

STEPPING STONES

*The Story of Lek,
a Bar Girl in Pattaya*



Behind The Smile
— volume five —

OWEN JONES



STEPPING STONES

Book Five in the Series

Behind The Smile

The Story of Lek, a Bar Girl in Pattaya

by

OWEN JONES

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Behind The Smile: Stepping Stones

by Owen Jones

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I LIFE'S LITTLE SURPRISES

“How do you think it’ll go?” The three people sitting around the table on the rooftop of the ‘Four Winds Hotel’ in Baan Suay looked at each other. None of them wanted to be the first to speak. “Like that, is it?” asked Lek.

“Don’t worry about it. You’ve done all you can and so have we. I for one think you’ve got it in the bag. Don’t you, Nic?” encouraged Ayr.

“If I were a betting man, which I am, I would say that you have a seventy-thirty chance and I have put money on you, but I’d be happier with eighty-twenty.”

“Well, thanks for your confidence. Did we bet on me as well, Ayr?”

“Oh, you are not allowed to bet on the outcome, it’s against the law and as your close associate, neither should I, but I got my cousin to put five thousand on you – they wouldn’t take any more, given the odds. How much did you do, Nic?”

“I didn’t, and for the same reason, but my mother managed to place six thou at three to two on.”

“Yes, that’s what we took too.”

“OK, let’s go and see what’s happening shall we?” They finished the bottle of whiskey before them with a swift double each from a small glass that they passed around between them.

Ayr drove them to Nic’s house which was across the road from the village polling station. His wife, Jan, was handing out iced-water and cakes, made and donated by a local firm as a self-promotion, to people who had either already voted or who had walked up in the heat of the afternoon and wanted a breather before they did.

It had been nearly four years since her first and last election success, when she had won the hearts and votes of her ward members, but this was for a different post – a higher position and she would need the support of not only all her own village, but also that of most of the Moo, or wards, in the other five villages.

There were six candidates standing for the job of Head Orbortor, or Chief of Finance for the district. She was worried that she should have stood as Orbortor for her own ward first, before going for the job of Capo di Tutti Capi.

So were all her main supporters, and her enemies were hoping that she had bitten off more than she could chew, trying to run before she could even

walk properly.

“Stand at the gate by the road, Lek and smile a lot. Greet everyone like a long-lost friend, however well you know them,” advised Nic, who had been in local politics for most of his adult life. He had been mayor for twelve years and was not interested in rising any higher, but a District Orbortor who was on his side, would make his job and life that much easier.

Lek moved out onto the side of the road, and looked back at her friends inside the garden nervously. There were three other hopeful candidates there already, and she cursed herself for not having the nonce to stand there earlier.

They nodded and smiled at each other, but not one of them meant anything by it. This election was for a plum job with a good salary, which could be used as a launching pad into bigger things. From District Orbortor she could get into regional and even provincial politics. She had everything going for her. She was about the right age, perhaps a year or two too old, but that wouldn't go against her; everyone in the two Moo in Baan Suay would vote for her, with the exception of a hundred or so of the family and friends of the man she had ousted to get her current post of ward councillor, which she would have to relinquish, if she won today.

She was hedging her bets. If she lost today, she could re-stand in her ward elections in five months' time. However, if she did win, she hoped that the previous councillor, who called himself Boss, would not stand again. That would mean that she had let her supporters down, because they had voted for her to get rid of him.

Still, she thought, let's win this election first, and worry about the consequences later. She and her advisers had weighed up the pros and cons of standing and had decided to go for it. Her philosophy was to do one job at a time and to do it to the best of her ability.

“Hello, Mrs. Chang, how are you? Lovely to see you again. Is your son still doing well at university? He is such a credit to the village. Come in and join us for a chat after you have cast your vote, won't you?”

“Hello, Ron, lovely day, isn't it? How's the drainage? Still holding out? Good, let me know if there's anything else I can do for you, won't you?”

The strongest threat came from Khun Tatsanai, a wealthy, cold-fish of a man from one of the nearby villages, designated as Moo 2, with seven combine harvesters and over three hundred rai of prime land. She could see him sitting just inside the mayor's gate with his entourage.

Somehow he had got the best table in the best spot so that he could see everyone coming and going and they could see and hear him and his greetings. He also had his big, midnight-blue Mercedes parked just outside Nic's but to the village side so that everyone would see it and its personalised number plates, and have to walk past it to get to the polling station.

