

TREASURY
O F T H A I
LITERATURE



THE MODERN PERIOD

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INTRODUCTION

The present **Treasury of Thai Literature** sets itself a rather modest aim. Its objective is to make available to the general reader a cross-section of Thai literary works which have appeared during the past 70 years or so. The Editors have decided to concentrate first on *the modern period* in the belief that the modern world, through better communication and greater communality of experiences, has become a smaller place that naturally facilitates cross-cultural understanding. This is not to say that "cultural gaps" have totally disappeared: the Editors of the present volume still feel compelled to offer occasional explanatory notes. But any reader wishing to familiarize himself with Thai literature would be well advised to begin with the modern period. Historians of Thai literature are agreed on the dating of the modern period which is supposed to begin roughly in the reign of King Chulalongkorn in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when Thailand opened its doors in a systematic way to the international community and when a comprehensive modernization process was ushered in. Thai literature partakes also of this modernization process.

It must be stated right from the outset that the present **Treasury** has emerged under a number of constraints. Instead of commissioning new translations, which would have unduly delayed the appearance of the volume, the Editors have resorted to making a selection from existing translations. No claim can be made that the works reprinted in the present anthology represent the best translations imaginable. They are the best translations available, or in most cases, the only translations available. Although English may be the *lingua franca* of the modern world, it has to be admitted that there is a paucity of English translations of Thai literature. For the classical period, more has been done in the way of translation into German, and for the modern period, Japanese translators have made significant contributions.

Factors other than purely literary considerations may have to be brought to bear on the issue, and the Editors do not think it worthwhile to pursue the subject any further at this juncture. The fact remains that no evaluative judgement can be made to the effect that the **Treasury** contains the best of modern Thai literature. There are certainly masterpieces which have never been translated or even defy translation.

In this connection, it is necessary to bring to the attention of the reader another constraint under which the Editors have had to labour, namely the problem of *genres*. It simply has not been possible to offer a well-balanced anthology in terms of literary genres. It will be noticed that there is an over-balance of short stories. Originally introduced from the West towards the end of the nineteenth century, the short story has been well acclimatized in Thai literary circles, and it is also a genre favoured by translators. The novel, too, has fared very well, but it is extremely difficult to make appropriate excerpts for the purpose of an anthology. Taken out of their contextual framework, the three novels excerpted in the present **Treasury** would at best capture the reader's attention on account of their documentary value rather than literary merits. Poetry is meagrely represented, for there are indeed very few translations that are good enough, the "music" of Thai poetry being entirely lost in the process of translation. We have decided to include a prose poem, a genre nurtured with great care by a few eminent contemporary poets, whose roots go back to the Buddhist *jataka*. It probably lends itself to translation better than metrical verse. Metrical translation is offered in the only excerpt from the dramatic literature, a verse-play by King Vajiravudh, the translation being the author's own, whose mastery of the foreign tongue has remained unrivalled. It is worth noting that modern spoken drama has not been included in the present volume for the simple reason that this is a genre which remains dismally underdeveloped, the essence of Thai dramatic talents being more akin to the Wagnerian concept of "total work of art". Finally, we have reprinted an extract from a philosophical essay by a noted Buddhist thinker. We Thai always take the term "literature" to cover a wider meaning than the Western notion of "imaginative literature". **Dhammic Socialism** contains potent philosophical message which is expressed in a prose style of literary merits. Although strictly speaking, "modern" Thai

literature is older than the oldest literary work represented in the present volume, namely the verse drama **Madanabādhā** of 1923, the Editors have not been able to find a translation of an earlier work that merits a place in the **Treasury**.

It may be appropriate at this point for the Editors to state their principle of selection, which can be formulated in rather simple terms. We have chosen those works which mean something to us and which we hope will mean something to our foreign readers as well. In spite of the various constraints which we have outlined at some length, we still believe that the present **Treasury of Thai Literature—The Modern Period** offers a fair account of the aspirations as well as the achievements of modern Thai writers and poets. It attempts to give a faithful image of life in modern Thailand, no longer in a pristine state of blissful innocence that can readily serve the purpose of tourist attraction, but a modern society fraught with deep and complex dilemmas that call forth serious debate, self-criticism and philosophic questioning. If the Editors have erred in their judgement, it goes without saying that they have erred on the side of seriousness. The majority of the works presented in this anthology are not meant as mere entertainment; they do not always make for easy reading. If the **Treasury** can serve any practical purpose at all, it is the hope of the Editors that it should serve to demolish the simplistic notion of Thailand being a "land of smiles", whose people are perpetually committed to the incurable hedonistic principle of "sanuk".

Let us be more concrete. By a strange coincidence—and the Editors maintain that there was no deliberate strategem on their part—three literary works represented here share a common main character, namely "Grandma". How did it come about that three different authors, whose styles of writing are really far apart, should tackle the same theme, the plight of a helpless and hapless old woman in modern Thai society? Is a "collective unconscious" at work here? Yet we have to admit that the three authors have their distinct approaches to the theme. The stark naturalistic and unmitigated pathos of K. Surangkhanang's **The Grandmother** is certainly not shared by Angkarn Kalayanapongse in the elegiac prose poem **Grandma**, whereas Granny in Vanich Charoongkij-anant's **The Song of the Leaves** at the hour of

her physical death redeems her dignity through a miraculous (in the literal sense of the word) act of initiation of her musical arts to her hitherto uninitiated granddaughter. Are these authors trying to tell us that a society in which old, decrepit, poverty-stricken and hunger-ridden grandmothers have to fend for themselves is an irresponsible one? Modern Thai writers refuse to be explicit and seem to take indeterminacy of meaning as artistic strength. One thing is certain: they seem fully conscious of their mission—as impressively conveyed in Angkarn Kalayanapongse's poem **A Poet's Pledge**—which is to shake their compatriots out of the myth of "Land of Smiles".

It would be inappropriate to ascribe such social awareness to the upsurge of political ideologies in the 1970's. K. Surangkhanang, for example, is a conservative writer whose romantic tales about charming princes wedding commoners' daughters are highly popular, and her short story, **The Grandmother**, pre-dates by decades the 1973-76 period of democratic boom. To be socially critical is not necessarily the fruit of a strictly political education. The same could be said about Angkarn Kalayanapongse's. It is probably fair to say that compassion engenders social consciousness and that compassion lies at the roots of Thai literary thinking. Thailand being a predominantly Buddhist country, this should not be surprising. As a matter of fact, various aspects of Buddhist thinking are implicit in the works presented in the anthology. A folk version of the law of *karma* — and a rather simplified version at that—is reflected in **Rain in the Fifth Lunar Month**. It might appear rather strange that love stories like **Rising Flood, Champoon** and **Shoot to Kill** do not end in fulfilment, but tend to bring to the fore a belief in the uncertainty and transiency of all things. One should not fall prey to any form of attachment, for even good intentions can be misinterpreted any time, as Dok Mai Sod has demonstrated in her story, **The Good Citizen**. Yet, all this is not to be taken as a counsel of despair, but more as a safeguard against *pramāda* or heedlessness. Some readers may become impatient at the absence of concrete solutions to the grave social and moral problems depicted in these works. In more radical terms, one could say that all the ingredients of a people's revolution are there, but the revolution never comes. The fate of the rural people in **Blessing from the Sky** should warrant radical social reforms, but resignation seems to be the dominating sentiment. The

same criticism could be levelled at **The Happiness of a Village Teacher**. How can such a situation be tolerated, one is tempted to ask. These people are inefficient as much as the system that governs them is ineffective. But who would have a heart to chide them for being what they are: admirable human warmth emanates from these likable characters. In the absence of heroic examples from real life and for want of a deep-rooted tradition of utopia, our writers and poets have learned to observe keenly, to reflect deeply and finally to internalize the multi-faceted problems they have encountered. Schooled in the teachings of the Lord Buddha, the good people of Thailand are plagued by terrible pangs of conscience whenever they transgress the bounds of good behaviour in order to fill their stomachs, as most touchingly portrayed in **Nightfall on the Waterway**. At his most philosophical, the author of the prose poem **Grandma** seems to be content with having all nature bemoan the death of the old woman. What ceremony of interment could have been more dignified?

Against this background of philosophic acquiescence in the order of things and vis-a-vis the noble principle of tolerance, dissonant voices must of necessity become almost inaudible. The acerbity of Chart Kobjitti's novel **The Judgement** may have been impactful at first, but this impact was short-lived. Sarcasm is not necessarily an effective instrument of social criticism, for in this case it soon lapses into self-immolation. The enemy of the people has never really been identified. The same observation would hold true for the revolutionary verses of the period 1973-76. Both **The Saga of Khunthong** and **Mere Movement** now read more like laments of irredeemable losses. This is the fate that must befall any "modern" literature, for we are too near the scene of action, too close to the originating conditions to be able to distinguish between what is transient and what is timeless. Besides, things move very fast in modern Thailand and people change their ways just as fast too. An eminent thinker once said that "literature is the expression of society," and modern Thai literature must of necessity reflect the complexity of modern Thai society, and sometimes the bewilderment and the philosophical anguish of its writers.

Yet when all is said and done, this is an "open" society whose tolerance and sense of brotherhood have more than amply compensated

for its inefficiency. The fictitious letter-writer in Botan's **Letters from Thailand** has sufficiently confirmed this. It is here that ethnic differences do not lead to serious conflicts. The same could be said of religious differences, as may be witnessed from Archin Panchaphan's **Heat and Heart**. Blessed with a long history of independence and venerable cultural traditions of its own, Thailand does not regard patriotism either as a virtue or a vice. That a work like **The Four Reigns** has gone through endless reprints bears testimony to this patriotic trait of the Thai readership. It may not be easy to convey this self-assertive bent to foreign readers without appearing self-congratulatory or even narcissistic. We place this **Treasury of Thai Literature** before you in the hope that what is meaningful to us might also be meaningful to you. Should this not be the case, we would simply ask you to bear with us.

