

**FIRST HONOURABLE MENTION
IN THE BOATHOUSE WRITING CONTEST**

6-2-6-4-6

By Alexander Maycock (Phuket)

It was an hour before dawn as Marcus dragged the ungainly canvas hold-all across the car park at the back of his office. He had taken too long, he knew. But Marcus was hardly an expert in these matters and the fat bastard in the bag had been a lot more difficult to carve up than he'd expected.

He gave the bag a sharp kick.

"Forty-three million dollars, Digby! Forty-three million, you stupid fat bastard!"

It had been a taste for the seedier sois of Patong that had brought Marcus and Digby together and they'd made an unlikely couple: Digby, as tall as he was wide, bobbing between the potholes as he tried to keep up with Marcus's long, loping strides. Digby also liked to talk constantly. Most of the time, Marcus tuned out his blather, but then, one night...

"What did you say?"

Digby was getting a shoulder massage from Am, the young girl who ran the bar, while Marcus's girl was massaging something else. He pushed her hand away and, with a flick of his eyes, sent her off for another beer.

"Oh yes," Digby beamed. "Hundreds of thousands... potentially millions, if—"

"You want more beer, Dingbat?" Am had a thing about farang names. Marcus and Digby had tried to teach her for weeks, but Am still insisted on calling them Mango and Dingbat.

"That wouldn't be 'potentially millions of dollars' would it, Dingbat?" Marcus said, as they watched Am bend over the large red beer cooler.

"No, no. I was talking about visitors to the portal," Digby smiled, dragging his attention away from Am's rear. "Millions of visitors, I would think. If I calibrate the software proper—"

"But what would these 'visitors'..." The word tasted alien to Marcus. He didn't visit websites, he looked at them. "...why would they 'visit'?"

"Oh, I dunno. To find out stuff...to plan trips—"

"To buy things?" Marcus offered.

"Well, yes. Yes, I s'pose they could... buy things." Digby looked as if it had never occurred to him, but a little bell had gone off in Marcus's head. He was thoroughly sick of grubbing around for bars that would suit his meagre salary. He wanted more. And here was his big fat pay cheque, sitting right next to him.

"Have another beer, Digby," Marcus smiled. "Oh, you've already got one. Well, hurry up and finish it while you tell me again how this port hole of yours works, and I'll get you another."

That had been ten years ago, and now his partner, his best mate, his drinking buddy Digby, was chopped up in a canvas bag. Marcus pulled out his keys and thumbed the remote to his SUV

In that pre-dawn moment, the SUV's automatic lock beep seemed to scream like a gibbon in heat. Marcus craned around to see if it had been heard, but the security guard was still sleeping soundly at his post, at the car park's gate. As quickly as he could, considering the awkward, awful, floppiness of the bag, Marcus dragged it into the SUV. Thirty minutes later, he was backing up to his private pontoon at the Boat Lagoon.

The internet business had been good to them, and over the years they'd been able to indulge in some expensive pastimes. For Marcus it was boats, while Digby gathered a formidable collection of Asian Elephant statuettes. "I love elephants," he would say. "They make me feel normal sized." Unfortunately, it was the large pewter elephant sitting on his desk that was the instrument of his downfall. Marcus had used it to smash in his skull.

It had been a stupid argument; Marcus thought as he motored out to a quiet stretch of the Andaman and tied diving weights onto Digby's body parts. But he'd been incapable of convincing Digby that it was time to sell.

"Listen to me, you stupid fat bastard. The Americans are having dinner at The Boathouse right now with that bloody German. I was just there, I saw them. D'ya want him to get all that money?" Marcus had barked. His temper had never been good, but Digby was pushing him over the edge.

"Now, look. Marcus, please. This is getting out of hand ..." The look on Digby's face just made Marcus angrier, and it was his next words that caused Marcus to lose control. "Really, you should just calm down and think about—"

"STOP TELLING ME TO THINK ABOUT IT!" Every word was accompanied by a blow. Afterwards, Marcus couldn't remember picking up the pewter elephant. But, there he was, straddled across the desk, and Digby's skull was

shattered. Marcus's stomach had lurched then, and he made a dash for the washroom. The retching continued even after there was nothing left to expel, but eventually became long, deep, self-pitying sobs.