Neither Nic nor Jan would have taken a bribe to allow him to buy that table, so he must have had someone waiting outside the gate to get in first. He knew all the tricks and reportedly had put on massive parties at his ranch-style house every night for the past week with expensive goody-bags for all those in attendance.

Lek had done none of that. The only concession that she had made to 'the people' was to be available for a 'chat and a drink' outside the hotel every night. OK, the drinks had been free, but Thai voters, especially in the countryside, still expected to be given something for turning out to vote, even if it had been made legally compulsory many years ago.

Old habits died hard and one of those 'old habits' was that men thought that rich men should be in charge of the country and women should be in charge of the kitchen and the children. 'Women should be kept barefoot and pregnant,' an old man had told her once, adding that he was only joking. Barefoot and pregnant, indeed! Except that he was a liar, he hadn't been joking, he had meant it and he had voiced an opinion that many men and even some older women held.

On the whole though, the vast, overwhelming majority of women wanted to take part, or at least have their say and their vote, and most local women even wanted Lek to win. It was only the men that she had to worry about and that smiling jackass in there in particular.

Much to her embarrassment, she came out of her reverie to find herself staring at him and he was holding up his glass of light-brown liquid, mouthing the word 'cheers' to her. The consumption of alcohol was illegal on polling day and she just knew that that was what he was drinking, but she also knew that she would never prove it. If she tried, it would be spilled 'accidentally' or one of his flunkies would take the wrap, saying it was his.

She held up her hand and shouted 'Chok dee, ka! Good Luck!'

He was arrogant, he expected to win as if he already knew the result, although she was still slightly ahead in the exit polls. Who believed those though? People lied. They would promise their vote to one person for an

invitation to a slap-up party and vote for the opposition. No-one could ever know in a secret ballot... until it was too late and they were sent home with their tail between their legs with everyone laughing at them and their confident expectations that had been fuelled by deceitful promises.

Craig waved to her holding up a bottle of Coke, she wasn't sure whether to give up her post, but went in anyway.

"How many hundred you got now?" asked one of Tatsanai's supporters and everyone on the table laughed except Fish, who held up his glass again. They all knew that the winner would need thousands even if the three candidates split the vote fairly evenly. She chose not to reply, but gave them one of her brightest smiles.

"I hate that lot over there, the arrogant.... so and so's. They just cannot conceive of defeat. It's his first election at anything, but he and his toadies are so used to him winning that... Oh, pass me that bottle will you, please, Craig? They make me so angry. It's just a laugh to them, an easy way to get his foot in the door to bribe higher officials and make even more money."

"That's politics the world over. Why would the president of the United States or the Prime Minister of the UK sweat and strive for so long for a job that pays the same as a medium-to-high-ranking executive or accountant, if their weren't other, unseen, unspoken-of perks?" opined Craig, but only Ayr and Lek could understand him.

"What perks?" asked Lek.

"Well, I don't know... they're 'unspoken-of', no-one's told me."

"So how do you now they exist?"

"Because it stands to reason. My ex-brother-in-law was earning as much as a thirty-year-old accountant partner of a firm as Margaret Thatcher was when she was a fifty-odd-year-old Prime Minister. They're not on fantastic money for running a country, so they must be getting something else that does make it worthwhile, something that most people don't know about. What about the MP's' expenses scandal?"

"You're in politics, Lek, you know that bribery and corruption exist."

She did, but it wasn't something she was going to discuss with a foreigner, even if he were her husband and certainly not in front of so many witnesses. "How much longer?"

"An hour, and then fifteen minutes, perhaps thirty for the count up. Come on, let's go inside for a livener," replied Nic. "I'll go first, follow me

in after a few minutes. I'll take Craig with me, make it look as if I'm showing him the toilet."

"Craig, go with Nic. He'll take you to the toilet," suggested Lek.

"I don't need Nic to take me to the toilet, thank you very much! But if someone's got to do it, why can't it be that young woman over there?"

"Just go with him... for my sake? I'll see you in a minute."

"OK, if you insist." He knew something was going on but didn't know what until Nic handed him an ice-cold beer Chang from the fridge in the house and smiled broadly. "Oh, I see... The old drinks ban... kapun kap."

Lek, Ayr and Jan joined them minutes later from the back garden door. "So, you didn't mind Uncle Nic taking you to the toilet then? You can be so slow sometimes."

