

## Lost in Asia:

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I met Peter Murphy rather late in his life, indeed quite close to the virtual end of it, an unfortunate end by any measure. I saw enough of him in the last months of his existence to recognize in him most of the qualities, or lack of 'em, that are displayed, in part or in whole, by a number of expatriate Westerners in Asia that end up becoming what I call "Lost in Asia." Generally I am embarrassed by these vulgar, loud-mouthed losers, fearful that I might be found guilty by an association as tenuous as ethnic origin, tarred by a brush of the same racial fibres, one might say. But I discerned in Peter Murphy some faint glimmers of untutored, undeveloped humanity that evoked an equivalent low glow of human sympathy. I did try to help him in his extremity, at least to advise him, but he was too far gone into misery to heed me...people in trouble hardly ever listen to advice anyway, do they?

I still lie awake sometimes imagining, in guilty horror, what probably happened to this unfortunate man at the end of his life. In my worst moments I feel I rejected a man's last pleas for life because...because he was guilty of bad manners. I will leave it to the reader to judge whether I should have...perhaps could have...done more to help him at the end.

Peter was born in New York in the twenties. I learned this, and other bits of his history, during several long alcoholic sessions in the rustic, dimly-lit bamboo bar next door to the luminous Jimmy's Lighthouse Restaurant on the beach at Ao Chalong, in Phuket. Initially I was embarrassed even to be seen in public in such company, but I wanted to identify the character flaws that drag such people down. As I listened to him that degree of sympathy that goes with understanding even ignorance, stupidity and crude racism slowly emerged so that I could sit uneasily with my sorry confidante, always alert however, to brewing racial ructions, that I might bolt for the backdoor.

I was less comfortable with the drinks Peter pressed upon me, especially as I ended up paying for them. I nursed one or two beers during such sessions, and purposely sat close to a pot-plant in which I could pour the vile Mekong whiskies that he insisted on ordering grandly for me. The copious Mekong that he tossed back himself lubricated his memory so well that I would only need to ask, "tell me about your Father!" to have him talk for ten minutes about his sad family life. At one low point he tearfully confessed that this was the first time in his life that anyone had expressed the slightest interest in what had happened to him. I suffered that small spasm of guilt that I always do when listening to a tale of trouble with ulterior motives.

Peter's unhappy early life is, I believe, relevant to this tale of later degradation so I will set down what I remember of it from his rambling account.

His full name was Peter Woodruff Murphy, He eschewed that middle name completely, and I learned it only during the extraordinary affair of his passport...of which more later. He was the son of an Irish immigrant father who himself arrived in New York, to start work a few months later as a stevedore on the docks of New York. By the age of forty his father had become a foreman stevedore, only to lose his job, and spend time behind bars, over a truckload of valuable cargo that disappeared out the side-gate. The man never

described his work to his son, and the brutality, violence, danger and utter callousness of those in charge only became evident when Peter himself followed in his father's footsteps at the age of fifteen, despite his mother's pleading. It seemed he knew of no other employment, and with his father newly out of jail and unemployable, it was only his meager paycheck that would keep him and his mother from starving.

Peter would buy food and kerosene, etc, with his paycheck on the way home, so that his father could not drink the whole lot. This prudent action would prove fraught with terror, as the father would turn his violent rage upon his son for the first time, as well as upon his wife.

Peter hated his father, and contemplated killing him. In his young mind this seemed the only way he might save his mother from probable death from the beatings. He haltingly related that "the beatings...maybe was what killed her". This sad end happened during his sixteenth year.

It was evident that only his mother ever offered him any human warmth or protection in a harsh existence. This fact coloured Peter's relations with the female of the species. It seemed to me that he searched his whole life for some woman who would offer him affection.

In retrospect, while writing this, I suspect that the act of intimacy, freely offered by a woman, appeared to Peter to be a hint of the unstinted affection he had received from his mother, one which would draw him without question, into what he believed would be a lasting relationship. This essentially womanly act of faith was the only feminine attribute to the man, however.

He married twice, but he proved to be a poor judge of character in others.

Colleen, his first, Irish and alcoholic, gave him a son and a daughter. Peter said little of these children, except a wrenching.."I wonder why my kids hate me?"

His second, Ethel, "ran me out of the house after one year...she owned it. She said she hated everything about me!" The union resulted in a daughter that Peter saw very little of initially, and never again, until he was drawn back, from his comfortable period in Thailand to search for her. This journey, or at least his absence from his house in Phuket, started his fall from the most settled part of his life, the most happy part, I believe, into his final living hell.

After his mother died, Peter fled New York and his increasingly irrational, violent father, of whom he never heard again, without regret. He found work eventually in a Country Club in NY State in various menial positions, as cleaner, gardener, waiter and parking valet. There was much less brutality than on the docks, but here he endured an even greater sense of humiliation in his treatment by the Members, all rich, selfish and arrogant. "No way I could fight with them Members...not like on the Docks!"

As car valet he was supposed to survive on tips, as he could expect no salary. Apparently he hardly ever pleased the stingy car owners for he nearly starved, living off scraps begged from the kitchen, or scavenged from the waste, sleeping secretly in a broom cupboard and washing his clothes in the staff toilets.

He suffered tremendously from these daily humiliations and privations, relating how he would cry in his broom cupboard at night. But to my surprise he denied harbouring any hatred for his oppressors..."they were rich, they can behave like that!"..so it seemed that he accepted his lowly position specifically because he was poor, and always would be. I

asked was there anybody in the Club who sympathized, who helped him at all? “No, why should they?” he asked. He was able to accept his inferior position in the order of things, but he gave no hint of being able to imagine being any further up the pecking order. This was Depression time, and the harsh realities of human existence, and his family experience, allowed of no hope of material improvement.

I think it was this untutored fatalism, which in the time I knew him, when he possessed a house, some money in the bank, and when he was surrounded by much poorer people in a poor country, that led him to act with the same arrogance towards lesser beings, specifically those of other races, that he himself had endured. You see, nobody ever told him about compassion, about fair-play for the underdog, about our common humanity whatever our skin colour.

It was just this last, vast burden of ignorance that did ‘im in at the end, for Thai men are prickly proud, and Peter’s accumulated insults, borne in humble silence for long, finally impelled the brown men around him into vengeful retaliation.

In many ways Peter Murphy was an undeveloped human, with our species’ big brain uncultivated, with animal instincts, cunning and ferocity filling the void. Now he did show signs of compassion, largely towards a woman or two, and he never threatened me, nor even tried to swindle me, if assiduously leaving his bar tabs for me to pick up shall not be considered larceny. But I was very careful to remain just an observer, a source of free drinks and even sympathy, and I dread to think what would have happened should my life have become entangled with his in any material way, which outcome did threaten at one point.

Peter passed the war years as a private in an Army garrison on the West coast of the US. He must have had some aptitude as a mechanic, because he was assigned to repairing his unit’s vehicles, in between drunken brawls, time in the brig, and periods AWOL. In this respect he would have been embraced by Steinbeck’s *paisanos* in their less romantic moments. He was discharged penniless, having pissed his meagre pay away.

These mechanical skills were sufficient for him to finally get a job in the oil industry, and he worked on rigs somewhere offshore, in the Gulf of Mexico, I think. Here, for the first time, was a job, that like his military employ provided free bed and board, but unlike the Army handed him a relatively thick pay-packet at the end of each month. Naturally he blew all his pay on wild weekends ashore, because no one had ever mentioned to him the arcane concept of saving...higher pay just meant wilder, longer binges, and a return to work hungover when the money was finished, to the enforced sobriety of work sites which were completely dry.

