

TOKYO INCIDENT

William Snyder

TOKYO INCIDENT

Published by:
William Snyder
Ban Kan Throm
Thailand

Printed by:
Lightning Source, LLC

ISBN: 978-616-95180-6-8

Filed from The Border Dispatch archive.

borderdispatch.com

© Copyright 2026 by William Snyder
All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews or articles.

This dispatch is adapted from a chapter of *The Road Here*, a larger work chronicling the unlikely chain of events that carried one man from collapse to a village halfway around the world into a life he never saw coming.

Stumbling recklessly down a narrow, dimly lit alleyway in Tokyo's bustling Ota Ward, not far from Haneda International Airport, Willie's vision swam with blurs and indistinct shapes. Holding his stomach, bent over in agony, his steps were unsteady, weaving a crooked path as if guided by an invisible hand. The neon colors of the night lights were softened and distorted, swirling in chaotic patterns that danced before his eyes, making it a herculean task just to put one foot in front of the other. Pedestrians eyed him with a mix of curiosity and caution, sidestepping to avoid his erratic, zigzagging progress along the sidewalk. In his clouded mind, a single

thought emerged with clarity: if he could just find some cold water to pour over his head, he might regain the senses he'd lost.

With this hope, he spotted a 7-11 along his route and tumbled in, nearly falling in the process. The fluorescent lights of the store cast a harsh, sterile glow over his disheveled figure. Barely managing to maintain his balance, he hunched over like a man who had braved a tempest, each movement a betrayal of his intentions, as if the very earth conspired to trip him. He squinted through the haze, trying to fix his gaze on what he hoped was a water cooler. Yet, after only a few faltering steps inside the store, he felt the weight of curious eyes and judgmental stares upon him. He wavered like a spinning top on the verge of collapse, muttering incoherently under his breath

before turning and stumbling back out into the night.

Somewhere along the bustling street between the fluorescent glow of the 7-11 and the comfort of his hotel, he reached into his back pocket, pulled out his phone and somehow managed to call his friend and neighbor, Wasum.

Though she was still cocooned in the warmth of morning sleep, the persistent ring of her phone pierced through her dreams. With a groggy sigh, she fumbled around the nightstand, finally grasping the device to see it was Willie calling. She answered.

“Willie. Are you ok?”

She could hear him attempting to speak, with city noises in the background, as he mumbled and fiddled with his phone. She

couldn't decipher what he was trying to communicate. However, knowing that Willie was never too far out of control, no matter how intoxicated, Wasum quickly became alert and concentrated on the call.

“Willie. Willie! Are you there?”

She checked the app – they had programmed each other into the Find My app on their phones. She could see he was in Tokyo, a short distance from Haneda airport. She knew he was due to come home from his trip the day before, but hadn't heard from him. She figured he was in the RV sleeping off jet lag and getting reacclimated to mountain time again. She was surprised to see he was still in Japan, which heightened her concern.

“Willie! Willie! Are you there?” The phone went silent.

Wasum's older brother, Decha, who was brought up by their aunt following their father's death, worked as a cargo plane pilot under subcontract with SIAM Shipping and a few other charter companies based in Bangkok. His job involved delivering goods, and occasionally people, across Asia, and he frequently flew into Kansai, Narita, and Haneda. When she contacted him, it turned out by sheer luck that he was on a layover in Osaka, having just completed a delivery of fresh bananas and dried mangoes to a client at Kansai International Airport.

“Wasum! What’s up, Sister?”

“You remember my friend Willie, my neighbor I told you about?”

“Yep.”

“I think he’s in big trouble in Tokyo...” she explained, telling him about the

uncharacteristic phone call. “Do you have any contacts at Haneda who could check on him, or is there any way you can help?”

Decha replied, “Let me see what I can do. I might even be able to get over there. I was deadheading back but trying to find a load or a charter. I’ll make some more calls. I’ll call you back.”

Wasum checked the app again and could see Willie, or at least his phone, was at the Oriental Express Hotel, about 15-20 minutes from the airport. She texted Decha with the location. Feeling helpless, all she could do was wait.

An hour had passed and finally Decha called.

“I found a load out of Haneda with another carrier, and I’ve got a friend – a local there who’s pretty well connected in Tokyo. I

scored a standby seat on the next flight over.
He's going to meet me there."

"Oh my Buddha! Thank you,
Decha."