"Maybe, but it would have been better if you had said 'show you where the toilet is'. 'Take you to the toilet' is what you do with little children... you help them undo their trousers and show them where to point it."

"Ah! Oh, well, I've got other things on my mind right now. How do you think it's going, Jan?"

"I think you've definitely got this village, so that's two Moo out of seven..." she replied trying to sound encouraging

"Two out of seven isn't enough though, nor is three out of seven... so I might be halfway to getting enough votes to win?" She took the shot glass of whiskey being offered to her, downed it in one and handed it back.

"Come on, Lek, it's not over yet. He's in a worse position than you are, and he's a man, so his vote is split... at least you're the only woman... that has to be a big advantage."

"You're right." She waited for the glass to come around to her again, downed it in one, took a coke from the fridge and said, "Right, I'm going back out there. You stay here, Craig," she asked Nic if that was all right, "Nic says you can sit here and have another beer. I'll see you later." Ayr went with her, and Nic and Jan wandered out the back door into the garden leaving him sitting alone in front of the netted window overlooking the front yard, where scores of people were socialising and discussing the election.

He could plainly see two of Tatsanai's men pouring whiskey into glasses under the table and quickly topping them up with soda. He didn't like the cocksure way they were flaunting the alcohol ban, but essentially it was no worse than what Lek and her friends were doing. He put his phone in video

mode, pulled the net back and shot a couple of minutes, making sure to include a scene of the Fish accepting and drinking a glass of whiskey and soda. ‘You never knew,’ he thought, ‘it may come in handy one day.’

He was in no hurry to go outside into the forty-two degrees of heat, when the alternative was a fridge full of cold beer, air conditioning and a hidden observation post. He saw Ross arrive and talk to Lek, then he looked at the house and started to walk over. Ayr was probably in the polling station as a reminder for Lek, he thought.

“Hiya, mate! I see you’ve got the best job again?” he said breezily, coming in through the garden door.

“What job’s that?”

“Chief beer taster and observer. Do you need an assistant? It’s too hot for me out there.” Craig indicated the fridge and he helped himself. “So, how’s Lek doing? Going to win, is she?”

“Who knows? They don’t tell me much, they never have. She seems more worried than last time, but this is a much better job. You know that every Moo gets a government budget which the councillors spend, well, the Orbortor makes sure it is spent properly and that none of it ‘gets lost’...”

“So he’s like in charge of the councillors?”

“You could look at it that way, though the councillors don’t. Well, that’s the job that Lek thinks she should have gone for, but in stead of that, she is trying for the Chief District Orbortor, the one in charge of all the little Orbortors... one per Moo so in our case seven of them.

“That’s why she’s so worried – people might think she is underqualified, but as she told me, she’ll have a boss too making sure that she doesn’t screw up, so she should be all right, if they give her a chance to prove herself.”

“Ah, well, good luck to her, I suppose there’s nothing we can do?”

“No, I reckon we’re helping by just keeping out of the way, so they’ve got one less thing to worry about. It should all be over in an hour anyway, then we can all go home. What have you been up to?”

“I ran Gail and Da into the wholesalers in Phitsanulok to pick up some stuff for the shop and the hotel. Boring really. Cheers, good luck, Lek!” They clinked bottles. “So, would this new job mean more travel or anything like that?”

“I’m not rightly sure, to be honest with you, but trying to work things out for myself, and I usually have to with Lek, I would say, that if she is

trying to control corruption in her seven lieutenants, she's going to have to be here, where they are so she can monitor them, but who knows? She may have to go on a few courses to train for the next job up, as they do. Yes, I'd say she would have to go away sometimes, these courses are only jollies though, aren't they? They're considered perks of the job.

"An hour or two's study in the morning; a three hour lunch-cum-shopping break; an hour or two in the afternoon and then a slap-up meal and entertainment at a top venue. It's a bit of a joke really, isn't it?"

"As you say, it's considered a perk. Our lot take their perks in Honolulu and Hong Kong, so the Thai people can count themselves lucky."

"I agree completely, although I wouldn't mind a few foreign holidays courtesy of HM Government because of the wife's job."

"They probably wouldn't let falang go, or they'd have to pay for it themselves."

"True, pass us another one will you, Ross, please? Then we, or at least, I, had better go out and give some moral support."