*The Committee for the Dissemination of Outstanding
Thai Literary Works*

March 1988

H.M. KING VAJIRAVUDH, RAMA VI



King Vajiravudh, the sixth monarch of the Chakri Dynasty who ruled the country from 1910 to 1925, was the eldest son of King Chulalongkorn, Rama V, born to Queen Sripacharintra or Queen Saovabha on New Year's Day of 1880, as Prince Vajiravudh. He studied Thai language with Chaophraya Phra Sadet Surenrathibodi, M.R. Pia Malakul. At the age of 8, he was conferred the title of Prince Kromkhun Dhepdavaravadi. At 13, he went to Britain and enrolled at Sandhurst Military Academy. He became a commissioned officer of Durham Light Brigade. Thereafter he went to Oxford, reading art history. During those years, he took up writing seriously and completed a book in English on the War of Succession in Poland. He came back to Thailand in 1902, and was made the Crown Prince. He succeeded to the throne at the death of King Chulalongkorn on 23 October 1910. During his reign, the First World War broke out. It was also the period of basic changes in the world, where monarchy was replaced by other forms of government around the world. King Vajiravudh as a keen scholar realized this transitional period and its impact. He took the lead in making fundamental changes in the country, paving the way for democracy, by making all the people literate and educated. He introduced universal compulsory education, set a noble goal of establishing schools instead of building temples. The first university was set up at his initiative, named after his august father, King Chulalongkorn.

As a true scholar, a poet and a sage, King Vajiravudh played his role of intellectual leader by writing and publishing, putting up plays, organizing the people as scouts and civil defense movements, to make them self-reliant. In his short reign, public education took its firm root in the country. His penchant desire to write and his new vision of the role of a modern monarch resulted in numerous literary works ranging from commentaries to full-length drama in poetry. His deep knowledge in classic and modern language greatly helped to enrich the Thai literary world.

King Vajiravudh fell ill and passed away on 25 November 1925. The day is observed as Vajiravudh Day, when tributes are paid to the literary King by his grateful subjects.

MADANABĀDHĀ

ACT III

Scene : The Yard in front of Kālādarsin's Residence

(The same as Scene 3 of Act II, but the deer skin on the marble seat is removed. It is night time, with the moon shining.)

(Enter King Jayasena, left.)

King

Ah, me! Never before have I suffered like this!
For love assailed me e'en at first sight.
The more I looked the greater grew the heat
As of eternal fire raging within!
No fault was in her found, for she's all fair;
Words are lacking with which to sing her praise.
Visvakarman surely modelled her form,
And then became lost in admiration,
Now, stood, now sat, most intently staring,
For no beauty is there like Madanā's;
And if Visvakarman should make others
In this same style, none would equal this one.
That's why women in all the regions three
Are never found like her in beauteous shape.
Fairer than human maids, she's like a dream;
When first I saw I almost shook myself,
Thinking myself in sleep seeing a vision,
And was afraid to wake and lose the sight!
When I did hear her voice, I felt as glad
As drinking water pure that soothed the heart;
Her voice is sweeter than string music played
In heaven, where music is aye divine.
Easy of gait, as though in lovely dance,
Her arm-swing exquisite as posturing;
In sitting she is quiet, not too bashful,

With her supporting arm like taut-strung bow.
 To look at and hear her made my heart ache;
 Ah, me! How then could I slumber enjoy?
 If I lay down I'd feel my passions heat,
 And if I slept my heart would burst asunder,
 So came I here, to be near her I love!
 Shall I never obtain my soul's desire?
 But soft! I see a shadow at the door,
 As of someone coming out of the cot.
 O Chief of Gods, with joined palms I pray:
 Grant one more sight of my lady to me!

(The King steps aside and hides behind a bush on the left. Enter Madanā from the hermitage, and stands leaning against a post on the porch, gazing at the moon.)

Madanā

Ah! Sad's my heart, and why should it be so?
 Never before was my soul so storm-tossed;
 Never have I believed that love would dare
 To so invade my heart and cause such pain.
 Never before have I said "yea" to wooers,
 Being proud that I'd never been beguiled;
 I used to mock at those enslaved by love,
 That they were fools and would surely rue it.
 I used to say that men deceived with words,
 And, having made girls love, would soon leave
 them;

So when men spoke to me and implored me
 I spurned them and would not have their love.
 Now I have met a man so nobly formed,
 That my heart felt as though 'twould leap aloft!
 So modest he, with manners good and gentle,
 That he in no way showed by his demeanour,
 His wish to enjoy love's passion with me,

But only now and then at me he glanced;
 And at each glance grew I now hot now cold.
 Sans him 'tis like the sky sans sun and moon!
 Ah! My poor heart may soon quite crazy be;
 By love oppressed, what will become of me?

King

(Aside) Hearing her words, I am still uncertain
 If she spoke of me or some other swain,
 If I reply, I might thereby cause her
 Anger, and then the cot she'd re-enter!
 'Tis better to let her speak on; her voice
 Merely to hear maketh my heart rejoice.

Madanā

(Not having seen the King, soliloquises.)
 When I think of it I could almost weep;
 After to-night my chance will be quite gone.
 What could be done to make the mighty prince
 Remain and not go from this hermitage?
 If I were not a youthful maiden chaste,
 I'd boldly speak to that Lord of the Land,
 Imploring him to make a longer stay;
 And if I thus implore he'd surely learn
 That I love him, and he too might love me;
 Then I could gladly serve at his dear feet.
 How I wish he could know what's in my heart.
 O My King, stay!

King

(Answering her) Most willingly I will!
 I'll stay to love that most precious lady,
 The mistress of my soul.

Madanā

Oh! Who is that
Speaking from out of th'enfolding darkness?

King

'Tis I, the man whom thou wouldst ask to stay.
*(He comes out from his hiding place and stands in
front of the hermitage.)*

Madanā

O Crownéd King! Why were you hiding thus
Behind a bush and listening to words
Of one nigh mad or talking in her sleep,
Not fit for you, my dread Sovereign, to hear.

King

I heard with joy as if I did receive
From thee ambrosia that I so desired.

Madanā

Had I known you were nigh the hermitage,
My modesty would have sealed my fond lips;
No woman wants to act as though selling
Her love, being afraid of man's censure.
I have been so careful of my good name;
I hate wenches who court the eyes of men.
This time by chance, You, greatest of all men,
Did hear my plaintive words spoke in the night,
And may think me a foul and graceless wench,

Just like a courtesan, devoid of shame,
 And probably despise me much for it,
 As one utterly sans proper virtue.
 Farewell, O Lord Protector of all men,
 I'll not stay to offend Your Majesty.

King

Dear Madanā, most unblemished and fair,
 Why should I blame thy words? So sweet they
 were!
 Thy honeyed words with heartfelt joy heard I,
 And that thou didst love me I knew thereby.
 When I saw thee, O maid of all-perfection,
 My love o'erflowed at once beyond subjection,
 As though thou didst reach out thy shapely hand.
 And plucked my heart away to keep in band.
 From that time, thou, beloved, hast holden fast
 My poor fond heart in that dear hand of thine!
 But if thou wouldst give my heart back at last,
 I would implore, while shedding tears of brine,
 That thou, lady, shouldst have pity on me,
 And not reject me as lover and friend;
 Even if thou lov'st not, I'd beg of thee
 To let me love thee on unto the end,
 Till thy heart knows my love and doth believe,
 And thou reward'st my constancy with love.
 Ah! Madanā, if thou wouldst but receive
 My loving plea, what joy thy act would prove;
 But if thou lov'st me not, my soul's darling,
 Then I'm in hell, with torments unceasing!

Madanā

Having heard thy sweet words, O far-famed
 Prince,

I do prostrate myself at thy twin feet.
 No sweetness view with that of thy dear words,
 Which so touch me that I can ne'er forget;
 And I am grateful for thy graciousness, My Lord,
 The which is graven on my heart till death.
 But I'm only a poor forest maiden,
 Who could never compare with town beauties.
 The ladies in thy service in thy town palace
 Have fair complexions and bejewelled all,
 And know the way to serve and please thee, sire;
 How could a woodland maid vie with such dames?

King

In truth, dear one, I would never notice
 Nor dally with others if thou lov'st me;
 In my palace there is not one whose face
 Or form could be compared at all with thine.
 Those palace girls are inferior as crows,
 Whilst thou, my Love, art as the golden swan;
 And, having seen such peerless swan as thou,
 Light of my eyes, could I consort with crows?

Madanā

I've heard that wise saying of ancient folk,
 That man in love hath use of many tongues
 To flatter, and while embracing speaks soft
 To lure a maid.

King

If I had many tongues,
 All would unite to tell thee of my love,

And ev'ry tongue would swear a solemn oath
That I shall love thee well unceasingly;
I swear before the moon bright in the sky.

Madanā

It is not well to swear by that moon, sire.

King

Why not, my sweet?

Madanā

For she is inconstant.
In first fortnight she shineth bright beringed,
But in the second half no moon is seen!

King

Then I swear by the stars scintillating
And brilliantly decking the airy space.

Madanā

But that's not well either, O far-famed Prince,
For in moonshine the stars all fade away!

King

Then by what deity wouldst thou have me swear?

Madanā

If thou permittest me the choice, O King,
 Then to ask thee to swear by any god
 Would not convince me more than by thyself;
 For thou, dear Lord, art people's chosen god,*
 So that if thou but giv'st thy solemn pledge,
 Being thy loving and loyal servant,
 Should I doubt thee?

King

Then I am well content!

