

12 THAI SHORT STORIES – 2012

TRANSLATED BY MARCEL BARANG

3 – Arnon's death – WIWAT LERTWIWATWONGSA

31 – The funeral investor – KAJOHN RIT RAGSA

54 – Faux amis – JARUN YANG-YUEN

71 – The destination – JIRAT CHALERMSANYAKORN

85 – Wailing sea, grieving wind – USSIRI DHARMACHOTI

99 – Dog-mess village – SAENG SATTHA NA PLAIFA

120 – The bridge – WATN YUANGKAEW

139 – The three-eyed boy who happened to fall down to Earth –
MAHANNOP CHOMCHALAO

160 – The madman of Lucky Star village – UTHEN WONGJANDA

179 – Fake – SOMPHONG THAWEE

189 – Social phobia – SAMPHAN RARUENROM

202 – Genesis – THONGCHAI PHANDEE

ARNON'S DEATH

Wiwat Lertwiwatwongsa

1 - Pregnancy

She became aware that she was pregnant in the hospital's bathroom. Without any doubt the pregnancy test strip showed a two-digit gradation brazenly. With a sudden giddy spell as if in a free fall, her first thought was that her father stood watching her from the doorframe, knowing full well that she was pregnant and showing seething rage. Actually, she was in her father's room, Special

Room No 302 in the Pracha Ruamjai building, a stark-white room, dull, with nothing to show that a human being lived there. Her father had been in a coma for three months. One night he had lain down and never woken up again.

From that day she had swung between school, house and Special Room No 302, a room that made her feel as if she was locked up in a mental asylum. In front of her father's limp body which in the end had to be denuded before her for her to clean it, his withered lingam put her oddly ill at ease and quite sad. The first time she had to take up the duty of washing his body, she was just back from making love with her boyfriend. A huge lingam had entered her naked lithe body, nothing like the dangling bunch in the emotionless hands and white rubber gloves of the nurse who showed her how to proceed. That time she had wiped him clean with the unsettling feeling that her boyfriend's lingam, or was it her father's, was still inside her.

There was a baby inside her. Her embarrassment verged on alarm as if she was under threat. She hid the pregnancy test strip which was straight and long, almost like a lingam, wrapped it in cute paper, secreted it in her pants, waiting to slip it into her schoolbag to throw away later, felt cramps in her bowels and nausea as if she was about to vomit her own child. Once again she had to clean her father's

body while fighting that feeling of unease. The air-conditioned room was freezing cold. The pervasive smell of orange peel skin she had dumped in the bin was sickening. Her father's face smiled in his deep sleep, his smile the luminous smile of a Buddha image. As her father had gone on sleeping for far too long, she had gradually forgotten what he was like when he was up and about. To tell the truth, she wasn't very close to her father, and even less so as she turned into a young woman. Almost all she could recall was shoulders seen from the back proceeding out of the house. Father in her mind meant discrete body accessories such as shoes, clothes, arms, hairs in the bathroom or his dangling bush. She thought the child in her womb was a boy. She felt it even though it was still a foetus, felt with apprehension that the men around her were forcing their lingams into her helpless self – erect and pumping and scorching hot, spraying creeping fear deep down.

2 – Gun

'You only die once. Once you pull the trigger, it's all over, you know. There's no bloody life after death. Pang! You're dead. 😊

THE FUNERAL INVESTOR

Kajohnrit Ragsa

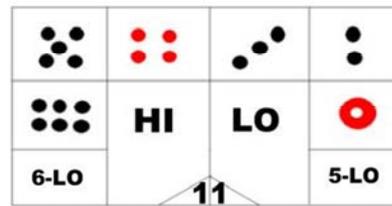
After our father's funeral was over, our elder brother took all the money left after expenses with him to Bangkok. Surely he should have shared that money with mum and us, his brothers and sister, but he insisted he'd keep that capital to organise mum's funeral. He spoke as if our mother, who is sixty-one, had only a few more days to live, even though she's strong and works as much as ever.

Listening to what he was saying, mum was speechless. I saw her turn pale and swiftly look away. He spoke of dad's death as

some sort of precedent: at only sixty-two, who would have thought dad would leave us so soon?

