

# Childhood Stories from Thailand







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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The National Identity Board would like to express sincere appreciation to the numerous individuals who have made the publication of *Childhood Stories from Thailand* possible. We are highly grateful to the authors "Waen Kaew" and Tipawanee Sanitwongse for graciously giving us permission to translate their very fine works into English, so that the great number of English language readers would have a chance to become acquainted with the lively stories about Thai life.

We would like to thank the editorial board for the wise selection of just a few examples of the multitude of fascinating stories on Thai children for translation and publication. Special thanks must be extended to Chamnongsri L.Rutnin who translated the *Days of Yore*, and to Charatsri Vajarabhaya and Savitri Suwansathit for their translation of "*Kaew the Irrepressible*". Pathom Poiwilai and Trasvin Jittidecharaks provided illustrations and pictures for the *Days of Yore* and *Kaew the Irrepressible*. The cover was designed by Krirk Yoonband. And finally, invaluable contributions were made by Nilawan Pintong as adviser, Nitaya Masavisut as coordinator-editor, and Michael Smithies and Judith Guskin as readers.

To all the above and to the many others who have had some part in the publication of this unique booklet the National Identity Board is very much indebted. They have all helped to describe to us not only children whose nature is basically the same the world over, but have also depicted children's imaginations, thoughts, games, behaviour and upbringing within the physical environment and cultural milieu of Thai society, past and present.

National Identity Board  
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## INTRODUCTION

*Childhood Stories from Thailand* is a collection of stories selected from Tipawanee Snitwong's *Days of Yore* and Waen Kaew's *Kaew The Irrepressible*. While *Days of Yore* tells of the way of life and activities of the children in times past, *Kaew The Irrepressible* recounts the adventures and misadventures of modern day children whose lives are caught between old traditions and modern technology.

On the surface, one may find that the childhood experiences as described in *Days of Yore* are quite different from those found in *Kaew The Irrepressible*. Children in *Days of Yore* played with pampas boats, caught fireflies, frolicked in the drenching monsoon downpour, and listened to ghost stories on moonlit nights. They belonged to the time when grown-ups still relished the art of making *krathong* or floats out of banana leaves, or wrapping sticky rice with coconut fronds. Children in *Kaew The Irrepressible* no longer play with pampas boats or catch fireflies. Lured by modern techniques of advertisement, they collect the lids of soap powder boxes or precooked noodle bags, waiting hopefully to be the winners of the draws. They belong to the age of plastic bags and electric rice cookers. Time is too precious to be fooling around with banana leaves and coconut fronds.

Yet, in spite of these differences, both stories demonstrate certain facets of life and values that are characteristically Thai. Most evident of all is a close tie between grown-ups and children. In *Days of Yore* when grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles all lived in the same compound,

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grown-ups and children shared all kinds of activities. On the moonlit nights, they gathered on the terrace, playing verbal games and telling ghost stories. The *Loy Krathong* festival was another occasion when grown-ups and children joined forces in making floats with banana leaves and decorating them with flowers, candles and incense sticks. During the rainy season, grown-ups let the children enjoy the fun of "rain play," but at same time jars had to be filled and the terrace floor scrubbed. Through the sharing of activities, the wisdom of the grown-ups was imparted to the children, while the children's innocence, mischiefs and imaginative inventions brought back to the grown-ups delightful memories of their own childhood.

In *Kaew the Irrepressible*, families no longer live in the same compound but a sense of extended family still prevails. On the "Lunar 'Clip" nights, the grandmother would go around to her children's houses, giving out medicine to each of her children and grandchildren. It is her belief that taking medicine on such a night will keep one healthy and strong. She also makes it a practice to come around to her children's homes on her grandchildren's birthdays, bringing with her a few turtles to be released by the birthday child as a way of making merit. In addition to grandmother, aunts and uncles also play very active roles in the lives of the children. Even an old neighbour has his say. When the children want to fly their captive kite to show off their victory, Uncle Pong, the old neighbour, is set against it saying, "I am an old man and I respect old customs. When you take down someone's kite like this, you should not fly it up again because the owner would feel badly offended. You just keep it with you." Mindful of the old man's advice, the children obey. But most influential of all the grown-ups in this story are the children's own parents. Besides giving their full share of love and understanding, they are always ready to give explanations about the strange happenings that bedazzle their children. In this way they help the children get through the rough transition between the traditional world and the world of modern technology.

By placing *Days of Yore* and *Kaew the Irrepressible* side by side, it is hoped that readers from other lands and cultures will be able to understand the spirit and essence of Thai childhood from the days of yore to the present. It is also expected that these stories will be appreciated by children as well as adults, particularly those who have not forgotten the delights and innocence of childhood.

**Nitaya Masavisut**

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# **Days of Yore**

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English Translation by

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## DINING WITH GREAT-GREAT GRANDFATHER

One day, my grandmother together with her brothers, sisters and cousins were invited to dine at the big house with my great-great-grandfather every evening, starting the next day. It was exciting news for all the children.

My grandmother's mother told her that her grandfather would never have invited children whom he did not love to dine with him, and so this invitation was to be taken as a great honour. After having digested this information, my grandmother felt that she must be a much loved child; but her grandfather did have such a long curved mustache and such a loud booming voice that she was quite afraid to dine with him. Her mother gave her the reassurance that things would certainly go well if she was careful with her manners, and that she would give her some practice in good dining manners that very evening.

And so my grandmother was taught to eat neatly with her fingers like the well-brought-up girl that she was. Her mouth must never be full of rice. She must gather each dainty mouthful of rice with her fingertips, pressing the cooked grains together carefully so that none would fall

when she lifted them from the plate to her mouth. Her fingers should never be covered with grease from the food beyond the first joints. Fish bones, husks or seeds that could not be eaten must be neatly placed on the flat border of the plate. The rice, however, must be kept well within the plate. Above all, she must never make a slurping or sucking sound when taking soup.

If she had to eat with fork and spoon, she must take care to handle them quietly. She must never tip her plate to spoon the food from it, never put more food on her plate than she could eat, never speak until she was spoken to, always keep her elbows close to her sides. My grandmother thus practised for the great event.

On the following evening, she was bathed and dressed in brand new clothes. All the children lived in different houses within the family compound. They gathered together at my great-great-grandfather's house to wait for the sounding of the dinner gong which was the signal for everyone to enter the dining room. That the great man disliked tardiness was a wellknown fact.

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In the centre of the room lay a large rectangular mat covered by a white cloth. My great-great-grandfather sat at the head of the 'table' which was actually a rectangular mat neatly spread on the floor. The children sat in two lines facing each other. My grandmother's youngest uncle, who was much older than she was, and known to be the favourite of my great-great-grandfather, sat next to him on his right. It was this youngest uncle who, seeing the nervousness of the younger children, told them that they were sure to enjoy the meal.

Great-great-grandfather wanted the children to eat well and kept spooning various dishes on to the children's plates. Unfortunately many of the dishes were so spicy that my grandmother felt tears spring to her eyes, even though she carefully put aside all the chilies she found on her plate. My great-great-grandfather noticed this and ordered the cook to make dishes more suitable for the children from then on. All in all, the meal went well, all the children showing their very best manners.

On the first day, the children were quiet, not daring to talk. The next evening, my great-

great-grandfather, feeling the children less nervous than on the day before, started asking questions. Only my grandmother's youngest uncle was articulate enough to talk about his adventures at school, bringing smiles to the faces of the other children. Sometimes, however, he got so carried away by stories of the punishments he received at school, and his voice grew so loud that he was firmly stopped by my great-great-grandfather.

On another evening, my grandmother was asked a question while her mouth was full of food. She swallowed the whole unchewed mouthful which seemed to block her throat. An aunt quickly gave her a drink of water which worked wonders, and she managed to answer the question. Another child was not so careful and answered a question with his mouth full. Rice spurted out, to his great embarrassment. My great-great-grandfather soothed him by handing him a glass of water, but the poor boy was so upset that he choked on the water, making things even worse. My great-great-grandfather then comforted him by piling his plate with delicious dainties.





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## MOONLIT NIGHTS

**B**right moonlight on clear summer nights made bedtime particularly unwelcome. The hottest part of the summer being the period of the long school vacation, the children were allowed to stay up later than usual. The terrace, which served various roles in the family's activities, became the gathering place where my grandmother's youngest uncle had all the children sitting in a large circle in the moonlight.

The games had to be verbal -- no sweating after bathtime. The favourites were the funny quizzes that the youngest uncle remembered from school. When the quizzes ran out, the children would compete in making up sentences that rhymed. Continuity of sense did not count, but speed did. While it was not too hard for the older children, the little ones were too small to know what 'rhyming' was; they produced 'rhymes' that triggered bursts of giggling which continued until they were summoned to bed.

Moonlit nights seemed to have been made for ghost stories. When the youngest uncle told ghost stories heard at school, only the light of the moon was allowed. My grandmother never really wanted to hear these stories, being terrified of ghosts, yet she would not allow herself to miss hearing what her irrepressible uncle had to tell. The uncle's spine-chilling voice, reserved especially for the occasion, the spooky sounds made by his accomplices, and the turning on and off of lights for special effects, caused the younger children to huddle together in a shivering ball in the middle of the circle.

As the night seemed to be filled with uncanny things for the little ones, some of the older children would creep away from the circle to imitate the sounds of hooting owls and howling dogs. Terrified squeals from the middle of the circle would cause the inevitable scolding, putting an end to the ghost stories. On such nights, my grandmother's sleep would be haunted by terrible nightmares filled with an unlimited conglomeration of ghosts.

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Her youngest uncle was threatened with the task of whisking mosquitoes for his father should he persist in telling ghost stories, so he turned to adventures of the jungle – tales in which tigers appeared in the shape of beautiful maidens to lure their human prey. He told my grandmother that if she squealed again the tiger would drag her away into the jungle for his supper. This failed to scare her, however, for she felt safe and sound in the warmth of the family.

Once having run out of quizzes, ghosts and adventure tales, her youngest uncle would lead his young relatives in singing all kinds of songs - lullabies, songs from children's games, songs remembered from musical boxes, songs heard from the servants – in fact any songs that came into his head. They sang loud and long until their throats were quite dry and sore.

One day, my great-great-grandfather bought a radio. From then on, everyone in the house gathered on the terrace on moonlit nights to listen to the news, the songs, plays and other programmes offered by this new-fangled instrument. The children gave up their quizzes and songs. The servants neglected their once-favourite nocturnal pastime of going out to the nearby playhouse. Drivers, cook, housemaids sat on the terrace stairs to listen to the radio.

But while listening, the women were never idle. Under the tropical moon, they did their needlework, fashioned banana leaves into food containers for the next day's offerings to monks, made garlands of jasmine or miniature trees laden with fragrant flowers by threading the sweet-smelling *pikul* tree blossoms onto the stiff branches of the seaside plant known as *kalapangha*. In this way the moonlit terrace became the place where the family shared their communal activities and pleasures.



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## RAINWATER

In my grandparents' childhood days, Bangkok already had a water supply system; but as it existed only in some areas, most people relied on rivers, canals, and rain-water for their water supply.

Water taps, the most evident feature of the official system, stood at intervals along the main streets. People who had them right outside their houses had the convenience of free water at their immediate disposal. Those living further away had to walk to fill their pails and carry the water home. Many simply paid water-carriers for the trouble.

My grandfather had school friends who helped their parents in shophouses after school. They went right on to work as water-carriers at night, with wooden poles, both ends bending with the weight of water-filled kerosene cans, balanced on their shoulders. Youngsters carried half-filled cans while their fathers shouldered four full cans at a time. With the great demand for water in the summer, lines of carriers could be seen at the taps all night. Without the searing heat of the sun, night-time was ideal for this exhausting job. The carriers' income peaked in the summer, and fell during the rainy season.

One of my grandparents' great childhood joys was to frolic in drenching monsoon downpours. Grown-ups always held the excited youngsters back until the raindrops became fat and fell thickly enough for a good healthy soak. There was never a lack of shrewd suggestions to mix work with the ecstatic fun of 'rain play.' The earthen water-jars got filled, clothes washed, and terrace floors were enthusiastically scrubbed with coconut husks specially sectioned and cross-cut to obtain maximum roughness for the purpose. The children were taught that as the angels did their part in sending us so much water, it was our duty to make the most of it. So that was why the house was always extra clean during the monsoon season.

Old people loved to drink rainwater, relishing its purity and what they called its 'sweetness'. Collected via drain-pipes from house roofs after the first few falls of the season, it was kept in big tightly-covered jars with wooden lids so that it was well stored for the dry season. The first rains were regarded as the natural cleaning of the roofs, and were drained away into the earth. Out-of-season rainfalls were joyfully greeted as a replenishment of the precious store.

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According to my great-great-grandfather, nothing beat rainwater for drinking – especially when well-cooled in earthen jars, from which it drew the subtlest flavour of baked earth. Earthenware jars were common household sights in those days. Besides making the water ice-cool, they were blissful to lean back against in the relaxed circle of family and friends on hot days.

During the dry season water was a precious commodity. Once the store of rainwater was depleted, the jars had to be filled with water from rivers and canals. The water was stirred with lumps of alum to cause the impurities to settle to the bottom, leaving clear water on top for household use. Great-grandmother made sure that not a drop was wasted: water left from cleaning the floor or even the dregs of drinking cups was poured on plants. The children were told to wash their faces and clean their teeth where plants grew.

The return of the rainy season was naturally an event of great rejoicing. The children were told to clean the water jars for the coming of the rain. Everyone looked forward to the abundance of water again.

And there was another important use for rainwater: the great-grandfather who was a doctor would put out large basins to catch the rain straight from the sky. He used this pure untouched water to make eye drops and other medicines. Of course, he was able to do this only during the rainy season.

And so, despite the public water system, just about every house in those days had roofs with special drain-pipes to collect the rain, hopefully for a whole year's use.





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## SAVINGS

Children in my grandparents' days had their own contrivances for saving their money. In addition to earthenware jars, pots, pans and other utensils, the potters of those days made children's 'private banks' in the shapes of little round jars or fat little pigs of varying sizes. They were unpainted and priced low enough for the children to buy. More expensive ones were shaped like pumpkins, mangosteens and custard apples. These were shaped by copper or bronze moulds, smoothed with a knife while still wet, baked and painted.

Some children simply made slits in the lids of used cigarette tins. These children had to have pretty strong self-control because it was difficult not to open the tins to extract the coins when temptation arose. Equally strong-minded were those who kept their copper coins (each with a hole in the middle) on large safety pins which they hung in a row on the wall.

My grandmother had a relative who kept a row of seven money jars on a shelf, one for each of her seven sons. The jars were labelled to prevent confusion. Each day, the sons came back from school and dropped what they had saved into their personal bank. When one of them had a full jar, his mother would take him to the government bank, deposit the money in his account and buy him a new money jar. Before and after school, the seven brothers would shake their jars, not only for the joy of hearing the clinking of the coins but to check the growth of their savings. If someone's imagination played a bad trick on him, accusations would fly. A couple of the seven sons hardly ever dropped coins into the slit but simply shook the money jars twice a day, as if praying that the coins would increase through regular shaking.

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Grandmother had a sister who was constantly hungry and spent most of her allowance on food. She bought an expensive money jar costing five satangs, dreaming of filling it and ending up a millionairess. She showed it to everyone, dropped coins into it, and shook it everywhere to hear the cheerful music of the clinking coins. Five satang coins made particularly pleasant sounds because they were made of silver. But then, after a few coins were in the jar, she would begin to extract one with a hair clip. She would insert a coin in the morning and laboriously work it out again in the afternoon, or insert one in the evening only to extract it the next morning. The jar finally broke - no doubt in protest at all the shaking and the probing of the hair clips.

As for one of my grandfather's brothers, he was a compulsive saver. Every coin he ever had went into the money jar. He looked so pathetic watching his brothers munching the sweets that they had bought that no one had the heart not to give him one. It was a good way to save at others' expense!

The children had their coins on safety pins hung on the wall. In this way, the savers could see their own, and others', riches each time they walked past the 'money wall'.

From her daily allowance of two satangs my grandmother as a girl had to save one satang. Her choice for one satang was therefore important; it had to be filling and take the longest time to eat. Roasted corn-on-the-cob was a good example. Another good choice was prawn crackers that sold at six pieces per satang. Six children could share that and be satisfied.

A friend of my grandfather was given two satangs a day for his tram fare. They all went into his money jar because, rather than spending them, he walked both ways. He became a very good walker and knew all the short cuts. The only drawback was that he had to leave home very early and arrived back home pretty late. Though his friends offered him rides, he would always refuse. From his example, my grandfather was taught that it was wise to start saving when you were still a child to assure comfort in later life, and, when you became an adult, saving assured a smooth life for your children.

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## GOING TO THE TEMPLE

As a child, grandfather sometimes went with the grown-ups to the temple, but not often. He hated the boredom of sitting through long sermons. He was always stiff and sleepy from having to sit with his legs neatly folded and his palms pressed reverently together at his chest. The temptation to get up, and to look and run around had to be kept tightly in check.

Grandfather's self-control was frequently reinforced by his aunts who pointed out examples of 'bad' behaviour in children 'whose parents haven't taken the trouble of teaching them good manners' -- children who wouldn't keep quiet, who sat with their feet pointing towards the monks and wouldn't pay proper homage when they were told to.

Not that the aunts were heartless -- they always knew when the children's patience was running out. Grandfather and the other children would then be allowed to go out and play in the shady temple yards, watch the tor-

toises in the ponds and while away the time with childish amusements until the grown-ups came out at the end of the sermon. Grandfather remembered seeing temple boys of various ages placing trays and food containers on long tables which were laid out for presentation to the monks to make merit on holy days.

Grandfather was glad that he wasn't born a girl. Whistling and singing loudly were the exclusive privileges of boys in those days. Girls were under strict rules where manners were concerned. Grandfather never really felt sorry for the girls, and was actually glad that they were kept out of his way and couldn't do the things that the boys were allowed to do. As he grew older, however, pity crept into his heart when he saw the girls sitting neatly and looking with longing eyes at the boys who were enjoying themselves.

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While the girls sat with their hands pressed together listening to sermons that they found hard to understand, grandfather was either feeding morning glory to the tortoises, kicking discarded tiles into the mid playing hopscotch or chatting with temple boys. The parents of these boys put them under the guardianship of monks who were either their relatives or acquaintances, so that the boys could live in the temple and go to school. They were either from the provinces, or were extremely poor, or lived too far away to go home after school. For the boys who lived far away, the temple served as a boarding school.

During sermons, the temple yard became the gathering place for both visiting boys like grandfather and the temple boys. Though grandfather was free to play and chat with temple boys, many of the children were forbidden by their parents to do so. The duties of the temple boys were to serve the monks, clean their living quarters, follow them when they went out on their alms-begging rounds at

dawn, and perform other odd jobs besides. They did their chores before and after school. Some went to the school located in the temple grounds, others attended schools outside the temple. Quite a few of these temple boys became very successful in their careers, and many came to hold high-ranking positions in government service.

