okay! We’re coming out,” she giggled.

“Myah, let’s go meet a friend. He’s outside the shop,” she told

Myah.

“Ok, who is he?” Myah was curious.

“I’ll fill you in with the details later. Come...” she said and started walking towards the door.

Outside Cherish, a well-dressed man caught her eye. He wore an expensive suit. Dianne felt herself blush when he smiled at her. She felt her heart skip a few times. He walked over to her.

“Hi, you are Dianne?” He kept smiling

“Yes! You are William right?” she smiled back.

“Here’s your Big Roster packs and drinks. And where’s your friend?” he asked

“She’ll be here in a moment,” Dianne replied still blushing.

They started chatting about the weather and work. William seemed quite charming and Dianne could help but smile.

“Hi William,” Myah cut into their conversation not sounding happy.

*“How did she know William?”* Dianne thought, looking surprised.

William’s face went pale as if he’d seen a ghost. He just wanted to disappear right then and there.

“Oh, hi Myah. I’ll leave you two ladies. Some stuff to complete at the office,” he said and quickly walked away.

“You know William?” she asked Myah when he disappeared.

“He’s a jerk! He’s a womanizer that flirts with all the ladies on Facebook, picks them up with his sports car, buys them lunch, sends them credits and all sorts of things to get into their pants,” she remarked.

“Oh shit!” Dianne frowned.

“Yeah, he has two kids from different ladies. He even messages ladies that have partners too. He kept sending me messages so Sam bashed him up at Gold Club!” Myah laughed.

“He asked to meet me...” Dianne tried to sound innocent.

“Stay away from that douchebag! He’s a womanizer and sugar daddy!” Myah retorted. “You have a good husband and a handsome son.”

Dianne bowed her head in defeat and embarrassment. She felt stupid to flip for William’s sweet words on Facebook.

*“Fuck!”* she swore to herself

“Throw that crap away and let’s go buy our own lunch,” Myah said trying to lighten up Dianne’s gloomy face.

“Thanks girl,” she replied sounding relieved.

Dianne dumped the Big Roster packs and drinks that William gave her and they walk over to the Food Junction to buy lunch. She knew she could trust Myah. Both of them go way back to childhood. They shared secrets, confided with each other and watched each other’s back.

She realized that there were lots of fake people on Facebook and not everything on the social network was true.

*Never trust a person from the outside, but judge him from the inside.*

How could she be so naïve and gullible? She pulled out her phone and quickly went onto Facebook to block William.

“I just blocked that jerk off my friend list,” She said to Myah with a sigh.

## ***RASCAL IN PARADISE***

Allah couldn't bear the oppressive heat from the mid-day sun. He checked that the M16 assault rifle was hidden properly underneath his jacket and leaned against the street light pole pretending that he was resting. His eyes were red and he felt a little light headed from the marijuana joint he had smoked earlier.

From his vantage point outside the bank, he could see into the glass walls of the bank and watched the people inside doing their banking. He studied the two security guards at the bank's entrance. They were unarmed but had a German Sheppard dog with them.

*"The dog must be shot to avoid any possible hiccups,"* he thought.

Three of his friends; Pitz, Buro and Wilz sat in a dark glass Toyota Hilux vehicle parked few meters away from him, all

armed and waited patiently for the right moment. One of the tellers, Joe who lived at the same street at Morata had informed them that there would be a payroll run by the Oil Search company today. Oil Search usually withdrew over two hundred thousand kina in hard cash to pay for its casuals and laborers' at their drilling sites in the jungles.

The bank robbery was a means to an end for Allah. He grew up in the notorious squatter settlements of Morata. Life was a daily struggle for his family. He had completed Grade 12 at Tokara Secondary School two years ago and was selected for the University of Papua New Guinea but his parents couldn't afford the tuition fees. His father was unemployed and would spend his days under the trees gambling and playing cards with the other men from the settlement. His mother would harvest kango from the nearby swamp and sell at the market every day. The little money she made would be used for food. However, she was recently diagnosed with brain tumor and needed money to go for further treatment in Australia. His share of money would be used to support his impoverished family and pay for his mother's medical bills.

He remembered when she had a fit. They took her immediately to the hospital. She could barely keep her eyes open and was admitted to the emergency ward. The doctor announced that she had cancer in the brain and needed chemotherapy treatment which was not available in Papua New Guinea.

"She needs immediate help, but it won't be cheap. She needs to go to Australia for an operation," the doctor had said. "I hope you find a way."

So weeks have passed and every day Allah would go visit his mother. He told her that he was going to find a way to get the thirty thousand kina that was needed for her treatment. Now

was his only chance to get that money.

Allah felt a little nervous. So many rascals were killed by the police. He rubbed the sweat on his face, trying to focus on the plan. They had planned to hold the Oil Search pick-up vehicle at gun point as soon as the cash was withdrawn and brought out of the bank. Allah's job was to make sure no one came near the vicinity of the bank when the robbery was taking place.

An Oil Search company vehicle pulled up next to the Hilux at exactly one o'clock just as Joe had mentioned. A police vehicle with two policemen escorted it. A smartly dressed employee of Oil Search walked into the bank and after some minutes walked out with a large trunk box. The security guards assisted him to carry it to the waiting company vehicle. It was time to move!

The doors of the Hilux suddenly opened. Pitz jumped out and fired a volley of shots at the policemen. Both of them fell down instantly. Buro jumped out from the other side and shot the dog before yelling at the security guards and the Oil Search employee carrying the trunk box to sleep face down on the pavement.

Allah quickly slipped a black mask over his head and pulled out the M16 rifle. His hands were shaking and under a normal mind he would have reconsidered his options. But he was drugged and his body was full of adrenaline. He cocked the rifle and ran over to the middle of the road.

"Down on the ground! Nobody moves or I'll blow your brains off!" Allah yelled and pointed the rifle at the crowd of bystanders. They scattered in fear.

"Put the trunk box onto the Hilux now!" Pitz ordered the guards. They complied submissively and loaded the trunk box on the getaway vehicle.

“On the ground now!” Pitz ordered them to sleep on the pavement again.

