

LOSER

A Novel By

Paul Slatter

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Chapter One

To say I was unable to control the words that came out of my mouth would be an understatement. And due to this somewhat recent inability to govern my tongue, I would soon be missing my front teeth, along with a couple of molars on the right hand side of my jaw.

Now, when I say I cannot keep my mouth shut, the problem isn't as serious as, let's say, Tourette's. Not at all. It isn't. I'm not shouting 'root my old granny' in the library and twitching or anything like that. I'm saying, the problem I've developed was that these days it seemed I simply had no filter. And if someone needed to be called a 'lazy fat cunt' or an 'inconsiderate prick' or whatever was appropriate at any particular given moment. I would say exactly what was on my mind. Plain and simple. Good or bad. Right or wrong. They would be told. Regardless of whether I wanted to or not.

Hence the soon to be missing teeth, but we'll get to that part later.

For now though I am sitting in economy on my way to Bangkok. At the back, by the toilets and wishing I'd paid the extra for business. So as I could be in row one, or maybe even in row twenty one, in premium. But no, I am not. I'm at the back - by the shitters. Next to some loser sitting beside me who's been making love to a kit kat bar whilst I listen to people in the trap behind me, shitting, pissing, wanking, belching, farting, or whatever. And all this, due to my brother.

My brother, Steve, asking for a \$7,000 loan that he swore he'd pay back. The man finding himself at the ripe age of twenty seven, suddenly in love to a Thai girl with remarkably big breasts, and wishing to open a bar. The man telling me, nothing could be better than living the rest of his life in paradise, on some wonderful beach, with the girl of his dreams.

Only the seven grand soon became seventy grand and the Thai girl with the big titties quickly, surprise, surprise, disappeared.

It happens a lot – so I'd been told more times than I'd care to hear. Listening, every time, as I'd sat with both elbows pressed into some Formica table top in some sterile canteen, built with sturdy decks and even more sturdier benches which fed the ravenous who worked the oil rigs of Northern Alberta. Inconceivable yarns voiced by oil riggers or otherwise, articulating sad romances, spouting tales personal or second hand. All now seemingly expertly knowledgeable, about the honey traps they themselves had admittedly fallen victim too or they had seen inflicted upon other lonely men with lost souls.

Men who'd openly and whole heartedly fallen for a beautiful women with a nice juicy snatch. Five grand here, two grand there. Apparently it was the norm. With most guys being hit hard and with pace in some Machiavellian manner or other, as my brother had. Or by a slow drip that lasted until the money run out or the poor soul died. Or both.

There are of course the oil workers I'd spent years working with who knew and understood the game, which obviously my brother didn't. These guys who lived a solitary life, earning a fortune on a four month shift. Taking their grungy rough hands and dirty bear like hairy backs first class into Suvarnabhumi airport as per their contract. Big oily fucks, sitting squashed in their expensive little pods for seventeen hours like a rat in a pipe. Looking as out of place as a banana in a fish shop. Gruesome beasts, off to blow all their money and play millionaire king for a month, in heat that could melt a brick. Some meeting their holiday wives at the airport. Others, renting one from a special bar close by, much the same as they would a car when they arrived.

Myself though now sitting at the back, having already spent more than any of them and deprived of any endless honeymoon period blowies that would have preceded the inevitable train wreck these beautiful young ladies exacted upon these men who should know better. Sitting at the rear, still in my work boots and jeans. My knees pressed hard into the seat in front. Right next to the shitter door that was banging every five minutes. The guy next to me unravelling a KitKat bar every ten. Each time pulling back the plastic silvery foil from the brown chocolate wafer. The man taking a minuscule sliver of a bite, scraping the chocolate away carefully with his front teeth. The man getting more satisfaction out of such a simple act of eating a chocolate wafer than I've ever seen another human achieve in my life.

The guy telling me in between bites that his girl in Pattaya wasn't like the rest. Telling me how she'd never scammed him, the way my brother had been scammed. Bragging about how she was honest and pure and had never worked in a bar. The stupid fuck, with his freshly manicured fingers going on and on about his Cinderella dream girl and how they were going to marry. The man taking tiny little, it'sy bitsy bites from his chocolate bar over and over as he spoke until I could take it no more, and screamed out saying...

"Just eat the fucking thing!"

It was going to be a long flight.

Chapter Two

With the thoughts of ramming chocolate bars down a man's throat still lingering, the oven like heat struck me hard as I stepped off the airconditioned plane. The humidity hitting me harder as I stepped out the cab in Pattaya and took a room in a four star hotel that should have been three.

Fuck it was hot, I thought. Hotter than Grande Prairie Northern Alberta in August it seemed, without the bugs though. Not that they weren't around, they were. I'd seen a few. But here they didn't come in gangs of what at times seemed like a thousand. Here they were like little Ninja's, slipping across the ground as they came for your calves and ankles. Tiny efficient warriors with escape capabilities that would make Tom Cruise sit up and listen.

And the women, wow, my goodness, the women. Now I could see the attraction this place held for the lost and the lonely, and all those grubby fucks I'd spent so many years in the company of who came here. Pretty girls in every direction, where ever I went. Bars and massage parlors full of smiling faces. Spouting deception as they told the ugliest of men how handsome they really were. Hotels loaded with beaming girls tucked away behind the front desk welcoming you home. Shops, cafes and restaurants bursting at the seams with gorgeousness in every direction I went.

