

Behind the Smile

The Story of Lek,
A Bar Girl in Pattaya

Book Two: An Exciting Future



Owen Jones

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An Exciting Future

«Tektime S.r.l.s.»

Jones O.

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In Daddy's Hobby, volume one, Lek met a man, Craig, who actually did come back for her, and then took her home to meet his mother. Her dreams seem to be coming true, but not everything is running as smoothly as they had both hoped, so will she wake up and be back in the nightmare she thought she had just put behind her? In Daddy's Hobby, Craig had promised Lek an exciting future, if she threw caution to the wind and went with him, and this volume picks up the story as they are flying back from Wales. Behind The Smile - The Story of Lek, a Bar Girl in Pattaya, Thailand Book Two: An Exciting Future This second book continues Lek's story from where book one left off and covers the next few years of her life. It gives more information about life in a rural Thai village and what is like to live there for a woman like Lek, whose mind has been expanded by working in a popular tourist city for ten years and meeting foreigners from all over the world. The question that this book poses is whether Lek would be able to shoehorn herself back into the rigid village society that she once loved so much and will the others accept her after what she has been doing.

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AN EXCITING FUTURE

The second novel in the series
Behind The Smile
The Story of Lek, a Bar Girl in Pattaya

by

Owen Jones

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Behind The Smile: An Exciting Future

The Story of Lek, a Bar Girl in Pattaya

by Owen Jones

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Novels in the:

Behind The Smile Series

The Story of Lek, a Bar Girl in Pattaya

Behind The Smile: Daddy's Hobby

Behind The Smile: An Exciting Future

Behind The Smile: Maya – Illusion

Behind The Smile: The Lady in the Tree

Behind The Smile: Stepping Stones

Behind The Smile::The Dream

Behind The Smile: The Beginning

Dedication

Dedicated to my brother Rhys, without whose encouragement this book would not exist, and to all the Pattaya bar girls that he has never met.

They gave me the material that inspired this series.

Thank you one and all.

Owen Jones

Thailand

March 2013

Acknowledgements

The cover girl's name is Chalita.

Please send any queries about work to me and I will forward them to her.

Owen Jones

Look Out for the Sequel:

“Maya - Illusion”

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1 1 STARTING AGAIN

As the wheels of the aircraft touched down on the runway at the new Bangkok International Airport called Suvarnabhumi, Craig knew that he was going to have his hands full with Lek. She suffered badly from travel sickness – it was her one big weakness, but she even got sick on the bus going to the market, so a flight of 11,500 kilometres and fifteen hours was always going to be a problem.

Lek had taken five of the green tablets which were her favourite anti-travel sickness pills. She always seemed to have about twenty of them in her bag. One tablet would make her appear a little drunk, but five made her seem like an escapee from a lunatic asylum. He had seen it on the outward flight. He looked at her sitting next to him; her eyes were glassy and she was humming something quietly to herself.

“Are we there yet?” she asked, “That was quick. Have we stopped off somewhere?”

“We’re in Thailand,” he replied a little too testily.

Craig was fifty years old and had never asked a woman to marry him so far, but he thought he might like to ask this one. She was a handful, as they say, that was to be sure, but there was also something about her that he found very special.

He didn’t like her taking those pills though, but he knew how badly affected by travel-sickness she could get. She’d had to throw up in her new crocodile skin handbag once – her pride and expensive

joy – because they had gone on a short bus ride and she had forgotten to transfer all her paraphernalia into the new bag. It was either be sick in her new bag or on the floor of the bus and she would rather die than do that and lose face.

Later, she would have to be assisted like a drunk through the airport, baggage control and immigration and suffer the stern stares from the Thai officials who would assume that she had drunk too much cheap alcohol on the plane.

He was glad that she had chosen to wear long, baggy trousers.

The plan of the day was Lek's usual one whenever anything unusual or exciting happened to her, namely to get down to 'Daddy's Hobby' in Pattaya and tell her friends all about it. In fact, it didn't have to be anything unusual at all, it was just the place where Lek felt most at home in the world. 'Daddy's Hobby' was the name of the bar that Lek's cousin owned and where he had met her. Craig didn't mind going there one little bit. The two dozen bar girls always made a big fuss of him and Lek even encouraged them to do it.

Within a couple of hours, he'd have girls hanging off his shoulders, sitting on his lap and plying him with drinks while Lek recounted the details of her recent adventure in the UK. She should have come round a bit by then too.

Just in time to share a couple of bottles of whiskey with her ex-colleagues.

Still, it would be very pleasant and the apartment that he had booked before they had left was not far from the bar.

He was wondering whether that would be a good time to propose – in front of her friends, when she least expected it and when she would get the maximum amount of attention and admiration. It would certainly give her face a boost, not that it was flagging in Pattaya. All her friends thought she was a star - one in a million.

Craig thought so too.

However, first things first, he thought; people were starting to disembark. Craig thought it best to wait for most people to get off before he tried to coax and manhandle Lek down the aisle, so they just sat there and he tried to get her to get a grip on herself.

Without much success.

The cabin staff were helpful – they understood about the tablets – and Lek and Craig eventually made it to immigration, which was pretty straightforward, although Lek did attract a few of the expected stern looks from the Thai officials and Craig got more than a couple of knowing nods from them too. He just smiled back weakly in reply.

They made it to the carousel, where Lek fell into a chair and Craig picked up the luggage, which he loaded onto a trolley. He considered putting Lek on it too, but that would have been just too embarrassing, so he settled for letting her push it, so that she had something to lean against. No problems at baggage control and then out into the heat.

He had more or less forgotten the overpowering heat and the everyday bustle outside a Thai airport. Taxi drivers and their touts all shouting at once for your custom. This was one of the occasions where having a Thai girlfriend helped a lot. She shooed them all away and they stood in the queue for a proper meter taxi to take them to Pattaya, which was only about an hour away.

They were supposed to go to the British Embassy to have Lek's six-month visa cancelled as it was still valid for three months and allowed multiple entries into the UK, but the Embassy would be closed now and Lek was in no fit state anyway. They would have to do something about it another day.

They arrived in Daddy's Hobby after an uneventful journey. Lek had tried to talk to the driver a few times, but he thought that she was drunk so he ignored her and tried to speak to Craig, but in Thai, which Craig could not speak, so that quickly fizzled out too and Lek, being ignored, soon fell asleep, which was probably the best thing she could have done anyway.

