

Can't live them, can't live without them....

Despite personal disappointments, Bangkok expatriate K.Z. Sutra admits he and his male friends can't resist being lured into the tender trap laid by Thai girls

Andrew, my expatriate friend, had his two-year son on his knee when he asked him: "Do you know who I am, little fellow, do you know? I'm the guy who pays your bills." If his remark - uttered over the burnt remains of homemade spaghetti his nine-year-old other son was scraping with a fork from the pan - didn't sound all that fatherly, my friend could be forgiven.

Their three-bedroom Bangkok apartment resembled the handiwork of a hand grenade, with blotches of last week's dinners ossifying in the kitchen and dirty laundry littering the floors. Andrew's Thai common-law wife of 10 years had been AWOL for days. Yet casting a pall on my friend's mood was more than just her absence (it'd long been routine enough for Lek to "go fetch coke from 7 Eleven" and then disappear for days): It had just turned out Andrew's beloved little son wasn't his, after all, biologically speaking. Quite a shock he got, yes, at the doctor's earlier in the day when he was presented with the results of a DNA test he'd surreptitiously requested on his two-year-old a week before.

His old suspicions had now been confirmed: the "little fellow" couldn't be his and wasn't. Andrew had long before counted back the months on a calendar from his second son's birth and realized that in order to be his, the boy ought to have been conceived by telepathy as at that time Andrew was in Tokyo tending to his business there for months. What to do



now? Order a DNA test on his older son, too? Andrew is hardly the sole farang in like predicaments in Thailand. Given enough time, a large number of foreign men in relationships with Thai women get into in hot water of varying fahrenheit. But they're not alone. Not generally aired is the fact that Thai men are often the target of scorn from their female counterparts. It's not always a question of their philandering ways, or their lack of financial responsibility. It's

more likely that they simply refuse to tie themselves, like willing marionettes, to their women's puppet ropes. Thailand is generally seen as a bastion of male chauvinism. And it is, for some lucky fellows, but hardly ever for a foreign male. As a foreigner, you must be a gentleman and as such are beholden to do right by your woman. In other words: pamper her to death, no questions asked. Thai girls have charmed themselves into the enviable

position of semi-suffragettes: they expect all the rights of Western women with none of their responsibilities. They demand all the courtly and financial attentions of their man, but when it comes to shouldering their side of the emancipation bargain, they fall back on the time-honored apology of oriental concubines: "I'm helpless. I'm defenseless. I need you!" And that's perhaps why they keep hitting you over the head with their perennial commands: "It's your duty!"

No matter how many kicks in the teeth, some guys just keep crawling back for more.

and "You're a man and must do it." Spend money, that is. Although citizens of a third-world economy, some Thai women have well-heeled, very first-world spending habits. There's no amount of your money they can't spend in a heartbeat on the silliest extravagances: A 20,000 baht new Nokia mobile phone; a lavish all-orders-on-me karaoke night-out with friends; a bet or two at high-risk gambling. Penniless again, your girlfriend's back at good old 12-baht cup noodles — and, of course, pumping you for more pin money she can kiss away. And the baht-buck doesn't stop there. What with the sluggish Thai economy and low wages, you might very well be expected to provide financial support for much of her cash-strapped family as well.

And still foreign men just keep on falling under the spell. Nana Plaza is packed with single white males, leaning on al fresco bar tops, staring at English Premiership games on overhead television sets, nursing Singha beers, and supporting a mollycoddling, sweet-talking Thai woman draped over their shoulders. Secretly, these loners are pining as much for love as anything else. And now they've found it. Ah, the fools!

"John," an American friend teaching business in Bangkok, fell in love some years back with an educated, financially secure local Thai woman. A perfect match, it seemed. Marriage and two kids were soon on their way. Apropos the bliss of his married life, John



recently told me: "I like to sleep on my stomach so my wife can't sneak up on me and cut my pecker off." She's psychotically jealous, you see, keeping him under constant watch and dead set to catch him in flagrante delicto even with a whimsical erotic fantasy. He's not even allowed to pick up the family's phone; his wife will invariably do it for him, inquiring sternly: "Why do you want to speak to him?"

Then again, I am not an entirely detached commentator. I have had my own baptism of fire. Shortly after arriving in Thailand I came to see the place, like so many other men before and after me, as a veritable paradise for an eligible bachelor.

Until six months ago I had reason to see myself as a lucky farang: I had a sweet girlfriend and she was a "clean" hard-working little thing. She was somewhat obsessed about foreigners' despicable "free-sex" habits, which she despised (and this by implication damned me too), but all the more reason to

approve of her: she was chaste as a nun!

Her job at a jewelry store didn't pay that much and though I helped her financially the best I could, I should have seen it coming: she kept boasting how many of her friends, having nabbed well-padded elderly foreigners, were living in High Disposable-Income Bliss. Returning to Bangkok from a month abroad, I found my apartment empty and her shaking it in a go-go bar in Nana.

"The circumstances forced me to do it. I had no money," she explained without a flicker of remorse. But whatever happened to the wad of cash I'd left for her on the living room table? Her sister needed money because her husband had gambled them heavily into debt.

Yet I would be the first to defend Thai women's honor against accusations of vulgarity and vileness all the way to a gentlemen's dual to the death. Thai girls are bashful to a fault; or rather, they are demure to a

virtue. Never mistaking an excessive display of naked flesh for a measure of femininity, they shun two-piece bikinis as indecent, and would never, ever appear topless in public. Besides, misbehaving Thai women aren't irredeemably spiteful; they're merely irresponsible. In putting a damper on you, they mean no more harm than does a peevish lass in throwing a tantrum and some tableware.

But Thai women do possess irresistible girlish charms. They can be so sweet that chocolate cake sours by comparison. They can make you feel blessed merely by flashing you one of these brilliant 1000-watt smiles of theirs. They'll spoil you with kindness. They'll fuss constantly about your health and diet. They'll never butt in on your conversation. They'll listen in rapt attention to your every word, even without understanding a single syllable. They'll pipe the paste on your toothbrush in the morning. They'll tuck you in at night. By God, they'll tie your shoelaces for you, if you let them. It's only over time that they turn bad, like werewolves.

Little surprise that no matter how many kicks in the teeth, some guys just keep crawling back for more. I am one of them. So is my British friend Andrew. To cheer the fellow up after his loss of wife and second child in one fell swoop, I took him to a discotheque near Siam Square. A fleeting romance would surely ease his heart aches, wouldn't it? Sure enough, within the hour two charming young girlfriends were beaming provocative smiles at us.

Andrew and his sweetheart hit it off instantly....

Four months later they were wed in a Thai-style ceremony in a Bangkok hotel. Truth be told, when I'd suggested he cure his broken heart with the hair of the dog that had mauled him, I'd been thinking more along the lines of a one-night stand than nuptials. But Thai women are highly addictive. Even if they can be very bad for you, you just can't get enough of them.