I walked out to the foyer of the hotel, smiled at the three young ladies behind the desk. Then I took a left, dodged the motorbikes and headed down to the beach. With a breeze in my face I sat myself down on a bench and looked out to sea. The turquoise blue ocean my brother Steve had described looking a dark muddy green in the cloud covered sky. The white sand leading out before me disappearing under the waves as they rolled in from across the gulf. Palms lining the sea-walk as far as the eye could see. Western men, well past their sell by date, with their white pasty skin, wearing sandals or crocs and wife beater shirts. All waiting to die as they sat under umbrellas, drinking beer with their holiday wives and fat guts. Korean men looking fly in their freshly pressed Lacoste's avoiding the gangs of Indian men, a dozen strong, too scared to leave each-others side looking like rape gangs searching for victims as they patrolled the road side. Thai men and women with their little food carts. Cars and motorbikes filing past that never seemed to end, filtering out the constant din coming from the bars that lined the other side of the street. Each competing for the loose coins ready to be shed by the stream of westerners from all walks of life, whom had drifted into town.

'Fuck me' I thought, as I looked about the place. How the fuck am I going to find anyone here in this zoo?

I pulled out my phone and opened a photo of my brother sitting at a bar with his new 'girl.' Steve, or Steven as our mother liked to call him. The young man a younger version of myself I suppose, sitting red faced with an even younger big breasted Thai beauty who was undoubtedly out of his league.

Then I looked around to the wives or girlfriends of the sad men that sat at the beach basking in the heat around me. Not one wasn't punching above his weight as they say. *Maybe it really was just the way things were here?* I thought. I can't say I hadn't heard all about it before.

I looked back down to the phone and zoomed in on the girls face, studying her features. She had long dark hair, flattish nose, nice lips, not overly made up. Extremely pretty. Then I slid my stupid brother into frame,

"yeah, I can see you falling for that, you dumb fuck." I said out loud as I looked to the photo's background and through the windows to the outside. Palm trees lit from below sat across the street. The trees above me not too dissimilar.

Maybe? I thought, Maybe?

I zoomed in on the drinks sitting at the table and the food. It all looked good, delicious in fact. Then I thought back to the sandwiches and shitty food I'd been eating on my journey out here and the frugal approach I always seemed to take for myself with regard money. With myself eating bread, yet happy to give to others. My brother being a prime example. The prick living it up the way he had been it seemed. The young man playing the rich guy, acting big, and knowing everything was all being paid for by me.

"Stupid - Cunt!" I shouted out loud unable to control myself.

Stupid cunt, not being what I particularly wanted to say, but what came out instead. My unusual uncontrollable inner voice spitting out as I'd stared at the phone. My big mouth, gaining the displeasure of the man in his wife beater shirt sitting next to his pretty woman a few feet away. The man from what I'd seen so far spending his afternoon drinking beer and looking at other women. His wife sitting bored in her high heels on the beach. The man now taking off his sunglasses and staring, looking to me, catching my eye and holding it for a moment.

So I stared back at him. This guy, unshaven, with his fat gut, disrespecting his girlfriend or wife who looked as though she'd once been a whore. Myself saying out loud as I did.

"Fat cunt."

What the fuck was this place, a human zoo? I thought, as I looked away and across the road to the bars with their blaring music loaded with men in the autumn of their lives.

The city being nothing like Steve had described it. A weird menagerie. A mecca built for drunks and lonely men, and any locals who saw fit to live off of them as they kept them fed and watered. *Maybe I'd just got off at the wrong stop, taken a hotel in the wrong part of town?* I wondered. But I hadn't and I wasn't in the wrong part of town. This was it. This was Pattaya, a destination of sleazy streets and bars full of hookers and predators alike.

Now, I don't want you to get this wrong. My brother had not actually stolen from me. The young man being nothing but open and honest to a certain degree about anything and everything - only for the fact that to myself, from what I could see so far, he had possibly exaggerated his version of paradise. Maybe after working on and off the oil rigs and getting his dick sucked by coked out hookers with bad skin and little teeth in Grand Prairie every three weeks possibly made this place appear like paradise?

Who knows?

There was one thing I did know for certain though, now I had found myself some it seemed called paradise, someone either here or somewhere in this country was walking about with my money, and I was not leaving until I got it back.

My brother had called me and I'd listened as my hands quickly froze whilst he'd told me how he was in love with this beautiful girl. Asking me for \$7000 which I'd left with my mother to send, who'd then sent over \$70,000 by mistake. But what is one zero between family. Mistakes happen and with what the woman was going through, it would have been wrong to get upset. But what should've happened is Steve in all his wisdom should've sent \$63,000 straight back. But Steve being Steve hadn't. So instead of losing \$7000 I lost \$70,000. Live and learn they say, and I'd certainly learnt.

I looked back. The man with his wife, beater shirt, and his sunglasses now on the back of his bald head was still staring. The guy openly offended after being told the truth. My irrepressible words obviously digging deep. Opening a wound some would define as reality.

Most people finding themselves unlucky enough to end up with me in their presence, seem to quickly work out that I have a neurological issue. They can see in my face or just hear in my voice that the words I say are not intentional. Some others, like this guy, just don't. And because of this the decent thing was always to in some manner apologize. So with every intention of doing that I looked to the man and as I stood and decided it was time to go. I said,

“Fucking loser.” The man saying as I did.

“you're lucky you're walking,”

But the truth being, with the way I was and the way I knew I could be - it was him who was the lucky one.

I walked along beach road, towards walking street. Nothing really changing, noisy bars hosting drunk guys sitting there since 11 o'clock in the morning. Some with girls, some without, some still looking. The heat sticking my clothes to my skin. Music blaring for miles as I walked and looked at each soi or laneway as they're better known in the western world.

Somewhere out, there was a bar that through the windows you could see palm trees and the beach with the ocean in the background. Now, some would say that to find a bar in a coastal town that had built its reputation on drinking and fucking, and not necessarily in that order, then that was going to be like finding a needle in a haystack. And it would've been, had it not been for the red table tops in the establishment where the photo had been taken.

As the afternoon came to close out and the sun began to drop from the sky I sat at the same table matching the one on my phone. The stall now absent this beautiful girl and my stupid brother who'd just lost a shit load of cash he should never of had in the first place.