We had agreed to keep the body in state at home, with customary prayers for seven evenings, and open house for gambling every night – hi-lo, *po-pan*, white-card, mixed-ten, rummy and blackjack, whatever the customers fancied. Big brother was very strict about the house intake. He didn't trust me. Maybe he was afraid I'd pocket the rake. He ordered our little brother, Seenin, to be in charge, but Seenin didn't like getting involved in gambling, which he actually resents. So he turned instead to Somsee, our sister. Even though she's in awe of her big brother, Somsee was reluctant to comply. She's a woman and her husband

is a teacher: having her supervise gamblers all night long to collect



Hi-lo



Po-pan



Mixed-ten



White-card



Blackjack

the rake was too much for her. She turned him down. He was incensed not to be able to find someone he could trust. So I rose to the occasion and volunteered for the job. He stared at me disparagingly and said something to the effect of how could he trust I wouldn't pocket that money to gamble with it.

'I've long given up gambling,' I said, unwilling to look him in the eye.

'So be it then,' he resolved, giving up. 'I'll trust you one more time.'

Wherever he goes, big brother takes a notebook with him. With thoroughness without equal, he notes everything down in that notebook, the duties of each of us as well as each expenditure. He ordered me to keep my eyes peeled throughout the night, collect the rake and hand it over to him down to the last satang.

Seenin has a friend who's chairman of the sub-district administration organisation. He promised to help get a marquee to be set over the whole length of the street, with tables disposed in two rows, fifty tables per row, eight seats per table. Big brother had already figured that, only for the day of the cremation, there'd be no fewer than five hundred people. With donations of at least two hundred baht per person, that day he'd make about a hundred thousand baht, but he was afraid there wouldn't be enough profit: 😊

FAUX AMIS

Jarun Yang-yuen

One night I made a new friend who was alive and well but the next day that new friend of mine was a cold corpse. But that's not as important as having to do my duty as a friend of his over several days. I came upon many things I'd never encountered before. It was exciting, scary and worth remembering.

It all began with my attending the yearly reunion of old friends of the nineties as a regular member, not a casual visitor, because I've been going there almost every year. In the first few years

we'd talk about courting. A few years later, what we talked about had changed to buying a house, buying a car and getting ready to get married. After ten years, our female friends began to complain about raising kids. And in the years since then our chats have been about the good old days when we were young, only silly anecdotes about cheeky pranks such as spying on the young female teachers as they went to the bathroom, breaching the fence to play truant or lifting girls' skirts when they were off guard. Whatever story we dug up, it raised rolling laughter every time, even though it was like projecting a film damaged in parts for being shown so often.

Wherever time takes you, to the moon or to Mars, the line of love for me is firm and hasn't changed. I've remained a steadfast bachelor up until now and perhaps forever, but it doesn't matter: I change colours at will like a chameleon and can easily smooth my rough edges to join a circle of infant-encumbered fathers. I know unhappiness only when goaded as to when I'll tie the knot. That's when I must mumble and fib that I'm thinking about it, whereas in truth it's the least of my worries.

Eating, drinking, chatting merrily past midnight, the eyes begin to see double, the legs begin to wobble. I know myself well enough to realise that if I persist sitting and jawing, soon I'll blow a fuse and that's a most dicey condition that can turn a worthy biped into a

four-legged animal ready to do almost anything stupid, whether good or bad.

Even though I still wanted to talk with my friends to the last drop, I had to decide to say goodbye and return to the nest. The eyesight beginning to harmonise schisms, awareness like an engine running in fits and starts: that's what brought carelessness to me. I emerged onto the main road without looking left or right, didn't see the motorcycle whizzing past at the speed of lightning. When I saw it, it was on me. No time to turn the wheel sharply. But the gods were still with him and me. The rider reacted so nimbly he deserved a medal. He swerved and missed my car by a whisker.

'I almost bought it!' I muttered under my breath.

Although I was in the car with all the windows closed and in spite of the alcohol producing a ringing sound in my ears that reduced my hearing by several decibels, vulgar curses still reached my ears. He was calling me all sorts of fruity names.