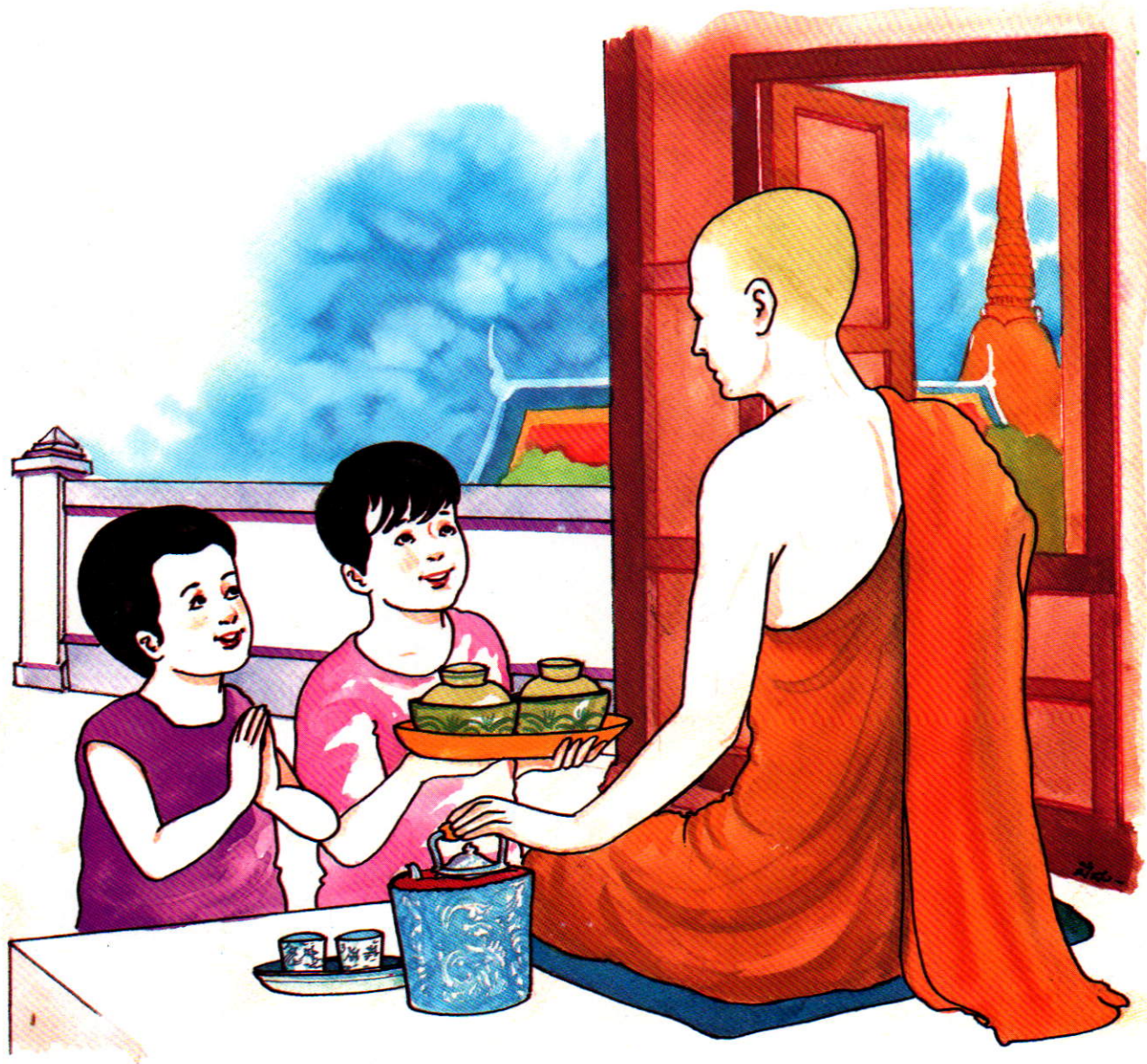
Though far more fortunate than these boys, grandfather sometimes felt a passing wish to be one of them -- there were so many friends to play with. My great-grandmother consoled him by telling him that he would have his chance at living in a temple, because when he grew a little older he would be ordained as a novice.

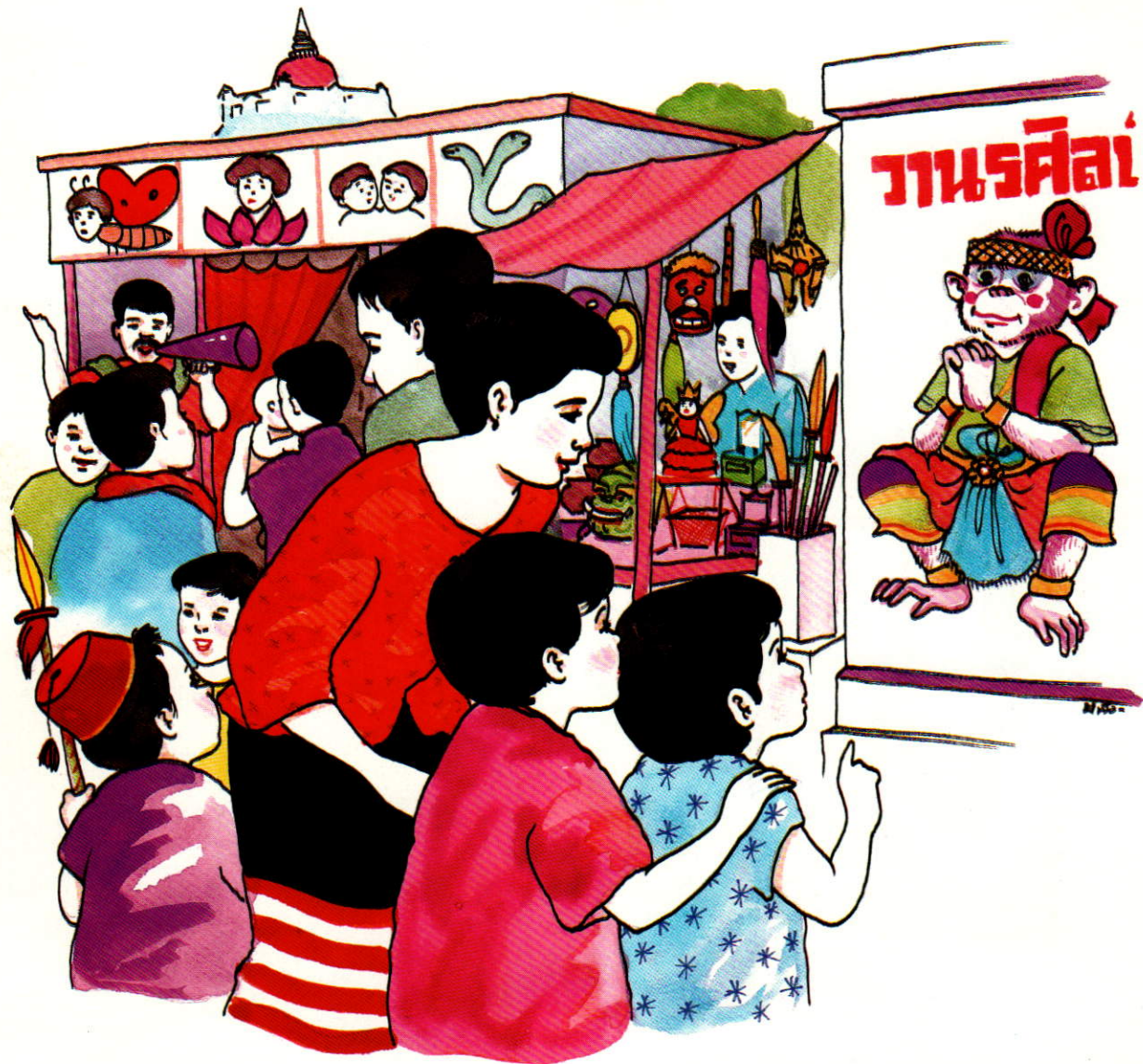
'But, mind you,' she said, 'novices must behave and not make too much noise!'

Grandfather asked her to choose a temple without a cremation pyre if he was to be ordained.

You see, grandfather had a hidden fear of ghosts!







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## GOING TO THE FAIRS

**L**ike most children, my grandparents loved going to fairs, because public entertainments for children were few and far between in those days.

To avoid rain, most of the fairs were held during the dry season, between the last three months of the year and the first two of the following year. They were mostly temple fairs; and there were, and still are, special ones like the New Year celebration on the Pramane Ground, and the annual Golden Mountain fair.

That they were all pretty much the same did nothing to dampen my grandparents' enthusiasm for them. Though temple fairs lasted anywhere from three days to a whole week, my grandparents usually went to each only once. With luck, someone who had not yet been would ask them to go along a second time.

They saw the same vendors at most of the fairs. Stalls selling toys were everywhere. Just about every child bought cardboard swords and hats, and fireworks. There were other familiar

toys: winged fairy dolls with tinsel crowns and dresses, miniature beds and dressing tables, tiny pots and pans, toy models of Thai-style houses, dainty maidens in sea shells, toy babies in netted cradles, spired headdresses made of palm-leaves, and wooden snakes. Always indispensable were the coloured gas-filled balloons.

Beside the fascinating array of toys there were, of course, the exciting variety of foods –dried baked sweets, sugared tamarinds, cashewnuts and, in the winter, roasted chestnuts straight out of heavy steel pans.

At one time there was a fashion for toy cicadas that, when squeezed, made sounds like the real insects. Almost every child bought them and squeezed them all the way home. The cicada sounds told you which houses had children that had been to the fair. The cicadas were made of thin corrugated iron painted green with red borders.

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What my grandmother never missed was the monkey theatre. The actors were all monkeys. There were favourite episodes from old plays such as the one when Chantakorop opened the crystal jar and discovered the beautiful Mora. She never forgot another piece known as "Jee goes fishing." Jee cast his net down into the audience and got the new red hat that grandmother's sister was wearing. Jee threw away his net and gleefully put on the hat which was finally returned by the monkey's owner.

Then there were the mechanical play boxes in which you inserted a coin to start the tinny music and stiff jerky movements of the figures in it. In 'Praya Noi Visiting the Market' the doll dressed as the tribal chief, Praya Noi, walked back and forth while the vendor dolls moved their fingers to show their goods. My inquisitive grandmother peeped through the hole into which the coin had been dropped, and saw

the owner operating the gramophone. There were wires tied to the gramophone head, automatically activating the movement of the dolls.

At the fairs, vendors shouted their wares in sing-song fashion through conical speakers to attract customers. The children watched while the grown-ups did the buying. Grandmother loved the slogan chanted by the perfume seller. It went something like "Long-lasting fragrance, use it on one sister and the other will smell good too, use it on the wife and you can smell it on the husband. Come on, try them, see which suits you."

The fairs always lasted late into the night. It was wise to hold fast to each others' hands. Grandmother once got lost in the crowd. After much shedding of tears, she was finally found and brought home by the cook.

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## WATCHING PROCESSIONS

The Bangkok traffic in those days was nothing like it is now. The streets were mostly quiet and lined with shady trees. There were still a great many *klong* or canals. Two or three cars passed now and again on the road and geese, ducks and pigs wandered about happily until the approach of a car drove them to the side; once the car had passed, they were back in the middle of the road. Other vehicles beside cars were horse-drawn carts that people hired for house-moving, and rickshaws, trams and tricycles for two passengers.

To advertise films, there were cars and horse-drawn carts carrying people playing trumpets, drums and cymbals which moved slowly along, distributing leaflets giving details about film shows. The children ran along-side these vehicles, for some reason known as *rot hae* or procession cars, to take the leaflets home to their parents. As children, both my grandparents loved the sight and the noise of these cars, but were not allowed to run after them. So, it was only now and then when the cars happened to stop in front of their house that they got the leaflets. In general, it was the boys that were permitted to run after the procession cars — the girls were not.

Around the beginning of Lent, the traditional time of the year for ordination of Buddhist monks, children of all ages would rush out of their homes to watch ordination processions, many of them tagging along to join the fun. Such processions were generally led by men and women, faces whitened with powder, wearing brightly coloured clothes and comic headgear such as false bald heads, dancing with great exuberance and gaiety. Then came the relatives of the monk-to-be carrying the saffron robes, the almsbowl, the cloth shoulder bag and the eight traditional objects required for the monkhood. Then came the future monk, known as the *nak*, sometimes walking on his own two feet, sometimes riding high on someone's shoulder. There were days when there was more than one ordination procession.

Then there were the engagement processions and bridal processions. At these times, there were cheers that sounded like a long 'ho..o..o..o' which the children, including my grandfather, joined in at the top of their voices. My grandmother, however, never did, as it was considered improper for a girl.

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My grandmother was much impressed with the beautiful and spectacular 'flower processions'. Trucks were lavishly covered with gorgeous arrangements of different flowers of all colours, competing for prizes. She remembers seeing an arrangement in the shape of the Royal Barge, and many as heavenly pavilions with tapering roofs and beautiful angels throwing flowers and confetti. The processions started at the equestrian statue of King Rama V, proceeded down Rajdamnern Avenue to finish at the Pramane Ground. They were always well-publicized affairs with crowds lining the route.

Grandmother and her family would always turn up early, equipped with picnic snacks, to get close to the procession; but they never seemed to be early enough. My grandmother had to crane her neck to the utmost to catch sight of the procession, though she was sometimes close enough to be hit by the jasmine flowers thrown by the angels. Small children were carried high on their father's shoulders. My grandmother envied all the men who were tall.

There always were so many trucks. The flowers were so beautiful, as were the girls sitting among them. Each truck seemed more gorgeous and exciting than the one before. There was a *naga* with snake-like scales made of fresh flowers and fine streams of water coming out of its mouth, and a beautiful angel reclining in the middle of its coils; another truck was turned into a moving jungle with a comical black-faced aborigine grinning and showing his brilliant white teeth.

When the processions ended, the trucks were parked around the Pramane Ground and my grandmother had a chance to inspect them at close range. She marvelled at the intricacy and delicacy of the work on all the fresh and colourful flowers... So much labour and craftsmanship! The parked trucks had only flowers – the angels and the aborigine were no longer there – but they still brought much joy to my grandmother's heart.







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## GOING ON HOLIDAY

In my grandparents' childhood days, each holiday trip was a grand and hectic family event. Preparations had to start days in advance because almost every object of household use had to be taken along -- pillows, mattresses, mosquito nets, rice and curry pots, and all the other kitchen utensils. Whether the house rented was a seaside or a riverside one, it was always empty. The tenants had to bring everything they needed.

The grown-ups, masters and servants alike, were all kept extremely busy with all the preparations. As a result, there was very little left for the children to do, everything having been done for them. Well, they did have things to do in the manner of children: the older girls would pack little snacks of watermelon seeds, rice-cakes, fried peanuts for the train or boat rides, which were usually very long. The boys had their own sort of preparations -- they were concerned with what they should take for games they might want to play once they had arrived.

On one occasion, the older boys decided to collect rubber bands for shooting whatever they wanted to shoot. Together they made

hundreds of pellets from sticky clay which they dried in the sun and stored in a cloth shoulder-bag. Even grandmother was recruited by the youngest uncle to help make the pellets.

As the day of the journey approached, everything was gradually packed away -- in chests, baskets, and boxes. 'Everything' included preserved foods that would not be available where they were going to stay, and medicines in case the younger children fell ill. The grown-ups were exhausted, the children were not. After all, they had little to do except, every now and then, help to close overstuffed cases by sitting or jumping on them.

The journeys usually started before dawn. Depending on where one was going, they were made either entirely by train or by train and boat. A truck had to be used to deliver the luggage to the railway station before coming back to fetch the family and servants, So much was taken that it seemed more like moving the whole house than going on a holiday. The house was left quiet and empty, with only the gardener remaining behind.

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The only member of the family who gave absolutely no contribution to all the work and for whom nobody prepared anything was Sausage, a brown dog. Having always travelled with the family, he would know that a holiday trip was afoot by the sight of the luggage and the bustle of the whole household. He would become very excited and run around inspecting everything. When the vehicle arrived, he would jump on and sit straight with his neck alertly stretched. On arrival, whether the destination was at the seaside or on a river, Sausage would dive in the water at once and enjoy himself thoroughly.

The grown-ups rested during the train or boat rides. The girls would bring out their watermelon seeds, alternately cracking the husks and chewing the tiny piece of flesh that were inside. The boys, none of whom had done anything to help collect them, never failed to approach the girls with outstretched palms, and the girls would always give in soft-heartedly.

Sausage had the most fun on boat trips. If he was in high spirits, he would jump into the water and swim alongside the boat. He always managed to keep pace with the slow-moving boat. When he had had enough, he would jump back and shake himself dry, all over his masters and mistresses.

It was difficult to talk on boat trips because the noise of the engine was so loud. The girls whiled away most of their time chewing their watermelon seeds. Once they had gathered a good large pile of husks, they would fling them on the surface of the water and watch them float slowly away like a miniature raft until the pile broke up or vanished from sight.

When the destination was finally reached, the grown-ups began exhausting themselves again, cleaning and putting the house in order. The children helped with the unpacking and putting things where they belonged. Then, off they set to explore the surrounding hills, trees, canals and ponds while the grown-ups prepared the meals. All in all, being a child was more fun....

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## FIREFLIES

My grandmother often recalled the great number of lampoo trees that lined the banks of the river at the place where the family often took their holiday. They were big trees whose soft and very light wood was good for carving. My grandmother was told by her mother that the brown hats that were popular with men of those days were made of lampoo wood covered with fabric.

On summer nights, the lampoo trees by the river would be covered with hosts of fireflies. The little creatures lit up the trees with their lights, making them look as if they were lit for a festival. They were particularly beautiful when everything else was dark on moonless nights.

After dinner the bigger boys would lead the smaller children to catch fireflies. The equipment needed was flannel towels and large bottles. Hearing the children approach, the fireflies extinguished their lights. My grand-

mother's youngest uncle would signal for total silence. After a while, the fireflies would start to flash their little lights again. He would throw a flannel towel over them, capturing them by the dozen. The smaller children pitched in and helped put them into the bottles.

The process would be repeated again and again. Now and again some of the little ones would let out squeals of excitement while putting the insects into the bottle. The fireflies hovered up out of reach and the children had to wait until they came down again. The great-uncle would instruct the other children to chant, 'fireflies grow heavy, fireflies grow heavy' over and over to induce the fireflies to come down. And they actually did ... to be caught in the towel and put into the bottles. My grandmother always took an enthusiastic part in the chanting and the children would return to the house with many bottles of the delightful little insects.

