

## ***1 A CLOSE CALL***

“Oh, bloody hell, girl! What have you gotten yourself into this time?” thought Lek as she was waking up yet again.

She had not slept much at all that night so far. Her ‘boyfriend’, Ali, was still asleep and the fumes coming from his open mouth told her that he must have been very drunk the night before. She had not noticed at the time, as she had been quite out of it herself. Her backside was still throbbing though where Ali had tried to take her and had beaten her in his frustration at not being able to manage it. She could have one of the boys do him over for that, she thought with some degree of satisfaction, or even report him to the police. She decided she would, if she were bruised. Yet he had seemed such a nice man earlier that night. It just went to show that you never can tell.

She wanted to get up and leave, but she had not been paid the 1,000 Baht they had agreed on; yet she was frightened of him waking up in case he wanted to try doing it again. It was not in Lek’s nature to take the money from his pocket and sneak out, even though it was rightfully hers already. There was nothing for it, but to lie there awake, watchful, letting him sleep and hoping that the sleep would put him in a better frame of mind when he did wake up. Lek gave him one more furtive glance and prepared herself for a long wait. It was 5:35 a.m. and she could not reasonably expect him to surface much before 9:00 a.m.

The night before, Lek had been working in ‘Daddy’s Hobby’, a bar off Beach Road when a thirty-odd year old Arab, Ali, had sat down. Things had been very quiet for her up until then, although most of the other girls were ‘out’. Lek had gone over to him to take his order and make him feel at home, as she had done with other customers thousands of times before. Lek and Ali had introduced themselves and Ali had ordered a bottle of ‘100 Pipers’ whisky, soda water and ice. Within minutes and with customary Arabic hospitality, he had offered her a drink and she had accepted gratefully. After all, she had thought, you never knew where things could lead, it was getting late and she was more than a little bored.

Looking back over events, Lek thought she had seen some danger signs even at that early stage. Why hadn’t she listened to her instincts? They had always stood her in such good stead before. Ali had already been drinking before he got to her bar – she had noticed that, but then he had ordered a bottle of whisky. It was not unusual to see Arabs drinking alcohol, but he was drinking this bottle too quickly and insisting that she kept up with him. Maybe ‘insist’ was too strong a word, but he certainly wanted her to go drink for drink with him and he did not want to take ‘no’ for an answer.

They had finished the bottle and Ali had asked her whether ‘she would like to go for something to eat’ – one of the many code expressions in her profession, which could lead to lucratively-paid nocturnal employment.

And sometimes even a meal too.

She had accepted, but instead of going to a restaurant or his hotel, he had led her into a noisy disco, where he seemed to know a group of other Arabs. (She had never found out where he actually came from because his English was poor and her Arabic was non-existent; she had guessed at Abu Dhabi).

She had not been acquainted with the establishment, but it had been too full and too noisy for her tastes. The toilets were smelly too and Ali was acting ‘weird’ in front of his mates, showing off; showing her off; but also just showing off in general. He had also bought another bottle of whisky and danced in

an odd way, pulling her about just a little too much, pawing at her, mauling her even, parading her in front of his friends.

She should have seen it all coming then, she thought. Ten years in Pattaya had taught her a lot, but she could still be too daft to listen to her inner voice. Sometimes, anyway. If she hadn't been such a good-natured person from birth, Pattaya could have done terrible things to her character.

Should she listen now? Get up, get dressed and sneak out, giving up the 1,000 Baht? No! Sod him!

She smiled to herself: 'Sod him' was a pun on what he had tried to do to her last night. The prick! But he hadn't been able to get it up! And serve him right – she had no sympathy. He had not said he wanted sodomy, if he had she would not have gone with him. Well ....., not for 1,000 Baht anyway, she joked with herself. They had left the disco after an hour or so, at about 1 a.m., and had gone back to his hotel with his friends in tow. Luckily, they had not wanted to go inside with them, but they had laughed and joked in an odd way even though she could not understand what they were saying.

They had slapped him on the back and winked suggestively at her. Immature, she had thought at the time, but still weird for guys of their age. Maybe they had led sheltered lives. Maybe it was their first taste of freedom away from their village and the watchful eyes of their elders. She had seen the same sort of behaviour from some Thai villagers on their first trip to Sin City otherwise known as Fun City, Paradise or Pattaya, depending on your moral outlook. Anyway, they had eventually arrived at his room and all seemed to get a little more normal. Ali was certainly drunk, but then so was she. Ali offered her a shower and she had taken him up on the offer.

He had given her a clean towel and waited outside for her to finish and while she got into bed, he had taken a shower too. Everything back to normal, she had thought, she could handle this now – she was back on familiar territory. Then he had switched out the light and made his way over to the bed, tripping over a shoe or something in the process. He had muttered something in Arabic, she had giggled, and then he had jumped on the bed and got weird again. It was hard to explain. He had torn the sheets off her, but without hurting her. He had frightened her certainly, but not too much. At first, anyway. Then he had thrown her over onto her front and, putting an arm around her waist, had raised her bottom up towards him.

OK, she had thought: doggy-fashion – she liked that! However, he was trying to put it where she did not like and he was getting angry that she was not co-operating. He had begun muttering in Arabic again and had begun slapping her backside hard like a cowboy on a horse in the films. Very hard – much too hard. The shit! Maybe she would go to see the boys about him. The wanker!

Anyway, after 10 minutes or so, he had collapsed on the bed next to her without achieving his mission. He had said something undecipherable and had apparently gone to sleep fairly quickly. She had seen it all before: bloke has a few drinks, gets randy, drinks too much, cannot get it up and blames the woman in his embarrassment. The wanker! No need to get violent though, she thought.

A lot of men were just like little boys in bed, with their egos and tantrums and oh-so-easily hurt pride. One day, she would find a good man that wanted to take care of her and love her and ... was not married, she smiled.

She lay there wondering whether he had bruised her or whether he had made her bleed even! Oh, she hoped not! But would she make him pay, if he had! However, she was not the vindictive type and she soon got bored planning hollow acts of revenge that she knew she was very unlikely to carry out.

It passed the time of day, well, night though and she was soon asleep again for the umpteenth time that night.

Ali could feel someone beside him when he woke up, but he could not remember who it was or even which sex it was. He had woken up facing the person, but had not opened his eyes yet. He decided to roll over, turning his back on his partner, while taking a sly peep. Please let it be a woman, he thought. He really did not want his colleagues from the oil rig to catch him with a boy. He had seen them on the way home last night, had he not?

Oh, please let it be a woman, he repeated to himself as he rolled over. Oh, thank God for that! She was pretty good looking too! In fact, very good looking and in the prime of her life, in her late-twenties, he judged. Oh, he could walk tall in front of his mates later and boast of his abilities. He could not quite remember what they had gotten up to and, for the moment, he did not care. His mouth felt as dry as the desert sand. He had to get some water and a couple of aspirins very soon. Getting up would surely wake her, but what was her name? Oh, shit! Still, he could bluff that one – at least it was not a man or a boy!

“Lak, Lek, Lik,” he mused. Sounded familiar. He settled on the middle one, as he was the middle son of three. Inch Allah! He decided to go for it and leapt out of bed, picking up a towel as he headed for the bathroom. Safely inside, he downed a glass of water, grabbed the aspirins and sat on the toilet seat to recover. He had moved too quickly and his head was spinning. What a night that must have been!