I thought the incident was over, but no: that motorcycle was following me at close quarters and, getting near, switched the headlight on full beam on and off as a signal for me to stop the car.

I felt my heart beating hard and I turned apprehensive. What was he up to? It was hard to guess, but with an attitude like that, I had to think he meant no good. At first I thought of speeding away, 😊

THE DESTINATION

Jirat Chalermpanyakorn

He stood staring at his reflection in the old and filthy mirror of the railway station toilet, surveyed his face to make sure it was thoroughly clean and noticed that the roots of his hair above his forehead had receded a little over his temples, exposing the scar, an elongated gash which almost reached the tail of his eyebrow. He turned on the tap and wetted his hand then slicked his hair sideways to have it cover the curve of his forehead. His eyes were glued to the spot he wanted to hide completely but before he could

touch up his hair once more the bell from the platform resounded. He withdrew his eyes from the scar the past had etched into the skin of his head, turned off the tap and shook his hands, dug out of his trouser pocket a dark blue handkerchief and dried his hands with it, shook his hands once more to dry them thoroughly, folded the handkerchief and put it back in his trouser pocket, then he grabbed his rucksack and went out.

People brushed past him as they walked back and forth in a hurry to get on the train – this middle-aged woman, one hand holding a suitcase, the other dragging a blubbering child ... that man flicking a butt onto the ground and then squashing it underfoot without looking down ... a young man with long, slightly curly hair raising a bottle of water to his lips and taking a gulp before walking on ... a diminutive auntie craning her neck as she held out her ticket for the official to check and asked in which carriage her seat was. She nodded a few times before walking back to the bench in front of the newspaper stand and then spoke with a younger woman, holding out the ticket for further common perusal. He stepped aside to let people get on first, in no hurry to be caught in the scramble. If someone happened to bump into him, he moved aside swiftly like a cat leaping out of the rain. He had chosen a late afternoon in the middle of the week to have some seats to choose from and he found one unoccupied close to the vestibule between two car-

riages. It was a window seat, but before he could reach it he had to turn round and flatten himself against the back of a seat to avoid a young woman coming his way. He heaved a sigh of relief and blushed before striding to the place his eyes had booked.

Once he had sat down he made himself as small as possible, bowed his head and looked at his rucksack. Thinking of the things in the bag, he opened it to see whether or not everything he had put in it was still there. He unzipped the front pocket, saw the bottle of perfume lying on the shirt and trouser, zipped up the pocket and undid the main zip, checking that there was nothing missing. When he was satisfied he softly let out a long breath and inhaled the faint familiar perfume. Meanwhile the corner of his eye was bothered by the toing and froing of passengers, so he turned away to look through the window. A forktail swooped down onto the rim of the baked clay lotus basin next to the big clock pillar. Its shiny black eyes seemed to know that before long it would be dark. It was cautious and kept its distance. The water in the lotus basin was so clear you could see the film of lichens and waterweeds, and another part of it reflected the bird. It dipped the crooked tip of its sharp beak into the water whose surface broke into overlapping widening rings and then its throat pulsed repeatedly. He stroked 

WAILING SEA, GRIEVING WIND

Ussiri Dharmachoti¹

Three years ago, as he jumped from one boat to the next to reach his own which floated further out in the open, he caught a familiar voice calling him above the sound of the wind. When he turned round, a small arm was handing him a telegram. 'From the skipper's house. It's just arrived,' the little girl said and then left, leaving him standing, tearing the cellophane edge against the wind with a trembling hand, thinking of mother at home.

¹ Pronounced 'at.si.ri tham.ma.choat'

He heaved a long sigh when he knew the content of the telegram. ‘Good grief, mother!’ he moaned in his mind. ‘Such a teeny patch of land, how much can you possibly get out of it?’ He folded the telegram and stuffed it in his shirt pocket. His boat was about to take to sea and his crew was waiting for him.