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Late at night, they would release the fireflies in their mosquito nets and watch them fly around. The fact that the creatures had light without heat fascinated the children. It was pleasant to chat and watch the fireflies until their eyelids grew heavy and sleep took over. When everyone woke up in the morning the fireflies would be forgotten, for everyone was intent on the fun of bathing in the river. But when the mosquito nets were put away, the fireflies would be shaken free and they would fly back to their riverside trees.

When evening fell and the lampoo trees lit up with fireflies, the children would go out again to catch them. Some evenings they did not go out, but even then there would be one or two left in the mosquito nets for the children to watch until they fell asleep. They saw the fireflies in the lampoo trees only at night, and often wondered where they went during the daytime; they probably hid in those very same trees.





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## PAMPAS BOATS

My great-great-grandfather's compound was very large. There were enough trees for the children to climb to their hearts' content, and there was an all-purpose pond in which the Indian gate-keeper and all the servants bathed every evening.

Under the leadership of my grandmother's youngest uncle, the children practised throwing stones and shooting elastic bands into this pond while my grandmother loved to throw handfuls of ruellia seeds into it and watch them burst in the water, making little 'poh-piah-poh-piah' sounds.

On the full-moon night of the twelfth month of each lunar year, this pond was the centre of the *loy kratong* party. In the summer, it served as the swimming pool for the children – not for my grandmother though, for she did not know how to swim. She once fell into the pond and swallowed an enormous amount of water. Since then, she was not allowed to go near it after dark or to play near it when no one was around.

Beside the stone-throwing practice, the youngest uncle also used the pond to show his prowess in shooting pellets by blowing them

through the hollow stems of dried pampas grass. The younger children all tried to imitate him. My grandmother's pellets always dropped into the water at the shortest distances. After a while, the children tired of the game and looked for something new to do with the pond.

The day came when the youngest uncle brought back a new idea from school. He cut dried pampas grass into short lengths, split each length into halves, used a knife to shape each half into a little boat and used feathers as sails for each boat. The feathers of the cocks and hens in the compound were not stiff enough to make good sails, so the older boys had to go to the market to look for feathers near the bamboo crates containing the ducks that vendors brought to the market to sell. The feathers had to be stuck onto the pampas boats with wax. Being a girl, my grandmother was assigned the duty of collecting tallow droppings from candles in front of Buddha images in the houses of her parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. The adults were more than glad to see the little girl cleaning their candlesticks for them.

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Once she brought him the tallow droppings, the youngest uncle heated them and used the wax to stick the improvised sails onto the makeshift boat -- two, three or four sails to each depending on the length of the boat. The boats were tried out in a tub. Some immediately capsized, some leaked dangerously, and the feathers had to be readjusted. All the children watched with great interest. My grandmother rolled the wax into little pieces and handed them over to him one at a time. When there was a good boat or two for each child, everyone went out to the pond for the real thing! If there was a good breeze, the boats would move with great speed, the ones with four sails being well in the lead.

During the early days of the pampas grass boats, the children were so absorbed that they remained by the pond until it was too dark to see the boats. The adults had to send servants to fetch them from the pond. Immediately upon coming home from school, the children would set down their school bags and head for the pond.

There they would be until they were called to take a bath, after which they would be back at the pond again until dark. Whenever the breeze changed, the boats would make a turn --some turned deftly, some turned too fast and capsized. Usually the big boats making too fast a turn would capsize first. There were happy squeals from the owners of the fastest boats, and cries of disappointment from those whose toys capsized. The youngest uncle would order the cook's son to swim to collect the capsized boats or to set them upright again.

When it grew dark early in the wintertime, the youngest uncle fixed lighted candles between the feathers. The lighted boats looked extremely pretty as they moved in the pond. However, when the wind changed, the feathers often caught fire and the boats were sometimes completely burnt. There were more trips to the market for new feathers. After the innovation of the lighted candles, several boats were destroyed each night until soon there were none left. The youngest uncle soon brought new ideas for games from school to amuse himself and his young relatives at home.



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## BOYS BATHING

In the heat of summer, nothing could be more congenial to boys in my grandparents' young days than energetically playing, jumping and splashing in the river, canal, pond, or even a narrow ditch. A boy whose house was on the waterside would invite his friends for a good long romp in the water.

My grandfather was no different from other children. When he was too young to join them, he watched with great admiration the devil-may-care way in which the bigger boys threw themselves into the water from trees, window sills, terraces, and even the edges of roofs. In his heart, he was waiting with impatience for the time when he would be old enough to join them.

On his first attempts, he jumped from low branches overhanging the water, graduating rapidly to higher ones. Then, whenever he had the chance to visit the riverside home of his rich uncle who was said to be a crocodile hunter, he would jump from piers or terraces; or at yet other houses he would swing back and forth from ropes tied to high branches before gleefully letting himself splash into the water.

Playing in the water was not to be taken lightly: it would go on and on, even when all the participants had turned blue and their teeth were chattering: it would go on until the grown-ups came and ordered these blue, shivering little beings out of the water.

One could not say that the boys 'bathed', because none of them had any thoughts of getting clean. In fact, part of the devilish fun was to put mud behind and into their own ears! The grown-ups had to soap and scrub them clean afterwards until they were almost as red as cooked lobsters. Their ears had to be thoroughly dried to prevent infections and they would be ordered not to play in the muddy water again for the day.

One of the 'dogs in my grandfather's house loved to jump into the water. It would watch the children splashing into the water from a branch while it scratched the tree trunk. My grandfather's friends pushed the dog up the tree and onto an overhanging branch where it stood trembling. Though it loved jumping from the bank it was too frightened to jump off the branch and finally had to be pushed off.

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For all its love of water, the dog hated soap. It would dash off the moment it saw somebody approaching with its personal carbolic soap and had to be tied to a branch while being lathered. To rinse it off, the children slung the rope to which the animal was tied over a low branch and lowered the dog into the water so that it soaked well while struggling and yelping as if in mortal fear.

One day my grandfather's rich uncle asked all his young male relatives to play in the river in front of his house. The young swimmers were all naked. As my grandfather's youngest uncle was climbing onto the roof and getting ready to jump into the water, the rich uncle told him to come down and make himself decent as he was getting too old to swim naked. The youngest uncle found the loincloth he was given a bother as well as and an embarrassment. He kept throwing it off whenever his host was not looking.

As in other activities, the boys had all the fun while the girls watched with envy. Girls were not allowed to jump and splash, no matter

how good they were at swimming. All they could do was to swim as modestly and quietly as they were able. Out of pure envy, a girl shouted "Balloon fish!" causing a commotion among the naked swimmers, all of whom scrambled onto the bank. Everyone knew the terror of the balloon fish with its prickly body and scissor-sharp teeth. It had been known to bite the toe of a girl and the penis of a boy from the rich uncle's house. The children were more afraid of the balloon fish than of a crocodile, for they knew that there were no more crocodiles in the river -- they had all been hunted by the rich uncle! The uncle, however, had not been able to do anything about the balloon fish.

"Wait, wait," he said, "I'll use its skin to make a lampshade one of these days!"

Long after, someone saw a lampshade made of the blown up skin of a balloon fish. "So you finally got the fish?" asked the admiring young relative. Laughing, the rich uncle said,

"No, no, I bought that one in the market!"





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## TOSSING CIGARETTE CARDS

Those were the days when cigarettes were imported in great variety from the West. They came in tin boxes. Smokers were mainly foreigners, and some Thais who had studied abroad. There were cigars, too, neatly packed in boxes made of thin fine wood; so expensive were they, that they were brought out only on special occasions. Older Thai men smoked the home product tobacco rolled in dried lotus petals or pieces of the dried banana leaves; of the latter there were the ordinary size and a formidable giant size known as *tapan po*.

My grandfather once tried a cigarette, to his life-long disgust. He never forgot the breathless choking and coughing.

As for the imported tins of cigarettes, they had special interest for the children. Inside each tin was a picture card known in the West as cigarette cards. For the sake of these, the children kept a watchful eye on their uncles and grandfathers. They would keep as close as they could to whoever had just picked up a new unopened tin of cigarettes. They would find all

kinds of excuses to serve him, to please him and, above all, to be near him at the crucial moment when the tin was opened. Each child had a treasured collection of cigarette cards because of the fashion among the boys to play the game called *ron roop* or tossing the cards.

This game required skill, a steady hand and good cards. Grandfather's eldest brother was particularly good at it; he even knew how to gauge the breeze accurately. Well-controlled, his cards glided smoothly through the air, landing neatly on the card of his adversary. This was called touching and the owner of the touched card had to forfeit a card in his collection to the winner. Naturally the card forfeited would be the very worst one in his collection. The quality of a card depended on its age and stiffness. Cards lost their stiffness after several tossings, and these were the ones given up by the losers. Quarrels were not infrequent over whether a card was so worn as to be unacceptable. Often the winner would demand the touched card, but the owner would refuse -- usually because it was his lucky card.

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When the squabble grew too noisy, an aunt or two would come along to demand that the cards be handed over so she could tear them up and put an end to all the noise. Winners and losers alike would hand over old and worn cards that they always kept for such an emergency.

Not surprisingly, our great-uncle had a large boxful of cards, while grandfather had only handful. One day, in a fit of generosity, great-uncle distributed sets of cards to all his younger brothers and cousins but the choice cards were kept, of course. Among the methods of increasing one's collection were winning cards in the tossing games, swapping them and buying them at temple fairs. These cards came in sets, sometimes of a hundred, sometimes fifty. There were sets with pictures of racing cars, ocean liners, flowers, birds and wild animals, but most popular of all were the pictures of Hollywood film stars. All the cards had explanations in English on the back.

Beside the foreign cards, the Thai cigarette maker whose trademark was a Thai gong also produced sets of fifty cards showing the story of the Ramakien, the letters of the alphabet, Thai proverbs and other subjects. They were sold in sets at fairs and were also available for exchange from collectors, who offered good and unworn cards. The vendors spread out their wares in improvised displays on the ground while enthusiastic collectors crowded around them.

Girls did not play *ron roop*; they would be regarded as bold if they did. (The same attitude applied to women who smoked in those days. Such women were to be avoided.) My grandmother just got near enough to the game to stand and watch. She wanted to have her own collection of cards. She often asked her grandfather or one of her uncles to read the printed explanations on the back of the cards so that she learnt the names of the ocean liners that were shown on the front. From these cards she also became familiar with names of racing drivers including Prince Bira and his car, Romulus.

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## THE NEW SCHOOLBOY

When he was old enough, my grandfather was sent to a school within walking distance of his home. A hot lunch from home was delivered each day just before noon. His first day as a student went quite smoothly. All he had with him were a ruler, a slate with a granite pencil and a book for reading – all these were wrapped in a large handkerchief with the four corners neatly tied together in such a way that the whole thing was easily held in one hand. The servant who walked him to school would carry a bottle with water to be used for drinking and for cleaning the slate.

Because he had elder brothers at school, my grandfather did not cry like many of the new schoolchildren on their first day. In those informal days, children often brought their little brothers to school; the younger ones would watch their elder brothers studying and often fell asleep when things got too boring. Often, too, the little ones would enjoy lively games together in the school playground. The teacher did not seem to mind the noise – all the better, if it made these future pupils accustomed to school! Some of these youngsters would chant the multiplication tables along with the pupils, often memorising them faster than their elder brothers.

Beside the pupils' younger brothers, there were their pupils' dogs. These animals were forbidden in the classrooms, and had to wait outside for their young masters. Though they were something of a problem, many new pupils were so unhappy without their pets that the teachers thought it wise to humour them until they became more used to school.

The school had no chairs. Teachers and students sat on the floor with their books and writing materials on long low tables at which they worked. The teachers had to stand up to write on the blackboard, then sat down on the floor again.

The classes were usually very small, allowing the teacher to pay close attention to each pupil. No matter how many younger brothers tagged along to watch or to doze, the classroom was always far from crowded.

The pupils learnt to write with the granite pencil on their slate with its wooden frame. The teacher would hold each pupil's hand and guide it until he learnt the skill. After that he had to fill both sides of the slate, show it to the teacher for corrections, then wipe the slate clean with a wet cloth before making lines on it with the help of the pencil and a ruler.

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While cleaning slates, one had a chance to chat with one's classmates. The wetter the cloth, the longer the slate took to dry and the more time they had for talking. To dry the slate, you fanned it in the air or you blew on it. In the latter case, both your own and your friend's slates were splattered with saliva in which case both of you would clean your slate again with the wet cloth and the saliva on the slate!

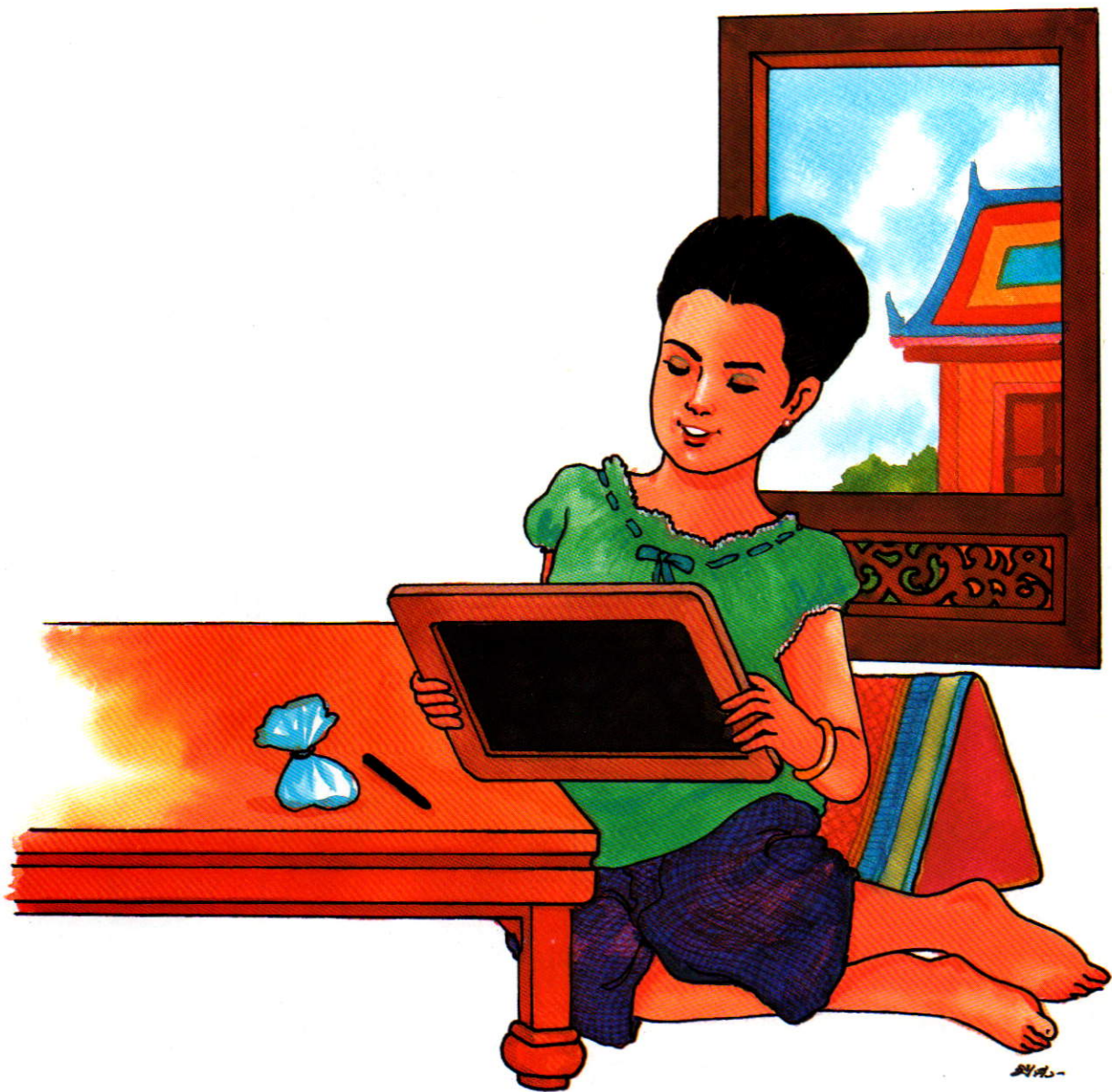
Another good excuse for a chat was the sharpening of the granite pencil, which had to be done by rubbing it vigorously on the cement path outside the classroom. It was a nice, time-consuming process, if the conversation was good and you didn't watch what you were doing too closely. The rubbing had to be done evenly all round, to make a sharp well-shaped point; if the points weren't sharp and properly shaped for good writing, then you just went on and on rubbing the pencil on the cement floor that is, until the teacher came to take you back to work.

The slate was a very practical device. It lasted for years after being used and re-used daily. Even when the frames fell apart you could still use it. In fact, it was so durable that it was often handed down from brother to brother. With a slate, you didn't need to carry a pile of exercise books to school. For homework, you did the arithmetic exercise on one side, and your Thai composition on the other.

For punishment, some teachers caned their pupils; some gave them *borapet*, a very bitter medicinal plant to chew (a bit like giving castor oil to naughty pupils); some made them hold a ruler between their teeth while holding their arms horizontally straight out and standing on one leg like a stork. None of these punishments seemed to create any bad feelings among the pupils, for they were soon laughing, chatting and back at their tricks again.

Children of those days were taught to respect their books and their teachers for it was from them that they received their knowledge. At the end of a class, it was customary for the pupils to pay homage to their books and the teacher by putting the palms of their hands together, then spreading them flat on the book or the bending down until their forehead touched their hands.





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## BEING CANED

When my grandfather's elder brother came home from his first day in the secondary school, he told everyone of the coiled tail of a sting-ray displayed menacingly in the headmaster's room. It was a tacit warning to those who might have been tempted by the thought of such crimes as stealing, brawling, or truancy. It was said that a sting-ray whiplash would leave a lifelong scar. Needless to say, my grandfather shuddered just at the thought of such a punishment. Other schools, however, went only as far as ordinary canes.

Grandfather himself was regarded, in general, as a good child and was not often caned. Even so, he was told by the cook that the wooden bar she used for holding the lid of the rice pot was smooth and just the right size for caning. She shook it at him whenever he slipped into kitchen to look for some goodies that she often kept ready for the table.

He learned from his grandfather that even members of royalty were caned when they did something very wrong. The canes, usually handled by a member of the royal household, would be wrapped in white cloth to prevent injury to the skin.

Whenever his brother was to receive a caning at home, my grandfather would be told to go and fetch a cane. In sympathy for his brother,

he would bring a stick either too small or too large to do the job properly. His mother would then find what she wanted for herself, and my grandfather would get caned along with his brother for being so crafty.

As for my grandmother, she was never considered unruly, only a little obstinate. Pinches were usually enough to keep her under control. She knew, however, the sharp sting of a bare *mayom* branch stripped of its leaves with which her mother whipped her when she misbehaved. The secret was not to run away from such a whipping, but rather to sit still and take it bravely; this reduced the length of the whipping. Grandmother always cried on such occasions, because she had no pretensions to bravery.

