

TARTMUS

ARMASTUSE,
ÕITSENNU,
HURMA JA
KADVU
OOD

Stories of Love/Bloom,
Lust and Loss



17.10.2020–31.01.2021

K, R- P 11- 18 / N 11-21
Wed., Fri-Sun 11-18 / Thu 11-21

Raekoja plats 18, Tartu

ALAN PROOSA „ARMASTUSE, ŶITSENGU, HURMA JA KADUVIKU LOOD“

Näitus „Armastuse, õitsengu, hurma ja kaduviku lood“ Tartu Kunstimuuseumis koondab fotokunstnik Alan Proosa Kagu-Aasias jäädvustatud materjali. Viimase viie aasta jooksul peamiselt Tais elatud ja kogetud aja vältel on Proosa huvikeskmes olnud Tai arvukad transsoolised naised –*kathoei*d. Kogukonda kuulumise soov on üldinimlik ja nii ei ole midagi ebatavalist asjaolus, et end samuti transsoolisena identifitseeriv Proosa puhkes Taisse sattudes õide, leides nii iseenda kui ka armastuse.

Proosat kütkestab kunstnikuna üle kõige portree. Nii teisi kui ka ennast pildistades näib ta pilk liikuvat korraga kahel teljel: ühelt poolt tingimusteta imetlus portreteeritava vastu ja teisalt kihk käsitleda kaamerat kui peeglit. Inimesed Proosa fotodel on väljapeetud poosides ja eneseteadliku kaamerasse pööratud pilguga. Ent Proosa ise ei jääd kõrvalseisvaks portretistiksi ega dokumentalistiks.

Näitusel koondatud inimeste ja suhete kaudu räägib ta ka enese lugu. Abstraktse eksootilise ilu asemel, mida kehastab keegi eemalseisev, näeb Proosa pildistatavaid ideaalina, mille poole püüelda, millega end identifitseerida.

Proosa fotode keskne tunnus – glamuur – on sealjuures mõnevõrra vastuoluline. Transsoolistel on Kagu-Aasia kultuuris pikk ajalugu, kuid nad ei tavatsenud olla nii silmapaistvad, sest ajalooliselt meeste ja naiste röivistus sugu ei röhutanud. Sugu eristava moe töid Taisse kolonistid, kes ei olnud nõus pidama tsiviliseerituks ühiskonda, kus mehel ja naisel ei ole võimalik vahet teha. Nii võib öelda, et äraspidisel kombel ei jäanud *kathoei*'del muud üle kui hakata naisena riietuma. Ka Proosa pilk, mis nende glamuursust imetleb, on seeläbi paratamatult kolonialistiklik. Kuid teisalt on selles pilgus ka traagika, mida Proosa iseloomustab kui austust ja imetlust *kathoei*-kultuuri vastu, kuid mis samas räägib ta enese siirast kurvastusest, et tema, sündinud valge mehena, *farang'ina*, iial selle kultuuri pärisosaks ei saa.

Alan Proosa on õppinud Tartu Ülikoolis semiootikat ja Tartu Kõrgemas Kunstikoolis fotograafiat. On vabakutselise moefotograafina pildistanud näiteks Tartu disaineri Triinu Pungitsa ja LAIVI kollektioone. Vahest veelgi tuntum on Proosa teatrilavastuste fotograafina. Oluline osa tema loomingus kuulub muusikale, ta on kuulunud bändidesse Ruff Enuff, Triinu Gonzales, Nyrok City, Soda Effect, Maikameikers. Proosa on töötanud õppejõuna Tartu Kõrgemas Kunstikoolis ja Eesti Kunstiakadeemias.

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ADEL

Jalutan taas kord öös ning istun ühes Jakarta pargis mõnede prostituutide ja öölendite kõrvale. Nende seas on nii geisid, trans- kui cis-soolisi naisi. Adel on veidi purjakil ja mind uesti nähes pea eufooriliselt õnnelik. Viiteist minuti pärast teen temast mõned fotod. Tean, et tal pole midagi selle vastu, kuid juurdlen peas ikka veel selle üle, kuidas teda oma kaamera ette paluda. Keeldun pakutud viskist. Alkohol mulle enam ei meeldi. Tohutu rott jookseb otse mu jalge eest läbi. Tunnen ennast pargis istujate seltskonnas hästi,

kuid leian end mõtisklemast, kuidas kipun ikka ja jäalle just prostituudi-laadsetesse armuma. Ja kuidas kõik töenäoliselt õnnetult ja kurvalt lõppeb. Taas kord. Samas on prostitutsiooni-diskursus mu jaoks jätkuvalt huvitav. Selle inimlikkus. Minu jaoks on see nii tõeline, ehe. Melanhoolia, iha, ajutised õnnevälgatused. Kaotus. Ausus ja valed. Mu sõbranna Adel küsib, kunas ma Jakartasse tagasi tulen. Ma pole kindel, kuid usun, et vähemalt aasta läheb küll. Ta vaatab mulle silma sisse ja sõnab: „Sinu tagasitulekut jäädakse ootama. Sul on siin nüüd oma pere.”

LYDA

Ta oli koos oma noorema õega kolinud maalt Kambodža pealinna Phnom Penhi. Ta töötas eskort-tüdruku ja seksitöötajana ning oli valves mõnes tüdrukute baaris, kuhu ta mind sisse smugeldas, ilma et oleksin pidanud päaset lunastama egabaaritudrukutele jooke ostma. Ta tutvustas mulle linna ning me veetsime nende kahe nädala jooksul, mis ma Phnom Penhis olin, koos veidi aega. Ta oli suhteliselt lihtne ja siiras tüdruk. Hea hing. Õpetas mulle Kambodža moodi tantsimist.

Lydal oli palju kallimaid, erinevaid farang'e, kes Phnom Penhis elasid või seda turistina külastasid. Ühel päeval kutsus ta mind endale külla. Ta lamas poolpaljalt põrandal, lahistas nutta ning rääkis, kui raske on tal ennast ja oma väkest õde ära elatada, ots-otsaga kokku tulla. Ta tuju kõikus masendusest helgematesse hetkedesse ja tagasi. Seejärel saabus apaatia. Lootusetus. Kuulasin tema lugusid ja tahtsin ta tuju parandada, kuid see polnud lihtne.

Ta oli minuga täiesti aus. Või vähemalt nõnda see tundus. Kui ma Kambodžast lahkusin, jäime Facebookis suhtlema. Ükskord saatis ta mulle YouTube'i lingi Nirvana looga „I Hate Myself and I Want to Die”. Olin üllatunud, et ta teab ja kuulab Nirvana muusikat. Mul oli hea meel, et jagame seda sümpaatiat, et meil on see ühisosa. Võib-olla paar nädalat või kuu hiljem avastasin, et inimesed postitavad ta seinale R.I.P.-teateid. Ta oli teinud enesetapu, ennast üles poonud. Keegi oli tema surmast kirjutatud uudise Facebooki seinale postitanud. Seal oli mitu pilti tema pikseldatud näoga koolnukangest kehast. Tal oli seljas ilus hele suvekleit. Kohaliku ajalehe artikkel teatas, et ta oli peale pikka võtlust depressiooniga endalt elu võtnud. Tekstis kutsuti teda gei-meheks, mitte trans-naiseks. Soovin, et oleksin suutnud teda aidata, ta enesetapu ära hoida.

