

G. J. FODE

ANOTHER NIGHT IN PARADISE

HARRY FOX IN THAILAND



In memory of Nang

INTERN COPY

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A remark on "Another Night in Paradise"

Harry has trusted me with his Thai blogs and diaries for publication as I see fit, following the Nang accident he did not feel like going through the efforts of arranging editing and publishing the stuff himself.

Harry is a great narrator and I love his style, so I think it would be a crying shame not to let his readers in on his fabulous and sometimes ambidextrous life in "paradise". Surely Harry isn't always politically correct, but he gives you truth and candour flavoured with bold humour. For me personally his profound reasoning and pensive comments on life add a depth to the narrations that makes this book stand out among the numerous shallower recounts of the genre.

I am sure you will enjoy Harry's stories. For those of you who haven't heard of Harry before or would like to know a little more about him, I have added a short FAQ at the end of the book.

G. J. Fode, Phuket 2014



1. IN THE PRESENCE OF BEAUTY

On the prowl

Awed in the presence of beauty, I offered her a drink

As I stepped out of the tuktuk (three-wheeled taxi) on Baramée Road only few metres from the Sandy Beach of Pakarang I noticed that the name on the sign was written in Thai only. So in this new but already funky place not many farangs could be anticipated. Farangs don't read Thai. So probably this was locals only.

สนุก

Paraphrased to English the name would be something like *Have a good time*. Now if that doesn't sound like the perfect beginning of a good night out! ...

TO BE CONTINUED

Money speaks louder than words!

I didn't recognise her at first. She looked different without the fancy clothes and the make-up.

At five in the morning Lek wasn't looking that sharp. Her eyes were closed and if the music hadn't been so loud I could've heard her snoring. But then again, she had gone through rough times. It was low season, there were only few farangs around and she had not yet operated in this particular field long enough to work up any number of boyfriends to send her a solid stream of money from abroad.

In spite of her girlish looks Lek was a mature woman, you see. She had three kids to take care of and an old father, who was working up horrendous hospital bills way back in Chiang Rai. Her husband had disappeared with somebody else one day and left the complete menagerie to Lek. I knew Lek had been on the chase several days in a row, never slowing down. It was understandable that she was tired.

All around us the sights and sounds of late-night Pakarang were flashing and wailing. I ordered another Jack Daniel's, fought off a couple of farang-starved girls and leaned back. I sat and kind of meditated while everybody were doing their thing. Slowly the level of whisky in the bottle sank close to the bottom. It felt good in a strange way to just sit there and watch Lek curled up in her bamboo chair like a kitten. Every once in a while a bartender would bring me some ice.

Then, abruptly, the power went and Pakarang was transformed into a black well of darkness. A hundred mouths

cried out at the same time. Lighters were enkindled, candles put on fire and one of the bars had a temporary flashlight on. Lek awoke and let her eyes roam like a hare's.

"Harree..." she exclaimed "what you do?"

"No no" I said "it's not me, we have a fei dab (power failure)".

"Ah..." she sighed.

In the flickering light of a candle she looked so young. Almost like a frightened child.

"It is all right" I heard myself saying "I'm going to take you home!"

She began to gather her things - purse, keys, hair brush - right away.

"Where you motobike?"

I ordered the bill and thought things over. I wasn't really prepared to spend the rest of the night - or rather the following morning - with Lek. I just felt I ought to bring her home and let her get some sleep. But when I sensed her slim body leaning onto my not so slim body and her bare arms around my not so slim waste, vows disappeared.

We rode up Sai Nam Yen, passed Visés Hotel and Andy's Umbrella Hut, which was still open. Lek's bungalow sat in a row of new buildings in a soi (street) off Nam Yen. Everything was still new and shiny. As we passed the last corner, I heard someone call out my name. I looked back and it was Dao.

Yes, Dao, the starry-lipped singer from the Coffee-shop with the name that meant something like *Have a good time*. I almost did not recognize her at first - she looked different without the shining clothes, the make-up and

the boots. Dao beckoned me to come, obviously she had something to show me.

I hesitated. What about Lek? But then Lek said: "No problem. I go sleep, you come later!"

She hopped off the bike and disappeared into her bungalow. I followed Dao into her room. She smiled and revealed these white teeth that took me back to the coffee shop, where she used to stand with long legs and all.

"So how is work?" I asked.

"Fine!" she said "Very fine! Everything is good."

She made it sound like it was not good at all.

"I will show you something!"

Dao grabbed my hand and dragged me off to the bedroom. There she sat down on the bed without letting go of my hand. I looked around. A bed, a close-hanger, a picture of the King on the wall.

"What do you want to show me?" I asked.

Dao shook her head a little and pulled me closer. Her eyes were black pearls in a nightly forest, beyond her lips lay the promise of eternal bliss. I felt her sweet breath on my nose. Longingly my lips touched hers. Bluntly Dao jerked her face back.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"No no, sorry!" Dao exclaimed.

She flung both her arms around my neck and covered my cheek with kisses.

"I sorry! I want you, okay?"

Feverishly she began to take off her clothes, exposing a black bra.

Even through the haze of my drunkenness I sensed that this was not right. I turned to go.

"I'll come back tomorrow, okay?"

Dao leaped towards the door and blocked my way. "Please" she begged "don't go! Stay with me tonight, okay? Don't you like me? I have big tits, you see! Since I had baby they are very big!"

She opened her bra. I drew a deep breath.

"I like you Dao. Even more than that, I think you are very sweet and very beautiful, but..."

"Okay, then stay!"

Her lips were in my face again, her tender body scented of temple flowers. Like two kitten in the Garden of Eden we floated in space. The airy sound of the fan transmuted into heavenly strings. How could somebody I knew so little about know so much about my deepest desires? I stroke her peachy cheeks.

And got wet fingers. Dao was crying. I wanted to look at her face, but she tried to hide it with her hands.

"Listen sweetheart" I said "this does it! What is the matter? C'mon, you can tell me!"

"Please, don't ask" she sobbed "Mai pen rai, it is not important!"

She tried to hold me once again, but it was too late. She couldn't stop the tears and the sorrow. Her face - once so sweet and happy, had turned into a mask of Asian agony.

Finally, through sobs and moans, out came the story. Dao's mother back in Isaan had been on a bus one not so lucky day. Trying to avoid a head on collision with a truck, the driver made a sudden turn and the bus landed way down in a ditch. Two people died, the driver fled the scene and now her mother had a broken back and no money to get it fixed.

So Dao decided to do what everybody had told her was the only solution. But it wasn't easy. She was disgusted by men who were much older than her and she didn't have the psyche to go through the rituals of the game. She tried to get drunk, but the alcohol only made her vomit and gave her a headache. She got fired from the coffee shop because she failed to show up...

So. Finally Harry Fox James came along. And even though I had been riding with Lek on the pillion, Dao had decided to try her luck with her special one - which was me!

I looked down on her sad face with those sweet red lips and black eyes. There was only one thing to do...

Yes, she said, and I make love like a rabbit, too.

If I ever met a hardcore coffee-shop worshipper, Wolfgang from Switzerland was it. Whenever he was on Phuket, he would spend hours and hours of night-time exploring the countless number of coffee shops on the island. Later he would ramble on for even more hours about the beauty and the natural charm and the what-yagotnot of these wonderfully amazing girls. But he was also a gentleman. And he was good looking. But most of all - he was rich.

So the next day I introduced Dao to Wolfgang. It was like a setting out of a Hollywood Romance movie. In the soft light of wrought iron lamps the well-kept lawn glowed like a green carpet. In the roofed outdoor section Wolfgang was waiting for us already. There was a huge bunch of flowers on the table. Red roses for a blue lady.

When Dao and I entered the garden, Wolfgang jumped out of his chair like a jack-in-a-box. Starry-eyed Dao approached him like a diva in slow-motion. A mild breeze made her dark hair fly in flows like waves in the Andaman Sea. And you know - unhurriedly Dao walked right up to Wolfgang, dropped her eyes, bent her knees and gave him an impeccable wai. As I said - pure Hollywood stuff. It took no more than ten minutes before the two love birds were so totally engaged in each other that I figured I'd might as well leave. And I did. I don't think they even noticed.

The next thing was to figure out what to do about Lek. What she really wanted was a husband. Not just any husband, but someone who would take care of her children as well. For a second I opted to make her Wolfgang's mia noi (second wife). But just for a second. It would never work out. Or maybe it would - but not right now, while he was busy romancing a blue lady with red roses and Andaman Sea waves for hair. I would have to ponder the matter.

There is no better place to ponder whether you should make a girl named Lek somebody's mia noi or give her a two-year's scholarship for Christmas than the Congo Bar. The sun was sinking low. Its golden rays wrapped Soi Bangla in a flaxen blanket. The street was still comparatively quiet. I sat down at one of the tables close to the pool-desk and watched the girls play. It was too early for straight whisky, so I ordered coke and manau (lime) with my Jack Daniel's. One of the girls shot some good balls, I noticed. And speaking of balls - her physical appearance wasn't too bad, either. When she bowed down over the green cloth and stood still for concentration, she was the

very picture of vigilant beauty. All in all it was a pleasure to see her do her thing and when she asked me to join the game I gladly took the opportunity to show off my balls a little bit and to get acquainted.

As it happened, the girl's name was Tay.

"Thai?"

"No, Tay as in Katay."

"Oh! Rabbit. I see."

"Yas" she said "and I make luhve like a labbit, too."

She stroke up a hearty laughter. "But I play pool like a senake (snake)."

I cannot say whether fair Tay made love like a rabbit. But she certainly did not play pool like a snake. As I said, she shot some pretty straight balls.

As I watched the spheres dance, a girl named Lek stayed in the back of my mind. Why could you not play the game of life like a game of pool? Every angle has its opportunities, every number has to go.

Tay was looking down her cue with concentration shining out of her eyes.

Zonk! She set the white ball spinning perfectly, number six went down with a smack. Then I heard somebody call my name.

It was Reinhard, the owner of the bar. He grabbed my hand and shook it like the bodybuilder he is. That the German do a lot. Shake hands, I mean.

A couple of years ago the Congo Bar had the literally strongest line-up of Pakarang bargirls ever. All the Congos seemed to be plump, muscular or heavy set girls with a squeezer of a handshake at that time. Maybe Reinhard the bodybuilder had picked them to his taste. Walking by on the narrow boardwalk presented a real

danger then. If you refused to come in and the girls really wanted you to, they would just grab and drag you and bind you to the stake in the middle of the room.

Reinhard laughed.

"Yes" he said "actually we did have some strong women back then, didn't we. And didn't you actually date one of them, what was her name, Toy...Koy...?"

He looked at me quizzically.

I changed the subject. No need to go into details of old bygone times.

"I know this girl..." I began.

"...and you love her too much" Wolfgang chimed in.

"No no, it's like this..."

I told Wolfgang Lek's story. Wolfgang listened and said, finally: "Sure, bring her in. I have a place where she can stay, I'll even give her a basic salary. We'll fix her up in no time. Pretty soon she will meet a rich guy from overseas and all her troubles will be forgotten."

Tay the "labbit" was patiently waiting for our conversation to finish. I took my cue. This was it - time to hit the eightball.

Smack! Neatly and nicely the ball landed in the designated corner. Tay grinned. She had lost, she would have to pay for the beer. I kind of suggested that we could make an arrangement, where money did not come into play as such... But she refused laughingly.

"Samall manee (small money)" she said, and I had to agree. As they say: Nern poot gwah kham - money speaks louder than words. But - it has to be a reasonable amount. For a moment I considered whether I actually should do some talking to little Rabbit with a reasonable amount of nern (money). But I decided against it. Not

right now. The evening was young, the bottle of whisky still full, and the pool-table was waiting for another round.

A couple of days later in Soi Seadragon I met Lek again. She dug me in the ribs and said: "You didn't come back to me that night. So now you love Dao, eh?"

"Not really" I said "It's just that Dao had this problem and she asked me to help..." Lek laughed.

"So you gave her some "help" and she forgotten the problem, eh?"