While the boat plied the emerald green waves of the Andaman Sea, skirting islands of all sizes on afternoons devoid of any omens, that telegram made him think of his old mother and recall his little sister who, he remembered, was born at dawn on a day when the sea in front of the house had the stillness of a mirror. The tourist town on the Gulf of Thailand was bathed in the gold of a dream sun. Father was wading ashore, he was running behind him, a young boy still, and the twenty crew members were trooping right behind.

‘You’ve got a daughter, *thaokae*²,’ someone on shore shouted and at once his father turned round, grabbed him and lifted him high, making him feel chilled by the wind although he was wrapped in a warm woollen jacket. ‘Are you happy, son? You’ll have a little friend to play with from now on.’ Even though father’s trawler came back empty that time, there was only elation on his father’s face.

Many people on shore called father either *thaokae* or skipper. They all spoke nice to him because he was famous and the richest person in this township by the sea.

² *Thaokae*: Chinese owner of a shop or business; here, of a fleet of trawlers.

On afternoons devoid of any omens, that telegram from mother made him think idly as he sat on a gunwale which booming waves sideswiped. He thought of the uncertainty of the sea magic that had reversed the status of his father's family as swiftly as lightning or a gust of wind. Father was long dead, but his family still lived in a secluded house which had mother and his little sister and her family on a small plot of land by the sea fenced off by a marshland, a land which before dying father had told him, 'The other plots I mortgaged with the banks and they've gobbled them all. What's left is this here, where you and your sister must live. You can't sell it to anyone. I'm a big bird that must be left with some death nest.'

The roar of the waves sweeping a large island ahead turned that afternoon over the Andaman Sea into a time of bearing with torment for all souls on board. He and everyone else could only stand dumbfounded and helpless when they saw a small gun boat sneak across their path ahead. Indistinct shouts in some alien language from those people cut through the sounds of waves, wind and engine, but the many guns pointed at them let them know unmistakably what they were in for... 😊

DOG-MESS VILLAGE

Saengsattha na Plaifa

‘Sometimes things that seem meaningless are full of meaning and may have a huge impact on our human society if we lack depth and don’t pay attention to them from the beginning.’ I ended the article I had just finished writing with that sentence from an old man I had interviewed three days earlier.

I still remember his face well, a face full of gloom as if something in life had just been lost, a face that had the effect of making me gloomy as if I had shared in the loss with him for three full days. If the tears in his eyes had rolled out, I would have cried with him for three full days.

About a week before, I had been assigned by my editor to go and interview former residents of ‘that village’, a village with a dark reputation, a village which had been destroyed by ambiguity, a village where no one dared to admit they came from ‘that village’.

At first when I knew what the editor wanted me to do, I was aware that my ability was being tested, but I knew very well that the editor didn’t expect me to succeed, for only one reason, which was that writers, journalists and other media people who had tried to find information on those who used to live in ‘that village’ had all done so in vain. But for all that I was willing to risk travelling in search of information this once, even though I knew that in the end I would return empty-handed as had my many predecessors.

I travelled some three hours before I reached my destination. From the main road where I stood looking at the other side of the road I could see the village emerge amongst all kinds of trees growing wild. That was a good indication that no one had been living in ‘that village’ for a long time. I consulted my wristwatch. In less than an hour it would be dark. Besides, I figured there was no need for me to waste time and effort going over there because, as everyone knew, there was no one in ‘that village’ for sure. I decided to seek information from people around here

first. If I didn't get any, tomorrow I'd be justified in telling the editor I had tried to find information and had seen 'that village' with my own eyes.

A few steps away from where I stood there was a food shop, a small shed by the roadside. The twinkling multi-coloured electric bulbs said well enough that it was more of a drinking place than an eatery with delicious food.

As soon as I stepped into the shop, an old man who sat on a chair smiled at me genially and his smile made me feel better, thinking that at least coming here this time I wouldn't have wasted the trip altogether.

'What do you want to eat, young man,' the old man asked as he stood up.

I returned the smile before letting myself down onto a chair and asking, 'Well, what have you got that's delicious, uncle?'

'Everything I cook is delicious. That's what they all tell me,' the old man said and then laughed lightly before suggesting, 'How about fried beef with a hen's egg on top?'