*(He takes Madanā's hand and leads her down from the porch
 to the middle of the stage.)*

King

I love thee, Madanā, my sweet darling,
 And will love thee always without tiring;
 If life should last a hundred years or more,
 I'd love thee, Madanā, aye as before!
 My eyes will feast on thee stead of gems rare,
 And thy sweetness replace blossoms most fair;
 In waking hours I'll gaze, sweet one, on thee,
 In sleep, dreaming, thy dear vision I'll see;
 Asleep, seated, afoot, I'd not be far,
 Both day and night, from my own Madanā;
 Away from thee, I'd be with sorrow bent,
 But close by thee, my soul would be content.
 If thou, too, art willing to love me aye,

*"People's chosen god"—This is not meant for fulsome flattery, but is merely the English rendering of the epithet "Sammatadeva", for explanation of which please see glossary.—R.

Come to the stream where we could take up by
Our hands some water, and there plight our
troth,
Declaring that to wed we're willing both.

Madanā

If it so pleaseth thee, I want no more,
And I'll follow thy steps the whole world o'er.

(The day begins to dawn. First, the sky becomes rosy, and then the light grows whiter and stronger during the duologue which follows.)

King

How brightly grows the dawn, blushing divine,
As the soul when first love doth illumine!
As aurora brightens the firmament
Softly brilliant with beauty all a-shine,
So maid and man at love's sweet dawning prove
Their hearts to be made resplendent by love;
The silv'ry light of dawn blanching the sky
Is like love-light on souls, shed from above!
My darling one, come walk thou closely here
By my side, like a cordial comrade dear,
Down to the brook, whose water swiftly flows,
And plight our troth with words truthful and
clear,
In presence of tutelaries who grace
With their sacred abodes this woodland place,
And swear that we shall aye together walk
And live our lives without parting one pace!

Madanā

The sun that shineth in the airy height,
 Maketh this earth of ours also alight;
 So hath thy love caused this poor soul of
 mine

To be illuminéd radiantly bright!
 The joyful happiness that my heart knows,
 To thy kingly graciousness surely owes;
 Under thy compassion, both night and day,
 I shall be free from pain, sadness, sorrows.

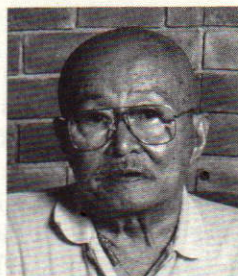
Thy affection to me will joy accord,
 My soul well soothed, knowing I am adored;
 Sweet Prince, to whatever place thou may'st
 go,

I will follow in thy footsteps, dear Lord!

(Exeunt King Jayasena and Madanā, left, hand in hand.)

*By King Vajiravudh (Rama VI)
 (1880 - 1925)*

H.R.H. PRINCE BHANUBHAND YUGALA



Born on November 27, 1910 in the Province of Songkhla, Prince Bhanubhand is the eldest son of H.R.H. Prince Yugala of Lopburi, a senior son of King Chulalongkorn the Great, Rama V, born to H.H. Princess Chalermkhet Mongkhon. As a favourite grandchild of Queen Sripacharintra, he was brought up at the Phayathai Palace under the care of the Queen herself before he reached the age of three. Prince Bhanubhand had his early education at the Dhersirind School in Bangkok. At the age of twelve, upon the death of Queen Sripacharintra, Prince Bhanubhand went to study in Britain. He later came back to Thailand to pursue a military career and became an officer in the Cavalry Division.

After the change brought about by the coup of 1932, the Government led by Mr. Kuang Abhaiwongse requested him to serve in an advisory capacity in the Fine Arts Department. The Prince was the major force behind the streamlining of the work within the purview of the Department. His keen interest in fine arts and archeology coupled with his good connection abroad served well in the laying of groundwork for museums and archeological studies of the country.

The Prince proved to be an all-round creator of art work. He is known as an author, a composer, and a movie producer. His novel, "TAI TON RANG" was the first work in the Thai language to be translated into English.

RAIN IN THE FIFTH LUNAR MONTH

Looking at the puppets manipulated by his little son to entertain himself, he felt a sudden contempt for those pieces of wood and clay. Wasn't it he who created them with his own hands, and made them dance at the command of the child's fingers? And human life, isn't it similar to a puppet, haphazardly manipulated by Nature to the tune of Destiny?

This happened many hundred years ago. A burly giant of a man with a grim face was hurriedly making his way past Wat Pradu Tai, just across the river from the town of Kanchanaburi.

Wearing a plain dark green pha-nung*, with an old pha-khaoma* wrapped around his waist, he looked drawn and tired out, yet kept pressing on his journey. Wiping sweat off his brows, the man looked up at the darkening sky. Large, black clouds were spreading, being driven by a strong wind in the direction of the monastery.

Suddenly thunders rumbled in the distance. The young man stopped and looked around for shelter against the threatening coming rainstorm. The sight of a sala* just a little further ahead, opposite the monastery, made him decide to turn that way.

*pha-nung : traditional Thai pantaloons-like garment, worn both by men and women in the old days.

*pha-khaoma : long piece of cloth men use as cummerbund, bath-cloth and for many other purposes.

*sala : small pavilion built by the side of the road for travellers.

While hastening his steps towards the sala, the man was saying to himself: "What's this? Rainstorm right in the middle of the fifth lunar month? Not since I was born have I seen such a thing? How fortunate I am that this tiny shelter should happen to be here. It's a perfect place for me to lie down for a rest and to keep out of the rain."

Only half way to the sala, the man was forced to run for it by the heavy drops of rain. And...he was not the only one. Behind him ran a monk and a young woman, also heading for the same sala. Apparently the monk was one of those residing at this monastery during Lent, but the girl's attire marked her as a native of Ayutthaya, the capital of the Thai Kingdom.

All three of them reached the sala almost simultaneously, followed by a heavy pelting shower. The monk was first to speak:

"What's this? I can't understand it. Why such a sudden rainstorm in the middle of the dry season like this? Something to wonder at really!"

The young man was stealing a look at the girl. Although with her eyes still on the floor, she showed sign of being aware of it. Nonchalantly the man took out dried banana leaves and tobacco tucked in the knot of his pha-nung, rolled himself a cigarette, and lay down to smoke.

The girl moved nearer to the monk and whispered to him:

"Is it destiny, or is it our past life catching up on us? Just when I could get you to come with me to Ayutthaya to save him from death, why...of all the bad lucks, why must this rain stop us?"

The monk felt great pity for the poor girl. Picking up his shoulder satchel, he was prepared to step out again into the rain. "I can put up with the rain. Come on, we must get to Ayutthaya as soon as possible."

Had it not been against Buddha's rule*, the young woman might have rushed forth to pull the holy one back by his rope, but for fear of Hell's fire, she could only shout out a loud protest:

*A monk must not touch or be touched by a woman.

"Oh no, don't trouble yourself that much. You'll make me commit another sin. As it is, I'm already loaded with misfortunes. If we can't reach Ayutthaya in time to stay my husband's execution, then we must conclude that it is so written by our past deeds. I'm only thinking of his poor old mother. How she must be beating her breast and pulling her hair in sorrow!"

The monk sighed with compassion. "My good woman, you seem to understand Lord Buddha's teaching well, for you mentioned the significance of our past deeds. A man born into life is never free from unhappiness, nor is he free to seek happiness the way he wishes. All depends on one's past deeds. A boat has to head the way its captain wishes it to. Your case is no exception. Just look, a heartless criminal like Ai Pong* destined to die by execution, managed to escape, while Khun Sakhon,* your husband, a loyal servant of the King, as everybody knows, should be responsible for it. Nobody would ever believe that Than Khun* had plotted for Ai Pong to escape, as accused by the court. Yet... isn't this due to our past deeds, woman, that Ai Pong should be able to escape from prison? And your husband would have to die in his place, paying for his negligence as guardian? This can only mean that Ai Pong's life is thus spared by some good deeds in his past life.

"My good woman, you have come and begged me to go with you to say prayers and to help free your husband. As a monk, I cannot say no. Yet you know that each man accumulates both good and bad deeds. All the prayers and incantations that I'm going to say, or all the merits and power I may have acquired through years of study and meditation, can never erase the deeds your husband has committed.

"Even so, if it could help relieving your grief and that of Than Khun's mother, I shall brave the rain to go, as you wish, and make use of my prayers to drive away evil!"

Having said this, the monk walked out into the rain. Hardly had he gone further than the eaves of the roof that his saffron robe was already soaking wet.

*Ai Pong : "ai" when added to a name shows *despise*.

*Khun : title of a government official.

*Than : when added to a name shows *respect*.

The young man, who all the while was lying down enjoying his smoke, suddenly sat up. Turning to the young woman, his knitted brow showed that he was concentrating hard on something vital.

"The holy one needs not go any further into the rain and the cold. You have just mentioned my name. Here I am, Ai Pong. You can take me to the authorities to be executed. That will save your husband's life. The holy one was right. Don't you think that this too is written by past deeds?... that the rain should pour down like this right in the middle of the fifth lunar month, right in the middle of the dry season?...that we should all have to come and seek shelter under this same roof? Yes, the holy one was right. I'll give myself up and escape no further."

Those words said, the young man looked up at the sky. The sun was shining in all its splendour, no trace of clouds was to be seen and not a drop of rain was falling.

By Vetal

English translation by Khunying Chintana Yossundara

M.L.BUBPHA NIMMANHEMINDR



Born on February 16, 1905, at Banmoh Palace in Bangkok, a daughter of Chaophraya Thevetwongvivat, M.R. Larn Kunjara, a high-ranking official of royal blood, M.L. Bubpha got her formal education at the St. Joseph Convent School and graduated in the French language.

An avid reader, and growing up in the atmosphere of theatre and performing arts, since her childhood home was the foremost training centre of musicians and theatrical troupes, M.L. Bubpha wrote her first play to be published in a newspaper. She later turned to novels, and became popular under the pen-name "DOK MAI SOD". Her works represent the suffering and muted conflicts of the upper class, the long-taught values and characters of the well-bred, and the life Thai women have to endure. Many aspects are still relevant today.

