



Expat Counsel

By James Finch and Nilobon Tangprasit

CRIMINAL LAW IN THAILAND

Part LVIII: Beware of scams V — luring in the lonely



ILLUSTRATION: NATTAYA SRISAWANG

When we opened up in Hua Hin, we were spending a lot of time in a friend's estate agent office, mainly to get to know people. A man, we'll call him M, came in and, presumably mistaking it for a law firm, asked one of the ladies for a lawyer.

We can't divulge his details, but this is his story.

M is a US citizen, who looked then to be in his late seventies. He'd been retired, living in his condo in the American Northwest when an attractive Thai woman in her forties came into his life.

Married to a neighbour, who worked, she was soon spending most of her time in M's condo.

You can probably guess how this turned out. But when M got this far, he burst into tears — after knowing us for no more than 10 minutes.

"I'm a fool," he said. "And you're the first person to listen."

Her marriage was already bad and M was so, so lonely. Our pain makes us believe.

She divorced her husband.

M had some savings from a lifetime of middle-class work. So he left with her for Thailand. He spent most of his savings on a house. He told us it was put in her name because of the laws in Thailand. Of course, we knew that a house can be put in the name of a foreigner; it's the land that can't. But we also knew that it was too late to lecture M about what could have been.

A man she introduced as her brother showed up and moved into the master bedroom with her. M was sent upstairs. They all lived on the funds M withdrew from the ATM.

Soon M wasn't let out of the house alone, and the "brother" took him to the ATM for money. During the day, though, they sometimes went out and it was then that he visited us.

After a couple of visits, M told us the woman was suddenly insisting on knowing the PIN number for his ATM card and saying that if he didn't give it to her, the brother would cause "trouble".

We asked M the location of his bank cards. He patted his jacket.

"Passport's in there, too," he said.

"It's time to go," we said.

He knew what to do, but needed to hear it from someone else.

He walked out of our office, caught a taxi to Bangkok and boarded a plane for home.

Time went by. Four, maybe six months after his exit, an email popped up on our screen — from M. He said he was poorer, but happy. He fished nearly every day and played cards twice a week.

For us, M has receded with the sands of time. But sometimes, as we do about so many others, we think about him, and imagine him fishing somewhere in Montana. ■

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