Once outside, after finishing his beer, he could tell there was something wrong. Lek and Ayr, and even Nic and Jan looked as if a calamity had struck. "What is it, Lek?" he asked gravely concerned.

"Oh, I've lost. The word is Tatsanai has beaten me... not by much, but there it is. Hush now, I have to go up on the stage for the official result."

"Was it by many? Can't you get a recount? If it's less than five percent, demand a recount." Lek left talking to Ayr.

On the stage, Nic read out the results: three of the candidates polled less than five hundred each; one got just over fourteen hundred; Lek polled 2,443 and Tatsanai 2,662. His supporters went wild, throwing their hats into the air and shouting.

Lek was about to lean forward to congratulate him, when Ayr put her phone to her ear and pulled her back. She then spoke to Nic. Nic tapped the microphone before speaking into it.

"Certain allegations have been made to Khun Ayr, a few minutes ago... very serious charges indeed. So, as adjudicator at this election it falls to me to try to resolve the matter, and the only way I know how is to have a public recount.

"So, security, would you fetch the ballot papers and the official counters and bring them on stage, please? Could someone have a long table set up

here? There's one in the garage, and seven seats for the counters to sit on... oh, and one for the chief teller that's eight chairs. Pass them up, please.

"OK, counters, on stage please, and the ballot papers... thank you. Now, start again, where everyone can see what is going on. We require complete transparency.

"Khun Ayr, may I have a word, please?" Nic signalled the back of the stage. Ayr and Lek followed him.

"Do you need Lek, Nic? She should be watching the tellers really. This could be crucial."

"No, it's only you that I want to see, since you reported the allegation. I agree with your manager, Lek, you should be overseeing the recount." Lek left them to it.

"Now, then, who made the allegation?"

"I don't know, Nic, the number came up as withheld."

"Did they give their name? Was it a man or a woman?"

"It was a man's voice, but he didn't give a name. he only said that he had been told that Khun Tatsanai would 'win one way or another' and that he should place as much money on him as possible. Then he hung up."

"Can I see the log entry?"

"No, Nic, my battery was on it's last legs and it is out now. I'll have to recharge it later tonight, but I can show it to you then."

"OK, as soon as you can, please, Ayr. I do need some justification for the recount."

"Yes, I understand, Nic. You will get it. Can I join Lek at the recount now?"

"Yes, sure, I should be there too." Nic stood behind the chief teller and Ayr went to stand with Lek.

"Anything happening yet?"

"No, this is a long shot. I'll feel even more ridiculous, if I lose twice in one day." Ayr put an arm around her friend's waist and hugged her.

The seven tellers were seven girls, completely by coincidence. Each Moo councillor had appointed a trusted person to represent their ward in the counting process. Each girl had been given a roughly equal bundle of ballot returns to count and they handed them back to the chief teller with an elastic band around their stack and their name and the number of votes for each candidate on an attached piece of paper, so it was possible to give each

girl back the bundle that she had originally counted. Or not, if that was to be the object of the exercise.

Each girl was recounting her own bundle, but now under the close scrutiny of the candidates and their teams. After twenty minutes, when they had finished counting, the bundles were collected and passed to the chief teller, who totted them up again.

She raised her hand when she was finished and her supervisor, went over. It was a tense moment and he was well aware that all eyes were upon him. He tried to give nothing away on his face, but he caught Nic's eye, and they walked towards one another. He whispered in Nic's ear, then they looked at the chief teller and went over to her.

She pointed to a line of entries in the ledger, and then a sheet of paper, and then at one of the girls. That girl was obviously aware of something. She first blushed, then tears flowed and then she howled like a baby from the shame. "They made me do it. I said I didn't want to, but they said I had to for the good of the village and my family. They gave me 5,000 baht. I'd never seen so much money, but I gave it all to my mother, I swear, I did."

Nic took a look at the figures, the girl was totally breaking down by this point. The six candidates were called over. Apparently, the girl had not allocated the correct number of votes to any of the candidates, but of the 1,237 ballot papers she had counted, she had given 641 too many to Tatsanai, 420 too few to Lek and 221 too few to the others.

The other girls' returns were checked and found to be correct. That made Lek the clear winner.

Nic addressed the corrupt girl. "Who made you do this? You know this is a very serious offence, don't you? You could spend years in jail for this."

"I don't know his name, sir?"

"Is he in this courtyard?"