Eventually, sometime in the ‘70’s I imagine, he worked with a man who casually remarked that his pay was supplemented by an equal income from a rental property in Miami. Peter pressed his workmate for an explanation of this strange anomaly, a fellow worker who was rich enough to own an apartment which returned money to him in rent, real money seemingly come out of thin air, not earned by hard-scrabble, dangerous labour. Peter looked in amazement on a “worker” who seemed to be also a “rich man”. The affluent comrade, when pressed for an explanation of this paradox, explained that he had worked for many years on rigs in distant, foreign places, mainly Muslim countries, I

imagine, because amazingly there was no place to go to piss one's paycheck against a mud wall, and so he had been forced to save lots of money, whence his felicitous investment. One imagines the anomalous worker must have had a Calvinist streak to comfort him in his monastic life.

Peter told me earnestly that he did not sleep that night of revelation for dreams of becoming a "rich man". He did not mention the necessary corollary, that such a status would mean that he could, in his turn, abuse mere lowly "workers", but such a conviction endured even until the last day I saw him, when he must surely have been destined for an early death, so pitiful was his condition.

When I met him he had worked for many years on rigs in the Middle East, in Alaska, in the North Sea, and recently in South East Asian waters. During his time in the Persian Gulf feminine company had been unprocurable for...errr...religious reasons. During his time on the North Slope of Alaska there just no woman to be had, period. By the time he worked on rigs in the North Sea the girls of Aberdeen looked too much like the hatchet-faced, demanding, whining American women he had married, and so his interest in that aspect of life dwindled considerably.

He finally aspired to work on an oil exploration vessel in the Andaman Sea, and landed in Phuket for long overdue shore leave. Here he met women of a different complexion altogether. They were gracile, small and slender, sun-gilded in the parts where Caucasian women are pasty white, and to his jaded eye they looked incredibly young and healthy..."Golden!" he cried in an uncharacteristic spasm of lyricism. Best of all, they all seemed to love him at first sight, even for just ten or twenty dollars. He was bowled over.

There is nothing unusual about being smitten in this way, it can happen to the best of us in Asia, but Peter Murphy, in common with those others "lost in Asia" never acquired the slightest understanding of the very different culture that surrounded him. To the end he imagined that all Thai women shared the same world-view as the amenable bar-girls who made up his social circle. He would address waitresses, shop-girls, and presumably a Princess, were he ever to meet one, in the same crude, jocular manner, implicitly demanding sex, and usually with a large hairy hand on a small round buttock.

Thai culture boasts only two degrees of feminine comportment...that of a virtual commoner-Princess, although impoverished, on the one hand, and that of Peter's professional Girls on the other, with virtually no shades of minor aristocracy in between. So it was a great surprise to me that Peter survived as long as he did, a source of wonder that some jealous boy-friend, or even outraged shop-girl, had not stuck a knife in his hairy belly long ago.

He never offered, since he was never given, the intensely expressive *wai*, the two hands together in a prayer-like pose with the head bowed, that gracious Thai greeting of respect and humility. The only time he ever noticed other people offering the *wai* he supposed that they were "prayin', or som'pn." The gesture does not come easily to Westerners. I note that very few Aussies, for example, can bring themselves to bow their heads during the *wai*, even though Thai Prime Ministers and even Royalty routinely do so. The inevitable, sad result of course, is that the locals think the visitors look down on them.

I became an acquaintance of Peter Murphy by accident, unsurprisingly, since I would not have sought his company voluntarily...his attire, his unshaven jowls, even his bull-necked, round bald head and pasty flesh, the very volume of his casual discourse, all warned of unsavory behaviour. I am not racially pre-judice-d, (L) I merely tend to pre-judge (E) people by their looks, their skin colour, and their demeanour before I know anything else about them.

At his most unsavory, Peter's appearance alone was an incitement to racial loathing. I saw him thus in front of the Bamboo Bar, sunk deep in a low chair, and completely oblivious, as always, to the shrinking disgust of numerous passers-by, tourists and locals. He was wearing only a small pair of briefs which completely disappeared from view, enveloped in cascading rolls of fat, an apparition of almost total, obscene nudity. Most of the flesh on display was an opaque, mottled white, with random patches of coarse black hair, utterly inferior in quality to the translucent, ethereal, pale porcelain of the thighs of Chinese girls. His arms and shoulders were burned a deeply contrasting brown, along with a ring around his neck. These areas were not protected from the sun by the habitual, sleeveless singlet with shoulder straps that he wore.

Peter seemed quite ignorant also of this ugliness...indeed he often boasted of his "success with the ladies!", due to his "good looks." I suspect what feminine attention he did attract was not due to any physical characteristics.

I happened to be sitting next to him at the bar of Charlie's Place in Patong Bay in Phuket. I must add that I occasionally go to such low-life places purely for professional reasons. I am inspired to linger there by Kipling's immortal lines:

*In extended observation of the ways and works of man,  
From the four-mile radius roughly to the Plains of Hindustan,  
I have drunk with mixed assemblies, watched the racial ructions rise,  
With the men of half Creation damning half creation's eyes.*

My neighbour asked for "a dubber rye on th' rocks!"

The Thai bartender looked at him without understanding.

"F'k it!" the man said more loudly, "gimme a dubber Mekong!"

The Thai grimaced nervously.

"Ya f'kin slope-eye! Whaddya think I'm under 18 or som'pn? Gimme a goddam dubber rye!" the American shouted, lunging forward, almost reaching out across the bar for the scruff of the Thai's neck.

The bartender backed away in fright, glancing in panic left and right.

I could not bear to let this potentially explosive misunderstanding go on.

"He wants you to put two Mekong whiskies in one glass...with ice." I offered to the bartender, in English. The man nodded in relief and served up the required double Thai whisky on the rocks.

My neighbour grabbed his glass without thanks, and before raising it to his lips he turned to stare in wonder at me.

"You...you speak their f'ing language!" he gasped.

"Well..." I said temporizing, hoping to move quickly away.

“Same ‘gain, for m’ friend ‘ere!” he commanded.

The waiter looked at me again for clarification. About the last thing I wanted was a double whisky before lunch...but the symmetry of misunderstanding impelled me to further linguistic experiment. I merely pointed to my neighbour’s glass, raised one numeric finger and brushed one open palm against my chest...not a word spoken.

The bartender nodded happily and fixed me a double Mekong, on the rocks.

The line that I hardly dared hope for came out in a fine spray of almost neat Mekong.

“Goddamn! You speak it perfick!”

I was ecstatic! I was Kipling in a bar somewhere east of Suez. I was Professor Higgins discovering a new linguistic phenomenon, a man who spoke a form of English but who seemed to understand language in others only in terms of the desired results, two successful orders of whisky, and who apparently heard no meaning in my first very ordinary sentence, nor saw any in my dumb sign language.

“I’m Professor Higgins!” I offered pseudonymously, extending my hand, determined to learn more.

“I’m Peter Murphy,” he replied grasping mine in a sweaty, hairy embrace. I could not gauge whether it was my words or my gesture that evoked his reply. I tried a direct test of language.

“How long have you been in Phuket?” I asked.

“More ‘n two years,” he replied, understanding perfectly, and diluting my new theory.

“Two f’ing years already, and none of these f’ing slopes can understand what I say!” he continued plaintively. “How come you speak Thai perfick?” I had not heard that derogatory term for Asians since Viet Nam War days.

“Well...” I tried, “maybe it is because you are speaking American, using the American slang of your hometown, and the Thais...”

“Whaddya mean? I speak perfick English, m’ father came from Eyeland.” (Ireland?)

“No doubt.” I replied, “but...”