I wondered whether it was possible for me to get across that I did not have any private relationship with Dao. On the other hand, it didn't seem important, either.

"So what about you?" I asked. I told her about the job in the Congo bar. Lek listened attentively. I was repeating Wolfgang's last words about meeting a rich farang, when Lek turned her head. Somebody was just coming into the bar.

"Oh" she cried out "Harree, meet my new boyfriend!"

It was Wolfgang, the coffee-shop worshipper from Switzerland.

I must have looked rather silly. Wolfgang laughed and said: "Close your mouth Harry! Your gold-teeth are showing!"

"But, aren't you supposed to be with Dao?" I gasped.

"Ah, yes Dao."

Wolfgang shook his head.

"You know what is funny. We had a wonderful night. The moon, the food, the champagne... Then Dao insisted in taking me to her apartment and I basically thought that

we were - how do you say this in English *ein Herz und eine Seele?*"

"On the way to get married" I said.

"Yes, like that, on the way to get married. But when I tried to kiss her, she shied back and said that she had somebody in her life already. I went out to smoke a cigar on the banner balustrade of her balcony and suddenly I saw her!"

He pointed at Lek, who beamed back like a Christmas tree.

"And the rest is going to be a history, as they say."

"And the rest is history" I corrected automatically.

I was baffled, not sure I understood.

So what had happened to Dao, I wondered, and why had she refused to patch up with Wolfgang?

I was kind of busy for the next few days. But as soon as I had the time I went to see Dao in the little soi off Sai Nam Yen. The house was still there, but Dao was gone. I asked the girls next door and they said she had left for Bangkok.

Bangkok...?

"Yes, her husband came and took her with him."

Her husband...?

The girls looked at me as the stupid farang I was. Yes, her husband! Didn't I know that Dao had a rich husband, who was in charge of Siam Commercials, one of the biggest trading companies of Thailand?

Right that instant I saw a somewhat familiar face peering out of a door further down the alley. It was Tay, the rabbit, who played pool like a snake.

"I didn't know you lived here, too."

"Yas" she replied "I see you, but you busy butterfly with Lek and Dao."

I wondered if I should try to explain to fair Rabbit that I had no personal involvement with neither Lek nor Dao but it didn't seem worth the effort. Looking at her beautiful smiling face - that bore no resemblance to a rabbit's at all - I decided instead that it would be much more worth an effort trying to see whether she really made *luhve like a labbit*.

INTERN COPY

The Clean Side of Dukdah

The next day I woke up in a different house.

Old Pakarang Hands just say "the trap". Don't ask me why ;-). The Banana was the first disco in Pakarang and it still drew a steady crowd that liked to hang out here and strut their stuff till the wee hours of the morning. Referred to as "Banana Girls" the ladies there were much sought after by a young German and Italian clientele because they were fun loving, action minded and generally rather pretty by European standards. Some even quite young, around early twenty. Maybe it comes as a surprise to you that "young" by Pakarang standards is around twenty. Some tourists believe they can find teenagers or even children in the streets of Pakarang. But that is not possible. The only children that rove around at night are the flower and chewing gum kids. Not that they are working here by choice, but they too are under strict supervision, believe me. As a visitor, you might not notice the old lady sitting on a log of cement, watching her little work force with apparent indifference, nor the young hoodlum in the corner with the inconspicuous shirt... But they are the mamasan and the police officer who watch and notice and know every little detail of what is going on. Don't be fooled by their looks, the police guy packs a thirty-eight and the mamasan drives a heavy knuckle. And these two are not the only ones. A whole squadron of mamasans and undercover police officers are at large here, there, everywhere and at all times. Tourists do not know that

there are practically no mafia nor pimps in most parts of Thailand. Certainly in Pakarang you will find neither.

Why is that? you may ask.

Well the answer is simple: the police act as both police AND mafia. So whoever wants to erect an illegal or for some reason not quite sober business, will have to go directly to the police. No need to escrow - bribe the person who is in charge, the police officer himself. And so the police know all and will act relentless in order to keep rules, written or unwritten, and power lines intact. Thus in regard to legal age and tourism the laws are strict and the enforcement fierce. Every girl carries her ID card. Firstly she may be scrutinised any time by an undercover police man (who is not undercover to her, if she has been around for some time) and secondly she will not be allowed to the hotels where tourists live. No hotels, no business.

So you won't find any girl under the legal age - which is 18. Thailand is very conscious of its image as tourist destination. What Thais do in their own native brothels and parlours is a different story altogether - but neither the tourists nor the press ever go there. For one thing, most brothels do not advertise at all, and if they do, you will see some inauspicious sign in Thai letters, so a stranger will never know where to find those secret spots that are obvious and well known to any Thai person, even if they are sitting right under his nose disguised as snack store, massage joint or barber shop...

Anyway, the Banana was a traditional disco and not a girly bar. So you don't have to pay a bar fine when you pick someone up. The name of the game is to pretend

you just dropped into the disco for a dance and a beer. Accidentally you meet this young beautiful lady, mutual attraction arises and you decide to spend a dance and a drink together. Maybe even two dances and two drinks. Or maybe the whole night...

Now I am not an old square. But it is not always the pumped up volume and hazardous speed that makes my fun. My ears were still hurting after the Tequila Bar screech so after a quick drink I decided to split and head on down to Soi Sunset.

It was running kind of late, so everybody on the streets was gravitating towards Soi Sunset. I followed the stream of black-haired ladies in black dresses and golden shoes up Bangla Road to the Vienna Bar.

It was night, but hot, as always. Thirsty after the sweaty walk I climbed a barstool and with the last bit of will power I ordered a Jack Daniel's and a beer to go with it. I relaxed a little while my blood pressure returned to normal. Out of the corner of my eyes I noticed the soccer game on the monitor, when...

There she was! Do you remember Manfred Mann? *Doo wah diddy...*? Well, old Manfred didn't know it back then, but this was the girl he was singing about. Pink tank top and a sweatshirt tucked beneath the waist. Showing a lot of skin and a navel like a fingerprint in almond paste. She was just standing there (remember the Beatles? *I saw her standing there?*) lost in a world of her own, swaying softly to the music.

I took a swing at my whisky and enjoyed the sight. I surely am neither the first nor the last person to be stricken by the remarkable beauty of Thai ladies. And through the years I assure you, brother, I have seen stunners in

troops. But still my heart skips a beat and I feel a tiny twitch in my stomach when I see a Thai lady that in such a beautiful way allegorises the glory of God the Creator. She was shooting alone, but patrons and girls were streaming in from the downtown bars. As the joint geared up, two other girls stepped in to play. All around the table it was tits and almond paste navels, round butts and shapely legs. If this had been a lounge in New York, a disco in Miami or a nightclub in Paris you might be cautious or even overpowered and would have to consider your openings carefully. But this was Pakarang. Glory was everywhere and beauty nothing but routine. Living in a paradise with feather beds as floor plates you lose the fear of flying.

So I walked over to God's allegory and asked if I could join the play. She smiled invitingly, let me go on for a little while, scrutinising my style before letting loose and giving me a hard time.

But I won the game and she immediately took revenge. In between shooting balls she told me her story. Born and raised in the poor province of Isaan she had left her home at the tender age of 18 to seek fame and fortune in fair Phuket. She had been working as a waitress in a Thai restaurant, where she was paid only three thousand Baht a month. Her mother had fallen sick and her brother had had a motorbike accident in Chiang Mai, so now she was looking for a well-paid job because her poor family had only her to rely on. Her friends had suggested that she might try her luck as a bargirl. Today was the first time she ever had ventured into the noisy, happy nightlife of Pakarang. I felt genuine compassion for the

little thing and offered her a beer, wondering where she had learned to shoot the ball that well.

"No no" she said "I drink Black Label only! Good for headache." So we fell into each other's arms and lovely Dukdah - that was her name - planted a lingering kiss on my lips. We shared a bottle of the brown stuff and by the time the bottle was empty I was kind of full. Lovely Dukdah looked me in the eye.

"You mau (drunk) already" she said.

I agreed. Maybe we better go home!

"You have my wife already?" she asked.

"No" I said "I have neither your wife nor my own!"

"Okay. Where is your hotel?"

At this point it became increasingly difficult for me to focus. I kind of hinted that I was a rich oil-sheik who stayed at the Royal Suite on Diamond Cliff. What happened later on is only a blur in my memory. I remember part of the tuktuk ride with lovely Dukdah and the wind in my drunken visage. But I don't recall the expression on her face or what she said when we arrived at my humble residence on Soi Nanai. I am sure the two of us had a good time. I vaguely remember her waking me up - and falling asleep again on the kitchen floor. Did I hear her asking me where the floor mop was?

I didn't have the strength to wonder about that. I mumbled something about stars and coffee shops and went right back to a perturbed sleep full of dreams about brown skinned sirens with almond paste bikinis.

The next day I woke up in a different house. Well, not really a different house. But a clean house. Truly clean. Effectively spick and span. Incredible. It hadn't looked like this since I moved in. I searched for Dukdah, but she

wasn't there. She had left a lipstick note on my bathroom mirror, though.

It read: *Thank you to much, teerak. I go home see mother in hospital. Come back to you again.*

Now - there is a lot to be said about nightlife Pakarang. Sure. But whoever said it was dirty has never met my Dukdah.

INTERN COPY

Fly me to the Moon

For some reason Pakarang has these special nights

Once in a while a man has to blow sawdust from his brain. I personally find there is no better way to do that than to saddle a heavy chopper - preferably my Harley or Suzuki - and just let it run.

On this particular night I was riding my 1400 Intruder. Harleys are great, but the Intruders are something special. For one thing, they run smoothly as silk... their cylinders fire timely as a Swiss clockwork, whereas the Harleys with their one pin crankshaft fire the pistons irregularly. Another thing is the dependability of the Japanese ladies. I just didn't want to have an American breakdown in the middle of nowhere.

I had been out seeing the sights of the island most of the day wherever the bike would take me - and it occurred to me that a late evening ride around Pakarang would be a worthy final for a wonderful day. So I maneuvered the ponderous bike through Soi Seadragon trying not to hit anybody. I enjoyed the cheers and the hellohs of the girls and parked the chopper in the back at the Rasta Bar. You know, where the farang ladies hang out with the dreadlock guys.

My Polish friend Attila's old place is gone. No more Seadragon burgers. Attila is now doing what he always wanted to do: mend motorbikes. Instead it's a new A Go Go. I wondered if this one was going to be just as all the others, or if they'll dream up a new theme. The Classroom theme is taken as well as the Country theme. Maybe they should make it a Burger a Go Go? Supply the

girls with plastic burgers around the waist and the bust. Now the thing about Soi Seadragon is - not every bar stocks Jack Daniel's. But okay, I'm not a fanatic, don't believe what Stephen says about me. I wasn't going to stay for long, so I just grabbed an ice-cooled Carlsberg bia Chang at My Love Bar. But by chance boss Somchai himself graced the bar that night, so all of a sudden it was Johnny Walker and Cocktails and what do I know. No way he was going to let me go without spending a few drinks – and then some.

Somchai is one of these truly Thai-like persons in the sense of being helpful and sharing. He was the first Thai friend I ever made on Phuket. One of the first things he did, he took me to an oracle priest at Wat Chalong temple. I didn't understand anything at all and Somchai had to translate everything afterwards. And it was all wonderful stuff: I was going to make it big on Phuket, marry a wonderful girl and so on and so forth. Maybe Somchai made all of this up. But it didn't matter. His intentions were more than good.

"Have you come to my bar to look for female company?" he asked.

Somchai smiled and pointed at one of his girls.

"This one has just come in from Isaan" he said "She would make a very good wife for you!"

"Thank you Somchai" I said "but let it be. The last time I made somebody my wife, I ended up with alimony bills and a broken heart. It's going to be a while before I will get around to that again."

"No no" Somchai said gravely "you just have to find the right one!"

He waved one hand at one of the girls and shouted: "Eh, Jui! Come here, leoleo (quickly)! There's a farang here to see you!"

"Oh please, don't!" I exclaimed.