I nodded instead of answering. 'And some liquor too.'

I sat waiting only a moment when what I had ordered was in front of me. 😊

THE BRIDGE

Watn Yuangkaew

I'm one of those who are most eagerly waiting for a bridge because Mum and I will no longer have to paddle across the canal to go to Granny's house every day. In his electoral platform for the post of head of the Sub-district Administrative Organisation (SAO), Uncle Chai announced that a bridge would be built at the concreted bend near the big banyan tree. Soon after, Uncle Rom announced that he too would build a bridge, but at the elbow of the canal where the old pier used to be instead. Wherever it was to be built, many

people hoped that, besides easing comings and goings, the bridge would have the meaning of reuniting the divided dwellers on both sides of the canal. But my hope was more than that: it would weld the relationship between Dad and Granny to be as close as it used to be; our family would no longer be divided, even without knowing how this would come about.

People on both sides of the canal are on bad terms because they are factionalised. Although it's only local politics, they fight tooth and nail with each other. Dad used to say that actually political struggle at whatever level is always a war between what lies deep in the hearts and minds of both sides, a war triggered by idealism, ambition, reputation or self-interest, with the latter seemingly the predominant factor. Dad told us further that the extent of a war is only a result but its causes do not change.

I thought Father was right and wanted to ask him if he meant the bad terms between him and Granny as well, but I knew that if I asked I'd be scolded.

Bad feelings that time began through silence, with each side having its own reasons and choosing to use silence against the other instead of battling it out with words. It was a crack very difficult to mend because Mum and I hardly knew how deep that crack was. In any case, she and I had to accept this drift and adjust to it.

I missed the old days that had been so happy. Our family used to

live together in Granny's large wooden house. Dad and Granny got along so well I used to think they should be mother and son rather than in-laws. It was Mum who occasionally had words with Granny.

Until there was a street leading to the opposite bank of the canal. It took from a newly built road. Our old community by the water thus began to change. One after the other, families old and new settled across the canal to be closer to progress. The land along the canal saw its price increase manifold. It was said that Uncle Chai, as the coordinator pulling the strings, benefitted fully in this context, but it was known all the same that without him pulling strings, there might have been neither road nor progress.

Granny respected Dad's decision since he was head of the family, so she didn't object when Dad showed his intention to build a house by the new road as other people did. He argued that it would be more convenient for me to go to school and for Mum to go to market without having to paddle across the canal every day, let alone that Granny's house was very run down.

Mum was more than a little worried about this.

'What about my mother, then?' she said.

'She'll have to come and live with us, of course. I wouldn't leave her behind to live alone. Talk to her so she agrees.' 😊

THE THREE-EYED BOY WHO HAPPENED TO FALL DOWN TO EARTH

Mahannop Chomchalao

Since the day I met that child, two years have passed. I still remember it was a Monday in the month of December.

That day the sky had been dark since dawn. The sun was up but dark grey clouds masked its rays. There was occasional flashing and rumbles of thunder. My wife had stepped out to light the fire for the rice. Only when the rice began to boil did the stove and rice cooker have to be brought in and set up inside the tent. Out-of-season rain came pelting down without mercy as if to turn the whole world soggy.

I sprang to the various cracks through which the rain entered the stall to block them with plastic sheets as best I could, grappling with them in great haste to prevent my goods from getting wet, because the garish colours of the cheap children's clothes would run and come out in a hopeless mess and the little profit I made would turn into a loss. Actually I would prefer to sell other kinds of goods but my wife likes them and keeps finding new lovely sets to sell.

‘...How old is that child? If he's eight, that's the model for him. It lasts and that colour won't show the dirt. ... That little girl you should dress in a skirt, she'll be as cute as a doll. ... How would you like a military outfit, kiddo? There's everything, see: shirt, slacks and cap. Put them on, grab your gun and you can go out and fight...’

That's how my wife is, talkative and a born seller. The two of us have been peddling children's clothes for almost ten years.