Lek had wanted to speak Thai though. She was excited to be back in her own country, where she could hold a proper conversation in her own language and where she could feel that she belonged

again. They had had a few months in Craig's home town of Barry in South Wales and everyone had made her feel very welcome. She liked European food and she could speak English reasonably well, but ...

It wasn't her town, it wasn't her favourite food, it wasn't her language and they were not her people. She had had a fantastic holiday – her first trip to Europe – but she was glad to be home and she just wanted everyone to know it. She couldn't wait to see her old mates.

They got to Daddy's Hobby at a good time: nearly six o'clock. All the girls had arrived and were ready for action, but there were no customers yet and so the music was low. It would seem like a totally different place in two hours time. Once it got dark, the punters would be out and the volume would rise to deafening.

But between four and eight o'clock, the girls had time to talk and the volume was low enough to be able to hear them. It had been Craig's favourite time to visit the bar before they had gone on holiday. He had come down to the bar for an early drink and a chat almost every day then and he and the girls had got to know each other pretty well.

He often translated messages, texts and letters from and to their 'boyfriends' for them. Not that he could speak Thai, but he translated good English into pigeon and vice versa. It was fun although sometimes the messages were rather intimate and the girls would blush and giggle and run around telling each other in fits of laughter.

It was a good 'job' to have: It earned him a lot of brownie points from the girls, even if it went unpaid in monetary terms. They genuinely liked to see him, although he was quite well aware that he had only gotten his foot in the door because he was Lek's boyfriend. Many of the girls were from Lek's village in the north and she had worked with others for years. She was like a big sister to them and many of them called her just that.

At thirty-two years of age, Lek was also the oldest woman in the bar or at least joint oldest with her two best friends: Goong and Ayr. Her cousin, Beou, was a few years older again, but no-one ever mentioned that – she was the boss anyway. Despite her 'advancing' years (most of the girls were in their early twenties or younger), Lek was acknowledged to be the most beautiful woman in the bar by everyone, although no-one ever mentioned the obvious fact that that would not be true for many more years to come.

However, for now, she was still the beauty queen amongst beauty queens, for they were all very good-lookers in their own right.

When the taxi pulled up outside the bar, it was as if a film star had arrived, all the girls crowded around Lek, took her handbag, led her up to the bar by the arm, fired a dozen questions at her and whooped and whooped and whooped.

Craig paid the taxi driver and carried the luggage to the bar. He had expected a bit more attention for himself than that.

Once he was at the bar, a few of the girls noticed him and flung their arms around him, kissing him repeatedly on the cheek and arms. A few of the girls took the luggage to store behind the bar and Lek and Craig sat down for the start of what they both knew would be a long and lively session.

All the women were talking at once and, although Craig wasn't being totally ignored, he wasn't getting served either. He was dying for an ice-cold beer. He couldn't follow the conversation, maybe nobody could, but he could see how happy they all were, so he went behind the bar and got three beers. The first one didn't touch the sides. He downed it in two mouthfuls, but the other two he took back to the bar and handed one to Lek.

"Oh, so sorry, telak! Nobody take care of you. So sorry."

She said something and a few girls were detailed to 'take care' of Craig. Then she said loudly:

"You only buy two beers, this is not enough!" and she leaned over and rang the bell, signalling a drink for everyone at her expense.

Craig finished his beer quickly and accepted another.

Two of the girls detailed to 'take care' of Craig were unknown to him. They had obviously joined the crew while he and Lek had been away. They were very friendly, but when Ayr thought they were getting a bit too familiar, she sent them behind the bar to serve.

"So, sorry, Craig," she said, "these girls new. They don't know Lek and you together. I tell them later. Nice to see you again. You have good time in Wales?" and she was gone without waiting for the answer.

Ayr and Goong were Lek's oldest friends, came from the same village and had shared a room in Pattaya before Craig came on the scene. Neither of them held any ill will against Craig for taking their friend away though. They were happy that she was happy, because they were true friends.

"Oh, well," he joked with himself, "Shame about that. Still, never mind. At least, I didn't get into trouble on my first day back. Saved from myself by Lek's friend. Saved from whatever-their-names were too."

It did the trick though. He was not ignored by Lek, her friends or the strangers again. Everyone was keeping an eye on him now. He was served, kissed and complimented without long intervals in between and it suited him fine.

The girls quietened after about twenty minutes and they all sat around Lek, or as near as they could get, to listen to her favourite stories. It wasn't long after that that the first bottle of whiskey was broken out and a few small glasses appeared. The girls preferred whiskey because it was less fattening than a bottle of beer and it was easier to finish quickly if a punter wanted to talk with one of them.

Craig sat nearby too and listened out for landmark words like: Barry, Wales and family names. Sure enough, they were all mentioned often and he was sometimes called upon to corroborate the details, although no-one actually waited for him to finish speaking. He just about had the time to nod and smile, even though he didn't know what was being said. He trusted Lek though.

She was speaking softly so that the girls would have to listen hard:

"We set off on a typically beautiful, balmy Pattaya evening... a bit like this evening, in fact, and at about the same time of day, to catch the overnight flight to Britain. We were going to Wales, where Craig's family lives, but we had to go to London first, of course.

"Naturally we had to be at the check-in desk two to three hours before the flight, but there was nearly a disaster! Really! We nearly couldn't go! All because, unfortunately, Craig had forgotten that he was carrying an old souvenir pen-knife in his pocket that his father had given to him twenty years before.

"I thought they were going to arrest him. I was horrified! I thought I might have to go alone and wait for him over there and I didn't want to have to do that now, did I? Anyway, we were lucky, they only confiscated it. He was very sad about it, especially as the airline gave us metal cutlery to eat with anyway and the knives that they gave us were bigger than the one they had taken off Craig. Weren't they, Craig? Bigger knives?

"Craig said it was stupid to take his one-inch blade from him under such circumstances and I think that I have to agree with him, don't you?

"Anyway, the ten-and-a-half hour flight to Bahrain was very comfortable. The food was not to my liking because I am a Buddhist that does not eat beef or dairy products and the only two other choices were Indian curry or vegetable pie. I didn't mind though. It all looked very nice and I swapped my main course for Craig's ice cream.

"Bahrain was a shock from Suvarnabhumi airport. Oh, my God! It was OK, really, but we didn't have any of their money, Dinar, I think, so we just had to sit there and watch people for the two hours until the connecting flight to Gatwick. That is in the UK. The time passed slowly and I was a little cold because it was 20°C there, much colder than Bangkok. Virtually freezing!

