

## Mom Tri's Boathouse Writing Contest Shortlisted Entry

### Serpico Won't Take Money by James Michael Geary III, Thailand

"Ser-pi-co! Wake up!" I hear the heavily accented voice, but I can't open my eyes. I feel a throb in the back of my head, and as soon as I notice it, the throb becomes a sharp pain. I want to rub my temple, but my hands can't move, tied tight. I use all my will to open my left eye, just a slit, just in time to see a shape moving towards me. I close my eye at the same time I feel the cold water on my face.

"Ser-pi-co! Come on, tough guy! Wake up!" There's laughter all around me, and my moaning and cold shivers bring another round of guffaws. It feels like an elephant is sitting on my chest; I know my ribs are broken. How did I get here?

"Wake up!" I know that voice; Russian, I think. I manage to open my left eye long enough to make out the face that belongs to the booming voice. It's blurry, but I see a golden smile, mad grey eyes, and a bulging crooked nose; then I notice the scar on his cheek. That's Vlad, and I'm responsible for the scar on his cheek. He resisted arrest, so I hit him with a bottle. He's Ukrainian, not Russian. He loves to dress sharp, always wearing a pressed shirt and trousers, and always in a nice pair of shiny shoes. His shoes are wet now and there's some blood on his shirt.

"One more bucket, Vlad, give him one more!" The water hits me and my head jerks back, reminding me of the pain in my brain, and laughter breaks like shattered crystal inside my head. I know that other voice. Who is it?

"Serpico loves water, Vlad, look at him. He loves to be clean. Clean cop." Again laughter cuts into me from every direction, and one more bucket of water hits me in the face. My eye comes open again and I see Vlad with a blue bucket in his hand, standing next to a big red barrel. My head rolls to the left, more by gravity than by my own power, and I see the other guy. He's wearing all black and his smile is purely wicked. Deng. Damn. Lao Hu Deng, "the tiger." That explains why my whole body hurts. Everyone on the streets says that Deng loves pain more than anything else. Supposedly he killed a tiger with his bare hands once, when he was still running opium up north, before he brought his business south to Phuket. He streaks his hair blond, with his natural black as stripes between the yellow.

If Vlad and Deng are running the show here, then my body has some more pain coming. I need to remember where I was, how I came to be here. It's hard to think when your whole body hurts, but I need to remember. I was following someone, from Patong to Kata, on that tip from my man Deck. Guns, girls, and ganja, he said. It's always the same. I'm just so tired of it all. I'm tired, period. I just want to sleep. Then the water hits me again.

"Serpico! You do not want to be falling asleep again, mate, I promise you." Who's that? Either a Kiwi or Aussie. Both accents are funny.

"One more bucket, Vlad. He likes water. You see, Sandy. Serpico is a clean cop. He likes water." Thanks Deng, thanks for the name. Sandy. That's the big Aussie who runs a new joint on Bangla, an Aussie pub; I've never been there. Don't know much about him, but they say he runs girls and deals some grass. Must be more than that though, if he's hanging around with Vlad and Deng. I need to

think. My head lolls to the right this time and I manage to hold it up for a few seconds, so I can see him, Sandy. He's in a tank top, jeans, and leather boots, those short Aussie ones that zip up the side. He's big. I need to think. What's that pub's name?

"Why the hell do they call him 'Serpico'?" Another voice behind me, and it's purely Yank, the accent I fell in love with when I was a kid, when I first saw Pacino in the movies. I wouldn't be here now, if I hadn't watched Pacino in the 70's; he made me want to learn English and he made me want to be a cop. That's a long time ago.

"He is a clean cop," giggles Deng. "Serpico won't take money."

"Well, I don't really give a damn what he takes or what his name is. I want my package and I want it today, so find it," the Yank snaps. He's a New Yorker for sure. Americans always want everything so fast: fast food, fast cars, fast women, fast drugs, and fast guns. I need to think fast now. Package? I was following someone yesterday; there was something in the car, Deck told me. I didn't have much going on, so I tailed him over to Kata, until he pulled into **The Boathouse** and ate lunch. That's a nice place, the Boathouse, so clean; I'd love to stay there just for one night, just eat one meal, but not on my salary. There's no way that place is mixed up in this mess, not a classy joint like that.

"Alright, Serpico. You awake now? Don't go to sleep." Vlad slaps me a little bit, smiling his golden grin, with the bucket of water in his other hand. "This is your last chance, you hear me? Where's the bag you took yesterday?" The water hits me in my one open eye and the lashes fold back into my eyeball, so I blink and flutter my lid. Deng giggles again. Bag?