I showed the picture to the girl behind the bar and the waitress. Neither showing any recollection at all. The girls suitably good liars, or just blocking out every loser and his new found princess that came through the door. I'd found this place, for all the good it had done me and now what I needed to do was find the bar that I was supposedly going to buy. Steve's hotel, not being hard to find at all as it was the same one I was staying in.

I knew the place, because he'd face timed me by the pool, which must have been around the time he was racking up the huge room service bill which an irate manager had told me about

after I'd enquired as to whether he was still residing there? Which he wasn't. But he was somewhere, I could just feel it.

By the time night had fallen in what felt like the same amount of time it had taken Buddha to flick some imaginary switch, I'd covered what I believed to be the town. Then I'd hit walking street with its endless bars and noise and supply of women to match. Exhausted I sat myself down in a bar opposite a club to watch the world go by with my first beer in hand.

One thing for certain, if I stayed here long enough Steve was going to come cruising past. He had to it seemed, as the rest of Pattaya pretty much had. In fact two of the guys I'd seen on the plane had already, along with my kitkat eating friend with his virgin bride who by the looks of her was nothing of the sort.

One beer became two and the fifth slowly followed as the world past me by. Everyone was here it seemed, in this circus of a town, this adult Disneyland. Girls in high heeled shoes that fitted, most that did not. Legs, asses and titties by the thousand. Girls that were having fun, others that were not. Long hair, short hair, red hair, blonde hair, curly hair, no hair, men dressed as women, women that looked like men. Music bars, executive bars, Go Go bars, blow job bars, Russian women bars, massage shops, soapy massage shops, oily massage shops, freelance hookers, pissed off burnt white skinned wives with their emasculated beaten husbands. Horny mums with horny dads, Arabs dressed in long white robes, Koreans dressed for golf, Japanese business men in nicely ironed suits. Perverted German men, losers, oddities, lowlifes, sexual predators, more gangs of Indian's searching for a discounted five on one special gangbang - and myself. Still wearing the boots I'd had on back in Alberta which felt now as hot and sweaty as the rest of me. Myself who in this sea of skirt was yet to talk to a women.

Myself sitting there waiting and knowing that Steve would at some point find the compulsion to hit the club opposite, and dance alone in the middle of the floor. The way he always had when it all became too much. The young man on the dance floor, in amongst the girls, over and over. Steve with his 'hands in the air like he just don't care.' Me on the side lines, wondering why I was born without this sense of rhythm the boy possessed. Wishing I could just let go the same way he did, me, loving the guy, as I watched, like I loved no other in this world.

Of course there were my parents - I hear you thinking. And yeah there was mum and dad. Dad who'd played it tough hiding behind his own Jujitsu and Aikido skills and whatever other martial art he could force down our throats from the moment we could walk to the day he'd killed himself after his boyfriend stepped into our world and announced to us all their love.

My mother now still in shock, and I doubt she will ever be the same. Not that any off us in the family would be either. Steve drinking just that little bit more than my mother, or maybe a little bit less. Both of them unable to cope with myself, the elder son who was now incapable of controlling his words.

This man who was me, who had suddenly become the man of the house, who would say it as it was regardless.

It wasn't until 7am the next morning when I began to relax. Knowing Steve had never gotten up before 10am in his life when he did not have to work. I'd had breakfast and afterward

bathed in the plush hotels pool that Steve had probably pissed in before he'd fucked off and stiffed the bill.

The morning sun hitting my back as I swam in my light colored boxers, wondering if now that they were wet my ass would be transparent, and if any of the staff could see. The water cool on my body as the air filled with moisture. The earth heating up beneath the sun's rays. In the background birds chirping as they called and sang their morning songs. The outside city now projecting it's silence as the breeze from the ocean found its way into the garden and across the pool. Rolling over I laid there on my back in the water, feeling the heat of the suns heat radiate the moist skin on my face as I stared up into the endless blue of the sky above me.

By 10am I was back. Back in the world of bars. Watching grown men as they sat and drank openly and alone, staring with contemplation into their pints. Their liquid breakfasts half drunk. Their 'long time' hooker girlfriends still back at some hotel shitty or otherwise, sleeping off another night off booze and chemically enhanced sex. The aging men sitting like conquering heroes with their bad backs and aching balls.

I hit the beach and looked at the waves as they drifted in. If Steve was up before midday, the kid would never be able to resist the surf and he'd be in the water now. Even if it was for just ten minutes. But for as far as my eyes could see, no one was swimming. I then looked further to the islands a few miles out. There was a chance he was holed up there, laying back in some \$10 a night beach hut. But I doubted that, not if someone had stolen his cash. It was the way he was or maybe I should say, the way we both were. But why the silence, why had he gone to ground after the call to let me know he'd been had? Was he embarrassed? Undoubtedly, who wouldn't be? But for as much as an idiot he was, we were still a team. He'd been caught in a honey trap, that's all - and shit happens. How you deal with it after is what counts. Going to the cops was probably a waste and not the way moving forward; he'd know that. Especially here.

What he'd do would be what I was doing now, tracking whoever was responsible down. Until the poor persons either gave it back or paid it back in other ways. How he dealt with them if and when he found them, now that would be the issue, and whether he had it in him to take things to the next level needed, I was not sure.

This would not be the first time he'd been ripped off. It had happened before and he'd not handled that well. Now he'd be hating himself for allowing it to happen again a second time.

The prior incident had occurred after he'd built six solid 20ft x 30ft sections of a temporary wooden track to be used in lining the road which led to a camp in the tar sands oil industry. Some guy had stolen them all straight after the first trucks that had carefully crossed them and the man had found out the hard way what happened when you messed with anyone close to me.

The guy lying dead from a heart attack with his right arm pulled from it's socket under one of the heavy wooden track sections Steve had built from scratch. The people out there searching for him, driving over his body day by day as they travelled up and down the makeshift road that he now lay beneath.

Many in the camp thinking it must have been Steve that had dumped him there when the camp rolled on and they'd pulled up the road at the end of the summer. But it wasn't, I knew that, because it was me.