Teachers generally used rulers -- they were always close at hand -- to punish those who did not hand in their homework or talked too much in class. Grandfather's youngest uncle received frequent application of the rulers to his posterior for arriving late. His mother felt so sorry for him that she sewed a thin pillow inside his pants. The punishment became so obviously painless that the teacher soon caught on. From then on rulers were always applied to bare unprotected legs.

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## COCONUT FRONDS

In those days, the variety of toys was small. Children were always pleased with whatever they could find to play with, especially things that seemed different. Towards the end of the rainy season, the grown-ups began to prepare food for the merit-making known as *tak bat thevo* that was to take place at the end of the Buddhist Lent; the traditional food for this ceremony was known as *kao tom luk yon* in which round balls of sticky rice were wrapped in young coconut fronds and cooked.

Before the merit-making day, young coconut fronds which were still pale green in colour were gathered in great quantity for the making of *kao tom luk yon*, the balls of sticky rice. My grandmother's cook had a cousin from the country to stay at the house to lend a helping hand. Besides being able to twist and

fold the fronds into round shapes for the rice, this lady had some skill in basketry, so she wove the fronds into a ball, known as *takraw* and filled it with the sticky rice. On this round ball she left a little tail that could be held. She told the children that in the days of Lord Buddha, many people surrounded him to make merit by giving him alms; the crowds were such that few could get near him and so the people who could not reach him would hold the rice balls by the 'tail' to throw them into the Buddha's alms bowl. Beside this, she wove the young fronds into the shapes of fish as wrappers for the sticky rice. All the children were thrilled at this novelty; they squabbled over the edible toys, and ended up in getting one each.

Young coconut fronds could be used for so many purposes. In the ordination ceremony

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they were intricately sewn into cones with which the candidate for monkhood paid respect to the senior monk who officiated at the ordination. The creamy white flower of the fragrant pandanus was preferred for this if it could be found; however, to find such a flower blooming just at the right time was quite difficult, so it was more usual to see the beautifully made coconut frond cones.

The cook's cousin fascinated the children by making this and that with the fronds left over from wrapping the sticky-rice balls. There were neat light balls for my grandmother, beautiful fat fish for my grandmother's little sister, and most ingenious of all, she used the hard spines of older fronds to make a bird on two wheels which the little girl delighted in pulling along on a string. Then, for my grandmother

and the younger children, she made little grasshoppers each clinging onto a coconut frond neatly cut for holding in little hands. These grasshoppers were extremely lifelike; while the wings were made of coconut fronds, the bodies were finished with banana leaves.

These playthings had to be thrown away after two or three days, for they wilted and dried. My grandmother did try to learn how to weave a fish but, somehow, always missed a step and ended up with only half a fish -- the head half -- with a tail. They did resemble a fish -- but a somewhat odd one. To make a ball was far easier; as you wove, the end at which you started rolled inward continuously, of its own accord, so that by the time you reached the end of the fronds you had a neat, tight ball of good weight.

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The deep green old fronds, too, had their many uses. Besides all kinds of basketry, they made excellent temporary roofs for the food stalls that were set up in the family compound for the birthday celebration of my great-great-grandfather. The bamboo poles which held up the roofs were decoratively wrapped with the fronds. After the party, the children had their fun with the stall for several days -- that was, until all the fronds dried. When the stalls were taken down, the hard stiff spines of the fronds were scraped clean and tied together to make brooms. They were also cut into short lengths for use in holding banana or coconut leaves when making food containers and other household items.

When gathering a great quantity of coconut fronds, the adults always took care to cut only a few from each tree, because a tree could be killed if it lost too many fronds. Most big houses grew a great many coconut trees, not only for the fronds but for the nuts which could be said to be almost indispensable in Thai kitchens.

To come back to the grasshoppers that the cook's cousin made for my grandmother's young sister, my grandmother told me that the little girl would not let it out of her hands. At bedtime, she would fall asleep holding it. The nursemaid would take it out of her hand while she was asleep. The moment she woke up, she would immediately ask for her beloved grasshopper.







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## MAKING KANOM JEEP AND PAN SIP

My grandmother's childhood home took orders for various Thai delicacies -- both sweet and savoury. Whenever an order came for the delicately flavoured and gracefully shaped stuffed dumplings called *kanom jeep* and *pan sip*, flour had to be ground a day ahead. Children, including my grandmother, were assigned the job of grinding the flour with the traditional circular grindstones because it required very little skill. The children took turns at grinding and at putting uncooked rice with water into the hole in a hand-turned stone mill that would grind it into flour. As they worked they chattered, quarrelled, told stories, the way children do the world over. Once the grinding was over, it was the grown-ups' job to put the wet fresh flour into a cloth bag and place a weight on it to press out the water, getting it ready for the next day.

The shaping of *kanom jeep* and *pan sip* was the test of female skill in the fine arts, and was done by the grown-ups and the young girls. My grandmother and the other children helped by rolling the dough into small balls ready to be filled and shaped.

My grandmother watched her elders pressing the *pan sip* dough between their thumbs and forefingers, neatly and swiftly, into decorative rims. There were a variety of fillings: fish, prawn, pork and crab. *Kanom jeep* were skilfully fashioned to resemble little money bags, some with closed, some with open tops.

The children were allowed to try their hand at it. My grandmother always split the dough with too much filling and was generally unsuccessful. The older boys made *pan sip* into the shapes of ducks, fish -- and little house lizards, known as *jingjok*. The *jing-jok* shaped *pan sip* looked transparent and extremely realistic when cooked. They nearly killed the unsuspecting cook with shock when she took off the lid of the double boiler.

My great-great-grandfather, however, was far from being disgusted by the lizard-like *pan sip*. He laughed and in his booming voice said, 'Good, good, Now, let's try it,' bringing delighted smiles to the boys' mischievous young faces.

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Orders sometimes came for sago dumplings with pork or fish fillings. This savoury snack required much less skill to make than *kanom jeep* and *pan sip*. My grandmother, however, always had problems with them, being firm in her belief that the more filling, the more delicious the dumpling. Most of her dumplings split and, according to the evidence, she would eat the fillings and throw the uncooked sago into the pond. Her aunt was puzzled at the discrepancies between number of cooked dumplings and the amount of filling and sago that they started off with. The crime was duly

discovered, and grandmother was forbidden to take part in the making of the dumplings so that the profit would not end up in the pond. She was told to sit and watch, but was allowed to eat cooked dumplings that had split and were unsaleable.

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## LOY KRATONG

In their childhood, all the children including my grandparents grew more and more excited as the night of the full moon of the twelfth lunar month drew nearer and nearer. It was the night of the *loy kratong* festival when my great-great-grandfather and other heads of large families invited their young relatives and neighbours to celebrate the festival by the garden ponds and canals.

My grandmother never forgot the year her grandfather held a *loy kratong* party by the large pond in the spacious compound that contained the many houses belonging to the families of his children, nephews and nieces. He ordered the people in the compound to make *kratong* or floats for guests who might come with or without their own. The atmosphere of preparation was full of bustle and anticipation.

There were two kinds of floats, the kind that was prepared days in advance made of coloured paper in the shape of a lotus, and the other kind, made of banana leaves, which must be freshly sewn on the actual day. My great-great-grandfather enlisted everyone in the house to work on the banana-leaf *kratong* – the grown-ups making the *kratong*, the children picking and handing them the flowers which the grown-ups then arranged with the incense sticks and candles in each *kratong*. The finished *kratong* were arranged on a large number of flat baskets that filled the room with colour.

The party took place at night accompanied by music from Thai string instruments played by musicians seated in the waterside pavilion where my great-great-grandfather presided. Before the arrival of the guests, all the gaily coloured paper *kratong* were lit and set spectacularly afloat on the pond. When the children came to pay homage to him, he would give them each a banana-leaf float and some fireworks. These *kratong* were beautifully crafted but were often not well-balanced, and tended to float in a lopsided manner.

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The surface of the pond was glassy and still, perfect for the lighted floats that became more and more numerous as the night grew late. The children had a grand time with the fireworks. They were allowed to float the *kratong* that were left over after all the guests had floated theirs. My grandmother floated more *kratong* than she could possibly remember. Whenever a candle went out, my great-great-grandfather would send a servant out in a boat to relight it; or if a *kratong* got stuck behind a rock, he would have it set free again.

While the grown-ups enjoyed the music, the children were more interested in the fireworks and the floats. Some brought along little mechanical boats inside which they put lighted candles whose heat created a pressure that increased the speed of the boats. One boy used his boat to tow his *kratong* to the middle of the pond, to the great admiration of his friends. The fun increased with the lateness of the night. Some adults knotted the four corners of handkerchiefs to make makeshift head coverings for their children who they felt might catch cold from the moisture in the night air.

My grandfather's rich uncle also gave *loy kratong* parties, but they were never as much fun as those given by my great-great-grandfather. His house was on the river the current of which, in the twelfth-lunar-month, was so strong that most of the *kratong* either capsized or tilted pathetically. The river breeze, too, was so strong that all the candles went out.

As a result of this bad experience, the uncle started holding his *loy kratong* celebration on the canal that flowed past the back of his compound. He used water lettuce in the canal for making floats, selecting large, handsome ones and decorating them with flowers and lighted candles. The water lettuce was a natural water plant, so it floated well and far more steadily than man-made *kratong*. Once he lost his balance while launching a water-lettuce float and fell into the canal. In the front part of his compound he had men and women playing the traditional singing-game known as *pleng rua* (boat songs). The game demanded quick wit, a ready tongue and a clear singing voice. It was, in fact, a battle of wits between the male and female teams, and helped to make a hilarious evening. The winners would always be handsomely rewarded.

This uncle had a boat made of a coral-wood log about half a metre long. For the *loy kratong* night each year, he would cover it with pieces of brightly coloured paper; he stuck a row of coloured paper banners all the way up the mast. The boat was alight with two coconut oil lamps made of small bottles with tin caps. He took this strange little boat up and down the canal, attracting a great deal of attention. The lamps outshone all the *kratong* candles. After *loy kratong* night, this boat would be put away until the following year.





# **Kaew The Irrepressible**

Stories by Waen Kaew

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## TREASURE HUNT

Among all plant enthusiasts, Kaew's father could beat any other. Their house was very small and most of the compound was covered with all kinds of plants. He was interested in every variety. The trees which Kaew knew were the mangos, rose apples, mangosteens and custard-apples. She also knew, among the kitchen garden plants, the names of lemon grass, chilli, egg plant, porcupine orange, and basil. In other words, the names that Kaew knew were all concerned with eating, though actually her father grew many other plants. His wish was to turn one of his children into an agriculturalist. His method was on his children's birthdays to give them some kind of gardening tool: a hoe, a shovel, a watering can, a hose of the size that children can handle, and would provide a small plot of land for his children to have an experimental garden. It was really a pity that these "experimental plots" were not fully used.

One day, after having finished their homework, all the children were planning what games to play.

"By the way, do you realize, Kaew," said Kai, the eldest sister, looking quite serious, "that there may be a great deal of treasure underground?"

"What treasure, Kai?" Kaew asked, getting quite intrigued, since she had not seen Kai looking so serious before.

"Oh! all kinds of diamonds, gold, precious stones. If we could dig them up, we could sell them all and become very rich."

"Let's do it, then," Lek, the youngest sister said. "Then I can spend the money buying beautiful clothes for Mummy." Lek was always thinking of others.

"Wait a minute," Kaew intervened. "How can all the treasures be buried in our lawn?"

"Well! History says....."

At the mention of the word 'history', Kaew began to yawn, then immediately suppressed it for fear of annoying Kai.

"We lost our country to Burma twice. The people had to leave their homes behind. Before fleeing, they buried their treasures in the ground."

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“I see,” Kaew nodded her head in agreement. It would be marvellous if the treasures were there. Kaew could then buy a bicycle which she had long wanted.

All of them hurried to pick up their tools and each started digging a hole.

“Let’s do it this way. We all take turns digging for one day. The others will scoop the soil,” Kaew proposed. Lek and Kai seconded her.

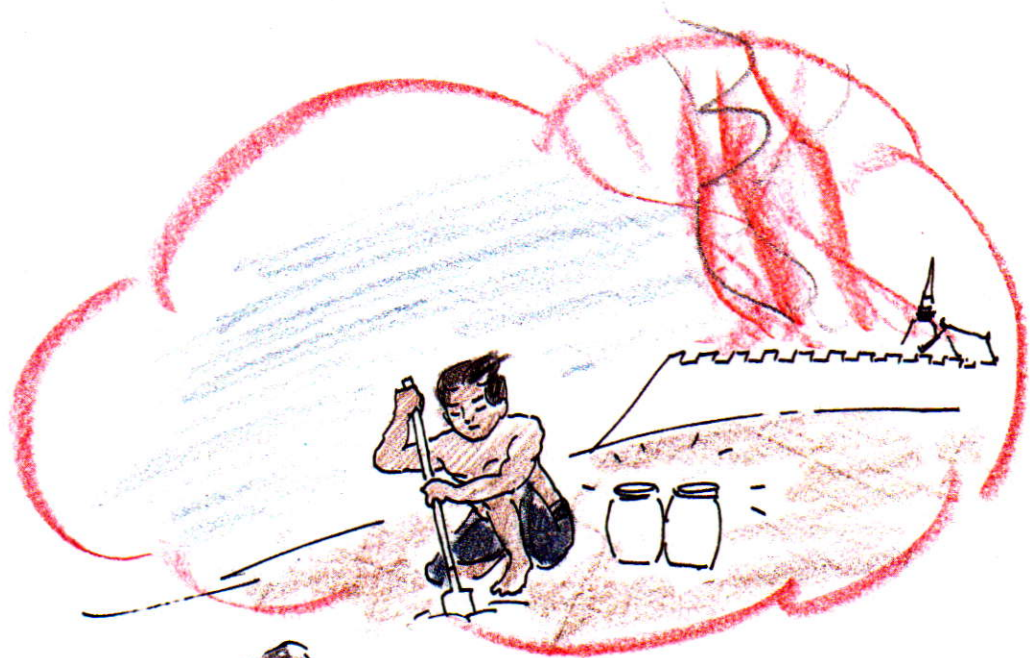
They worked hard every day. Their mother watched them curiously, not knowing exactly what they were up to. After a few days, they each got rather bored, since apart from three large holes in the ground, there was no treasure in sight. Finally Kaew could not bear in any longer.

“Let’s give it up, Kai. There seems to be nothing buried underground.”

“You’re right,” Kai agreed resignedly, while Lek stood gaping and speechless. Kai went on, “What are we to do now? Fill the holes with soil again?” And she was on the point of doing so.

“I have an idea,” said Kaew, “Let’s make ponds.” She ran to connect a hose to a tap inside the house and filled all the three holes with water. She then set an example by soaking herself in one of the ‘ponds’. Since the soil was clay, it held the water well. Lek and Kai followed suit. Lek the artist used clay to decorate the edge of the pond in beautiful patterns, and also used mud to smooth the edge as if to cement it.

In the end the children had a cooling spot which was rather dirty but nice. Kaew wondered..... would Mummy and Daddy be mad at her in the evening for being the leader of the gang?



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## THE MASTER CHEF

**K**aew's mother believed that every girl should be able to do household work, particularly cooking. However, she herself had not much time to do it herself, since she had to go out to work. Their food at home was very simple - omelette, soup, and when they felt like it, chilli sauce or curry which they bought from a shop next door for five baht, enough for five persons. Rice was no problem, since they had an electric rice cooker. Recently Lek had taken over the job of cooking rice. Since their mother wanted her daughters to learn how to cook, she went to seek the help of Aunt Joy

who was expert in preparing all kinds of dishes.

"That's fine. I shall teach my nieces how to cook. My children are all boys, so I cannot pass on any cooking tips."

And so on holidays Kai, Kaew and Lek started to learn how to cook. Aunt Joy asked the children beforehand what they would like to eat. The general agreement was for *pan sip* a kind of Thai dumplings. Aunt Joy agreed, although this dish is not at all easy for beginners.

Aunt Joy's kitchen was much bigger than Kaew's. All her utensils were modern, and

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there was also a dining table in the kitchen. The children sat around the table. First the stuffing had to be prepared: chopped onion, and crunched peanuts, with flavour added to one's taste. Then the pastry followed.

Nid and Noi, although belonging to the opposite sex, volunteered to learn also. Rice flour mixed with cassava flour had to be kneaded together well, then boiled until the dough was cooked outside, but uncooked inside, followed by more kneading so that the dough became sticky. When shaping the dumplings, one must dip one's fingers in wheat flour so as to

prevent the dough from sticking to the fingers. The dough must first be shaped into small round balls, then stretched into a flat piece. The stuffing was placed in the middle. The piece of dough was then folded, and the edge twisted in a spiral pattern. This always takes a bit of practice. After some time, Kai and Lek could produce nice looking dumplings, but Kaew, Nid and Noi, who are all rather impatient, could not. So Aunt Joy made these three practice with plain dough, without any stuffing. Kai, Lek and Aunt Joy put their dumplings into the steam pan.

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“Kaew, you are quite a gifted person,” Aunt Joy encouraged her. “Go on practising. I’m going out for a while. Once the stuffing is all used up, you may then stop.”

Aunt Joy was gone. Nid took a piece of dough and tried to shape it.

“Oh, bother! Can’t turn it into any shape,” complained Nid. “Look at Kaew’s. It’s worse - all black from dirt off her hand!”

“How dare you!” Kaew threatened to throw the dough at Nid. But Nid was faster. He threw his dough at Kaew’s face first - and so began a real dough battle, with Noi entering into the act. Kai and Lek were the ringside supporters.

To make it more messy, the dough was first dipped in wheat flour before being used as a weapon.

On her return, Aunt Joy was quite shocked at the sight of her kitchen. “What have you all been doing?” Aunt Joy exclaimed, “Why! you all behave like young kids who know no better! Stop at once! And clean up the mess, all of you!”

Aunt Joy made the children clean the kitchen floor. She said, “That is it. I’ll not teach you to cook any more.”

She kept her word, to the children’s regret.

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## A GREAT ARTIST

The schools were now promoting students' creativity in all areas, such as in sports, writing, painting, inter-school art competitions or even international competitions.

"Kaew, what are you doing?" Kai asked as she looked over something Kaew was occupied with.

"Painting for a competition," Kaew answered, not looking up from her piece of art.

"What do you have in mind?" asked her sister. She had never once seen Kaew painting anything. In the whole family, it was only Lek who loved art and had talent in this field. She had been making and selling small gifts and souvenirs for weddings and New Year and earning some money as a sideline.

"My teacher told me to paint buses from my imagination. That means I can paint whatever I like. Whoever wins in our school will have his or her work sent to an inter-school competition. There will be many prizes," Kaew explained.

