

THE CASE OF THE CHINESE CLIENT

I get a lot of business through the internet, so it isn't unusual for work to come my way through e-mails. More often than not it's a tourist who has gone home and is having second thoughts about the fidelity of his new girlfriend. But the email that arrived from 'Jamie' was different from the average internet inquiry.

For a start, the client didn't give his full name, or supply an address or telephone number where I could contact him. I ran a check on the ISP address and found that he was in Shanghai, so I figured that he was an expat up in China. Anyway, Jamie wanted me to keep tabs on two rotund Englishmen who would shortly be arriving in Bangkok. They would be staying at the Landmark and were conducting banking seminars during the day. They were both fans of Playskool Bar at Nana Plaza, which was just around the corner from the hotel. Playskool was always one of my favourites, what with the staff dressing up in sexy school uniforms and having some of the prettiest girls in the plaza. Jamie wanted to know how much it would cost for me to keep an eye on the two guys and I told him. Two days later and the money had been transferred into my bank account so I stopped worrying over much about who my client was. Jamie also emailed me head and shoulder photographs of the two men and promised me a big bonus if I could get a photograph of the bigger of the two guys leaving with a lady of the night.

On the day the two men arrived in Bangkok, I went around to the hotel. I did a quick walk through of the bars and restaurants but there was no sign of the two men. I waited until reception was busy then wandered over and asked to speak to Andrew, the one that Jamie was particularly interested in. The harried girl behind the reception desk looked at her computer screen, tapped out a number and handed me the phone. Andrew had a typical upper class plum-in-his-mouth English accent and sounded like he'd been asleep. I switched into my very best Antipodean accent. 'Howyagoing Cobber, ready to go sink a few tinnies then are ya?'

I got a very polite 'I beg your pardon' from Andrew before I apologised and put the phone down. Now that I knew he was in his room, all I had to do was sit in the lobby and watch the lifts. Turned out to be a wasted evening. By midnight he hadn't appeared so I figured he'd decided to have a night in. He might well have phoned an escort agency for a takeaway but even if that was the case I wouldn't be able to get a picture, and without a picture there wouldn't be a bonus.

The next night, I checked the hotel again at 7pm and this time Andrew wasn't in his room. I checked the bars and restaurants in the hotel and drew a blank, so it seemed fair to assume that the boys were out on the prowl.

I hit Playskool at 8pm, parked myself in a seat at the back and ordered a Jack Daniels. A pretty little thing from Si-saket was soon sitting by my side, massaging my thigh and telling me how handsome I was. After another couple of JDs I was starting to believe her.

I'd bought her half a dozen lady drinks by the time a fat, balding man waddled in. It was Andrew. He was greeted like a long-lost friend by the elderly mamasan and ushered to a front-row seat where he could get an eyeful of the girls on offer. It wasn't long before he had a girl either side and he was buying ladies drinks like there was no tomorrow. I kept buying drinks for myself and my new best friend from Si-saket until Andrew called for his bill. I did the same. I gave Miss Si-Saket a big tip and got her phone number, then followed Andrew outside. I had my digital camera with me and was hoping to get a few shots to send to Jamie.

I overtook him on the way out and got myself a vantage point in the Nana Hotel car park when he came out. He'd paid bar the two girls which got me thinking that perhaps I'd be able to talk Jamie into giving me a double bonus. My luck was in. There was an elephant at the Nana Plaza exit and its mahouts were trying to extract cash from the drunken tourists in return for the opportunity to feed a few green bananas to the beast. The authorities don't like elephants wandering around the city streets. Every now and then one puts a foot through a drain and the traffic gets backed up for miles. Part of the problem is that the old work that the elephants used to do up country had now been replaced by machines, so the mahouts don't have any choice other than to beg.

I made it look as if I was snapping away at the elephant but in fact managed to get several good shots of Andrew and his two hookers. He waddled over to the Nana Disco with the two girls.

I went home, satisfied that I'd earned my fee and bonus. Early next morning I went back to the hotel, hoping to catch Andrew and his two bargirls having breakfast. The two chubby bankers were sitting at a table, devouring plates piled high with a food. As I watched them my heart sank. Sitting in Playskool I'd been sure that it was Andrew who'd walked in. But now that I saw the two Poms together, I realised that I'd had the wrong man. The guy I'd followed and photographed was Andrew's colleague. Andrew was bigger and balder and about five years older. The whole surveillance operation had been a waste of time. Other than the fact that I'd got Miss Si-saket's phone number, of course.

I sent the pictures off to Jamie, along with a brief report and a note that Andrew had stayed in the hotel. Not strictly true, of course, but I didn't want to admit that I'd been tailing the wrong guy. Jamie took it better than I expected and said that he'd be in touch next time Andrew was back in Bangkok.

I thought that would be the end of it, but three months later I got another email from Jamie. Andrew was heading back to Bangkok for a couple of days and would be staying at the Landmark again. The bonus was still on offer – all I needed was a photograph of Andrew with a bargirl. I accepted the job and Jamie put the money in my bank account, and emailed me with Andrew's flight details.

According to Jamie, Andrew had an afternoon meeting so I left it until early evening before I went to the hotel. I spotted him in the Huntsman studying a menu, and figured that he'd be there for a while. It looked as if he was eating alone and I started to have visions of my bonus slipping away again, so I decided that maybe I could short-circuit the process by supplying my own temptation.