Did I tell you that a man died on the flight? I nearly forgot. Shock or travel-sickness, I think. When they opened the doors to take him off mosquitoes as big as birds flew in! Oh my Buddha! I was sure we'd get malaria...

“Anyway, the second leg flight was also OK; not as good as the first, but at least I could eat the scrambled egg and pork sausage. I had Craig’s too, because he took my feta salad. Feta is cheese by the way. Greek cheese, isn’t it, Craig? Craig? He’s not listening again... Anyway, they eat a lot of cheese in Europe. The coffee was much stronger than I am used to too, but it was lovely. All in all, I liked Etihad Airways and would fly with them again, wouldn’t we, telak?”

“It took five hours to get to Gatwick and if Bahrain was a shock, Gatwick’s 5°C was as good as icy to me. As soon as I got off the plane, I was looking for the Ladies! It was that cold, honest. If you haven’t been abroad, darlings, you have no idea what cold is. We are so lucky here in good old Thailand. Anyway, fortunately we only had twenty-five minutes to wait for the bus to Cardiff via Victoria Coach Station – that’s in London again, of course.

“The tour coach was good and the driver was friendly, but the weather turned so bad as we crossed the Severn Bridge, into Wales, that is, over the Bristol Channel, isn’t it dear? that we were late arriving in Cardiff. We got there just in time for the eleven o’clock traffic jam. Just as bad as Bangkok, but you’re in the dark, which makes it a lot worse!

“It was hor-ren-dous!

“So, then our friend Nick, you know Nick, he comes in here sometimes took us in his car through Dinas Powys and Penarth before coming into Barry through Cadoxton.

“Craig suggested getting out at the King William IV – called The Billy – that’s a pub, so that we could have a drink. It was typical of him; well, you know my Craig, but it was bitterly cold, and it was close. We had been travelling for thirty-three hours and now we were ten minutes from my Welsh Mum’s house.

“Ooh, I’m parched, well, when we got to Mum’s, which was a day and a half after we started out from here... No, more about that later.

“I met so many handsome men, Oh my gosh! Our friends Colin, Ray, Billy, Digger, Danny, Sam, Paul and Selby, the father of two famous Welsh boxers, Andrew and Lee (he gave me one of Andrew’s jackets – I’ll show it to you one day) - they were in O’Brien’s and Mike, or Henry as his friends call him, in the Buccaneer and so many others. Those places are in the centre of the town of Barry, of course, Holton Road, near the King’s Square. When they come over to visit us, we could introduce you, if you like....”

Lek had them spellbound. It was exactly what it must have been like to watch Hans Christian Andersen telling fairy stories to kids in Denmark, although Lek’s stories were true even if a little dramatised. They just stared at her, sometimes looking at Craig as if to say ‘What with him?’, but actually saying “Ooh, really?” and “Ahhh, really? None of them had been to Europe before, although it was the dream that every single one of them had.

In fact, they would happily go to live anywhere abroad so long as the job was better and there was more money, which everybody believed that it was ‘abroad’ – meaning Europe, Australia and the USA. Not many of them had heard of Canada or New Zealand. Second choice was northern Africa, but most of the girls had heard rumours of sex slaves there and none of them fancied that.

Beou arrived on her motorbike and the commotion started all over again. Some girls jumped up to pretend they were working and others got out of the way to allow the boss easier access to her favourite cousin. She put one arm around Lek and, as she leaned in to exchange kisses, took Craig’s hand with the other.

“Hello, both! How the devil are you? Did you have a good time? Sorry that I couldn’t be here to greet you when you arrived, but someone was late coming to see me. (They’ll never do it again though). So, he didn’t sell you into slavery then? Or did you do a bit of part-time sex-slaving? Did she tell you, Craig? She was rather worried that you would sell her as a sex-slave to a bunch of old men in a nursing home! She might not have minded if it was to a football team. Or what do you play over there in Wales? Ah, rugby, is it? Yes, rugby.”

Lek was blushing deeply and she thought she would die if any of the girls knew what was actually being said about her, but it was a bit too fast for most them.

“No, she didn’t say anything. What’s this all about, Beou? And how are you anyway?”

“Oh, I’m fine. A few of the old women back home warned Lek to be careful that you didn’t sell her into the sex industry. A lot of people are worried about it, but I told her that the old biddies in the village were just jealous.”

Lek could still barely speak so she covered her face below her eyes with a hand to hide her blushes.

“Oh, Beou! How could you? I didn’t really believe them, but you hear such terrible things, don’t you? And I never said anything about an old men’s home or a football team! And I didn’t even know what rugby was until a few months ago.” Then in English: “Don’t believe her, Craig..... Well, not all of it anyway.”

“I don’t know what you are all talking about. Don’t believe all of what? What did Beou say?” asked Craig

“Oh, don’t worry, I tell you later. It is not important now. Ladies in the village tell me to take care nobody sell me into sex slavery, that’s all. Don’t worry.”

“Oh, is that all,” he replied, still not completely understanding. One thing he had learned though was that if Lek said ‘later’, it usually meant either ‘no’ or ‘never’, so he just let it drop. He trusted her and her judgement and, besides that, they were back on her turf now where she knew far more than he ever would.

Beou sat down and a gin and tonic was put in front of her, she lit a cigarette and rang the bell, which was an uncommon thing for her to do. Half-a-dozen of the girls jumped up to see to their boss’ order, but they all came back to find out how the story would develop. Beou didn’t mind that, she was a pretty good employer and the majority of these girls were not there to clean glasses anyway.

Lek recovered quickly from her embarrassment and she seemed to have thrown off the effects of the tablets too. The adrenaline and excitement of being with her friends again had ‘sobered’ her up faster than a cold shower, a coffee or even a car crash ever could have. She was flying high and everybody else was up there with her, so Craig just settled back to drink his beer and watch the proceedings.

Customers came and went and girls got up to keep them company and either came back when the man had left or went with him. Some girls had their regulars, whom they were grooming so that they too might have an adventure like Lek’s. Everybody wanted what Lek had and they were hoping that she would pass on some secret, insider tips on how to accomplish it.

No-one was surprised that Lek had been the first to manage going abroad in years and no-one begrudged her her good fortune either. She was their big sister, the legendary heroine Lek, and they all wanted to be like her. Even the new girls had heard of her, they had just never met her in the flesh. This put Craig on a pedestal, because they all assumed that a woman like Lek would have had many chances to get out, but just didn’t take them for one reason or another. That meant that Craig must be something special.