Metro Manila on huvitav koht. Vormirõivais relvastatud mehed seisavad poodide ja muude asutuste ees. Paljudes piirkondades pole tänavavalgustust, nii et päikeseloojangule järgneb pimedus. Siin-seal nuusutavad narkarid liimi. Ummikutes top-pavad ürgavate sireenidega tuletörjemasinad, mis proovivad päaseda agulite kahjutulesid kustutama. Sinu külge klammerduvad tänavalapsed, kes agressiivselt raha pommivad. Rikkust ja kõrgtehnoloogiat täis piirkonnad kõrvuti lootusetult armetute-vaeste getodega. Miljonite vanade automootorite saaste segunemas troopilise kuumuse ja niiskusega. Mõnel surnuaijal elab hauakabelites tuhandeid inimesi. Tohutul katoliiklikul üritusel, kus ühte linnakeskusse on koondunud massiliselt rahvast, läheneb mulle keskealine kohalik mees, osutab mu kaamerale ja küsib, kas olen peast segi, kas olen siin esimest korda, „sest siin on palju halbu ja ohtlike inimesi“ ja mind võidakse väga lihtsalt rõövida. Manila on põnev, erutav, ka kiratsev, ahvatlev ja inspireeriv, nii väga huvitav.

Leian ta Tinderis või Badoos. Olen kohtumisest väga erutatud. Ta on kindlasti üks ilusamaid naisi või üldse inimesi, keda olen eales kohanud. KC töötab telesarjade ja -saadete stilisti assistendi ning modellina. Teadsin tema sotsiaalmeedia profiili nähes kohe, et ta võiks olla ja peaks olema rahvus-vaheline supermodell, töeline Filipiine esindav juveel.

Arvan, et tundsin esimesest pilgust armastust ja täielikku imetlust. Samas mõistsin alateadlikult, et ta on minu jaoks kättesaamatu. Teadsin seda kusagil kuklas, kuid proovisin eirata. Ta on suhteliselt tagashoidlik, räägib vaikse häältega, naeratab natuke, on uje. Peale kohvikus istumist ja öhtust jalutuskäiku, vesteldes erinevatest asjadest ja oma eludest, küsin, kas võin temast paar pilti teha. Ta naeratab ja pärib: „Mis! Nüüd!? Ma pole valmis.“ Jah, miks mitte, vastan. Teen vaid paar kaadrit, kaamerat on raske paigal hoida. Ta näol on lihtne, aus ja siiras naeratus, ujeduse ja kerge edevuse armas kombinatsioon.

Hiljem kuulen vaiksetel hetkedel takso tagaistmel tema hingamist. Tunnen, justkui

salvestaksin selle enda mällu. Ta käsib mul autoukse lukustada ning kui me punase foori taga peatumine, lendab tänavalaste kamp autole peale, tagudes ja kopsides aknaid ning proovides uksi avada.

Sõidame edasi ja ta küsib, miks mulle trans-tüdrukud meeldivad? Vastata pole lihtne, kuid ütlen talle, et selles, kui poiss muutub ilusaks tüdrukuks, on minu jaoks midagi imelist ja maagilist. See on niivõrd eriline, niivõrd huvitav ja ahvatlev. Arenev ning sotsiaalselt õpitud ja hangitud naiselikkus, selle eriline sarmikus. Selles on midagi jumalikku. Samuti on mind alati veedelnud, huvitanud ja ligi tömmanud androgüünsus. Toona ma ei lisanud juurde, et olen alati olnud trans-tüdrukutesse kiindunud ja neist sisse võetud, kuid samas olen ka alati soovinud olla üks nende hulgast.

Kohtan teda uesti peale kahenädalast reisi Palawani provintsi Coroni saarele. Me kohtume öösel peale tema pikka tööpäeva. Ta on natuke väsinud, kuid ma lihtsalt pean teda veel korra nägema, enne kui lendan varahommikul tagasi Bangkokki.

Suudlen vaid korraks ta huuli ning siis võtame eraldi taksod ja jätame jumalaga. Mõne nädala pärast küsib ta, kas saaksin teda aidata iPhone 6 ostmisel. Ühel teisel korral, kui ta ajutiselt töö kaotab, küsib ta, kas saaksin teda rahaga välja aidata. Mäletan, et saatsin talle tookord paarsada eurot, kuigi see aeg oli ka minu jaoks rahaliselt suhteliselt kitsas. Ta vastas: „Seda pole just palju...“

See tsipa külm ja natuke inetu reaktsioon ei takista mind veel kuude kaupa temale mötlemast ning temast unistamast. Olin kohanud maailma kõige kau nimat olendit. Jumalust. Imet. Ülimat ilu. Umbes poolteist aastat hiljem, kui ma teist korda Filipiine külastasin, sõime koos ühes Manila restoranis õhtust. Oleme ka sotsiaalmeedias edasi sõbrad ja suhtleme mõnikord. Mul on hea meel, et tal hästi läheb, et tal on pojssõbraks nägus lääne modell, et ta on loodetavasti leidnud tõelise armastuse ega pea enam aegajalt eskorditööd tegema. Kuid samas, mis see minu asi on? Tean, et ei unusta teda iialgi. Ja tunnen ennast õnneliku ja privileegeerituna, et sain teda kohata, et me tunneme teineteist.

SANDRA

Sandra oli maailma näinud. Kõrgema klassi eksootiline iludus.

Huvitav ja seiklusrikas elu, kerge raha.

Ihaldatud, hellitatud, kinnimakstud, ära kasutatud, armastatud. Kõik need erinevad kultuurid ja inimesed, kõik need kogemused ja elutarkused..

Arvan, et märkasin teda ammu enne töelist tutvumist mingis transseksuaalses seksvideos. Ta oli imelisus ning tema ilu ja seksapiil olid kuidagi üleloomulikud, koguni ebamaised.

Tal oli ammune positsiooniga armuke Moskvas. Austajaid üle terve planeedi. Mulle meeldis ta lugusid kuulata. Ta armastas Jaapanit ja eelkõige Norrat – seda rikast riiki, kus on piiramatus koguses imemaitsvat lõhekala.

Nii magus ja unustamatu: kinos pistab ta mulle popcorni suhu. Ta pikk maniküür muudab kogu aktsiooni tsipa kohmakaks. Mõned popcorniraasud kuvavad põrandale ja peagi me suudleme.

