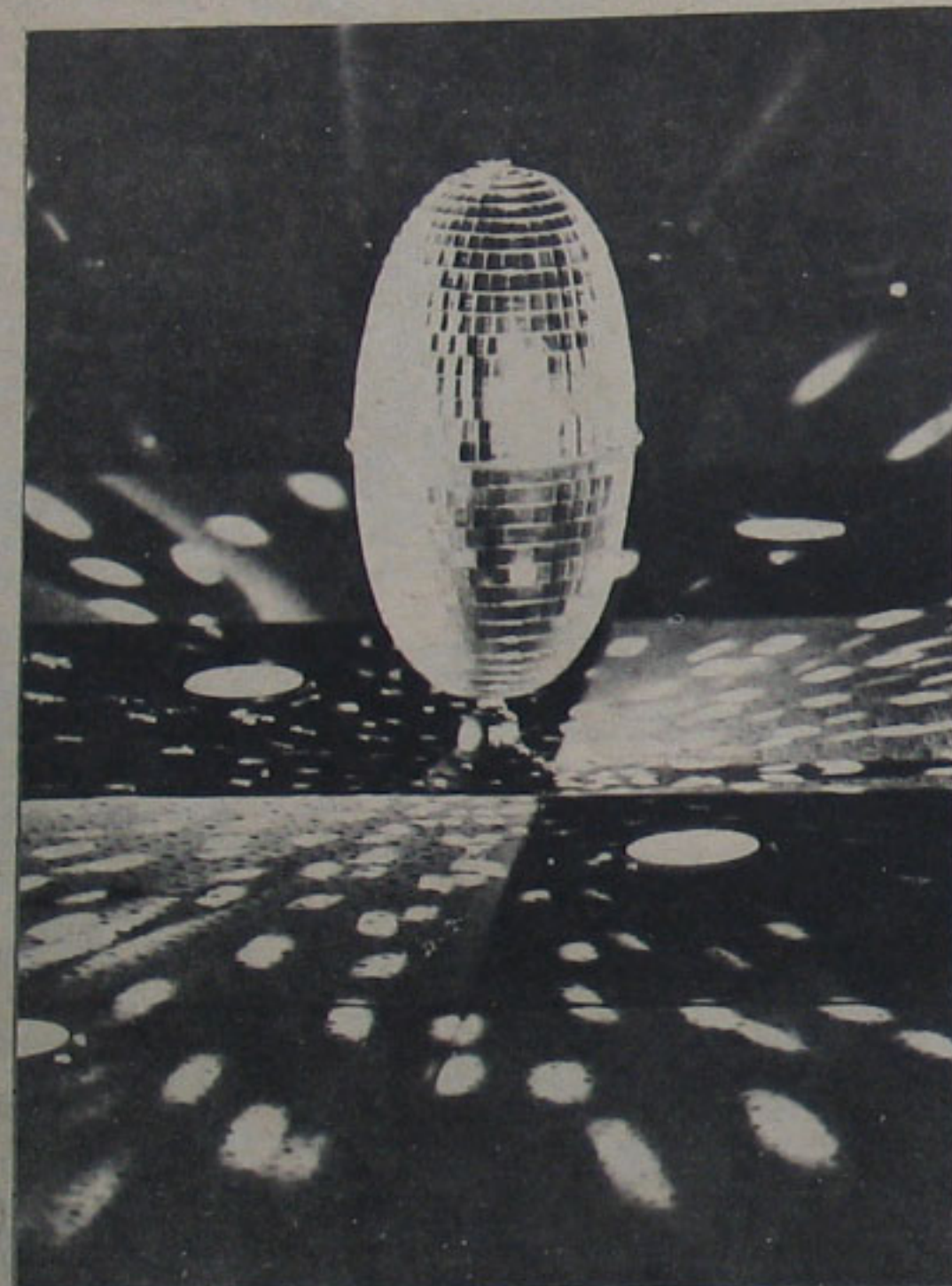




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**CARL,
BOB,
AND ART**



CARL, BOB, AND ART

By A.A. Maytree

Little Annie at the Petchburi Hotel is really the cutest prostitute I know. She's got these big "Keane-y" black eyes sunk in a pool of Max Factor eye-shadow that could make a saint break out in a cold sweat.