No Adonis, so must be kind and wealthy, most of them assumed. Or at least well-off.

Sometimes, Lek wasn’t sure why either. Some things were coming to a head in her life, it was true: she was no spring chicken any more; but more than that, her daughter, Soomsomai, was twelve, and she didn’t want her to know that her mother was associated with the seamier side of life. She also liked Craig a lot, even loved him and he was kind. Not wealthy, but well-off by her standards and still of an age that he could work.

For his part, Craig really loved Lek. He had never met anyone like her before. True, he had worked, studied and travelled nearly all his life and had never been married, but he wasn’t totally inexperienced with women either. He had just never met one quite like Lek before. Or maybe he just happened to meet her when the time was right. He didn’t know and was not much interested in why

anyway. He knew that he wanted to stay with her and that he wanted to stay in Thailand, a place he had come to prefer over his own country.

The only problems from his point of view were that he had always been wary of marrying someone from abroad because of his limited financial resources and the huge travelling costs involved with visiting two sets of parents on two different continents regularly. He would not be able to work in Thailand except perhaps as a teacher and he was sure that he lacked the patience and confidence for that. There was savings money and a few investments for the time being but how long would it last?

That was the big question.

He would have to get out of central Pattaya as soon as possible; that much was clear, but go where? He only knew Pattaya. Bangkok was sure to be even more expensive and he didn't like big cities anyway. They both liked Pattaya, so maybe they could move to the suburbs. He and Lek had not broached the subject yet, but they had pre-booked an apartment for two months, so they had some time to work something out.

Craig spent the next six or seven hours day dreaming and drinking, while Lek spent them drinking and talking. It wasn't boring.

Not at all. It was peaceful. Relaxing.

He had even managed to filter out the awful, loud music that he so detested. He was just so pleased to be back in Pattaya and Thailand. He was tempted to go and look at the sun setting on the sea, but couldn't be bothered.

At sometime near one o'clock, the official closing time in Pattaya, jet lag and the alcohol were winning out over the excitement and adrenaline and Lek reluctantly wanted to call it a day and go to their room. Beou called them a taxi which arrived too soon. They had hoped it would take ten or twenty minutes to get there, but it arrived in two. Lek knocked her whiskey back in one and Craig took his bottle with him. The driver put their bags in the boot and they were off. Glad to be going to their new home for the next few months.

Their apartment was in the Diana Estate which was not far away in Soi Buakhao so they were there in less than ten minutes despite the busy streets. The security guard on the gate was waiting for them with the key to the apartment, because the concierge had already gone to bed. Not that that was a problem. They refused the security guards offer to show them the way as Craig had inspected the apartment three months previously before paying the deposit.

They went up to the room, stripped off and showered together. When they fell onto the bed, Craig was starkers and Lek was in her customary towel; pleased to be wrapped in a towel like she had been for some time every day of her life in Thailand and which she had missed in the UK. She had never thought that such a simple thing like a towel could bring so much pleasure. She hadn't realised that she had missed it in Britain, but now that she had its protection around her again, she knew that she had.

Or maybe it was just Thailand and her friends that she had missed when she was in Europe, despite the fact that it had been her ambition for ten years to make that journey.

It didn't matter for now really; neither of them had much chance to analyse anything because they were both fast asleep in minutes.

That would have to wait until the next day, the real start of their new life, their exciting future, together.

1 2 SETTLING IN

They woke up at nine o'clock, which was a bit later than had become normal for them. When Lek had been working, she usually didn't get up until midday or even later, but if she was with someone, it depended on the friend.

She had been with Craig for almost a year now and she had adapted quite easily to his lifestyle. In fact, she usually got up a couple of hours before him in order to get most of the chores done first.

She had also gone back to eating rice soup first thing in the morning as she had done when a girl in the village, like most people did in the countryside.

There was no food in the apartment, so Lek went for a shower, in order to go out to the shops nearby. Craig put the TV on to look for Pattaya People's News, a local news channel that broadcasts mostly in English. He lay there catching up with what had been happening in the last seven days. As usual, a Scandinavian had jumped, fallen or been pushed off a balcony and somebody had been robbed at knife-point by a couple of lady boys on the beach at three a.m.

Some things never changed.

His mobile phone rang and it took him by surprise until he remembered that they had both put their Thai SIMM's back in the day before. It was Lek, but then who else would be phoning him, he thought.

"Hello, darling. What's going on? Are you OK?"

"Sure, telak, but there is a good-looking café on the grounds outside the room. I don't want to cook, so will you come down here and we can eat in there or outside in the sunshine? They have Thai and falang food. The coffee looks good too."

"OK, don't cook. I'll have a quick shower and see you there. Where is it?"

"Go onto the balcony, look down to the left and you see me. I stand outside the café."

Craig did as he was told and saw Lek waving up at him enthusiastically.

"All right, go inside. I'll be down in ten or fifteen minutes."

He didn't rush. He fancied a coffee, but he didn't usually eat soon after getting up. Lek, on the other hand, liked to eat within minutes of getting out of bed, unless she had to go outside when it would be minutes after her shower. She was one of those people who start to feel ill, if they don't eat regularly. Lek grazed throughout the day, whereas Craig liked one or two large meals.

When Craig caught up with Lek, she was eating a bowl of rice soup – the Thai equivalent of porridge. She had learned to drink tea and coffee because of the company she had kept, but left to her own devices, she preferred ice-cold water.

Although a lot of the apartments were owned or occupied by foreigners, farang or falang in Thai, the staff in the café could not understand his English, so Lek ordered him an English breakfast and a coffee. It was meant to be a treat, but Craig wasn't really hungry. It was a poor imitation of an English breakfast too, but he pretended to enjoy it so as not to disappoint anyone.

It was a glorious day and the sun glinted off the small pool nearby. There was also a big pool just under their balcony and Craig decided to go swimming every day to loose some weight. He hoped that Lek would join him, but doubted it somehow.

"Telak, what you want to do today? I love this compound and I love our room. What shall we do?"

He could almost hear her think: 'Say, go down to Daddy's Hobby, go on say it.'

"I don't know. We need to discuss where we are going to live and how we are going to make a living, but I suppose we don't have to start doing that right away..."

"We can stay here! And you can swim and work on the computer. Same as before; and I will take care of you and maybe find a small job, although that is not easy. You want me work in a shop or a hotel – make bed – or in a bar?"