Kohtasin Sandrat vaid kolm korda. Mulle meeldis, kui aus ta minuga oli: kiiresti tekkis vastastikune austus, mõistmine, sümpaatia ja isegi usaldus. Ta kutsus mind oma väikesesse Pattaya korterisse külla. Tal oli seal ka väike nunnu koer. Suutsin isegi ette kujutada, kuidas ma sinna tema juurde jääen, olgu sõbra või armukese na. Mul polnooks isegi probleemi sellega, et ta teenib elatist eskort-tüdrukuna. Möista ja lepi. Rääkisin talle oma soolisest voolavusest ja ta lausus, et tal pole selle vastu midagi.

Kui ma kolmandat korda peale umbes kaheksa-üheksa kuulist pausi teda uuesti nägin, olid ta juuksed muutunud õhemaks. Ta oli kaalus kaotanud, näis nõrk ja mitte eriti hea tervise juures. Suitsetamisest oli ta loobunud. Ta nahk polnud enam nii täiuslik, puhas ja sile nagu enne. Märgates tema sagedast vaikset köha, muutusin kurvaks ja murelikuks. Pildistasin teda Siam Square'i pingil istudes veel korra, vaid paar kaadrit. Olen austav ja hooliv. Süda taob pisut kiiremini, kaamerat hoidvad käed välisevad natuke. Seekord ei vaata ta objektiivi, ta silmad on õrnalt ja mahedalt kõrvale pööratud. Ma ei julge ega isegi

taha paluda, et ta kaamerasse vaataks, olen peaaegu hirmul. Kardan teda kaotada, olen liialt sentimentaalne, et neisse nõtket kurbust täis silmadesse vaadata.

Paar nädalat hiljem sain temalt sõnumi: ta tervis pole kiita ja ta on Pattayas haiglas. Minu tagasilennuni Eestisse oli jäänud vaid nädal. Tahtsin teda haiglas külastada. Ta kätt hoida, pehmeid juukseid silitada, teda naerma ajada. Kahjuks ei saanud ma asju niimoodi organiseeritud, kuigi ta oli kõigest 200 kilomeetri kaugusel.

Mõni nädal hiljem, kui olen tagasi Eestis ja sõidan parajasti vanemate autoga Rakverest Tallinna, kus Art Weeki raames on Vabaduse väljakul näitusel ka mõned minu fotod, avan telefonis Facebooki ning märkan järsku, kuidas paljud Sandra sõbrad ta seinale hüvastijätusõnumeid postitavad. Möistan, et ei näe teda enam kunagi. Jääen vaikseks, kaotan suhtlemisvõime, justkui kivinen, paar pisarat aeglaselt üle mu põskede veeremas, sel päikesepaistisel päeval teel Tallinna.

Aky profili leidsin samuti ühest kohtinguärist. Ta näis teistest niivõrd erinev. Esmalt ja üle kõige tundsin, et tahan temast portree pildistada. Mu eesmärk ei olnud tingimata intiimse või seksuaalse kontaktini jõudmine. Kuid me jäime suhtlema ning tekkis vastastikune sümpaatia. Oleme koos palju õnnelikke aegu läbi elanud. Kuid oleme samas ka palju tülitsevad, on olnud draamasid ja negatiivsust. Meie meebleedid on suhteliselt erinevad. Mõnikord olen tundnud, et meil polegi eriti palju ühist.

Meie tutvumise ajal töötas ta ühes peenes Bangkoki ilukliinikus administraatori ja õena. Hiljem sai temast mõneks ajaks ka juhataja. Tema inglise keel oli hea ja ta oli kuidagi palju nutikam kui enamik ta sõpru. Ta oli jõuline ja terav, kuid samas siiski ka lihtne. Olen temas alati mingisugust toorest jõudu tunnetanud ning temas oli midagi pungilikku, see energia ja veidi pungilik välimuski – see on mind alati ligi tõmmانud. Ta küll loomulikult ei teadnud midagi punk-rockist ega

vastavast subkultuurist. Talle meeldib hiphop. Kuid kõige rohkem meeldis mulle alati see, kui ta valis kuulamiseks ja nautimiseks Tai muusikat. Ta ema oli teinud õige otsuse, kui sundis teda õenduskooli mine-ma mitte õpinguid katkestama, nagu oli teinud enamik tema maapiirkondadest pärit sõpru. Ajapikku armusin temasse üha enam. Oleme teineteisele päris mitu korda haigelt teinud. Käitunud rumalalt ja valesti. Kuid ma tunnen ikka veel, et ta on minu elu armastus. Samas on meie suhegi ajapikku muutunud. Ta on pidanud palju vaeva nägema, et leppida minuga sellisena, nagu olen. Paljud mu Tai *kathoey*'dest sõbrad on mind veennud, et 99% *ladyboy*'dest ei pea teisi *ladyboy*'sid ahvatlevaks. Samuti ei peeta Tai ühiskonnas normaalseks, sündsaks ega isegi aktsepteeritavaks, kui üks *kathoey* on suhtes teisega, on teise *kathoey* partner. Sest „*kathoey* tahab töelist meest”. Mõned Tai transsoolised elavad siiski koos *tom*'ide ehk pojlike naistega ning seda ei peeta tabuks, vaid see on aktsepteeritud, loogiline. Mulle on see alati meeldiv olnud, kui mõni Tai *tomboy* mulle silma teeb või minuga natuke flirdib.

Aky on pärit maalt, Kirde-Taist Surini provintsist. Koolis oli ta päris probleemne, kuid tark laps. Mõnikord sattus ta kaklustesse. Sellest on ta kehal praeguseni üksikud armid. Mäletan šokki, mis mind valdas, kui temast esimest korda poisina pilte nägin. Mu tunded olid ses suhtes segased. See kutt polnud minu jaoks absoluutselt veetlev, kuid samas meeldis mulle väga tolle metsiku kathoey välimus, tema sarmikus, seksapiil ja eriline ilu. Kui ta valiti tööle Bangkoki väga prestiižsesse ilukliinikusse, sai ta töötajana ülihea hinnaga feministeरीvaid lõikusi ja muid protseduure. Tema unistuseks olid ka rinnaimplantaadid, kuigi ma ise pole neist tema juures kunagi puudust tundnud. Arvasin, et need pole nii olulised, kuid samas, mida minu arvamus siin loeb. Kui soovid, lase teha.

Kui läksime koos mõnda restorani või ööklubisse, tulid paljud inimesed, nende hulgas ka mõned kohalikud kuulsused, teda kui tuttavat tervitama. Teda lubati isegi mõnedesse ööklubidesse, kuhu ladyboy'del tavalliselt asja polnud, sest mõnedki neist on ladyboy'de

maine halva käitumise või isegi kuritegudega ära rikkunud.