Pitz signaled the boys to retreat back to the Hilux. Wilz had the engine running and he rammed it several times, ready for a fast take off. Allah gave a warning shot before running over to the Hilux and jumped in quickly. Wilz reversed and quickly accelerated down the road towards the freeway. They overtook several vehicles before turning off into the road leading towards the airport and the Hiritano Highway.

Police vehicles were nowhere to be seen. Allah felt a sense of relief run through his shaking body. They needed to get to 9 mile and take the back road to Gerehu Stage 7 fast. At this point, every police vehicle in the city would be on alert. Pitz quickly cut open the locks on the trunk box and loaded all the K 100 and K 50 notes into an old bag they had brought. It wasn't long before they reached the outskirts of Gerehu Stage 7 via the back road. No one was in sight, they quickly changed into different clothes and abandoned the Hilux. They had loaded their guns into hiking bags and separated to catch PMV buses without raising some sort of alarm.

They all made it back to Morata safely. Their plan had worked out perfectly or so Allah thought.

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It was late in the evening and Allah wanted to drink beer. His mouth watered at the prospect of a cold carton of South Pacific lager. That afternoon they had distributed the cash among themselves including Joe and he was given forty thousand kina as his share. Allah had never had such a large amount of money in his whole life. He gave thirty nine thousand kina to his mother for her medical bills as well as buy food for the house.

The remaining one thousand kina was his to burn.

Allah found Pitz at the buai market. Pitz was drunk and chatting away with the buai sellers. Pitz took a SP bottle out of his pocket and offered him.

“Brother, drink!” Pitz was in a merry mood.

Allah opened the bottle with his teeth and took a large gulp of the beer quenching his thirst. It tasted really good.

“Ah-h, this is real beer,” he remarked.

“Cheers!” he tossed his bottle against Pitz bottle.

He removed a hundred kind from his pocket and sent a boy to buy a carton of beer from the nearby trade store. By the sixth bottle, Allah was drunk. The sort of drunken state where everything is beautiful and perfect and every lady looks like an angel. A lady walked by and he whistled at her. She ignored him.

“Naispla ya! Nogat makmak na moson!” he said in Pidgin and laughed.

“She’s a married lady,” Pitz said.

“I don’t care brother,” he smirked.

Allah and Pitz finished drinking the carton of beer and walked over to the trade store where they sell beer. They bought another carton.

“Let’s go to your house and drink there,” Pitz suggested.

“Ok, let’s go” Allah was already really drunk.

“Carry the carton and go first. I’ll look for Wilz and Buro and we’ll come over to your place,” he said.

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As he passed the side street leading to his house, Allah heard someone tell him to stand. He turned ninety degrees to face the voice. The empty street was littered with semi-permanent houses and insufficiently lit by sickly yellow street lights. He was drunk and seeing double figures so he couldn’t work out who they were.

“Who are you?” he asked.

“Stand where you are! Don’t move!” one of them ordered.

He was older and clearly a person of authority. The other two young policemen stood on either side of him. He looked overweight but the way he moved towards Allah hinted that it was accompanied by agility. He pulled a pistol from his side and pulled the hammer. Click.

*“Ob shit! Police!”* Allah realized but it was too late.

If he ran, he’d be shot in the back. The prospect of being shot in the back was not something he would relish.

“Where did you get the money to drink?” the senior policeman asked.

“Ah-h, from my market money boss,” Allah tried to sober up and act normal.

“You’re under arrest,” the senior policeman said.

The policemen surrounded him. Two of them hauled him

towards the police vehicle that was parked in the dark with its lights turned off. Allah hesitated and felt a fist land on his jaw. He fell on the ground letting go of the beer carton. Several bottles smashed when the carton landed on the ground.

The next thing Allah knew he was on the ground trying to protect himself from three sets of boots. They were all around him. He writhed on the ground. He raised his arms trying in vain to fend off the next attack.

“Boss, please I didn’t do anything,” he cried.

Allah tried to shield himself, tried to find some sanctuary from the blows. It felt as though pain was a volume switch being turned up and up in different parts of his body. He rolled over on his back just in time to see the butt of a gun.

Everything went black.

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Some hours later, Allah opened his eyes slowly. A white light from the ceiling dazed him. He was unsure whether it was because of the brightness of the light or if it was because he was unadjusted to the light. After squinting a little, his vision cleared up and he saw a brick wall and iron bars blocking off any possibility of escaping.

He was in a prison. It took him a minute to figure out what the hell he would be doing in a prison.

All of a sudden he had a flashback. He remembered the three policemen kicking the living daylights out of him. At exactly the same time he felt the pain. It ran through the whole of his body. He couldn't feel his arms or legs or his chest, only the pain. He could feel each blow again and again.

*“Please use the money for your treatment and get well soon. I love you*

*mum,*” He whispered to himself and closed his eyes trying to forget the pain.

## **AFTERNOON ENCOUNTER**

*(A true story based on the author's experience while working at the Provincial Health Office in Alotau, Milne Bay Province from 2009-2012)*

It was a just another usual fortnight Friday afternoon. The clock in my office showed four-thirty pm. I saved the cashbook and ledgers I was working on and shut down my laptop somehow feeling happy that the weekend had finally arrived. It was a stressful week sorting out payments and allowances for the provincial health officers to do their routine supervisory visits to the districts.

I was about twenty four years old and was a contract staff of an Australian Aid development program based at the Milne Bay Provincial Health Office in Alotau. I managed the Health Sector Improvement Program Trust Account and all donor funds given for health programs in the province. It was a demanding job but

I was an enthusiastic and smart, young accountant who managed the trust account prudently. My bosses were proud of me, even the staff at the National Department of Health spoke highly of me. In fact, Milne Bay province was ranked as the top-performing province in terms to key health indicators partly due to my contribution.

The afternoon sun was still burning hot when I walked out of the office. My boss, from Manus was also leaving the office.

“You have a nice weekend Jordan,” he said.

“Thanks boss,” I replied and watched him drive off in the fifth element vehicle that was purchased from the trust account.

*“One day, I’ll be a boss too,”* I thought and sighed!

I stood for a while under the tree beside the office to shelter from the heat thinking of what to do or where to go next. Pulling out my cellphone, I found Brendan’s number and called him.

