

Honourable Mention Mom Tri's Boathouse Writing Contest One Week a Year by Deirdrea Lyon, USA

Rachel looked at every foreigner with anticipation; none came close to the man in the photo. She knew it might take awhile, if she was to find him at all, but she kept telling herself to be patient. She was snapping pictures now and again, pretending to be a tourist. The photo wasn't recent, but he would be easy to recognize. It was taken twenty years ago in front of the boathouse his parents owned.

She had a seat at the Irish bar in one of the busiest sections of Koh Samui. It was perfect for a cold beer, or maybe something stronger. She had a front row view to quietly spy on all that passed by the busy thorough fare.

"Miss, would you like another beer?"

Her stomach reacted first. "No, it's too hot for beer. May I have a gin tonic, please?" She asked on the edge of begging.

When the sweaty glass arrived, she took a small sip. A miniature oasis had been delivered to her lips. She was tough when it came to weather, but was taken aback by the heat and the sheer weight of the humidity. Beer was good and cold, but each sip just sat in her belly without answering to the thirst on the way down.

Gin and tonic. Nectar of the Gods. Respite from the tropical weight that is heat. She mused how much life would have sucked without ice. She quaffed, quenched and snapped pictures of nothing. Very quickly, she felt herself unwind. Patience would not be so difficult, she had two weeks, she was in paradise and only had to wait and watch.

It was simple, find him, observe him and finally get close enough to speak with him. To make him understand that she didn't want anything material, only time. Secretly she wished he would just sense her presence and recognize her on the street and, and what? She wasn't sure of anything after the recognizing part, but her logical bits also knew this was just a fantasy.

He had been a car salesman in the U.S. before that first trip to Thailand. Even at twenty, he was legendary, both new and used cars found themselves in garages of almost every person he encountered. He was all the clichés of a car salesman, but with less scruples. The thrill of selling cars was nothing to his new passion of selling paradise; he had found his true calling in Thailand, selling time shares.

No one called them time shares anymore; they had sullied their own reputation. It was now a 'vacation club'. The mechanics were similar, but part of the new and improved sales pitch was to say how bad it was before and explain all the improvements. 'Club' was the most important evolution of terms; it was an exclusive club membership that was sold. Now, one doesn't own a time share, one owns a

membership - exclusive club membership. Find people in paradise and sell them a subscription to paradise to be consumed at a later date.

Day two started the same; gin tonic and watching people pass by. She waited, she chatted with other tourists coming and going, and then she spotted him out of the corner of her eye. He had just been dropped at the corner by a much younger woman on a scooter. Rachel had to catch her breath to keep from panicking, it was too soon; she didn't expect to see him so quickly. She wasn't ready.

She moved her chair slightly out of his view. He appeared to be going to work. Rachel looked at the photo and then again at him. He was easy to spot, a tall American with dark hair slicked back to defy the island humidity. His bright pink company polo shirt and black polyester slacks didn't speak tourist, but someone going to work. His contemporary version looked young at a distance, but the years were showing through. His hair was too black, the black that can only come from a bottle for a middle aged man. It was no doubt the man in the photo.

She returned again the next afternoon to see the same scene unfold. As she watched him swagger into to work, she finally decided her course of action. She needed to meet him face to face, but in a place he couldn't run. The touts were her ticket in. The directory in the hotel room warned against the touts, 'don't tell them your name or where you are staying as they will hound you without mercy'. The next day she would let these scooter-riding conversationalists rope her into a meeting to see about the vacation club.

"Do you speak English?" The hippie looking tout sitting on the back of the scooter asked.

"Yes." Rachel said with purpose.

"Would you be interested in a free give away?" The hippie tout continued his discourse.

"Sure."

The tout's eyes lit up.

"We are promoting a new vacation spot, where are you staying?" He inquired.

"Oh, I would rather not say." Rachel replied sheepishly.

"Of course, no problem, mate. First time to Samui?"

"Yes, it's paradise. I'm here to see the regatta next week." Rachel answered, implying she had some amount of money, although it was not the case.

The tout's eyes lit up one notch brighter.

“We are promoting a new luxury property here in Samui, just one hour of your time and no obligation. As the people extending the invitations, we are up for special bonuses based on lucky scratch off cards. Would you mind helping me maybe win a special bonus?”

“I’d be happy to help.” Rachel took the scratch off card and quickly removed the silver spot and showed it to the tout.

The tout’s eyes lit up again, but in a more rehearsed manner. “One thousand Baht, these are rare.” He said with raised eyebrows of faked astonishment. His partner added “I haven’t seen one of these in months.”