Oh right, the car went down to the pier for a few hours and I just sat there looking at the water, wishing I was on one of those boats, fishing. It was a new boat race, **The Kata Regatta**, and there were sails all over the water. Strange, it was Chalong actually, not Kata. After a few hours, the driver stumbled back to the car. Halfway to Patong, he swerved off the road, so I pulled over to check him out.

"Alright man, listen up," the voice comes from behind me now, the Yank. "You tell me where to find that bag, and we all walk out of here right now. I'll give you one million dollars in cash and we all go home. You hear me?" Yes, I hear. His voice comes like a hammer into the back of my head, his accent thudding in my brain.

When I flashed my lights, the driver stopped, and looked back at me. When I stepped out of my car, he threw the bag out the window and sped down a dirt road. That seems like a long time ago now, forever.

"I won't take money." Nobody laughs when I speak, not even Deng. "I am a police officer and I protect the people of Phuket. That is my job. I won't take money."

"Is he for real? A Thai cop named Serpico who won't take money. Funny." The Yank's voice has a nasty edge and I know the pain is coming, and it does, right into my kidney. And again it comes, the other kidney. Fear and pain flood my brain. "Give me my package or I kill you and your family. Understand, Serpico?"

I took the bag, as evidence, but it had a lock, so I didn't open it and threw it in my trunk. I didn't really think much about it. Seemed like small fish to fry.

"G.B." I see Vlad signaling with his head to the man behind me, then a door opens and three of them walk outside and shut the door. The Aussie, Sandy, moves in front of me and rinses his hands and face in the big barrel of water, then looks at me. I need to think. I heard there was a new Yank running smack, but

there weren't any leads. Some folks said it was tied to the Navy boats that come on R&R, that the military was in on it, moving drugs and guns all over Asia, but that was too big for me to consider. I try to keep it small, watch the streets.

"Mate, you do not want to fight this guy. Trust me, this Yank is no small fish. He will throw you to the sharks and never think twice. Trust me. Take the money, stay quiet, buy yourself a little boat, and live your life. You can't land them all, mate." I know this guy for sure. He runs **The Oasis**. Small operation, I thought.

"I can't do that. Sandy, right?" His eyes narrow when I say his name. "I'm a police officer and I won't take money. So, what are *you* going to do? You want to kill a cop? Is that what you want? You help me now and we can sort it out. You have your pub, right? **The Oasis**. You sure you want to do this?"

The big Aussie looks at me and drops his head to the side, but then the door opens and Vlad and Deng come back in the room. The Yank isn't there. G.B. Who is he? Maybe Glen. Or Gary. Or Gus.

Vlad walks over to the barrel, grabs the bucket, fills it and throws it at my face in one motion. "Alright, Serpico. Listen up. We have something to do, somewhere to go. Deng and Sandy are going to ask you some questions. You give answers and then we all go home, happy. You don't give answers, and you feel pain. You like pain? Deng, he likes pain, to give pain." Deng giggles and then I feel his foot come up into my ribs. I can't believe I forgot that bag in my car.

"You need to talk, mate. You hear? Talk and we all go home happy." Sandy stands in front of me, looks right at me, but I see fear in his eyes. He does not want to kill me and that's where this is headed. He takes the bucket from Vlad and tosses some water in my face, but not with much vigor. The water wakes me a bit, and I remember the bag from yesterday.

I arrived back in Patong, there was a bust happening down on Bangla, so I stopped to check it out, and things went strange. Big brawl. Drove to the station with three lady boys in the back of my car, and had to book them all.

"Deng, Sandy. Find that bag and find that package. We'll be back in an hour and G.B. does not like to wait. Do what needs to be done. You, Serpico, talk and walk, my friend. Don't be a hero." Vlad taps me on the cheek with his fat fingers, winks, and flashes that golden smile. "See you later."

The door closes and Deng starts to giggle. "Just you and me now, Sandy. You ask the questions, I make pain." Again, a boot comes into my ribs.

Sandy chuckles, tosses some water on my head, drops the bucket, turns and hits Deng square in the face. Deng falls straight down without a sound, blood pouring from his nose. "Mate, you'd better be right about this." Sandy takes a knife from his belt, cuts my ties, and helps me stand up. "Serpico, huh?"

I try to smile, "Yes, I won't take money." We walk outside and find my car.