Her novel "NI LAE LOK" (Such Is the World) was translated into English and cited for an international literary award. A short story, "PHONLAMUANG DI" (Good Citizen) was selected for publication in English in the Australian literary magazine SPAN

M.L. Bubpha married Mr. Sukit Nimmanhemindr, a well-known career diplomat in San Francisco, the United States of America in September 1954. She died of heart failure on January 17, 1963 at the Thai Ambassador's residence in New Delhi, while Mr. Sukit served as the Thai Ambassador to India.

THE GOOD CITIZEN

The train, full of passengers in every compartment and even overflowing into the corridor, started off from Hualumphong Station in Bangkok, at four o'clock in the afternoon. At five minutes to seven it dragged its heavy load into a small station by a river.

The train stopped here for only two minutes. The passengers to this little place rushed out in a hurry, carrying their belongings in both hands. The lucky ones had their families and friends waiting, ready to help and to exchange news of their experiences. Those who lived on the same side of the river went home on foot; others crossed it by boats.

It was in July, 1945, after the Germans had surrendered in Europe. In the Far East, the Japanese Empire was being shaken to its foundations by increasing Allied attacks. Siam (Thailand) was then under Japanese occupation and, therefore, received its share of air raids. Many people in the capital who could afford to run away fled in every direction. Those not so fortunate had to work in Bangkok during the day and rush back before nightfall to wherever they had evacuated themselves. That explains why the evening train was so crowded.

Nai Mai, a Bangkok man, had to move his family to this little village in order to get out of danger. Every day he went up to work in the capital before daybreak and came back in the evening. It was an extremely tedious journey. But what could he do? He spent at least four hours each day in travelling, sometimes even much more than that; especially when an air raid was on and the train had to stop for hours.

But on that day the train arrived on time. The sky was clear blue, with no signs of rain anywhere. How unlike the past two weeks, when it had teemed practically every day! Nang Somchit, Nai Mai's wife who

was with child at the time, was excited; she had much to tell her husband, because during all the day a so-called "four-engined monster" had been hovering over Bangkok and all parts of the neighbouring provinces.

"I saw something very big and very long come down and hit the ground with a thud," she told her husband while they were crossing the river in a boat. "Everybody ran away into the fields. I started to run too, Mai; but I came back, otherwise there'd be nothing left in the house."

"The soldiers stationed at Rangsit told me that the planes dropped only leaflets," Nai Mai said. "Bangkok was alerted; but there was no siren. There was only one aircraft, flying very high and dropping only leaflets."

"Do you know whether anyone has picked them up?" Somchit asked.

"You have to wait until tomorrow."

Then Nai Im, the boatman, put in: "They say that a few bombs were also dropped at Bangsai."

"What?" Nai Mai exclaimed incredulously. "Why should they do that? There's nothing important there."

"It might have been the big long thing that I told you about," Nang Somchit interrupted. "Perhaps it's a leaflet container."

The residence of Nai Mai and Nang Somchit was a little thatched-roofed, four-room house, with a long veranda. The floor rested upon poles seven or eight feet above the ground, with a wooden ladder leaning against the veranda; it was the only means of going up to or down from the house. The four rooms were all in the same line, parallel with the veranda. No room, except the third, was walled; in each there was a window. Towards one end of the veranda was the kitchen, with a single door just enough to keep stray dogs away but quite useless against either human beings or vermin.

As soon as the boat arrived at the boat-landing in front of the house, a little boy of no more than four years old ran out on to the veranda and waved his hands in excitement. Both Nai Mai and Nang Somchit, seeing their son coming near to falling into the river, were frightened.

Nai Mai ran up the six or seven steps of the ladder and caught hold of his son.

"The boatman wants to know whether you'd like him to come for you tomorrow, dear." Nang Somchit shouted from the boat.

"What for?" Nai Mai shouted back.

"You were thinking of going to Nang Yam's party, weren't you? She's celebrating her son's entering the Buddhist monkhood."

"Oh that! What do you think? Should we go?"

"Well, I don't know. Anything you like."

"I want to go with the party to the monastery; but, if you'd like to come too, it would be awkward; their boat might be full and the sun would be too strong for you."

"But what would you decide, any way?" Nan Somchit shouted in an irritated voice. Nai Mai realized that since their evacuation from Bangkok his wife had begun to show signs of impatience and moodiness.

"Anything you like," Nai Mai said and sat down. For a long while past he had been wanting to have a railing made round the veranda to prevent his son from accidentally falling into the river below. He had discussed it with his wife several times; but in the end, when the problem of finance came up, the matter was dropped. His salary was hardly enough to cover current expenses; and there were times when he had to sell some of his belongings, such as personal ornaments and household furniture, just to make ends meet. Both husband and wife hoped that the war would soon be over and they would be able to return to Bangkok. In that event, it would not be worthwhile to have the railing made anyway. But every time Nai Mai saw his son playing on the veranda and perilously near to falling into the river, he thought of the subject.

Then there was the lavatory problem. In this little village where poor folk lived, no house had a lavatory, for it was by a big river, surrounded by a great expanse of open fields, where its inhabitants could ease themselves privately almost anywhere; hence the need for a lavatory

had never arisen. Both husband and wife agreed between themselves that they should have one; but then it cost money.

Nai Mai slipped into a pakama, hung a towel over his shoulder, put on his wooden clogs, lit a cigarette and carried his son down to the river to bathe. Meanwhile, Nang Somchit went into the kitchen and did her cooking. At this time Nai Kloi, the owner of the house, who let it to Nai Mai, walked up the steps into the house smiling.

"What, haven't you had your dinner yet? I've had mine," he said, puffing his home-made cigarette.

"Didn't you go to the party?" Somchit asked. "There seems to be quite a do over there. I've heard them pounding mortars in preparing food since early in the afternoon."

"You mean at Nang Yam's house?" said Nai Kloi. "No, I didn't go there. Perhaps I'll go tomorrow. Today I haven't time; just back from attending to my rice fields."

"Oh, you mean to go just when the ceremony begins, is that it?" Nang Somchit asked, "I don't know yet whether I can go then. If Mae Perm goes, I shan't be able to go. Aunt Un is afraid of being left alone in the house."

Mae Perm was Nai Kloi's sister-in-law who came to work as a maid and charwoman combined at Nai Mai's residence. Aunt Un was a distant relative of Nang Somchit's mother. She was quite well-to-do, with a fine house in Bangkok, which she had left because of the air raids.

"What is she afraid of anyway?" Nai Kloi asked. "Nobody would dare to do her any harm in broad daylight."

"I don't know; but I think it's you and your friends that scare her with your news of dacoity, hold-up and what not. Not only Aunt Un, but even I am afraid. It doesn't matter whether it's day or night, when an air-raid warning's on and everybody's running for dear life into the fields, I often feel quite afraid when I'm alone in the house."

"Was there an air-raid warning this afternoon? I was in my rice fields and didn't hear anything, only saw a plane, that was all."

"Nobody could hear anything for the noise they made at Nang Yam's house. Anyhow, I believe there were quite a number running into the fields; but I didn't, mind you. I was afraid that someone might come in and steal our things."

"Oh, nobody would dare steal anything." Nai Kloi said, laughing. "Your husband also has his firearms and the thieves here are scared of modern weapons."

Nang Un emerged from the kitchen, wiping her hands with a piece of cloth.

"When Mai's at home, I'm not afraid of anything," she said.

"There's no need to be afraid even if he's not in; I've just told you that there's no thief here."

"It's you all over." Nang Un remarked. "No thief, no thief. Then why did you tell us to close all our doors and windows right after sunset? We could hardly sleep it was so hot and stuffy with no ventilation. And now you say there's no thief!"

Nai Kloi could only laugh drily. He was the sort of man who could not offer any reason for anything he said. To help him out, Nang Somchit put in:

"He means, of course, that there is cat-burglary in this district, small pilferage, things like that, you know. But large-scale robbery is unlikely because we have our guns. Our house is in a central position; everybody knows us very well. At night the men in this village often get up and have a look at their bulls and cows to see whether they are stolen or not. So it's just like having nightwatchmen about every night."

"I myself sleep with my own bulls and cows," Nai Kloi affirmed, feeling quite satisfied with Nang Somchit's explanation of what he himself could not make clear. "Nai Pew also sleeps with his cattle; while Nang Yam doesn't seem to sleep at all; the noise she makes pounding her betelnut seems to be going on all night. Perhaps she's chewing all the time."

At daybreak ten days later, Nai Mai, his wife, and Aunt Un were awakened by loud noises. They came out of the house and found that the

villagers were gathering and talking about an incident which just occurred during the night. It was said that one cleric preceptor of Nang Yam's son, who was recently ordained, fell ill with stomach trouble. Nai Khem went to stay with him at the monastery, leaving Nang Yam with a daughter, only twelve years old, in the house. It had been raining almost all night. At three o'clock in the morning, Nang Yam woke up because she heard her cattle making strange rustling noises and lowing loudly. This, however, lasted only a few minutes and so did not rouse her suspicions. At four o'clock she got up and went into the kitchen to make a breakfast packet for her husband. She then came downstairs with a lighted coconut-oil lamp in her hand. To her dismay she found that, out of the six bulls that she had, four had disappeared.

Nang Yam ran to the nearest house, Nang Perm's, and poured out her tale of woe. Nai Pik, Nang Perm's husband, and Nai Kloi, instantly started off to the monastery to break the bad news to Nai Khem. Then the three of them went off in pursuit of the bulls, following the trails left by their footsteps on the soft mud of the rice fields. They walked for about five miles and the sun rose high in the sky. So they gave up and came back exhausted. They stopped near Nai Mai's house and discussed the matter vociferously and frantically. This noise woke up Nai Mai's household.

Nai Mai had not much time left to find out the details of the matter; for he had to take a boat to catch a train for Bangkok. When he reached the capital, everybody seemed to be in high spirits and said that the war would soon come to an early end; for the Americans had just dropped an atomic bomb on Japan. Nevertheless, some were not so hopeful, because they thought that the Japanese would not give in so easily, especially when an unconditional surrender was demanded of them. Nai Mai's mind was occupied with world affairs until he got back home in the evening.