The man who was now so deservedly dead telling Steve "not to worry and to trust him" six months earlier. My brother doing just that and leaving the six wooden sections of road with him for the man to put to work. The man then later when payment was due denying that the deal

had ever happened at all, asking for proof and for the contract papers he'd told Steve he didn't need because it was a deal built on trust.

No police had been bought in back then, or law suits filed, or a big scene made at the camp. Just a cold and heavy wet grave which the man had built for himself with his deceit.

Had there been a murder committed, they could not tell. The question was though, how had the man who was dead from a heart attack ended up under his own road with his arm removed from its socket? That was the big question that needed answering. Then out of the blue as the oil management team scratched their heads and looked to the RCMP for answers, Arthur Mekes, an old boy just nearing retirement had out of the blue happily confessed to a murder he did not commit.

All the work I'd done in planning and securing an alibi should things get nasty as they had that night back then in the spring many years before, made for nothing a week after the man was found. For Arthur Mekes, after some careful consideration had instead of taking a work truck that he was supposed to use to deliver fuel, instead had delivered himself to the nearest RCMP station and confessed to torturing and killing a man who had other than to stiff someone who he considered a friend, never once done him wrong. The man trading his bed surrounded by thugs and losers in an Albertan oil camp with three meals a day - for a bed surrounded by thugs and losers in Alberta's Edmonton Institution with three meals a day. Steve seemingly believing the man's story and that he'd murdered the man in retaliation for the slight he'd made upon his friend and never knowing it was me.

A year later when the dust had settled and the world had moved on from the man who was found in the frozen mud, I took a trip to see Arthur Mekes to ask him why. The man sitting comfortable in his prison clothes and soft shoes. The man smiling as he'd told me of his retirement plan and how he'd been worried about his old age. Worried about where he'd go once they'd forced him out of a camp. Worried about the thought of sitting in a world full of geriatrics once he was then forced into a home.

"He was happy," he'd said, that he'd saved my brothers life and how he'd known the minute he went missing that Steve had killed him, and the moment they'd found the body what he wanted to do.

"If I could tell you that I could prove your innocence, along with Steve's also, would you let me." I'd said.

And as the man had looked at me with his dark and tired eyes, he'd just smiled, as he'd then understood that it had not been Steve who had ended this cockroaches life, but myself. Who in the freezing cold of night had dumped the body beneath the wooden road deck.

"Thank you for your offer." Arthur Mekes had said as he'd looked back at me through his sagging watery eyes. His hair now thin hair combed back across his head in perfect lines. "A brother of Steven is a brother of mine son. I have friends here and food and medical, dental, and more books than I'm able to read before I die." Then in a room full of wives and children, family and friends, I'd felt the thin skin of his worn out hands as Arthur Mekes had taken my hand and said,

"Go have a good life Sandy Childs. Both you and your brother - have a good life."

But that was then and now it wasn't minus 35 in the oil sands, it was plus 35 and the sand was a different kind altogether. And yes, Sandy is my name, Sandy Childs. The older brother to Steve, son of Sal and Shirley. A family full of S's. A family destroyed by a father who could not admit to the world who he really was. Sandy Childs, thirty five years of age, oil rig, tar sands consultant, Jiu-jitsu master, Aikido master, boxer, murderer. Now turned private investigator in a

tropical country I knew nothing off, where I now searched for my dumb fuck of a brother and the money he'd lost.

As the sun became hotter and the coconut juice I'd purchased became nothing more than a dribble at the bottom of a cheap plastic bag, I moved on. Following a similar route as I had the day previous and with newly cut down jeans, the boots I wore in camp slapping down upon the uneven and broken side walk as I went.

Steve wasn't a day drinker I knew that. The kid sleeping as soon as the flow of alcohol stopped if the sun was still in the sky. With that in mind and armed with his photo, I hit the hotels large and small. Some opulent, some scummy. All full of people who were there primarily for the same thing. The receptionists smiling with the palms of their hands closed together in a way as they bowed their heads to me. Looking me in the eye as they sent me on my way. No one knowing the girl or my brother, no one helping in my quest.

As the last of the day hung on and the silent dispatcher of jetlagged fatigue tried its best to take a hold of my body I saw her for the first time, and another natural urge took over.

This siren of a girl, in a sea of so many. This wonderful young women sitting tall and with grace on her brand new scooter. Her long hair half hidden by a hat, complimenting an outfit that exemplified style. This girl riding with ease through the dirty crowded streets which linked this den of iniquity. This girl, squeezing her little red colored Vespa in amongst a line of one hundred more motorcycles. The girl then walking through the crowds with her bare legs and brand new heels.

With a compulsion I had never in my life felt before, I followed. Knowing what I was doing was in so many ways wrong. Watching this young lady as she walked before me, weaving my way through the crowded streets, amongst a sea of people. The waves of bar music bleeding out upon the street. Ignoring all the invites as I passed every small cluster of badly liveried petite Thai women wearing uncomfortable shoes. Russian women with attitude, tall and skinny with their tight dresses and platform shoes and strangely dyed hair. Happy African women looking strong and curvaceous with their lithe figures and beautiful in their dark russet skin.

Live bands singing western songs, screaming rehearsed words that to them had no meaning. Modern DJ's mixing songs which had less. This girl before me holding herself tall and gracious, passing through the smut and sadness. Myself staying untouched by the jeers of the girls calling to me and the gapes of losers as I journeyed through.

Reaching a restaurant at the end of the street, she made her way inside. The girl smiling as she wayed the Buddhist shrine by the door and then her bosses as well as her friends. The girl disappearing to the rear and reappearing at the door. Standing behind her little desk where she welcomed guests with her smile.