Tahtsin, et ta mulle tai keelt õpetaks, kuid ta kannatus katkes väga kiirelt, ja kuigi mul on muidu hea keelevaist, on tai keel töeliselt raske. Hakkasin seda ajapikku siiski veidike rääkima. Mõnus on märgata, kuidas kohalikud sind üha enam aktsepteerima ja austama hakkavad, kui sa nendega pisitasa nende keeles suhtlema asud. Seeläbi astud ka esmapilgul ilmselgest turistikategooriast ajapikku eemale. Olen alati üritanud seda turisti-diskursust võimalikult vältida. Ma tahan töelist, autentset. Ei tahaks ealeski elevandiga sõita ega Full Moon Party'le minna.

Aky polnud kunagi reisinud üheski riigis peale Tai. Käisime koos Kambodžas, Vietnamis ja Myanmaris. Korra tundsin ennast ärritununa, sest rannarestorani kelner ütles talle „härra”. Aky ei teinud teist nägugi ja pidas seda ebaoluliseks. Myanmaris *kathoey*-skeenet eriti ei ole. Ega ka Vietnamis, kuigi seal suuremates linnades *ladyboy*'sid leidub. Ka Kambodžas kolivad transsoolised sageli suurematesse linnadesse nagu

Phnom Penh, Siem Réab ja Sihanoukville. Kathoey-kultuuri ulatust ja kathoy'de hulka arvestades on Tai endiselt esikohal. Aky on pärit Kambodža ja Laose piiri lähedalt, kus räägitakse khmeeri ja tai keele segu. Kambodža maapiirkondades aitas see meid mõnikord suhtlusprobleemide korral hädast välja.

Ta on ka parim kokk, keda kohanud olen. Nojah, ma töesti armastan Tai toitu ning olen isegi õppinud tõeliselt vürtsikaid toite sööma, kuigi „Tai vürtsikas“ on minu jaoks siiski jätkuvalt liast. Sel aastal ei saanud me koroonapiirangute ajal eriti reisida ega isegi klubides tantsimas käia. Selle asemel olime peamiselt kodus ning sõime sageli liigagi palju ning meil polnud eriti võimalusi lisakilodest vabaneda. Aky vanematekodu külastades hakkasin ühel hetkel ta emalt paluma, et ta ei kuhjaks mu taldrikule riisimägesid, tahtsin selle mõttetu ülesöömise lõpetada. Tailastele meeldib rikkalikult süua ja paljudele meeldib ka napsutada. Ma lõpetasin alkoholi tarbimise natuke üle pooleteise aasta tagasi. Mõned tailased ei tahtnud minu mittejoomist mõista või seda

aktsepteerida.. Mulle ei meeldi, kui Aky ennast purju joob, sest sageli kaasnevad sellega järjekordsed rumalad draamat ja tülitsemine. Mõnikord oli see nagu lugu Dr. Jekyllist ja Mr. Hyde'ist.

Aastate jooksul on paljud mu lähedased sõbrad minutl uurinud, miks ma selles keerulises suhtes jätkan. Ja tegelikult oleme mölemad aeg-ajalt tundnud ja mõistnud, et peaksime lõpu tegema, olema ehk lihtsalt sõbrad, minema eri teid. Kuid meie suhe näib siiski tugev: kui oleme ka paaril korral otsustanud teineteisest vabane da, oleme hiljem ikkagi uuesti kokku saanud. Tahan, et ta naerataks, kuigi temasugused sitked tüdrukud seda eriti sageli ei tee.

Ühel päeval leidsin ta meie voodil valjult ja peaaegu hüsteeriliselt nutmast. Proovisin teda rahustada ning uurisin selle kurbuse ja meeletehte põhjuseid. Ta meenutas mulle, et eelmisel päeval olin öelnud, et tunnen, justkui poleks ma ikka veel elus oma kohta leidnud, ning et ma aeg-ajalt arvan ja arvasin ka tookord, et olen kaotanud usu oma

loomingusse, nii fotograafiasse kui muusikasse.

Vahel ta analüüsib või kritiseerib mu käitumist ning mingil põhjusel oli minu jaoks eriti armas, kui ta tänavu aprillis mulle äkitselt teatas: „Mõnikord ma ei mõista, kes sa oled. Oled sa *ladyboy* või *tomboy*... (või ikka veel poiss)?“ Tunnen, et mu sugu on töepoolest komplitseeritud. Ja aeg-ajalt on mul kategooriatest ja siltidest niivõrd kõrini, et soovin olla lihtsalt inimene.

Tahan teda Eestisse külla kutsuda. Loodan, et järgmisel aastal saab see kõigi raskuste kiuste teoks, kuigi Tai *kathoey'* on raske Schengeni viisat saada ning maailma räxiv koroonaviirus ei aita just kaasa. Ta isa tunnistas, et teda teeb see reis natuke murelikuks, sest ta on kuulnud, et paljudes lääne riikides transsoolisi diskrimineeritakse ning neile saab osaks ülbe ja ebaviisakas käitumine. Ma ei laseks temaga mitte kunagi midagi sellist juhtuda.

Metamfetamiini populaarsus ja tarbimine omab paljudes Kagu-Aasia riikides lausa epideemilisi mõõtmeid. Seda pruugivad laialdaselt erineva sotsiaalse tausta ja staatusega isikud ning paljude prostituutide, tuk-tuk'i- ja taksojuhtide seas on see igapäevane asi. Tösisemad kasutajad püsivad mõnikord terve nädala ärkvel ning magavad seejärel järgmise otsa. Jää liiga sage või liiga suures koguses manustamine on töeliselt väsitav ja destruktivne. Aky oli suhteliselt kindlameelselt kõikide narkootikumide vastane. Mõnikord ta vihastus või muutus väga murelikuks selle peale, et lähen mingile under-ground muusikaüritusele ning neelan tabletti või pool ecstasy't või teen triibu kokat. Mõnede illegaalsete aineteega taskus või kehas politseile vahele jäätmine võib su elu Tais ära rikkuda. Ametliku juurdluse vältimiseks peab farang ehk lääne kodanik maksma politseile 1000–2000 eurot sulas. Kui vahelenjääl sellist raha ei ole, võib tema tulevik olla töeliselt tume ning teda võib ees oodata vangistus mõnes kurikuulsas Tai vanglas.