Brendan was my schoolmate and friend from Cameron Secondary School. He had dropped out of Grade 10 while I continued to Grade 11 and 12 and onto university. But he managed to get into a family business and was doing quite well. He had a Toyota Corolla, which he allowed me to use from time to time for urgent runs, go out partying or to take ladies out on a date. I dated a new lady almost every month. I didn’t know whether it was my good looks or the money but I didn’t care. I was only concerned about getting laid. Brendan jokingly called me ‘Elvis Priestley’ because of my prowess with the ladies.

“Yes Elvis,” Brendan answered.

“Bro, you have any bright plans for tonight?” I asked

“Nothing interesting. What’s up?” he knew I was up to something.

“Just want to have a few drinks and watch karaoke at Airways,” I said

“Cool, so where are you now?” he asked with a happy tone.

Brendan loved drinking beer and it showed on his protruding tummy. He was a slim guy but had put on a few kilograms lately due to his alcohol consumption.

“I am outside my office but will walk over to the beachfront market to look for cigarettes while waiting for you,” I said

“Okay, give me thirty minutes to sort out a few things,” he replied

It was almost five o’clock and the sun was losing its heat now. I walked slowly over to the market at the Sanderson Bay beachfront. It was only a three minutes stroll away from my office.

The beachfront was a hive of activities and people. The pathway from one end of the bay to the other was littered on both sides with street vendors with their tables and umbrellas. I would sometimes joke and call this area, the *‘Umbrella City’* of Alotau. People from the surrounding squatter settlements and the cargo boats at dock would mingle around here until late at night. The informal street market flourished and the vendors would make about K400 to K500 a day selling their items there. They sold items from scones, betel nuts, and cigarettes, cordial drinks to diving torches, sunglasses, clothes and fuel.

At around 4 pm when the main market in town closed, the villagers would bring their vegetables, fish, fruits, and other

garden food that were not bought to the Sanderson Bay beachfront to sell and make extra money before boarding the late PMVs at 6 pm to head back to their villages along the highway to East Cape and Garuahi on the north coast.

The first vendor's table from my office, near the small creek from Duau Compound was my favorite table. Bolo, the young man that minded it was from Suau and had become my good friend after realizing that I was a frequent customer to his table. For me, it was the convenience of not having to walk further to buy a cigarette since it was the nearest one. He would allow me to collect cigarettes and buai on credit when I was short on cash and when my pay came in on business week, I would pay for it. I always paid up and he trusted me.

"Afternoon boss," Bolo greeted me.

"Afternoon bro. Looks like a busy afternoon," I said observing the place.

"You know it already," he smiled.

I knew from the smile that he had made a fair amount of money today. I've had several friendly chats on my frequent visits for cigarettes with Bolo about his informal business and his aspirations. Bolo was a Grade 8 dropout from the village school and had come to town to live with his uncle at the settlement on the hillside. His uncle had given him K100 to buy a few items to sell and now he had saved over a thousand kina in his Micro-Finance Bank account. Bolo wanted to raise enough money to buy a dinghy and outboard motor to go fishing and sell at the market. I admired his determination.

The sun was slowing disappearing over the Pini Range in the western end of the bay. Bolo handed me a stool from his market

table to sit down. I watched as the working class people with vehicles parked beside the road and hurried about to grab some vegetables for dinner. I checked the time on my cell phone. It was only 5:20 pm. There was still time before Brendan arrived.

I grabbed a betel nut from Bolos table and husked it before chewing it with mustard and lime. Then got five cigarettes. Buai goes well with cigarette and I felt good. I gave Bolo a K50 note and collected K20 worth of flex. Bolo calculated the amount for the flex, cigarettes and betel nuts before giving my change.

“Go buy yourself a drink,” I gave him a K5 note.

“Thanks boss!” he smiled in appreciation.

I quickly entered the flex card numbers and subscribed for a data package from Digicel to access my Facebook account. I was so addicted to Facebook and would spend a lot of money buying flex cards. My mum would advise me to cut down on the flex but what the heck! It was my money and I made my own decisions.

Then, I saw him! An old man in his late fifties and probably lived in one of the nearby squatter settlements. He wore an old shirt and had some white hair. What caught my attention was that he kept looking at a bunch of bananas on sale. He turned it over and over, felt it, asked much it was then walked away quietly. Some minutes later, he walked back again and asked the lady who was selling the bananas again. She told him the price and the old man walked away again.

I kept watching the old man intrigued by his movements. He stood under the nearby tree deep in thought. He stood for probably fifteen minutes and then walked back to the lady selling the bananas. Again she told him the price and he bowed

his head in defeat and walked away.

Something bothered me so I stopped him when he passed by Bolo's table on his way to Duau Compound, the squatter settlement nearby.

"Hey father, you okay?" I asked him.

The old man didn't reply. He just looked at me. He looked worried and helpless. I could see the pain in his eyes.

"I saw you going back and forth checking the bunch of bananas over there," I said trying to get him to talk.

"I can't afford it. She couldn't reduce the price. It's K4 and I have only K2," he muttered and bowed his head in response.

"What were you planning on doing with it?" I was curious.

"I have nothing at home. That banana would have made my family a good meal. Maybe one banana each but still okay," he said

His response broke my heart! I couldn't utter a single word and suddenly felt a pain inside me for the old man and his family.

*Here I was spending so much money on unnecessary things while a fellow countryman had only K2 in his pocket and a family to feed!*

I felt my entire body tremble with the feeling of guilt. My conscious was bothered.

"Here, go buy the banana and some protein for your dinner," I pulled out a K50 from my wallet and gave him.

He stood there completely lost not knowing what to do, whether to smile or cry. After a moments silence, he looked at

me. This time I saw a bright look in his eyes.

“Thank you very much son. I don’t know how I can repay your kindness but God will surely bless you,” he said with a tear in his eye.

“Don’t worry about it father. Just go buy the banana before the lady hops on the next PMV,” I ordered him.

“Okay, but thank you again. God bless your kind heart,” he said and walked back to the lady selling the banana.

“You welcome,” I smiled.