"We are booked in here for two months, but after that, I think we need something permanent. And yes, I will try to do something on the Internet, but no, I don't really want you to do any of those jobs. That can wait for now anyway, unless something comes your way that you would like to do."

"OK, good idea. You want to swim after breakfast. I go get towels and costumes and book for you," and she was gone. Craig suspected that she had a plan of some kind. Thai women, and a lot of Thai city men, do their best to stay out of the sun because they want to keep their skin white, so why would she volunteer to sit at the poolside with him?

Lek came down with a duffel bag with his things in and a towel around her waist, which made him think that he must have misjudged her. While he went to get changed in the toilet, Lek rearranged two of the sun loungers to be as much in the small amount of shade as possible. She also put a couple of parasols up.

The pool was deserted and looked very inviting even though it was eleven a.m.

Craig swam for an hour and Lek watched and pretended to try to sleep. When he got out, Lek handed him a towel and began pulling on her jeans.

“I cannot sit here, darling, it is too hot and the sun move and give me black skin. I want to go to Beou’s house and eat lunch with her. You stay here, swim and read your book. It is boring for you to sit listen to me and my cousin speak in Thai, I think. No?”

“I want to know everything what happen here when I stay in Wales. Too boring for you, eh? I want to speak Thai and eat real Thai food from north Thailand. Beou phone to me and ask me come for lunch. She ask you too, but I say I think you not want. You want to come, telak?”

Craig knew that he had been outmanoeuvred, but he didn’t really care. Lek was right, he would find it boring and this way, he could slip out to a bar and see who was about.

“No, that’s OK, don’t worry about me, Lek. I’ll see you later.”

“OK, thank you so much, telak. Don’t drink too much and I phone you later. Maybe see you in Daddy’s Hobby bar at four o’clock. Good idea, neh? OK, good idea. Bye-bye.”

She looked around furtively and then gave him a quick peck on the cheek. She was back in Thailand now and kissing in public was frowned upon even in Pattaya. He watched her walk away and could not help thinking how beautiful she was yet again. It was still too early to go out, so he took Lek’s advice, rummaged in the bag for his book and started to read.

He decided to wait until twelve-thirty to start his first tour. At midday, a fat, old man made a huge splash in the pool. It took Craig by surprise because he had been engrossed in his book, but he looked up to see if a greeting of some kind was in order. The man was not looking at him, but he caught sight of a small, young woman hiding from him behind a bush not five metres away.

She was looking at him, then at the man in the water and giggling. The old man shouted at her: “Spring ins Wasser” – German for ‘jump into the water’. The woman was obviously shy of Craig, so he looked down at his book, until she ran past him, dropped her towel at the last moment and slipped into the water.

Craig watched her for the last few seconds and she knew it and wasn’t too happy about it either. They were probably used to having the pool to themselves, he thought. Ten minutes later, an old couple came down, also German, as it turned out. They were both as brown and as wrinkled as walnuts. He was twenty kilos overweight and she was about twenty kilos underweight. They were lappers – swimming up and down the pool, obviously counting out a predetermined number of laps before they could go for lunch.

The first German was quite adept at keeping out of the way of these serious swimmers, but his girlfriend, just hung onto the side as if an undertow would suck her away if she let go. Each group, the man and his girlfriend, the couple, and Craig studiously ignored one another, although Craig had not started it.

‘Very friendly, he thought, ‘very friendly indeed’.

Meanwhile, Lek had got on a Baht Bus outside the compound, gone right to Pattaya Klang and then had to change bus to turn right again as the one she was on turned left towards the beach. She was in her cousin’s house fifteen minutes later. Beou’s daughters were in school, so they had the place to themselves.

“How did you get on in Craig’s town, Barry, isn’t it? Did you like his friends and family?”

“Oh, yes,” replied Lek, “I wasn’t joking yesterday when I said that I loved everything about it except being away from my daughter and a few others in the family. I want to go and live there, but

that will take some work too, because Craig has his heart set on living here. With me, of course. Still, I can work on that one. There is time enough.”

They both laughed and hugged. It was great to be in cahoots with each other again. They really got on well, more like sisters than cousins. Lek had worked for Beou in the bar for ten years but even then Lek had had a special position that none of the other girls could ever have achieved.

“Well, look at it this way, telak, Soom is still only young and cannot speak English anyway – well, not fluently, eh? So, maybe it is better to get Craig to teach her before you all go over there anyway. That will take a couple of years and by then he may want to go home again. Don’t worry. As you say, you have plenty of time. Let’s see what fate has in store for you all.”

Lek had told a white lie to Craig, she hadn’t been invited to lunch, well, not a prepared lunch anyway. The two friends wanted to cook lunch together as they might have done if they were back in the village, where it is normal for visitors to help prepare the food. There, if you are not asked or allowed to help, you know that you are not being considered a close friend.

So, the first job was to call another old friend from the village, Noi, who also worked at Daddy’s Hobby but as night watch woman. She had arranged to get off early to be with her oldest friends. They met up in the market and when Noi and Lek saw each other they ran at each other and hugged.

“Oh, Noi, I have missed our chats together. I tried to wait for you to come on shift at the bar last night, but we were so tired and the taxi came early. Still, here we are together again, all three of us. Like ‘The Three Sisters’, three peas in a pod, eh?” and they walked off arm-in-arm to shop for their favourite foods.

They spent an hour shopping, an hour washing, chopping, preparing and cooking the food and an hour eating it, although, in proper Thai country style, they prepared three or four dishes and started eating them first, but cooked other courses at the same time, so that there were always half-eaten and totally fresh, different courses on the table at the same time

By the time they had finished they were truly stuffed and there were still kilos of food both cooked and unprepared. After an hour dozing, chatting and watching TV, Beou, put the left-overs into cartons and put the cartons into three carrier bags so that they were shared equally.

Noi would take hers home, because she had to meet her daughter after school, but Lek and Beou weren’t finished yet. They would take theirs to Daddy’s Hobby and start the party up again, but with a lot more people this time.

Craig thought that he had got away with a free pass as he nodded to the security guard on his way out of the hotel compound, but in fact he had been granted one, so that Lek could do what she wanted. He thought he would stroll quietly down Soi Buakhao, the same way Lek had gone, but turn off before the end and make his way down to one of his favourite places the ‘Pig and Whistle’ on Soi Seven, which was not far from Beou’s bar.

He intended to stop at quite a few of the intervening bars along the way though and get to Daddy’s Hobby between four-thirty and five – late, as is normal in Thailand. He knew that Lek wouldn’t consider an hour as being late.