Her long black hair hangs down to where her mini skirts come up to and the GI's just love her-- for 400 Baht a nite. Little Annie is lucky to get half that--some greedy gnome in a massage parlor gets most of it, and he doesn't do anything at nite but stand at the door and blow smoke rings at the moon.

Little Annie is the heart of the R&R scenes that stretch along Petchburi Road here in Bangkok. She is about the size of a pillow on a Hollywood bed and if she didn't wear so much paint you'd think she came into the room looking for her drunken father.

But she's not a little girl anymore with magic dragons and little blue slippers with puffs under the bed, and that's son of sad really. She's the genuine, bona-fide, half-cups, see-through hooker who's had a platoon or may be a whole division of "America's finest" from Chu Lai, Da Nang, Hue and Can Ranh Bay in the last golden years of the R&R boom.

She knows more secrets than General Westmoreland and if you ever asked her, she could tell you some scary fairy tales about Jolly Green Giants and Flying Cobras and things that go "bump" in the night. She's heard them all. She's paid to. And little girls don't thrive on nightmares. Little Annie is tough.

Girls like Annie keep soldiers like Carl, Bob and Art coming to Bangkok. Like anyone else in a foreign environment, G.I.'s tend to be "groupies" when they first land here in Thailand.

Hostile hums and strange smells make them stick together like pioneers in Indian country. The pool is definitely held by the "friendlies" as is the coffee shop, the TV in the lounge, and every path leading to and from their rooms. Outside this defensive perimeter it is safe only at night, in a taxi. In the day it is controlled by Tango Hotel Alpha India Sierra. The prostitutes come into the compound like deserters under the "Open Arms" program, but the G.I.'s suspect their sympathies lie elsewhere. A lot of Bangkok still isn't pacified.



Carl sits outside by the pool in the warm sun, eating breakfast. It's June in Thailand and the temperature this morning is 90 degrees. He's got a half dozen eggs surrounded on a plate just below his mouth in a narrow valley between a stack of toast and a wall of bacon.

As the cleaning lady closes in he's slicing up the remnants and by the time I get to the scene he's just mopping up with a sweep of a crust of toast.

Carl is a tall, Germanic private in the mould of Gunner Asche. His eyes are covered by Andy Warhol sunglasses, the type that remind you of one-way mirrors in a psychology lab. With a positively rude burp he shoves away from the

table. There are no survivors.

Around Art's neck is a big pigeon-foot peace symbol, a pair of dog tags and a miraculous medal, which turns out to be an image of Buddha on closer inspection. He's wearing smartly tailored green pants and a blue short-sleeve button-down shirt with the tails sticking outside. He had the shirt tailor made for him when he flew in a few days ago, at one of the G.I. tailor shops that line Petchburi Street. He's a black man with a pencil moustache and he pulls a small pocket phrase book out of the shirt pocket.

"Poo-ying. No...let's see - POO-ying! Yeah, man; that's it. POO-ying! I'm gonna go get a POO-ying tonight."

Little Annie and the other Thai prostitutes sitting around the pool break up at his attempts to master Thai and start imitating Art, whispering "POO-ying" in each other's ears till they are rolling with laughter. Most of the G.I. prostitutes speak fairly good English.

"You number TEN!," someone yells out.

"The third man at the poolside this morning is Bob O., 252499 zeo, zero, eight. Bob is a farmboy from North Carolina. Shuffle, drawl and constant grin, at your service, folks. A true American folk hero, guaranteed to cheer the heart and raise a smile on a dead man's face.

He's smoking a "Samit" cigarette when I sit down but he

handles it like a boy sneaking a smoke behind his daddy's barn. The smoke comes out of the mouth, not the lungs, and for a sweet second I sniff the air for a whiff of "gancha" (marijuana). But no, it turns out to be just plain smoke and as a matter of fact he has just started to smoke cigarettes. He wanted to try a Thai cigarette.

The three of them are clustered around the remains of breakfast and as we start talking about R&R in Bangkok I can't help thinking of Dylan's "John Wesley Hardin" album-- the one filled with bad guys, good guys, cheats and crooks, robbers and saints. R&R troops in Thailand have a bad reputation among the local Thais. Humanity is too



tangled up together to find out who's cheating and robbing and saying who, but there is certainly a lot of it going on.