"I understand," Kai said, nodding. "You want to win some prizes, that's why you're sitting here painting. Is our youngest sister sending in her work for this contest?"

"Not this time. Lek said she was not interested in buses and cars. But look at my bus. If there is a bad traffic jam, you can push a button and the chair will become a comfortable bed, your head will come out of one window, your feet another window. If the bus is crowded,



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you can push another button, and the bus will expand like a balloon. This is my dream. But it's an impossible dream. I should only dream of something more practical like a car of our own. When do you think Daddy is going to buy a car?"

On the day of the contest, Kai asked Kaew at home, "Did you win?"

"No, the teacher said she could not figure out what my painting was about."

Kaew, however, did not give up her intention to win a contest. Some weeks later, there was another contest at school. The topic was flowers. Lek was very happy and started painting a beautiful rose in her father's garden

which happily began to bloom for the first time. Lek was a very good painter, and her painting was charming. Kaew, on the other hand, had been painting secretly. Nobody had seen her painting yet.

When the prizes were announced, Lek came home and reported to her father and mother excitedly.

"Kaew and I both won first prize, with equal scores."

"Yes, your painting was really beautiful. But I have never seen Kaew's at all. I think I'll have to go to your school to see it. What did you paint?" her mother asked.

"Jasmin flowers," Kaew said.

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“Don’t give out all the details, Kaew,” Lek said, still with obvious excitement, and continued.

“Mine was praised for being natural, with a good composition and good sense of colour. But Kaew’s won a prize for originality. She painted a boy selling garlands of flowers.”

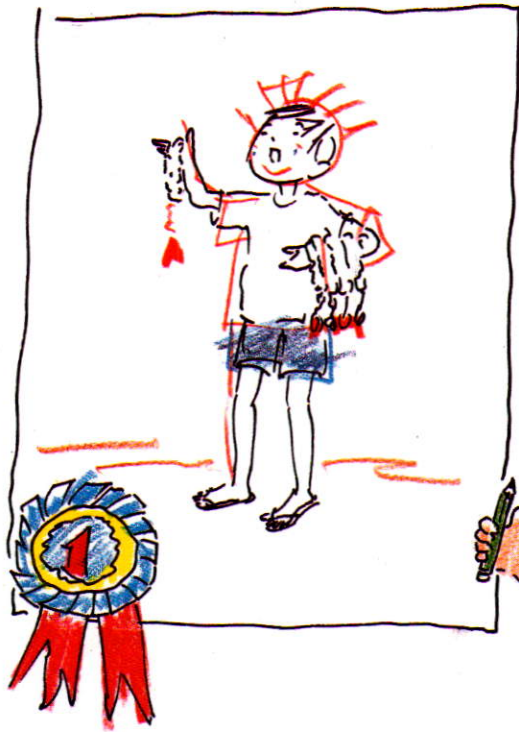
“I thought that garlands were something very important. Children who sell garlands help their parents by earning some extra money for the family. I talked about it with Pan, Uncle Pong’s nephew. He had to go out in the street to sell garlands every day before he went to school. I then realized that, although I have no car to drive me to school like Moo

Wan or Oey, at least I am much better off than Pan.”

“I am very happy that my children have won prizes,” their father said. “I believe Kaew will have to practice painting more often so that she will become a better artist.”

Kaew shook her head. “I think I am giving up. I would rather play. After a hard day at school, it’s very tiring to sit down and paint. I think I am going to see Uncle Pong now,” Kaew said and ran away quickly.

Her father sighed. He had thought two of his daughters would become two great artists. But it looked as though he could only count on one.



7.5.2023



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## PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

**K**aew's professional training was rather exciting and unusual. She made it happen.

This is how it all started. The children enjoyed discussing what they would like to be when they grew up. They usually wanted to be like their heroes.

"Kaew, when I grow up, I would like to be a teacher." Kai often said this, and stuck to it. As a result, their parents were very proud of the fact that eventually their eldest daughter would be a model for the nation.

"I'd like to be a nurse," Kaew said. Actually no one really paid serious attention to what Kaew wanted to be, since some days Kaew would like to be an agricultural officer like her father; on other days she would like to be a teacher like her mother; then she would prefer to be an irrigation engineer like Suthi, her neighbour. For the time being, Kaew seemed set on becoming a nurse, like Aunt Lai. On

hearing this, even her father exclaimed, "What? Kaew a nurse? Pray for those poor patients!"

Kaew did not say anything in front of him. "I can really be a nurse," Kaew insisted in private to Kai.

"What about you, Lek?" asked Kai.

Lek, who had kept silent all this time, answered hesitatingly, "Well! I am not sure whether to be a singer or a dress designer."

All the others laughed. Kaew said seriously, "Really, Kai, I would like to be a nurse. Then I could help people."

"Well and good," said Kai.

"But the problem is that whatever profession one wants to take up, one should get training from an early age. Kai will be a teacher, and she has been practising all the time," commented Kaew.

That was quite true. Everyone had to come

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to Kai to do their homework. When it was examination time, it was Kai who gave tutorials to the whole class.

“As for Lek,” continued Kaew, “whenever she feels like practising singing, she can just sing; or if she feels like designing, she can design paper dresses for her dolls. It’s only poor me who has no training at all,” complained Kaew, miserably.

“Let’s do it this way,” suggested Kai. “Whoever does not feel well, let Kaew know. Headaches, fever, knife wounds..... Kaew will give first-aid treatment and then we will tell Mummy who acts like our doctor.”

“Agreed,” said Kaew, delighted.

From then on, Lek and Kai decided to consult Kaew whenever they felt slightly unwell. Kaew, meanwhile, voraciously read up all the books she could find about health and hygiene. However, no one felt ill, and Kaew never managed to get any training.

“Let’s try this,” proposed Kaew. “I’ll ask Euang to provide us secretly with alcohol, an antiseptic, bandages and plaster. She can take them from her mother’s large medicine cupboard which is not locked like ours. Once we have these, we can then go cycling at Nid’s house. If we speed up, one or the other is sure to fall off the bicycle.”

“But that will hurt!” exclaimed Lek.

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“In that case we’ll cycle on the lawn, so that when we fall off, it will not hurt too much, except that there will be minor scratches. I will then treat the wounds with antiseptic, which will cause no jabbing pain at all,” Kaew tried to assure Lek.

The following Sunday the children went cycling at Nid’s house. At first they cycled round the lawn, so there was no accident. Gradually the cycling became more and more exciting. Finally Kaew and Nid were the only two who vied with each other in trying to make the other fall off the bicycle.

At one point, Nid tried to cut across Kaew’s path, with the result that Kaew lost her balance

and rode the bicycle right into a tree. She fell down, and there was a deep gash on Kaew’s leg.

Kaew slowly got up. “Good. I now have a wound.” She could speak calmly because her leg was still numb. “I’ll treat the wound myself.” She was on her way to get her first aid box, when she ran into Aunt Joy.

“Kaew, come and get something to eat. But what has happened to your leg?”

“I fell off the bicycle. It’s nothing, Aunty. I’ll dress the wound myself,” said Kaew, while taking out the antiseptic solution from her bag.

“Where did you get the medicine from? The gash is rather deep, you know. A special type of

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medicine will have to be used to heal the gash. I'll have to see to it myself." Aunt Joy led Kaew to her medicine cupboard, and efficiently dressed the wound. The other children came inside. "Was the gash caused by the bicycle?" asked Aunt Joy, "In which case we'll have to give an injection against tetanus. Nid, go and ask your father to come here, will you?" Nid's father was a doctor.

"I suppose Kaew is still not so good at cycling, that's why she fell off," Nid's father teased Kaew.

"On the contrary, I am good at it," Kaew felt discredited if anyone mentioned that she could not ride the bicycle well. "I intentionally made myself fall off the bicycle so that there

would be a wound for me to dress. I would like to be a nurse, and therefore I need some training now."

"Listen , Kaew dear," said Aunt Joy, trying to suppress her laughter. "If you want to be a nurse, then study hard; and on completing secondary education, you can pass an entrance examination to a nursing school. It's no use trying to jump the steps. If you want some training, then I'll take you this coming Sunday to the hospital where you can fold the bandages."

So in the end Kaew not only got no training, but had to have an injection against tetanus in the bargain.



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## ASK THE SPIRIT

Whenever the children get together for a good chat, the subject of ghosts almost always crops up. Kaew's parents did not want their children to be afraid of ghosts, and they avoided the subject. However, the children learned about ghosts from their school friends, and believed everything they were told.

"Honestly, Mummy," said Kaew excitedly. "Tui told me that she once saw a ghost smoking a cigarette. She saw it with her own eyes!"

"Ann also told me that her mother was visited by the ghost of Ann's grandfather. Pui also saw one," said Lek.

Their mother gave up trying to stop the children from getting scared of ghosts.

It was the fashion to play a game called the 'spirit in the chopsticks'. At school they used unsharpened pencils instead of chopsticks. First the spirit of any dead person was invited to come and live in the pencils. Two persons

were required, each holding three pencils. One pencil was held horizontally, lengthwise; the other two were placed across the first one, parallel to each other. The tips of the two parallel pencils held by one person touched the tips of the similarly placed pencils held by the other person. Then a wish was made, for example, "If I am going to pass in the examination, let the pencils be raised" (through the help of the pencil holders?). Then one had to say, "Please return to where you came from."

One day, the science teacher, Miss Chaweewan, had some personal business to settle, and so she was late. The children were all wondering whether she would come or not.

"Want to bet? Miss Chaweewan will not be here today," Kaew raised her voice above the noise.

"How can you tell?" asked Nid, sneeringly.

"Let's do it this way," Pom gave a ruling. In

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this class, whenever there was a disagreement, it was usually Pom who was the mediator.

“Let’s ask the spirit in the chopsticks.” Pom then asked Ouan, her twin sister who looks exactly like Pom, to join in the ritual of inviting the spirit to dwell in the chopstick pencils.

Pom’s and Ouan’s pencils did not move up or down according to the game, but pointed instead towards the door. The children turned their eyes towards the door, and at that very moment Miss Chawewan entered the room.

The children also loved to play the ‘spirit in the drinking glass’, although it was less popular than ‘spirit in the chopsticks’ because it is more difficult to play. The items required were: a board (a piece of paper may be used instead), on which squares were drawn like on a chess board, and each letter of the Thai alphabet was

written inside each square, including all the consonants, vowels, tone marks and all the signs in the written language. For a drinking glass, one might use any small glass.

Inviting a spirit involves extensive rituals. First there must be offerings for the spirit, for example rice, which may be replaced by toffees or dried salted plums. Then joss-sticks must be lit. The glass is placed upside down on the central square marked ‘rest place’. The players may ask any questions they like. The three players touch the glass very lightly with their index finger. The spirit will move the glass from square to square, thus spelling out words to form an answer to a question, as with an oujda board. When an answer is made, the glass will move back to the ‘rest place’. An important point to remember is that each player is strictly

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forbidden to push the glass.

When the children played this game, if Kaew was not the one to invite the spirit and did not have her index finger touching the glass, then the glass did not move. Kaew explained that not everyone has the ability to communicate with the spirits. Kaew had a special ability in this sphere. Most of her friends believed in her explanation, since the spirits seem to answer her questions very clearly. However, the boys did not, especially Nid.

“Kaew was pushing the glass, I could see very clearly,” shouted Nid. Kaew stared at him in the face, and said, “Don’t you dare say such things! The spirit will wring your neck!” But Kaew and Nid could never be angry with each other for a long time, since they were great

chums.

On Euang’s birthday, which that year happened, fortunately, to be a Sunday, the children had a whole day to play together. Euang invited all her close friends to her house. All kinds of games were played, and finally came ‘spirit in the drinking glass.’ As usual, Kaew offered to invite the spirit. After the rituals, questions were asked.

“Whose spirit dwells in the glass?” asked Euang as a customary greeting.

The glass slowly spelt out the reply. “It’s me, Nid. Why haven’t I been invited to join you all?” wrote the spirit.

Euang jumped up. “Oh, dear me! I completely forgot to invite Nid. But Nid is still alive. How come his spirit is here?”

Euang put away the board and the glass,

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and rang up to invite Nid and Noi. After a while Nid turned up, not knowing anything about the 'spirit in the drinking glass'.

Nid was full of suggestions for games. Euang's birthday party was therefore great fun. Without Nid the party would have been very dull. Nid himself preferred to play rather than study at home.

This is one of the useful services of the 'spirit in the drinking glass'.

The day before, Ouan, Pom, Nid, Noi, Euang, Ann, Pui and Tui played the 'spirit in the drinking glass' at Kaew's house. Kaew had to make a new board, since the old one was stolen by Ow the dog who chewed it all up.

The children asked all kinds of questions, which were all properly answered by the spirit.

"Who is the most kind-hearted person in the school?" somebody asked.

The spirit started to spell out 'K-A-E' and then the glass started moving round and round

without stopping, as though looking for a missing letter.

"Oh! I forgot to write the letter W," said Kaew. So Kaew added it on the board. The spirit in the glass immediately ran to the square marked "W", then returned to the "rest place."

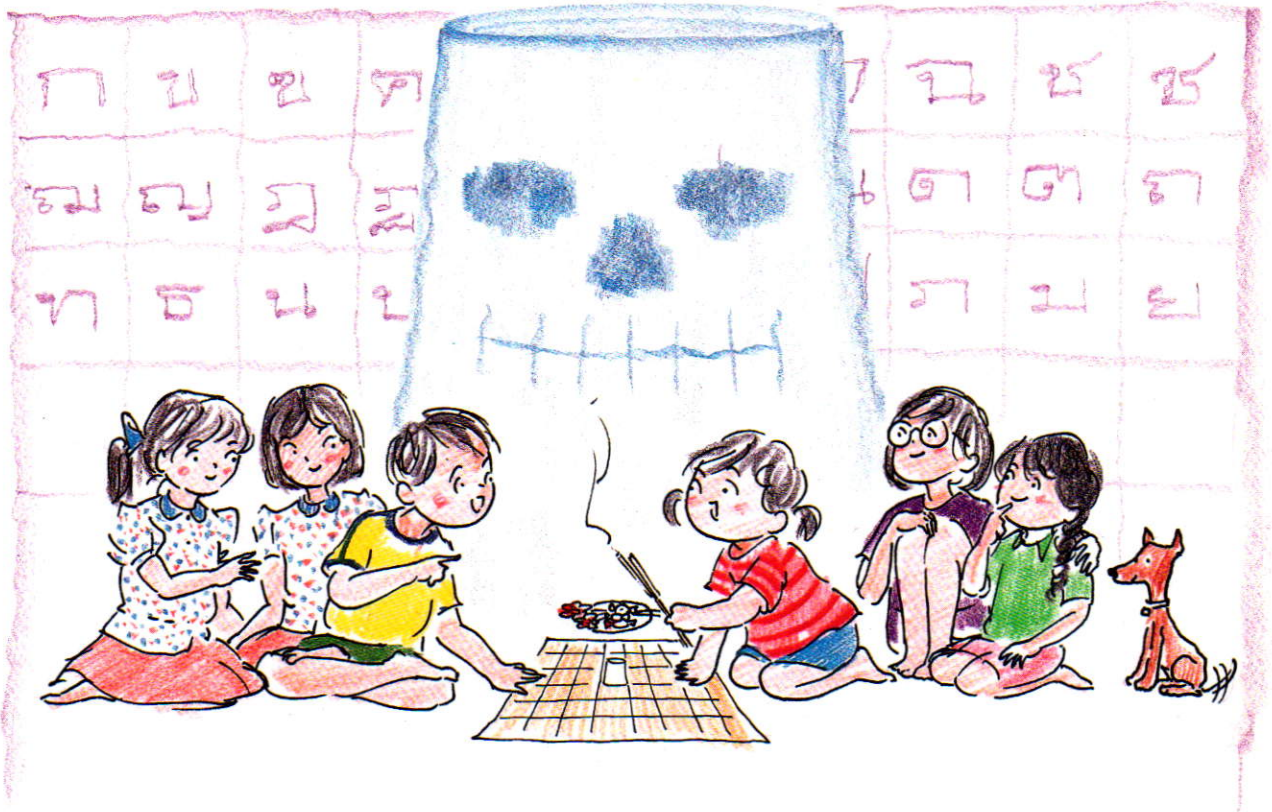
"See, the spirit said that I'm a good girl, but nobody recognizes my good qualities," said Kaew.

"I am sure Kaew pushed the glass," said Kai.

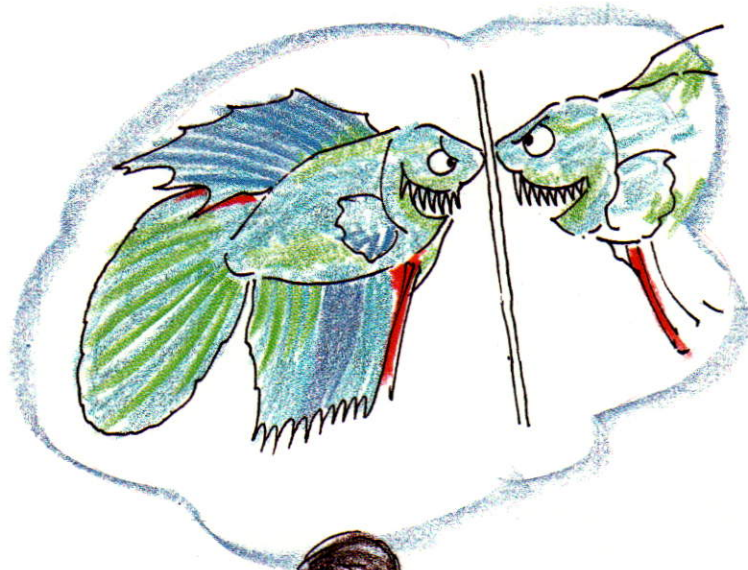
"I think so too," added Ouan. "I've been noticing it several times."

"Just as I have been telling you from the beginning. Don't try to deceive us, my dear Kaew," scorned Nid.

In the end Kaew had to admit that she had been pushing the glass, so that it would be more fun, otherwise what spirit would ever accept the invitation to visit them!



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## FISH REARING

The science teacher explained to the pupils how to keep a balanced fish tank. First they must get a fish tank, then any kind of fish they wish to rear. What is important is that there must be some kind of water plant to filter the light; one or two shrimps to keep the water clean; and a spiny eel to eat up the waste. In the beginning, a little fish food must be given. After a while algae will appear which will provide food for the fish. There should also be sufficient air so that the tank can be completely closed, and there will be no need to give any more food to the fish. It is quite difficult to know exactly how many fish to put into a tank to maintain the proper balance. In addition, there are other problems. Some pupils try to catch the fish with their own hands. One way of preventing this (which does not seem to be very effective) is to put into the tank some fierce fish which bite the fingers of the fish-catchers. Some pupils though do not dare to put their fingers inside the tank because they are put off by the ugly-looking spiny eel.