Olime lahku läinud. Aky pööras ilukliinikus töötamisele selja ning liitus paljude oma kathoe'ydest sõbrannadega, kes töötasid Pattayas esko-rt-tüdrukute, prostituutide ja baaridaamidena. Ma põlgan Pattayat. See kubiseb nilbetest ja nõmedatest lääne seksuri-istidest, sisserändanutest ja alkohoolikutest. See on lol-lidemaa. Minu jaoks on sealne õhustik jälk, ebaintelligentne, ebameeldiv ja labane. Aky jää Pattayasse pea aastaks. Hiljem ütles ta mulle, et õnnek polnud tal ühte halba klienti. Teda hinnati ja ta oli populaarne. Samuti oli ta sattunud sõltu-vusse kristallilise metamfetamiini ehk jää suitsetamisest. Selle aja jooksul tegime vaid üksikuid videokõnesid, kuid hoidsime siiski ühendust ning saatsime teineteisele kord või kaks kuus sõnumeid. Mulle oli väga vastumeelt, et ta oli hakanud jääd suitsetama. Ühel päeval tuli ta aga mulle Bangkoki külla. Ta polnud vähemalt öö või veel kauemgi maganud. Lasin tal magada, tõin talle süüa, hoolitsesin ta eest. Saime peale pikka lahusolekut väga hästi läbi. Ta puhkas, sõi korralikult, magas korralikult ning paar päeva pärast saabumist tellis grammi jääd. Nüüdseks omas

ta mitmete gangsterite ja narkodiilerite kontakte. Oli pisut kurb, aga ka huvitav vaadata, kui professionaalselt ta oma piipu kokku pani ja suitsetamiseks valmistus. Alguses ei lubanud ta mul ennast suitsetamas või ettevalmistusi tegemas pildistada. Vaatasin teda ning nägin, kui meisterlikult ta seda saatlikku suitsu valitses. Ma ei tahtnud suitsetada. Olin seda vaid korra varem proovinud ning see toimus tükki aega tagasi koos ühe Laose kathoe'ga kui peatusin paar päeva mingis Khaosan Roadi hostelis.

Lasin tal rahus suitsetada, sest ei soovinud teda kuidagi ärritada. Tookord peatus ta minu juures veidi üle kahe nädala. Juba paari päeva pärast lubas ta mul ennast suitsetamas pildistada. Ma ei puutunud seda saasta poolteist nädalat, kuid palusin tal siis lõpuks ikkagi seda natuke ka minuga jagada. Suitsetasime üks-kaks päeva ja ööd, olles peamiselt üleval, ning magasime aeg-ajalt 3–4 tundi. Seejärel lõpetasime ja jätsime paar päeva vahele. Magasime hästi, sõime hästi. Ta õpetas mulle, kuidas ohutumalt tarbida. Mida süüa ja juua, et kahjud organismile oleksid väiksemad,

miks regulaarselt duši all käia, hambaid pesta, jne. See on kummaline narkootikum. Seda tarbides pole sa tegelikult eufooriliselt pilves ning see ei muuda sind ka sotsiaalsemaks. Kuid sa tunned ennast hästi, eriti peale paari esimest mahvi. Mul oli väga loomingulisi hooge, mille jooksul ma tekste kirjutasin ja kitarri mängisin ja teisalt tõi see kaasa kummalise rahu. Sa ei tunne igavust, ükskõik mida sa ka ei teeks või millest ei mõtleks. Paarist esimesest korralikust piibupopsust piisas, et olla järjest peaaegu terve ööpäeva üleval. Aga ajapikku pilves olek lüheneb ning sageli hakkad sa alla tulles nägema maailma, ennast ja oma elu vaid tumedates värvides, depressiivse ja mõttetuna. Sellest õudsest tundest päased paari uue mahviga. Aky ei soovinud, et ma liiga palju suitsetaks, ning tutvustas mulle trikke, millega tarbimist piirata, et saaksin natuke magada. Magama jäämiseks tuleb juua kuuma teed või mõnd muud kuumemat jooki, süüa süsivesikuid ja midagi magusatki. Ka pudel õlut võib hästi mõjuda. Kui selle abiga ei tule tsipa sügavamat und, võib võtta paar tabletti unerohtu. Pärast paari minu juures veedetud nädalat läks ta tagasi

Pattayasse. Palusin tal natuke seda kraami mulle jäätta ning tarbisin selle paari esimese päeva ja öö jooksul ära. Peagi saatsin talle sõnumi ja palusin mulle veel üks gramm korralda-da. Ta teatas mulle naeratades: „Ei, Alan. Sa naudid seda juba liiga palju.” Tema vastus ja reaktsioon panid mind muigama ja ennast kõrvalt jälgima ning ma ei soovinudki juurde tellida.

Me hoiame sidet ja peagi lähen talle Pattayasse külla. Veedame koos mõnusalt aega, suitsetame. Ööd kuuluvad meile. Suitsetamise ajal pole päeval väljas käimine hea mõte. Palavusest võid südamerabanduse saada. Aky rahustab mind maha, kui ma aeg-ajalt öistel tänavatel liiga elevile lähen, olen äkitselt liiga sõbralik ning kipun oma katkendlikus ja piiratud tai keeles võõrastega suhtlema. Jah, mulle hakkas suitsetamine meeldima. Aga me ei luba sõltuvusel süveneda. Jäme ots on veel meie käes. Peagi kolib Aky Pattayast ära.

Järgmisel aastal Taisse naastes olin nii endale kui paarile heale sõbrale lubanud, et ei hakka uesti suitsetama. Aky tarbis ikka veel. Hoian ennast kaks kuud puhtana, kuni lubaduse

murran. Suitsetame kaks kuni neli päeva ja teeme siis nädala või kahese pausi. Arvan ikka veel, et suitsetasin jääd puhtalt seetõttu, et see Akyle meeldis, ja ma tahtsin temaga kaasa minna. Mõnikord helistas kirjakandja või keegi teine uksekella ning me olime toas vagusi ega julgenud paranoiaast halvatuina värvat avada. Ma ei taha seda rohkem suitsetada. Soovin, et temagi lõpetaks. Aeg-ajalt jätab ta kuu või isegi kaks vahene, kuid siis on mõnel sõbral see jälle käepärast või tundub lihtsalt hetk selline. Nii lihtne on seda uesti teha, kuigi tead varasemast, kuidas see tervist kahjustab, rahalisi probleeme tekib ja su sõbrad eemale peletab. See ei ole narkootikum, mida tahaksin tarbida. Mul on hea meel, et oman sellega kogemust, kuid kindlasti hoiaksin sellest parema meelega eemale.

ALAN PROOSA STORIES OF LOVE, BLOOM, LUST AND LOSS

The exhibition *Stories of Love, Bloom, Lust and Loss* at the Tartu Art Museum assembles Alan Proosa's photos taken in South-East Asia. Over the last five years Proosa has mostly lived in and experienced Thailand and has been interested in the numerous transsexual women of that country: the *kathoey*. The desire to be part of a community is common to all people and therefore it is not a surprise that Proosa, who also identifies as transsexual, blossomed in Thailand, finding both themselves and love.

Proosa as an artist is above all captivated by portraiture. Photographing himself and others, his gaze seems to focus on two aspects: unconditional adoration of the model and a desire to see the camera as a mirror. The people in Proosa's photos strike dignified poses and they look into the camera with self-awareness. But Proosa isn't merely an observing portraitist or documentarian.

Through the people and relationships included in the exhibition, Proosa tells their own story. Instead of abstract exotic beauty represented by a bystander, Proosa sees the models as ideals to strive for and to identify with.