“Hey, Susie!” cried Peter. I turned to see a mean looking girl wearing nothing but a diaphanous, very brief pair of panties, a big pair of breasts and a bored expression sashay up to my new acquaintance. Charlie’s Bar was a swinging place, even before lunch. The girl placed an elegant hand on Peter’s bare shoulder, and demanded, in a harsh voice, “Hey, you give me money!” Despite her rude tone, Peter elaborately fished a five thousand Baht (\$15) note out of his pocket and handed it grandly but dismissively to the girl, and then looked at me as if proud of his way with the ladies..

The girl’s lip curled in disdain and then she turned a quizzical eye upon me. More in customary gallantry than in an attempt to deflect a similar begging request, I smiled, bowed my head a little and offered the respectful *wai* to her with my finger tips at nose level.

Susie’s professional, enameled mask slipped for a moment as a flood of warm delight crossed her suddenly elastic face and bright brown eyes, and she quickly responded with a more extravagant gesture than mine. She walked away with Peter’s note, but looked back at me once with a slight smile. In her more human mode, I thought Susie looked quite beautiful.

I then realized that the girl’s brief, very different forms of interaction with us two could have offered the inarticulate Irish-American a lesson in cross-cultural relations, but Peter,

still with a smile of pride on his lips, had returned his attention to his drink...he had noticed nothing.

I was later to understand that all Peter Murphy's terrible troubles were exacerbated, greatly magnified, by his almost total inability to discern emotions in others. Only now, while writing this, do I wonder if Peter suffered from autism, if his disability was the adult form of that dreadful childhood affliction? At the time, of course, I merely regarded him as an ignorant, insensitive boor with interesting character deficiencies. I feel guilty about these arrogant assumptions.

Barely had tall Susie disappeared when a shorter, browner girl, fully dressed, with a similarly mean expression walked up to Peter and issued a sharp command. Peter turned a surprisingly warm smile upon her, tossed back his drink, and slid off his stool. "Gotta go now with my Candy." he announced and walked off arm-in-arm with the new girl.

The bartender looked at me with a question. Well, I thought, I guess it is partly my responsibility, after my uninvited intervention.

While I was paying for two double whiskies, one consumed, one untouched, I saw Susie, still near naked, intercept the couple at the door. Susie whispered something in Candy's ear, and both girls glanced in my direction. Candy dragged Peter by the hand back to me at the bar.

"You come see my hou'...beautiful hou'!" said Candy. I recognized the word "house". Ultimate s's are difficult for Thais.

Well, I thought, I have invested 20 minutes and the price of two whiskies...maybe I can learn what makes a guy like this tick.

By the time we had reached a huge black SUV with darkened windows Susie had caught up with us a little breathlessly. Somehow she had managed to become, well, partly dressed in half a minute. Susie and I sat in the back. She grinned impishly at me. If I had realized that Peter's driving would be so wild and lethal I would have rejected Candy's invitation. By excessive use of the horn and sheer momentum, he cleared our way through the side-streets of Patong thronged with humanity. I tried to shrink into invisibility in the back, for fear that the enraged mob must surely clog the road and stop our rolling avalanche of steel that they might drag us out to be justly torn apart. Candy shrieked in glee at every near miss. Susie continued grinning at me. I began to regret my impulse to follow these dangerous lunatics.

Candy's beautiful hou' was indeed! It was perched on a cliff with a panoramic view of the blue bay below. With great plate glass windows, teak floors and plush leather armchairs on a breezy verandah, it seemed we were looking out over Malibu Beach rather than tropical Patong Bay. I thought it would be a great place to sit writing my stories during the brilliant months of the North Monsoon, if only it were mine.

Both Candy and Peter insisted on proudly showing me their favourite parts of the house. Candy used the phrase "my hou" in every sentence. Later Peter told me had spent nearly a quarter of a million dollars to buy it. "So you own it, not Candy" I asked.

“Yup, it’s all mine...I did a real smart thing...all that paper shit says it belongs to Candy, same for the car. I did it that way ‘cos foreigners can’t own property here!” he continued proudly.

I had heard several sad stories of similar arrangements where the foreign “owner” went home on holiday to find on his return the door locks changed and “his “ house sold from under him by the official “owner”, nearly always a bar-girl.

“You are not worried about such an arrangement?” I asked.

“Whaddya mean?”

“Well, are you certain you can trust...?”

“No problem!...she’s a good gal...anyway who would believe her if she says it belongs to her...she’s just a f’ing tramp, a goddamn bar-girl!”

I glanced around nervously, but Candy was nowhere within hearing. I felt like saying “You mean a court will not believe that is her name on the title deeds?”, but wearily I thought this is not my business! Nevertheless a cold chill of impending treachery seeped into my backbone.

I had identified a terrifying weakness in Peter’s hold on his life of supposed privilege, worth a few lines in my notebook...but I did not relish the thought of further contact with this inarticulate, stupid and doomed man. Similarly Susie’s mute, almost manic grin offered no prospect of interesting discourse....and I did not like Candy. So I excused myself and hopped on a passing tuc-tuc back to my rooms and my keyboard.

I did not know then that I would witness much more of the frailty of Peter Murphy’s tenuous life...and I underestimated smiley Susie’s firm grasp of direction in her own.

Two weeks later I was in a hardware store in Phuket Town when I hear a loud honing (local-speak for sounding a car-horn), followed by a splintering crash. The shop assistant rushed out to see, leaving me with a handful of screws.

I heard a harsh American voice shouting. I examined my screws critically. More shouting, Thai voices, added to a swelling hubbub. I thought, “trouble brewing for some arrogant *Farang!* (Thai for Long-Nosed Westerner.)

Then I heard some words clearly: “Ya f’ing Slope-eyed cock-sucker! I had the f’ing right of way!”

I grinned at my screws. Peter Murphy was fulfilling his destiny, my earlier predictions were coming true: he was about to be beaten to a pulp by an enraged street mob.

I decided to watch the massacre discreetly from inside the shop, not wishing to provoke further xenophobia with the presence of another Long Nose. From the top of the shop steps I enjoyed a grand-stand view of the drama.

Peter stood a full head above the crowd. His agitated face was even more florid than usual and a fine spray of sun-gilded spittle spewed out with his invective. Through the legs of the mob I could see a forlorn motorcycle lying on its side amidst some sherds of red and white plastic.

The mob had formed an oval ring with the motorbike at its centre. At one end Peter fulminated in front of his massive, shiny wagon. I could see Candy sulking inside. At the other end crouched in silence a small, wiry young man, eyes flashing dark hatred, with a ripped shirt and a red-stained trouser knee. At his end of the ring, several men attempted

to match Peter's volume of raucous abuse with high-pitched Thai squawking. One of the men was trying to attract the victim's attention. When the young man turned to him, the other passed him something in the palm of his hand. The young victim looked down at the object and turned back to confront his oppressor. He swelled upright with a manic look of triumph in his face. With an increase in my heart rate I guessed that the object handed over was a folding knife, a weapon much more favoured amongst Thais for its lethal sharpness than the painful bluntness of fists.

Up to this point I had been a mildly amused observer, smugly awaiting a predicted, much deserved denouement...and anyway there was not enough material for a story, merely another sordid footnote to human degradation.

I had already recognized the legalistic basis of the debate in the street. The American was invoking his idea of "right-of-way", a largely Western concept, part of the Rule of Law. The motorcyclist and his supporters were expounding a Thai, an essentially Asian, view of Justice: Rich Man in posh car knocks down Poor Man on bike...Rich Man pays. Add a racial dimension to this clash of cultures, spice it with loud, boorish *farang* behaviour in the face of Thai "respect"...devious, class-ridden humility...and the scene was indeed framed for violence.

I reflected that while Peter Murphy deserved chastisement for gross insensitivity, he was surely not such a villain that death in a foreign street by arterial haemorrhage was warranted?

