

Glass

By Ananya Vahal

A small flowerpot with artificial red and yellow flowers slipped out into The Gulf of Thailand, shortly followed by a small wooden statue of an Apsara dancer. In exchange for the flowerpot and the statue, the ocean filled the two-story wooden boat with cold salty seawater as it rocked violently from side to side.

The tiny shattered pieces penetrated her skin as dark red blood oozed out and slowly dripped down her legs.

“I’m OK!” The hefty American man who was fast approaching his middle-age exclaimed as he got to his feet that he could barely see beyond his over-sized midsection.

Surprisingly, the Beatles soundtrack was still audible over the thunderous storm and the loud roar of the ocean. “All You Need is Love” played through the speaker on the boat. A strange peacefulness took over the moment as I sat drenched and huddled on a wooden couch watching from a few feet away. Time slowed down for us. It felt like this was our last moment.

Her brown skin almost blended in with the wooden boat and the wooden chair she sat in. Brown like the wooden statue of the Apsara dancer that slipped away into the ocean without anyone bothering to save it or give it a second look.

The empty scotch glass came crashing down on her brown legs, piercing her skin.

Perhaps he worked too hard this year and deserved a vacation in an exotic country where he could spend his days intoxicated with freedom and privilege. To him this Cambodian woman was just part of the background of his vacation and part of the background of this brown wooden boat.

The American man picked up his plate, careful not to slip and fall again, and stumbled a little as he tried to find his footing. The ocean currents continued to rock the boat violently from side to side. The roaring ocean continued to fill the wooden boat from the bottom as the thunderous storm filled the boat with rain water from the top.

In this moment, he was the most important person in the world to her. It was his empty scotch glass embedded in her skin in small shattered pieces. It was his lack of concern for what he did to her that degraded and humiliated her. Perhaps, it was his choice to come to her country and completely disregard her and her people that left her in disbelief, not the shards of glass in her legs or the blood dripping down from them.

The boat was trapped rocking violently between the angry ocean below and the imposing storm above. The woman was trapped between the excruciating pain in her legs and her humility towards the stranger in her country. The American man was trapped between his conscience and his privilege.

He stumbled back up the narrow, slippery wooden stairs that caused him to fall in the first place as the ocean rocked the boat violently from side to side. Perhaps the slippery stairs seemed safer to him than acknowledging the woman sitting in a chair next to him with shards of his broken scotch glass in her legs.