Having finished patching the leaks, I opened my umbrella and went out to buy some more food at the coffee shop in front of the temple. The owner was about to put the kettle on the stove. The newspapers hadn't come yet; there were only those of two days ago. The coffee shop was so depressingly quiet I had to order three-baht worth of the hard stuff.

The morning news from the shop's transistor radio competed with the din of the rain on the tin roof. The weather forecast was that the storm would be with us for another two days. The rain

dashed my hopes for the on-going temple fair.

The monkey troupe had folded and left the day before, followed by one of the three Ferris wheels, even though there were still five days and five nights of the fair to go. I had never seen a temple fair so deserted and eerie. It was as quiet as the burial grounds at the back of the temple. The people that strolled about wore last-year rags and glum faces like corpses that could walk. The children looked at the Ferris wheels as if they were beyond reach. The owner of the cork gun stall waited for amateur gunmen basket of corks in hand and King Kong's voice broke out of his cage. At the dunk tank stall, the girls, who hadn't had a quick dip in days, sat waiting for custom to the point that their skin was dry and flaky.³ The fortune-tellers pretended to lose their jottings of astrological data and made fussy palm readings just to have something to do one day at a time. The worst off was the *likeh* troupe which had yet to be booked and to find a Lady Bountiful and was so frantic that they had to perform *Janthakhorop* whose hero and whose jungle bandit were played by the same actor and whose heroine 

³ The Sao Noi Tok Nam game, long a feature of Thai temple fairs, consists in making a girl sitting on a folding plank over a water tank fall into the latter by striking a small target on the side with a rubber ball from a distance of a few metres.

THE MADMAN OF LUCKY STAR VILLAGE

Zithen Wongjanda

They say his family moved to flee from progress, moved from place to place, in almost all the regions of Thailand, at first from Korat around the Ban Lueam district. At the time, around Ban Lueam there used to be hordes of wild elephants that intruded and ran wild into the village, the jungle was pristine, watercourses ran to full banks, troops of langurs jumped uproariously at the edge of the woods. The villagers were united and lived in harmony until something unusual from outside flowed in. They called it progress,

progress that ate away at everything, including people's hearts. Everything began to change – jungle, people, river, climate. His family who liked to live close to the jungle thus set off to travel once more.

They went to stay around Chaiyaphoom, staked out a claim to squat a piece of land they undertook to clear and flatten, sowed seeds in the ground that turned into shoots with bright green leaves. There were many families that moved in from other districts to try their luck; there was plenty of land to claim. It wasn't long before puny humans harmed the jungle, digging out roots, felling trees, burning, widening their territory progressively, quite unlike the jungle in that the jungle must take a long time before it becomes a jungle replete with trees and animals. Some trees take a hundred years stretching out for their leaves to get light, for their roots to penetrate deeply, for animals to inhabit, but man is able to destroy them in a mere half a day.

As soon as it became a village and the electricity came in, his family fled from electric light and went into the jungle around Chiang Rai, from Chiang Rai went down to Tak, from Tak to Kamphaeng Phet in the Khlong Narm Lai district, Bueng Lom village, in whose swamp it was said many a wild elephant had fallen and died. His family loved the jungle, loved nature, loved birdsong, loved lamplight and starlight on moonless nights, loved to use their

physical strength on tough tasks, and his family's last abode was in Chumphon.

His family had many children. Let's see how many there were. Apart from him, if we count those that died in the womb or lost their lives shortly after they were born, along with those that are still alive, it was more than twenty. Those that survived numbered thirteen. He was the second-born of them all. He was brought up the same as his brothers and sisters, that is, starvation and hunger in childhood. Sometimes he had to go and sit ogling families of relatives when they sat around eating: they might call him over to eat with them or call over his younger siblings to eat with them. His father flew into terrible rages, cursing everything in the vilest and most vulgar terms, cursing even his father- and mother-in-law who had forbidden him to marry their daughter who had been determined enough to dare proclaim that if she couldn't marry she would hang herself.