Now an arrogant, almost evil thought arose. I was so cocksure of my social skills that I thought I could placate the crowd...by persuading the *farang* to pay up. And now I could discern the bones of a story: Peter Murphy might just learn (wishful thinking) from his miraculous deliverance something new about a foreign culture...in which case here might hang a tale of redemption. Or, far more likely he would learn nothing, offend Thai sensibilities again and again, and suffer the inevitable consequences..."And so there!"

I had conceived of the dubious notion that I could play with a man's life in order to provide myself with a story!

I left my screws on the counter and approached the crowd. By gentle wriggling and numerous expressions of "*Cap!, Cap!*" (Excuse me) I was able to get through to Peter's side. I made a minor *wai* of respect towards the knife holding victim.

It was difficult to attract Peter's attention. He was still in fine form, seeking to curse all in the crowd, all Thais, and Thailand itself. Fortunately he was so incoherent with rage that I hoped few of the Thais would understand. I fervently prayed that he would not urge a similar fate upon the revered King of Thailand, an act of lese-majeste never tolerated.

Finally he turned distractedly to me. "Peter!" I shouted, for there was still a rumble of discontent all around. "You should pay that guy for the damage!"

The American loudly repeated his claim of right of way, and added his rabid opinions of all things Thai, complete with expletives. I was beginning to doubt the wisdom of getting involved.

I improvised. "The law in Thailand says *you* must pay *him*...you are the rich man, he is the poor man!" Apparently this recognition of his superior status seemed to have some appeal, for he paused and regarded me thoughtfully.

“I ain’t gonna pay no f’ing Slope-Eye. Wait till the Police arrive..they’ll sort the little f’er out!” he muttered.

“Give me five thousand Baht, and I will pay him...otherwise you are going to get knifed...you are outnumbered and the Police will take his side. You are the Rich man!” This affirmation of status worked. Peter fumbled in his pocket, handed five notes to me and edged his way quite quietly through the bystanders to his car and climbed in.

I was on my own and feeling foolish. Why had I got myself into this confrontation on behalf of an arrogant fool?...in order to be knifed in the belly rather than him? The crowd had gone quiet, sensing a change in tone. If only I had more than a smattering of Thai... I did the only thing I could think of. I approached the victim slowly, giving a reasonably deep *wai* with bowed head. I offered the money to him in my extended right hand, left palm under my elbow, head still slightly bowed.

It worked. The young man accepted the cash with no thanks, and without counting it. He offered a vicious little expression of hatred towards Peter’s car with a short, intense burst of shrill words. He then bent to pick up his bike. The men who had been vociferously supporting him bent to help. I resisted a foolish impulse to assist. One of the men asked for his knife back.

There was some quiet muttering in the crowd with the word “farang” much in use. Apart from that my presence there was accorded no more notice than that given any other curious bystander.

The motor-bike started easily, the crowd started to disperse. I went straight back into the shop on my own business...to hell with them all, especially the foul-mouthed American. I hoped I would never experience his toxic presence again.

Unfortunately, of course, I had entered Peter Murphy’s consciousness as a vaguely benign influence, an occasional presence that somehow seemed to soothe his perpetual trouble....and so the next time he noticed me (before I saw him) he naturally sought to join me, calling out “Perfessor! Perfessor ‘iggins!” he remembered my pseudonym! The first two times I found urgent reasons to be elsewhere. On the third occasion I wearily sat down with him, hoping that a worthwhile story might yet emerge. In this way I learned about Peter Murphy’s life, as outlined earlier.

“ I trust you learned something about Thai culture that day when you hit the motorcyclist? ” I asked him.

“ Yeah! ” he laughed, “ Pay the f’ers a little bit and no problems! ”

“ Were you really planning to pay that guy on the bike? ” I asked.

“ Nah! I shouldha ’ beat the shit out of ‘ im! ”

“ You know he had a switch-blade knife in his hand! ” I warned.

“ And I got a Smith & Wesson! ” he laughed, pulling the butt of a small revolver out of a belt-bag at his waist. I shuddered. So had I perhaps averted a shooting murder in that crowded street?...or perhaps I might have found myself in the firing line between two scornful antagonists?...and all on behalf of a man who knew nothing!, and didn’t want to know nothin’. I resolved to be a passive observer from then on.

There were of course more occasions to be embarrassed, and many more where I could have, perhaps should have, advised Peter about his attitude to local mores. But I felt that by intervening I would be altering the natural course of events, and thereby perverting the

outcome of what I still hoped would be a story. Anyway, I reasoned, surely he would not learn, or even listen?

One morning I walked into the Bamboo Bar for breakfast. Peter and some Westerner cronies were carousing in one corner, with bored bar-girls with smudged make-up in languid, peripheral attendance. From the green ranks of numerous empty bottles, overflowing ashtrays and stale odours, I surmised they were still at it from the night before. Peter had not noticed me so I sat in a different corner behind a potted palm. While I was eating my scrambled eggs a trio of Buddhist monks in orange robes entered with begging bowls on their morning rounds soliciting alms. Although such perambulations are common enough, I had never before seen monks enter a bar like this for any purpose. They collected offerings from the bar staff and manager and then approached Peter's group. All the girls jumped to their feet to offer small sums. One girl, mischievously I suspect, pointed to Peter's back and gestured to the monks. The orange leader approached Peter's elbow, bowed diffidently, and held out his bowl. Peter rather calmly picked up a thick menu from the table, rolled it into a tube, and to everybody's astonishment lashed out at the monk with it, sending the bowl flying with coins cascading on the floor.

"Out, ya f'ing beggar!" he shouted, rising to his feet and beating the orange back of the cringing monk. Several shocked girls scrambled to scoop up the bowl and the money rolling around the floor, and rushed after the retreating monks. I too was shocked and contemplated chasing the fleeing clerics to make an offering myself...what for?...to compensate for my fellow Caucasian's disgraceful behaviour?

I decided to remain unannounced and racially anonymous...if Peter were to be knifed one day by offended Thais, he would doubtless deserve such a fate. Loud laughter rang out from Peter's companions...they were not shocked. It seemed that he had found some soul-mates.

One other character, one and a half actually, emerged that would add a more human dimension to Peter Murphy's animal-like decline. I was shopping in a supermarket in Phuket Town when a young Thai woman, demurely attired, with a small child in tow, approached towards me in the Condiments aisle. She suddenly stopped and stared straight at me with a quizzical expression. Her face was vaguely familiar, but I could not put a name to it...until it cracked in a wide smile of delight...and Smiley Susie made a deeply extravagant *wai* of greeting.

I too was delighted and responded in kind. My attention was drawn down to the child, a little girl about three, who was peering at me from behind the protecting legs of Susie, I knelt down and smiled and was amply rewarded with a miniature *wai*, complete with tiny hands at eye level and a little bob of the head...plus a shy smile. This surely must be Susie's daughter to behave in the same endearing way?

"This my daughter!" Susie announced, looking down proudly. "Thai name very long, you say "Nit" enough."

I was so pleased to meet two such nice people that I demanded that Mother and daughter join me for coffee. When I asked her choice of drink in English, little Nit seemed to understand, and merely pointed wordlessly to Coca Cola, but Mum intervened with a

firm lecture in Thai, and chose a yoghurt drink instead, which the child happily sucked on. "Healt'y drink!" explained Susie.

So previously mute, smiley Susie, near-naked decoration in Charlie's Place, was also a responsible, loving Mother!

Susie took pains to make me understand that her "work" at Charlie's was as "Hostess only," She emphasized that she was "not bar-girl." I understood, although I would not have disapproved of her in either profession.

I asked could she make enough money as a "hostess"?

"No enough...but Mr. Peter very nice man..he give me money enough rent, enough eating. Other man...men...give me little bit."