But it was too late. The one that would make a very good wife for me had already taken the message and was coming over to introduce herself. She took my hand and asked me politely, what my name was? Where I came from? How long I had stayed in Thailand? How old I was?

Oh, but I looked so young! Then, out of words and wisdom, she stood and looked at the floor, moving her hips slightly, hoping I would say or do something. Which I did. "Would you like a drink?" I asked.

Her eyes came back and she smiled at me.

"Singha bia" she spoke softly.

I ordered the desired brew and leaned back a little. Jui looked at me longingly and when I smiled back, she took it as an invitation to snuggle up and put an arm around me. She fit so nicely into my embrace, it was like hand in glove. I heard her sigh.

"What is it?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"So now you're sabai (comfortable)?"

"Yes" I heard her say "very much sabai."

And she planted a kiss on my neck.

So I took fair Jui out for a nightly stroll. It had been a while since I had walked the streets of Pakarang hand in hand with an Isaan girl. We looked at the boutiques and street front vendors. I bought Jui a T-shirt that read *Yes they are. No you can't!*

Of course she had no clue as to what it meant. But that didn't matter. Everybody was walking around with T-shirts with no knowledge at all what was printed on their chests.

Of course we had to stop and eat something.

After all, this was Thailand. Jui had one of those hard, leathery dinosaur-skins they call blah meuk (squid). I guess they don't have these in Isaan, in the middle of dry land.

I took her down to the beach. A short distance from the sounds and sights of bustling Soi Bangla the waves rolled in with a soothing heartbeat frequency. We found a bench and sat there for a while, listening to the Andaman waves gently lapping at the white sand and the wind shushing the palm trees. It was a full-moon night. Again.

I don't know, somehow I always had the feeling that on Phuket, you have a full moon every week or so. Every time I look up, there it is - big and round and shiny! Back home we didn't have so many full moons. Maybe it was the clouds...

"Does your country have a moon, too?" Jui asked.

"Yes" I said "every country in the world has a moon!"

"Every country?"

Jui seemed surprised. Wow, how many countries were there?

"Oh, I don't know" I answered "hundreds, for sure?"

"Are you joking me?"

Jui looked me straight in the eye.

"I know Thailand and Farang, Burma, and Laos. And Jippun (Japan)."

I said "I am not sure exactly how many countries there are, but there are certainly more than that. In Europe alone there are more than forty and in the US there are 52 states."

"And all of them have a moon?"

"Yes" I said "but it is really the same moon everywhere, you see!"

Now Jui knew that I was bullshitting her. No way for one moon to shine in all these places at the same time! I insisted for a while, pointing out that the earth was round and that the moon was more or less shining on half of its nightly surface all the time. But Jui was having none of it. Finally - as not to make her mad - I gave in and conceded that the earth had many moons. Roughly one for each country. Most countries had a moon for themselves, but the poorer ones had to share. The next question was, obviously, which countries had more than one moon?

I drew foolish little Jui close and gave her a kiss.

"Do you want to fly to the moon with me?" I asked.

"Wow!" she exclaimed "I never knew one can go there? Can we go today? Are there people up there? How do we get there, with a long-tail boat? With an airplane?"

"No" I said "we'll take a Suzi."

"Now I know you bullshit me again" Dukdah said.

"Actually not" I replied "Let's go to the Rasta Bar and I'll show you my big old Suzi."

It was one of those magic nights. Once in a while in steamy Pakarang it is like that, you know. For some unknown reason Phuket has those special nights. Nothing is planned, everything happens by pure incident. Suddenly the air is fresh with a fragrance of jasmine.

Everybody is in a good mood, everybody smiles and there is even a parking space to be had on Soi Bangla.

Jui placed her sweet behind on the pillion of the Intruder and sat like an angel. Thai girls seem to be born with this ability to go with the beat of a motorbike. Maybe it is because they start to ride on a bike in their mother's womb.

Slowly and heavily we trucked onto 200 Phi Road.

It was a dark night, only a few stars twinkled in the black sky - except, of course, a cloud drew back and there was the brightly shining full moon above the mountains, as always beaming benignly down at earth. After we passed the Simon-Cabaret curve I let power loose. The Suzi's husky grumble turned into a full-fledged roar as she took on the mountain.

Right into the full moon we rode, like something out of a Jules Verne novel or a Spielberg movie.

I am sure Jui sensed it too, even though it lasted only a couple of minutes. A sense of being lifted and born by a flying Suzuki chopper, riding through the dark and unknown land of people into the realm of Gods.

I barely, barely contained power and hit the breaks in the nick of time. There, on top of the hill, was the Safari; a living, burning, resounding place. A peculiar mix. A little Mad Max, a lot of Swinging Safari and some Gothic Rock, the Safari had all its own style. Parking the bike and walking up the entrance with fair Jui by my side I felt like Indiana Jones - if it wasn't for the hat and the whip.

Jui squeezed my hand and said: "This is not the moon, you know. This is Safari!"

"Yes, I know" I said "We'll make it the moon next time, okay?"

"It doesn't matter" she smiled and her dimples showed. "I knew all the time that you were only joking. But is okay. Do you want to dance with me?"

I certainly would! Jui let me drag her tender body close to mine and from this moment on, when we stood as two people who had become one, the music changed. Gone were the slashing drums and the pounding techno rhythms. Jui and I floated on cellos and violins played by heavenly hands.

But alas. Nothing lasts forever, not even Cinderella could extent the spell of magic till after midnight. After floating around in the air amongst strings and bows, I got kind of thirsty. I knew Jui wanted a Singha beer and I decided to have one, too. At the bar I met somebody, I hadn't seen for years.

"Shanoo!"

"Harry!"

Now that was a surprise! The last time I had seen my buddy Shanoo was on a rooftop in Afghanistan, clinging to his machine-gun, only seconds before the house was coming down. We were taking heavy shelling and it was all anarchy. When the roof finally crashed, I lost my conscience. Later I awoke in a small rocky village with a young hijabi woman bending over me, but that's another story. I had never expected to see Shanoo again. Now he showed up in the Safari, of all places.

"Shanoo" I said "how did you get out of that mess?"

He grinned and said: "Nothing much to tell. I was lucky I got nothing broken by the fall, so I decided to take it easy for a while..."

It turned out that Shanoo was working in Phuket town as a medical. So we sat there, shooting the bull for a while, until I felt a tuck on the arm.

"Christ" I exclaimed "I forgot about Jui!"

I introduced her to Shanoo and he said "Don't I know you from somewhere?"

He scratched his head.

"Yes" he finally said "you were the one with the money bundle in your stomach!"

Jui reddened and nodded her head.

"Tell me the story" I asked.

"No" Jui said.

Then, thoughtfully she added: "I angry my boyfriend and I eat all his monee..."

"You can't eat money" Shanoo interrupted.

"Can!" Jui insisted with a mocking face that made her look like an angry cat.

"Eat monee can! Eat love cannot!"

"At least not without getting it surgically removed" Shanoo replied.

I wondered... what did he do with the money after he had removed it surgically, but I forgot to ask.

I don't know about you, but I don't meet old buddies who have risen from the dead very often. So I invited Shanoo to go with us and find a place, where we would be able to talk some more. As it turned out, he would rather rock and roll. To reminiscence the old days, I suggested Rio Bravo.

Down at Rio Bravo it was Creedence Clearwater time, which suited us fine. This was the music we used to fire our adrenaline on, when we were young and did what young men had to do.

"Do you still drink Jack Daniel's?" Shanoo asked.

I admitted that I did. So we ordered a bottle and when it was gone, we ordered another one.

Soi Bangla was having one of its special nights - what with fragrance of jasmine and smiles and even an available parking space - and we were having a ball. The whole house was singing along to Bad Moon Rising. At one time we discussed whether each other still could make a hundred and I recall Shanoo on the floor with two girls sitting on his back, doing push-ups.

Suddenly it wasn't Rio Bravo any more and it wasn't Creedence any more either. The moon had gone and the first rays of a rising sun were sending silver-plated darts into the air. My eyes hurt and I squeezed them shut while slipping back into the realms of dreams.

A few hours later I awoke again and decided to get up, since I had to go to the toilet.

To my surprise, I found six people in the room next to me. Shanoo was there, Jui and four other girls, a couple of which looked suspiciously like ladyboys. I supposed we must have had a ball last night...

Upon returning from the bathroom, I found that Shanoo had awakened, too.

"Man" he said "you sure as hell got my head spinning with that whisky of yours!"

He looked at Jui, heavily snoring away in her sleep.

"She reminds me of somebody we used to know, hmm..."

He scratched his head.

"I think her name was Trong or Trink..."

"Trang" I said.

"Right" said Shanoo "She also could do things with her body."

He bowed down and kissed Jui on the nose. Jui cuddled up close to him.

"Teerak!" I heard her whisper gently.

Well. Still I had my chopper waiting outside. In case anybody else wanted me to fly her to the moon...

INTERN COPY

Little Miss Sao

You are not handsome, she noted, but I will go with you anyway. Where is your motobike?

Soi Seadragon has always been a favourite of mine. It was an amazing thing this horse-shoe shaped soi, built for pleasure only. I have been sitting in those bars off and on for years, in steamy hot and splashing wet nights and at any time of day. Soi Seadragon is a metaphor of life. People come and go. Everybody has a different story to tell, everybody makes different experiences here. Yet, when seen from a distance, Soi Seadragon remains the same. It beats to the pulse of life. Sleeps through the morning, opens in the late afternoon, rambles through the night. Every day the same schedule. Always the girls. Always the farangs. Always the laughter. Always too hot. Never seems to change.

I made a sport out of visiting each of all the bars at least once. The interesting thing is - you might think they are all the same. Loud music, barstools, hammers and nails. But that is not so. Every bar has a different ambience, a different feel, no matter how. The bars are like families. Every family has its ways and mores. And every family likes to think they are different. And they are.

Go to the Drinks and Dreams, for instance. In spite of all the fun and noise, you will be able to sit in an old English sofa under the picture of Big Ben and read a genuine book, while the vivid adwhoreable Pakarang highlife rotates around you.

Or take the Sexy No. Nine Bar at the bottom of Soi Seadragon. This bar has the double advantage of ena-

bling you to see the swinging buttocks of the dancers in the Lipstick A Go Go through the open doors... besides enjoying the presence of dames a plenty by your elbows. And then there is the High Seasons Bar. I am not supposed to tell you this, but if you pass the little entrance beside the fake fireplace you will enter a little backdoor speakeasy, where you are in for a special treat. Here my discreetness kicks in - but go see for yourself!

One night as I was doing my rounds, I noticed that the Sweetheart Bar had a hundred balloons as well as flowers, signs and food displayed. Treading closer, I could read the text on a banner: *Happy wedding Rainbow*.

It was only six o'clock in the evening, far too early for any serious action. But in contrast to the others the Sweetheart Bar was already half filled. I took a seat and was immediately greeted by three ladies who fought each other to accommodate me with cold refreshment towels, flowers, food and drink. As I hadn't been out all week, I was in the mood for a little hanky-panky. So when one of the lovely ladies placed her shapely behind in my lap I happily gave her a kiss on the neck. She smelled of lime fruit and Sunsilk shampoo.

"One drink for me?" she asked and gave me her hand. It was dry and warm, very inviting.

"My name Noi. What your name?"

I told her.

"You want some to eat? Sao has marry today, so food is for free."

By the way - where was lucky Sao anyway?

"Ah" Noi said "Sao will be here soon. She and her husband come here seven o'clock."

And so they did. At seven sharp (farang time!) an open jeep drove up the narrow entrance to the bar. The car was covered with garlands, flowers and fake money bills. Out stepped the proud groom and the happy bride. There was something familiar about the woman. I took a second look... yes! Pictures emerged in my mind. Fond pictures.

Actually I remembered little Miss Sao very well from a time before her marriage. Her original Thai name was Fah Rorng (thunder). And thunderous she was, even though... She was such a small thing, you know, maybe just about 145 centimetres in pumps. All legs and ass, not much of a bosom. So she made up for it by making a point out of wearing ultra-diminutive shorts and ultra-high heels; a combination that showed off her awesome thighs and firm glutei.