However, the central characteristic of Proosa's photos – glamour – is also somewhat controversial. There is a long history of transgendered people in South-East Asian culture but they didn't use to be as prominent since historically men's and women's clothes didn't emphasise gender. Fashion that distinguished genders was brought to Thailand by colonialists who didn't consider a society civilised if it was not possible to distinguish between men and women. It can be said that in a roundabout way *kathoey* didn't have any other possibility than to start dressing as women. Proosa's gaze, which admires their glamour, is therefore inevitably colonial. On the other hand, this gaze also contains tragic undertones that Proosa describes as respect and admiration for the *kathoey* culture but that nonetheless reveals his sincere

sadness, since as a person who was born a white man, a *farang*, he can never be a real part of that culture.

Alan Proosa has studied semiotics in the University of Tartu and photography in the Tartu Art College. As a freelance fashion photographer, Proosa has photographed the collections of Tiinu Pungits and Laivi and is even better known for photographing theatre performances. A significant element in Proosa's creative output is played by music, as he is a member of the bands Ruff Enuff, Triinu Gonzales, Nyrok City, Soda Effect and Maikameikers. Proosa has taught in the Tartu Art College and in the Estonian Academy of Arts.

Curator: Indrek Grigor
Graphic design: Margus Tamm
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Educational and audience programmes: Kristel Sibul
The exhibition is supported by the Cultural Endowment of Estonia.

Thanks: Richard Adang, Tanel Asmer, Kaarel Isak, Margus Joonsalu, Heiti Kulmar, Liina-Mai Kaunissaare, Katrin Lõoke, Julia Polujanenkova, Peeter Talvistu, Terje Toomistu, Kristo Tamm ning Andres Toodo ja FP2 OÜ

ADEL

I walk the night again and sit down in a park in Jakarta, accompanied by some prostitutes and creatures of the night: some gay, some trans, some cisgender women. Adel is tipsy and almost euphorically happy to see me again. In fifteen minutes, I will make a few photo portraits of her. I know she does not have anything against it, but I am still figuring out in my head how to ask her to stand in front of my camera. I get an offer to drink some whiskey, but I turn it down. I don't like alcohol any more. A huge rat almost runs over my feet.

I feel good connecting to those local people I am sitting in the park with. Also I discover myself thinking about how I tend to fall in love with prostitute types, and how it all will most probably end up miserable and sad in the end. Again. Yet I seem to remain interested in the prostitute discourse. The human condition. I think it is so real. And true. The melancholy, the lust, the glimpses of temporary happiness. The loss. The honesty and lies. My friend Adel asks me when I will return to Jakarta. I am not sure, but I think not for a year at least. She looks into my eyes and tells me "We will be waiting for you. Now you have a family here."

LYDA

She and her younger sister had moved from the countryside to Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. She worked as an escort and a sex worker. She would sneak me into girly bars without the compulsory entrance fee, without having to buy drinks for the bar girls. She showed me the city and we hung out a few times during my two weeks in Phnom Penh. She was quite a simple girl, and a sincere one. A kind soul. She taught me a bit how to dance Cambodian style.

Lyda had many darlings, different farang living in Phnom Penh or tourists visiting there. One day she asked me to come by her place. She was half naked, lying on the floor, crying her eyes out, telling me about how difficult it was to take care of herself and her little sister, to make ends meet. She was going through serious mood swings. Then the apathy would follow. Losing hope. I listened to her stories and wanted to make her feel better, but it was difficult to do.

She was totally honest with me. At least it felt that way. After I left Cambodia, we remained in contact on Facebook. At one point she sent me a YouTube link for Nirvana's "I Hate Myself and I Want to Die". I was surprised that she knew and appreciated the music of Nirvana. I felt good about having that in common with her. Some time later, maybe a month or a bit more, I discovered people posting R.I.P. messages on her time wall. She had committed suicide, hanging herself. Somebody had posted the article about her death on her time wall on Facebook. It featured several photos of her stiff dead body, with her face pixellated. She was dressed in a beautiful light summer dress. The local article said that she had taken her own life, after having battled with depression for a long time. In that text they called her a gay man, not a trans woman. I wish I could have helped her, not let her commit suicide.

KC

Metro Manila is such an interesting place. Uniformed gunmen in front of the shops and different institutions. No street lights in many areas of the city, so darkness after sunset. Some junkies sniffing glue. Fire brigade vehicles stuck in traffic, with their sirens on, trying to get to fires in the slums. Street kids hanging all over you, aggressively rapping about how you have to give them money. The wealthy and hi-tech city districts next to the ghettos of the miserable and hopelessly poor. The tropical heat and humidity mixed with the pollution from millions of old machine engines. At some graveyards there are thousands of people living inside cemetery crypts. At a massive Catholic event and a gathering of people in one of the centres of the city, I get approached by a local middle-aged man; he points at my camera and asks me if am crazy, if I am there for the first time "because there are many bad and dangerous people here", and I could very easily get robbed. Manila is so exciting, so thrilling, miserable too,

attractive and inspiring, so very interesting.

We match up on Tinder or Badoo. I'm so excited to meet her. She is definitely one of the most beautiful human beings that I have ever met. KC works as an assistant stylist for some television productions. She also models. I knew it right away, having seen her profile on social media, that she could and should be an international top model, a true gem representing the Philippines.

I think I feel love and total admiration from the very first moment that I see her. At the same time, I kind of realise that she is out of my league; somewhere in the back of my mind I know, but I want to ignore it. She is quite modest, speaks in a soft voice, smiles a bit, is shy. After sitting at some cafe and taking an evening walk, talking about different things and our lives, I ask her if I can take a few pictures of her. She smiles and says "what, now!? I'm not ready." Yes, why not, I tell her. I shoot a few frames only, but it's difficult to hold the camera still. There's a simple, honest, sincere smile on her face, that

sweet combination of shyness and vanity.

Later in the back seat of a taxi, I can hear her breathing when it's quiet. I feel like I'm recording it in my memory. She tells me to lock the door: stopping at the next red light, a gang of street kids almost fly against the car, banging strongly on the windows, and trying to open the car door.

We drive on, and she asks me why I am attracted to trans girls. It's difficult to answer, but I tell her that I seem to find something extraordinary and magical in a boy changing into a beautiful girl. I find it so special. I seem to be very interested in and attracted to that. The developed and also socially learned and acquired femininity, that special charm. It is something divine. Also I have always been interested in androgyny, drawn to it. I did not add this to my answer to her then: "I have always felt attracted to trans girls a lot, but I have also wanted to be one myself."

I meet her again after having travelled and stayed two weeks at the Palawan island of Coron. We meet at night, after her long

working day. She is a bit tired, but I just wanted to see her once again, before flying back to Bangkok in the early morning. I kiss her lips, just once, before we take separate taxis and say goodbye. Maybe a few weeks later, she asked me if I could help her buy an iPhone 6. Also, at one point, she had temporarily lost her job and asked me if I could help her with some financial support. I recall sending her a few hundred euros then, even though it was quite a difficult time financially for myself as well. She reacted: "well, that's not much..."