"I can't see him, sir."

"Well, stand up and try, or I'll take you to the police station myself! This is not some joke! Get up on your chair."

She did so, but didn't point anyone out, whether he was there or not, which Nic suspected to be the case. "Do you know anything about this Khun Tatsanai?"

"Of course not, Nic, you know me – as honest as the day is long, but I do object to being ousted from office after such a short time and because

some stupid slip of a girl can't add up. You announced that I had won and that should stand."

Nic chatted in private to some of his advisers, it was a tricky point of law.

Craig and Ross stood in front of the stage, leaning on it. Their Thai was pretty good and Lek and Ayr had been keeping them informed after a fashion, so they knew what was going on. Craig retrieved his Smartphone from his pocket, played with it for a while and then sent two text messages and two emails – one of each to Lek and Ayr. The text just said 'Lek, look at your tablet'. He heard Lek's phone and tablet, beep, he was that close. He knew that she often ignored the tablet, but never the phone, in case it was Soom.

She read the message and then, turned her Kindle Fire on. A recent email, with a video attachment. She looked at Craig and he urged her to watch it, which she did. Then she passed it to Ayr and Ayr showed it to Nic. Nic, called Tatsanai over.

"I want you to reconsider withdrawing from this election with some of your honour still in tact in light of new recent evidence."

"What are you talking about, man? What new evidence? I demand to know what is being said about me and by whom."

"Yes, fair enough, that is your right."

He played the video of him flouting the alcohol ban with his pals that Craig had taken a few hours before. "Who took that? It's libellous? It's a fake! I'll sue. How did you get hold of it?"

Nic returned to the email, of which the video was an attachment. The metadata just said 'From: candidcamera@canadaproxy.ca Subject: ☺'. Nic knew about proxy servers, but he had to have Lek translate the English, which she did with great pleasure.

"All right, I withdraw. You win this time Lek. Come on, let's get off home." He stormed off stage with his men in his wake.

"Where did that come from, Lek?"

"I have no more idea than you do. You can see when it arrived, a few minutes ago."

"You two do seem to have had a lot of help from 'dei ex machina' today, don't you. Anonymous tip-offs, anonymous emails and videos. It really is most strange. Anyway, you deserved to win Lek, so I'd better announce that before everybody goes home with the wrong idea." He

switched the PA system back on and told how there had been an ‘unfortunate mistake’ and that Khun Lek had in fact won reasonably comfortably, after Khun Tatsanai had magnanimously conceded the error in addition and withdrawn any objections. Those that were left, about half of those there at the first announcement roared, for Lek was the preferred candidate in Baan Suay by far.

Nic turned the PA off again. “Come on, I need a drink after that. What a bastard, eh? Intimidating a young girl like that, she couldn’t have been more than sixteen.”

“What will happen to her, Nic?”

“I’ll let her stew tonight. I hope she doesn’t sleep a wink, but I’ll go and see her parents tomorrow and let her off. I won’t report this and I doubt that anyone else will either.”

“I won’t,” offered Lek, “I’d like to see you phone her parents and tell them what you’re doing, in case they get too heavy with her.”

“I agree,” said Jan, “she looked awfully upset and we wouldn’t want her to do anything stupid, would we now?”

“OK.” He phoned his Number Two, the Chuai Baan. “Tom, do us a favour will you. That girl who falsified the figures today, could you get me her parents’ phone number, please? I’d like to speak to them right away.

“Right, do you want a drink here or on that gorgeous rooftop of yours?”

“Up to you, Nic,” replied Lek.

“Oh, I love it up there, the view is so much better and it’s more breezy than our living room.” So, they retired to the roof garden of Lek and Ayr’s small hotel. They bought a bottle of 100 Pipers from Nong on their way up and invited her and Kurt to join them later if they wanted, but the loving couple rarely socialised after working hours, and it was one of the reasons why the invitation was extended anyway. They had been expected to decline. Craig and Ross kept a dozen beers in the fridge as a matter of course, or at least the girl running The Cloud Café had a standing order to keep at least a dozen bottles in her fridge.

They sat on the roof in the cool breeze which didn’t exist at street level. It transformed a sweltering, muggy, mosquito-infested evening into a very enjoyable experience especially as Baan Suay was relatively pollution-free and so the stars and even some planets were usually on display.