I felt his words and slowly took in a deep breath. Deep inside, I felt that I had done something good. I had helped a man in need.

*“At least, someone else would breathe easy because I lived,”* I thought and smiled happily.

I decided not to go out drinking that night after the encounter I had with the old man.

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Brendan arrived some time later looking excited. He had parked the Corolla on the other side of the market and walked over to Bolo’s table. He knew that was my favorite table and would find me there.

“Have a cigarette and chew one buai bro,” I said when he arrived.

“Thanks bro,” he said and got two cigarettes and lit one. “So what’s the plan? We got grab a six pack from Toto’s black market to warm up before going to Airways?”

“Nah, I changed my mind bro. I’ll give you some money to get your six-pack. I don’t feel like going out,” I stated politely.

“What?” Brendan looked at me in disbelief.

“Yup, drop me off at home. I’ll give you K50 for your six pack,” I offered.

“Okay Elvis. Something happened?” he kept asking.

I told him about the encounter with the old man and Brendan finally understood.

“I think you’re right. Get us some buai and cigarettes and I’ll drop you off at home. We can go out another time,” Brendan said.

“Thanks bro,” I said feeling relieved.

We bought about K20 worth of betel nuts and a packet of cigarettes from Bolo before leaving for Brendan’s vehicle.

The sun had gone and darkness was crawling in. My mind wandered off to the families all over the country who would be cooking their meals at this time. Some would be cooking delicious meals with chicken or lamb or fish. Others would be dining at expensive hotels. Others would make do with whatever little they had and others may go to bed hungry and hoping that the next day would turn out better. The old man I had helped would cook the bunch of bananas. I hoped he had bought some aibika and fish to go with the bananas.

*“May God bless the old man and others like him!”* I prayed quietly in my heart.

## **SILENT TEARS**

*(A true story based on the author's experience while working at the Provincial Health Office in Daru, Western Province from 2013-2014)*

I arrived for work early as usual. Being a senior officer had its responsibilities. The Provincial Health Office for Western province was located beside the Crow's Nest Hotel. It was a three bedroom house that belonged to the Wyborn family who were also the owners of the hotel. The Fly River Provincial Government didn't have enough money to build an office complex in Daru to house all the government agencies so we rented residential properties and worked from there.

Daru was a difficult place to live and work in and was called the 'Wild West' by the expatriate advisors and consultants that worked there. Basic services such as telephone and television services were non-existent and the town's water supply was unreliable. It had serious law and order issues and there was

wide-spread poverty in the small township with so many squatter settlements and beggars around. A lot of the luxuries that one enjoys in other towns and cities in Papua New Guinea such as Cadbury chocolates, lamingtons, meat pies, taxis and bus services were not available in Daru. There wasn't any secondhand shops too. The status of health services in Western province was among the lowest in the country and my job was to help improve it.

I was a contract staff of the Health and HIV Implementation Service Provider, an Australian Aid program managed by JTAI Limited and was transferred from Milne Bay province to Western province in 2013. As the Senior Finance and Budget Officer, I managed all the funds; recurrent, internal revenue, donor funds and other special grants at the Provincial Health Office. However, accommodation was a big problem in Daru. I was at the point of giving up and jumping on the next flight out of Daru when the Director for Health Services, Alice Bossmeri allowed me to move into the AusAid duplex. She lived on one side and the other side was vacant. Anyway, I managed to settle in comfortably and blended in with the simple, small town lifestyle.

I had a heart for the people and wanted to help improve governance and financial accountability so that health services were delivered and felt at the health centre and rural community level. I wanted to change the world for better.

It was still eight am and the Project Officer, Ian Gera wasn't in the office yet. I had assigned him to furnish me with all the acquittals for the irregular items that appeared on the audit report. I took out my phone and texted him to make sure he would come to work. He replied that he was on his way. Kevin, the office driver walked in and came over to sit on the chair near

my table.

“Boss, you have an extra cigarette to spare?” he asked politely.

“Here,” I said and gave him a cigarette. “But when you’re going to town, come see me so I can give you some money to buy our buai and smoke for the day.”

“No worries boss,” he said and walked out of my office to smoke.

I carefully checked the arch-lever folders that contained all the acquittals behind my table. The Health Sector Improvement Program trust account for Western province was shut down by the National Department of Health in 2012 after audits revealed gross mismanagement and non-compliance of the Public Finance and Management Act. When I first started work at the office, I immediately sorted out the outstanding acquittals and re-established the Provincial Health Finance Committee to provide oversight and approve funding for the implementation of the various health programs. When the audits were done in April, 2013, they were impressed with the drastic improvement in the management of the trust account and reopened it with the first tranche given in May that year. Since then, I made sure that all payments were acquitted and field reports were provided.

After an hour or so examining all the acquittals, I turned back to my laptop to read through the electronic copy of the last audit report again.

*“At least, we passed the twenty percent threshold required for the release of the next tranche,”* I thought to myself.

I was good at my job and felt confident that most of the expenditures were acquitted.

“Jordan, can you sign these requisitions urgently?” Celestine, the Administration Officer said placing a folder on my table.

I looked through the requisitions making sure all the necessary documents were attached before signing the Finance Forms. Celestine picked up the folder to give it to the Director for her signature.

Phil Whiteman walked in, looking quite stressed. Phil Whiteman was my immediate supervisor and the Provincial Health Advisor. Although an Australian, he had worked in the various parts of Papua New Guinea for over fifteen years and had vast management experience in the health sector. Phil was in his sixties and a typical, arrogant Australian.

“Jordan, can you email me the financial reports for the trust account today so I can put it in my weekly report to the office in Port Moresby?” Phil requested.

“Sure, I’ll work on it and email it over probably after lunch,” I replied.

“Thanks. Are we safe for the next audits?” He asked.

“We should be okay. But I’ll work on the outstanding issues with Ian to try reduce the threshold to less than 10 percent,” I said confidently.

“Perfect!” Phil sounded pleased.

After a brief chat about work, he left to have a chat with the Director in her office before heading home. Phil worked out of his house but called into the office every now and then for meetings or when he needed some information. I got back to my laptop to finalize the financial reports that Phil asked for. I

entered all the transactions for the month into the cashbook and quickly did the bank reconciliation. I was working on the management report when two policemen entered the office.