I watched for a while. Myself lost in a world of marvel come curiosity and for the moment forgetting about my brother. *Go in and meet her you fool.* I told myself as I looked down at my boots and the jeans I'd cut down into shorts. I was a mess, I knew that, but less than an hour ago I did not care. *So why be bothered now?* I thought. Then I saw a man who would bring my new found worries and concerns back to reality. This man in his wheel chair pushing his way through the crowd with his hard cased folder carrying lottery tickets on his lap. A group of loud and excited young Israeli men cutting him off, making him lose any momentum he'd gained with their self-centred ignorance. The men animated and insensitive in their little group,

all without a care for the disabled man's constant struggle. They reached me, not one oblivious to their boorish actions. Looking to them as they passed I said.

"Watch where you're going you cunts."

The men, hearing me, understanding my words, looking behind them to the man in the wheelchair and then back to myself. The men feeling strong as a group but instinctively knowing there numbers would still not be enough to handle my size should they be brave enough to respond.

I watched them go, the men with their tight shorts and nicely pressed shirts disappearing from view as they became swallowed by the crowd. Then as I looked back to the beautiful girl in the restaurant I saw the man below me now sitting there in his wheel chair. Smiling up at me with his rotten teeth. Opening the case that lay upon his lap, he showed off the rows of lottery tickets all neatly lined up.

"How much?" I asked. The man saying back. "one ticket - one hundred baht."

For a moment I stared at him, this man with his worn out clothes and beaten down skin. The man doing his best to keep his dignity despite living an existence which would have been more difficult than myself or that band of pricks I'd just called cunt's could ever comprehend.

"How much for all of them?" I asked as I stared at the folder and tried to do the math. All the ticket lined up in order, each one showing off its lucky number. Twenty across and fifteen deep. That had to be three hundred total so 30'000 baht, unless they were doubled up. Reaching down I lifted up a ticket to check and seeing it wasn't, I pulled back another to see the same. Looking back at the man, I said.

"I'll take them all."

The man not understanding me correctly for the moment and then having no problem as I discreetly pulled the wad of money I'd pulled from the ATM at the airport and placed it in his hand.

"Forty thousand Baht. That enough?" I asked as the man stared at the money in shock. It was. Pulling the tickets from the case as fast as his worn out fingers would allow and handing me a wad of tickets not to dissimilar in size to currency I handed him he took my money, throwing it quickly into his now empty chest and with a smile and a quick "thank you." Was back off into the crowd and gone.

Two and a half hours later I stepped through the door. The happy meeting with a wheel chair bound lotto salesman absent from my mind. All the tickets now gone except one which I handed to this goddess of a girl with a smile as her eyes met mine.

She sat me at a table and my eyes followed her until there was nothing left to see. The girl then coming back and taking my order. Saying sweetly,

"I'm glad you came in. I was getting worried about you standing all alone out there." Surprised, I stumbled for words, then like a fool, I simply told her the truth.

"I'm looking for my brother."

"Oh?" She answered in surprise.

"Yeah."

Then she waited, pen in hand for me to elaborate. And I said.

"I don't know what to get."

"Take a chance."

I looked some more at the folded menu, without truly looking. The tiredness in me suddenly non-existent. Looking up I said,

“your English is perfect.”

“I try.” The girl replied without another word.

I said, “burger and chips.” and the moment the words came out of my mouth I felt like a fool. The beautiful girl telling me to take a chance on a menu with so many dishes that I’m sure were beyond compare, and I’d gone straight to good old basic level one - *Fuck!* I thought, as then without the slightest judgement she asked,

“Drink?”

“Beer, please.”

And it was going to be the first beer I had had in a long time.

Now, I’m not saying I’m a drunk, but I will say that I can drink - and drink myself into oblivion is what I tend to do. Another addition to the complicated life I’d found myself in and one I believe I can thank my late father for.

Not knowing where I was, I woke up as the dawn light blessed the windows of the hotel room which I had called home since I’d arrived. With a swollen head I looked to the pool. My ankles itched from mosquito’s, that had found their way there despite wearing my boots which lay on the floor by the entranceway. Reaching down and scratching the bites until they bled I tried to remember.

The girl, yes the girl. The girl in all her beauty on her little red motorbike, giving me her time. The captured smiles from her position at the door as I’d sat eating. Her eyes rarely leaving mine.

Me waiting in my little booth at her request, beer in hand, as I’d watched her while the hours passed by until her shift was done. And then watching her again as she’d danced in front of me in the club. Our eyes closing as we’d kissed. The smell of her perfume, the taste of her mouth, the feel of her body as with alcohol induced bravado I’d pulled her too me.

But what had happened after? *For fuck sake!* It was always the same, drink to be happy, drink to be social, drink to oblivion.

I got up and hit the shower, seeing the girls hair now around the plug hole, then her lipstick by the sink. *Fuck?*

With a towel around my back, I sat down on the bed and racked my brain for a piece of the previous evening. What had I said? Where had we been? Had we fucked? My pickled mind stretching for something another part of me had already obliterated. I looked down at my dick, it was still there. And then it hit me. I’d told her about Steve, as we’d sat there in another bar after the restaurant had closed. Pouring out my troubles to a girl right there and then I believed I’d known forever. Myself talking of Steve in the fashion that could have just as easily been an ex. Myself telling her how I’d wandered around this city, that had at first seemed so big but was actually quite small. Telling her of seeing the losers I’d seen on the plane getting blown in a BJ bar without explaining why I was in there myself.

Fuck, I’d done it again. Found a girl and with my drinking, turned her into Cinderella. What a fucking idiot I was, what was her name? It was a good question. I then thought back to

how she'd listened as I'd told her my tale of woe. How I'd spoken to her of how my mother was stupid for not being able to navigate a bank transaction. How stupid my brother was for just saying to me he'd handle it. How I'd sent him the cash in good faith in the first place. Then agreeing with him that he'd be able to sort it out when it had all gone tits up - only for him then to go silent. *Fuck me*, I thought, *how many times had I said the word stupid, when in reality I was the stupid one?*

One thing this girl had said I then remembered as we'd sat close in a bar trying not to lose a word said to a band that could not play quietly.