In addition, Sao knew that farang people go wild for the warm, deep tan that Thai girls obtain so easily. She made a routine out of spending a little time at the beach most days. As a result, her skin was radiating a warm, bronze sensuality. She had always been the first choice of the newcomers. As the psalmist put it "her cup was running over", and I mean in every sense of the word. Sao was wild. Even in low season, at times where the rains flooded the pavements and nobody but kiniau (stingy) Italians with garlic breath roamed the streets she was still able to dig up young, slim, blond Swedes with long noses and money in their wallets. She never slept alone.

I have had the good fortune of spending a whole month with Sao. And I didn't have to pay for her services, either. Why...?

I just happened to be there when she needed a friend. Not any friend, but somebody who could listen, understand and give an opinion. She had many Thai girlfriends, of course. But, you know, in Thailand... when you are happy, you have lots of friends. But when you are unhappy, you cry alone. Sao had lots of European friends, too. But they all stayed overseas. She was working them in a schedule, so that only one of her worshippers at a time was staying on Phuket for holiday. It was not the money either, Sao had plenty. Most of the time she enjoyed taking me out and paying bills herself. At that particular time, Sao was sad and nobody was there to comfort her. She had the low season blues.

Originally I had met her at a local temple. She was seeking the advice of the abbot. Not surprisingly, he told her to do merit and eat vegetables. I watched her kneeling and patting the floor three times with the palms of her hands. When she rose and turned around, the two of us were looking straight into each other's eyes. Her melting gaze was so open that I had a hard time standing up for it and keeping my eyes steady. Slowly and tantalisingly she extended a slender hand, never failing to look me in the eyes.

Holding my fingers she said in a husky voice: "Where do you go, farang? Can I go with you?"

I felt a prickle down my spine as if somebody had put an ice cube down my neck.

"Yes" I answered "you can go with me. And I am going where ever you want me to go!"

Sao looked me over even more closely.

"You are not handsome" she noted "but I will go with you anyway. Where is your motobike?"

As the proud groom and Sao, the happy bride, jumped off the jeep, she recognized me at once. She tried to hide it, but I could tell by that little hesitating twist of her head that she had seen me and not yet had made her mind up whether or how to react. First thing it was important to keep face and draw the blinds. Naive and trustful, as most tourist farangs were, her spouse might not even know the true nature of little Sao's business. But it took only a few minutes for her to adjust and make a stand. All smiles she dragged her proud husband - a young Swedish looking man - and introduced us. With a discreet wink she presented me as an old farang friend who was married to a Thai friend and who had helped her translating some important English papers.

What audaciousness?

No, not at all. Farangs were easy and at this phase her Swedish newlywed would believe everything she said. One often heard farang-phrase in Thailand was "I believe my wife". When a man said that, you and everybody else except for the guy himself knew he was being goofballed by the book.

Sao even let go of her spouse - who's name was Eric by the way - and seated her gorgeous legs next to me.

"Teerak" she whispered in my ear and even through the whispering her erotic huskiness sounded through like a promise "I never forget you. I can go with you for a short time if you want to. I just have to be careful that my husband or his friends won't know about this. Can you meet me at midnight at the Vienna Bar?"

She smiled that wonderfully open and trustworthy smile that Thai girls give you when they are double dealing

and beguiling somebody's head off. She looked so glorious. I envied Eric, who was lucky enough to carry little Miss Sao - Miss Thunder - up and away. But I also felt sorry for him for being such a cuckoo.

A short-time with lovely Sao in heat surely would have made my day. Except that I could not be sure of what little Sao really had in mind. It might be a sweet short-time for old-time's sake. But it might as well be an attack by a hired friend with a baseball bat. So I did what a man has to do. I made an appointment with gorgeous Sao at Vienna Bar at midnight.

But I didn't go there. I had a drink with Stephen at the entrance of the Rock Hard instead, trying to make up my mind whether to go upstairs or stay downstairs. You know the rest of the story.

INTERN COPY

Another night in paradise

Even - God forbid - the girls!

Every time I've been away from Phuket for more than a few days I promise myself - when I come back, I'm never going to leave the island again. Especially when the journey takes me north to colder pastures, pictures of warm, lush, succulent Phuket with green palm trees, white beaches and blue waters immediately spring to mind and I miss my tropical home even as the airplane touches wintry ground.

But still... you know how it is, once in a while, after a long while, you feel the urge to go somewhere else. Breathe different air, see different people, hear different sounds. Man is so built, one doesn't appreciate what's right under one's nose. Even paradise begins to bore you, if you stay there long enough. You get fed up with the food, the people, the landscape. Even - God forbid - the girls. After a while, the food becomes too spicy, the people too content, the landscape too green and the girls too greedy. You don't even notice the daily deadly motorbike accidents any more than the mosquitos or the boozed farangs.

"Wouldn't it be nice" you think "to get away from the loud bars, the hot weather and the perpetual *how much you give me's?*"

Your mind conjures up pictures of civilized Westerners, meeting on time, talking sense, operating fax machines and water wells that actually work.

But hey - already at the airport you find out that you were mistaken. Your mind has pulled a trick on you. You

had plainly forgotten that the world you once were a part of is full of tasteless food, reckless people, trees without leaves, cold grey skies... and frustrated, self-minded girls the size of elephants but with the sex appeal of herrings.

Oh well. I am not going to waste any more words on the world outside of Phuket. I have been away, it was business, it was pure misery. But now I'm back and so are the happy times.

The first thing I did upon my arrival was to buy myself a new bike. Not quite new of course, you can't buy a new American motorcycle in Thailand, but a second hand one.

I would keep my old Honda Dream, of course. No man in his right mind would do away with his "Mule of Asia" as Stephen called it. My Honda is a good old bike, unbeatable when in downtown traffic. You can put your market-vegetables in the basket up front plus a bottle of Mekhong (not that I ever drink that poisonous contaminant). You can drape bags full of plah meuk (squids) and milk-cartons in plastic bags around the handlebars. You can squeeze a bucket of mangosteen in between your knees. I have been riding my Dream to Soi Bangla and Soi Seadragon so many times that by now this mule knew the way home all by herself.

It is not quite true though that buying a new bike was the first thing I did. The **very** first thing I did, when I stepped out of the plane was, I kissed the runway. I did the Pope.

Go on and laugh! I kissed the bloody asphalt and I didn't give a damn about the stares and snickers of my fellow passengers. Let them see I was doing the Pope, let them

ridicule my posture, kneeling with my derriere up in the air.

The important thing was, I had come back to the one and only place where I could have that certain irreplaceable Thai thing they call sanuk (fun). Okay, so I kissed the bloody runway, picked up my bags, took the limo to Pakarang and marched right into Big Bike on Rath U Thit. The garage was filled with motorcycles and parts and grease monkeys and the smell of oil and leather. I marched on into the tiny air-con cubicle where Jay stood erect, issuing orders, directing her troops like a French lieutenant.

I looked Jay right in the eye and said: "I want a Harley and I want it now!"

Jay didn't raise an eyebrow. She has been into motorcycles for decades and she knows the look on a man's face, when the time has come. For those who have never seen Jay's own Harley: she even had a turbo attached to it.

So she showed me the available bikes, I picked one and minutes later I was ready to enjoy Phuket the way it should be done - riding a big bike, enjoying the sound, letting the warm winds caress my face.

It was early afternoon, so I spent a few hours emptying my bags, trying to locate my house-keeper, looking up a friend and taking my new bike for a ride.

If you have been in Pakarang, I guess you are familiar with the road to Kata. It is one of my favourite jaunts for a short ride. I enjoyed the hills and waved at the elephants. I passed the Safari and looked at the oceanside with new eyes. Man, it was good to be back home!

But even riding my new Harley and enjoying the sun and the sky and the palm-trees could not quench that special feeling in my guts. You know what I'm talking about... I just couldn't wait for night to fall and all the action to begin that I had been missing so much while I was away. To shorten the time I took a drink at the Sky Inn. In case you don't know, Sky Inn was a wondrous, bizarre place, even by Pakarang standards in the old days. Some of the apartments there were elegant suites with mahogany furniture and ivory inlays. The high rise had this quaint Swiss restaurant on top with the sleigh and the skier and the woodwork, outrageously built from original imported Swiss fir-parts, and even the freaking deer antlers. But at the bottom, a universe totally different from the high-browed fir and mahogany closets opened its funky parlours to anybody who was broad-minded enough to enjoy pure, undiluted sanuk. Like the biblical giant with clay feet, Sky Inn towered on sodomite foundations. At ground level one found funky shops, restaurants, beauty parlours etc. that bore no relation to the luxury above. Cracked paint and cheap interior prevailed and gave no clue to the abodes above.

Of course it wasn't Thailand if the opposites didn't meet and mingle in the elevators. Tourists in shorts, business people in designer dresses, Thai managers with mia nois and first of all the kathoeyes... they all stood cramped together in a moving tin can for a minute or two. The tourists staring at the kathoeyes, the frozen chosen keeping their eyes on the floor, and the kathoeyes admiring themselves in the broken mirror, screeching *sawasdee kha* (hello) and *how are you today* at everybody.

I took it all in and had a good time. And sitting with my back to the parking lot (where my newly bought HD was parked!) I had a grand view to a Chinese noodle restaurant, a Thai supermarket and a beauty parlour that was specially geared toward katheoy needs. Suddenly somebody somewhere put on a B.B. King record. The sound of Lucille hitting them signature notes made my hair stand up. So when one of the ladyboys came over to bid me *sawasdee kha* and ask for a drink, he found a man with emotions. A man who for once did not immediately make it clear that he was strictly and hardcore hetero.

As it turned out, that particular ladyboy had been in Sweden lately, where she had spent several months making love in saunas and Volvo cars.

"Europe is so cold" she said with an all too girlish shrug "I thought I was going to die!"

I laughed and she added: "But they all have big, big bananas, same same!"

He or she glanced at me. I knew what was coming.

"I bet you also have a big banana" the katheoy said invitingly.

I said: "Yes, you bet. And do you know where I and my big banana are going to go tonight?"

I saw a secret smile flicker over her face. Another one down! But that was not going to happen. B.B. King had been replaced by some Thai pop singer who constantly pitched his melody a quarter tone low, making my skin break out with horror bumps.

It was getting dark. I paid my bill and swung one leg over the saddle of my Harley. I was going to go home, park my new chopper and take the good old Honda Dream mule to town. No point in riding bulky, heavy machinery

into cramped Pakarang at party time. But then I thought, what the heck, let today be a special occasion!

When I rounded the beach corner and headed up Soi Bangla, I even decided to put on a little show. Why not let everybody know the Fox is back in town!

Down to first gear, crank the mother up and let her ride on one wheel for a moment. The ladies yelled and applauded. Which meant that they took me for a greenhorn - real dumb easy spender. I didn't care. To be honest, I enjoyed. I was still in that special "coming home to Phuket" state of mind. And speaking of coming home to Pakarang... I have been around some, I have been a few places. But let me tell you - there ain't nothing like sweet Soi Seadragon in them good old days. I drove around the horse-shoe a couple of times and enjoyed the cries and hollers of the ladies. Jesus, they were so pretty! I had been looking forward to this moment - I had fantasised about the Nings and Nongs and Leks and Saos while in dreary office buildings in Des Moines and sterile hotel rooms in Copenhagen. And even though my fantasies had painted it all golden - when I saw the girls again and this special scent of perfume, flowers and incense once again hit my nose, it took me aghast.

I said to myself: This time, for once, I am going to grab a whole bunch. I am going to take a bar-full of ladies and have a party at my house the whole night long!

I took a few rounds and finally parked the bike at the Buffalo Soldier. My old friend Rhumba the Dreadlock was at the desk, mixing drinks under the giant Bob Marley flag. According to himself the reason they call him Rhumba is that a certain roll of his hips drives the girls wild. But I suspect that the fact he was born on Cuba has

something to do with it. The only rolls I had seen on him where the handles under his shirt.