I was astonished, and mortified that I had judged Peter far too harshly...at least as far as this young woman was concerned...and for good measure I had misjudged Susie too!

I asked obliquely about Nit's father. "He bad man, many Thai man bad man! *Farang* good man!" she said, dazzling me with her incandescent smile.

Susie told me more about her life and her struggle to bring up her daughter. Suddenly she grasped my wrist to look at my watch, whistled and said, "Excuse! Time for School! Mr. Peter pay my school too."

"What are studying at school, Susie?"

"English!" she replied proudly. "Nit come with me....she learn English too," she said giggling.

"So you can speak English, Nit?"

The child's reply was a solemn, wordless, but confident, nod.

I waved good-bye with bent fingers, the "Pooh-Bear wave". Both young women replied with the same gesture.

In a warm glow of new friendships I decided to once again attempt to advise Peter in his relationships with the people of the land where he had chosen to live out his retirement.

Naturally these noble sentiments would soon be sorely tried. There followed incidents one with less threat of violence than the Motorcycle Fracas, another with much less insult to local culture than the Monk's Scandal, but great embarrassments nevertheless.

One morning Peter telephoned me, and actually asked for advice! Quite diffidently, by his course standards, he requested a meeting at Charlie's Place in Patong. This was progress!

There was a double Mekong on the rocks waiting for me when I arrived. Peter had never noticed my drinking habits, or lack of 'em, but I appreciated the gesture.

Peter produced an air-mail envelope with a dramatic flourish. At this point new Dramatis Personae appeared on stage left. They were Smiley Susie, in mother's mode, with little Nit on her hip. They arrived between us males at the bar. Susie gave me a casual *wai*, one-handed perforce, and Nit waved one bear-cub paw at me.

What followed dumbfounded me. Nit reached out both little arms to Peter who took her on his knee with a genuine smile of pleasure. For one credulous moment I imagined that they were father and daughter...but no, the child was cute but manifestly pure Thai, there was not one of those delightful and unmistakable attributes of the 50-50 Eurasian mix, as in my own kids.

Peter ordered a Coke for Nit. Susie tolerantly did not intervene on health grounds. After some cooing and tickling Peter returned the child to its mother, groped in a pocket and produced another envelope which he handed to Susie. She grinned her thanks, with no *wai*, (difficult holding a child), and smiled brightly at me. Nit waved a cub's paw, and they were gone.

"Well!" I exclaimed, looking at Peter in astonishment. "Was that your contribution to Susie's schooling?"

"Yup!", said monosyllabic Murphy, quickly lapsing into sourness, anxious to get on with his "important business."

"This letter is from my daughter, Eleanor...." He paused and stared morosely into the mirror. "She's says....I think she says she's dyin'...of somp'n, and...." His voice broke. "She wants to see me...before she croaks!"

This was not just the longest, coherent sentence without an obscenity I had heard, it was also a genuine outpouring of emotion concerning the welfare of another human being! He showed me the letter. It was brief, unemotional, but informed her father that she had terminal liver cancer, and offhandedly suggested he should come to see her before the end.

"What can I do?" Peter croaked, all choked up.

"You can go to the US and visit her...and soon...while there is still time." I suggested.

"But...but...it's expensive..."

"Well, sell your car....a motor bike is all you need."

In the end Peter did fly off to Iowa to see his daughter before she might die. He insisted that I should live in his magnificent mansion, Candy's Hou', while he was gone. With the idea of peaceful quiet in which to write with a glorious view, and in a warm glow of fellowship, I foolishly agreed.

The peace and quiet did not last. Candy, of course, reclaimed her hou' quite often, when not engaged in her nocturnal trade, which continued in lively fashion in Peter's absence. She did not resent my presence in an upstairs room with a balcony, indeed she hardly seemed to notice me. It was the low-life crowds who arrived after midnight, sometimes with Candy's presence, sometimes without, that disrupted my train of thought at my most creative time of the day. I was however quite entertained by the dregs and sweepings of Patong night-life, and made copious notes for future use....while always locking my room.

On the fourth night the invading crowd contained two of my friends. Disconcertingly, Susie arrived in "hostess" attire with a sleeping Nit in her arms.

These two ladies provided pleasant company at breakfast...indeed Susie whipped up tasty Thai spicy omelettes and went shopping for provender, at my expense.

Our breakfasts together extended into morning English lessons. Susie was quick enough to grasp a few of the subtleties of my exasperating language....but little Nit seemed to soak up English words, nouns, verbs, even adverbs effortlessly, and remembered them faultlessly. After five or six sessions together I formed the impression that she was unconsciously building a grasp of English syntax....sometimes correcting her Mother's word order. I have since read that we human's are in some way "hard-wired" for syntax, and Nit seemed living proof of that. I hope my introduction of a foreign form did not inhibit the later development of her own language.

One morning Susie announced that there was to be a “big party!” that night. I asked the reason: “Candy sell black car already!” I suffered an uncharitable spasm of suspicion, but remembered that I had, after all, suggested exactly that to Peter.

The Party started to take shape quite early in the afternoon. Some long-haired youths with tattoos arrived to set up huge amplifiers and the console things used by DJ’s to produce the necessary level of offensive cacophony. A small army of caterers arrived to set up tables and load the refrigerators with colourful snacks. More men arrived to set up a marquee in the garden. I was unable to figure out why the sale of Peter’s car warranted such lavish celebration, but put my doubts aside.

Various motley guests started to arrive after dark, most seeming to be nocturnal professionals from back-street Patong.. I recognized several bar-Owners and Managers...obviously the watering holes of Patong would be lightly staffed that night. The lights came on, the band played, the guests tucked into the food. About 9.30, Candy, quite the imperious, anxious hostess, shushed the band, and loudly demanded that all the celebrants gather at the head of the driveway. It seemed some VIP was expected...but who?...some visiting Impresario of Bangkok night-life come to invest?

I thought of Peter as VIP...his early return was conceivable, but did Candy owe him this degree of devotion?...never evident in her hard-eyed, demanding domination of the hapless American.

I was right. A convoy of three SUV’s arrived, one of them looking remarkably like Peter’s ex vehicle. A phalanx of sinister looking bodyguards emerged out of the first and last cars and took up look-out positions. The uniformed, bemedalled VIP emerged from the middle car...Peter’s SUV indeed. His brown shirt and trousers were impeccably, narcissistically tailored to hug his body closely, even the modest bulge of his belly. He was a senior Police officer.

The Top Cop advanced coolly through the adoring crowd of Pimps, Cutpurses, Whores, Bouncers and Sleaze-Mongers, barely acknowledging, with a supercilious smile, the waves of deeply bowed, humble *wais* that were offered as he passed. I was so impressed that I forgot to offer the greeting myself, although as the sole *Farang* present this lapse was probably forgivable.

The whole scene would have been appropriate for a visit by a senior member of the Royal family to some outlying village...but what relationship existed here? It occurred to me that the fealty owed, the dependency felt to the most senior Policeman by those outside the Law was of a similar nature.

Susie told me that the VIP was indeed Top Cop for the entire Phuket Province. His bearing certainly suited his exalted position. The VIP visitor stayed less than an hour. He was accorded a detailed tour of Candy’s Hou’, even more comprehensive than usual. Candy instructed me to follow the entourage up the stairs to see my room. Here he turned to me and said in passable, American-accented English, “You may stay longer...no need to worry, I will make sure!” I thanked him nervously, wondering why his approval of my residence was necessary? I guessed there must be some obscure law which required the registration of aliens living in private homes. In Susie’s room he chatted amicably with her, although her smile did not crack that impassive hostess’ face. He glanced down briefly into the small bed where Nit lay sleeping.

The Colonel left, this time answering his loyal subjects with a perfunctory *wai*. I humbly offered one in return.