Getting that somewhat cold and kind of nasty reaction didn't stop me from thinking about her, or dreaming of her for many, many months to come. Because I had met the most beautiful human being in the world. A godly one. A miracle. The ultimate beauty. Approximately a year and a half later I would meet her again for a dinner date at some restaurant in Makati, when I was visiting the Philippines for the second time. We are still in contact on social media, communicating sometimes. And I am happy that she is doing well, with a handsome Westerner

model as her boyfriend, finding true love, hopefully, and not having to go on those escort dates any more. But then again, who am I to say? I know I'll never, ever forget her. And I feel lucky and privileged having met her and that we know each other.

SANDRA

Sandra had travelled the world. High class, exotic beauty. Interesting and adventurous life, easy money.

To be desired, wanted, to be spoiled, to be treated well, to be used, to be worshipped and loved.

All of those different cultures and people. Experiences and the wisdom gained.

I think I had noticed her in some transgender adult sex videos long before I actually got to know her. She was gorgeous, possessing that supernatural, even a bit distorted beauty, and lots of sex appeal.

She had a very special and long time lover in Moscow. Admirers all over the world.

I enjoyed listening to her stories. She liked Japan and especially Norway, a wealthy country with plenty of delicious salmon.

So sweetly and unforgettably, at a cinema she would put some popcorn into my mouth, her long nails making the process a bit clumsy. A few bits of

popcorn falling on the floor and soon we kiss.

I met Sandra only three times. I liked how she was so sincere with me, and that quickly developed into mutual respect, understanding, sympathy and even trust. She invited me to visit and stay with her at her small, simple apartment in Pattaya. There she had a small cute dog. I could imagine myself staying there with her as friends or as lovers. I wouldn't even have any problem or issues about her making her income by escorting. I would understand and accept. I also let her know about my gender fluidity and she told me that she had no problem with that.

The third time I met her, after almost eight or nine months of not having seen each other, her hair had gotten thinner and weaker. She had lost weight. She seemed weak and not in very good health. She had given up smoking cigarettes. Her skin was not perfect, clear and smooth like before. It made me sad and worried to notice her frequent quiet coughing. I photographed her once more, just a few frames, sitting on

a bench at Siam Square. I was full of respect and care for her. My heart beat a bit faster, hands shaking a bit while holding the camera. She would not look into the lens this time; subtly and softly her eyes looked away. And I didn't dare or actually even want to ask her to look into the camera; it was almost like being afraid of it, being afraid of losing her, being too sentimental to look into the eyes of that graceful sadness.

A few weeks later I got a message from her: she was not doing well, staying in a hospital in Pattaya. I had just a week until my return flight to Estonia. I wanted to go visit her at the hospital, to hold her hand, softly touch her hair and make her smile. But unfortunately I could not make that happen, although she was just some 200 km away.

Some weeks later, back in Estonia, sitting in my parents' car, travelling from Rakvere to Tallinn, going to see some of my photos exhibited in the Freedom Square, during Tallinn Art Week, I opened Facebook on my phone and I noticed many of Sandra's friends posting sad farewell messages on her time wall. Realising that I would never be able to see her again, I became silent, almost uncommunicative, frozen, a few tears rolling slowly down my cheeks, on that sunny day, on the road to Tallinn.

AKY

Again, I discovered her profile on a dating app. She looked so different from the others. Mostly, I really wanted to take her photo portrait. My intention was not necessarily to make out with her. But we remained in contact and developed mutual sympathy. We have experienced a lot of happy times together. Yet we have also fought quite a lot, and have gone through many dramas and negativity as well. Our personalities are quite different. Sometimes I have felt that we don't actually have much in common.

By the time we met, she was working as a receptionist and a nurse at a really posh beauty clinic in Bangkok; later she would become a manager for some time as well. She spoke good English, and was actually much smarter than most of her friends. She was powerful and sharp, yet also simple. I have always sensed some raw power in her and she had a kind of punk attitude or energy and even the looks, a bit, and that is something I've always been

attracted to. She of course didn't know much about punk rock and the subculture. She liked hip-hop. But I was always happiest when she would play Thai music. It was a good thing her mother made her go to nursing school, not abandon her education as most of her friends from the countryside had done. I fell for her, more and more. We have both hurt each other quite a few times, behaving stupidly. Yet, it still feels like she's the love of my life. I cannot help that, although our relationship has changed over time. She has been going through hard times of accepting me the way I am. So many of my Thai kathoey friends keep telling me that 99% of ladyboys are not attracted to other ladyboys. And in Thai society it is not considered decent or even acceptable if a kathoey is in a relationship with, or is the partner of, another kathoey. "Because kathoey want real men". However, some Thai transgenders live together in a relationship with tomboys, and that is not a taboo; it is considered acceptable, even logical. I have always found it exciting and thrilling to have some Thai tomboys checking me out, flirting with me a bit.

Aky comes from the countryside, from Surin in north-eastern Thailand. At school she was quite the problem child, yet a smart kid. She would get in fights at times. She still has a few scars from those fights. I remember being shocked when I saw photos of her as a boy for the first time. I had mixed feelings about that. I was not attracted to that guy, not at all, yet I really liked the appearance, charm, the sex appeal and that special beauty of that wild kathoey. Since she was chosen to work at a very prestigious beauty clinic in Bangkok, she, as an insider, got her professional facial feminisation surgeries and procedures done for really good prices. She dreamed of getting her breast implants done as well, even though I personally never missed those. I thought getting them was not that important, but then again, who am I to say. If you want breasts, you should get them.

When we would go out to dinner at some restaurant or out nightclubbing, many people, including several local celebrities, knew her and would come to greet her. She would even be allowed to enter some

nightclubs where ladyboys would normally not get in because some of them have bad reputation and are known for bad behaviour or even crimes.

I wanted her to teach me the Thai language, but she lost patience so easily, and even though I am good at languages, learning Thai is very difficult. Still, I did slowly start speaking it a bit. It's a good feeling noticing how the local people start accepting and respecting me more, as I was able to communicate with them in their own language. It made me step a bit further away from that obvious tourist category as well. And I have always wanted to avoid that tourist discourse, as much as possible. I want the real, the authentic. I would never want to ride an elephant, and I would not want to attend a full moon party either.

Aky had never been outside of Thailand. We visited Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar together. I felt irritated there once, because a waiter at a beach restaurant called her "sir". Aky didn't get upset about it; she felt it was quite irrelevant. Myanmar doesn't have much of a kathoey culture or scene yet, and

neither does Vietnam, although there are ladyboys there in bigger cities. In Cambodia transgenders often move to the bigger cities of Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville.

Thailand is still of course number one when considering kathoey culture and presence. Aky comes from an area very close to the Cambodian and Laos borders, where people speak a mix of Khmer and Thai. She would sometimes help us out when we were in the Cambodian countryside and had communication problems.