As he had hoped, every bar along the way was devoid of customers, because it was still too early for most people, but they were full of bored bar girls and he got come-ons from every bar. They took a standard form, which was usually: ‘Hello, sexy man’ or /and ‘Come have drink with me’. He took more than a few up on their kind offer, but he had no intention of doing any more than drink a few beers.

Most of the girls were beautiful and scantily-clad. Not many of them could speak English well enough to hold a decent conversation, but if the truth be known, they weren’t really interested in talking either. If you didn’t want sex and you wouldn’t buy them a drink, you were soon left to your own devices. This was not a problem, because there were literally hundreds of bars on his chosen route and thousands of girls. He could not possibly have even one small beer in even five percent of them.

There were usually some nice surprises too though. You would meet a girl who was willing to just talk for a beer or even for nothing, because it kept you spending money in her empty bar and because she was bored out of her mind. If there were clients then it was only fair to move on. These were the sort of contacts that Craig was hoping for today. Just a few nice chats with young, beautiful, half-naked, female strangers.

He always made a point of telling the girls the truth, although he would never reveal where he was staying. After all, the last thing you need is some drunken, desperate woman knocking on your hotel room when you and your wife are asleep. And that had been known to have happened, or so he had been told. You never knew what to believe in Pattaya, but it sounded plausible enough to make him cautious.

Today he could tell the girls that this was the first day of his holiday. That always caught their attention, because it could mean that you will stay with them for a month (most people go for a month's holiday), or at least take them out often or it could mean that you didn't know your arse from your elbow with regard to Thai bar girls, so they would get more money out of you. The second question was usually: 'How long you stay here' and the third, though less important question for most girls was: 'You have Thai girlfriend already?'

Most girls didn't mind ousting another Thai if she didn't know them and some didn't care whether they did or not, but those were rarer – much rarer. It was usually the older, desperate pros who fell into that category – and the loners and the free-lancers.

As a bar girl had once told him: 'We bar girls don't cheat on wives, we are just the rope that cheating husbands hang themselves with.'

In time, he got to the 'Pig' and went inside to see who was there. It was four o'clock, not the busiest of times, which revolved around meals: midday, five to six and seven to ten, but there were a few faces sitting at the bar that he recognized from his previous visits months before.

"Hello, Craig, how are you?, When did you get back?," said a voice from down the bar. It was one of the people who either owned or managed the bar/restaurant-cum-hotel.

"I'm fine thanks, Rob. How are you? We got back yesterday evening."

"How's that little darling of yours, Lek, isn't it? I thought I saw her walk past here a few minutes ago with another woman arm-in-arm, but I thought, no, that can't be Lek, she's in Wales with that Taff."

"It probably was her – with her cousin, maybe. She went for lunch at her house and I'm supposed to be meeting her at about now. But she's all right, can you ask one of the staff for a pint of Guinness, please? Do you want one?"

"Nah, not for me, thanks. I've got an hour off, then I'm on till closing. It'll start getting busy soon. Can't be pissed on parade, can I? Well, not every night anyway."

The pint of Guinness duly arrived. The taste of burnt wood or charcoal that characterized Guinness for Craig was always a lot stronger in Asia than in Europe. Probably because of the water supply there he thought.

"What's the news then, Rob? Anything monumental happen while I was away? A few more Scandinavians fell off their balconies pissed, I suppose?"

"Nothing much has been going on. The season has been quiet and hot. Except for Songkran, of course. That was busy, but then it always is. Even if there were no falangs the Thais would make up for it. It's always good. A couple of jumpers, yes, if you believe that. I think most of them get pushed. Pissed, robbed and pushed. Not only Scandinavians either. Quite a few Germans too."

Rob left and Craig had another Guinness. Nobody else seemed to recognize him and he couldn't be bothered to start a conversation with any more strangers, so he just sat there and watched the girls walking to work and the falang coming back from the beach, wondering about where all this living in Thailand lark would eventually take him.

In truth, in private, in his head, he had no idea at all, although he was more confident when talking to others. He knew what he wanted to do: live in Thailand with Lek and support them by working on the Internet. And that seemed possible, but so much was beyond his control that anything could go wrong any day with just minute changes in the law or the exchange rate. It seemed unlikely that no law or no currency valuation would not go against him in the twenty-five years that he reckoned he had left to live there.

That was too much to hope for. What then? Would he have to go home broke with his tail between his legs? Would he be able to take Lek, even if she wanted to go with a pauper? The future was exciting, but it was also very uncertain and there was nothing he could do about that at all.

He and Lek were riding a canoe in white water on an unknown river.

So, on that sobering thought, he finished up and ambled down to see Lek, who he assumed would be waiting for him at Beou's.

And there she was, looking as beautiful as ever, standing behind the bar chatting with Beou and a couple who were sitting in front of it.

She saw him coming and waved and whooped as if she been doing it for years. "Hello, sexy man. You want to have drink with me? Where you come from?," she shouted. The three women laughed out loud and the man smiled broadly. When Craig got closer, he stood up and held out his hand.

"Hi, my name is Bob. I've heard a lot about you. How are you doing?"

"I'm fine thanks, Bob. How are you?"

Craig struggled with the man's face as he shook the girl's proffered hand. He knew her all right though – that was Mia, an old friend of Lek's from up-country, but Bob with the Australian accent, Craig was sure he'd never met him before.

Craig had met Mia before though and in such a way that it would take senile dementia for him ever to forget her. She had behaved even more 'friendly' in the past than the new girls last night, although Mia had been shrewd enough to avoid being seen doing it. Mia was dangerous, but he liked her. However, they were all sitting right in the front of the bar with Mia's fairly long-term boyfriend so that should be all right, Craig was reasoning.

He sat down next to Mia, Lek put a beer in front of him and Mia squeezed his knee.

"Oh, Bob! I love this man. He is very good friend for my good friend Lek and he help me too. You un'erstan'? You not jealous, neh? Craig only good frien'."

Bob nodded and smiled at Craig. Craig smiled, but grimaced inside knowing the truth that was being shared between him and Mia, but which had not been told in its entirety to Lek and Bob. He felt as if he were being held to ransom.

"We good frien's long time, neh, Craig? You, me and Lek?," she said as her hand moved up from his knee to his thigh and squeezed it. "I know Lek very long time and I love her friend, same she love my friend, neh, Lek?"

Lek nodded enthusiastically, saying: "Mia and I know each other from baby school and we met Craig nearly one year ago."