“Morning. You here for something?” I asked

“Yes. We are here to take you,” one of them said.

He’s name was Brian. Daru is a small place so we knew each other.

“Oh? What’s this regarding?” I was alarmed

“It’s about a post you put on Facebook last night. The complainant is at the police station so we’re here to take you in. Just for you to provide some explanation about the post,” Brian explained

“Ok, sure,” I said and logged off my laptop before following them to the police vehicle that was parked outside.

The previous night, I had posted in the Fly River group about a contract that was awarded to a local fuel company, Daru Fuels under the pretext of the Daru Beautification Project. From observation, only grass cutting activities were done yet there was some inside information that several millions of kina was paid. Things looked fishy and I knew it was just a deception to divert monies from the public purse.

Sobou Awa’ae, the Managing Director of Daru Fuels looked furious when I arrived at the police station. He had brought several of his relatives for support. All their eyes were on me and I felt a little nervous.

“So you are Jordan?” Sobou asked angrily.

“Yes,” I answered nervously.

“Are these your words?” the Police Station Commander asked.

He handed me a print out of my post in the Fly River group. I looked at it and nodded.

“Who are you to poke your nose into our business?” Sobou snapped. “Are you the authority? Who are you?”

“That post is an observation of what is actually going on in Daru and was for discussion purposes only,” I said defensively.

“That’s defamation to my company! I can charge you for that!” Sobou started yelling at me.

The Police Station Commander told Sobou to calm down. He read through the print out and turned to me.

“There’s proper ways to go about with this type of issue, but not post it on Facebook,” he advised.

I kept quiet and listened to the Police Station Commander talk about national security issues and the current rumors’ about the Governor for Western province and Namu Awa’ae diverting PSIP funds were not true. Namu was Sobou’s elder brother.

“What you posted on Facebook is just a speculation,” he said.

“My apologizes for any inconvenience caused,” I murmured.

“I want you to post an apology to the Daru Fuel company in the Fly River group and delete your previous post!” Sobou ordered. “And zip your mouth ok! This is not your province!”

“Okay,” I said in defeat.

An angry feeling built up inside me. The original information

about the misappropriation was put out on the public domain by the former Provincial Administrator. Why should I apologize? Where public funds were concerned, everyone has a right to ask questions. If the speculations made on my post were not true, simply rebut the ‘untruths’ with the ‘truths’ as they know it and clear the air. The story about the Daru Beautification Project wasn’t a top secret. Everyone in Daru was talking about it. Yet the Police Station Commander had ordered me to stop discussing about it as if it was a top secret. And don’t we have the freedom of speech and expression in our constitution? They were just simply diverting attention.

*“Fucking corrupt people. I hope justice is served!”* I cursed quietly.

I stood there for a while to calm down before leaving the police station.

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Back in the office, I logged on to my laptop and tried to complete the management report I was working on. The continuous buzzing of my mobile phone was annoying so I checked who the caller was. It was the HHISP office in Port Moresby.

“Hello,” I answered.

“Morning Jordan. I have a caller on the line for you,” the lady on the other end said.

“Hi Jordan, this is Richard Fitzgerald,” Richard said.

Richard Fitzgerald was the Human Resource Manager. An Australian too, he was a short and small man in size.

“Hi Richard,” I sensed that something was wrong.

“We are suspending you from work. We will look into the facts and advise you of the outcome. In the meantime, you are required to leave the office,” he said.

I felt the blood drain from my face. I simply couldn't believe it or take it in, nor grasp the implications of it.

*“No, this wasn't happening to me; it couldn't be happening,”* I thought to myself.

I knew it was Phil Whiteman who reported the matter to head office. Phil was like a spy sent to Western province. Sometimes, I wondered if the expatriate advisors were really qualified because most of the time, we locals did all the work. They would just compile our reports and were paid ten times more than us. A surge of anger built up inside me and I grinded my teeth in an effort to control it. Sweat formed on my forehead.

“Okay,” I said and hung up.

Why wasn't I asked to give my side of the story before suspending me? This was so unfair. More anger boiled up inside me.

*“Fuck shit!”* I mumbled.

I was too stunned to take it in. So many thoughts swirled around in my mind. It took some time before the realization sank in. I walked out of the office and lit a cigarette, trying my best to calm down. Kevin joined me to have a cigarette.

“Bro, I'll pack up my laptop and you drop me off at home,” I said to him.

“What? Something wrong?” he asked looking surprised.

“Just not feeling well today,” I lied.

++++

I slept in the next day. The sun was shining and a warm breeze blew through the open window when I woke up but I felt a mixture of emotions. I was still angry for been suspended without even a chance to explain myself and also regretted posting on Facebook. The hours dragged on but I couldn't take my mind off the suspension. I feared the outcome wouldn't be favorable for me. Phil Whiteman had some connection with the Daru Fuel company and I knew they would use their weight around to get rid of me. I pulled out my Blackberry phone and typed an email to Richard Fitzgerald to justify myself.

*"Good morning Richard.*

*The issue was sorted out already and the complainant required my apology, which I did. I stated clearly in my email to Phil that it was a personal opinion and observation, which doesn't represent or concern Provincial Health or HHISP, outside of working hours using my personal phone and credits. I didn't breach anything in the ICT policy. Probably seen as 'offensive' post but it was resolved already. I apologize for any inconvenience caused. It won't happen again.*

*I await your decision and will be more than happy to move out of Daru. I'll need my demobilization (return airfares to Alotau and 200kg excess to airfreight my household items back to my hometown) and any entitlements in lieu of my termination.*

*Please note, I require a written letter of suspension and termination as stated in my contract.*

*And I wish to seek further clarification and legal advice on my employment contract and termination and any personal loss that ensues.*

*Thanks."*

I clicked on the send button and walked out to the kitchen. I poured myself a glass of Ballantine's whiskey and went out onto the verandah to clear my thoughts. I looked down to the beach where the Frog Town squatter settlement was located and slowly sipped the whiskey. Birds were chirping from the nearby mango tree and I could hear people at the settlement laughing. It was a beautiful day after all.