Marcus was, unfortunately, a very bad murderer, and it was just days after Digby's disappearance that the local police came to call. Although Marcus had a plausible alibi, he was still the prime suspect.

The forensics team not only discovered copious evidence of blood in Digby's office, but also Digby's mobile phone, which had slipped down between the cushions of his executive chair.

"There was SMS message on phone," Police Inspector Somkiat told Marcus during his interrogation. "Sent night Mr Digby disappear. His blood and prints on phone too."

When had Digby sent a message? Then Marcus remembered puking his guts up in the bathroom. Had Digby condemned Marcus as he was dying?

The Police Inspector looked grave. "So, Mr. Marcus, tell me... Who is Khun Nam-in?"

Police Inspector Somkiat held up Digby's bloodied phone and Marcus read the message – NAMIN DID IT.

Nam-in Chaipet, the security guard at Marcus's office, was arrested later that day. The police found evidence suggesting Digby had been diddling Nam-in's wife and that was enough, they believed, to convict the hapless security guard.

Serves the lazy bastard right for sleeping at his post, Marcus thought maliciously as he read the report of Nam-in's arrest in the Phuket Gazette.

Marcus pushed back his chair, stretched out his long legs, and pondered the odd SMS message that had exonerated him. But he couldn't be bothered to work it all out: the American deal was going ahead and, tomorrow, he would be forty-three million dollars richer. Last week his life had been over, but today everything looked swell.

The knock on his office door surprised him. So did the person who followed it.

"Hello Mango, how you?" Am smiled, didn't wait for an answer, and plopped into the chair opposite him. "So sorry for Dingbat. You know, him me friend long time."

"Really?" Marcus spluttered. "I had no idea he—"

"Oh yes," Am smiled back. "Him come my bar every week. Him always talk 'bout you. How you do. Him very happy. Dingbat special friend me. Him me... you know." Am tapped the lengths of her index fingers together. The smile was not so innocent now.

"Police come my bar," Am said, the smile gone. "Want to know why Dingbat message me. I say, maybe my name first in phone. They say OK and go 'way. But I not tell them Dingbat special friend me."

"I'm so sorry," Marcus said, but looking for the catch. What was it going to be? Sick relative? Dead buffalo? He'd heard all the stories. This was going to cost him something. Still, he didn't mind shelling out a few grand, especially as he was the one who'd dropped her cash-cow into the Andaman.

"Yes, so sad." Am sniffed, then suddenly stood up. "OK, I go now. Just come say hello." She turned to the door, but then turned back. "Oh, maybe I have birthday party soon. You want come?"

This was getting weirder by the second, Marcus thought to himself. "Yeah. Er, yeah. Why not," he said.

"OK," Am said cheerily. "I call you. Let you know." And she was at the door, but then turned again. "Hey, me so stupid. I no have you number. Hah!"

She was back in the chair, pulling out her mobile phone. "OK, you tell me, I put in."

What could it hurt? Marcus thought. "OK, it's—"

"Wait!" Am held up her spare hand, as if stopping traffic. "First I put in name. M-A-N-G-O."

Marcus let his gaze run over Am's full lips as she slowly spelled out the name she had given him all those year ago. Maybe he could replace Digby as her 'special friend,' he thought perversely. But then her lips were pursed and her brow furrowed.

"Hey! That strange. I put you name. But this not you name..." Am turned the phone to show Marcus the screen.

It read – "NAMIN".

Marcus looked down at the phone's keypad.

6-2-6-4-6.

M-A-N-G-O.

6-2-6-4-6.

N-A-M-I-N.

"Shit!"

Am stood up, put away her phone, and again walked to the door. "OK, Mango," She said quietly. "Now I have you number. See you tomorrow... partner."