

carrion floating by

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TRANSLATED FROM THE THAI BY MARCEL BARANG

ThaiFiction

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You feel like your whole body is hurled against a stone wall or something just as hard. The force of the collision shakes you all over. In that split second, a deafening KRASH! fills your ears. Noise and impact are one and the same thing, tearing into your consciousness. The sound pushes in deep and fast like a scared animal in search of a hiding place. It digs its quivering self into that gap.

You don't feel any pain, only know that every part of your body is totally insensitive as if this whole thing about an accident is happening in a dream.

A dream which startles you awake with a sense of relief.

You open your eyes, see several pairs of lights so bright it hurts. Almost as soon as you see them, you close your eyes in apprehension. You don't want to believe that what you see is true, sputter to yourself:

– It's a dream.

– It's only a dream.

Thrust this belief with alarm into your mind, try hard to force your awareness into accepting that everything that's happening right now is only a nightmare.

Too bad that what you feel around you won't play along. Your body keeps performing as usual, but you

feel as if it's trying all ways to contend with your belief that this is a dream. It compels you to open your eyes to confront the world of bitter reality, the here and now.

Sound of broken glass raining down. A few breaths later you hear running feet getting close.

'Is he dead?'

'Not yet, not yet.'

Inside your ear you hear the clamour of a throng around you, engine noises, car-hooting everywhere, exclamations of curious onlookers.

'Better prise the door open.'

'Right, let's do it. Quickly.'

'Hey, grab hold of it right here.'

'One! Two! Three! Pull!'

Then your body is dragged out. Your shoes fall on the car floor. You're still scared of the truth, don't dare open your eyes, but know from the way you're being handled that the good citizens pulling you out of the car number no fewer than three.

Your back hits a hard slab of cement. They carefully make you lie down flat. The warmth from the cement permeates your flesh. You'd like to keep lying fully stretched like that, don't want to open your eyes to look at anything at all, thinking all along you're dreaming, calling for everything right now to be nothing else but a dream, even though the noises around you contradict your belief, your secret hopes that it's just a dream.

'Don't turn your head, sir. Don't move.'

‘Anybody got smelling salts?’

...The reek of smelling salts enters your nostrils. You inhale that smell deep inside though you’re not sure whether you want such a smell or not and can’t figure out why you’re inhaling it.

‘Sir, sir, sir!’

You hear the call as your left arm is being shaken. It’s like being shaken awake but you still don’t want to wake up, you still want to keep lying lazily drowsily in bed.

You still pretend to have passed out, want others to think you’ve really passed out. For the time being you don’t dare face up to reality. You deny it. At least while you’re ‘passed out’ it’s like avoiding real life for a while, so you still aren’t ready to come to when you’re given the smelling salts.

‘But look at the blood! He’s bleeding non-stop!’ A woman’s voice, all shook up.

When your ears hear the word ‘blood’ a searing pain wracks your head at once and almost at the same time you think ‘hospital’. Those two words are like twins. When you think of one you think of the other. You don’t know since when those twin words have been in your mind.

You feel the headache getting worse every moment and you’re aware of the track of blood trickling out of your wound. Your nose begins to get the sour smell of blood mixed with that of the smelling salts. The smell of blood getting stronger makes you apprehensive.

‘What about the people in the other cars?’

‘They’re all hurt. They’ve all been taken out. What about this one? Is he in a coma? We’d better take him to hospital.’

You think it’s time for you to dare open your eyes and face reality, the reality which keeps flowing all the time. No matter which way you turn to avoid it, it keeps following you and finally when it drives you into a corner, when you can’t flee anymore, the only option left is to turn round and face it and grapple with it. You gather all of your remaining courage and open your eyes.

You see a circle of faces peering down expectantly.

‘He’s come to.’

‘He’s come to.’

Even though it’s now nighttime, the lights from roadside lampposts and from the cars, which form long unmoving lines, make the area look as bright as if there was a fair. The people gawping at the cars in the middle of the road and all around you are crowding together as if they’d really come to enjoy a fair.

You slowly hoist your body into a sitting position. A young man comes to help support you. He’s dressed almost like a soldier, with a round-necked greenish brown shirt, greenish brown shorts and a crew cut. You try to stand up, thoroughly puzzled. You don’t know where you are, which road this is. Your head is in a muddle. You can’t think of anything, except that you must drive to hospital. You lumber to the cars stalled askew in the middle of the road.

'Just go to hospital. Don't worry about the car. I'll watch over it,' the young fellow who supports you tells you.

'Get all valuables out of your car,' a middle-aged man shouts against the din of hooting.

Your car is quietly static in the middle of the road, its nose half caught into the mud of a plantation. A taxi is stuck in front of it, its muzzle appallingly wrecked. You turn to look at your car. Its condition is hardly different. The front right mudguard is so crumpled it touches the wheel. The bonnet is all askew. The right headlight is all smashed in. Bumper and grille have nothing left of their former condition. Fine bits of glass from the windscreen are strewn all over the road.

You forget your pain for a moment, can't do anything right, can't believe the damage you see, can't believe that what you see is true, as if you were standing right between two worlds.

'You'd better look after the valuables in your car,' the middle-aged man cautions again. His voice calls you back to the real world.



Chart Korbjitti, born 1954, is a highly successful, self-publishing Thai novelist and short story writer with a wide range of styles. Both *The judgment*, 1981, and *Time*, 1993, received the SEA Write Award and were translated into French, English and other languages. They can be downloaded from thaifiction.com, along with *Mad dogs & co*, 1988, and his best short stories.