"I'll call as soon as I know
anything." He replied.

Several hours went by, and it was almost 1 PM in Arizona, 5 AM in Tokyo. The app indicated that Willie was still close to or possibly inside the Oriental Express, which Wasum took as a positive sign. She knew that this was the hotel where he planned to spend the last few nights before his scheduled flight home. Just then, her phone rang.

"Decha?"

"We're here at the hotel looking for him, *under the radar*..."

"What do you mean, *under the radar*?"

Decha replied, “Turns out my friend here knows the girl at the front desk of the hotel. She told him the police came in looking for Willie. Apparently he had stumbled into the street just down the road from here and caused a motorbike accident.”

“Well the app shows him at that hotel, is he there?”

“The lady at the front desk says she saw him about six but he hadn’t been back all night.”

“Holy shit!” Wasum said.

“Hang on, my friend just popped his head around the corner, he’s motioning for me to come over”, Decha said.

A few minutes passed. Wasum could hear shuffling footsteps and muffled voices.

“Decha, what’s going on?”

“We found him. He’s out cold.
Looks pretty beat up. He’s tucked away
between a cargo truck and a cement wall.
You’d never see him and wouldn’t think to
look for him back here.”

“Is he ok?”

“My friend is going to talk to his
friend at the front desk to see if we can sneak
him in the back way and get him to his
room.”

“Oh my Buddha!” Wasum exhaled.

Decha’s cohort came out the back
way and propped the door open, saying “He’s
not even checked in here but she’s going to
let us use an employee meeting room on the
second floor. We’re going to get him up there
on the freight elevator. She’ll keep it under
wraps for now but we need to get him out of

here, fast. They'll find him eventually and probably throw him in jail."

Decha and his contact managed to get Willie up to the meeting room and assessed the situation from there. Willie was still out cold. Once up there they could see a big red mark on the side of his face and his clothes on the same side were scuffed and dirtied. He had a rip in his shirt with a little blood near his shoulder. They figured he hadn't been beaten up but had more likely fallen with a hell of a dead weight thud back behind that truck.

In a determined effort to rouse him from his stupor, they called out his name with increasing urgency, their voices rising in pitch. They shook him, trying to jolt him back to awareness. When that failed, they resorted to slapping his face, the sound of

skin against skin echoing in the room. Still, he remained unresponsive. Desperation mounting, they dragged him into the bathroom and sprayed him with the shower hose letting the cold water hit his face in a relentless stream. Yet, despite their efforts, he remained oblivious, his chest rising and falling steadily, as if he were merely in a deep, unreachable slumber.

Decha's load out of Haneda back to Bangkok was scheduled to depart later that day. They figured the police would catch up to Willie before then, so they started scheming a way to sneak him out of there. All the way out. He wouldn't be safe in Tokyo, or anywhere in Japan.

Decha called Wasum and brought her up to speed.

“He’s still out, and the police are bound to be closing in on him. We’ve got to get him out of town.”

Wasum questioned, “Out of town?”

“Yes, out of town, out of Tokyo, out of Japan!” They’ll throw the book at him if they catch up to him. The Japanese don’t take kindly to Foreigners causing trouble over here. We found out one of the people on the motorbike, a local, had to go to the hospital after the wreck he caused.”

“So what do we do? How the hell are you going to get him out of there?”

“I’ve got to somehow get him on that plane with me back to Bangkok. Once we’re back on Thailand soil, everything gets easier.”

"Ohhhhhhh," Willie groaned.

"That's a promising sign," Decha remarked. "Did you hear that?"

"Yes, I did," Wasum responded, while typing away on her laptop, attempting to reschedule a trip to Bangkok she had originally planned for February to an earlier date. "What about Thanaporn? Could she assist?"

Thanaporn was Decha and Wasum's cousin. She's a manager at a third-party contractor office in Bangkok that handles immigration and visa paperwork.

Decha and Wasum hail from a well-connected, affluent family with ties to the monarchy. Their family is well-known and influential enough to pull off a rescue plan in Thailand that could succeed, provided they managed to get Willie on that plane and out

of Japan. So, they began plotting their strategy together.

Decha's contact was still in play, fascinated by the whole sordid affair. He would be instrumental in getting Willie to the plane. Once airborne, they'd be in the clear. All they needed was a convincing enough story and some paperwork that looked legitimate to fool a couple of lower-level security guards at BKK. They wouldn't have to deal with customs, just get past the gate guard – who would likely be known to Decha and relatively easy to deceive.

