



# THE FOIL FROM A TUBE OF PRINGLES

By Shaun Mason

My heart froze with fear on the day the Tsunami struck Thailand. I rushed for my phone and desperately dialed her familiar number with frantic fingers.

"Come on Sao. Come on. Answer the phone. Please, please, please God, let her be safe. Don't let her be dead. Please, I'll be good from now on, I promise."

I waited for the number to connect, eager to hear her reassuring voice but I heard nothing. My mobile informed me in the most clinical manner that the call had failed. Nausea washed over me, my body trembled and my legs gave way. I sat down and tried over and again for five solid, terrifying hours but all I ever heard was a detestable flat-line tone.

I've loved Thailand and its people for a very long time and for many different reasons. Sao and her children had become reason number one and she was on holiday in Phuket, visiting her extended family.

Now Phuket was in tatters on my TV screen and I was in England, unable to help and increasingly frustrated. I'd only spoken to her the day before and her phone had worked perfectly but; five hours into my panic and there was still no word. I'd tried the emergency number that the authorities had advertised but it was a pointless exercise, it was continuously engaged.

Staggering to the bedroom I lay on my bed and willed myself calm. I checked the bedside cabinet for my passport because I already knew what I had to do and then I saw it; my sentimental keepsake... the foil from a tube of Pringles. I touched it tenderly and I saw her face, tasted her lips and remembered the first time, two years previously, that I thought I could possibly love her; at least for one night.....

She sat hunched into a lotus position on a hotel bed. The small of her back resting snug against the headboard and her fingers

flashing as she knitted her care into the scarf she was making for me. A light linen, powder blue robe draped casually around her naked beauty and I lay in awe in front of her crossed legs. I wrote inspired verse after having made languid love and was happy in my post coital haze.

"It cold in England." She said as she diverted her gaze from the knitting to my admiring eyes. "What you write?"

"I write about you Sao. I draw you with words."

She smiled a long dry smile as her eyes lowered back to her task.

"You talk stupid."

But still she smiled and so did my heart.

I noticed the fine, fair downy hair on her legs, light against her perfect skin. I kissed the faded, jagged scar which straddled her shin, inhaled her subtle musk and thought 'Is this hormones or love?'

I lit a cigarette, turning away from her and my emotions.

"Actually Sao, you talk stupid and you knit like shit." I retorted, turning back quickly.

She grinned and the knitting needle threatened as she deftly wrapped another strand of wool around her poised finger.

"And you dance like shit."

I clutched my heart in a wounded affection.... "That hurt." I whined.

"Good." She replied.

I turned away again, huffing loudly and continued to write. She kicked my backside reassuringly and I glanced over my shoulder at her unruffled, graceful concentration.

"I think you've knitted enough now Sao."

The scarf was at least two meters long as she'd been working on it for days.

She pulled a frown, her head and her eyes still lowered, the love still flowing into the scarf.

"No. I not finish yet. I finish before you go. I make sure you remember me Shaun. I make sure you love me when you in

England and you no see me."

My heart surged with the unfamiliar feeling that was becoming increasingly familiar around Sao. Could she be the one? My eyes swept around the room that we'd merged into and I saw the detritus of a couple who had become comfortable with each other. I realized that we'd been together for most of the last month that I had been on Koh Phi Phi, the most enchanting place on Earth.

I saw her shoes casually dropped beside the bed, her make up next to my aftershave, a razor that we'd both used balanced on top of the TV. I heard David Gray playing on the CD player that I'd bought her last week and I knew that in a few short days I would be too far away....

'Say hello and wave goodbye.'

I turned back again.

"For your information, Sao, I dance very well."

"No. You a good man but you dance very bad. Ping say to me that you dance like monkey."

She laughed and I scowled.

"What does Ping know? She's just a little girl."

"She know you dance like monkey."

Before I could retort I was distracted by a line from the song that was playing and I repeated the lyrics to her.

"Sail away with me honey. Put your heart in my hand."

She stopped her knitting and regarded me sadly. Despite speaking limited English her perception was razor sharp.

"I cannot be with you."

"Yes you can."

She erupted into manic, bitter sweet laughter.

"I cannot."

"Why?"

"Because you too good for me and I a bad lady."

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