Although the preparation of a balanced fish tank was not quite complete, it created a great

deal of enthusiasm in fish-rearing among the children. Noi took it most seriously. Aunt Joy bought her a fish tank. Noi bought sword-tail fish, which were given beautiful names like Waning Moon, Glamour Lady, Scratch Sky, and the like. Kaew had never kept any fish, but used to enjoy catching them from a pond, and then throwing them back again. Most of the fish she caught were needle fish, and sometimes baby snake-head fish. Once Kaew tried to catch a catfish which was submerging itself in the mud, with the result that she was stung by it. Those who have never been stung by catfish have no idea how painful it is. Kaew's regular co-fisherman was Suthi. Once in a while the others would also join in. The grown-ups used to say, "Look at Suthi. He plays like a small boy, and not like a grown-up," to which Suthi would reply, "Just to relax my mind." Kaew was of the view that Suthi should not be working at the Irrigation Department, but should be transferred to work at the Fisheries Department.

One day, Suthi stood shouting in front of Kaew's house, "Kaew, come along. I've got

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something to show you.”

Kaew ran after Suthi to his house. There she saw four jars, each one containing a fish.

“They are fighting fish,” Suthi proudly told her.

“Where did you get them from?” asked Kaew.

“I bought them myself, of course,” Suthi said, “Three baht each.”

“Three baht for such a tiny fish!” Kaew exclaimed.

“You know nothing about fish. This is already a bargain price. I happen to be friendly with the fish seller at the Sunday Market. Good fighting fish are very expensive. In the old days, we didn’t have to buy them. We could catch them in the ponds around here. I don’t know where the fish have all gone to.”

“Do they actually fight? Is that why they are called fighting fish?” asked Kaew.

“Of course they do,” replied Suthi. “The male ones, that is. Whenever they are put

together, they will bite each other to pieces. We have to put a paper card in between each jar so that they don’t see each other.”

“But since each fish is in a separate jar, how can it fight?” asked Kaew.

“They will swim towards each other, and crash their heads against the jar until they hurt themselves,” explained Suthi.

“Are you keeping them to make them fight?” asked Kaew.

“Oh, no! Just keeping them. You know, if my mother knows I have spent twelve baht for the fish, she will scold me for wasting money. Take them to your house, Kaew.”

Kaew shook her head, “No, thanks. I have no space at home to keep the fish. Anyway, your mother should not really scold you since you bought them with the money you earned for yourself.”

“Don’t speak so loud!” whispered Suthi, “I still have to ask her for extra money every month.”



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"I know what we should do. Why not give them to Noi," Kaew suggested, and Suthi promptly agreed. The two then took all the jars to Aunt Joy's house, and met her on arrival.

"We are bringing these fish to give to Noi, Aunty," Kaew reported.

"Noi, come here!" Aunt Joy called out. There was no need to call a second time. As soon as Noi heard Kaew's voice, he immediately put aside his homework.

"Kaew and Suthi are giving you some fighting fish. They are quite pretty. But don't let them fight, otherwise I'll spank you," Aunt Joy promised.

Two days later, Suthi had to see Aunt Joy about something. On arrival, he met Noo (Noi's eldest brother). Noo hurriedly reported, "Suthi, Noi's fish are all dying."

Out came Aunt Joy and Noi.

Aunt Joy said, "Suthi, those fighting fish are in a bad shape. So I gave Noi a real spanking."

"Actually Mummy should not have punished me," argued Noi, "I did not make them fight, but only took away the paper cards. The fish swam and banged their heads against the jar themselves."

Aunt Joy continued the scolding, "You know very well that fighting fish cannot be allowed to see each other's heads, otherwise they will immediately want to fight. They banged their heads against the jar until they were completely disfigured."

"I was worse when I was a small boy," Suthi said, trying to protect Noi. "We used to enjoy catching crickets. Mother allowed us to catch them, but not to make them fight, saying that it was a sin. So I merely put two crickets together in the same jar. They started fighting themselves. I had nothing to do with it. Mother would not listen to my explanation. What a spanking I got that time!"

In the end Suthi had to take back all the fighting fish to give them first aid at his house.

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## EXPERT SCIENTIST

**O**f all the subjects that Kaew had to study, science was her favourite, since it dealt with real things and gave results, and everything could be proved. Some topics made one think and made one want to learn more. For example, yesterday Kaew, Kai and Lek asked their parents' permission to go and play at Euang's house until evening. Euang's father had a telescope which was powerful enough to see the mountains on the moon, which if seen merely by human eyes would appear like a rabbit. One could see four of Jupiter's moons. On a clear day, Euang told them that she could even see the halo surrounding Saturn. All the stars are millions and millions of miles away, and their number is uncountable. Euang's father taught the children to watch the various constellations which have special names. The one that Kaew remembered very well, even before she was taught its name, was Orion. A few days ago Kaew began to puzzle over whether there were actually 'men from outer space', or living things on other planets. Kaew asked Kai once, who told her, "I have read

somewhere that on other planets there is no water like on the planet earth; the atmosphere is also not suitable, and there is no oxygen for living things. I don't suppose any humans can exist there."

"But," Kaew argued, "it is possible that there are human beings who need no water, who can survive in extremely hot and cold climates, and who can breathe carbon dioxide or any other kind of gas on those planets."

"That could be," answered Kai, but without much conviction.

Even now Kaew still ponders over the question of 'men from outer space' and dreams that one day she will be an astronaut going to explore other planets.

There are many equally exciting topics in science. This year Kaew is studying science with Miss Chawewan, who often teaches the children how to experiment. A few months ago they were taught how to keep a balanced fish tank. Then how to look after frogs. The teacher told them how to follow the growth of a frog, from the time it was merely an egg, then a

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baby frog, until its limbs began to grow. Actually the children did not keep frogs, but toads. Frogs' eggs are so difficult to find. Kaew had never seen one. The teacher told the children that frogs' eggs stick together in clumps, while toads' eggs (which Kaew found in the pond by the house) stick together in strings.

Last week the teacher told the children to grow beans, and make a report on their growth. Kaew was complimented on her detailed report. Kaew recorded the time, the height of the plant in centimetres, its general appearance, and her own observations. However, Kaew's report had only one flaw - her handwriting at certain places was illegible. Also there were dark blotches and the lines were not drawn straight. That was why Kaew never came top in science.

This week the lesson was on 'crystallization'. There was no homework, but those interested could conduct an experiment. Kaew wanted to do so, since she was interested in the subject. In the evening, after class, Kaew consulted Nid.

"I would like to have a go at it. The teacher

said that different substances produce different shapes of crystals. Shall we try different things?"

"Let's do it," agreed Nid.

Nid decided to experiment on copper sulphate crystallization, while Kaew chose sugar crystallization.

In order to get beautiful crystals, one must let them grow, that is to say, dissolve the substance in water to turn it into thick liquid and then leave it to crystallize. The small crystals should then be put in the thick solution again for a fortnight to let the crystals form around a thin thread into various shapes depending on the substance.

Kaew had no bottle at home to make the crystals, because her mother sold all empty bottles to the Chinese hawkers. Nid had to provide her with a bottle (Nid had plenty of empty medicine bottles at home, since his father was a doctor). Nid also told Kaew that a scientist must have a spirit burner to provide heat in certain experiments. Kaew had none, so she had to use a candle instead (which she got from

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her father who used candles for his prayers at night). When the candle was used up, Kaew turned the wax into candles again, using raw thread to make the wicks. Because Kaew used candles in her experiments, Kai made fun of her by saying that she did not appear like a scientist at all, but rather like a witch doctor in a well-known horror tale.

When Kaew asked her mother for some sugar for the experiment, her mother said, "This small amount will be enough. You are likely to eat the sugar rather than use it in your experiment."

Kaew carried out the experiment according to the process explained by the teacher. The liquid which should be thick was rather thin, since Kaew did quite a bit of tasting during the experiment.

Two weeks passed by.

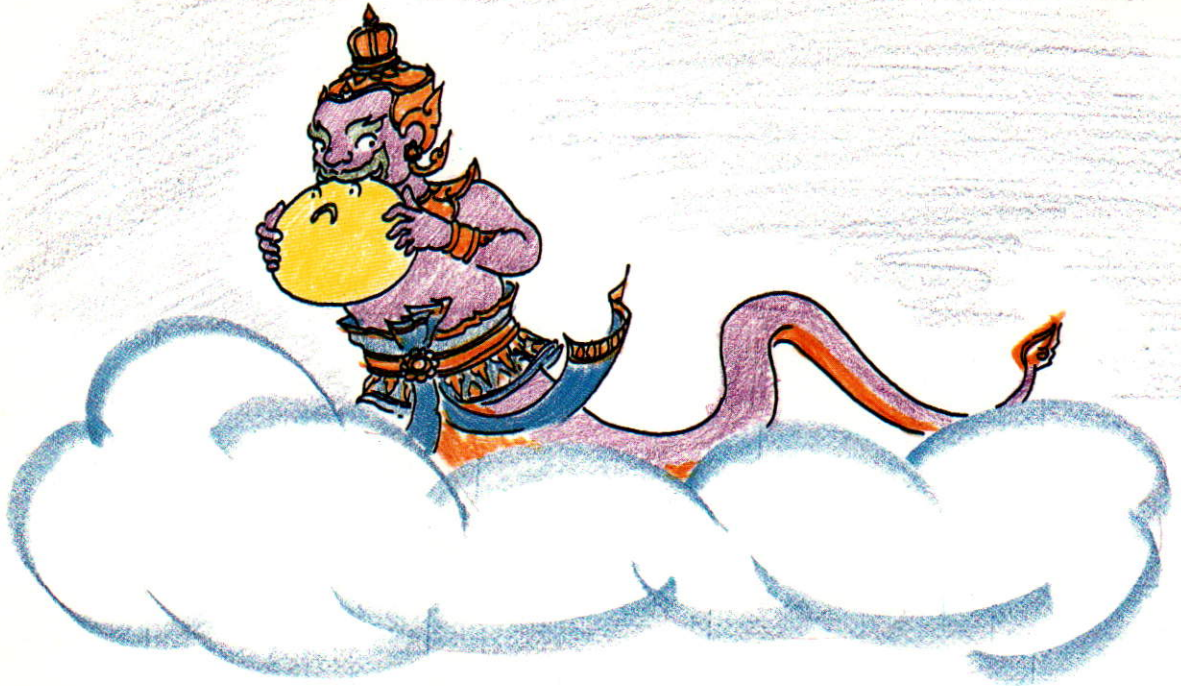
"Well, Nid! How goes the crystallization?" asked Kaew.

Nid made a face, "What crystallization? At first Noi kept on pulling the thread around on which the crystals were forming. A few days later, it was the wretched Noi again who swept the bottle off the table and broke it! I got so mad I gave it up. What about yours?"

Kaew replied feebly, "You know very well that I have a sweet tooth. I dipped my finger into the liquid to suck it everyday. Mummy saw it and poured the whole thing down the drain. She then sold the bottle to a hawker!"

Even if her experiment was not a success this time, Kaew, the expert scientist, will certainly carry out another experiment in the near future.





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## LUNAR 'CLIP

**B**ang! Bang! Clash! Boom!  
All those noises (which cannot be described in words) woke the children up.

"What's all that noise, Kai?" asked Lek before she jumped out of bed.

"I don't know," replied Kai and she went over to look out of the window. She turned round and called the others excitedly, "Come and take a look! The people next door are doing something strange. They are all banging tins and buckets like mad."

Kaew and Lek ran to the window.

"That's Uncle Pong," Lek pointed him out.

"Let's go and ask him," Kaew ran out and into her father.

"Daddy, they are doing something at Uncle Pong's house," reported Kaew.

"To-night there is a lunar eclipse."

Before her father could explain further the connection between Uncle Pong's family members making so much noise and the lunar eclipse, there was honking in front of the house. Her father looked out of the window and said, "That's Joy's car. Kaew, why don't you go out and open the gate?"

Kaew did so. It was Grandma who got out of the car, panting. Kai, Lek, their father and mother rushed out to greet her.

"Anything the matter?" asked the girls' father.

"Lunar clip, don't you know? I am here to see whether everyone of you has taken medicine. I had to ask Noo to drive me here."

Kaew looked up at the moon which was almost half hidden by a dark shadow. She asked Grandma, "Why do we have to take medicine, Grandma dear?"

"Don't you remember my telling you once that in the old days people believed that if there was a lunar clip, then one was supposed to take medicine, any kind of medicine, to make oneself healthy."

While explaining, Grandma took out of her bag some tablets and gave one to each of the family.

"Take it. Then I shall have to move on to Jiep's house." She took hold of Noo and made off.

"What's all this?" Kai was quite puzzled.

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“It’s a long story. Let’s go inside the house first,” said her father. Once inside, they sat around the dinner table.

“People in the old days believed that the lunar eclipse was caused by a giant named Rahoo gobbling the moon. People had to make as much noise as possible in order to shake him into releasing the moon. Grandma, for her part, believes in taking medicine to make one strong. Oh, there are many other superstitious beliefs,” their father explained.

Their mother added, “People in my area believed that while there is a lunar eclipse, or lunar ‘clip’ as Grandma calls it, we should make slight cuts at the lowest part of the tree trunk. It would make the tree bear more fruit.”

“Is there really a giant?” asked Lek.

Well! I don’t think there is. The scientific explanation is that a lunar eclipse is caused by the earth coming directly between the sun and the moon. The moon gradually becomes darker as it moves into the shadow of the earth.”

“I’m still not very clear,” said Lek.

“It’s rather difficult to understand. Tomorrow I will explain the whole thing by drawing it on paper. In any case you will have to study it in a few year’s time,” said Kai.

“Daddy,” asked Kai, “Mummy said that making cuts on the tee trunk will make the tree bear more fruits. How does that help?”

“I’m not so sure why. It is said that a tree has a natural fear of danger. When it is cut, it believes it is dying, and so it has to produce blossom and fruit. Actually, to explain it in another way, a tree gets nitrogen from the soil which produces leaves. It gets carbon dioxide from the air which produces blossom and fruit. The cuts on its trunk reduce the nitrogen intake which tends to make the tree produce only leaves.....” Their father, the plant enthusiast, explained with some pride. But, on seeing the children looking half asleep, he stopped talking. Kaew, although quite dozey, managed to say, “Tomorrow I will make cuts on all mango trees.”

“Don’t you dare!” said her father.

Their mother intervened, “Come, time for bed, you children.”



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## HAPPY BIRTHDAY

**I**t was Kaew's birthday. She got up very early to cook rice and prepare things to be offered to the monks. Her sisters Kai and Lek lent a helping hand. After giving food to the monks, Kai said, "I have read in 'Ceremonies and Traditions' that King Rama IV started the tradition of merit-making on birthdays."

It was Lek who was interested in the subject, rather than Kaew, the birthday girl.

"But I have seen Mummy and Daddy making merit very often. Last Sunday, for example, Mummy offered food to the monks when it was nobody's birthday!" Lek said.

"Well, we can make merit on many occasions, not necessarily only on birthdays," Kai answered.

"Then it wouldn't be all that exciting to make merit when your birthday comes, if you can do it on any other day," Lek continued. "And why do they tell us to make merit on birthdays, after all?"

"Because it is believed that since you have lived safely and well for the whole of one year, and because you didn't die during that year, it is something to be appreciated, and therefore you should make some useful contribution to others....."

"Kai!" protested Kaew, who did not seem to be listening at all. "Today is my birthday, and of course, I didn't die last year. I am not going to die so young."

"Young or old, everyone dies, sometime...." Kai answered.

Their mother came down from the house and said "What are you doing, children? Sounds like quarelling again?"

"No, Mummy." Kaew smiled to cover up. "Kai was telling us about the history of birthday merit-making."

"Carry on then," Mother said and waited.

"There's nothing much to it." Kai's voice softened. "I have read a magazine which said that lately fewer and fewer people are making

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merit on their birthdays, while more and more people are giving birthday presents and parties. I prefer the way we do it in our family, merit-making on birthdays.”

“But I also have a present for you, said Lek, proudly. “It’s a birthday card I made myself.”

“Me too!” said Kai. “I have made a little writing book with the unused pages from last year’s exercise-books.”

“Thank you very much.” Kaew gave Kai a sign of respect by joining her hands in front of the face.

Suddenly they all heard a car horn. Everybody including their mother and father went down to the gate.

Their father cried out, “Grandma! You’ve come so early.”

“Of course, I had to. It’s my granddaughter’s birthday.” Grandmother then turned to Cousin Noo who had driven for her.

“Take this down also.....”

Cousin Noo lifted a rather heavy plastic pail, its weight pulling down one of his shoulders.

“It must be turtles!” Kaew guessed. And she was right. On the birthday of each of her granddaughters, grandmother would always bring a few turtles with gold leaves pasted on their shell, to be released by the birthday girl. Each time she explained that releasing turtles on birthdays would give one a long life.

“Kaew,” Grandmother called out. “Take these turtles and set them free. And may you live long and happily, my dear granddaughter. The pail is an extra present for you. Now, I must go. Today is a Buddhist holy day. I have to go to the temple to listen to the sermon.”

Grandmother got back into the car so quickly that Kaew hardly had time to show her respects and thank her. Cousin Noo cried out from the car, “Happy birthday, little Kaew.”

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It was not a holiday. So, after releasing the turtles, Kai, Kaew and Lek, all had to go to school. Their father and mother also had to go to work. Kai asked her mother before leaving for school, "May I take Kai and Lek sight-seeing after school?"

"Where do you want to go?" her mother asked.

"I want to go to Chatuchak Park," Kaew volunteered an answer.

"There's nothing there! If you want to go I'll let you. But you'll hurry back, won't you?" her mother said.

After school, Kai went directly to meet Lek and Kaew at their school. There were not so many people at Chatuchak Park. Suddenly, Kaew saw three people who looked like a father, mother and son, sitting near a pond.

They were blowing plastic bags, from which they had drunk iced-coffee and soft-drinks, into balloons, and having fastened the balloons with

rubberbands, they threw them into the pond.

"Look at them, Kai." said Kaew. "They are making the water in the pond dirty. I will tell them not to do that."

Kai grabbed Kaew's arm and said, "Don't annoy them."

"You can't stop me, Kai. This city is also mine."

Kai couldn't stop Kaew who went up to the group and said, "Excuse me, please don't throw plastic bags into the pond. It will be a pity if this beautiful park becomes dirty."

The three people looked at Kaew with cold angry eyes, without saying anything. The mother continued to throw the last plastic balloon into the pond. Kai and Lek, seeing that things did not look very good, came over and led Kaew away.

"Let's go," Lek suggested.

The three sisters walked away from that area. They were very quiet for a while. Finally,

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Kaew broke the silence.