Rhumba flashed his white shark teeth and gave me this droll "hey mahn" Rasta welcome. Two Scandinavian girls hovered by the counter. Rhumba raised an eyebrow, thus indicating that he already had done at least one of them. Funny, how black and white are drawn together, isn't it?

Whenever the topic hits exploitation of poor little Asian girls by fat and sleazy tourists, I use Rhumba and his fellows from the Rasta Bar to illustrate that in Pakarang, at least, there is absolute equality and sisterhood of man. You won't guess the scoring rate of the Rasta boys or how much money they make on Scandinavian girls.

I liked listening to Rhumbas stories once in a while - and actually I felt like drawing out the time before I hit My Love Bar and all the rest. Foreplay, you know :-). So I sat next to the frozen Scandinavian girls and let Rhumba serve me one of his oozy drinks. And while my ears where listening to the narration of Rhumbas latest conquests my eyes were watching the action at Sexy Number Nine Bar where the girls were dancing, hollering and having a good time. As the drinks went down and spread this lazy hazy feeling in my guts I knew it was going to be another great night in Paradise.

Ah, and the Curvaceousness of Rainbow

*"I be your wife tonight!" she said.
And smiled.*

I had met her a few times. She was one of umpteen free-lancers in the abysmal and migrational pack of she-hounds that populated Pakarang. I had seen her in the bars she "worked", I had seen her with farangs at the Buk Ruk waterfall during the day and at the food stalls at night and I had noticed the shapely curves on her voluptuous figure... But I had never made her acquaintance. Until the day she literally bumped into me, with her Honda Dream, bringing both of us to the ground. By Thai standards it wasn't really an accident or an injury. Just a little blood and scrape, enough to make you hurt, but not enough to remember.

Still, I took her to the hospital. Rainbow may never have heard of germs and infections, but even though she was the one that had impacted me I felt responsible for at least having her checked and medicated, if required.

The hospital was hot and though there were no patients in line, we had to wait for some time because a pickup truck rode up with a corpse on the cargo area. It wasn't even covered, I could see the blood stained face of a dead man. It didn't look like an accident, more like a shootout. Jokingly the men dragged the body into the hall and let the paramedics handle the matter.

Meanwhile I studied the exhibition row of deformed foetus' in methylene bottles. The zombies made me shudder, but Rainbow pointed and laughed at the hor-

rendous alien faces and the distorted bodies as if it was a comic strip.

I didn't really know what this ghastly display was supposed to warn you against, but the condom and AIDs commercial on the side were clear enough. Strangely, even though AIDs commercials were to be found practically everywhere, nobody seemed to prepare. Rather than loosing a call, the girls would accept bareback traffic.

"Does it hurt?" I asked her.

Rainbow puckered her lips and twisted her head.

"No, mai pen rai. Only a little bit."

Finally it was our turn to see the doctor. She gave Rainbow's injuries a quick glance than injected a shot of antibiotics - as they always do. A prescription for painkillers. I paid the bill at the cashier's and that was it.

Rainbow did a mock curtsey and gave me a wai.

"Thank you" she said calmly.

I noticed a moist reflexion in her eye.

"De nada" I said "For what?"

"For taking me to the doctor and paying for my medication. Nobody has ever done that before."

I sensed that Rainbow was really moved. How sweet. I couldn't help but smile.

"Come on" I said "it is nothing really."

Rainbow smiled back, wiping an eye.

"I buy you breakfast, OK?"

Surely it wasn't breakfast time, but a meal and a drink with shapely Rainbow did seem attractive. So I let her pick the place and we headed for Laan Sukapok - the favourite restaurant for Isaan girls. The name of the place is not really Laan Sukapok (the dirty restaurant).

We just called it that because this place had no name, even though it may have been the most popular eatery among the Pakarang girls - and because it WAS dirty, even by Thai standards. Just very few tourists there, only the casual backpacker. Too hardcore Isaan, you know. But this place certainly was known by every bar girl, every Thai worker and every expat in the city. Surely besides the native menu the native prices played an important part in the popularity. Where else could you get a full meal, a seat and a table for a meagre twenty Baht?

The Laan Sukapok is completely open to one side, the interior extends to the pavement and as rasping and funky as the place looks and smells on the inside, the view is great, as the very heart and soul of Pakarang street life displays and performs right in front of your eyes.

Rainbow ordered Chinese noodles and a sauce that looked (and smelled) like barf. And even though they do have a few dishes at the Laan Sukapok that might be digestible by farang stomachs, I decided to stick with a drink.

Time runs fast when sitting in Laan Sukapok watching the great entertainment. So suddenly it was early afternoon, time for a hotweather-nap, and I was going to drive Rainbow home. On the bike she put her soft arms around me and leaned her head against my shoulder. Then, at her doorstep, she asked me inside.

"Come take a sleep with me" she said "No bumsing, just sleeping a little bit..."

I wonder if any man could lie next to Rainbow's curves and not be fired up by zest. But even though I did resist

temptation, Rainbow could not. The presence of a white-skinned farang in her bed and coy thankfulness in her veins caused her system to flush various places, I guess. While we were "sleeping" several other girls entered the house. Nobody took much notice of me. After all, catching farangs is the name of the game in Pakarang. But as the noise level rose, sleeping became impossible. Already the girls were warming up to the evening.

Was it party time? Of course! Every night in Pakarang was party time. Putting on makeup, watching themselves in broken mirrors, trying on different clothes the girls had a ball in hopeful anticipation of the catch the night would bring. One of the girls fetched Mekhong whisky, manau and coke, and of course Rainbow and I were invited to join. It was expected that Rainbow too, would go through the motions and get ready for her nocturnal stint, but Rainbow, still thankful, whispered in my ears: "Teerak, please you can have a short-time for free."

Sitting on the floor in her sarong among the other girls I once again realised just how pretty and well rounded she was. There she sat, au naturel, wearing no makeup, no fancy clothes, barefoot, among all those outrageous girls dressed to kill and made up to tease... looking heartbreakingly lovely with that pneumatic body of hers, all apple pie and mama's chicken soup. As she shifted her curves into another position and let a luscious hip shine through the garment I became aware that she wore no briefs. But that was nothing unusual. Thai girls love their bras, I doubt if you will ever see a female Thai

person without her bra regardless where or when. But panties...

The bliss of an amorous tete a tete with fair Rainbow sounded really promising but somehow the sight of natural Rainbow even in her curvaceousness and partylessness did not only arouse me, but made me a little... sad. She so much embodied Madonna and Babylon Sister in the same person that oozed heart-breaking and compelling vulnerability. She was a lost lone lovebird in a safe and familiar cage with an open door that for some reason could not be trespassed.

Sad? I pondered my feelings. Even after all these years among calculative and manipulative women that could give you one or two great nights as Stephen put it - and, if you stuck with one of them, years of gruelling and viperish torments - was I still a romantic?

"Would you like to go out with me tonight?" I asked Rainbow.

"Yes teerak!" she beamed, sat up and reached for her makeup set "Let's go dance!"

I made it clear that I did not want her to make up and dress the sophenee (working girl) part. It would be nice for once to pretend we were an ordinary couple.

It took a while for Rainbow to let the idea sink in. But then she laughed and placed her head in my lap, looking up at me with those inscrutable dark almond eyes. As I stroke her pitch black hair she said "I be your wife tonight!" and smiled.

No, we did not go dancing. It so happened that a movie band visited Pakarang that night. We rode up the steep hill to the platform where they had erected a big outdoor screen and parked an old truck with an ancient but

vicious carbon arc lamp hurtling its screamingly brilliant rays like hot spears through the side and on to the silver screen. The heat from the carbon rod disgorged a snarling fume and the diesel generator coughingly added to it with its exhaust.

A crowd of spectators - all Thai - had gathered, most of them perched on their Honda Dreams. Rainbow and I sat leaning against each other in the warm tropical night while Chinese swordsmen and swordswomen flew up walls and over rooftops, darting battle disks and spewing light rays from their eyes. I brought out a Bia Chang and a spritzer that we had retailed at Seven Eleven along with some prawn crackers. The full moon barely managed to shine against the lights of the movie, but it was there.

Time went by slowly and blissfully. I sat and enjoyed intoxication - not only by alcohol, but by the magic of it all. The lush night, the blessed oblivion... but most of all, Rainbow's sweet nearness and fragrance. Everybody was watching the events on the screen. Once in a while I felt Rainbows gentle elbow nudging my ribs, when she saw something funny or exciting. But I must admit I was not looking at the movie much. I looked at my "wife" Rainbow.

At one time she noticed I was watching her. Coyly she took my hand and planted a kiss on the back of my fingers.

"Teerak..." she whispered. I opened my mouth, but quickly Rainbow placed her palm over my lips. I knew that she knew what I was going to say.

"Don't speak" she said softly. And through the dark and through her smile I saw a moist reflexion in her eye.

Navy Day

Every bar girl would now shift into emergency mode.

"Tonight I go with a farang from Saweden (Sweden)" Lek beamed "and he give me two thousand Baht".

Laughingly she waved some bills in my face.

"Come, I pay for beer!"

It was six o'clock in the morning. It was dark. I was still in bed. Lek was drunk. I didn't feel like having a beer at all.

"Why are you here then?" I asked her.

Lek's answer wasn't clear, but apparently she had left her one night stand sleeping in his hotel for a time-out and had planned to go back to him later.

I loved Lek. Like a sister that is. We had never had any sexual bonds, neither had any of us wanted to. I had helped her financially at a time where she was really down and out and in return - being a Thai person and holding all appropriate civil rights - she had facilitated life for me on several occasions. Finally, just a month ago, she had moved in with me and the other three ladies that lived in my house.

"Listen Lek" I said "I think you should go back to your boyfriend and have some sleep. Or give him what he paid you for..."

"Okay..." she said hesitatingly and sat down on the bed, tucking up her legs. I waited for a minute, knowing what was going to happen. And yes, Lek's head began to sag more and more and a few moments later she was sound asleep. I pulled a blanket over her body and went back to sleep myself.

Peace didn't last long, though. Slamming doors, noisy laughter... my other three housemates were coming back from town as a bunch. You might think they would go to sleep, but that goes to prove you are not Thai. What they did, they fired up in the kitchen. Eating time! Not that the racket disrupted Lek's sleep. But I decided that I might as well rise and shine.

In the kitchen the girls were all aglow with great news. As soon as she spotted me Ning shouted: "Navy comes to town!"

In case you don't grasp the intricate ramifications of the event (which would be comprehensible), "US Navy coming to town" was something like a war cry. Every bar girl would now shift into emergency mode. As long as the handsome, wealthy, and well endowed warriors from across the pond were going to stay in Pakarang you might as well consider all previously existing agreements with any bar girl cancelled. The girls would throw themselves at the friendly fire, working overtime to wallow in love, sex, and sweet excess.

Lek appeared at the door. So our noise had awakened her all the same. But the Navy news was no novelty to her. Instead she had news for us.

"I know" she mumbled blearily "But do you know they have put Noi in monkey house?"

Noi was one of our old friends. According to Lek the police had caught Noi and her boy-friend allegedly with a joint in the boy-friends room. Both of them were put in jail for drug infringement because the boyfriend had claimed that Noi too had smoked the weed. But Noi never touched the stuff, everybody knew that. The farrang had paid his way out of jail, but Noi... If she could

not raise bail - thirty thousand, how could she? - would risk a long confinement, maybe a year or more! I made myself a drink.

In this world people disappeared all the time. Some went to jail simply because the police wanted money. Others were shot by enemies or business partners or knifed by ex-lovers. A lot of people died in motorbike accidents, careless and stupid tourists died in the water currents off Kata Beach. And some people just moved.

But Ning was not going to let it be. She decided we should bail Noi out. She was going to make a collection. Already she was counting on her fingers. The four girls and Harry, that made five. The twelve or so girls from My Love Bar, that made seventeen...

"Harry" she said "if we are twenty, how much for each?"

"Fifteen hundred" I replied.

"Oh" she replied as disappointment showed on her face.