His father cursed even the monks who practised dharma, cursed and punched and even kicked his wife like a pig or a dog. He had seen it. He understood well that that was the love dad had for mum. He may well have been a result of rage and volatile abnormal mood. His father was always thrashing him, cursing him with 😊

FAKE

Somphong Thawee

What Suwanna wishes to the utmost is happiness in life. She wants social status as well as wealth, she wants the best of the material world, but I don't want anything at all apart from love, apart from warmth from one heart to the other, because for me that's the best in life as a couple. There's nothing more sublime than living as a couple that stands on the basis of faith. I think that a family replete with understanding should give importance to this feeling from the first.

But then the wish to live as a couple goes away in time. Love turns into emptiness. My heart is asking, begging for something in the tie-up with the opposite sex that is a human craving, but what? I've begun to search. Sure, I try and tell myself I should know myself better. Meeting with a refusal doesn't mean a permanent loss. My search for myself has turned into a patrol fending through a dark narrow opening resembling a nightmare – a dream both true and false, both abominable and sublime.

In the end, what will I get in exchange, I ask myself as I push the door open.

There's a blast of chilling air and a blend of music and bustle, like a large Thai orchestra going full blast amidst a throng, women and men drinking, eating, talking merrily.

'Where shall we sit,' I ask.

'The same table, in the middle,' my lame friend answers.

We both sit down, order beer, Coke and roasted cashew nuts. My lame friend handles his lame leg into position, casts a sweeping glance at the other tables.

Some of the young women shoot us sideways glances; others smile sweetly.

'Is Jina here yet?' My lame friend lights a cigarette.

I look deep inside the shop. A tall thin fair-skinned longhaired young woman is stepping out towards us. I raise my hand and

wave to greet her.

‘There, she’s over there,’ I say.

She comes and sits down beside me, flexes her neck to bestow a smile, eyes aglitter. She turns to my friend.

‘Eh hasn’t come yet, Chart.’

My lame friend smiles back, adjusts his lame leg, raises his glass of beer and drinks.

‘Where have you been, Yarm? We haven’t seen you in days.’ Jina turns round to talk to me.

I take her hand in mine, squeeze it loosely. I like Jina a lot, maybe because it’s night time or maybe because of Suwanna – I’m not sure.

Jina is expensive. I can buy her. Even though Suwanna too has a price, I don’t want to buy her. Too expensive. Must put my life on the line to buy her. A scary investment, I think.

Suwanna isn’t a woman of the night. Suwanna is a vision of hope. We met by chance. I don’t know what inspired in me a feeling for family and marriage.

I look at Jina, shift my hand to stroke her fine brown hair. When she lowers her head, the blurry yellow light chisels out a slice of her face in an odd way. Jina is in dim light and darkness. She is in the drift of the music. 😊

SOCIAL PHOBIA

Samphan Paruenrom

I suffer from social phobia...

I should keep to my own dark world. The diffuse light coming in from the window through the light-blue curtain distorts the colours of the things in the room. I hate brightness. It makes me see, makes me accept the truth that there's such a thing as the present. Eyes closed, that bloody awful light remains behind my eyelids. I miss her, she who left without saying goodbye. All this time, I still see a picture of her moving in a dream. The doctor told me to try to stop thinking

of the past. This sounds funny. What will we have left if we have no past? It's lucky we have a memory, so the past can leave a track, so we can believe we really exist. We've really gone through all manner of events that fade off. Sometimes it's the reason why we don't kill ourselves. I see myself laughing at her in the dim light. She always made me laugh. I drove the car and we felt each other, taking turns to sing love songs with high-pitched voices to the end and then we laughed again. Her fine-textured skin, fair complexion and thin puckered lips ... I see myself as a child, standing as a target for a friend to punch until I was dizzy, my mouth full of salty, sticky saliva. It was my fault. I met that friend for the last time in Thewet. He told me he'd just moved house. I come to once more, try to think of the present. I'm not sure of who I am, but don't feel too happy about my own existence. I'm not sure about where I come from, therefore I don't know if I'm happy about that place or not. But I know that I'm someone who's just woken up, need to open my eyes to look around me, find myself lying curled up in a sleeping bag under a table in a corner of the room. Four or five computers are aligned on the grey table. The front door is made of glass. The room is square with yellow plastered walls. I think it's my office. Right! I'm a computer programmer. I don't know which second the thoroughly disgusting affair enters my brain before I open my eyes and am left with a feeling of disappointment, floating without knowing the cause. I turn