“Oh really, Kai! That kind of person doesn’t want to see any improvement in our country.” How can we ignore them? You’ve said yourself that we should make some useful contribution on our birthdays. I will contribute by helping make the city clean! We can all help by picking up plastic bags around the park and put them in the rubbish can.

Kaew picked up the garbage while continuing to complain.

“If we threw garbage around carelessly like this, we would certainly be spanked. Why, we even have to put toffee-wraps in our pocket if there’s no rubbish-can nearby.”

After a while, Kai suggested that they should go home. “Mummy and Daddy will be worried,” she said.

At the family dinner, Kai told them what had happened at Chatuchak Park.

“In our country, there are still a lot of people who only think of themselves,” their father

concluded. “I am glad that my daughters wanted to make some useful contribution to society. Kaew, today is your birthday, it is therefore very important that you should do some good deeds. But do them every day too.”

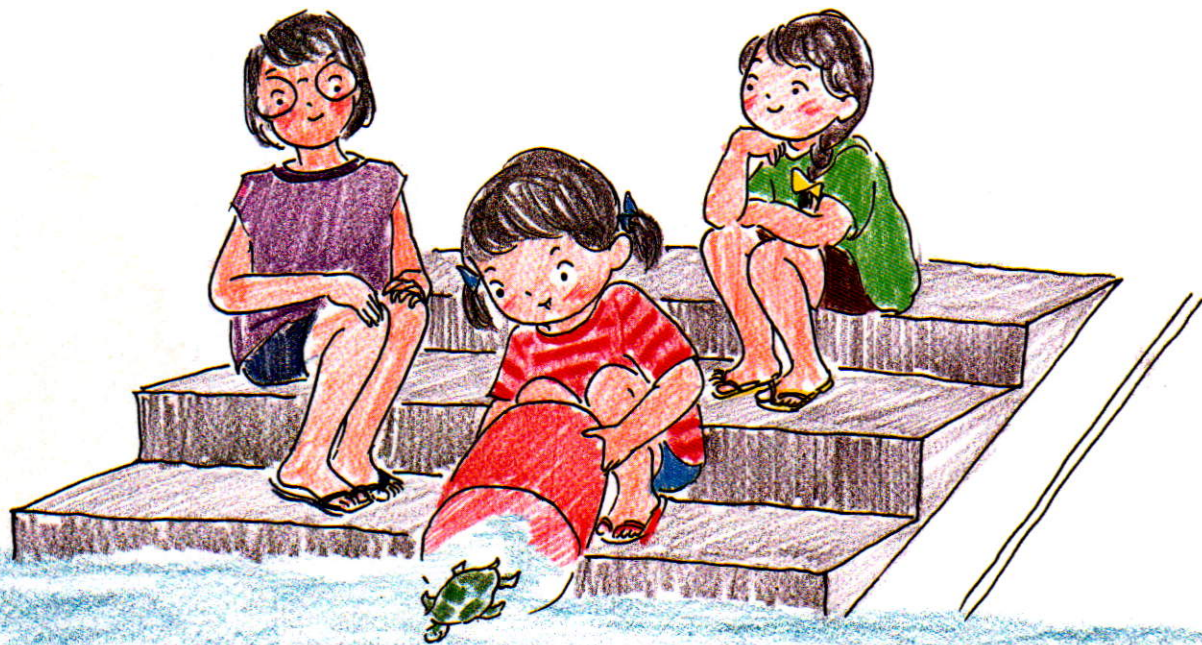
“And what about making merit and releasing the turtles?” Kaew asked.

Her mother took the opportunity to give a long lecture. “Offering food to the monks is a way of making merit through those who practice Buddhism and teach people to do good deeds. Releasing turtles is an act of giving a free life to animals, and therefore is a form of merit-making. Your grandmother loves you and wants you to do good deeds. You’ll have to love your grandmother too.”

After dinner, their father said, “And now, whose turn is it to wash the dishes? It’s the turn of the birthday girl! Do your duty then. Happy birthday my daughter.”

“My daughter too,” her mother said.

And everybody joined in the laughter.



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## TOP MUSICIAN

“I am going to learn how to produce music,”  
Kaew announced to no one in particular.  
“Good idea, Kaew. Music calms one’s nerves. There is an old saying, ‘He who dislikes music is of dubious character’.” Kai was teasing her. Kai rarely teased anyone, and when she did, no one could be angry with her, since everyone was amused by Kai’s references to literary works, old sayings, and proverbs; or else the person did not even realize that Kai was teasing.

One evening, after having finished their homework, Kai sat reading on the verandah; Lek, as usual, was painting inside; Kaew was scratching the dog’s belly (Ow, a Thai dog, who had been given to Kaew by her neighbour, Suthi). Ju, the other dog which Aunt Joy had given to their father, was lying nearby.

All of a sudden, Kaew got up and took something from the top of the cupboard.

“What is it, Kaew?” asked Lek.

“It’s a two-string instrument called a *saw*,” said Kaew with pride. This particular instrument was hand-made by Uncle Pong, using an oil can which he once hung to create noise on the night of the lunar eclipse. The two strings were made of ordinary wire.

“Listen to it, Lek. I’ll play it for you,” said Kaew; then she began to play. The weird sound produced was awfully piercing. One could not tell which tune Kaew was playing.

While the budding musician was playing her instrument, a riot took place in the house. Lek, who was inside, ran outside. Kai, who was outside, ran inside to see what was going on.

“What are you doing, Kaew?” asked Kai.

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“Practising my music,” Kaew replied with a straight face. “It’s a tune called *Pleng Ton Pleng Ching*.”

Kai did not try to understand, and went out again calmly onto the verandah. Lek was cuddling Ju the dog which was trembling with fear.

The only one who appreciated Kaew’s music was Ow, the other dog. Kaew took it that Ow liked her music, since as soon as she started playing the instrument, Ow abruptly sat up and began to howl so loudly that the music could hardly be heard, and he would not budge until Kaew stopped playing.

Even now Kaew is still learning how to play the two-string instrument with Uncle Pong.

Kaew can play the whole of *Pleng Ton Pleng Ching*, and is learning how to play *Chorakay Hang Yow*, tunes that everyone starts with. The sound produced is not as awful as when she started her music lessons, and so Kai and Lek, although not particularly fond of Thai classical music (which Kaew plays), are getting used to it. They tolerate it calmly if Kaew does not play her music while they are doing their homework or trying to sleep. Only Ow and Ju maintain their own reactions. As soon as Kaew takes up her instrument, Ow rushes to her, his mouth moving as if ready to sing, while Ju runs about nervously, trembling, trying to find a hiding place away from the sound produced by the top musician (and top singer).



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## THE COLLECTOR

**K**aew and Lek were running around the kitchen table.

“Kaew! Lek!” Their mother was almost screaming. But too late. Kaew hit a mortar. It fell down, but fortunately, did not break. However that made Kaew stop running.

“Another spanking for me again! What’s wrong these days?” Kaew mumbled to herself. Her mother heard her and said, “And you know that you deserve it, don’t you!” She spanked her daughter lightly.

At dinner, their father said, “My sister Joy came to see me today and suggested that I should start collecting decorative glass pieces. I am not very keen really. With all the documents that we have in our house, we wouldn’t have any more space! But even if I

were to be interested, we don’t have the money! One piece could cost a quarter of my salary. Better save it for Kaew’s cakes and cookies. Isn’t that true?”

“Very true, Daddy!” Kaew agreed.

Her mother looked at Kaew coldly and said, “I think even if we had the money to buy them, we wouldn’t be able to set them up nicely as decorative pieces in our house. They would all be broken by our daughters! I don’t know how your sister Joy can do it! And her husband Prakorb also plays with antique pieces.”

“What do you mean by playing with antique pieces, Mummy?” Kaew could not control her curiosity.

“Playing with antique pieces means collecting valuable old objects,” Kai explained.

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“Why do people collect them?” Lek too wanted to know.

“So that they can study them,” her mother explained. “Your uncle is not only a doctor, he is also very knowledgeable about history and archaeology. And he can collect antique pieces because his children are very well behaved and never break them.”

“You think our cousin Noi is well-behaved? Every time he comes to our house, I have a headache,” Kai remarked.

“Noi is also a collector,” Lek explained. “He collects pencil-ends!”

“That’s no use!” Kaew commented. “I know that Noi sometimes collects used-up pencils from friends, but sometimes he sharpens good pencils into pencil-ends for his

collection.”

“How do you know that, Kaew? It’s me who’s in the same class as Noi,” Lek said.

“I know because Noi himself told me so,” Kaew argued.

“Don’t start quarrelling again,” their father said. “If Noi collects his pencils-ends that way, then it’s not good. And you shouldn’t follow that kind of example. Everything that we have bought costs us some hard-earned money. Therefore we should use it carefully.”

“Cousin Nid collects stamps. Is that good, Daddy?” Kaew asked.

“Very good, my daughter. You can learn a lot from it,” her father said supportingly. “Your uncle Prakorb must have a lot of foreign stamps. He has a lot of contact with foreign

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doctors.”

“Nid collects various kinds of stamps and puts them in separate albums by countries,” Kaew explained. “Therefore he learns the names of many countries and other related information. Sometimes he becomes interested in the pictures on the stamps and he looks up further details later. By the way, he has a secret. Whenever he is interested in getting stamps from any country, he will write to a pen-friend in that country. He can’t write the letter himself. Noo always helps him. But he said he would try to write by himself soon.”

“Children who collect useful things can always learn from their hobbies. It’s called making good use of leisure time,” her father said.

After dinner, everybody went back to their work. Kaew sat down and thought about collecting something useful. Valuable objects collected by Aunt Joy and Uncle Prakorb were absolutely out of the question. Collecting stamps was already Cousin Nid’s hobby. If Kaew wanted any stamps, she could always get them from Nid. Tom collected bus-tickets which Kaew didn’t really approve of. Kaew herself used to collect plastic toys which came with certain kinds of cookies, but those were usually bad cookies which gave one a stomach-ache. What could Kaew collect then?

Now Kaew had decided what to collect. But it was a secret which she kept to herself, until one evening.

“Kai, Lek,..... have you taken the cookies I

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have been collecting?" Kaew asked.

"Do you collect cookies, Kaew?" Her younger sister Lek looked confused.

"Don't pretend! If it's not you, then it must be Kai!"

"What kind of accusation is this?" her sister said curtly. "I don't even know what you collect and where!"

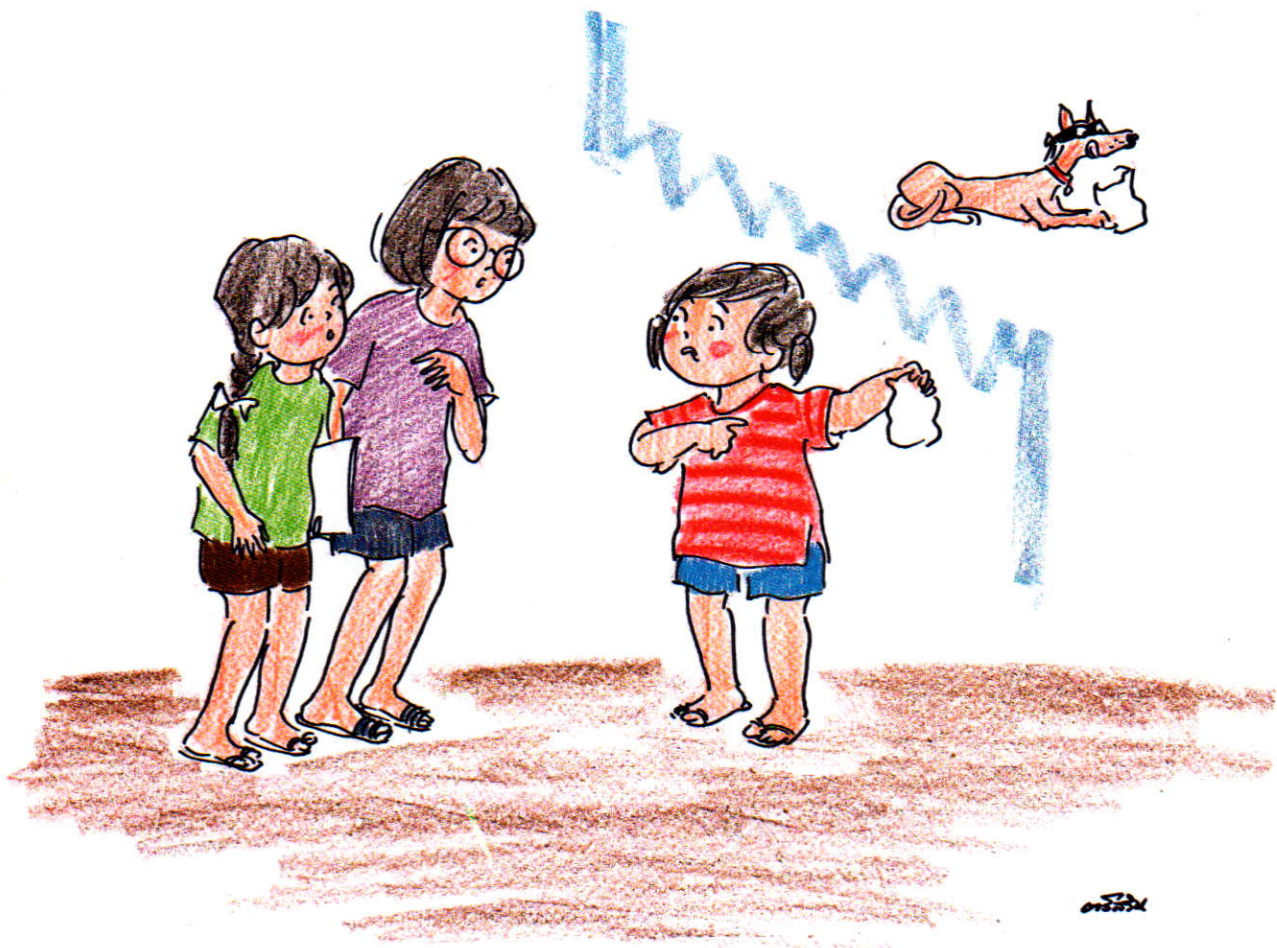
"But I have been collecting cookies! I dug a hole where we used to grow vegetables and hid them there. And who has been stealing them everyday? Some days, all the cookies are gone. You see, this bag has been torn! Who could it be if it's not one of you?" Kaew in complaining revealed her secret.

"I have been having a lot of bad luck these days," Kaew continued. "I was scolded yesterday because of the bad mark I had in my geometry test."

"Perhaps you should sharpen your pencil. I saw it when you did your homework the other day. I thought your teacher would give you a bad mark for that reason. You have always done well, but this time you almost failed. You deserve to be scolded!" Kai explained.

"It's only because I tried to get the most use out of my pencil," Kaew mumbled.

Meanwhile, the dog Ow, who had been stealing Kaew's cookies, was deliciously chewing away at the new bag of supplies!





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## LUCK IS NOT ON OUR SIDE

“**W**hat are you doing, Kaew?” Her sister Kai asked curiously when she saw Kaew preoccupied with some work.

“Well, Kai, the television programme said that if we mail back all the lids of the boxes of soap powder, we might win some prizes,” Kaew said proudly.

“Oh, that! I think it’s just a waste of stamps!” Kai was not enthusiastic.

“But if you send many lids, you are likely to win at least one prize,” Kaew held on to her belief.

Lately, Kaew had been collecting all kinds

of odd materials such as lids of boxes of soap powder, pre-cooked noodle bags, papers from wrapping bars of soap, and so on, all the things for which the radio and television programmes had been announcing prizes. Whenever Kaew was sent to buy things for her mother, she would purposely choose and buy the brands they would give something extra, or which promised prize-winning draws. Mother would get what she ordered, but naturally, Kaew would be getting all the extras which were a kind of reward for her troubles.

“Kai, why don’t we go into this together?”

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Kaew proposed.

“What do you have in mind?” Kai was puzzled.

“I’m pretty broke right now. If you could help by buying pre-cooked noodles and let me have the bags that I could send them for the prizes,” Kaew said.

“No, Kaew. I don’t like those noodles. And I really don’t think that we can win any of those prizes or become one of the lucky ones the advertisements talk about.”

Kaew was not deterred by Kai’s uncooperative attitude. She would have to find someone else to share in her scheme.

Kaew tried to persuade her little sister. “Lek, I know that you like to eat noodles as much as I do. So instead of throwing the bags away we could send them for the prize-winning contest. This way we have a good chance of winning some prizes and becoming rich.”

“Yes, I have seen those programmes on television. People send noodle bags for prizes, but I think you have to know many rules and other things. You have to put the bags in the envelopes and put them in a special box at the department stores. I don’t think I can do all that!” Lek looked a little doubtful.

“That’s all right. All you have to do is to



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buy noodles to eat and I shall arrange everything. And if you can't eat all the noodles that you've bought, I can also help out too. And if we win two gold chains we'll get one each."

"But if we only win one chain, what would we do?" Lek was still unclear.

"Then we'll sell it and split the money," Kaew answered.

For days on end, there was no sign of good luck which would make the two sisters owners of the desired gold chains. Nevertheless, they continued collecting and hoping, until one day their mother called out.

"Kai! Kaew! Lek! Who's been opening all the boxes of soap powders? How many times have I told you to open one at a time and not to open another one until the last box is finished? The reason we have bought many boxes at a time is only because it's more convenient and cheaper."

"I did it, Mother." Kaew confessed quickly and went on to explain, "I opened the boxes so that I could send the lids for the nice prizes they advertised. I would like to win a house together with some land, a car, a refrigerator, an electric fan, a bicycle and many other things for our family."

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“What are you talking about?” Her mother was confused. Her sister Kai had to explain about Kaew’s enterprise.

“I see” Mother concluded. “I’d say that Kaew has got it all wrong. If you want to become rich you shouldn’t expect luck to help you. I don’t think that is the right attitude. If you want to own something, you’ll have to work and save your money. Your father and I, for example, worked and saved up to buy this house.”

“But it’s fun to think we might get a prize,” Lek argued.

“If you want to do it for fun once in a while when you have spare boxes or lids, I wouldn’t have any objection. But you have been taking this seriously. No wonder, Kaew has been having stomach-aches so often these days. You must have been eating too many of those packets of dried noodles.”

Kaew was sorry that luck had not been on her side at all. Besides not winning any prizes and suffering from stomach upsets, she was also spanked for opening up all her mother’s boxes of soap powder.

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## WHOSE REVENGE?

“Mummy, will you please let me go and play at Piak’s house,” Kaew asked one Saturday afternoon.

“Why? Is it his birthday?”

“Not really. He just invited some friends over to play together. About ten of us will go, Kaew, Ooy, Toy, Pom, Uen, Pok, Nid.”

“All right, but don’t cause any trouble for his parents,” her mother said, not completely trusting Kaew. In fact, she did not like to let her children go and play at other people’s houses.