Willie, now barely aware of his surroundings, sees a man talking on a phone, his voice muted from the thunderous buzzing in his head. He barely made out...“Ok, you get a hold of Thanaporn. Have her put together...” before it faded out completely as the

man walked away towards the door to let someone in. Willie faded to black again.

Another few hours vanished. The front desk lady alerted Decha's connection that the police were checking all the hotels and were closing in. They were ready for the escape.

Straining to piece together fragments of his memory, Willie was now being partly dragged, partly walked out of the meeting room by two unfamiliar men. They guided him down the hallway. He was clueless about both what had transpired, and where he was being taken. One man loosened his grip with one hand while still holding firmly onto Willie's elbow with the other. He opened an old wooden hoistway door, and they entered a large freight elevator. Willie sensed they were descending.

The elevator came to a stop, and they swiftly moved through a dimly lit corridor to a set of double doors. The light was blinding and disorienting as they passed through. A four-door truck awaited them, with a third man in the driver's seat. Willie and the two men holding him got into the back seat, and the truck sped off. The driver handed a legal-sized envelope and a small black travel bag to Decha. The man took some papers out of the envelope, glanced through them, muttered a few words in what might have been Japanese, and then placed the envelope into the bag.

The side of Willie's face was starting to throb by this time. He caught a glimpse of himself in the window as they approached the truck. He could see a bruise. He could

feel the swelling. He had shooting pain in his right shoulder, ribs and hip.

Am I being abducted? he thought to himself.

Silence weighed heavily inside the truck, a tense quiet that seemed to amplify every bump and jolt. The driver maneuvered through the city streets with a relentless precision, as if on a mission handed down straight from the gods. Suddenly, they halted. Willie, trapped in a haze of disorientation and nausea, slipped back into a fog of semi-awareness. The vehicle's movements tossed him about, and the muffled drone of voices barely penetrated his consciousness before he slipped back into a void of oblivion.

Decha's contact vaulted into the front seat, leaving Decha and Willie in the

back as they turned into the employee section of TIACT No. 1 International Cargo Building. The driver was a close ally of Decha's contact and held a senior position at the airport. With a swift, purposeful maneuver and a few waves to co-workers manning checkpoints along the way, he had whisked them all through the gate, navigating the facility's labyrinthine security with seamless precision. His mission: to deliver Decha to the prep area for the flight back to Bangkok, a delivery he had secured during his layover at Kansai.

“We’ve got 90 minutes before take-off. I need to do my prep,” Decha stated, his voice steely with urgency. “Can you guys get Willie on the plane?”

“Yep.”

“It’s the Falcon on 1. Just tuck him in the jump seat behind the co-pilot. There’s just one passenger. I’ll cover the story. It should be fine.”

With that, they whisked Willie away in a wheelchair, moving with military precision toward the plane. Willie, slipping in and out of various stages of confusion, mumbled incoherently, giving the men escorting him an indication he was still alive. As they approached the aircraft, they were abruptly halted by a stern security guard, his presence imposing and unyielding. The guard demanded to know their purpose. The driver of the truck, unwavering, presented his credentials with authority and declared they were executing a critical medical transport, destined for the charter jet just

ahead. He pointed decisively to the Falcon, a sense of urgency pulsating through the air.

“Go ahead” the young guard said without even asking for any paperwork.

Upon reaching the plane, the men lifted Willie from the wheelchair and, with him groaning in pain, they partially carried and partially dragged him up the stairs.

“Where are you taking me?” he struggled to say.

“You’ll be alright, Willie, Decha will take good care of you” one of them said.

With the aircraft ready, cargo onboard, and its sole passenger – a newly recruited flight attendant bound for Bangkok to begin her job with one of the charter companies Decha contracted with – they began to push back from the loading area.

“Who’s that?” she asked.

“Medical transport,” Decha replied.

“He doesn’t look too good.”

“No, he doesn’t.”

Once they received clearance for takeoff, the plane sped down the runway, lifted off smoothly, and just like that, they were headed up and out of Japanese airspace.