There, almost in front of his own house was a crowd of people discussing the theft of Nang Yam's oxen, and Nang Yam herself, sobbing. The thieves demanded a sum of four hundred baht for the return of the four head of cattle. Nang Yam had not enough money, for the proceeds from the sale of the previous year's crop had already been spent on the ordination ceremony of her son.

"What does it matter if she has not enough money?" Nai Mai asked, rather bewildered. "Since now she knows for certain the whereabouts of her beasts."

"If she has no money, she'll not have the cattle back," a fellow in the crowd explained.

"Don't we know where the bulls are?"

"Do we, really?"

"Haven't we been told where they are? We can tell the police and let them get the bulls back."

"Oh no! That won't do at all. That'll be the end of everything." Nai Pik interrupted.

"What do you mean?" Now Nai Mai was really annoyed.

"If we call in the police, there would not be any bull left alive."

There seemed to be neither rhyme nor reason for this argument, which had the effect of infuriating Nai Mai.

"Why should they be killed?" he asked.

"Well, because the thieves will kill them," Nang Perm explained bluntly, "if they don't get the money by tomorrow."

"What! D'you mean to say that there's no law and order in this country?" Nai Mai was now at the height of his indignation. "What does it matter if some of the wretched beasts got killed if we can catch thieves and bring them to justice..."

"No, no. that's not the way," said a woman.

Nai Mai was so angry that he did not think it worthwhile discussing the matter any longer. So he went to have his bath and then straight on to Nang Yam's house where he thought he might find out the truth.

Nang Yam's husband was not at home, having gone to the district officer. Thus it seemed to Nai Mai that the matter had been put in proper hands. So he took his leave.

That night Nai Mai could not sleep until very late. To a Bangkok man like him who had never seen or experienced any theft or robbery of any kind, the whole thing offended his sense of justice. He was lying thinking of getting up and going to the district officer at once but rain was threatening and the night was pitch dark so he gave up the idea.

The next day was a Saturday. He was catching the train to Bangkok as usual and it so happened that, on the very same train, the district officer was also travelling to Bangkok. Nai Mai had known this official slightly, having met him three or four times in the past. On being asked whether he had been informed about the theft, the district officer was surprised and in fact as much annoyed as he himself was.

Nai Mai did not get back till nightfall, the train having been delayed by an air raid in Bangkok. In front of his house, Nai Mai saw Nang Yam and a few others.

"We have our bulls back," Nang Yam reported, her voice trembling with emotion. "Oh, without them, we would not be able to grow any rice next season."

Before Nai Mai could say anything, woman in the crowd said: "A hundred baht each isn't too bad; to buy new ones would be far more expensive."

It soon transpired to Nai Mai that when the owner of the lost cattle, together with a party of three, kept on pursuing the spoors for almost seven miles they came upon two villagers who had come out to meet them and who escorted them to one of the houses. There the visitors were entertained with victuals and drink in accordance with the local rule of hospitality. During the meal, however, the self-appointed hosts kept on dropping hints that by this time those missing oxen must have wandered very far and as the sun was now too hot to be comfortable, the party should retire for the time being and come back again in the evening of the next day. They would then be certain to get their animals back again, especially if they would bring with them a sum of 560 baht to provide for appropriate rejoicing for the occasion.

As the pursuing party realized that they were not sufficiently armed, whilst the other side's strength could not be determined accurately, they

deemed it more expedient to resort to diplomacy rather than force. They pleaded, on the ground of poverty, to have the ransom money reduced to 400 baht. To this, after due bargaining, the other party agreed.

On the morrow Nai Khem succeeded in securing loan from a wealthy Chinese who ran the largest grocery store in the district and who owned a fleet of rice boats used in transporting paddy from local farmers to rice mills in Bangkok. Thus provided, Nai Khem, with his three friends, made off in the afternoon for the home of the intermediaries who, once more, prepared for them a sumptuous feast. Nai Khem deposited the requisite ransom. Just before sundown, the hosts hinted to the guests to take leave by conducting them in a westerly direction for a while until there came to view four oxen serenely grazing in the neighbouring meadow. Thereafter Nai Khem and his party drove the bulls back home.

The following Monday evening Nai Mai came across the district officer at the railway station. As soon as the officer set his eyes upon Nai Mai, he left all his companions and made a bee-line for him. After a few words of greeting, he went at once to the subject of their former conversation by saying: "By the way, I looked into the case of the cattle theft of Nai Khem and I was told that it was all nonsense. There'd never been any theft at all"

"What!"

"That's what he actually said. The oxen happened to go astray for a day or two and later he found them grazing somewhere. That's all there was to it."

"That's strange," said Nai Mai, scratching his head.

The district officer laughed gently: "But, of course, I let him know that what he had done would simply make cattle theft more widespread later on. Now you must excuse me, I am afraid, I have friends waiting."

On his way home in a boat Nai Mai was still confused over what the district officer had just told him. As his boat approached his house, he saw Nang Yam bathing and scrubbing herself on the landing of Nang Perm's house. He could not make up his mind whether he should approach her and greet her as usual. But it was she who gave him the cold shoulder

by turning her face away. Beside her there were two other women, one engaged in plucking and preparing water convolvulus for making curry, while the other was busily cleaning her pots and pans. All three of them seemed to have been previously engrossed in a sort of animated conversation but as soon as they set eyes on Nai Mai in his boat, their conversation stopped abruptly.

"What are you doing there?" asked Nai Mai by way of greeting.

"Just nothing," answered one of them and they appeared to look uneasily at one another.

Whatever doubt Nai Mai might have on his mind came to an end the moment he stepped up to his house. His wife, Somchit, at once shouted at him heatedly: "Here comes Mr Nosy Parker. What made you carry your tale to the district officer? You are making all these people quite furious now."

Without waiting for her husband to make any rejoinder Somchit raised her voice, "Come out here, Uncle Kloi and all of you. Come out here and speak your mind." Then turning towards her husband she added: "These people kept on harping on the matter although I know absolutely nothing about it. So there you are, Uncle Kloi and Mae Perm, here comes the villain."

Nai Mai threw his hat and a packet of cigarettes on the veranda and then walked nonchalantly to the kitchen. He certainly had the happy knack of remaining cool whenever there was a storm brewing. As he perceived, Nai Kloi, Nang Perm, and her sister who was Kloi's wife, kept on looking at one another somewhat diffidently. He said: "How now! Come out with what you have on your mind. You all look as if the whole world is afire. Kloi, come and have a smoke out here, please."

Nai Mai sat down on his haunch on the veranda with his feet dangling freely. He kept on coaxing the trio to join him outside. Reluctantly, Kloi sat down leaning against a red earthen water-jar. Nang Perm and her sister followed suit.

"Well, hasn't the district officer come to investigate the cattle theft?" Nai Mai asked.

"Yes, in a way," cautiously replied Kloi.

"What happened then?"

"Nothing. Since the cattle have all come back..."

Nai Mai listened patiently, but Kloi kept on faltering. His wife, who was rather impatient, broke in: "He, the district officer, came here and upbraided us. He kept on reminding us that we are conniving at robbery. This upset Auntie Yam very much. She kept on weeping all the while. She said she already suffered serious loss of money, leave alone her anxiety. She can hardly swallow a morsel. And now she is accused of aiding and abetting cattle robbery again."

"So you are all angry with me because I told the D.O.?" said Nai Mai.

"Not exactly," said Nai Kloi. "But...but we are all sorry because it gave the D.O. the opportunity to come and say nasty things to us. He ran down all of us villagers as accomplices."

"We have never stolen anything in our lives and yet we are accused of being partners in crime with thieves and robbers!" Then Nang Perm, her sister and Nai Kloi each tried to get a few words in here and there to let off steam. Nai Mai silently listened, philosophising simultaneously on human folly; not forgetting his own share.

That night, after a square meal, Nai Mai, noting that his wife Somchit was in good humour, asked from her a black sarong and a blouse. After much heart-searching argument, Somchit gave in. He lit a candle and then took both pieces of feminine clothing with him to Nang Yam's house.

He handed his peace offerings to her saying: "Please do not take it amiss, Mae Yam. After all, I am, in a way of speaking, your kith and kin."

Nang Yam sobbingly took the proffered gifts and placed them by her side with joined palms in token of her gratitude. Turning to Nai Khem, Nai Mai began to unfold to him the news about the devastation in Japan following the announcements of the Allies in the form of leaflets

dropped from the air last Saturday.

Once back home, Nai Mai went straight to bed. Just when he was about to close his eyes, he heard Somchit murmuring audibly to Aunt Un: "Fancy! Poking his nose into what did not concern him at all, and forced us to part with what we could least afford. A black sarong nowadays costs pots of money; and quite an expensive blouse too! What's the use of toiling and moiling if he keeps on doing stupid things like this all the time?"

Nai Mai turned on his side, smothered his ear with a pillow, and closed his eyes.

By Dok Mai Sod

KANHA KIENGSIRO



Known to the Thai public under her pen-name, K. SURANGKHANANG, Kanha was born on February 26, 1911 into a titled official's family in Thon Buri. She was sent to the Rajini School for girls, as is the case with most girls of good upbringing or royal blood. Having shown a leaning towards the Thai language, Kanha was recruited to teach Thai grammar and usage at the School at her graduation. She later got a diploma as a certified elementary school teacher. She resigned to take up writing as a profession after three years.

Even in her school days, Kanha wrote short stories and novels. One known short story written in the final year of her upper secondary school was entitled "MALINEE"—a girl's name, that of the heroine. Her first novel written under the pen-name, K. SURANGKHANANG, was "KRONKARN", another girl's name. Her real success came with the two novels, "YING KHON CHUA" (The Prostitute) and "BAN SAI THONG" (Villa of the Golden Sand).