There was music coming from the next-door apartment and I leaned out a bit to see around the brick wall that divided the duplex. It was Alice Bossmeri's son Gibson. He was the same age as me but unemployed.

Richard Fitzgerald called some minutes later and informed me that the issue had gone to the Brisbane office and that they were still investigating the matter. He also mentioned that it was serious so that I am aware and won't be surprised by the ramifications.

I threw the glass of whiskey angrily to the flower gardens below.

*'Fuck!'* I swore in resentment.

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After lunch, Kevin dropped by the house with my e-ticket.

"Boss, Phil Whiteman gave me your ticket and said you should pack your stuff to travel out next week," Kevin said with a concerned look.

"Oh? Okay. I'll do that right away," I mumbled.

For a moment, I couldn't think clearly. I stared at Kevin expressionless. I didn't know whether to be angry or cry. I felt a lump in my throat and swallowed hard to look calm on the

outside. I knew what the ticket meant although not mentioned. I was terminated without any proper explanation or formal letter in writing. It was a bitter pill to swallow.

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I checked in to get a boarding pass an hour early at the Daru terminal and walked out to chew a betel nut and have a cigarette while waiting for the Airlines PNG flight to arrive from Kiunga. I had only two bags and a hand luggage. All my cooking utensils, gardening tools, curtains, mattress, pillows and everything I bought for the three bedroom apartment were given away to my colleagues at the health office. I was going back home empty handed.

Kevin was with me at the airport. He was the first person I got to know when I arrived in Daru over a year ago and became a good brother and friend. I could see the sadness in his eyes.

“Here, have a cigarette and stop feeling sorry for me,” I tried to cheer him.

Colleagues from the office came to the airport to farewell me. I hugged all of them and thanked them for everything. They drove back to the office but Kevin remained to see me off.

I thought back to all the memorable moments I had there. Daru became my home for over a year. It was usually boring over the weekends so I kept myself busy with my small garden in the backyard. I had planted peanuts, pumpkin, aibika, sugar cane, ginger, betel nuts and even lemon grass. I loved the feeling of seeing the plants grow up healthy. I also bought a cute, chubby puppy from the Post Office Manager and called it Snoopy. It would sleep with me in the master bedroom. Snoopy had his budget in my salary. He had his own pillow, small mattress,

towel and shampoo. I loved Snoopy and treated him like a human being.

The arrival of an Airlines PNG Dash 8 aircraft brought me back to reality. Passengers from Kiunga disembarked and several minutes later, passengers for Port Moresby were asked to board the aircraft.

“Ok bala. We will see each other one fine day,” I almost cried when hugging Kevin.

“Take care bala,” Kevin’s eyes were red.

I took a deep breath, swung the hand luggage bag over my shoulder and followed the queue of passengers. It was then that I felt tears form in my eyes. I took one last look back at the terminal and saw Kevin waving among the crowd.

*“Goodbye bala! Goodbye Daru!”* I waved back before boarding the aircraft.

I tried to be strong but I couldn’t. My heart was shattered into a thousand pieces and I cried silently. I cried for Kevin and all my colleagues at the office. I cried for my apartment and garden. I cried for Snoopy. I cried for Daru and Western province. I cried for been unfairly terminated. I cried for the injustice done to me.

*“God is not blind. He has seen all my pain and silent tears. I hope all those corrupt people are brought to justice one day!”*

I prayed quietly.

I was now unemployed and didn’t know what the future had in store for me. More tears rolled down my checks.

## ***BUS RIDE***

The bus stop in Down Town was crowded. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon and many of the office workers were rushing to get on the buses to go home. I worked as a junior accountant with the Price Waterhouse Coopers accounting firm that was located at Deloitte Tower. The roads in Down Town were widened and a traffic light installed recently to cater for the ever increasing traffic. I stood on the other side and wanted to cross over to the bus stop, but seeing how the vehicles were speeding by, I knew that it was dangerous to do so. I decided to walk over to the traffic light and wait for it to change to red so I could cross.

An old man, a beggar sat beside the road with his arms outstretched. I felt sorry for him and dropped several one kina coins into the carton placed in front of him. I reached the traffic light area and waited with a group of people. Vehicles sped by

sending their obnoxious fumes towards us. After some minutes, the traffic light changed to red and vehicles screeched to a halt behind the white lines except for one vehicle that made a dash past even though the traffic light was red.

Several people swore at the driver. Commuters in Port Moresby were too seasoned to trust the traffic lights completely.

“Asshole driver!” someone shouted loudly at the driver.

*“That’s the type of attitude that’s why Papua New Guinea never develops,”* I sighed.

We crossed briskly to the other side and other people crossed over to our previous side. There were two kai-bars and the smell emanating from those kai-bars tingled my nose. The mixture of garlic, lamb, fish and spices made a potent combination. I held my breath for a moment as I walked past feeling the pangs of hunger crawl up in my tummy. I always wondered how the people working inside the kai-bars could stand the smell. Perhaps, they were used to it.

I made my way quickly towards the bus stop. There were too many people pushing and shoving to get on the buses. I stood patiently at the side not wanting to be in the middle of the crowd. It was common for pickpockets to mingle with the crowd and when they rushed for a bus, they would snatch commuters’ bilums and bags. I carefully scanned the crowd for any police presence before going over to a highlands man that was standing nearby.

“Buai stap ah?” I asked.

“Em stap. Wan kina lo wanpla,” he replied.

“Tupla kam. Kambang wantaim,” I requested and handed him a K2 note.

He put his hand into a bilum that was hidden under his shirt and gave me two betel nuts with mustard and a lime bottle. Buai sellers were very discrete with their business activities since the National Capital District Governor announced a ban on betel nut selling and chewing in Port Moresby city. I chewed the betel nut quickly and bought two cigarettes to smoke. The cigarettes made me feel relaxed from the stress at work.

After some time, the crowd lessened and several buses had some seats available. I boarded one of the buses. It was filled in no time and some passengers literally hanged onto the door of the bus. I secured a seat beside the window. An attractive young, working-class lady sat next to me. From her features, I guessed she was from Manus.