I moved out the next morning, feeling quite uncomfortable about the Cop's approval of my stay. My chief regret at leaving was missing the breakfast English lesson, for otherwise I had achieved little writing at Candy's Hou', since Susie often went to work in the afternoon and evening, leaving me to look after and entertain Nit...a pleasant pastime, however.

Some days later I was at lunch in the Bamboo bar when a taxi rolled up and out climbed Peter Murphy with his bags, newly arrived from the airport. He seemed quite cheerful, in contrast with his usual sour demeanour, almost pleased to see me. I surmised that his visit to his daughter had gone well?

"F'k no!" I wish I had stayed here...this is a good place!" he said, looking around his favourite bar approvingly, his double Mekong in his hand.

"Well, how was your visit with your daughter? How is her health?"

"F'ing awful! She's really old, very ugly....and smells so bad! I could only stay five minutes. Any longer I would have puked!"

"So were you able to help her at all?" I asked, knowing the answer, but seeking understanding of this appalling man.

"Shit, no! Don't want to help her....let her rot away quick!"

I was more disgusted by this revelation than by any other of the unpleasant aspects of this sorry man. I shrank into private silence, staring gloomily into my lunch. Naturally Peter did not notice my mood and talked warmly of being back among friends, citing Candy, Susie and even me among others. "Well," he remarked, "maybe Candy don't like me too much, but Susie does!"

At any other time this sociability would have impressed me, but now I was implacable. I would not describe the Party, nor its source of funds...I would not, even obliquely, warn of my misgivings about the Top Cop...let this nasty piece of work find out for himself! Peter finally tired of his self-congratulatory monologue and announced, "Well, I must go go see my Sweet Candy!" He nudged me and winked, proud of his wit. "Here's trouble!" I thought to myself.

Now I must turn to first hand, even second hand reports, for I was not witness to most of the drama that ensued. My informants included of course, Smiley Susie, reports from other parties about what Candy had said and did, a vivid first hand account of the initial assault and battery from Somjit, the Bouncer at Charlie's Place, and finally some hearsay report from a middle-ranking police officer well known to me, who shall go nameless.

The following is a compilation of the events, largely without attribution, and with considerable conjecture on my part:

Peter naturally went "home" from the Bamboo bar to "his House" (Candy's Hou'). He was surprised to find the place locked and barred, with shutters over the windows...the place looked deserted. He was surprised to find that his set of keys did not fit the locks of the outer gate. He climbed the wall, topped, on his own instructions, with broken glass,

with great difficulty and some bloodshed, being overweight and not at all agile, only to find, to his great distress, that his keys could not open the front door either, nor the back one.

He left his bags in the shelter of the portico of “his own” house, climbed back over the wall, lacerated again, and walked down to Patong to find Candy and ask for help. He appeared bloody and unsteady at Charlie’s Place. Certain indiscreet persons there informed him cheerfully that Candy had “gone home to Chiang Mai”, where she was born (whores always work a long way from home). One unnecessarily talkative source even told Peter that “Candy very rich now, no need work any more!”

By this time the unpalatable truth must surely have begun to sink into Peter’s limited intellect, but by all reports he merely sat down and started to drink heavily. It is almost certain that sometimes during this alcoholic bout some stupidly talkative, insensitive boor, even enjoyed informing Peter that “his house” was no longer even Candy’s Hou, it had been sold to the Colonel of Police, Top Cop!

It is said that at this point Peter, in a cascade of bottles, whisky and glasses collapsed on the floor, whether from drunkenness, apoplexy, loss of blood, rage or despair we will never know.

Now Fate played her cards unkindly. Top Cop, for reasons unexplained chose to visit Charlie’s Place. While his two bodyguards were parking his car, Top Cop, resplendently narcissistic in brown tights and medal ribbons entered the suddenly hushed bar alone. Seeing a bloody body stretched out on the floor he naturally approached in morbid curiosity, even perhaps in professional concern.

Fate now decreed that Peter would emerge from his emotional coma just as the Policeman bent over him, with that slight smile of embarrassment that Thais display during awkward moments.

Peter saw, and recognized his Nemesis, the destroyer of his fortune, his life of privilege and his happiness, looking down at him and gloating at his downfall.

A tremendous surge of rage and loathing fueled a remarkable eruption of physical violence that is still talked of in awe by the Night People of Patong, even those gentlemen who were safe abed in Phuket Town that night.

All agree that Peter Murphy sprang to his feet like a manic Cossack dancer and in one smooth and massive lunge carried the slighter figure of Top Cop across a table top, across the slippery surface of the bar and into the mirror behind. Any shattered sherds of glass that remained adhering to the wall after the initial impact were now systematically dislodged by Peter using Top Cop’s head as a battering ram.. All agreed that the Policeman would not have survived much longer had the two bodyguards not entered the door shortly after Peter’s ballistic lunge. By force of superior numbers, the liberal use of their gun butts, and two shots fired, the keepers of the Law succeeded in subduing and hand-cuffing the raging American.

One informant, Somjit, the Bouncer, who thoroughly enjoyed a professionally approving view of all the violence, related with great amusement that when an ambulance finally arrived the two combatants were laid side by side to be driven away, both unconscious, for Peter had also succumbed through loss of blood, some in a pool where he had lain initially, and more on top and behind the bar, doubtless mixed there with Police effluent..

I come now to my own reluctant part in Peter's further descent into Hell. He somehow managed to gain access to a telephone and called me, of all people. Perhaps that is not so surprising, since it is quite possible that I was the only person who had ever offered advice or even help.

He told me hoarsely, in a stage whisper, as if he feared someone else listening, that he was in prison, injured, and that he needed money to buy his way out. I was not at all surprised but for a moment I feared he would ask me for cash, but he told me that there was "nearly ten grand US in my account", and did I know how to get the funds out? Since I was officially ignorant of Candy's real-estate transaction at that moment, and not having any wish to become involved, I recommended writing a letter requesting the release of the funds "to some trusted acquaintance...Candy would be the obvious candidate." I offered disingenuously.

"Well no, maybe not Candy!" he said in uncharacteristic diffidence. Looking back was Peter at that point ashamed of his foolishness in trusting the girl?.....or was he perhaps still hoping...?

"Higgins, I trust you completely, can you do it? Can you type the letter for me? I gotta get out of here...I think I got a bullet in my leg and they ain't gonna do nothing for me" Peter continued plaintively and amazingly without profanity.

I was very reluctant to have my name on a piece of paper associated with this outcast, this blatant misfit, but...he was a human being and he needed medical attention. I decided that the use of my name could surely involve no legal consequences, so I grudgingly agreed.

I typed the letter, and decided to check with the Bank Manager first that it was suitable. I had an account there myself, and so I was known, and could expect some assistance. The Manager was polite and helpful but was sorry to say, after checking the balance, that all the funds had been withdrawn four days before by the co-signatory, Miss Candy Pinralainon! So Peter had trusted one who was "just a f'ing tramp, a godamm bar-girl" with his cash, as well as his Hou' and his car!

Now I had to find Peter, and be the bearer of bad tidings! I went to Charlie's Place, at 10.30 am, to see if Susie, or Candy?, or anyone else might confirm my rising suspicions that Candy had most likely cheated Peter out of his Hou'. The only person there was the assistant manager, a dim-witted young man. After many questions, I gleaned from him the fact that "Candy go Chieng Mai, buy everybody drinks, much money", and that there had been trouble of some sort two nights previous. This was enough circumstantial evidence to convict Candy in my mind. The dim-wit had other concerns...he asked me to pay for Peter's considerable intake of Mekong that night of the trouble. I asked "Why me?" and not to my complete surprise he observed that I always paid Peter's bills.

I found Peter in the Main Holding Cell at Phuket Town Prison....at the cost of a \$50 bribe. A compliant cop escorted me to....