Kaew arrived last. She went to pay her respects to Piak’s parents, and then rushed to the back garden.

“What are you all doing?” Kaew asked Tui, Ood, Toi, Pok, Nid and Piak, who were hovering over something.

“Digging for earthworms to use as fishing bait,” Piak answered.

“This is strictly boys’ business, girls are out,” Tui quickly added.

“Why? It’s not fair! We were all invited. You can’t just play among boys only.”

“You girls wouldn’t dare to pick up earthworms with your hands anyway! How can you play with us?” Tui said.

“Kaew,” Moo Wan called, “let’s play at something else among ourselves. Don’t bother with them. I don’t like fishing or killing, I feel sorry for both the fish and the earthworms.”

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“I wouldn’t touch the earthworms,” Ooy said, “They are so ugly!” Ooy gave a look of disgust which made Ood feel like throwing earthworms at her. Ood turned around and asked the others.

“Let’s see: if any of you girls dare pick up the earthworms with your bare hands, she will be allowed to join us.”

“I wouldn’t want to do that. I think the earthworms hate me as much as I hate them,” Uen said and walked away disinterestedly, followed by Pom.

Kaew was not really disturbed. If the boys did not want to play with the girls, that was all right. The girls could play by themselves. But, as

for the earthworms, it was a matter of honour and dignity. Kaew would have to show the boys that whatever they can do, she can do too.

Kaew picked up one of the earthworms. It looked rather disgusting, but Kaew had to fight off the feeling.

“This one is the biggest. Poor earthworm. I think we should let it go. We shouldn’t use it as a fishing bait,” Kaew said, putting down the worm in the can, feeling obviously relieved.

“You see? Kaew doesn’t scream nor is she stupidly afraid of things like earthworms!” Nid cheered and boasted further. “When my brother Noo was taking Biology, he even had to operate on frogs. Kaew and I helped him.”

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Later, the boys plus Kaew began to dig up more earthworms and finally they managed to collect a canful of them.

"I am tired!" Pok complained. "Let's rest a while in the shade."

"My goodness! Doesn't this boy have any strength at all?"

"It's so hot," Pok still continued to mumble. Other boys, who did not complain, joined him in the shade of rose apple tree.

Suddenly Toi pointed at a beautiful green, hairy worm.

"Can this worm be used as a fishing bait?" Kaew asked.

"I have never seen anyone using it before," Nid answered.

"Perhaps we can, Kaew," Ood suggested. "We don't have to use the same things as other people. But, perhaps Kaew doesn't want to pick up the worm. Are you afraid of it, Kaew?" Ood asked and smiled teasingly.

"Of course not!" said Kaew. Quickly, she put her fingers and palm on the worm to catch it, thinking to herself that this worm was much less ugly than the earthworm. But suddenly Kaew felt a pang of burning and itching on her palm and fingers. She told herself that it must be her own hand that was itching and that the worm had got nothing to do with it.

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Ood laughed when Kaew rubbed her hands together trying to relieve the itching. At that moment, Kaew did not want to argue with Ood anymore. She was itching very badly. Ood became a little bit frightened now.

Piak quickly led Kaew to his mother who was making cookies for the children.

“Mother, Kaew caught an itchy worm,” he told her.

Piak’s mother put down her work to look at Kaew’s hand.

“Wait a moment. Don’t wash your hand just now. I will warm some wax and spread it on your hand. This way we can remove the hairs first, and afterwards we can put some ointment on,” Piak’s mother said and started to look for

the necessary materials. “Kaew is still lucky it was only a hairy worm. If it were another kind of worm on the trees, it would burn and itch even more than this.”

Piak’s mother gave Kaew first-aid treatment, then gave her something to eat and drink. After a while Kaew took her leave.

On the way home, Kaew wondered whether it was she who hated the worm, or was it the worm who actually hated her. She decided finally that the worm must really hate her, that was why it had made her hand burn so and feel so itchy. The most infuriating person however, was Ood! Her own friend! He shouldn’t have done this to her at all!







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## ABOUT EATING

“School lunches are very bad these days,” Tui complained.

“That’s true. We have been eating the same curry every day,” Kaew added. “The other day I was so glad to see something new on the menu. But it was lousy too!”

“Daddy said school lunches are very expensive,” Piak joined in. “Expensive, yet the menus are the same day after day and boring. It’s better to give us the money so we can buy our own lunch.”

As everyone knows, no Thai menu is completed without a dish known as *nam prik*, made from a shrimp paste. It comes in all sorts of varieties. So it was not surprising when Pui said, “I’ve got a good idea. Mummy can make very delicious *nam prik*. I’ll ask her to prepare some for all of us and I’ll bring it to school in my school bag.”

Everyone was in total agreement. Since then, they had been eating rice with a little bit of *nam prik* each day. Even when they served noodles which until recently had been their favourite dish at lunch, some of them still insisted on mixing the paste with noodles. One day their secret was disclosed because the *nam prik* container broke inside Pui’s school bag making all the books smell fishy, including Pui’s

report on “How to Make *Nam Prik*.”

Even at home, Kaew continued complaining to Kai and Lek. “I am so tired of eating the same food. When can we stop eating *nam prik* with salty steamed fish and have something exciting for dessert as well, instead of green beans in syrup?”

Kai and Lek were also tired of the same dishes. However Kai tried to explain.

“You have to eat them. Mummy and Daddy told us many many times that this kind of menu gives us what we need - proteins, carbohydrates, fats, and minerals. We are all growing girls and we need to build up our bodies and brains. Therefore, we have to eat a lot of this kind of food.”

“Yes, I know that eating a lot is good. And in fact I used to like this kind of food, but having it too often is very boring.”

Nevertheless at dinner, Kaew quietly finished her plate without protesting.

The next day, Kaew went to school as usual. There was a bad traffic jam. When Kaew got off the bus, classes had almost begun. She ran and tried to catch up with Tui who she could see had just gone into school.

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“Ooops!” Kaew clumsily bumped into somebody who was also a student of her own age. Kaew didn’t know her, she was from another school.

“I am very sorry, I didn’t mean to hurt you. Did it hurt very much?” Kaew asked.

The girl didn’t reply. She put her hand into an old bag which she carried, and sighed in relief.

“All’s well. My rice container didn’t break. I thought I might have to go without lunch!” she said, almost to herself, and then turned to Kaew and said, “That’s all right.”

“Don’t you eat the school lunch? And what did you bring?” Kaew was curious. The girl took a small plastic bag out and showed it to Kaew.

“Would that be enough?” Kaew was astonished to see that the plastic bag contained only a small amount of hard rice and a tiny piece of salty fish.

“Not really enough! But today I am lucky to have a little bit of salty fish with rice. After I have eaten, I’ll drink a lot of water. That’ll keep my stomach heavy.”

“You mean you don’t always have some fish with rice every day?” Kaew was again very surprised.

“Some days I can only drink a lot of water to fill my stomach, and then I’ll run and play around to keep my mind away from hunger. It works.”

“How unlucky you are! I really admire you. And me! I have been complaining just because I have to eat the same kind of food everyday.”

“I consider myself luckier than others. I’ve got a scholarship to continue my studies into secondary school. None of my friends has a scholarship. They have to work harder and make do with less than me.”

Kaew remained silent. After a moment, she took the *nam prik* container out of her bag. “This is for you,” she told the girl.

“Why don’t you keep it for yourself?” she asked Kaew.

“No, I already have the school lunch,” Kaew answered and ran away very quickly, leaving the girl a little surprised.

Kaew was told off for arriving late at school. But she felt the experience that she had just gained was a truly worthwhile one.

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## LETTER WRITING

“**K**aew, there’s a letter for you again.” Her younger sister Lek, who inspected the mail-box every evening, reported.

“It could be a letter from Suthi,” Kaew guessed. Her grown-up neighbour Suthi had gone to work in Chiangmai and had been writing Kaew many interesting letters. She enjoyed his letters so much that she didn’t want him to come back from Chiangmai, hoping to receive many more of his letters.

“But this is not Suthi’s handwriting. Whose is it, Kaew, another of your friends?” Lek questioned.

Kaew opened the letter and read it aloud.

“Dear Friend,

When you receive this letter, copy its contents and send it to ten of your friends. If

you follow my advice, you will meet with good fortune and happiness. But if you fail to do so, you will later regret the consequences, because you will lose some of your closest relatives.

From a well-intentioned friend.”

“This is not very good, Kaew!” cried Lek. “If you were to lose some of your closest relatives, Kai and I will be in trouble!”

“That’s true. If we were to send out ten letters we need ten two baht stamps. That would cost us twenty baht. All the money I have saved in the Piggy Bank wouldn’t be enough. Can you lend me some money, Lek? I don’t want to lose either you or Kai. I’ll be willing to lose that much money instead,” Kaew said.

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Kai entered the room and asked, "What's going on, Kaew?"

Kai nodded when she saw the letter.

"It's called a chain letter. The writer received the same kind of letter and fearing the curse, wrote a series of letters to people he knew. I once received one. But I believe in what our parents always told us, that we shouldn't believe in unreasonable curses. What will happen to us depends on our past deeds, not on somebody's curses. Don't be afraid, Kaew," Kai explained.

"I believe you, Kai. But do I still have to write ten letters?" Kaew was still unclear.

"No, Kaew, after all my long explanation! No, you are not writing any of those letters!"

"Can't you recognize the handwriting?" Lek was still suspicious.

"I don't know who wrote it; who is it who knows me?" Kaew persisted.

"Hm. We'll have to investigate."

The next morning, Kaew asked her friends at school.

"It was me," Oey confessed. "I received a letter last week and I was so afraid so I wrote to father, mother, my brother who lives abroad, Kaew, our teachers Sumon, Prapot, Chaveewan, Chintana, and my uncle and aunt. Ten all together. I know your address, Kaew, so I sent a letter to you. As for all the teachers, I delivered theirs at school."

"But it's not your hand-writing," Kaew argued.

"I was lazy. So I asked my uncle Moon to write instead."

That day, after class, their teacher Sumon

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announced : “Today we received letters from friends from another school. Each of them wrote to students in our school who have the same registration numbers. I think you should answer their letters. It will be very useful. You can make new friends and you can practice writing.”

“But I will not use my real name and home address when I write. Can I ask them to write to me at school?” Kaew asked.

“It’s up to you. But why do you want to keep your name a secret?” the teacher asked.

“I don’t want anybody to know me. I am afraid they will send me chain letters.”

“Chain letters? Yes, I received, one this morning,” the teacher said disinterestedly. “I think it’s nonsense really, it’s for people who don’t have anything to do.”

“But I really don’t want to receive one,” Kaew said.

Kaew decided to write to a new friend called Jaew, using not her own name but the name and surname of Pen, her Uncle Pong’s niece. Her father and mother, as well as Kai and Lek were very surprised to see Kaew writing letters so often, and becoming very friendly with Jaew. Both Kaew and Jaew asked for all letters to be sent to them at school.

Before the end of the school term, the students asked permission to invite their penpals to a sports contest at school. Kaew was happy to meet Jaew and decided to reveal her true identity. After all, Jaew sounded a very nice person in the letters. She could not be dangerous to Kaew.

On the day of the school sports contest,

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Jaew's teacher brought her students to Kaew's school. To add to the excitement of the meeting, the teachers asked their students to hide in a room at first, and calling them out in pairs. The first pair of pen-friends, were Tui and Ong; the second pair, Moo Wan and Ratana; the third, Ood and Soo. Kaew ran out when the names of the fourth pair were announced, ready to tell Jaew that her real name was Kaew and not Pen.

"Ung! it's you?" Kaew cried out.

"Kaew!" Ung was also surprised, not expecting to meet Kaew as her pen-friend.

"So Jaew is your pen-name? I didn't know

you went to this school, Ung!" Kaew said.

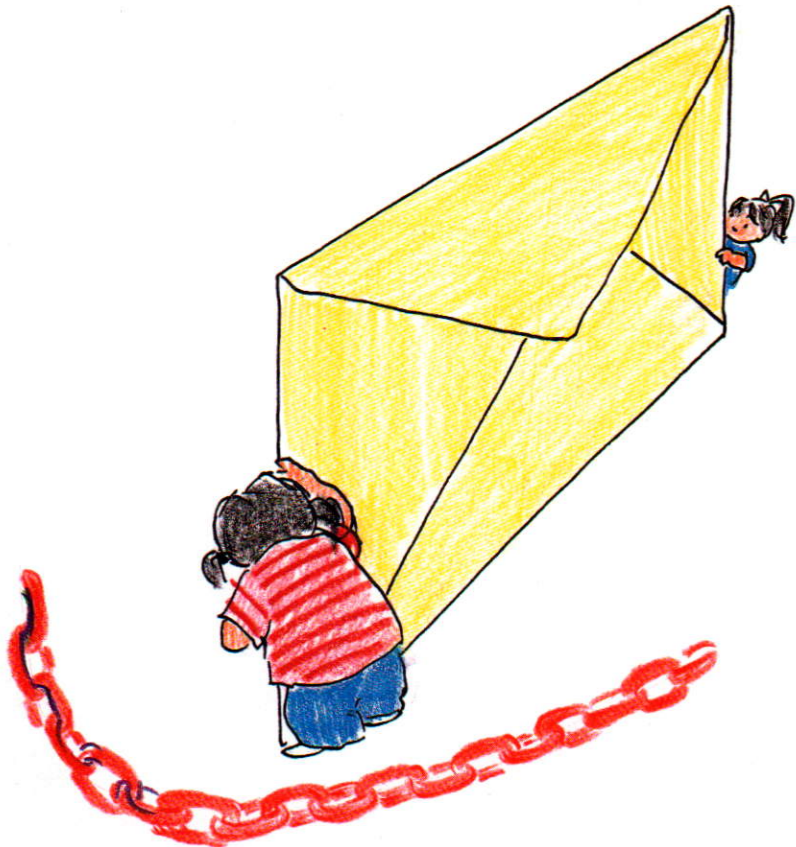
"Yes, I was afraid of writing to someone I didn't know, so I decided not to use my real name. I intended to reveal mine today."

"Do you both know each other?" the teachers from both schools asked.

"Yes, we are related. I only met Ung once when I went to stay at her place," Kaew explained.

"Everybody has gained a new friend through letter-writing, all except Kaew," Moo Wan concluded.

"That's all right. It's also good for Ung and me to be closer than before," said Kaew.



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## WHEN THE KITE-WIND BLOWS

**M**arch and April are the summer months. The children have just finished their exams and are looking forward to the fun and joy of the summer vacation which began today. Everybody agreed to go to Nid's house to fly kites. There are too many trees at Kaew's house, and there's no space for kite-flying.

Nid's house is near the river, and there is a big open space. The weather was not terribly hot. There was a strong wind blowing, known as the south-eastern monsoon or the "kite-wind."

Neither Kaew nor her sisters asked for any money from their parents to buy the kites or the string. They had been saving their daily allowances for this purpose, yet father still grumbled when he heard about this.

"Children these days don't know how to make anything themselves. In my day, if you wanted to fly a kite, you couldn't buy one anywhere. So you would have to cut and shape the bamboo and cover it with paper, all by yourself, to make all kinds of kites..... *Pak Poa* or *Chula* and all the other kinds." Father then went on to give a long lecture on the techniques of kite-making.....how to select the bamboo, what size, how to make the bamboo sticks into kites, how to fly them, and the various types and names of kites, especially those which are father's favourite, such as *Tui-tui* kite from the south which makes a funny noise of "tui-tui-tui" before taking off and when flying not too high.

Kai told her sisters how she used to watch father cut and shape a stick of bamboo into a small frame the size of a match-box, then cover it with cellophane paper, making it so very light that it could actually fly. But now father was almost always too busy with his work, and had no time to make toys and play things for the children. Kai was proud of the fact that she is the only daughter who had ever "played" with father.

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Anyway, Kai and the other children had no other choice but to buy their kites. Kaew's was a red snake-kite while Kai's and Lek's were a bird-kite and a butterfly-kite. They had great fun flying them up in the sky, taking turns sending each kite up and keeping them up there in the wind. Today, the high wind was quite strong and all the kites were flying nicely high up in the sky.

But, after a while, a strange kite flew over the trees across the fence and into the children's "territory". It was a plain, white, square kite, without any design.

"Oh! Whose kite is that?" Noi wondered aloud, but before anyone could say anything, that strange kite became entangled with Noi's string. Noi tried to pull his kite back, but the strange white kite cut Noi's thread, and off flew Noi's kite.

"His thread is very sharp!" Nid murmured, looking with disbelief at Noi's kite being cut away before everybody's eyes. Lek and Kai were

both pulling their kites down very hurriedly, for fear that theirs too will be cut off and flown away by the strange kite. But Kaew was still enjoying the strong wind, and only steered her kite away from the "danger zone".

"Look here", said Nid, being also determined to keep his kite up in the wind for quite a while, "I'd like to fight that sharp thread a little!" He then moved his kite nearer and entwined his string around that of the "mysterious" kite. Nid's kite had got a rather thick string, and both were now pulling each other back and forth for a long time. But soon Nid's kite was cut off, and flew away in the same direction as Noi's.

Kaew too wanted to try her luck, since the string of her kite was a little bit stronger than any of the others. She lured the mysterious kite to come nearer and nearer until the two strings were entangled. Softly she held onto hers, then slowly she began to pull it down. And it worked. The mysterious kite was finally cut down by

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Kaew's string.

"We have got a prisoner kite!" Kaew's voice was full of pride. "And look, we have got quite a bit of his sharp thread too!"

Sharp string was generally desired by children but obviously forbidden by their parents because they could easily cut their fingers with this kind of string. To make sharp string, one needs broken glass, or broken light-bulbs, or broken bottles, all to be finely ground and sifted, then mixed with hot glue. An egg may be added to make the glue thicker, Gecko's eggs can be used for this purpose. Then the thick glue is applied onto the string to make it thick, sharp and cutting. Kaew's father did not approve of using sharp string to cut off other people's kites. Kite-contests, he believed, should be based on the players' skills.

The children tested the prisoner kite. It flew beautifully, but the string attached to it was not long enough to enable it to fly very high. Nid and Noi agreed that Kaew should keep the

prisoner kite, since she was its "conquerer" while both of them admitted being the losers of the day, having lost their kites in the battle.

Back home, Kaew showed off the prisoner kite to Uncle Pong. He looked at it closely and said firmly. "Kaew, I am an old man and I respect old customs. When you take down someone's kite like this, you should not fly it up again because the owner would feel badly offended. You should just keep it with you. Look at this kite that you have taken. It's very skillfully made. Look at the bamboo frame. It's nicely polished with sand-paper. Obviously it's not the kind of kite that can be bought anywhere. I think its owner must miss it very much".

Kaew entirely agreed and put the kite on display on a shelf, hoping one day to be able to make one herself as beautiful.