"You only supported someone you love - you did nothing wrong."

True enough in its basic and simplistic form I suppose. But there were a lot of 'buts' I could slip in after such a kind statement rolled sweetly from these beautiful lips of a girl who oozed compassion. A girl born from an honest soul. 'But' I should have known better and not been a fucking moron - 'But' I should have flown here and seen the situation for myself first before I'd wired had the money wired - 'But' I should have gone to the bank myself. 'But' what was the good in dwelling in the past. I just needed to find my brother. Then I could look at the playing field - even if it did now need resurfacing.

I got dressed, stepped into my big boots and realized I'd missed breakfast. Then skipping my morning swim as penance, I once again smiled to the pretty girls at the reception desk, walked to the beach, sat down beneath an umbrella for the third time, and stared at the ocean.

That girl, oh man, that girl. I thought. Her presence, her essence, still surrounded me - like an peaceful spirit who'd latched onto my back and decided to hang.

Was I going to do it again? I thought some more, as I heard the first of the noisy bars turn on their music. *Walk these streets again*, sweating, dodging potholes, dodging the motorcycles which whipped past, dodging loser men looking for paid love, visit the same bars, hear the cat calls, hello mister, hello handsome man.... Do it all once more without even the luxury of a half-hearted massage or getting my dick sucked. The novelty of the place, the noise, the sexy girls with their tiny slim waists of all ages, wearing off.

The answer was simple. I was, and I would until I had found Steve.

So I began my walk again, sifting through the bars on the main roads and nestled down back alleys. Heard the calls from the maidens. Smiled away the offers of BJ's given with the simplest of hand gestures to the mouth. Within an hour as the sun poured down from the blue sky above, I found myself standing once again outside the same restaurant I had embarrassed myself with a burger and chips plus my drinking the night before.

The girl wasn't there. No smiling angel standing behind the greeters desk. Inviting me in with eyes which I would know were meant for me and me alone. I moved on, only to find myself back there an hour later. And then the next hour after.

What was I doing? I wondered, as I stared through the sea of people who wandered without purpose before me. I was becoming like so many of the losers here is what. Guys obsessed with one girl in a land of plenty. Here I was, infatuated after one drunken night in which I couldn't even remember its end. *Loser*. That was definitely the correct definition of

myself, a guy who should have been in his little office. The one I'd earned for myself in the oil district of Calgary. Switching my office in the evening for an almost as small apartment on the Beltway. A home in which I couldn't sleep because of the drunken screaming from the cowgirls and cowboys as they made their way home. Stopping as they always seemed to do right below my window. Spouting their drunken bullshit and laughing at nothing at all. Were they really a pain in the ass or was I just jealous that I myself had no life? It was something I'd began to often wonder as I'd put back on my big boots at the weekend so I could feel real again. Myself, wishing I was back on the rigs I'd worked so hard to get away from. Myself, there in Calgary, staying close to my mother who I know after each weekend visit, wished I'd never leave.

But here I was once again in a foreign country watching and listening to people having fun the same as I had in Calgary. Sitting on the fence as the world passed me by. In the guise of finding my elusive brother. Fighting the urge to stand for an age outside that restaurant again, I sat myself down in a bar. Swearing to myself when a beer arrived that it would be only one, and when it arrived I then settled in to watch the world go by.

Just as I was starting my third my stomach dropped as a ping from my phone told me there was a message. Picking it up and hoping it was my brother, I was then surprised by my sudden sadness as I saw a picture of myself and this stunning girl whose name I did not know from the night before. Her looking beautiful, myself red eyed. Quite the happy couple, enjoying life, in a bar which I have no memory of being in. Under it she simply asked.

"You found him yet?"

I stared at the words as though they had been delivered to me by the messiah himself. Words sent by an angel I suppose. An angel who was interested in me. Without a lot of thought, I answered with purpose.

"not yet!"

And as soon as I did, I wished I'd asked how she was instead. Then before I could do just that, another text arrived. And all it said was,

"Try... BoysTown?"

And that's exactly where I found him.

Chapter Three

'BoysTown' a place of mystery, sat hidden away from the world at the end of a small soi and when I eventually found it, I could not believe the zone had escaped me prior as I'd walked the length and breadth of this city.

The whole area a mini gay version of Pattaya snuggled inside the city. Instead of girls standing outside of the bars or dancing half naked on the stages, there were men. The bars loaded with handsome guys mostly of a younger age. Their customers a million miles away from the cargo short pants and wife beater wearing hoards that frequented the rest of the city. Handsomely groomed men of all ages, most completely out and others wishing they could be as they were at that moment no doubt just for this particular trip. Uber gay Thai men with bright underwear showing through thin silk or linen suits wandering the streets.

Steve sitting in amongst the rainbow flag waving hoard and standing out to me like a sore thumb. The kid just staring at a line of dancers in a bar three bars down.

I sat myself down next to him and as he looked up for a second I saw the minutest glimpse of surprise, then as he looked back towards the dancers in the bar he heard me say.

"When you going to stop being a complete and utter cunt all your life?"

Steve nodding. As he took that one in. Then he said.

"you took your time?"

Fuck me, I thought. The guy had said over and over how he was going to handle it, and I wasn't to come. Now he was complaining that I wasn't quick enough, Steve then said.

"Mum wants you to call her she's worried." Confused, I replied.

"She tell you I'm looking for you?"

"Yeah."

"And you didn't think you should call me or something? Or even get her to tell me where you were?" He didn't. It was just the way he was I suppose. The guy trying to fix his little issue on his own, no doubt. But wishing I was there with him to help. Then with his eyes still fixed on the bar away from the one he was sitting in, he said.

"See that guy there with the muscles in the pink undies? Well he knows where my Sherri is." *His Sherri?* I thought. *So that was the girls name who'd fleeced him*, Having either not heard it at all, or simply forgotten it quickly as he'd droned on and on about her prior on the phone. I stared at the Thai man as he danced away gyrating his hips, all covered in oil. The guy smiling at the western men as he waved his ass.