About thirty-minutes into the flight, Willie began to regain some awareness. He glanced around, noticed the fellow passenger seated behind him, heard the roar of the engines, and felt slight turbulence, and realized he was on an airplane. But where was it headed? Decha was seated diagonally from him at the controls, a co-pilot was directly in front of him, and that small black travel bag rested on his lap.

“Can I get a water?”

“Welcome back, Willie”, Decha said as the co-pilot handed him back a cold water bottle. He drank nearly the whole thing in one swallow, then finished it off. The co-pilot handed him another.

“Bathroom?”

“In the back.”

Willie stood up, wobbled, and sat back down.

“You ok?” Decha said.

“I’m ok.”

After a few deep breaths that set his rib cage on fire, he slowly stood back up. As he made his way to the aft of the smaller aircraft – a Dassault Falcon 900 – he noticed only two seats. The mid cabin was retrofitted for light cargo. There were two small secured pallets stacked on either side with boxes wrapped in plastic marked

medical supplies. He forced a half smile to the young lady sitting in one of the seats as he walked by and found the door to the lavatory.

He pushed it open and stood at the sink, gripping its edges for support. As he splashed water on his face, each movement sent jolts through him, the cold liquid barely easing the sting of his skin. He looked at his reflection in the mirror and saw what a mean fight the hours, maybe days after his memory went dark had put up. A raw, purple shiner bloomed around his eye, and bruising spread like a storm over his cheekbone. His face was an abstract canvas of swelling and discoloration. Throbbing pain pulsed down from his shoulder, wrapping around his ribs like a vice. He felt each heartbeat like a

hammer, tapping insistently against the sore flesh.

He took a moment to steady himself, tracing the unfamiliar geography of injuries with a grimace before turning to the narrow space behind him. Struggling slightly, he opened the door and stumbled back into the aisle. The plane shook gently, and he grabbed onto the seat back for support, the movement rattling his already rattled bones. He felt lightheaded, as if every bruise and throbbing muscle had taken on a weight all its own, dragging him down with each step. The low hum of the engines vibrated through his body, and he focused on that sound like a lifeline.

As he made his way back he asked the woman,

“Mind if I sit down?”

“Sure, go ahead”

He winced as he lowered himself into the empty seat across from her.

“What the hell happened to you?”

“Honestly, I have no idea.”

“Must have been quite a party”, she replied.

“It sure must have been.”

He reclined his seat, put his head back and laid there trying again to remember what had happened.

“Where are we headed” he asked.

“Bangkok”

“Of course we are”, he muttered.

For the next few hours, Willie drifted in and out of dreamless sleep, occasionally jerking awake with a start, as if he were falling into a void. The last jolt convinced him to reposition his seat

upwards, resting his head on a small pillow against the wall next to the window. Focused on the futility of finding a position that didn't hurt he sat there shifting relentlessly in his seat, occasionally standing up to stretch and moan. This was going to be a brutal flight.

Another few hours passed and they finally began their descent into Suvarnabhumi Airport, quietly gliding over the city like a feather. He stared out the window and started to contemplate what he would do with the open air he hoped he'd have in front of him when the cabin door opened. *Should I run*, he thought. *I don't know anyone in Bangkok. I don't even know what I'm doing here.* He still didn't know any of these people. Didn't know if they were helping him or if they were kidnapping him. Was he in danger? He wasn't sure and didn't

want to engage with anyone until he could piece together at least some of his darkened memory.

He settled on a decision. He'd try to break away and find an authority figure to help him get somewhere known and safe so he could contact someone back home and begin to unravel his lost memory.

It was then that he realized he didn't have his phone. As he went for the small black travel bag that had accompanied him to see if he could find any clues, he stopped short noticing a silver wedding ring on his left ring finger, and a tattoo – some lettering in a foreign language – on the inside of his right forearm. *What the hell is this!* He thought to himself.

Decha hollered back, “Everyone strapped in? We’ll be touching down in 10 minutes.”

“Willie?”

“Ya”

“Stay close to us when we get to the gate, we’ll get you through security and over to the train station. My Aunt will have a good meal and a place laid out for you to rest and recover. Her son Tuk will pick you up at the Sisaket station and will drive you out to the farm. She’ll fill in as many blanks as she can. You’ll have to fill in the rest as you go. You’ll be in good hands.”

Feeling somewhat reassured, Willie decided to abandon his plan to bolt. He figured he’d ride it out and see where it all landed.

They touched down like a dream,
braked to a slow roll and eventually came to
a stop.

