

PRELUDE:

“The problem with these stories,” he said, “is that they have no plots.”

“Deficient in the plot department?”

“Woefully. They just wander around aimlessly.”

“Merrily meandering is the way I like to think of them.”

“Well, think of them as you will, but a good story needs a compelling plot to keep the reader’s interest, and these stories are . . .”

“Plotless.”

“Exactly.”

You like plots, I thought to myself, go visit a cemetery.



A few nights later I was sitting at the Woodstock bar drinking scotch and casually minding other people’s business—which on that particular evening would have put me to sleep, if it hadn’t been for the scotch. A guy came in, sat down two stools away from me, ordered a bottle of Heineken and said, “Hi.”

I said, “Hi.”

He said, “How are you?”

I lied and said, “Fine.”

He looked at me and said, “Yeah? Well, neither am I but let’s fake it.

So there we were, a couple of strangers to each other, willing to bear the burden of some lightweight pretensions in order to engage a bit of conviviality.

“What do you do?” he asked.

“I drink scotch, smoke cigarettes, and think about sex a lot. Aside from that, I’m basically a bum.”

“You make a living doing that?”

“No, that *is* my living. Only drawback is I don’t get paid for it.”

“Where can you afford to live that way?”

“Koh Samui. Been there about five years.”

“Not a bad life.”

“It’s better than not bad, actually. How’s by you? You on holiday?”

“You ever meet anyone in the Woodstock bar who was here on a holiday?”

“As a matter of fact, no. So...?”

“I live here.”

“In Bangkok?”

“Yes.”

“You get paid to live here?”

“I get paid to work here.”

“Doing what?”

“I’m the editor at a publishing company.”

“That’s funny . . . I was just in here the other night talking with a guy about getting some stories published.”

“Stories you wrote?”

“Yeah.”

“I thought you were a bum.”

“Yeah, well . . . I’m a bum writer.”

“This guy the other night . . . he like your stories?”

“Not especially. He only read a few of them. He said they lacked plots. This guy really likes plots . . . you like plots?”

“No . . . I’m gonna be cremated. That a scotch you’re drinking?”

“It used to be.”

“Want another one?”

“Love one, thanks.”

“What kind of stuff do you write?”

“Short pieces, one to four thousand words. Humor . . . meant to be amusing.”

“About...?”

“Basically, about a middle aged guy from the frenzied world of a highly industrialized society who cashes in his chips and retires to a ‘tropical island paradise.’ There he sits in a rattan chair, on his coconut-wood verandah in the shade of gently swaying palms, and makes a record of what life on a tropical island paradise is like.”

“And, he does this via an assortment of short, meant to be amusing, pieces.

“That’s correct.”

“Short, meant to be amusing pieces that are essentially devoid of plots, so to speak.”

“Yes, essentially . . . so to speak.”

“Mind if I read a few of them...?”



Well, that's more or less how this project got uncorked. I dropped off a packet of eight pieces at his office. From there, I was on my way to Phnom Penh for a couple of months. He said he would fax me at the Hotel Paradise and let me know what he thought of the stuff.

Never heard from him....