That elicited another squeeze on the thigh, but higher up and a kiss on the cheek. Lek was sitting behind the bar, so she couldn't really see exactly what was going on, although she knew from the direction of Mia's arm where it was roughly.

Bob knew exactly and he wasn't too pleased about it.

He realized that there was more going on than he knew about, but didn't know what. Lek, for her part, could see the growing consternation on Bob's face, but she put it down to jealousy – an emotion that she detested and had given up when she had left her husband more than ten years before.

Craig had asked Lek before whether Mia was an exhibitionist, and Lek had reacted with surprise, but he knew from previous experience with Mia that she was 'up for anything' as long as there was a reasonable chance of not getting caught, although he suspected that she did want to be observed one day really.

Mia was like a 'shy' convent girl who drops her towel while changing and is so flustered that it takes her three minutes to cover up again.

The only one sitting there who knew that except Mia herself was Craig, because he had been on the receiving end. He would happily be there again, if the truth were known, but the stakes were higher now for him and he had had his fun.

Still, she tempted him more and more as the drinks flowed and Bob was becoming more and more cheesed off.

When Bob went to the toilet and everyone behind the bar was working because of the rush, Mia leaned over, put her hand on Craig's bulge, slowly undid his zip and said in his ear:

"Your trousers are open, do you want anything while I'm here?" and she stroked him inside his trousers.

'Where was Lek and her guardians when you needed them', he thought, 'when resistance was low?.' Bob came back and Mia said:

"Craig you zip kaput Look!"

Three or four by-standers looked and laughed.

"The zip is broken, I'll go fix it and go pee-pee," he said in pigeon-English.

Craig slinked off to the toilet with his hand over his crutch, trying to keep up the illusion that the zip was broken. Lek blew him a kiss from behind the bar. Once in the toilet, Craig did his business, zipped up and walked outside, only to be grabbed by Mia.

She pulled him into a shadow, lifted up her skirt and put his willing hand into her knickers.

"I shave my pussy," she said, "but you think I do good job? You shave for much longer than me; can you help me learn to shave pussy good same your face? Have little bit hair here, by pussy, what you think? Feel here. Oh, too wet, not have hair here. Sorry, what you think? Cannot grow hair in there, eh?"

After a fondle and with a great deal of will-power, Craig said: "Mia, you said that you had finished all this stuff because you had your own boyfriend. Bob, I suppose. If you are happy with him and I am happy with your friend Lek, what the hell are you doing?"

"Nothing," she said, "Just having some fun" and she walked back to the bar.

Craig followed a few yards behind, but he was troubled.

This was beyond his ability of deception. Not that he wanted to deceive Lek anyway. The problem was that he couldn't help feeling flattered and attracted to Mia. In fact, this was the first time anything like this had ever happened to him. Mia was unique amongst his friends or even casual acquaintances.

When he retook his seat, Lek smiled at him from where she was standing in front of the customer she was serving and Mia smile at him too.

Bob was looking the other way quite studiously.

Eventually, Lek tired of helping out and went to sit with Craig. Lek was on his left and Mia was on his right, so to talk over the din, they both had to lean across him and shout in one another's ears. Lek put her hand on Craig's thigh to steady herself and Mia put her hand about a foot higher on the other one.

Whenever Mia thought that no-one was paying attention, she stroked Craig's crotch lightly by wiggling her little finger. She pretended to be really drunk too, but maybe that didn't take much pretence. Eventually, the night finished and everybody went their own way.

On the way home, Lek said:

"Mia likes you, I can see. If I didn't know any better, I think I might have reason for concern."

"Ah, don't worry.," said Craig, knowing that he would never shag Mia or swap her for Lek in a month of Sundays.

As much fun as Mia was.

1 3 WHITHER NOW?

One afternoon, while they were drinking iced coffee on the balcony, the conversation turned to the future.

“So, Lek, we have had a bit of a holiday, so now it’s time to start making some plans. What do you think? What would you like to do?”

“Well, first of all, I want to go see Soom and my Mum.”

“Yes, OK, we’ll go in two days, if you like, but I mean longer term than that. Where do you want to live for a start?”

“That is up to you, darling. I give you two choices: here in Pattaya or in my village, Baan Suay.”

“OK, that’s a start. I must have the Internet, so if we can get the Internet in the village, we still have two choices, but if we cannot, then we live in Pattaya. We could buy or rent a condo or house here and have a small ‘hunting lodge’ affair in the village for holidays.”

“Hunting lodge? What is ‘lodge’? No hunting in the village. Only hunt frogs, not tigers. Cannot hunt tigers now. Police take you and not have tigers any more. I don’t understand.”

“Yes, all right, wait a minute, calm down. I don’t believe in hunting for fun anyway. I mean a small house. A hunting lodge is just a small house. Like a cabin. A small wooden house.”

“Ah, I see! We have many hunting lodges in the village. Not many for chow though – I mean for rent. Maybe buy land and make small house. Can do?”

“Do you have Internet in the village?”

“I don’t know, telak? I think nobody has a computer, but I don’t know. We can go look in two or three days.”

“Yes, good idea. I want Internet in our room too, so today I want to go buy a USB wireless modem. It’s a bit like a mobile phone, but only for the Internet. I saw one yesterday in Pattaya Klang for 3,500 Baht, so not too expensive. Then I don’t have to pay 20 Baht every hour in an Internet shop. Now I pay 100-160 Baht every day. Then I can work from the room or the beach or anywhere I like.”

So, they drank up, grabbed the laptop and set off. Once in the shop, Craig spoke to the assistant:

“I am interested in that wireless modem.”

“Eh?”

“That wireless modem there.”

“Eh?”

Then she said to Lek in Thai:

“What is the falang talking about? I cannot understand him. Does he speak English? I can speak a little bit of English.”

“He is speaking English, but I don’t know what he wants either. I don’t understand computers at all. Ask him again, but tell him to speak slowly.”

“What you say? Say again, but speak slowly, please, sir.”

“OK, I want that wireless modem there. That one, right there.”

“Ah! Wi-Fi? Internet Wi-Fi. OK. Here. Look.”

Craig inspected the device, took out his laptop and switched it on.

“I can try now?”

“No, cannot. Not have ca’s.”

“What? Not have ‘cars’. What are Internet ‘cars’? Lek what is she saying? Can I see the instruction book, please, Lek?”

There was a flurry of Thai and the manual was handed over.

“I don’ know how to tell you, but we don’t have ‘ca’s’ for modem. I don’t know what is ca’s.”