Kanha was the Executive Editor of the Muang Thong Daily Newspaper and the Director of the Narinat Weekly Journal. She was also the owner of the Rosamalin Press. Her works are wide-ranging and numerous, written under the pen-names of K. SURANGKHANANG, ROSAMALIN, MONRUEDI and NAKHON SURAPHAN. She authored about 300 short stories, among them "YAI" (The Grandmother) was selected to be translated into English for readers abroad.

Kanha deals with the plight and perseverance of Thai women, class-conscious Thai society and the emergence of modern, educated and liberal-minded girls. She suffered a stroke and was paralysed in her old age.

THE GRANDMOTHER

Watched over with care, with new kindling sticks placed carefully one by one, picked up from the woman's side as she sat there and put them on top of the old sticks which were almost burnt out, the fire did not take long to burn up again, licking at the new tinder until its flames gradually came back to life in the half-light of dawn.

By the blaze, now burning bright under the three-legged iron stove on which sat a big steaming-pan, always standing there at this same spot in the space under the flooring of this woman wholesaler's house, built high up on piles, a close cropped head or hair could be seen, the colour of white weed-flowers, bobbing up and down five or six paces away to the right of the stove. The head was bent down below the level of a flat, smooth, bamboo pole, polished to a shade of shining yellow at the middle. The two ends of the pole were small and slightly bent up just at the right places where scoring marks had been made on both sides by four old rattan strings, plaited at the top and hanging down to form a kind of sling for two old crumbling baskets, black with age, one at each end. The baskets themselves each held a flat plaited bamboo tray, on which were placed, one on top of another, a few white enameled bowls with cracks and black chipped spots on them. There were also an old cigarette tin containing bamboo pins and a small piece of rag serving as a cloth for wiping the hands.

What else could all these represent but a "mai-khan" and "saraek"? The "mai-khan" itself, so long in service on human shoulders, shone in the middle a beautiful colour of gold.

*mai-khan and saraek: In Thailand, peddlers, especially woman, carry their load in two baskets which hang from the two twisted-up ends of a pole (mai-khan). The 'saraek' are the strings of rattan which form the slings for those baskets.

The sound of water boiling came from under the two-tier steamer. Steam was pushing its way through the seam where the cone-shaped cover met the steamer. Sitting by the side of the stove was a middle-aged woman. She was wearing an old creased "pha-lai"* with several patches and a long-sleeved, grey-flannel blouse open in front. When the woman stretched out her hand to pour some water into the pan, the sound of boiling subsided while a heavy cloud of steam billowed out for the last time before it gradually disappeared. The woman then got up and took off the cover of the steamer, laid it on its back on the ground, lifted the steamer up and put it on a wooden stand where a girl was sitting adroitly rolling dough into dumplings and putting them into another empty steamer. The soft and well-kneaded tiny tapioca grains were flattened in her palm by the tips of her fingers, then wrapped around a sticky filling, which had been well fried and seasoned with both salty and sweet tastes. The white dough was then rounded off and pinched tight over dark brown pork-stuffing. When her hand was dry, the girl dipped it into a small bowl of water, then moulded more dumplings into a round and smooth shape before placing them in the steamer, ready-lined with banana leaves oiled with fat to prevent the tapioca paste from sticking to the iron of the steamer. The uncooked dumplings looked white and quite different from those already steamed. When she heard the noise made by the steamer being put there by her side, she took a quick look towards one of the thick posts forming the piles for the house above. There she saw the bending form of an old woman, huddled up against the cold. A pitiful sight indeed!

But this was only a daily scene, too familiar for any other feeling to be aroused in the girl but the usual sympathy. She lifted the steamer filled with dumplings which she had arranged in neat rows with her own hands and passed it on to her mother to set on the pan, before calling out to the old woman: "Oh, grandma. Bring your bowl over here. I'll count the dumplings for you."

Her whole body starting up from slumber, the old woman lifted up her wrinkled face marked with old age, to look at whoever had

*pha-lai: a kind of printed cloth popularly used by Thai women as a version of 'sarong'.

called. "Yes...what did you say, my dear girl? My hearing isn't good any more."

"I said...bring your bowl over here, grandma. I'll put the tapioca dumplings in it for you."

Once she had heard clearly, the old woman got up awkwardly, then clumsily poked about for the bowl in her basket. With her back bent she walked over, bringing it to the young girl. Fixing her gaze on the cooked and shining dumplings, still steaming hot, she opened her mouth, with the chew of betel still in it, to say; "Only fifty today, my dear. I want to come home early today, so I can have time to look around for something to offer to the monks. Tomorrow is a holy day."

The daughter of the wholesale dumpling dealer did not answer. She had her work to do, and apparently it called for quite a lot of attention and patience. She dipped her hand into a bowl with chipped rim; the lard inside was hard because it was cold. She spread it on the dumplings to prevent the tapioca from sticking to her hand. Then separating the dumplings from each other, she arranged them neatly in the bowl. When the heat was too much for her hand, she would blow hard on it...But...why worry about a little thing like that? She was not the one who was going to eat those dumplings. The bowl was soon filled. She patted the dumplings with her hand to make them look smooth and even, topped them with some golden fried garlic and red and green hot peppers, then handed the lot to the old woman.

Watching her all the time, the old one reached out for the bowl the minute it was handed to her, taking care that her grasp was firm enough so that the bowl would not slip from it. But before walking back to her baskets, she could not help turning around to ask in a voice, tremulous because the teeth were not there any more to bar the way of the breath coming out: "Have you put in the three extra dumplings as usual, my child?"

"You needn't worry about being cheated, grandma. If you don't trust me, you can count them yourself!" The young girl was sensitive and a bit snappy. The tone of her voice showed that she was not in a very good mood.

"I didn't mean that, bless you, dear. I'm just afraid that you might forget." Her voice dragged on, while betel-juice trickled out from the wrinkled corners of her sagging lips. "If you haven't forgotten, then it's all right, bless you. Then they're there all right."

She shuffled back to her baskets, put the bowl of tapioca dumplings on the bamboo tray, mumbling something to herself the way old folks do, touched this and that for a moment, then lifted the pole on to her shoulder where patches could be seen on the creased old flannel jacket, stained all over with spots from the betel juice. Tottering a little, she trudged off from the house.

Lights of gold and silver were gleaming on the horizon, but mist was still covering the whole area. The cold penetrated into her very bones. Those bare feet, which had never worn shoes, stepped rather gingerly on the gravel road. Everything seemed to hurt in the cold season; even this fine gravel cut into the soles. The old woman took a short cut across a patch of grass growing under a row of trees by the road-side. A car's horn sounded just behind and she faltered in her steps. Only when she felt the sensation of a car speeding past her in a commotion of noise did she feel relieved. She stopped then at another house to get some "miang-lao", put them in another basket, so that the weight of the two baskets would balance, then hastened on towards the village market, so as to get there in good time.

Once there, she put down her load next to a road-side grocery store, arranged the two baskets so that they would not be in the way, then sat down. Her knees stuck up over her drooping head and she kept lifting up her face, that face with signs of approaching death written all over it, to cry her wares to get the customers to buy from her.

"Sakoo-sai-moo* ...miang-lao**! Buy hot sakoo-sai-moo, my ladies!"

*sakoo-sai-moo : a kind of dumpling made of tapioca paste with stuffing made of pork and peanuts. They are eaten with parsley or lettuce.

**miang-lao : another kind of dumpling with nearly the same kind of stuffing wrapped in pickled cabbage-leave, to be eaten with fried popped rice.

The people came early to market. They bought vegetables and they bought fish and pork, until their baskets were all full, but not a soul bent down to ask for her hot tapioca dumplings or her newly wrapped miang-lao.

Some passed so close that their skirt even brushed against the rattan strings which supported the baskets. Instead of feeling sorry when they turned around and saw her, they would abruptly turn their face away as if they had brushed against a log and not a human being. The old woman could only follow them with her eyes. Her mouth which was just opening to cry her wares, slowly closed. She remained sitting there until the sun was high and the market stalls had nearly all packed up. Still she could not sell anything. Already, she had chewed three or four mouthfuls of pounded betel. With no more patience left, she was just getting up when a woman's voice right in front of her said:

"Grandma, give me three satangs' worth of sakoo."

The hands trembled that were wrapping the dumplings in banana leaves. She was fastening the package with a bamboo pin when the buyer stopped her.

"Where's the parsley, grandma?"

She looked around, but could not find any. She searched everywhere, even to the bottom of the baskets, but in vain. She must have forgotten to bring it along. Her lips trembling, she pleaded, "I forgot to bring it along. Please wait a moment, my good lady, I'll buy some for you."

"I can't wait." The customer was a woman of a little over twenty. On her waist was a small skinny child with a snotty nose that often ran down to his mouth. "Have you ever seen anything like it. Selling sakoo-sai-moo, and forgetting to bring any parsley along? If there's no parsley,...then I don't want any!" She fairly croaked with displeasure.

"Well then, so you don't want any, my dear." The old hawk looked up downheartedly at the buyer. She was blaming herself for

being so forgetful. She could have earned three satangs, but now... nothing!

The young mother had not moved more than three steps away, when the child on her waist began to struggle and cry for the dumplings in a mixture of greed and temper. The mother then had to turn back to the old peddler who was putting the dumplings back into the bowl.

"All right. grandma, give'em to me. Curse this greedy boy!" she said, "Don't bother to wrap them up. I'll give them to him right now." She threw a five-satang piece onto the bamboo tray, took the dumplings, smelled them, bit and chewed half of the dumpling herself and stuffed the other half into the mouth of the child.