"But Harry, you are farang" she accused me "you must to pay more!"

Sure, I didn't mind helping an old friend. And I knew the iron clad rule "farangs must pay (more)". But briefly I wondered whether it would stop there. As I said, people disappeared all the time and my resources were limited. I couldn't help them all.

As you may guess, at the end I put up most of the money, Ning handled the formal and informal affairs and finally all five of us drove up to the monkey house in a rented jeep. Even so, negotiations took most of the afternoon, so I spent the time with my laptop and a cool drink at a food stall next to the jail entrance until finally they let Noi out. She was shaken but kept her posture. She waived all of us with her hands up over her nose then

she kneeled down in front of me and positioned her forehead and palms on the ground.

"Come on" I said a little embarrassed "Noi that's okay. Maybe you will have to help me out some other time."

Noi rose, embraced me and planted quick kisses on my cheeks.

"I never forget!" she promised.

We celebrated Noi's new freedom at the Sala Isaan. In case you don't know, Isaan is a rather big and poor rural geographic part of Eastern Thailand that supplies the richer parts of the country - among them Phuket of course - not only with rice, but even with a steady stream of emigrant workforces. Gaew, Ning and Lek were all born and raised in small villages amongst rice paddies. And so the music of Isaan has spread to the rest of the country with them. Actually you could say that Isaan music was the soul music of Thai people. It was aired on the radio and on the TV and it was being constantly played in the numerous karaoke bars - accompanied by videos that showed beautiful, white-skinned girls with nose jobs in waterfalls, who could not help but undress down to bikinis or even less. The girls, not the waterfalls.

At the Sala Isaan Thai people met to party and make sanuk according to their own local dance rites which seemed mostly to consist of slow ballet like movements with raised elbows and spread fingers.

We had a ball and I enjoyed the girls' country dancing. Of course they wanted me to dance along with them as there is nothing funnier for a Thai person than to see a farang make a fool of himself while "dancing" to Isaan music.

"What you know Isaan music?" Gaew asked me.

"I think I do" I replied "Mostly pentatonic scale. Basically only in one mode without real chords or changes. Beat is always four to the bar with emphasis on three and four..."

Gaew laughed out loud. "Harry teerak, you understand no thing. Isaan music is for the heart, it makes you happy. It is sad text, but when you dance, you are laughing."

"You are right" I smiled "that is a much better definition."

After an hour or so we left the Isaan dancery and proceeded to the My Love Bar as business had to be taken care of. And since business consisted of sitting at the bar, flirting with farangs, business was also sanuk and therefore indispensable.

That night boss Somchai made our drinks on the house. Which I deemed no less than justified. After all he had his bargirl back - and Noi was not a bad earner for him - without spending a single Baht.

It was a great Pakarang night, motorbikes and girls everywhere. The bikes flashing in neon and the girls swarming like exotic humming birds all around. Earrings, skirts, high heels, twerking butts, juggling chests.

Noi touched my arm.

"I have no boy-friend tonight and I don't like sleeping alone. You know I am afraid of phee (ghosts)."

She lightened up a smile to rival a Christmas tree.

"Will you sleep with me tonight?"

"Noi, there really are no phees to be afraid of..." I began.

The Christmas tree went out. She placed a hand over my lips.

"No!" she begged "I want to go with you, okay? You have good heart! You got me out of monkey house! I come for free!"

I shook my head. "Noi, you don't have to pay me back. But if you insist I am sure there will be other occasions, where I would call your help. And helping or paying back doesn't necessarily include sex."

Noi looked at me in bewilderment. Her eyebrows twitching.

"Why don't you like me? Am I not sexy like farang girls? Look, I made my hair today and my fingers..."

She showed me her self-luminous nails. Her eyes looked into mine. They were very dark and very pretty.

"Are you hungry?" I asked "What about a chicken wing?"

"No, I eat already! Where you go? I go with you, okay?"

Finally Noi scowled as she understood that she had to accept my decision. An elderly gentleman with a beard and gold rimmed glasses next to her gave her a smile and she smiled back ostentatiously, indicating that if I didn't want to go with her, she would throw herself at the next idiot that looked her way.

Well, that was fine with me. Go girl! Make some money! My gaze followed Noi's as she trudged away with her pickup courageously, showing off her butt, waving a naughty backhanded finger at me. Good luck girl and good business!

With Noi gone, I relaxed and enjoyed the scenery. Two of my little house-mates had left with farangs, but Lek and Ning still remained. They were in high spirits and the three of us sang along to "we will, we will *beep* you".

When the bar closed, Lek and I joined the streaming masses up to Lan Sukapok where Lek had a bowl of mee

jinn noodle before she left for the Banana to make a pickup.

For once even Stephen was there, he had dropped in for a beer and we talked about girls the expat way. Steven and I had different tastes it seemed, but we agreed on one thing: with the stunners, sex was a bore.

"They don't even try"! Steven said "They are so damn blasé."

I didn't agree though. I mean yes, most stunners are blasé, simply because the guys worship them like saints no matter what. But why should the fact that they were widely admired make them boring in bed? I suspected there must be another explanation. But I had no clue as to what.

The next day was Navy Day. It had been a hot night and even the morning was hot already. I got up and took a shower. Lek and Ning had slept at home, Lek had taken her pickup from the "trap" to our house and Ning had made it back to her room late at night after a short-time at Holiday Inn.

Finally Gaew and Paht wandered in at early afternoon and we prepared for a shared meal. The girls were all excellent cooks, Ning had even managed a food stall back in Isaan. Accordingly, food in our house was always great. Another great thing about the food in our house was that I never was on roll, since I was both man and farang. One of the few advantages: farang always has to pay, but he never has to prepare food... or wash dishes... or do the laundry... all of which by the way, done by hand.

The six of us sat down on the patio floor enjoying the shade and the garden breeze. Gaew had brought a newspaper and she read some of the news to me before using it as a table mat. I was informed that there had been several motorbike accidents that night, sewage from a big hotel had poured out into the sea, and a young bar girl had been murdered by a farang. In Bangkok a young girl had committed suicide by drinking pesticide in her cell to prevent herself from being molested by the police.

We commented on the murder. Though people disappeared and died in motorbike accidents all the time and killings were a common way of dealing with unpleasant business partners and unfaithful husbands, the murder of a bargirl was an extraordinary event. Pakarang's night life had always been flamboyant, but safe.

The girls were uneasy, for the first time I sensed that they were having fearful thoughts about their working conditions.

But as soon as we had finished our generous meal the mood changed. It was Navy Day, remember? After a nap, the girls came together in our living room and began to groom and make up. Lek had sent her pickup away, though the guy was quite handsome and seemed ready to lose some money. Sorry, but ain't nothing beats them Navy strappers!

Enraptured, Gaew, Paht and Lek left early, they weren't going to miss a moment of the party.

Ning and I sat on the veranda, watching the steaming mountains.

"Have you ever been abroad?" I asked her.

"Yes, farang took me to Switzerland once. It was very cold. He made me wear much clothes and a hat, and gloves."

"It must have been in the winter then."

"I don't know, but there was snow everywhere and ice on the water and sharp ice hanging from the roof like a knife..."

She shuddered. I heard a door slamming and saw Boomer, our farang neighbour leave his house and hop on his bike. A few moments' later Dah, his Thai wife came out to lament. For three years she had been with her unfaithful husband, a "butterfly", a Don Juan, a Casanova, who didn't care and didn't mind that everybody knew he was making a cuckquean of his wife. It was not only the money. Poor Dah really loved that old son of a bitch.

The sky was clear, the sun was quickly setting, soon a rosy and reddish glowing band of skies would lighten up behind the mountains of Kathu for a short while before making space for a pale moon.

"Why is he doing this to me?" Dah sobbed as she had done so often.

"I always was a true wife. Yes I make a little work, but only because he gives me so small money!"

Her tears began to roll.

"I know he has other lady, but I don't care if he comes home every night!"

"You should go working while there still is time and you are young" Ning replied "Boomer treats you like a dog."

Dah took a sip of Thai whisky.

"I think of the future all the time. I am already thirty soon, too old to work farangs. Who want go with an old lady?"

She shook the ice in her drink fretfully.

"Dah" I said smilingly "if you ever work farangs, I will be your first customer!"

"Thank you Harry. You want some whisky?"

Traffic was picking up, the road at the bottom of the hill was aflow with motorbikes. The procession of Navy girls in short dresses and high heels had begun. Time for Ning to join the show. I offered her a ride as I was going to watch the show myself.

Downtown at the My Love Bar Lek sat puffing into the whistle I had given her for her birthday, letting out fierce catcalls every time a yummy soldier ambled by.

"Come and *beep* me! I'm so horny!" she yelled.

Ning snorted. "You make noise!" she complained.

And she was right, even through the roar of the speakers Lek's train whistle was a sharp assault on the ears.

I saw Gaew and Paht sitting on their stools. But one chair was vacant.

"Where is Noi?"

"I think she have boyfriend."

"That early?" I asked.

Lek shrugged.

Maybe a short-time. Maybe Noi would arrive later. But Noi never showed up...

The turmoil and noise picked up as more and more marines roamed the streets. Girls hollered and rejoiced as horny marines caressed them and lifted them up in the air like basketballs.

That night was a long and hot one, and the atmosphere was filled with noise, smells, evaporating perfumes and hormones. I guess for the girls it was like Christmas and Easter at the same time. Tonight I was going to take it

easy, have a few drinks and spend the rest of the night in front of my computer.

The next morning was calm and the house was empty as all my friends were "working" marines. The verdant hill behind the house oozed peaceful misty morning dew into the scalding glimmering air. It was too hot to sit at home or at a road-stall kitchen. I decided to imbibe my breakfast in the air-conditioned lobby of the Sabai Hotel. I ordered continental breakfast and enjoyed the luxury of freshly squeezed mango juice. The (English speaking) newspaper told the story of the American battleship that was gracing us with its visit and had more details on the bar girl killing. Her identity had been determined as one Miss Suthapa Nianthar - but I will spare the reader the details of the slaughter, just a hint: unlucky Miss Nianthar had the bad fate of meeting a surgeon on her last assignment, it seemed.

"Miss Nianthar who worked at a Pakarang bar as a cashier leaves a child..."

I kept myself busy writing and reading for the next couple of days. The house was tranquil and I enjoyed the peace as the girls were busy on their Navy stints. Stephen popped in and we chatted for a while. We discussed the Navy's visit and the fracas it had brought along.

"When I first came to Thailand I had no idea how hot-blooded these girls are by nature" Stephen mused "Today I understand a little bit more. Still it is hard to grasp the vehemence with which these Valkyries chase the Navy."

"It is the big S" I said "You know the three big S' that rule the Thai way of life: as in SUAY (handsomeness) and SADANG (money) and SANUK (fun). Thai girls are shackled by emotion and under the spell of love potion no. nine when the mighty warriors of the high West come down to earth in their vessel and uniform..."

"Yes" Stephen added "it is kind of funny though, people always accusing men of being chauvinist swines, picking beautiful young girls for fornication... they should experience the shock of seeing our local girls at a time like this..."

He laughed. "And it even is just one big game. The girls and the navy boys have a heck of the time, bugging each other to kingdom come..."

Then ponderously he added: "And luckily what happened to your poor friend is just a very seldom thing..."

"What do you mean by my poor friend?" I asked perplexed.

"I mean Noi of course" Stephen said "What happened to her is an absolute abnormality in this place. Thank God."

Seeing my stupefied face he added: "I thought you knew her, wasn't she one of your girls?"

"Yes, Noi is a friend of ours. What do you imply saying something *happened to her*?"

"You mean you don't know? Haven't you heard?" Stephen asked back unbelievably.

Slowly a bad feeling crept into my guts.

"It was all over the news" Stephen said, quoting the newspaper "Miss Nianthar worked at the My Love Bar and she leaves a daughter..."

Instantly I hoped that Stephen was wrong. I rushed down to the My Love Bar. It was open, but only a few of

the girls were warming their stools. I noticed that the flags were hanging low and there were black balloons. So Stephen had been right...