“Here is the deal, if you go and see what the hotel has to offer, no obligations of course, just listen, I get the full bonus. You would really be helping me out.”

All the touts appeared to be sweaty tourists that didn’t return home and were working to make a go of living, although without showering much, in paradise. One feels obligated to help them get that bonus. They fetched a taxi and loaded her up to be taken to the hotel offices.

Her low level salesman handed her a bottle of water and she settled in to listen to the pitch. She knew by late arrivals of the man she was here to see that he was probably the closer, the expert salesman to push unsure prospects into the proper direction. She would need to play skeptical to get to meet with him directly. She feigned her way to being an almost vacation club member, but kept asking pesky financial questions and saying she wasn’t sure. Three rounds of back and forth and the sales person had exhausted his tactics, it was time for the big guns. He called in Ken, the manager.

This was the moment Rachel had waited for. She was about to be face to face with Ken, he was at work and could not escape a conversation.

Ken came in and she took a long time to get up and shake his hand. The resemblance to her own reflection was even more than in the photo. He shook her hand and paused ever so slightly. She hoped it was a glimmer of recognition of the DNA they shared, but knew that he was likely sizing her up for the vacation club membership kill.

She had no time to waste.

“Ken? Ken Harris? Formerly known as Kevin Harrington?” She asked straight away.

He stepped back with his breath stuck in his lungs. The fear in his eyes was instant.

“I just want to talk,” she tried to reassure him.

“Who are you?”

“Don’t you recognize me?”

“Did we used to date, back in the States?” He queried, looking back into his memory of why he should recognize her. But she would have been too young then, even for him. She wasn’t now, but she did look familiar.

“Oh God. No. Eww. Of course not. You were married to my mother, Susan”

He still looked puzzled.

“Are you that dense? Look at me. I AM YOUR DAUGHTER.”

“Rachel?”

“Yes, Rachel.”

“But, but what are doing here? How did you find me?” He stammered, all the color gone from his face. Then his eyes sharpened, almost closed as he focused his gaze on her.

“What do you want? Money?”

“No, I want nothing, only to get to know you. You know, spend time, maybe one week a year.” She optimistically put her wishes out on the table. She wasn’t the salesman that her father was, but hoped that he would want to get to know her in return.

“What? I don’t have time. Look, Rachel, I’m not sure how you found me, but I have my life here, I’m busy. I don’t take vacations.”

“A week a year just to spend time with you oldest daughter is too much to ask?”

“Yes, it is too much to ask.”

“You chose to stay in Thailand and ship your pregnant wife home. You broke your promise to send for her because you found someone new. She sent you baby pictures and you sent her divorce papers in return. It’s been twenty years and I just wanted to meet you, get to know you.”

“Okay, I did that, but I just wasn’t ready to be a Dad, I’m still not.”

“Is that what you said to wife number two in Phuket? How many kids did you leave there?”

“How do you know that?”

“Kevin, Ken, whatever your name is now, it’s not hard to know everything about anyone, even someone living in Thailand. How about just one weekend a year? I’ll come here and we’ll just do a few dinners and catch up like the long lost relatives that we are?” She was trying to get what she came for, but even as she reduced the request, she knew it was a lost cause.

“Look, I’ve made two offers of very little obligation, no money just time. That is all I want. What do you say?” She clarified one last time.

“No, I just can’t. I’m sorry.”

“I ask for nothing but time and you refuse.”

“Yes.”

“This is your last chance.”

“Last chance for what?”

“To accept my offer, nothing but time, even just one weekend a year?”

“No.” He answered more emphatically, but also puzzled.

“Fine then. Here is your bill.” She had not wanted this, but was glad to have the lawyer’s papers on the ready.

“What? Bill for what?”

“Eighteen years of unpaid child support, five hundred dollars a month. Rounded down, one hundred thousand dollars total.”

“That’s crazy, I don’t owe you any child support.”

“No you don’t, but you owe Susan, my mother, and you are going to pay. All debt would have been forgiven had you agreed to my terms, but you did not, now you will pay.”

“I don’t have that kind of money.”

“Think of it as the yearly maintenance fee all at once for an obligation you never had to keep”

“I don’t have that kind of money.”

“Yes you do and I know all about it. You can’t hide here. That money you siphon off of your check and deposit in the States? It will be garnished. That house on the lake, from YOUR Dad, with the boathouse? Stop paying from your wages and there will be a lien on that until you do.”

“You can’t do this.”

“I just did. Happy Father’s Day.”