The old woman lifted the tray up, put her hand into the basket and pulled out a piece of cloth which was once red, but which had now turned nearly black, untied the knot and counted the one-satang coins in it: one...two...not this one, it's still new. Let me give her an old black one instead. Before giving the change, she looked at the coins well once more to make sure whether there were two or three. Once assured that they were only two, she handed them to the woman. Then she picked up the five-satang piece and dropped it on the cement floor. It sounded all right...not a counterfeit one...so she put it back into the old cloth and tied a new knot very tight and put it back into the bottom of the basket. As she was lifting the pole on to her shoulder, she stopped as if remembering something, and set it down again. Once more she lifted the tray up, pulled out the cloth, untied the knot and took out a few copper coins*, they could be used to buy some parsley!

Leaving the market, she then edged along in front of row-house shops and then dwelling-houses, stopping here and there to hawk her wares. She had been walking since early morning, when the air was still quite chilly, until it was noon, and then through the afternoon in the hot sun, all the time painfully making her way on hot gravel and asphalt roads. She kept looking at the dumplings still left in her bowls while

*copper coins : In those days the one-satang coins were made of copper, the five-satang nickel, the tens and the quarters silver. One baht still has 100 satangs.

she walked on. Little by little she sold them. Every time she stopped to rest, and to grind herself a mouthful of betel, she would untie the knot to count and recount the money, and repeat the performance again to make sure. In this knot was the money to be invested in sakoo-sai-moo, in the other that for miang-lao. To-day's profit would be put together with those of the previous days in a separate knot.

Once she had regained her strength, she put the load back on her shoulders, and continued hawking:

"Come buy my sakoo-sai-moo and miang-lao!"

"Master, would you like some sakoo-sai-moo? Here's your hawker."

"Where? Oh, no...better not. The hawker is an old woman. She's dirty!"

"Mammy, I want to eat shakoo-sai-moo!" pleaded a child.

"Wait till I give you a good slap! Asking for this, asking for that when the evening meal is so near. You didn't bring along any bags of gold or silver at your birth, you know! Old woman, go and hawk your goods somewhere else, or you'd be making me spend my money".

"Come buy my sakoo-sai-moo and miang-lao," the hawking sounded more feeble now.

"Buy my sakoo-sai-moo! I've got miang-lao too!"

"Grandma, give me five satangs' worth of sakoo. What? They're all gone? Then why you still hawking it?"

"Forgetful, master. Old folks are, you know."

Putting the load which was by then much lighter than in the morning back on to her shoulder, she continued her painful steps. The sun had already gone down behind a row of trees. Only ten or more miang-lao were left. It would not matter even if they were not all sold since they would not spoil. She could keep them until tomorrow. Passing through the market, she stopped there to buy two salted eggs, one salted pla-too* and five well-ripened freckled bananas, put them all in the empty basket and headed home...which she could already

*pla-too : a fish of the same family as mackerel, one of the cheapest in Thailand.

glimpse a good way off ahead. But why...why was it that her legs felt so tired and without any strength?

As for those who were left behind at home, when the evening approached they would be waiting and expecting her return...not to welcome home this poor old soul as you would wait for a person who had brought you up, and for whom it is now your turn to care. As soon as the mother saw old grandma, tottering along in the distance, she hurried to tell her daughter and her three sons:

"Look, children, your grandmother is back. Go and ask her for some sweets."

And the children would run out to surround their grandmother from all sides. The quick ones would snatch whatever was left in the baskets and put them into their mouths. Those who were slower would cry and fight for some. So, the minute the old woman reached home, with the load scarcely taken off her shoulder, the eldest boy, in one jump, driven by hunger and greed, reached for the bowl of left-over miang-lao. He was a boy of eight, wearing a shred of a pair of shorts with no shirt on, dirty and grubby all over from head to toe. His eyes were quick and cunning. When his sister and brothers protested, they fought noisily until the mother had to tell them sharply to share the food; the noise then subsided.

The old woman could only look forlornly at the disappearing miang-lao, but would not dare to interfere or stop the children from eating them. What a pity...What a great pity! After all, she had been hoping all the way home that she could keep them for tomorrow. Of course, she should not have forgotten that these grandchildren would come around and snatch whatever was left over from today's sale, just the way they had been doing every day. She could only look at them putting the miang-lao into their mouths, chewing and swallowing them. Nothing was overlooked, not even the popped rice in the tin box.

She hurried to put the load away in its usual place because only then did she remember the salted eggs and the freckled bananas that she had put in the basket. If one of the children happened to find them, they would also be gone. She did not mean to keep these two

things for herself to eat, but they were meant as offerings to the monks. It would not matter much if she would have to eat only one meal out of two. It would be like this only in this life. With all her good deeds and the offerings she had made, she might be born again a great king's daughter in her next life.

The mother looked as if she could hardly wait for the old grandmother to get home. She pretended to scold the children: "What children, snatching grandma's things? Leave them alone so she can sell them tomorrow. Get away, get away from here, go and eat them somewhere else."

The old one could understand only too well that her daughter was scolding the children in the "mouth-scolding, eye-winking" fashion*. She often pitied herself for all the troubles and all the hardships that she had to endure, for having a grown-up daughter who had married and had children of her own, on whom she could not depend for anything, not mentioning the fact that she had to strive and labour so hard to earn her own living, even at her ripe old age.

The old woman did not utter a word, for she felt too hungry to bother about anything. Furtively she reached for the red rag holding the money and put it in the pocket of her one-sleeve tunic, then tiptoed into the kitchen, opened the earthen rice pot with a broken edge, only to see some burnt rice left over at the bottom of it. The few dishes of food scattered around the rice-bin bore the look of something waiting to be taken away and washed up more than something that could be eaten. Anyway, taking out a wide bowl, filling it with rice, she sat down and reached over for the dish with a few legs of salted crab left on it. In a tiny bowl was a ball of namphrik-som-makham** the size of a thumb. She mixed together whatever left-overs there were; it would be enough for subsistence.

*mouth-scolding, eye-winking fashion : in Thai 'pak-wa, ta-khayip' meaning scolding with your mouth, while winking with your eye—a way of saying things which one does not really mean.

**namphrik-som-makham : 'namphrik' is a kind of sauce made of shrimp paste. This particular kind is prepared by adding 'som-makham' — tamarind paste.

As she was lifting the first mouthful of it to her mouth with her hand, the daughter came into the kitchen.

"Mother, have you got some money? Lend me about thirty, will you? There's no more kerosene for the lamp." Those were her words.

The hand that was lifting the rice to her mouth was weakly lowered. In order to avoid looking at her daughter's face, she looked down at the grains of rice in the bowl instead, and remained silent for quite a while. With whatever small profit she had made today she had bought food that was intended as an offering to the monks. What was left was only the money she would have to hand over to the dealer as the cost of the dumplings, so that she could get a new lot for tomorrow's sale. It was a long while before she was able to utter a halting answer: "No, I haven't got any. I only have enough for the cost of the dumplings."

"Why, didn't you make anything at all selling things today?" asked the daughter, the tone in her voice showing displeasure.

"I did not sell them all. Didn't you see the ten left-over miang-lao that your kids have eaten up?" This was the only answer the old woman could make, feeling hurt to the point of tears by her daughter's words.

Already put in a bad mood by the thought of not being able to screw any money out of her mother, the daughter was now touched on the raw by her mother's mentioning the miang-lao that her own children had eaten. Taking it as reproof for ingratitude that her old mother was directing at the children, she raised her voice and retorted:

"If I had known it, I would not have let them eat them!" Then abruptly she left the kitchen, went straight to one of the girls who was enjoying herself playing a game, slapped her once on the cheek and spat out: "Here, you wicked brat. Why did you have to eat your grandmother's things? There...there...for being so greedy, not knowing what you should eat and what you shouldn't. Didn't you know that they were not for you, you little devil?"

The little girl howled because she was quite hurt and unprepared for the punishment. She was absorbed in her game and did not know what it was all about when her mother rained blows on her.

"I did not eat them. Phi Choi* did," she cried and struggled. "Please mother, don't hurt me."

"You're all alike. Come here, ai** Choi! Come here you villain, or I'll have your blood, I will!"

With her hands on the hips she yelled at the boy, pointing her finger at him. A few bamboo sticks were stuck between the slats of the wall. The sight of Choi, trying to hide from fear behind the water jar, made her temper still worse. She ran for a stick and rained blows on him without mercy. She called him while beating him: a child who was born to ruin his parents, born to waste all the money, born to make her bankrupt etc. But Choi, though the blows hurt, was not the only one to howl. His other two small sisters also joined in this unison of caterwauling.

The grandmother saw everything and heard every sarcastic word directed at her by the daughter whom she had borne and brought up with all due care until she should get married and raise a few children of her own, ...and who, even then, still had to depend on her old mother. Old as she was, instead of being cared for by her children like other mothers, she had to go out to peddle in order to earn a bit here and there to support herself. She could not hold back her tears thinking of this. She bent down to dry her eyes on the lap of her skirt.

The rice she was trying to swallow seemed to get stuck there in her throat. Every word that passed through her ears hurt her so. She would not blame her daughter, but thought instead that all this must be the result of the bad deeds she had committed in a former

*phi : in Thai means "elder brother or elder sister." A Thai often uses this same word to address anybody who is older and who deserves his respect. In this case, the child means her brother named Choi.

**ai : contrarily to the word "phi," "ai" is used with a person one hates or disdains or for whom one holds contempt.

life. Joining her two hands and putting them above her head, she murmured: "I'm doing only good deeds in this life. Do not let me come across such a heartless child in my next life...please!"

What was left over was all eaten up, but the poor woman still had not eaten her fill. Only a lump of rice remained at the bottom of the pot...yellow because it was burnt. She poured some fish sauce on it, then mixed it up and ate it the way poor people did in times of hardship. She could not help thinking back to the time when she was still raising her own children...never would she let any of her little ones eat plain rice with fish sauce. There had to be at least rice mashed with bananas or with bai-tamlung* soup. In better days they would have rice with meat curry, sweet-and-salted pork stew. But now that the time had come for her to ask the children to take care of her, all she got in return for the kindness she had bestowed upon them was some rice left at the bottom of a pot mixed with fish sauce, which tasted more like salt water than something that was supposed to be made of small shrimps and fishes.

