

Third (3) Prize in the Mom Tri's Boathouse Student Short Fiction Contest 2008

“REALITY OF PARADISE”

By Philip Upton (Age 16)

When Jack Shepherd walked into the Boathouse, it was an unusually warm Thursday night in March and the salty breeze off the Andaman Sea swirled with distant memories. He took a stool at the Galley Bar, ordered a Heineken from the impossibly young-looking man wearing a black bow-tie, and shifted his weight on the stool just enough to look around without being obvious about it.

He and Anita had sat just over there, he thought to himself. That table out at the far edge of the dining room, almost on the beach. Could that really have been just two years ago? It felt like he had lived a lifetime or two since then, and he supposed he had.

He took a long pull from his Heineken and glanced again at the table he and Anita had once shared. Tonight the table was occupied by three men and a woman who didn't seem to be having nearly as much fun as he and Anita had had back then. He started to look away, but then he stopped. His eyes jerked back to the table.

It couldn't be, he told himself. It simply couldn't be. But, and now he had no doubt of it at all, it clearly was.

The woman at the table had the same necklace as Anita had. Jack knew he was right. He had given Anita a customized necklace with a gold chain, a gold heart, and the letters- A J. This couldn't be. Was he looking at what possibly was Anita's killer? Was his mind playing tricks? Or was it just a fluke that the woman had the exact same necklace?

Jack and Anita had met five years ago. He was a simple, English guy selling boats and yachts. She was an active Aussie who settled down in Phuket as a rock climbing instructor. When they met at Phuket's biggest boat show, it was love at first sight. They got married a year later at the Boathouse and spent their honeymoon there. The newlyweds were happy together. They bought a luxury villa overlooking the Boathouse and the beautiful Kata Beach. The Boathouse was their special place. They went there every Saturday night and knew almost all the staff. The locals also knew the couple and were always glad to see them.

This all changed two years ago. At 11 P.M., Anita went down to the local 7-Eleven to get some drinks. Jack waited and waited for her return, but she never came. At 11:30, Dang, the bartender at one of his favourite bars, called him. It was the call that changed his life forever. Anita had been killed- murdered- shot in the chest. Her wallet, necklace, and phone were gone. No one saw what happened and the police never figured out who did it.

Jack still couldn't believe his eyes. On what would have been their 4th wedding anniversary, he spots the necklace. He finally came to his senses knew that that was Anita's necklace. He called Tony over, his best friend and the Boathouse bartender who just ended his shift.

"Tony..." Jack started, "Look over at that table."

"Where?" Tony responded confused.

"Where Anita and I used to sit. Look at that woman... now look at her necklace... remember that?" Jack quickly said.

"Isn't that..." Tony was interrupted.

"Yes."

Tony had a seat next to Jack. They studied the woman for a minute before Jack spoke up.

"Do you know her? Is she a regular?"

"I've seen her a couple times, but I don't know her. I do know the guy sitting on her left though. He's a business man from France."

"Why does she have Anita's necklace? Can you go ask?"

"What? I can't go now. I'll ask when they get ready to go."

So there they were. Sitting and staring at the table, waiting for them to get up. The moon lit up the sky and stars twinkled. A breeze cooled down this warm night. Finally, they got up. Tony approached the businessman. Jack watched nervously as Tony introduced himself to the woman. Then, Tony, saying his goodbyes, came back.

"So?"

"She got it at a 7-Eleven near here."

"What? They don't sell necklaces!" said Jack.

"That's what I said."

The next day, word had gotten around that Anita's necklace was found. Locals grew suspicious with the fact it was bought from a 7- Eleven. Jack and Tony visited the 7-Eleven. This area was a tuk-tuk hangout. It had been known that the 'tuk-tuk mafia' ruled this area. But Jack never thought a 'mafia' existed here. Phuket was so peaceful and kind to him. Before stepping into the 7- Eleven, Jack was glaring at the spot where Anita's body once lay. It was hard for him to be here. Tony, noticing Jack's problem, spoke up. "It's okay, mate. Hey, I'll do the talking. Come on. Let's go inside."

The familiar 'ding- dong' sound arose as the door opened. "Hello."

"Hello, sir. Welcome. How you today? Nice day, na?" answered the man behind the counter.

"May I ask...How long have you worked here?" Tony chuckled a little. He could never take the Thai's English accent seriously.

"I work here 2 half year, na. Why?"

"Good. Maybe you remember...An Australian woman was killed across the street from here almost 2 years ago."

"I think so. Yes... I remember...Very sad, na. Me sorry for her. But I no see what happen. I take break, then I hear gun, and run out. I first one there. I tell lady next door call police."

"So you didn't see what happened?" asked Tony.

"No sir. Me not see."

Jack looked at the man. He looked a bit nervous. Was he trying to hide something from them? Did he know what happened? Jack finally spoke. "Does anyone else know what happened?"

"No mister. I don't know."

One drop of sweat came down the man's face. Tony and Jack looked other. Tony was thinking the same thing as Jack. "Uh... Thanks mate. We're going to go now. Sawadee krap." Tony waved goodbye.

"Have good day sir!"

On the way back, Jack and Tony stopped at the bar where Dang works.

"Hey mate! Remember me?" Jack said cheerfully.

"Khun Jack! Long time no see. How you? Less hair now, na!" laughed Dang.

"Good to see you too. By any chance do you know the guy that works at the 7-Eleven down the road?"

"Yes. But I don't like him. Him have brother in mafia. He drive tuk-tuk. Why?"

Jack and Tony shared another looked. “Anita. That’s what.” Dang put down the glass he was cleaning and listened. “We asked about that night and he looked quite nervous. We think he knows and now that you’ve told us about his brother and the so-called ‘mafia’; we’re even more sure. Do you think that we can get a surveillance tape?”

Dang took a few seconds to think about it. “If they don’t give tape, we get protest, na.” Dang said with a laugh.

Tony, Jack, and Dang returned to the 7-Eleven the next day. Tomorrow would be Jack and Anita’s 4th wedding anniversary. Hopes where high among the three men. Dang stepped inside and made himself look tough, even though he wasn’t. He explained to the man in Thai what they wanted. At first the man shook his head, but after a few more words, the man looked scared. Obviously, Dang threatened him. Tony and Jack smiled at each other.

They walked into the back and up to the second floor where the tapes were kept. Searching for the right tape took a while but the frightened man worked quickly to find it. At last they did. The men searched through it to find the right time code. They were lucky. They had found it. They had found the footage that shown the killer. Jack couldn’t stand to watch Anita get shot. Tony and Dang looked carefully. The tape showed everything. Apparently, the man was lying. He saw everything. Tony tackled the 7-Eleven man and Dang called the police.

When everything was over, Tony sat Jack down. “It’s all over, mate. We did it. You did it.” Tony looked him in the eye. Jack didn’t respond.

“Hey. I know we can’t bring her back...”

Jack spoke up. “...but life goes on.”

“Here, I got something for you.” Tony searched his back pocket.

In his hand was the necklace. He had gotten it back from the Frenchmen’s girlfriend. He handed it over to Jack. He put it around his neck and slowly walked off into the sunset with one tear rolling down his left cheek.