

**FIFTEEN**

Melanie's laughter was more a squeal. She hung her arms around me and gave me a wet, sloppy kiss. "You've made me so happy, Unc." Then she stood back, at arm's length, and peered into my eyes, squinting and contorting her face. "That was a 'yes,' wasn't it?"

I nodded. She latched onto me again and danced around the kitchen with me like one of those oversized dolls whose feet you strap to your shoes.

Rick actually became exuberant. He joined in our dance, putting his arms around us. We stumbled around the kitchen, knocking my Pyrex baking dish out of the dish rack onto the floor. Giggling, Melanie scrambled for the broom and dustpan.

"How about a drink in celebration?" I asked.

"It's kind of late, Unc," Rick said. He was aware I heard what he called me. "We better be going."

"Neither of you is in any shape to drive. Hand the keys over, Rick." He complied with only the weakest resistance.

"I'll sleep in Melanie's room," I said. "You two can have my bed. Maybe you'll bring it some good luck."

"Oh, Unc. You torture yourself. You'll find somebody."

I couldn't keep from grinning.

*After the Flood / Fifteen*

“What, Unc?”

“I think maybe I’m in love, too.” I shuffled through the photographs lying on the counter and took out the one of Doi Pia standing beside their little boat down at the river. It was the only one I had of her where Khuang was out of the picture.

“Doi Pia? She’s beautiful. But I thought...”

“I know. But she’s leaving Khuang. I’m sponsoring her to come to America. She’ll have a job at the *Thai Cousin* fish market: you know, the one next to the Thai restaurant you like.”

“That’s wonderful,” Melanie squealed. “Maybe we could have a double ceremony.”

“You’re jumping to conclusions, Melanie,” I scolded, pouring brandy into three small glasses.

“I’m just optimistic. She wouldn’t leave her husband *and* her family and her country if you didn’t mean something to her. Come on. Let’s toast. To the future!”

We clinked our glasses and stood around the sink for a while, discussing Melanie’s and Rick’s wedding plans. There’d be a lot to arrange. They shuffled off to bed and I turned in, too.

Melanie would lose her old room, but I don’t think she cared. I’d have to get it ready for Doi Pia. I hoped Melanie wouldn’t mind lending a hand.

I lay back on the bed with the nightlight on, staring at the shelves full of Melanie’s stuffed animals and high school memorabilia. I pretended they were mine, part of my childhood. Tonight would be my last night of childhood. Tomorrow I’d awake an adult, responsible for my own happiness and maybe, I hoped, for a little of Doi Pia’s, too.