I took the footbridge over Sukhumvit, ignoring the family of Cambodian beggars who had set up there, and headed for one of my favourite watering holes, the German bar in Soi 7. It's a well-known pick-up joint, packed with freelancers on the make. There are a lot of over-the-hill hookers and go-go girls who've failed their medical, but there are pearls among the dross and one of the pearls was Gay. I worked my way through the growing evening crowd and spotted Gay sitting between two large Australian tourists. I caught her eye and signalled for her to meet me outside.

Gay was in her early twenties with shampoo commercial hair and great breasts courtesy of one of Bangkok's best plastic surgeons. She had at least two sponsors that I was aware of who both sent her a fair whack every month, and one was trying to get her a visa to visit the UK. She had no plans to visit the UK, though, the guy was going to be disappointed. She had a young son up-country and was saving to build her own house. She spoke good English. She told the punters that she'd learned English at university, but the truth was that she'd been hooking for more than seven years and had picked it up from the hundreds of guys she'd slept with. I'd used Gay on a few jobs, and I knew she'd be perfect for Andrew. I told her what I wanted, and promised her a thousand baht plus whatever Andrew gave her. Ten minutes later we were walking into the Huntsman. I made sure we were seated at the table next to Andrew and that he could get a clear view of Gay and her very impressive breasts. I ordered a JD for me and her usual Black Label and soda, and chatted away in Thai for fifteen minutes or so, pretending not to notice the occasional smile that passed between Gay and the Englishman behind me. After I'd finished my drink I said goodbye to Gay and promised to phone her, then left her to it.

While Gay went to work on Andrew, I adjourned to a nearby Pizza Hunt. I'd told Gay to get Andrew to buy her dinner and then suggest that they retire to his hotel room. When they were on their way, she was to send me a text, so I was able to relax, order a medium pepperoni pizza and flirt with one of the cute waitresses. By the time Gay sent me the text I had polished off the pizza and had the waitress's phone number. I was back in the lobby by the time Gay and Andrew were heading for the lifts. I got several good pictures with the zoom lens of them walking arm in arm, which I figured would make Jamie a very happy bunny.

I went back to the Pizza Hut for dessert and bit more flirting, and an hour later I got another text from Gay saying that the dirty deed had been done. I met her in the hotel lobby. Andrew had given her three thousand baht so she was well pleased, especially because he'd wanted nothing more than a blow job. It had been easy money and there as plenty of time to get back to the German bar to reel in another punter.

I asked her what sort of guy he was and she said he was a gentleman. He loved Thailand and would love to live here, but he had a good job in Shanghai. He'd told her that he didn't enjoy working with Chinese people and that some of his colleagues were always trying to get him sacked. There was one woman, Janey, who really hated him and who made his life a misery. 'He said he was very happy to meet me because I helped him to forget about her,' said Gay.

Alarm bells started to ring. Janey? Jamie? I started to wonder if my mysterious client was Andrew's colleague. Suddenly it started to make sense. If the Chinese colleague got

hold of a photograph of Andrew in a compromising position, she could do him a lot of damage. She could have sent it anonymously to the board and it wouldn't be long before Andrew was told that his services were no longer required. Or maybe she'd decide that a little blackmail would be more profitable. I wasn't happy about being part of whatever her devious plan was, but on the other hand I didn't want to lose the bonus that I'd be promised. What's a private eye to do?

Now, not all investigators have the same high moral standards as yours truly. It's not unknown for a less-than professional private eye to approach the subject of his investigation and, for a higher, fee agree to file a false report. It wasn't something that I was in the habit of doing, but I didn't like the way that Jamie had been using me. He (or she) had been less than honest, so I didn't think that he (or she) deserved any less from me. Andrew was just being one of the lads and I wasn't happy about being the architect of his downfall. So, the next morning I went over to the hotel in time for breakfast. I saw Andrew attacking the buffet and I waited until he'd sat down before I headed over to his table with a cup of coffee. He didn't look happy as I sat down at his table, but I went quickly into my speech. I explained that I'd been paid to follow him, and that I had compromising photographs of him. I told him about my mysterious client in Shanghai, and that I had become uneasy about what I was being asked to do. For all I knew the girl he'd taken to his room the previous night could have been a client, I said, even though we both knew exactly what he'd been doing. I said that I didn't want to lose the bonus I'd been promised if I emailed the pictures to my client, but perhaps there was another option. A small token of Andrew's appreciation, perhaps, and I could tell the client that Andrew had been whiter than white. I smiled and waited for his reaction. To be honest, I had nothing to lose. If he told me to go and screw myself, I'd just sent the pictures and report to Shanghai and pocket my bonus. He stared at me for a while, then nodded and pulled out his wallet. He took out a wad of American dollars, peeled off a few one hundred dollar notes and handed them to me.

'Cash,' I said. 'That'll do nicely.'

I pocketed my retainer, wished him a safe trip home, and left him to his breakfast, picking up a sausage from the buffet on my way out.

Later that day I sent an email to Shanghai Jamie. I said that Andrew did little more than eat in the hotel restaurants and visit the Huntsman Bar in the basement. He never even had a sniff of a bar girl. I had no misgivings about telling a little white lie. Andrew was a decent enough guy and I had double the bonus that had been promised, so I reckoned justice had been done. Justice a la Thai Private Eye.