The co-pilot turned the latch handle
on the door and with a push it swung out and
up, the stairs fell smoothly on pneumatic
extensions to the ground and they
deboarded. Decha found a wheelchair nearby
and told Willie to climb in.

“I can walk”, Willie said.

“Get in, It’s better this way. Trust
me” Decha said.

As soon as they passed into the
cargo terminal, a security guard intercepted
them, barking a question at Decha in rapid-
fire Thai. The air bristled with tension as
Decha and the guard volleyed words back
and forth, the exchange crackling with
urgency. Decha swiftly rummaged through

the travel bag, extracting the necessary paperwork and thrusting it at the guard. The guard scrutinized the documents with a hawk-like intensity, then finally nodded in approval, clearing their path forward.

After enduring the grueling pain of the seven-hour flight, followed by the chaos of navigating the terminal, the clock now ticked past seven thirty in the evening. Decha, moving with purpose, escorted Willie to the train station – a distance that seemed about thirty minutes away. He purchased a ticket with decisive speed and drilled into Willie precise instructions on where to wait and which train to board. Pressing five 100 baht bills into Willie's hand, he urged him to grab a meal on the train, ensuring he was equipped for the journey ahead.

"The train will arrive soon enough, around 9:30. The journey to Sisaket takes about 9 to 10 hours. Even though you don't have a phone or a watch, make sure to keep track of the time. Around 6 am, be vigilant for Sisaket Station. The train will make a quick stop, so be ready to get off. Tuk will meet you there. He'll be looking for you."

Willie, still in a lot of pain, still confused and disoriented, had a rush of vulnerability, even gratitude flush over him. He stepped forward and hugged Decha.

"Thanks, Man."

"You're going to be ok. Answers will come. My Aunt will look out for you until you can sort it out. Take care, Willie."

It had been nearly twenty hours since this ordeal began. Now, slouched on a bench in the humid sprawl of Bangkok,

waiting to board a train bound for Sisaket, he reached back for something solid – anything – and came up empty. Just a haze. Kyoto Station, four days earlier, was the last clear image he could conjure before his memory went dark, and even that flickered like a dream already halfway out the door. Still, despite the chaos, the dull ache behind his eyes, the absence of a phone, and the disorienting stack of unanswered questions, Willie felt an unsettling calm. As if he'd slipped between dimensions. Fallen off the map. Disappeared from time itself.

In the distance he could feel the rumble of the train approaching. He stood up, grabbed the travel bag and followed the others – who had been trying unsuccessfully not to stare at the motley sight of a man

before them who looked like he'd been drug through hell and back – to the platform.

‘Car 8 - Seat 12 Second Class A/C Sleeper’ it read on the ticket. As he made his way to his seat he observed it wasn't a seat at all. It was the top bunk in a row of sleeper-like capsules running parallel with the aisle. *Capsule! Why did this word nearly jog loose a memory?* Now feeling one solid ache from head to toe, he had a hell of a time making his way up. Once he did he found a decent mattress, a pillow and a blanket, and a privacy curtain. He eased down and nested in for the long ride to Sisaket, *wherever in the hell that is...*

There was an undeniable sense of nostalgia wrapped up in the clatter of that long train ride, a romance in the rails that evoked a different era altogether. The

rhythmic rumble of the wheels, the mournful blow of the horn, the gentle swaying motion that rocked him like an infant in a cradle – it all conjured a simpler time, a time before life became tangled in chaotic knots and war wounds sprouting like unwanted weeds. A time when destinations were mysteries to be savored, not dilemmas to be solved. Willie tucked the travel bag under the pillow behind his head for added support, feeling the low thrum of the tracks around him, and let the hum of the train carry him away from the chaos and into the comforting arms of oblivion. He surrendered himself to the moment, embraced the timelessness of it, trying to ignore the battle scars his body wore as a memory of contorted hours passed. Let the waking world and its confounding riddles wait. It was easy to get lost in the

music of the rails, letting them sing away the confusion. He intended to forget about the world and its expectations, if only for a little while, and drift away into a place where the past and future ceased to exist, where only the present mattered.

As the small world around him disappeared, Willie slipped silently into another dreamless slumber, one so profound that it bordered on amnesia, erasing pain and doubt until they were less than shadows.

He didn't know how long he'd been out, only that time had lost its grip on him and the monotonous chaos of the past few days slowly dissolved into nothing, suddenly bringing him to a different kind of awareness.