She is also the best chef I have ever met. Well, I really love Thai food. I have even gotten used to eating real spicy dishes, although "Thai spicy" is still too much for me. This year during the coronavirus restrictions we didn't get to travel much; we didn't even get to go dancing at the clubs. Instead, we mostly stayed home, often eating too much with not many opportunities to shake those extra kilograms off. Visiting and staying at her parents' home, I at some point started asking her mum not to put those massive rice loads on my plate, wanting to stop that unnecessary

over-eating. Thais love eating a lot, and many of them like drinking alcohol a lot as well. I stopped drinking alcoholic beverages a bit over a year and a half ago. Many Thais did not try to understand or accept me not drinking. I didn't like Aky getting drunk, as very often when that happened we would go through some stupid dramas and fighting again. Sometimes it was like Jekyll and Hyde when she got drunk.

Over the years, several of my closer friends have actually asked me why I keep going through this difficult relationship. And actually even Aky and I have sometimes realised that we should end it, maybe just be friends, go our own ways. Yet still the connection seems to be so strong: after getting free from each other a few times, we have gotten back together again. I want to see her smile, even though, the tough girl that she is, she does not smile that often.

One day I discovered her crying loud and almost hysterically in our bed. I tried to calm her down and find out the reason for her sorrow and despair. She reminded me that the day

before I had told her that I felt like I still hadn't found my place in life, and that I sometimes felt like losing all hope in my creativity, in my photography and in my possible creation of music as well.

Sometimes she would analyse and criticise my behaviour, and for some reason it seemed so sweet to me when in April of this year she suddenly told me: "Sometimes, I don't understand, who you are. You ladyboy or tomboy... (or you still a guy)?" I feel my gender is somewhat complicated, indeed. And sometimes I get so tired of being categorised and labelled, and just want to be a human being.

I want to invite her to visit Estonia. Next year, hopefully, we will manage to make it happen, despite all of the difficulties of a Thai kathoey applying for a Schengen visa; the world coronavirus situation is not helping very much either. Her father admitted that he was a bit worried about her visiting here, as he had heard that in many Western countries transgenders can face discrimination, and rude, disrespectful behaviour. I wouldn't let anything like that happen to her.

ICE

The popularity of methamphetamine is really epidemic in many South-East Asian countries. It is widely used by a lot of people from different backgrounds and economic levels; a lot of prostitutes, and tuk-tuk and taxi drivers use it on a regular basis. Hardcore users sometimes stay awake on it for a week at a time, and then sleep for a week. It is really exhausting and destructive when used too often or too much. Aky used to be quite strongly against all drugs. Sometimes she would get angry and really worried about me going to some underground electronic music parties and popping a pill or a half of ecstasy there, or doing a line of coke. Getting busted with some illegal substances in your system or in your pockets in Thailand can ruin your life. In order to escape official processing, a farang, a Westerner, has to pay the police around 1000-2000 euros in cash. If you don't have the money, your life will probably get really messed up, with the potential of doing time in some notorious Thai prison.

So we had broken up. Aky turned her back on the beauty clinic work and chose to join many of her kathoey friends working as escorts, prostitutes and bar-girls in Pattaya. I despise Pattaya. It is full of rude and ignorant farang sex tourists, ex-pats and alcoholics. It is a land of fools. To me the overall vibe there seems really nasty, unintelligent, unpleasant and low. Aky stayed in Pattaya for almost a year. She told me later that luckily she never had a bad customer. She was appreciated and popular. Also she had developed an addiction to smoking crystal meth. During that time we rarely video called, but we still remained in occasional contact, messaging each other maybe once or twice a month. I had a strong feeling about her smoking ice. Then one day she came to visit me in Bangkok. She hadn't slept the night before or probably even longer. I let her sleep, brought her food and took care of her. We got along very well after that long separation. She rested, ate well, slept well, and then a few days after her arrival, she ordered a gram of ice. By that time she knew and had contacts with several gangsters and drug dealers. It was a bit

sad, as well as interesting, to observe her constructing a professional pipe and preparing to smoke. At first she wouldn't allow me to photograph her smoking it, or preparing to smoke. I would watch her and see how skilled she had become with that devil smoke.

I didn't want to smoke it. I had only tried it once before, quite long ago, with one Laos kathoey, when I stayed a few days at a hostel in the Khaosan Road area. I would let her smoke in peace, not wanting to upset her. She stayed with me for a bit longer than two weeks that time. Within a few days she would allow me to photograph her smoking it. I wouldn't touch that shit for a week and a half, and then I asked her to share some with me. We smoked it for one or two days and nights, mostly staying awake, with three or four hours of sleep at times, and then we would stay away from it for a few days. Sleep well and eat well. She would teach me how to do it safely. What to eat and drink in order to minimise the damage, taking regular showers, brushing my teeth etc. It is a strange drug. It doesn't actually give you a real euphoric high, and

actually it doesn't make you very social either. But you will feel good, especially after the first hits. I would go through some very creative rushes, writing some texts, playing guitar and it brought me a strange kind of peace. You don't feel bored, no matter what you do or think about. The first few proper hits from the bong would easily keep me awake for almost 24 hours. But the highs get shorter, and when you come down very often you start seeing the world and yourself and your life in dark colours only, depressing and pointless. So in order to escape that terrible feeling, you take a few fresh hits. Aky didn't want me to smoke it too much, explaining the tricks of how to cut it off and get some sleep. Drinking some hot tea or other hot drink, eating carbohydrates and something sweet to help you fall asleep. A bottle of beer is useful for that as well. If those means don't help you get a bit of deeper sleep, then some sleeping pills will help. After two weeks at my place, she returned to Pattaya. I asked her to leave me some of that stuff, which I used during the few days and nights after she left. Before long I messaged her, asking her to get me one more

gram of it. She told me, with a smile on her face: "No, Alan. You enjoy the drug too much". Her answer and reaction made me smile, take a good look at myself and give up that wish to buy more of it.

We stayed in contact and soon I went to visit her in Pattaya. We had fun and smoked it together. Nights were our time. While smoking it, it is not wise to go out during the daytime. The heat can bring on a heart attack. Aky would tell me to calm down when I sometimes got too excited, out on the streets at night, or suddenly got too friendly, communicating with strangers in my faulty and limited Thai. Yes, I started to like smoking it again. But we didn't let that habit become too heavy. We could still control it. Aky soon moved away from Pattaya.

The next year, returning to Thailand, I had promised myself and a few good friends of mine that I would not start smoking it again. Aky was still using it. I stayed away from it for two months, until I broke my promises and began using it again. We would have sessions of two to four days and then

stay away from it for at least a week or two. I still think I did it mostly because she liked it and I wanted to go along with her. Sometimes a postman or somebody else would ring the doorbell and we would sit quietly in our room, paranoid, not wanting to go open the gate. I don't want to use it. I want her to stop as well. Sometimes she has been clean for a month or even two, and then some friend has it, or the moment overwhelms her. It is so easy to smoke it again, despite the damage to your health, getting in trouble financially, and creating distance from many of your friends. It is not a good drug to use. I'm pleased to have had the experience, but I would clearly prefer to stay away from it.