....one of the Lower Circles of Hell...a large cage packed with gaunt, ragged, stinking, lost souls. Most were sitting silently, or standing, since it seemed there was insufficient room for all to sit., but enough were moaning, or keening, or crying to form a Dante-esque chorus for an Infernal Opera.

My arrival stirred an Aria of interest, a buzz of high-pitched, tonal comment, directed in a wave towards the far corner. In orchestrated response a barrel-chested, beer-bellied baritone arose, roaring familiar, racial obscenities and flailing away with one arm to clear his way. His bass, hoarse expletive-ridden rendition was counter-pointed by a by a wave of tenorial laughing, quacking, whistling mockery that followed Peter in his slow progress towards the bars outside of which I stood, quaking already in shock.

Peter limped heavily, favouring his left leg. His face and bare chest were caked in black, encrusting dried blood, and he held his right arm pressed awkwardly against his chest as if sprained or broken. His sole cover was a pair of stained white underpants. One grinning vulture jabbed at Peter from behind with a sharp rod. Another delivered a kick to his rear end. Despite his impediments he lashed out several times with his good arm at the worst of his tormentors, who prudently scrambled out of reach, to a crescendo of hooting, catcalling and raucous laughter. I was reminded of a mediaeval Bear-baiting scene. Peter was acting true to form, demonstrating his unfailing ability to antagonize all around him, even when they surely held collectively the power of death over him!..to be exercised on a whim...as a form of entertainment for the mob.

My animal analogy was holding...Peter was like a bear, capable only of dumbly lunging at his persecutors, his mind innocent of notions of diplomacy, of careful negotiation.

When Peter came to the bars he reached through towards me with his good arm, itself scratched and smeared with dried blood.

I prudently withdrew out of reach, at this point there was reason to doubt Murphy's grip on reality, on sanity even. But he was capable of speech. He launched into an impassioned, pleading monologue.

"Ya gotta get me outa this f'ing hole! They gonna kill me...or they gonna put me outside tied to a pole..there's one cocksucker out there been there ten years, maybe more, in the sun all f'ing day...and I seen him at night ...outa that winder!" Here he waved his hand towards a small barred opening high in the concrete wall. "I seen him in the lightning, just f'ing sittin' there in the rain. They say no one knows who he is or what he did...they have f'ng forgotten! And no f'ker asked me my name yet. I gonna end up like that cocksucker!" he wailed. "Ya gotta tell some'on 'm here! I left my bags on the front steps at my house. Can you get my passport so these f'ers know I am American?"

"OK, I will find it, and I will inform the US Consul as soon as I can!" I promised.

"Nah, nah! He's the last guy will help me! Candy will help...she owes me! Did you bring the f'ing money from the bank?"

"Peter! I'm very sorry but the bank manager tells me Candy withdrew all your money four days ago!"

The man clutched the bars with both hands, even though his right arm looked terribly twisted in doing so. The bars vibrated with the intensity of his emotion.

"And Peter, Candy can not, will not help you...you have to face the truth...she has sold your house, and your car, and emptied your bank account,...and she has gone home to Chiang Mai with the loot...I'm sorry..."

As I finished this coldly factual litany of his woes he started shaking the bars violently, and howling like a soul in torment, like a jungle primate, or a prairie wolf...the animal analogy was irresistible.

This solo rendition of infernal song was soon backed up by a chorus of manic hooting, laughing and jeering by the enthusiastic cast of operatic villains.

Three uniformed guards appeared on the run, one of them carrying a gun-like contraption with wires attached. He leveled it at Peter and with a bang he shot the wires into his chest, at the level of his heart.

Peter's howling subsided instantly into a hoarse rattle and he collapsed heavily backwards on the ground unconscious...or dead? For a shameful moment I contemplated a blessed end to this horror story, and the end of any responsibilities I might have.

The horror continued. Four of Peter's cell-mates rushed forward and started groping in his underpants. They even rolled his inert body over to inspect his hairy backside. Presumably they were looking for hidden money. The guards looked on, smiling in apparent amusement...or in Thai embarrassment.?

I was so shocked at this callous treatment that I forgot my status as polite observer. I grabbed the arm of the guard with the stun-gun, motioned vigorously towards the scavenging criminals. "Shoot the f'kers!" I cried, in feeble imitation of the prone exemplar of obscene invective.

The guard brushed aside my hand, glared at me, and marched away with his diabolical device. I had merely succeeded in reducing my status as a somewhat honoured *farang*. At this point Peter sat up with another roar, flailing away at the scavengers. The man's animal vitality astonished.

Since Peter was as much alive now as before he was stunned, I decided that I had seen and heard enough. I badly wanted to get out of this hell-hole. I left in a hurry with Peter's roaring and the chorus of quacking still ringing in my ears.

My exit took me up a flight of stairs and along a covered walkway over an open yard. I glanced down and saw with another nauseating surge of shock, the Forgotten Man Peter had graphically described. He was dressed in rags with gaping tears, his dense black hair was matted and down to his waist. His ravaged face, hands and bare feet were burned a near total black.

I stared down in shock. The poor wretch must have sensed my presence for he looked up and his eyes of black set in startling whites connected with mine as he lifted both gaunt arms as if in supplication. His movement was restricted by chains on each wrist which clinked as they came taut. I fled, frightened and demoralized.

After a night without sleep as I relived the horrors I had witnessed, and agonized over what I should do, I became convinced that I should take small steps, one at a time. I did not wish to rush back into Peter Murphy's dreadful story..

I drove to Candy's ex-hou' and peered through the bars of the gate at the front portico where Peter had told me he left his bag. The portico was clearly empty...no US passport there to help identify and succour an American soul lost in a Thai hell. No need to risk laceration on the wall.

Without knowing exactly why, I went then to Charlie's Place, perhaps in the hope that there would be someone there with some clue to guide me. I was right, Smiley Susie, attired already that morning as naked hostess, was pleased to see me. She ushered me into a private function room and disappeared. She came back shortly with a large, thick brown envelope, folded as small as possible.

“This...these...would be...to Mister Peter!” she tried hesitantly, a little shy of her words with her part-time English teacher.

“These should be given...it is right that they should belong to Peter?” I offered.

“Yes! Should be...should be...for Peter...is right!” she agreed. She put one elegant, long-nailed finger to her mouth and nostril, requesting discretion, and then waved me out gently, softening this with her brilliant smile. Quite irrelevantly, I realized that Susie’s big breasts were due to the fact that she was producing milk...was she still suckling her three year old Nit? Remembering the child, I waved goodbye with the Pooh bear wave, to an even wider smile from beautiful Susie.

I walked out feeling that whatever was in the envelope there existed some decency in this depraved town.

In a nearby restaurant, I sat in a quiet corner and peeked inside: a thick wad of green dollars, and a US passport in the name of Peter Woodruff Murphy:...Good Heavens!..who would have chosen that middle name for him?...surely his mother, not the distant, violent father from whom he had inherited his animal genes? . I counted the dollar bills discreetly, without actually removing them from the envelope....\$9760. This number was familiar...it was the precise amount that the obliging bank manager had shown me as Candy’s withdrawal.

Susie had somehow come into possession of the money that Candy had virtually stolen, and the passport of Peter. Both these scoundrels had disappeared from the scene, yet this young, struggling mother sought to have these valuables returned to their “rightful” owner. (note how that adjective seemed so incongruous in a Murphian context!) Susie went up yet another notch in my already high estimation.

Now my responsibilities were both clear and blessedly limited. The items would go to the US Consul, despite Peter’s intemperate rejection of help from this quarter...and I would be relieved finally of any obligations.