Seven hours later he woke up to a perfectly still train in an unknown village in

the dark of the Thailand sky. A little unsettling, barely a sound could be heard. He looked out the window and people filled the streets, carnival rides, elephant ears...

elephant ears? Am I reading that right?, food vendors on both sides of the street. Yet, he couldn't hear a sound. It was surreal. He sat and watched through that window like he'd slipped into a parallel universe. Was it a dream? Was all of it a dream? The pain he was feeling in his body didn't jibe with that premise. Within a few minutes, the train roared back to life and continued its trek towards what would hopefully, soon, be Sisaket. After that weird sight, he wasn't sure.

Willie clumsily rolled out of his bunk, landed with a wince on the floor, grabbed his bag and set off in search of a

bathroom and some food. After walking through about eight cars forward, he finally reached the dining car. Only two other people were there, enjoying an ice cream cone. His eyes caught sight of the bar at the front – his instincts were still sharp, thankfully – and he headed over to check it out. An ice cooler was filled with large, cold, dewy cans of Chang beer, Leo beer, and Heineken. He pointed to the Leo, handed the bartender one of the bills Decha had given him, then another after a grin and soft point to his hand for more, and when the bartender tried to return some coins, Willie gestured for her to keep them. She smiled in response. With his big, cold can of Leo beer in hand, he left the glass she offered at the bar, walked back to a booth at the rear of the car, and popped the can open. That beer was

colder and tasted better than any he'd ever remembered. He finished it, ordered a second, and sat back down.

He'd been carrying this confounding small black travel bag ever since Tokyo, without even realizing it. In perpetual distraction he never had a chance to peek inside. While sitting there, halfway through his second Leo, he unzipped the bag, retrieved a legal-sized envelope, and placed it on the table in front of him. A quick glance back inside the bag revealed toiletries: deodorant, toothpaste, a toothbrush, a travel pack of Q-tips, lotion, and a small pack of tissues with Japanese writing on the package. "Huh," he remarked aloud, finding it amusing.

He opened the flap of the envelope, turned it over – his passport fell out – and

took out the papers. There were about a half dozen letter size sheets of paper with Thai writing, some both sides, tables with checks and handwritten scribbles and signatures, and some with official looking red inked stamps. He examined them closely. One looked like a certificate, the type you receive after completing a course. Most of the text was in Thai, except for his name, Willie James Lyonsan. The scribble beneath seemed to be a name as well, with the last name matching his – Lyonsan. He decided to show it to the bartender.

“What is this?” The document was a puzzle piece that begged for context.

The bartender leaned in, her eyes scanning the paper with the quick expertise of someone accustomed to translating chaos for foreigners.

“Looks like a marriage license,” she said, as casually as if she’d been asked about the weather.

He sat back down. A marriage license? Each syllable reverberated, setting off a cascade of new questions that collided with the old ones. He ran a hand over his stubbly head, trying to smooth down the mental static. *A marriage license? Who the hell did I marry? And why can’t I remember?* He thought to himself.

The name on the document, the same as his own, taunted him with its possibility.

He wondered who the hell *he* really was now.

Before Willie could dig deeper into this new layer of confusion, the train came to an abrupt halt and soon after a shadow

loomed over him, startling him back into the immediacy of the moment.

“Sisaket”, an official looking fellow barked, followed by some rumblings in Thai he couldn’t understand.

“Thanks”, Willie said as he stuffed the papers back into the envelope, back into the bag, and headed for the door. He got off the train.

The sun was coming up. The sky was glowing a bright yellow/orange at the horizon. The town was mostly silent. The platform was quiet too and devoid of anything other than the small handful of people who got off the train from different cars, and they had already dispersed into bathrooms or waiting cars. As he stood there alone he looked over at the makeshift, tin roofed market stands that lined the other

side of the tracks in one direction, and the small water tower that was almost completely overgrown with vegetation in the other when he heard the latch on a chain link gate clang behind him. He turned around to see a young man, late teens-early twenties, maybe, heading his way. He walked up to greet him with a big toothy smile.

“Tuk?”

“Ka” he grunted with a little throaty laugh, smile still plastered to his face.

“How’s it going”, Willie said. Tuk didn’t respond, just kept smiling. Willie soon figured out this kid didn’t know a single word of english.