"How do you know that? I asked.

"Because he's her brother."

"You met him?"

"Briefly"

"Yeah in the street, he was with his wife and kids."

Confused I shook my head as I took that one in, turned and looked to my brother, then back to the stage.

“Sorry?”

“Yeah - he’s not gay,”

“He’s not?”

“No – He’s straight, as an arrow, same as us. Does this for a living and drives a cab when no one’s knocking on his rear door, when things here get slow, if you know what I mean.”

I did.

“And you know this – How?”

“Because I ask questions and I’m not stupid.”

Well that was to be debated.

I asked,

“If you’ve met him, how do you know he has not seen you?”

“he hasn’t.”

“yeah - but how do you know?”

“Because he told me all us white guys look the same.”

I sat back and watched the guy in his pink undies for a moment then looked around. It was certainly a sausage-fest and there was definitely a vast discrepancy in the look of the two of us and the style and expensive neatly cut haircuts of the majority of gay men we sat amongst. I looked down at myself in my freshly cut off jeans and big work boots. Then Steve said,

“You see that guy sitting at the table with grey hair, white shirt and fancy dickie bow tie?”

I looked through the crowd to the tables, sifting from one man to the next, until I thought I’d found the person Steve was referring too.

“Yeah - go on?”

“well, he’s the guy who suggested I buy that bar.”

“And?”

“said it was a good idea.”

“And?”

“well, he was full of shit.”

“And you’re surprised by this?”

Steve thought about that one. Then answered me with,

Well I wasn’t suspicious until I saw him here talking to Sherri’s brother.”

“Sherri?” I asked again, making sure I had the name right.

“Yeah – Sherri - My fiancée, fuck me. How many more times I gotta say it. We were supposed to be getting married tomorrow.”

This came as news to me.

“What? Like officially married with government stamps and everything?” I asked. “Or you saying like a private bullshit marriage, between you and her without a rubber stamp?”

“Proper - And don’t be getting all pouty faced about it either. We’d have let you and mum know once it was all done. Had a party planned when we got back to Alberta for the both of you.”

Thanks for nothing

With my nose put out of joint, and not getting ‘pouty,’ I looked about. A group of roided body builders in muscle shirts sat at a table over eyeing up the talent as a collection of masculine ladyboys floated past. Then a skinny man passed by also wearing a tight top, holding hands with his Thai boyfriend. The body builders following him with their eyes. Openly smirking at the young man’s physique, making him feel self-conscious. The stares to the man from these simple minded bullies ending as they met mine. But any opinion these pricks had on this man I’d never met or ever would was none of my business and had nothing to do with me. So I looked at them all and said out loud,

“Fat roided bully cunts!”

Then leaving that out there, I turned back to Steve, and carried on with,

“And you’re a bigger one.” Steve saying straight back without missing a beat,

“Still got that thing then?”

Yes, I still had that thing.

Even though Steve had heard it all before, and he was doing his best to ignore it, I could see that one cut deep. But fuck him what could I do. The truth hurt I suppose and he deserved it. Not inviting myself and mum to his wedding. Not that I’d have gone to this ‘wedding’ that is. Knowing our mother would not want to go without our father and I’d never have left her alone on such a special day. I took a deep breath and let it out. That was it, I would let that one go, not mention it again. Then without a minutest piece of guilt for my previous words, I carried on with,

“You’re still a cunt.” Steve then smiled, ignoring me, and said quietly.

“I like it better here, if you put all the gay shit to one side. The music’s better, and most of all, apart from those Mr. Universe wannabe’s, it’s not full of low life’s.”

I looked about and gave that one some thought. Steve was correct, where were all the alcoholics’, the predators, the rape gangs, the scruffy fucks, and the lost and lonely, I’d spent the last couple of days wandering through. I said,

“they weren’t all losers from what I could tell.” And reality was there were normal people there as well, people just like myself. The curious. Observing this exhibition of man-made human debauchery, much like patrons of a zoo. Except here, there was no moat or fence or giant window made from reinforced glass, the lookers on were inside the walls. Steve asked,

“You at my hotel?”

“Yeah, the manager wants a word with you about the minibar.”

“well when you next see him, tell him to stop basing his pricing on Paris.”

“You never been to Paris.”

“Don’t need to now.”

“Anyway, no need, I paid it.”

Steve then looked at me as though I’d done him a huge injustice.

“What the fuck for?”

“I’m staying there – I didn’t need the dagger eyes okay?”

“Now I suppose I owe you \$7000, plus the mini bar?”

What the fuck was this, the man had lost \$70,000. I thought, so I said.

“Maths was never your strong point was it?”

Steve took a deep breath, thinking about that one, Then said,

“I only asked for seven – mum fucked up there, not me.”

Even so he'd lost it,

But I did not get around to reminding him of that small detail, as the next thing Steve said took me even more by surprise. The man drawing in the deepest of breaths before saying.

“You know I’ve been sitting here for the last few days and the only thing I’ve been thinking is whether our father would of been thinking about guys in fluorescent undies when he fucked mum.”

“Maybe?” I answered, and the moment I had, I wished I hadn’t entertained the stupidity of the comment. Steve then carrying on saying.

“you ever think he came to places like this with that guy?” I shrugged,

“does it matter?” I said, and I wasn’t wrong, it didn’t. Dad was gone and we missed him. The guy living his life in a cage he’d built for himself. And giving his own life up when that same cage broke open. Steve then suddenly said something that surprised me more than finding my brother sitting here in the first place.

“I’d have happily taken a dad who came here over what he’s left us with.”

But that was an option we’d never been given. The man in such panic after being suddenly outed not giving any of us that choice. Steve then carried on,

“no wonder he did all that rolling around on the floor with other guys at the gym.”