There was Gaew, sitting with her pickup - a black marine double her size. As she saw me, she hurried over to hug me and I felt her moist cheek against mine. She held my hand for a minute.

Finally I asked: "What was Noi's real name?"

"Her First Name Suthapa" Gaew said "last name Nianthar. Why?"

It took me a long time and a lot of Jack Daniel's to summon the strength to look the truth in the eye. And I cursed the day I had turned Noi down. I accused myself heavily for letting her go with the bearded killer-surgeon and saying a dumb thing like *what about a chicken wing* instead of saving her life by saying "Yes I go with you".

The Golden Hour of Laan Sukapok

Place with no name everybody knows

If you have stayed in Pakarang for more than the average two to three weeks, you might have noticed this place. Certainly every expat knows it...

TO BE CONTINUED

INTERN COPY



2. PHUKET DIARY

The Phuket Diary is not Harry's intimate personal diary - but close to. Originally it was written as a blog when he was still living on the island. Here you have it on print in a slightly revamped version...

TO BE CONTINUED

INTERN COPY

Low Season Blues

When the dark, misty clouds gather over Mount Kathu and the street vendors cover their banana cakes with plastic film... when the sparkling *zinghs* of rubber tree fruits exploding in the midday heat no longer punctuate the solitudal sound of silence on my hillside veranda... when the waterfalls of Phuket grow big, strong and splashy like the foreign soldiers who invade this island from time to time...
TO BE CONTINUED

INTERN COPY

Country & Eastern

"How much?" the pump attendant asks.

The tank of my little bike holds about 3 liters of petrol. When full. That's 30 Baht, less than two dollars. Less than a bottle of beer.

Well then, let's have a party and fill'er up! That will give me about 100 kilometres on the road, enough for one day's leisurely travel.

Or maybe not? Who knows what a difference a day makes... 24 little hours from now, where will I be?

It feels great to be on the road again. When the low season blues wash over the island with their heavy bellies all black and blue and when the laundry comes back all damp and smelly... when the breakers off the Kata and Patong beaches show their teeth and eat tourists alive... when the monks hide in their temples and huts instead of wandering the misty morning sois... that's when I grab my bike and rediscover Phuket.

It does rain during monsoon season. But still it is just like a hot, if wet, summer. All right, when it rains it rains cats and dogs. But there are those clear days. Like today. By tonight my nose and arms will be burning red. But that's okay.

Further on down the road there is an open air market. A lot of pick-ups and vans. Fifty or more small motorbikes parked at wayside. Many of them are samplers (three-wheelers) with a home-made side car attached to the frame. I stop and find a vacant spot between a rusty old sampler whose third wheel stands at an odd angle to the other two and whose gas tank has been replaced by an old plastic oilcan... and a shiny new street-racer with

flashing colours and the misspelled name *new road an-gell* sprayed proudly on the side. The place is bustling. The first stalls right next to the road sell snacks. Spring rolls, hot cookies and sugar cane juice are being made and sold fresh on the spot. Further on fruit vendors have stacked their wares up high. Mountains of chili paste in red, yellow and brown towering everywhere. Fish, shells, crabs, shrimps... and a feast for tropic fruit lovers: mango, mangosteen, rambutan, lichee, lamyai, lime and the king of fruits, the mighty and smelly durian. The vegetables on the other hand seem quite familiar to Western eyes: carrots, cabbage, corn, onions and mushrooms abound.

The middle section of the market space belonged to the meat-vendors. Freshly slaughtered chicken, raised in the yard on leftovers from "real food" laid on wooden planks side by side with pigs' ears, noses and intestines.

From the clothes-vendors' stalls comes the monotonous rattle of voices appraising colourful T-shirts copies and cheap bras made in Thailand.

Right in the middle of the market a truck has dumped some P.A. equipment which seems to originate from Chuck Berry's first garage back in the woods 1952. An old synthesizer that must have belonged to Ray Charles in his teens and an antediluvian copy of a Fender bass made in Hong Kong. A microphone like the one from my old tape-recorder four decades ago... But this wondrous collection of museum pieces is not on display or for sale, neither is it a heap of rubbish, I discover. This is the actual road-gear of an authentic upcountry Thai band. While I stand and inspect the musical tools, the musicians enter the "stage". They all have a somewhat funny

kind of unsteady walk. The keyboard player feels his way to the stool, which actually is a wooden crate, with his fingers rather than with his eyes. And the singer grabs her microphone while meditatively looking in a different direction. I do not realise it at first, but when the bassman is being escorted up to his Hong Kong Fender and has his helper crank up the volume on the amplifier for him, it dawns upon me that this is an all-blind bunch. Without further ado the songstress intonates a wail that makes my hair stand erect.

"Oioioi..." she goes "ahahaha...."

And one, two, three - voila, the band joins in to the crash of a cymbal. And guess what! They sound incredibly good! The girl's piercing, lamenting voice crisp and clear on top of the instruments full-bodied backdrop.

Fascinated I sit down on an empty wooden fish-crate and open my beer.

A blessing for the musicians, that they cannot see their audience. Nobody really listens, people walk by and carelessly drop a coin or two into the battered old cookie jar in front of the singer's inwardly looking eyes. Actually I, the only white-skinned person in this place, am a greater spectacle for folks to behold. People actually stride up, pretend to listen to the music, but stare at me, their curiosity barely masked by the casual cling of money in the dented old cookie jar in front of the girl with the inward eyes.

The music is strictly Isaan - the Country and Eastern of Thailand so to speak. Lengthy ballads about the love between poor farmers who cannot unite, because parents give their daughters to wealthy landowners as

maids and playtoys. About girls, that must go to the big city and sell their love for money.

All songs are in the same key, all melodies are in minor, all the singer's vocals are interspersed with needle-sharp, pentatonic guitar fills. But the mood is not sad. Rather hypnotic and relaxed. Once in a while the guitar-player grabs a bamboo flute, somewhat like a pan-flute, but with the pipes organized in two parallel rows rather than in a semicircle and blows away. The arrangement of the pipes allows him to produce chords as well as melodic fills. Strangely, he makes the flute sound very much like his electric guitar.

The sun is shining, big umbrellas cast shadows over sapodillas, rose-apples, and plastic wares. The air is filled with scents and smells. Of spicy pastes enriched with coconut milk. Of dried fish and smoked squids. Open fires from stalls and samlor-shops that prepare deep-fried pawpias (spring rolls), dried squid and chicken legs with sticky rice give away billowing clouds of smoke.

Smiling, slender girls from Pakarang and Kathu in T-shirts and designer-shorts mingle with big, bargaining mama-sans in ankle-length sarongs. Shy boys and girls from country villages with big eyes cannot help but stare at me, flash their teeth and avert their face, when their eyes meet mine.

Everything breathes peace and leisure. Time flies by while the narratives of love and sorrow spin their haunting web of notes through the scented air. The bottle of beer is empty and my butt hurts from the uncomfortable seat. Menacingly a giant black cloud moves its heavy belly downward from the Kathu mountains with a promise of rain. But the sun prevails and the blinding light

creates a spectacular show against the enigmatic backdrop.

Time to move on. I find a 50 Baht note in my pocket and slip it gently into the old tin can. It will be the only one of its kind between all the coins. With the wails of the blind songstress still in my ears and the wind in my hair I ride on. The long and winding road leads through pineapple and rubber tree plantations. Newly pressed rubber mats hang here, there and everywhere. On fencing wires, garden fences, clothes-lines.

A samlor or two drag themselves along coughingly, loaded to the brim with heavy rubber mats. Papa, mum and kids waving happily as I pass them by.

I know there is a waterfall in this area of northern Phuket. This is a good time to visit it and I might as well drop by. No tourists around and lots of water in the fall.

I remember the last time I was on a waterfall trip, ages ago. The woods were gently whispering, the water happily gurgling and the birds caroling... a setting out of wonderland. And the girl... ah. Pink and white flowers tucked in dark, long hair. Pearly white teeth behind ruby red lips.

Well, this time I will tuck a flower in my own hair and let the cascades whisper sweet off-season promises in my ears.

The Joy of Suffering (Vegetarian Delights)

It sounds so innocent and so pure: Vegetarian Festival. Something with carrots and cauliflowers. Something with health and proper diet. You bet not. Well yes - in a way. Hundreds of serene Asian faces, devouring mountains of grey-green Chinese cabbage heads and slurping yucky cabbage soup. 99 monks in carrot-coloured robes walking solemnly around the temples... But beware, such is only the beginning.

Actually, I had seen pictures. Terrifying sights of men clad in square aprons. Walking in street processions with huge monster objects and artefacts like spears, metal rods and saw-blades drilled straight through their gums and cheeks.

But those were just pictures. A picture can never substitute the real experience, no matter how seizing.

You look at it and you say: *oh well...* Nothing forces you to confront reality. And nothing in the pictures had prepared me for the real thing.

So there I was, at five o'clock in the morning, the sandman still in my eyes, standing in the yard of the Jui Tui temple. Bells were ringing, drums were being beaten and people milled around everywhere. The place was bristling with anticipation - and reeking of cabbage soup.

A group of chosen ones lingered in front of the left wing of the altar. *Morituri te salutant*. The death-defying heroes were getting ready to get down with destiny. But they didn't look anything like Caesar's rugged bunch of lion-eaters. Actually they looked a little bit lost, even frightened, as they stood there, facing the task at hand. Doubtful thoughts knocked at the doors of their percep-

tion. *Would it work one more time? Had they cleansed their bodies and souls thoroughly enough? Had they imbibed sufficient heaps of cabbage and other vegetables?*

But things were moving up. Heavy fumes from wood and incense filled the temple air, superseding the cabbage reek. The "band" really got into the groove and pushed, pushed, pushed for ecstasy. Already the first men began to show signs of possession. Sweat started to pour, dripping from faces. Eyes became glassy. Movements became obsessed...

TO BE CONTINUED

INTERN COPY



3. TURNING THE TABLES

Watching the Water fall

Finally I did it. I let myself be caught, handcuffed and prisoned in the holy jail of marriage. Her name was Nang and she had a graceful motion that made her stand out, even though she wasn't nearly as beautiful as some of the other girls and stunners I had been with. But in her case, beauty did not count as much as - well, personality and grace. She was The One. So I switched from alcoholic to monogamic. I hasten to say that our marriage was a Buddhist Thai wedding, so it was not legally binding. I still had a backdoor open :-)

We were sitting on the big bed together with a couple of friends, munching shrimp-flavoured rice-cookies and shoe-leather, camouflaged as dried squid. Watching one of the countless TV shows on one of the countless channels.

As the picture showed a map of Trang - a southern district, famous for its many waterfalls - Nang, my beloved, said: "Let's visit my sister!"

I asked: "Where does your sister live?"

"Not far from here" she replied "just south of Phuket, close to this huge, wonderful waterfall. You will love it, teerak. And remember, we have to bring our bathing suits!"

She went on: "Let's rent a car. A black one! I'll pay."

And so we did and so she did. The next day we rented a four wheel driven Japanese kind of jeep copy thing. Which was ridiculous, as the ride from Phuket to Takua

Pa consists of some 200 kilometres mirror-smooth asphalt highways, made for red Italian sport cars, not for black rugged four wheeled, deep profiled mountain runners. Except, that is ... for the last three kilometres up to Nang's sister's. After a smooth journey through green and verdant forests lining the grey-blue mirror-asphalt, Nang suddenly exclaimed: "Slowly teerak. This is it. Turn right onto that road by the supermarket."

But it wasn't a supermarket and it wasn't a road. The supermarket was a wooden construction with dried leaves for a roof, a few bundles of bananas dangling from a wooden pillar and a shady concrete seating arrangement in front for the lao khao drinkers. And the road wasn't a road but a dry riverbed. Steep as the path to the Pearly Port, filled with holes as deep as bathtubs and clogged with huge, bumpy, sharp stones. I suddenly wished we had rented a real jeep or even a tank instead of this Japanese tin can copy...