Putting on my headphones firmly on my ears, I watched the ocean as we passed Ela Beach towards Koki Market. The afternoon breeze blew straight into my face and I thought back to my village. I would go down to the beach and watch the beautiful sunset. The pretty Manus lady tapped me on my arm and broke into my reverie.

“Bus crew is collecting bus fares,” she said and smiled.

“Oh? Okay,” I took out a K1 from my shirt pocket and handed it over to her to pass onto the bus crew.

At Koki Market, several passengers left and new ones got on. The bus sped off again towards Badili. There, more passenger got off. A group of men with eyes that clearly looked stoned from marijuana got on. One of them studied the passengers and said something to his friend.

The bus slowly climbed up the 2-mile hill and one of the men from the group that got on at Badili shouted for the driver to stop. The driver slowed down the bus and pulled up into the bus stop. Almost simultaneously, the boys removed sharp, pointed knives from the pockets and the driver, bus crew and passengers were caught by surprise. The bus crew had a sharp knife against his throat.

“Hand over all your bags, mobile phones and wallets!” One of the men yelled at the passengers.

Everyone started handing over their possessions out of fear for their lives. The smallest of the group, looked like he was from Goilala, walked over and tried to pull the bag off the Manus lady sitting next to me.

“Please...please don't take my bag...” she begged in tears.

“Give me the damn bag or else...” the small man threatened her.

His breath was filled with the smell of alcohol and his teeth were slightly rotting. The Manus lady kept holding onto her bag and I could tell that the small Goilala man was getting impatient. He suddenly stabbed her in the arm and she screamed in pain. The other women in the bus started screaming in terror and the robbers panicked.

I was scared and sat very still, hoping to prevent more bloodshed. Until that moment, I had never known the meaning of fear. The Goilala man quickly snatched the bag from the Manus lady and left the bus. His friends followed and they all ran down the hill towards the 2 mile settlement. The Manus lady was bleeding badly and she was crying in pain. I used her face towel to apply some pressure to slow the bleeding.

“Can we take her to the hospital please?” I asked the driver.

“Yes, we’ll go there then go over to Boroko,” the driver replied and we sped off towards the Port Moresby General Hospital.

I turned back to the lady and asked for her name and if she wanted any of her family members to know about her condition. Lucky for me, the robbers didn’t get to me and I still had my phone. Her name was Angela.

“Please call my mum,” she cried and told me her mum’s number.

I called Angela’s mum and informed her about her daughter and that she will be dropped off at the hospital.

“You’ll be okay on your own before your parents arrive?” I was worried.

“Can you stay with me please?” she begged with tearful eyes.

I was starving and couldn’t wait to get home and have dinner. But the poor lady looked so helpless and I couldn’t leave her.

When we arrived at the hospital, I stood up and helped her out of the bus and to the emergency area. There was a long queue of patients and people there.

I started up a conversation with Angela, asking where she lived and worked. She answered all of my questions keeping up the casual conversation but never taking her eyes off me.

*“It’s going to be a long night ahead!”* I sighed feeling hungry.

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A week later after the incident on the bus, I was busy working

on a client's tax returns when my mobile phone rang. It was a new number. I didn't like entertaining unknown numbers so decided to let it ring out

*"Some people don't check their numbers properly and dial the wrong numbers,"* I thought.

My phone kept ringing and I got really annoyed.

"Yes! Who's this?" I snapped.

"Hi," a female voice paused. "Is this Tony?"

"Yes, and you are?" I answered.

"Hi Tony. It's me Angela from the bus and hospital incident," she said.

I remembered giving her my mobile number when she asked at the hospital.

"Hi Angela," I calmed down. "How are you and how's your arm?"

"Still sore but I am okay," she said. "You wanna hang out for lunch with me?"

"Okay? I mean sure," I said.

"That's if you're single," she laughed.

"What?" I was caught off guard with that remark.

"Oh you know. I am single so it's your call," she teased.

"See you at lunch time then," I smiled and ended the call.

*"Wow! Unexpected romance,"* I thought still smiling.

## *HIGHWAY TO PARADISE*

Pyaso and his boys were flying his new Toyota Land Cruiser Ten-sitter on the Highlands highway. At a hundred and fifty miles per hour, they overtook all the vehicles along the highway and headed for forty mile. The midday sun shone down on the Markham Valley as the savannah grassland rolled by.

“Leader, drive easy ya,” Kuti said and chuckled.

“Relax bruh,” Pyaso smiled and concentrated on driving at top speed.

Pyaso was in high spirits at that moment. He was a mining engineer with Ok Tedi Mining in Tabubil and was on break. He had a four weeks on and two weeks off schedule. At twenty-five, he had a highly paid fly-in, fly-out job and he felt invincible. He was from T’sak Valley in Enga province.

His best buddies from childhood were Kuti and Patrick. Kuti was from Banz, Western Highlands and Patrick was from Yangoru, East Sepik and they were neighbors at Tent City in Lae. Every time, he was on break, they would drink non-stop.

That Saturday, they had decided to have some beer and cruise along the highlands highway. After buying two cartons of stubbies from Food Mart and loading the bottles into an esky filled with ice cubes, they headed off for the highway.

The stereo in the Land cruiser was on full blast and Haus Boi's song 'Highway to Paradise' was on repeat. The lyrics matched the moment perfectly.

*"I leave haus boi Lae city, take a leave, take a ride.  
Where the children wave and smile, it's a bright and sunny day...  
Hitim 140 na overtake nambaut,  
highway to paradise mipla e singaut,  
Paradise.  
I am on the highway to paradise..."*

They all knew the lyrics by heart and sang in unison like a choir although out of tune. When they passed Nadzab airport, Patrick opened a bottle and passed it over to Pyaso.

"Leader, your drink," Patrick said.

Patrick opened another two bottles for Kuti and himself. They tossed their bottles and started drinking.

"Thanks bruh. Perfect day for a drink!" Pyaso beamed with happiness.

"Cheers to that," the boys agreed and gulped their beer.

They stopped briefly at Mutzing market to buy some cigarettes. A good looking lady stood beside the road waiting for a bus to

go to the city. Patrick whistled at her. She stared at Patrick up and down and snorted in disgust.

