

Barbara Parkin / BROCHURE TO SAVE THE MARRIAGE

The Day before the first day: Flight CX800: Nap over Japan. D. wakes. The twins in *Twins* separate. Buffooning actors drag each other across lines. I hold D.'s hand because I am trying. We glide over the dateline. Today comes after tomorrow. Yesterday will catch up soon. Everything rides on this, the vacation of miracles. Laughter. On the plane we use it like medicine. We pour it over Eroica Hair Tonic for Men, the vomit depository, & the plastic bags telling us to Arrive in Better Shape. When we land we get an extra day & a shoe horn. Things look possible.

Day One: Peanut butter bun with a piece of insect. One glass coconut milk. One beer. HiC orange drink.

Day Two: Filet o'fish. Small fries. Trucks tow baskets of skinned animals, waiting to be hung in street vendors' stalls. Carts take narrow streets, teeming with socks, fruit, Panther brand underwear, shelled walnuts, live chickens. D.'s underwear needs replacing. Elastic shot.

Day Three: Ride a sampan steered by a young girl through the junk boats in the typhoon shelter in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong. D. snaps a photo as we leave. I tell him he is culturally impenetrable. He says I should be more impenetrable. I remind him that we agreed not to mention C..

Day Four: The store across from our hotel is called Golden Marriage Co. All You Need. Bed linen. Sheets. Napkins. D. says when we get back to Canada we should have a separation agreement made. He announces this after our fight in Chatter Park. We are supposed to put C. behind us, that is my position. I am a liar, that is D.'s position. Around us, middle-aged women do Tai Chi exercises. I want to be one

of them. I do not know anything about them. C. would remind me of this. He is coming up, a lot.

Day Five: We take the subway to Wong Tai Sin, a city in The New Territories. Once we arrive I smoke a Marlboro & fall asleep for an hour, dreaming of C.. He boards a plane. A flight attendant holds his hand across the Pacific. In my dream he is prone to trembling. Not sure what he is doing.

Day Six: We land for a two-day stopover in Bangkok. A gang of pre-schoolers play tag along the six-lane highway we're riding on. I start to think about babies. I don't tell D. because I know it will upset him. For dinner we eat car exhaust with the meat skewers we buy from street vendors.

Day Seven: All day people sweep the streets & the sidewalks. Still, dirt everywhere. We visit three Wats & a giant golden buddha, reclining. At one of the temple grounds we enter a massage tent made of fine white cloth. Rows of white beds: white bodies caught in the act, receiving back rubs, leg rubs. We pay. We take our places. I cannot look at D., the sensation of four hands moving along his legs. I turn to face the billowing walls of the tent. Fingers press into my scalp. Later, a stoned blonde man serves us *Gado Gado* for dinner & collapses on the restaurant floor.

The brochure to save the marriage said, *You Save \$600 By Adding A Stop In Koi Samui, Thailand, Before June 2nd.*

Day Eight: D. lies on his back, head entirely submerged in Thai waters & hears cracking, like glass. There is a sound between his ears. His brain is splintering. Ear wax, I say. Two couples dance on the beach. All are topless. Beyond the couples there is nothing, an empty beach.

Day Nine: Sand like brown sugar. Sand between D.'s fingers moves inward, fisting. At the beach-front massage tent, a woman named Mama feels up a girl who strips off her shirt. Mama says, "You've got one titty bigger than the other." The girl drops her cotton pants & climbs on the massage bed. The masseuse scans for witnesses.

Day Ten: Lightning flashes against noisy palm trees and falling coconuts in the wind. Dark sky hangs over a bath-water sea, flashing yellow for an instant. Clouds rumble, anxious. Rain spills from the air like a colorless drape, unrolling continuously. D. wants to go to the disco across the island. Out of the sand, I sculpt a man's face & shoulders. He washes away in the tide. I write a postcard home: *Thailand is not a cure. Exactly. Wish you were here.*

A bulldozer arrives to remove palm trees. Mama points the driver toward the trees surrounding the restaurant where we are sitting. One of our dining companions looks terrified except when she laughs, loudly. Her boyfriend drinks something called a Blow Job. He tells a chirping bird to fuck off. Finishes the last of his burger, throws a piece of burger lettuce onto her plate. D. says the guy's haircut reminds him of C. I want to be in Thailand, along with my body. I watch two wild dogs & three pigs play cat and mouse on the sand.