TO BE CONTINUED

At Turning Point

I decided to venture further and left the little lake behind. Following the creek upstream, the overgrown trail led up a gentle slope in ever winding turns.

After about twenty minutes I reached another plateau and another lake. This one was as deep and sinister as the first one had been shallow and friendly. The sun shone glaringly bright on its surface, creating chilling black shadows where the lake disappeared into a big and deep grotto.

I sat down on the rim - the lake was contained by a natural dam - a wall rising steeply up from the slope. At one side at the edge of a water basin a small amount of water leaked out of the bowl, thus creating a miniature waterfall. No telling how deep the water was in the basin. In contrast to the shallow first lake "downstairs" this one was not clear, but looked muddy and hostile. I could not make out the bottom. Not even the fingers of my submerged hand at arm's length.

From where I sat I could not see much ahead either. The wall of naked rock rose threateningly behind the lake like a fortress. On top and on its one side ample vegetation prevailed. The rock itself was hollow. A mighty, black grotto opened in the middle.

I decided to test the waters. Something about this menacing cave challenged me. It beckoned.

"You are a different man now, Mr James" it said. "You have abolished your former life as a prowling Fox amid lovely Thai chickens. You have decided to be true and faithful to your chosen lady."

It didn't make sense, but I knew exactly what the voice was telling me. I had made a decision a few days earlier, I was going to leave the blissful shores of Pakarang. Something about Nang and her firm acknowledgement of me as a person, as her lover and husband had made a difference.

Maybe you think that Thai girls are all soft and submissive. Chances are you have seen pictures of fat old men together with youngish and sweet looking Thai girls so often, you actually believe in the old stereotype. But let me tell you, most Thai girls are nothing like that. I admit, they can give you one or two nights in paradise (as Stephen had put it), but as soon as you are going steady, your main squeeze turns into a tigress. Forget about loyalty, forget about submission. A cat fight for every snip of tenderness is what you get.

But Nang was different. Also she was more mature than my Pakarang pickups in the old days. It was pure luck and good fortune that I had met this wonderful lady and received her blessed love. And it wasn't that "I believe my wife" thing either. I wasn't naive and no cuckoo. I saw her like she was and I loved her for it.

So what did actually drive me to accept, or rather provoke, the challenge? At that moment I couldn't figure it out. I just knew that this was the time, the instance, the turning point. If I did not do it now, I never would.

Maybe I didn't believe in my own luck? Maybe I needed a sign from above to indemnify my decisions? Maybe I was just suffering a setback? In any case it seemed the right thing to do to leave the lures, temptations and pitfalls of Phuket paradise behind and reach for real happiness in mutuality.

Slowly I got into the water. My feet did not reach the ground. I held onto the basin's wall for a second, pondering my situation. I was alone in an alien place. I was going to swim in bottomless muddy waters into the dark cave, not knowing how deep it was, what currents there might be, what animals might frolic under the surface. As I began to float towards the opening I made a quick calculation in my mind. There were no freshwater crocodiles here. There was hardly any chance of poisonous or biting fish at this place. Insects, well. Centipedes, spiders, maybe scorpions. Snakes, certainly, but Thai snakes hardly ever interfere with man. Statistically, I assured myself, swimming into the cave was as safe as taking a nap in an airplane. It just didn't feel that way, that's all.

As soon as I passed the entry and forwarded into the shadowy part of the cave, my eyes that up till this moment had been submerged in bright sunlight could see nothing at all. It was a frightening minute, sullenly proceeding into pitch darkness and cold waters until slowly my pupils widened enough for me to faintly make out what was ahead. I felt an abysmal shiver. Thoughts were running through my head.

I had been in much worse situations before. I had looked down on kilometres of enemy rocks. I had been held at gunpoint, even heard the click of the failing weapon positioned against my forehead.

But this was different. Swimming into the unknown, dark and icy cave in Phang Nga there was no tangible threat besides my imagination. At war, problems tend to jump at you and you react instinctively or mechanically. But in this place my mind had all the time in the world to con-

jure monsters that originated not from the real world, but from inside my brain.

And there I had it. In this place, for the first time since my childhood, I was confronting the fears insidiously concealed in the depth of my soul.

There was a dull reflection, a drab wall sparsely lit by the distant sunlight. Beyond the wall was blackness and I heard a rising sound, like the rumble of a distant train. Current started to tuck at my legs, oddly it dragged me sidewise. Whatever was behind that greyish wall was threatening and fearful.

My reflexes anxiously bid me return, but I decided not to leave before I had accomplished some sort of success, so I opted for the wall. I was going to strike it, then turn around and swim back. Fighting the sinking feeling in my guts I approached the wall and reached out to touch it.

Later, lying in the sun while letting the warmth dry my body I reflected on what had just happened. The unforgiving agonising pull of the current close to the wall had nearly drowned me. That was not quite unexpected. Obviously there would be some risk in a hazardous dare like swimming into the unknown current of a mountain cave. But what happened immediately afterwards took me aback and shook my senses. Luckily my ancient but well trained army drill had taken over and I contented myself by the fact that I had done what I had to do and I had returned safely. I did not know what that "thing" was that had approached me and I was not going to probe either.

On my way back I enjoyed the stunning nature all around me. After the dark and minacious grotto the

sunny world of the jungle was a joy to behold. Enormous buttress roots jettied wall-like up into a green roof made of leaves interspersed with blue dots of sky, while faint misty vapour from the waterfall drifted through the lush vegetation. Lianas with snake-like torsions connecting giant trees and ample ferns with flexible cords. Bamboo bushes stood erect with thick buds sprouting out of fertile soil like erotic cavernous bodies. Exotic flowers and epiphytic plants cowering in branch forks. An occasional traveller's tree like an enormous fan with every shade of green, flashing its wings like a windmill in the ever shifting patterns of sunrays.

Still there was a nagging feeling somewhere back in my spine...but I let it be drowned by sights and smells of amazing Thailand.

I had met my demons and my doubts. I was alive. I had a wonderful Thai lady to call my wife. I was blessed, I contented myself.

Arriving at the spot where I had left the girls, Nang was so beautiful as she waved her hand gracefully, displaying a sparkling smile, her body damp with moisture.

I embraced my sweetheart and hugged her, whispering into her ear "I love you".

Nang did not respond like Thai ladies going with farangs usually do - that is by pushing me away, shouting "คนโกหก" (liar). Instead she whispered back "I love you too teerak" and planted a soft kiss on my lips.

Noi laughed out loud, bashfully. It wasn't common for Thai people to show loving affection in public - in public outside the farang bars and beaches that is. But I didn't care, and Nang didn't care.

Meanwhile a happy crowd of Thai people had gathered. Sitting in the shades, imbibing som dam (papaya salad), crabs and mussels and other Thai snacks. Girls were laughing, children squeaking and the waterfall gurgled its assents. Under a row of kapok and jackfruit trees the falling waters pooled into a river. I sat and watched it flow for a while.

Time is nothing but an illusion, Einstein has said. And he was right. Suddenly time had flown by, the sun was hanging low, already the shadows from the cliff were moving toward our carpets. We had to leave.

Nang and Noi packed our belongings, we followed the path back to the parking and stuffed our things into the car. At Noi's hut Nang's mother and Lek the soldier were getting ready to prepare dinner. But at first Lek poured us a quick khao lao, indicating that in Thailand there is no sanuk without alcohol.

I accepted the drink, secretly holding my nose while imbibing the revolutive fluid. But he was wrong, of course. From the time Nang has stepped into my life I have experienced otherwise. Joy was wherever Nang was.

As I said, my alcoholic days were over. Monogamy rules! The next day Nang and I bid our friends the jungle dwellers farewell and pulled out. Along the way we visited Wat Sua (tiger temple), a particular sacred place, where Nang wanted to "speak Buddha" as she called it.

Actually, the tiger temple was very impressive. There were no living tigers of course, just statues, but monkeys, dogs, snakes, birds and lizards.

Tucked away behind solid cliff walls, accessible only by a narrow entrance out of Jurassic Park, one never gets a

hunch what to expect. A glorious series of grottos and vaults in the midst of a landscape out of prehistoric fiction movies. The forgotten land - you wouldn't be surprised to see dinosaurs and ancient raptors roaming freely. Which you do actually. Right beneath the floor of one of the monk's bamboo huts a huge monitor lizard held its siesta. The main grotto was wonderful - a giant, cool, dimly lit abyss with marble floors and slowly rotating fans on twenty meters long holders dropping down from the ceiling. A few meditating monks, some humble visitors. Nang kneeled down and exercised the local worship ceremony.

Next stop, the obligatory shoe leather and som dam at the food stall.

I knew that the following item on my personal agenda was going to strain my persuasive powers, so I made sure Nang was in a good mood before I pointed out that it would be great to enjoy the view from the fabled mountain top of the Tiger Wat.

"1237 steps!" Nang exclaimed, reading the sign "Teerak! You want to kill me?"

Thais seldom take pains like climbing a mountain or a stair - let alone 1237 steps - unless a really forceful motivation compels them to (like for instance the promise of delicious foods). But I persuaded Nang to escalate with me - in the end she gave in and armed with plastic water bottles we commenced the ascent.

We took it slow and easy, still in the cloudless and humid heat of the day it took great efforts and litres of perspiration. Soaked and feverish we arrived at the top. Immediately I was glad I had coaxed her. The view was outstanding - comparable to the view from an airplane.

Flat green plains interjected by meandering streams, pried open by jutting rocks, stretching their jarred boulders against the blue skies. Even wide-winged eagles sailed majestically over the outstretched landscapes. It was magnificent. For quite some time Nang and I stood close, taking it all in. At the distant horizon I could spot the characteristically crooked rocks of Krabi. Standing on the top of Tiger Temple Mountain with my love, silently savouring the glory of this outlook, gave me a strange, but good feeling. It felt like arriving. I had arrived. Yet, I had to leave.

Just like the grotto under the waterfalls of Phang Nga had challenged me to make a stand, the horizons of Krabi beckoned me to venture further. Standing on the peak, looking out over the exotic landscape while pondering my inner life I knew I had to leave this country. Something in me had turned a page. That was the unfulfilled feeling that had nagged me back at the dark waterfall grotto.

Would Nang go with me? I looked at her and without speaking, her eyes answered "no".

Back in the shade of enormous rainforest trees around Wat Sua we sat and enjoyed a simple but sapid meal. Fried rice with green curry and a freshly opened coconut for a drink to go with it. A giant greyish shape appeared on the compounds. It was an elephant.

Nowadays elephants in Thailand and its neighbouring countries survive only for touristic reasons, so of course it was not a wild animal.

Nang gave the mahout a few Baht and made her turns under the belly of the beast while I contemplated my

next move. I was not sure about Nang's imaginative "no". I wasn't even sure if I were going to pop the question. What would I do if I was compelled to choose between leaving without Nang - or staying with her?...
TO BE CONTINUED

INTERN COPY

Cutting the Cards

Arriving safely back home in Pakarang after the visit to Nang's sister's and the waterfall I prepared for my departure...

TO BE CONTINUED

INTERN COPY

4. FOX FAQ

Before answering your questions I would like to relay Harry's own comment on his book:

"My name is Harry "Fox" James and before you ask, what with the middle name, here is the story: I am a vet and during the war against terrorism they used to call me the Fox because I was a reliable brother in arms, especially at night patrols. Also I took great pains watching my tail, you see. That is why I survived, even without much injury. Except from a little shell wound that still aches once in a while.

But that is not the interesting part. At least not for my readers I guess. Having a journalistic background I did some blogging while living on the rock in Andaman Thailand. And everybody kept telling me to hard copy the stuff. So finally, now I did with the helping hand of a friend. If you enjoy reading it just half as much as I did writing when going through the motions, I know you will have a heck of a time. Except for the ending, that is... But of course I don't have to tell you that even paradise does not contain eternal happiness.

The stories are mostly located shortly before the big T hit in 2004, so we are in the good old settings when sex and fun were abundant, before all those new buildings and malls rose to stardom and ugly fame. And before the horrid stench...

TO BE CONTINUED

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