“Why are ladies so hard to get?” Patrick asked when he returned to the vehicle.

“We’re not bigshots that’s why,” Kuti answered.

“Nowadays, it’s not about your looks bro. It’s about the money. Ladies don’t care if you’re ugly, so long as you’re rich, you’ll marry a sweet sixteen,” Pyaso stated.

“True story,” Patrick agreed and sighed.

They threw out the empty bottles from the vehicle and Patrick opened another three bottles of beer. Pyaso drove off at high speed.

The market at forty mile was crowded with highway buses and semi-trailers. It was a popular spot for the highway drivers travelling from Lae to Mt. Hagen and Porgera. Pyaso slowed the Land cruiser. He drove past the market to the side of the road and parked at a spot that looked reasonably quiet. They parked under a rain tree that provided cover from the scorching sun and continued drinking.

“Did you guys read yesterday’s paper?” Patrick asked, taking a quick sip on his sixth stubby.

“Oh, the one about that crap Vote Of No Confidence thing,” Kuti said sarcastically.

“Yeah,” Patrick nodded.

“You know, Don Polye and the members in Opposition just want to get their hands on the money! What will they achieve in one year? Nothing! I just think that they should just let the

current government complete their term. They can try make the numbers to from the next government in next year's elections," Pyaso said waving his beer for emphasis.

"True aye? They're all crooks. We can't trust any of them," Kuti said after some thought.

"Don Polye had his chance to be the Prime Minister when Sir. Michael Somare was sick and undergoing treatment at Singapore in 2011. Sam Abal was keeping the seat warm for him. Sam Abal should have combined with Don Polye as Engan brothers to form the government. Instead, they were too proud and didn't want to work together. Belden Namah and Peter O'Neill took the opportunity and formed the government. But Namah made a lot of noise and was removed. O'Neill is a really cunning guy," Pyaso continued.

Patrick and Kuti nodded in agreement to Pyaso's encyclopedic knowledge about Papua New Guinea politics.

"There's no such thing as Mr. Nice Guy in politics. You have to be ruthless to survive," Pyaso said, wilting slightly. "Don Polye missed his chance of been the Prime Minister."

"Yu bai next leader blo country ya," Patrick said and laughed.

"Leader ya, leader blo ol people" Pyaso joked. "Cheers brothers."

They tossed their bottles to that. The discussion about politics continued for a while. The first carton was gone. They opened the second carton and refilled the esky.

They went to discuss about the Presidential election in the United States. Donald Trump was making a lot of headlines trying to outplay Hillary Clinton but the people didn't like

Donald Trump.

After a while, the discussion changed to the topic of white ladies.

“I’ll make sure I have a child with a white lady,” Pyaso stated matter of factly.

“Yu kisim pinis. You can do it,” Patrick encouraged him.

“They come to our country acting all expensive and stuff. In their country, they’re piece of shit. You’ll date them easily,” Pyaso said.

“Fact bruh! I went down to play rugby union in Brisbane and the Aussie ladies were all over us,” Kuti smiled.

“You probably made a baby before returning,” Patrick asked.

“Almost,” Kuti said and they burst out laughing.

“You should have made one!” Pyaso exclaimed.

The hours rolled by and it was getting late. The sun was slowly disappearing over the mountain ranges. Pyaso was already feeling light headed.

“Guys, drink up and lets go,” he ordered.

They gulped their beer quickly and headed for the vehicle. They were a little unsteady on their feet although both Patrick and Kuti were slightly more unsteady than Pyaso. Patrick tripped and stumbled several times and Kuti caught him to stop him falling.

“Brothers, I am drunk,” Patrick muttered when he climbed into the back seat of the Land cruiser.

“No worries. You can sleep in the vehicle,” Pyaso said and turned on the engine.

Back on the highway, Pyaso began to accelerate. Patrick made himself comfortable and promptly fell asleep leaving Pyaso and Kuti to listen to the music blaring on the vehicle stereo and make small talk.

Pyaso stepped on the accelerator pedal to about a hundred miles per hour and stayed at that speed. It was a two hour drive back to Lae city but he wanted to make it in an hour. His vision was a little blurry. Pyaso was thankful for the white strips on the road that guided him to stay on the left lane.

After turning the sharp corner at Markham bridge, the headlights of an approaching semi-trailer blinded him. His first instinct was to slam on the brakes. Pyaso pressed hard on the brakes and prayed for his life. A few seconds later, the headlights were so close, he gripped the steering wheel with all his might. He heard Kuti screaming and then everything went black.

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Several hours later, Pyaso was awoken by the sound of a beeping pulsing through his head. It was so irritating and he was angry. He opened his eyes and there were doctors around him. He tried to look around but the pain started to catch up with him. A sharp stabbing pain ran down his body and his head throbbed. He laid back hopping to ease the pain.

“How are you feeling?” a tall doctor asked through his surgical mask.

Pyaso raised his eyebrow in confusion. He had no idea what was going on.

“Can you tell us your name?” another doctor asked.

Pyaso moved his eyes towards him. He was a little shorter and looked like he was from the highlands.

“Py-a-so,” he said struggling to get the words to come out. His throat was very hoarse and scratchy. It hurt to swallow.

“We should let the patient rest.” Pyaso overheard the tall doctor say to the short doctor next to him.

“Hi Pyaso,” the short doctor said calmly. “You have been in a car accident Pyaso. You are very lucky to be alive. Your two friends didn’t make it. You have a broken wrist, a broken ankle and some internal bleeding. You also have a concussion, so you need to rest.”

“What? Where are my friends, Patrick and Kuti? How the hell did all this happen?”

Pyaso grabbed his head in confusion. He closed his eyes because he just couldn’t rap his head around what was going on. His head felt heavy and he slipped back to sleep.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jordan Dean was born on June 12, 1984 on Fergusson Island, Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea. He did his primary & secondary education in Alotau, PNG. He first studied for a Bachelor of Arts (Literature & Journalism) at the University of Papua New Guinea. He withdrew from the course in second year, 2004 and decided to take accounting and management.

He had worked in Milne Bay and Western provinces. He currently works with the Papua New Guinea (Research), Science and Technology Secretariat in Port Moresby.

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