Day Eleven: Sun stroke. Scaly bumps in patches on both our arms & thighs. I'm stuck at 39.4 degrees. Diarrhoea in the squatting basin. Mosquito larvae breed in the water container. Slime covers the gritty floor. D. & I lie under mosquito netting & watch bugs fall through the holes. Take turns staggering to the restaurant for pots of ginger tea. Don't think either of us has felt this generous for months. D. reads to me from a travel brochure about the Bulak Laut Bungalows in Pangandaran, Indonesia.

Day Twelve: Sleep.

Day Thirteen: We move into the brochure's life.

In a strategic position right by the beach freely face Indian ocean and white sand. Far away crowd and high way pollution. Greenish circumstance with fresh oceanic air. Bungalows in bamboo house and unique interior design performs peaceful joyment. Advantageous location in the west coast near Animal Preservation, so the evening can be seen, the sunset, the flying bats. With family and relatives the right place for spending holyday.

Children in gangs put their hands out at us & say, "Hello, Mister, give me money." Then they laugh. I decide to spend the rest of our down payment savings. We dine separately on Tuesday. Later that night we make love for the first time in a month.

Day Fourteen: A woman in a bamboo cap & rubber thongs walks onto the motel compound & stands before me with a sack of fruit over her shoulder, saying, "500 rp. for a pineapple. I'll chop it up for you." The rp. translate into a couple of dimes. I am already eating a pineapple, though, & she can see this. I shake my head, but she remains, until I look away for her to leave. She walks back one kilometre to the marketplace in the midday sun. I know it is a kilometre because I went there this morning. My chest wet with sweat, and nothing but a camera over my shoulder. I feel watched by C.

Day Fifteen: D. & I play in the waves. Something is keeping us together. We move into the sea & don't know it. I look toward the shore & cannot find it. Waves rise on all sides of our bodies. I can no longer see D. A wave presses violently on my head & drags me out. I am nothing. My will is flat. D. is visible in the spaces between bursts of wave. He is fifty feet east. The water jerks me under & out, further from him. Each second takes us closer to loneliness & we stay married to avoid that. Under & out. I think, This will be a quick. Once I understand this, the fear is gone. This death will be peaceful. But my body thrashes. I rise above & watch my body try to save itself. It is calling, "Help me." It swallows more water. It holds its breath. Its arms are enormous suddenly, doing the front crawl & not moving. Everything that is known, the shape of D.'s face, is precious. D. is the only person the body wants to say goodbye to. It wants to mouth, I am sorry. D. yells to the body & gestures: GO SIDEWAYS. DO THE CRAWL SIDEWAYS. NINETY DEGREES TO THE SHORE. When I understand the body will live, I return to it. I am crawling up the sand, people watching. I go on. The journey is exhausting.

Day Sixteen and Seventeen: We do not leave the motel room. We lie on the batiked bedspread, staring at the bamboo mats on the ceiling. Bodies ache to the touch. The strain of the fight, immense strength of

water. My shoulders burn as if every muscle & ligament has been torn.

Day Eighteen: We sit on the concrete outside our room & watch the waves that nearly took us. At lunch, two men approach & ask about the children we don't have. "Hello Mister." (I am not addressed.) "Where is your country? Are you married? Is this your wife?" They remind me of two doctors at the Fertility Clinic back home. They try to sell us chocolate buns & a knife with an intricately carved handle for only five dollars. "Come on, Mister. Good knife. Sharp." I think we should buy it. I nod approval at D. He says, "I really love you sometimes."

Day Nineteen: D. goes to the Monkey Forest without me. I stay alone at the motel. Like every other tourist, I cannot understand anything. How can I *see* anything in this place? *I hear your voice, even here. Hope your studies are going well. Happy Birthday.* Can't decide whether to send this card to C. It takes me two hours to write these sentences. Sending it would be a sign of weakness. Not sending it would be a sign of weakness. I mail it.

Day Twenty: Jakarta: Concrete with fierce traffic. That is what I can see. We take a taxi to the airport, an Indonesian pop song sung in English hums from the front dash: "True love means planning a life for two. You fill my dreams. You are my life forever." I laugh wildly. I go over the top. D. is solemn, just like our driver. I have offended them both.

Day Twenty-one: Singapore. One-night stopover. We take a tour bus to the famous Open Zoo, an animal reserve without cages. I pose for D.'s camera, holding a mother chimpanzee on my lap. She is shaking. Of course she wants to get off.

Day Twenty-two: CX801: We fly home holding hands. I throw out the postcards in my purse. In my shirt pocket I carry loose tea picked from plantation fields across from the motel compound. We will drink it until there is no more.