So he sat down to read the manual.

It was only in Thai. He couldn’t read it and Lek couldn’t understand it. Then the sales assistant took out her mobile phone, took the back off it and pointed to the SIMM card.

“Not have ca’s in modem. Must buy, then can use for Internet.”

“Ah, I see. Must have SIMM card.” The two women smiled and nodded. “OK, if I buy Wi-Fi and a SIMM card will it work everywhere?”

“No,” she said, “only in Thailand. If you go to Cambodia, stop working.”

“OK, does it work everywhere in Thailand? Everywhere? Even Sukhothai, Uttaradit, Phitsanulok, in a village up there? Or only in big city?”

“Everywhere, sir. It working everywhere in Thailand. Even in village.”

“OK, I want one Wi-Fi and one SIMM card, please.”

He was putting his laptop away, when she said:

“You can buy Wi-Fi, but cannot buy ca’s. Not have.”

“What?,” he was starting to become hot and bothered now. “Why not?”

More Thai, then Lek said:

“You must get SIMM card from a DTAC telephone shop.”

That meant nothing to Craig, but he bought the modem and they left. He wasn’t sure about the DTAC SIMM card, but Lek led him straight to a shop near the apartment. When he saw the shop, he realized that he’d seen hundreds of them before. There were several in every main street in Pattaya. DTAC is one of the biggest mobile phone providers in Thailand and with thousands of girls and several million tourists a year, Pattaya could support hundreds of phone shops selling DTAC SIMM cards.

Craig’s cost 750 Baht a month for unlimited usage, which worked out far cheaper than the roughly 4,000 a month he was spending then and it was much more convenient. It also still left them with two choices of where they could live.

Things were looking up.

They went down to Daddy’s Hobby, where Craig plugged in his new toy and was chuffed to find that it worked like a dream. They sat there until the battery on the laptop ran out and then Craig wanted to go home. Lek had a simpler solution and she had the laptop plugged into the mains. The adapter was always in the bag because the battery only lasted two hours and Craig regularly spent eight hours working in the cyber cafés in one session.

He was off again and, with a beer, was as happy as a sand boy.

Lek admired the way that Craig could sit self-contained, detached and completely absorbed in whatever he was doing. At times like this, she had noticed, he would be the only person in his world. Nothing would distract him, yet he would react to his name. It fascinated her. Lek found it hard to concentrate on anything for more than fifteen minutes at a time. For that reason, reading novels was not her favourite pastime.

Lek was telling everyone how excited she was to be going home for a few days to see her family. They all made the appropriate noises, wished they could be going too and those from Baan Suay asked if she would take small presents home for their families for them. It was a custom and Lek naturally agreed. Some girls even rushed off there and then to get something from a local store, while it was not busy in the bar.

Gifts would be things that were impossible to get in the village like chocolate for the kids and dried squid for the grown-ups. A pineapple from Chonburi, the Province that Pattaya is in, is also a luxury as they are famous for being the sweetest in Thailand. Children’s clothing was also often sent back by mothers missing their children.

Some of the girls who knew how to, wanted a go on the Internet. It would save them time and money not to have to go to an Internet café and Craig found himself reading, translating and writing some quite pornographic message to amorous falang lovers. Little did they know that a bloke was writing them, he thought. The image of their faces if they had known made Craig smile.

“Ha, ha! Man tell man he want to kiss him all over. Funny, neh, Craig? If my boyfriend John know you send message, he want box you and me. Tell him I wan’ to kiss him down there. Good joke, neh?”

Craig was not very impressed but wanted to help out and so did so.

It went a log way to getting him back in with the girls and he loved every minute of it. It would become a regular part of his frequent visits to Daddy’s Hobby.

They went to the apartment quite early at nine o’clock, but both were tired after a week of parties. They went to bed after a shower and Lek fell asleep almost immediately as she often did. It was a knack that Craig envied.

He had had problems getting to sleep all his life; for as long as he could remember. Even as a very young child, he could remember going downstairs to ask for a drink of water, just because he was bored that he couldn’t get to sleep. His parents’ advice had always been to just lies there with closed eyes as ‘a rest is as good as a sleep’. He didn’t believe it any longer, but he still couldn’t get to sleep.

Usually, he just got up and read, but this evening he had a new toy, so he switched the computer on and got ready to work. It would set the trend of the way things would be for the rest of his life, but he didn’t know that yet.

Craig had made a few web sites before, but he knew that they were amateurish, so he set about looking for instructions on how to do it properly. He didn’t want to have to learn HTML thoroughly, so preferred the route of using an editor.

After three hours of research he had selected a British HTML editor from a short list of six. It was not cheap, but by two a.m. it was on his desktop and he was preparing to launch it. This was typical of Craig, he always wanted to be ‘doing it’.

By six a.m. he had created a web site that was better than he had ever made before. At least it looked good in preview, so he looked around for a host for the web site. Within the hour, the web site was uploaded to the host and a decent-looking web site was live on the Internet. When he looked up, Lek was standing behind him.

“You get up early, telak? I think you not go to bed. Why you not sleep, my dear?”

“Don’t worry, Lek, it’s just that I’m excited with this new modem. It allows me to do what I want at any time of the day or night. I love it. Look, I made my first web site in Thailand. Not bad, eh?”

“Very nice. You can make money with that?”

“Well, no, not yet. As it stands it will not make money, but...”

“So, I don’t understand. Why you work all night for web site that not make money? Seem stupid to me. I don’t understand Internet and web sites. Tell me later, I go to sleep again for one hour.”

He didn’t feel too discouraged, but he knew that he could not ever be certain of being able to make enough money on line to keep them together either. It was another facet of their new life together that was not guaranteed. In fact, so far there was nothing guaranteed except that anything could happen.

When Lek woke up again at eight thirty, Craig had applied for a Google AdSense account, a PayPal account, an Amazon account and several others. These would allow him to monetize his web sites, if he were accepted and it would mark the first step to being able to live in Thailand without financial worries whether it be in Lek’s village, Baan Suay, or Pattaya.

There was little more he could do now except think of an idea for a good web site, so he undressed and crept into bed beside Lek with sunlight streaming in through the French windows leading to the balcony.

Moments later, he heard:

“Telak, I go get tickets for go to the village tonight. OK? I want to see my daughter and my family. See you later. We go tonight, if I can get tickets. Or tomorrow if I cannot.”

Lek was getting up, before he was completely asleep – this too would become a regular occurrence in their future.

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