over and feel more comfortable in the narrow space, feel at ease to the point of wanting to go back to sleep, close my eyes and begin to think of her until I fall asleep. A loud noise like a gunshot. I open my eyes slowly. The housekeeper stands looking unnerved in the middle of the room, a broom held tightly in her hands. A chair has collapsed on the floor. After a moment she laughs and claims I scared her. I doubt it was I who scared her and think, when I see her eyes, that's how it started. She hastens to open the curtains on all sides. Blinding light floods the room. No time to think of anything. I feel heavy in my head, cautiously get up and the feeling in my head begins to worsen. I breathe and my heart beats hard. The clock says eight in the morning. I feel sorry to have to wake up. The last image I remember is a good feeling of some kind towards her. Maybe I can carry on dreaming if there's enough time. The housekeeper still moves around the room but she doesn't look at me again. After a while she goes out, a flabby garbage bag in her hand. I go into the bathroom. The man with unkempt beard and moustache in the mirror stares me in the eye. There's a striking scar above the right cheek. I remember it comes from a child's bicycle. The weight in my head is beginning to lift. I return to the office, sit down at the table, turn on a computer. It moans briefly. Letters race onto the screen 😊

GENESIS

Thongchai Phandee

1

The rain is falling hard

Under dark looming skies, stormy winds are pounding

Tree trunks snap and crash

Sizzling flashes of lightning lash out

Sending thunder claps that shake sky and earth

.....

Flash floods surge overly strong

Solid vines are chosen to hold on to
For the flows not to sweep us apart

.....

Sudden fear grips every particle of our hearts

.....

Rain and flood drench every hair of our coats

Whose temperature-adjustment property

Alarmingly fast loses its efficacy

.....

The condition of the eighteen lives

That sit dejected under thick foliage looks pathetic

Eyes that keep glancing sideways at one another tell of

Solitude

Loneliness

Turmoil in the heart

A condition like this makes us miss the land we hail from

Our homeland

What's the point

When the homeland we hail from is no more

.....

The rain abates

The group leader shows his mettle

We must find a place where to shelter from sun and rain

And avoid dangerous animals
If we are lucky we'll find a cave sufficiently vast
With abundant food all around

2

The sky over the eight hundred and ninety domes
Lit up with orange-red rays was frightening
The atmosphere within was less vile
Dirty grey clouds of dust stuck to the roofs and frames of the
domes every day
Those domes which used to adjust light and temperature automat-
ically
Deteriorated our physical condition
We all knew the planet was doomed

3

The rain stops when the evening sun sinks
Almost half way behind the edges of the volcano cones
Thin fumes float out of the vents 😊

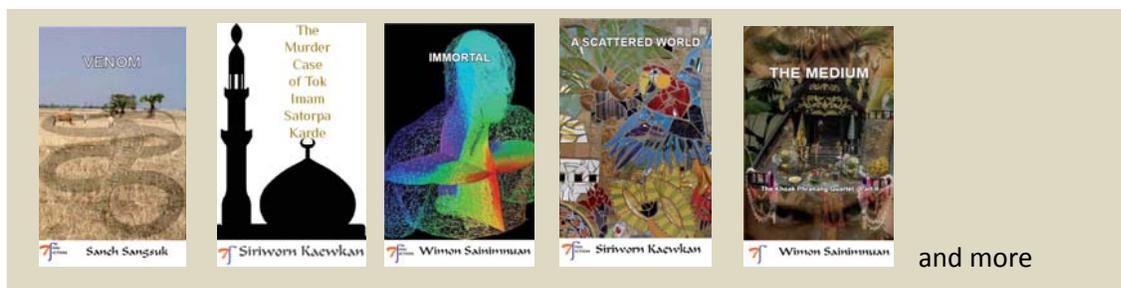
IN THE SAME COLLECTION



MORE SHORT STORIES



AND NOVELS



thaifiction.com