They made their way back through the chain link gate, across a small lawn and into a parking lot to a small, bluish, early 90’s Toyota Hilux fitted with a cab and a

half. Tuk grabbed Willie's bag and they both went for the right side door. Tuk shot him a puzzled look.

“Thought I was aiming for the passenger side”, Willie chuckled

Pointing at the steering wheel. “You guys drive on the right side here, eh?”

No reply, Tuk just smiled. He went around to the other side and got in.

It was an uneventful ride. Tuk inched along with caution at a mind numbing, snail's pace, cars whizzing by as if they were stationary road art. He never uttered a sound. Willie talked to himself much of the way, intrigued by the new surroundings.

“Oh that’s a pretty lake. Check out that rice field. I can’t believe how many dogs are roaming around. What the hell is that”,

to a strange, skinny contraption that resembled an elongated rototiller chopper hitched to a wagon.

On this, his inaugural journey through the lush Thailand countryside, he was mesmerized by the sights of more motorbikes than he'd encountered in his entire life. Families of up to four, wedged in one behind another, zipping down the narrow streets with a fearless urgency, as if being chased by the wind. Along the roadside, serene monks in saffron robes ambled with a tranquil grace, while towering, resplendent golden Buddhas gazed over the landscape, embodying peace and majesty. Magnificent temples, adorned with intricate carvings and vibrant colors, stood as testaments to devotion and artistry. Adding to the countryside's unique tapestry were the

curious rototiller contraptions, their engines tek tek tek'ing along as they hauled bountiful crops, hinting at the region's deep-rooted agricultural life. There were beautiful forestlands with perfectly rowed trees that seemed to stretch endlessly towards the edge of the world.

They traveled through village after village until they approached a picturesque farm that seemed to be the heart of yet another small village. Unlike the houses he'd seen on the journey from Sisaket, this gated home was larger, more elegant, meticulously maintained, with a veranda and an enclosed porch. The atmosphere was serene, complete with well-kept outbuildings, chickens darting around, water buffalo grazing across vast, endless fields, and impressive machinery – everything you could imagine.

As they approached, a distinguished gentleman, seemingly plucked straight from the pages of a Hollywood movie script, looked at Willie with a smile, pressed his palms together and bowed. He then engaged in a brief conversation with Tuk. Their laughter rang out, genuine and hearty, with broad smiles lighting up their faces. Tuk glanced down at the freshly cut grass, his head shaking slightly in amusement, a grin still firmly in place.

Another few minutes passed as Willie stood there, trying to absorb everything like a dry sponge in a rainstorm. The morning sun stretched long shadows over the lawn, and just when the anticipation reached its peak, a pretty woman emerged from the direction of the house, striding confidently across the freshly cut grass with

three water bottles in hand. Her long black hair flowed like silk behind her, dancing in time with each step. She walked in their direction, and her expression was unreadable – a mix of purpose and playfulness that he couldn't quite pin down. She was petite, graceful, and had a presence that seemed to fill the entire space between them. Who was she? The old mans wife? Daughter? Another woman, younger, emerged behind her. Quickening her gate she trailed behind the first woman by ten or so paces, closing the gap rapidly. As she was coming into focus, he heard a familiar voice.

“Willie, oh my god I can’t believe you’re here.”

He leaned forward just a hair, brows knitting as he squinted in the direction of the voice, “Wasum!?” he blurted

out, "What the fuck are you...ooof!" Willie nearly fell over from the collision of Wasum's clumsy lurch in to hug him. "Careful, careful", he winced. "What's going on, what are you doing here?" he questioned.

And then he heard...

"Welcome to Thailand, Win," from a voice that sent a shiver down his spine, one he eerily recognized. The familiarity of it was unsettling, almost ghostly. It couldn't be... His heart pounded as he spun around quickly, the hair on his neck standing on end, prickling with a mix of anticipation and disbelief. The humid air seemed to thicken around him, and the bustling sounds of the farm faded into the background.

"Chitra!"

Disoriented, spent, and utterly blindsided, he needed to sit before gravity

did the job for him. Desperately, he sank to the ground, his body collapsing against a cluster of large bundled rice stalks, his heart pounding, seemingly, out of his chest...

“I knew you’d make it home one day, Win...” Chitra said with a coy smile, her voice soft with wonder.

•
•
•
•
•
•
•
•
•