As they were talking about the local events of the day and Thai politics in general, as they usually ended up doing, Nic’s phone rang. “Hello,

speaking. I see, I'm actually sitting with her now... I'll put her on... For you, Lek. It's Phichai police, It appears that your phone is dead and someone has been trying to reach you for a while..." Nic handed her his phone, "Daap Prasit..."

"Hello, Daap Prasit, what can I do for you?... I see..." she rummaged in her handbag, pulled out her phone and tried to switch it on, but it was dead. "No, that is correct, I am trying it now, but the battery is dead, it has been a very busy day. What exactly is the problem? I see, my son-in-law... yes, I have his number... all right, I'll phone him right away. Thank you for your perseverance and diligence, officer. Good night.

"It seems that Soom's husband has been trying to phone me for the last two hours or so, but my battery was dead and so was yours, Ayr. I need to phone him 'immediately' apparently..." Ayr took out her phone, pulled the back off it and inserted a battery,

"Here, use mine," she handed it over and Lek dialled.

"You told me that your battery was empty."

"No, is that what I said? Sorry, I meant 'had fallen out'. I dropped it and the battery fell out." She apologised with her expression and a shrug, but was listening intently to Lek. Nic didn't believe her, but believed that the ends justified the means and they had ousted that scoundrel Tatsanai. He sat there shaking his head in disbelief that he had fallen for one of Ayr's ruses, while listening to Lek, as were they all.

She waited anxiously for her call to be answered, not knowing what the problem was, but fearing the worst under the circumstances. "Ah, Mike, I understand you've been try..."

"I'm so sorry, Mae, so, so sorry. I love Soom more than my own life, I would never have wanted this to happen."

"Calm down, Mike... good. What has happened?"

"We went to a party, and, and er, I drank too much. Soom told me to leave the car there, but I said I was all right..."

"Get to the point, Mike, quickly!"

"It's Soom... we had an accident, and she's in hospital... intensive care... she's in there now. I'm so sorry, I, I..."

"Is there a doctor I can speak too, or a nurse?"

"I don't know..."

"Well, find out, and bloody quickly!"

"Yes, Mae."

“Craig, put this number in your phone, it’s that bloody idiot’s my daughter’s married to. Send him a text so he can keep in touch. I’ll kill him if Soom, if she... Hello, nurse, my name is Mrs Williams. Yes, Soom’s mother... can you give me any news please?”

“I’m terribly sorry, Mrs. Williams, Khun Soomsomai is in surgery as we speak. She was unconscious on arrival with a suspected fractured skull as a result of an RTA, I believe. We won’t know any more until she comes out of the operating room... No, I don’t know when that is likely to be, I’m sorry.”

“OK, thank you, please put me back onto her husband.”

“Mike, we will be there as soon as we can, but it is awkward at this time of night. Craig has sent you his phone number. Ring it as soon as you have any news.”

“Yes, Mae, thank you...” Lek hung up. She didn’t want to hear his excuses and she certainly wasn’t making the journey for his sake.

“Right, did you all get the gist of that?” She was looking at Craig and said in English, “Soom is in an operation room after a car accident,” her mastery of the English language deteriorating quickly as other things filled her mind. “We have to get down there now, Craig! Anybody any ideas? Little Soom is in intensive care, Craig, Oh!” He jumped up and held her shoulders, resting his head on hers.

“It is too late to fly, the next flight is in twelve hours. We could drive you, but we’ve all been drinking... there’s a bus from Phitsanulok, that would get you there at about five o’clock, or a taxi all the way,” said Ross, summing up what everybody already knew.

“Ayr, could you get us a taxi for as soon as possible, please? Make sure you tell them the circumstances and offer a bonus if they get us there sooner than they would normally be able to. Make it a nice car too.”

Ayr made a few phone calls. “It will be here in half an hour. It’s got to come from Uttaradit. They’ve promised the boss’ Mercedes, but they’re not sure. Do you want to get any clothes to take, Craig?”

“No, I don’t think so, we can buy whatever we need when we’re there, but it’s four or five hours to Bangkok, even if they hurry, so I need to take a couple of travel sickness tablets for Lek, a couple of cans for me and maybe a ‘ben’ of whiskey to put in my pocket for Lek in case she wants it. Oh, Ayr, and mints, a toothbrush, a comb or brush, whatever Lek uses and some toothpaste. Here’s a thousand, we’ll follow you down in a minute.”

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