Between the American GI's and their five day friends only God knows the score. One thing's for certain though. It's not just the prostitutes that are getting taken.

"Lots of guys don't know what's happening. You're just happy to be out of Vietnam, to be anywhere. You'll pay anything anywhere. You'll pay anything. Most of the GI's don't mind spending their money here. (He pats his wallet.) Most of them bring about \$300. The broads, and the cabbies,-- they figure out how much money you

got so they can make sure you use it all before you go. But I don't have any hard feelings about them trying to steal my money. I don't blame them."

Art: "The prices are ridiculous though. \$1.25 for a beer at the Whiskey a Go Go. My girl takes me there because she says she

gets a dollar from the guy if she brings me in. But I went to Taiwan on R&R last time I had leave and I spent \$500 there. But I didn't have half as much fun as I am here."

Bob: "The taxi driver gets a cut too. One day I went into a store and bought some stuff and my driver was really mad. 'What'd y'all buy?' he said. 'I don't want them to cheat you.' He makes like he doesn't want me to get cheated but really he's ticked off because he wants me to go to his friend's place because he gets a cut."

A lot of GI's rent a cab for the five days they're in town on R&R. It's like being in an armored personnel carrier, rolling through the streets, peering out the window slits at the sights from behind a solid sheet of tin. It feels safe. But it's like that Daffy Duck cartoon where Daffy, chased by a bear, bolts inside the house, locks the door and swallows the key. When he turned around, the bear is inside with him.

Likewise, once inside this rolling, gear-grinding tin juggernaut the soldier discovers that the enemy is driving the damn thing. Then it's too late.



Inside the cabbie's smiling grip he's hugged to death then turned upside down and shaken till his pockets are empty and he'll be lucky to make it back to Saigon with his skivvies.

Some cabbies make Victor Charlie look like a neophyte in the art of ambushing a retreating column of GI's. On their way back to the safety of Vietnam, an R&R patrol was recently hit for 700 Baht (\$35 U.S.) to go from the Chao Phya to Don Muang airport. Massacres like that rank with Hamburger Hill and Custer's Last Stand.

The GI's come home to Thailand for the girls because girls enjoy a great reputation among many GI's in Vietnam.

In a society such as Thailand where women are taught from birth to be cheerful, polite and long-suffering towards their men, even the prostitutes are affected. Few of them are coarse, vulgar or vicious.

A few of the 48,000 U.S. soldiers and airmen stationed in Thailand permanently in towns such as Korat in the Northeast take a Thai girl for a "minor wife." The girl lives with the soldier and he supports her. The arrangement works out well for both parties and there is no social stigma attached to the system of minor wives. Many Thai men have minor wives themselves.

The problem comes if the girl has a baby and the GI does not take the responsibility for supporting the child when he leaves for the States.

In Bangkok recently however there has been a noticeable change of atmosphere. The boom is ending and lean times are ahead. Several thousand soldiers are being pulled out this year from Thailand and Nixon is winding down the war in Vietnam. Fewer soldiers are arriving in Bangkok to fill the massage parlors, the hotels, the jewelry shops. Prices are skyrocketing and after five years of GI-call girl relations some of the magic has worn off.

Still, Bangkok has everything a G.I. could ask for: beautiful girls, good food, a wide variety of night clubs and discotheques with the latest rock and roll, nearby beaches and great beer.

The local merchants, hotel-keepers, cabbies, and even the Thai government will be sad to see the American GI go home. Last year R&R expenditures accounted for a third of Thailand's tourist earnings and Thailand needs those dollars to help bridge a growing balance of trade deficit with the U.S. R&R troops annually spend around U.S.\$22 million in Thailand.

As for little Annie, she's go-

ing to be an orphan when her GI daddy goes home.

Every day on the radio now you can hear a popular Thai song which goes:

"Dear John, you can forget the kisses and embraces but my figure is spoiled because you en-

joyed me. You've forgotten me and returned to Illinois, but I'm so sorry that I've gotten typhoid and have to use Tiger Oil so I don't die.

"So much sadder than sad movies, oh, John you make me cry."

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