And he had done just that. Along with us both, there in the guise of learning the same self defence techniques which involved man handling your opponent into some intricately worked out floor move that cumulated with some other guys sweaty ass or crutch stuck in your face.

And as it dawned on me that my brother was perhaps sitting here for no other reason than he missed our father and that this guy three bars down, one of which was gyrating in pink undies was nothing other than that, I said.

“Dad’s gone Steve - Let it go.”

Then we sat for a moment again, both in silence. Two boys who loved girls, comfortable in a world as foreign to them as a Saharan shepherd at a Christian revival meeting, simply because it had been a slither of our fathers world. I gave it sometime, then took a deep breath.

“So what do you want to do?”

Steve shrugged and as he did I doubted his plan went further than buying another beer. I picked up the one Steve had not long before ordered for himself, “Listen.” I said

“If this guy here or the one up on that stage is not who you say he is. It’s okay.”

Turning, Steve stared at me. The man now confused by my words.

“What?” He answered straight back in complete confusion. I carried on.

“If you’re here because you miss dad – you know - It’s okay, you don’t need to make up excuses.” Sitting there Steve thought about that one as he looked into the bar directly opposite, watching an oil soaked Thai man give him the eye. Taking a deep breath, he replied,

“Feel free to leave whatever fucking phycology degree you found on the internet back at the hotel.... I’m here because Sherri’s brother is slapping his little Asian dick about up there on that stage being watched by the same guy who told me it was a good idea to invest in that shithole of a building. You think it’s anything different, that’s on you.”

“Just saying it’s okay - that’s all.” I said back, not giving in.

“Fuck off.”

Hearing that, we both, sat in silence again for a moment as Steve pretended I wasn’t there. The body builders with their tight shirts clinging to their steroid induced soft muscle still smarting from the slight I’d slapped them with. The pricks giving me the occasional detestable glance.

“If you don’t believe me, go ask the guy.” Steve then said, without looking me in the eye.

“pretend you’re like dad, make out like you want to fuck and then beat a confession out of him.”

I laughed, good old Steve. When all else has failed just turn instead to violence. So that’s exactly what I decided to do.

I moved along to the bar and sat myself down. The man who was very nearly Steve’s brother-in-law now staring at my work boots. The fella covered in more oil than I’d seen working the tar sands. The man moving his gaze, staring me in the eyes, his mouth biting out at nothing.

Fuck me this is awkward, I thought, as I stared back and gestured for to him to go upstairs. The man mouthing back to me 5000 Baht as he held five fingers in the air to make sure I understood.

Without a second thought I was up and heading towards the stairs. The man who was supposedly as straight as myself and drove a taxi in the off days, doing his best not to slip as he climbed off the stage to follow.

I reached the top and stopped. Then waited for Steve’s brother-in-law to catch up. The low voiced screams and panting of men now very apparent, Their animalistic tones floating out from behind closed doors that lined the corridor I now stood within. A very male looking Ladyboy exited a room and stared into my eyes as she passed me by. Steve’s brother-in-law reached the top of the stairs and without looking at me moved past. Then with the slightest of glances back, he disappeared into a room.

When I entered he was already sitting on the bed. The man’s oil soaked body glistening in the neon light from the window. The noise of the music now more apparent. Looking at me the man said.

“Five thousand baht.”

And putting my hand into my pocket, I pulled out some money counted it and walking over held out my hand to pass him the money. As soon as his hand was next to mine I had his greasy wrist in the clasp of my hand and I had pulled him to the floor. Then, with a move I’d practiced for years with my father, I had him in an arm bar with one leg across his neck and the other behind his head as I stretched his arm back across my thigh until I thought there was little else for the joint to do other than to leave the man’s shoulder socket.

Doing my best to stop my hands slipping on his oily skin. I then used the sweaty underside of my knee to cover his mouth and silence his screams.

Moments later the door burst open and Steve rushed in. He looked to the man on the floor covered in oil, with his eyes popping out of his head, and said.

“You fucking idiot, you got the wrong guy.”

Letting the pressure off the man’s arm, but keeping him held fast I looked up at my brother.

“What the fuck are you talking about.”

“He’s the wrong guy!” I looked to the man’s pink underpants, then back to Steve. I said,

“They’re pink – you said the guy in pink undies?”

“I know - but I meant fuchsia.”

Jesus Christ, my brother was stupid.

I felt the man beneath my legs fighting to get his breath. Letting go of the pressure on his mouth and nose with my leg I felt him panic breathing as I watched his eyes staring up at Steve.

“I not know where sister!”

What? I thought, *did I hear that right?* Not quite believing I’d accidentally got the right guy, Steve stared down at the man on the floor. The man still looking back in panic.

“Sister bad woman – not here – I tell...” Letting go of the man, I quickly got to my feet as the Thai man stood, then holding his ruptured shoulder sat himself on the edge of the bed. Still looking at Steve but wary of myself, he carried on.

“She with her husband.”

“She’s Married?” Steve barked back in disbelief as he unconsciously held onto his head. And before the man could say another word the door opened and the Ladyboy who’d passed me five minutes prior stepped into the room. Taking a moment to size up the situation, and before I could move, she’d span around in her heels with a kick straight out of the Mai Thai knock out handbook and caught me straight in my hands as I guarded my chest and sent me off balance and staggering back straight through the centre of the window.

With shattered glass all around me and the air completely gone from my lungs, I felt my body hit the outside canopy of the bar I’d just been sitting at and bounce off the tight fabric before I dropped another seven feet and hit a row of motorbikes lined up below. The bikes leaning at an angle and collapsing perfectly enough to break the second part of my fall.

With the Ladyboy’s right shoe still in my hand, I hit the road outside with a thump and for the moment wondered how the fuck that had just happened as a crowd of gay guys watched on. Then Steve arrived, his face all in a fluster and helping me to my feet, said.

“Stop fucking about, we need to go quick.”

End of Preview Chapters