The Consul proved impatient, and became very curt at the first mention of Murphy’s name. “That man!” he exclaimed. My unfortunate association with that man was lessening my social standing on the island already. I explained Peter’s predicament, still standing at the front door. To my astonishment the man now seemed to deny Murphy’s existence on the island. . I insisted that Peter’s situation should be looked into, that justice demanded...

The consul grudgingly conceded to call his opposite number in the Police, and went away to do so. Nearly half an hour later, during which I stood in the empty, chairless foyer, the Consul came back out again.

“The Police have no record of your Peter Murphy! There is only one American in custody at present, and he is not Peter Murphy! The US Government has no record of your friend either.” he announced, shepherding me towards the door.

“But...but!” I stammered.

“Case closed!” he said firmly, closing the door with heavy symbolism.

I walked away dazed. Too late I recalled that I had Peter’s passport, and the money in my briefcase. I contemplated returning to bang on the door again...but... some horrid, suspicious doubt ate into my resolution.

I went home to think about this strange business. Was the US Consul conniving with the Police Colonel to just...get rid of Peter Woodruff Murphy?...to turn him into another Forgotten Man? Was such an outrage possible?

I contacted my friend the nameless Police Officer at Police HQ. He promised to find out where Peter Murphy was held, on what charges, and whether he had a lawyer.

I had to wait overnight, a miserable time with little sleep, for a call from the policeman. There was no record of Peter...there was only one American in custody, a black man...did I want to know his details? My friend also told me, in passing, that Top Cop, his boss, had been discharged from Intensive Care, was instructing his subordinates from his hospital bed, and would take up his duties again in two or three weeks time.

There seemed only one course of action left...I hated the idea, but I steeled myself to bribe my way into the Main Holding Cell again. It did not work, the officers refused to let me look into the cell, they denied the existence of Peter Murphy. It was plain too that I had expended whatever respect I might have had there as a polite *farang*.

Because I had dreaded the prospect of another encounter with hell on earth, I admit to a feeling of relief at this point, and I hastily escaped to the brightly lit reality of a dusty Thai street at midday, being careful to avoid the walkway above the Forgotten Man.

But Peter Murphy had existed, was still alive, at least, in that cell, just thirty six hours before! The awful truth, that I was the only outsider who knew this, made my stomach churn, and my legs feel weak. I went home again to sit in a chair and think uncomfortable thoughts.

I knew that I had to face conflicting emotions, challenge cherished beliefs, and...the worst part...to balance the almost certain dreadful fate of a fellow human being against...what?...my craven reluctance to risk perhaps my own liberty, conceivably my own life?...in order to challenge the utterly impenetrable, callously complicit, solidly monolithic monster of the Thai Police force, in apparent alliance with the US Government!

Certainly Top Cop had every reason, especially considerations of revenge and real estate title, plus the resources at his disposal, to eliminate the very existence of Peter Murphy...and to deal harshly with any one foolish enough to attempt to expose his summary disposal of the hapless American.

And yet my whole upbringing, my heritage, my personal philosophy, my very conscience argued that gross injustice inflicted on a helpless individual by a powerful government was the worst tyranny, the animal nature of Man reinforced by his ability to organize and rule, and oppress.

I pulled out a sheet of paper and drew a line down the middle, thinking I would in some way achieve a tipping of the balance one way or the other. This was ridiculous, no way to weigh a man's life on paper! I screwed it up.

I looked at myself in a harsh light. Yes, I was extremely reluctant, too bone-weary even, to attack the ramparts of officialdom for the sake of Peter Murphy. And yet, viewed objectively, what had Peter done to deserve the fate that I imagined would be his?...to

bleed slowly to death over days from innumerable small injuries inflicted by the flock of vampires that hovered constantly around him, while he continued, with animal energy to roar curses and to flail one-armed at his tormentors. The other alternative was worse: that he might spend the next ten years forgotten, chained to a pole in the sun and lightning and rain, sustained only by that incredible vitality. What had he done to deserve this?

Legally speaking, he was guilty of a very serious assault, but...in a fair system of justice there could be mitigating factors...the extreme provocation of being deprived of his complete fortune by the victim of the assault. Morally speaking, Peter...oh dear!...I detested his bad manners, but in truth he had done no great evil, to my knowledge.

I was forced to recognize that I was asking a question: was he worth saving? If he were, did I have that capability to do anything? What resources could I muster? I had his passport...that might prove to be a card to play at some point...I was glad I had not let it vanish into the clutches of the corrupt Consul! I had nearly ten thousand US Dollars...a sum enough to bribe a Low Court Judge, or a senior Policeman! But how? The memory of how I came to possess these things reminded me of Smiley Susie, and tiny, smiley, incredibly bright little Nit. I was happy to contemplate my two friends, and the decency they represented. I purposely dwelt, with affection, on the fact that Susie had volunteered this treasure.....for the sake of Peter Murphy!

But, supposing Peter deserved such devotion....what could I really do that would have any effect?...and was he still alive?

Despite Susie's loyalty, I was still uncertain myself. I, the sneering intellectual, born with the golden broomstick of education up my arse, I was still mean-spirited enough, still sufficiently disdainful of Peter's boorish behaviour, and above all still arrogant enough to question whether Peter Woodruff Murphy deserved my best efforts to prevail against Top Cop!

I knew, secretly, that I had no right to make such a decision. But I could clearly see that Susie and Nit deserved better than the hand that fate had played them. Now a bright light of convenient reason illuminated my dilemma. Of course, Susie, and her future in the tiny shape of her daughter, deserved what was in the brown envelope! And without this resource, could I really accomplish anything?

Susie took some persuading to accept the money, including some expedient lies on my part about Peter's mortality. After that I took some relief in the fact that I really did not need to expend any more effort in the sorry saga of Peter Murphy. I also slept for twelve hours.

I still have that damned passport in my files to remind me of my rejection of the life of a fellow human being because he was....guilty of bad manners.

Of course I still wonder about Peter's fate...but I have experienced redemption of sorts, a happy little footnote makes me feel much better.

Some twenty years after those grim Thai days, I was back in Phuket. I was walking along a road in the town when I saw a Thai family, a middle-aged, distinguished-looking father, a tall, elegant mother and a young teen-aged boy walking towards me. The woman stopped, and stared intently at me. I, perforce, stared back, with a growing sense of....

Susie's face was the first to crack into that great, elastic, sunny smile. Her head went down, quite low, her two hands went up to her nose in that memorable, endearing *wai* of long ago. I responded of course.

Neither of us knew what to say initially. Susie finally said "This is my husband!" He extended his hand and said with an American accent, "Good morning", coolly and politely...he was obviously not delighted to see his wife on such intimate terms with a graying *farang*.

"This is my..our son,," Susie added. Her English sounded much improved.

"And Nit?" I started to ask, just as Susie said, "Nit is studying at Chulalongkorn University, in Bangkok. She majors in English Lit...er...a...English Lit!" she finished, struggling with the long word.

"Wonderful!...I am so happy!" I cried.

"Me also!..thanks!" cried Susie.

"Thanks to you, Susie!" I returned. The husband looked sharply at his wife...perhaps the name I used was merely a relic of her "hostess" days. I did not wish to cause her any more embarrassment, so I cravenly performed a *wai*.

Susie responded, with the same old extravagance, smiled brightly, and walked away with her family. I watched them move away.

I was so pleased that the future I had imagined so long ago for her and Nit had proven a happy one, but was extremely sorry to see her walk away. Some distance off, Susie turned to look back, and seeing me give a Bear's wave, gave me a smile whose incandescence spanned twenty yards. I was reminded of the first time I saw her, in Charlie's Place, so long ago.

Some time when I am next in Bangkok, I might just drop by the Dept. of English Lit. It would be interesting to hear the younger generation's view of past history, and of the future.