Well...at least with this daughter she could still find a roof to sleep under and something to eat. From the other four daughters and sons she had got nothing except signs of disdain. Her eldest son was now the abbot of a monastery in the country. Since he was a monk and not an ordinary person, if she went to visit him often, the temple boys would insinuate that old grandma went there to be fed with whatever food was left over in the begging bowl, which by rights should belong to the serving boys. So now she had to force herself to feel that her eldest boy had no more place in her life.

As for her second daughter, she was married to an orchard owner with two big wooden houses. The old mother once dragged herself over to stay with them, but found it impossible to remain after a few days, because that daughter, Piam, would keep nagging at her: "Do help Phi Boon to cut down those weeds in the ditches of the orchards, mother, or he will say that I brought you into this house,

*bai-tamlung : a kind of vine, the young leaves of which make delicious soup.

only to treat you like a princess. Near the bamboo clump over there... the hired men have done it so many times already, but they just don't seem to get rid of them fast enough."

So, not long afterwards, she had to bring her old frail self back across the river from the orchards in Klong Mon, to come and stay with her third child. Nearly every night she did not get to sleep; this son would come home nearly every evening drunk and start beating his wife and children. If she intervened, he would push her so hard that she would be sent reeling.

The fourth child was the most wretched of them all. When the mother went to her asking to stay with her for a certain length of time, she burst out crying and complained: "How can you stay with me, mother, when I myself can't stand the harsh treatment of my mother-in-law yet? They are all people of blue blood. I'm so afraid that you'll come here and do something awkward and funny, then I'll have to be ashamed of you. Please don't stay here with me, go and stay with Nang Phew!"*

Phew was her fifth child and the youngest...the one she was now staying with. She was poorer than the others, because she was married to a lazy man who did not like to work. He could never stay long at one job, giving as reason that the work was too hard, or that he was not strong enough for the work. Things being like this, the old woman could not sit still; she had to get herself a pole and a pair of baskets, and go out peddling whatever she could.

When the son-in-law and her own daughter were able to make some money, they would quietly spend it themselves without letting her in on it. But if she ever earned any, the daughter would always be there pressing her for a share. This, she did not mind so much; she realized that she was living with them, so it was only natural for her to help out. But...showing their displeasure toward her by beating their

*Nang Phew : literally means "Mrs. Phew," but also used with a younger person one is close to or a person one is familiar with. Sometimes this same word is used with a woman to show disdain.

own children!... Often she cried, pitying her poor own self and wished for death to come soon as a means of escape from all this misery.

Phew kept it up for a long time, scolding her children with the intention of directing her spite at her mother, until she was so tired that she had to stop. Dusk came, but she pretended not to notice and let the whole house remain in darkness. Since there was no light, her small children stumbled over uneven planks in the floor and cried.

The old grandmother could not stand it any longer. In the dark she had to look for the bottle and then went down the steps to go out and buy some kerosene for the lamp.

Around half past seven her son-in-law came home with a few packages of sweets for his wife and children. They got around together to enjoy the sweets...but who would expect them to have enough heart to hand some over to the poor old soul? The good smell of the food came wafting past her nose and she could only swallow betel-juice and choke over her hurt feelings.

That night...before the poor creature could fall asleep, she had to get up several times to get a drink of water to quieten the pangs of hunger and to quench the thirst caused by eating salted food that evening. She thought of the freckled bananas which she had hidden in the basket...but they were intended as offerings to the monks. It would not matter if she had to starve herself, but let the holy ones have them, so she could have merit in the next life. Little did she realize it, but the one monk who came around to receive the offerings, the minute he saw her coming down those rickety steps, would say to himself words that would have shocked her: "Here comes this wretched old woman again! Hasn't she got anything else except salted eggs and freckled bananas? I'm so sick of the...stuff!"

What would she get in return...this poor creature who so deprived herself in order to give to another?...Heaven!

It is nature's law that ripe fruits will finally fall off the branch, and this old creature was thus like a ripe fruit...so old...so ripe! How many more days could she last? Every night before going to sleep she

would repeat in her prayers her wish for the god of death to come soon to take her, and she prayed she would go in such a way what it would cause neither grief nor trouble to any one. Little did she know that these wishes were soon to come true, on this very day even...without her being the least conscious of their fulfilment...

That morning, she woke up before her daughter. In the kitchen she cooked rice and then went to make merit with her offerings of a salted egg and a package of cake wrapped in dried banana leaves. After breakfast, she went as usual to get the dumplings for her daily round of peddling. She still felt strong, both in body and mind. Then came midday when she felt faint; she had been walking in the heat of the sun without any rest. But she forced herself to keep on hawking along the street. She took a different route today. On the left side of the street there was a small canal with water about one metre deep. She intended to turn and cross over to the left bank of the canal by a little bridge made of a single plank with a rail of bamboo to hold on to. A small lane let from this bridge to the house of a man who was a good customer for her dumplings.

The minute she stepped on to the bridge, her sense of hearing became dull and thousands of little lights danced before her eyes. Her heart felt funny, but she thought it was nothing serious, for she could still see her way. With her hand she grasped tightly the bamboo rail and thus supporting herself, continued until reaching the middle of the bridge. Then...everything suddenly became dark...her step missed the plank and she tumbled down on one side. Her hand let go of the rail and she fell down into the water below!

Five minutes later, only the banana leaves, which were used to wrap the parsley, could be seen floating in the water. Bubbles came up all around the spot and gradually disappeared. The flow of water carried away the banana leaves and other light objects which came up from under the water later. Some of them floated along and then got stuck in the bushes of tall grass or the Java weeds with pale purple flowers growing on the side of the canal. None of the people who crossed the bridge would ever suspect that deep down below them was the death bed of a poor old woman!

The people in the neighbourhood of Samsen Nai, Bangsue, will no more hear her voice. The familiar hawking of "Sakoo-sai-moo... miang-lao" will no more reach their ears. Those she left behind will feel sad, will miss her or mourn her death only when they begin to miss her helping hand and the good deeds she once rendered them. But... what would mourning do, when the person herself has gone...and never will return...never!

By K. Surangkhanang

English translation by Khunying Chintana Yossundara

MALAI CHOOPINIT



A native of the northern province of Kamphaeng Phet, Malai was born on April 25, 1906. He had his early education in the province, and came to Bangkok to pursue secondary schooling at many leading schools for boys in the city. He underwent a training as an elementary school teacher, and passed the required examination before getting back for the pre-university classes at Suan Kularb School. He became a teacher at Wat Saket School for two years, and embarked on journalism in 1926 as the editor of a regional newspaper called "Thai Tai" (Southern Thais). He later became the executive editor of "Suphap Burut" (Gentleman) bi-weekly journal, the birthplace of many famous Thai writers, including Siburapha, Kularb Saipradit, and Ussana Plerngham. They pioneered one of the first newspapers after the event that brought about the change in the country's administrative system in 1932, under the title "Prachachat". He also took a break of one year from journalism, working in his coconut plantation in the Province of Chumphon.

Malai Choopinit was a prolific writer, with 14 pen-names designated for the many different types of works. His well-known pen-names are MAE ANONG, for fictions, NOI INTHANON, for jungle stories and adventures, RIAM-ENG, for short stories and features, and M. CHOOPINIT for philosophic writings on human life. He immortalized his hometown of Kamphaeng Phet, in many adventure stories that sing of the charms and beauty of the jungle and life on the river. Apart from his great writing skill, Malai Choopinit was a shining example of a person with vision, courage, and social concerns. As an established and respected journalist and novelist, he taught at the universities and took active part in many social activities, concerning mainly journalism, conservation, and social welfare. He died at the age of 57.

RISING FLOOD

The flood from the north had risen by almost a foot during the night, making the Mae Ping river, where it curved past Pak Aow Monastery, swell so high over its banks that it looked vast and deep like the sea. Although the water rushed swiftly and ceaselessly carrying with it bushes and clumps of water plants, a youth was seen determined to get across to the plantation village on the other bank in his small narrow "piggy boat".

His boat got caught in a bamboo bush that was floating downstream and for a moment it seemed that he would be carried away from his destination by the current, that he would have to give up his attempt to cross the river altogether and bring the boat back to the same landing again. But no, like a thoroughbred fighting fish, our young man seemed to enjoy the danger of being tossed about in the foaming flood amid floating objects. He jumped on to the floating bamboo bush, tugged at his little boat that got caught in its branches, finally pulled it free and jumped back into his former position. Then he paddled against the current at such a speed that it seemed as though he was trying to flee from a fierce animal or to reach the winning post in a race. A few moments later the boat reached the opposite bank, a few "sen"* lower than the landing of the plantation, quite safe and sound.

"What a dangerous risk to take! Even if he could swim," my wife said, her voice sounding normal, although she had paled visibly.

*sen : a distance of 40 metres.

"When I was young, I used to swim out to catch teak logs and held them for ransom. It was much more dangerous than this," I boasted. "Some of my school-mates, who were born and bred on the sea, could not swim against me."

"That cannot be compared to this at all," my wife spoke up. "To be naughty is childish instinct. A child does not have to think. He has no reason, but merely act according to his whim. He will realize what he is doing only when he learns that the result is the opposite of what he is aiming at. It's like a child playing with fire; he does not know that it is hot until he learns from burnt fingers."

"How can you know for sure if that young man did it because of his youthful instinct or because of his will to brave dangers?" I said. "My guess, which may not be far from the truth, is that he did it because of the former reason. What do you say, Nai Chune?" I turned to the pilot who sat in the stern of the boat.

The old man, from whom I had hired the boat in Pak Nam Pho to take us north, smiled politely while he made his slow reply.

"It may have been for either reason. The lady may be right, or maybe you are." He paused a little, his eyes fixed on the stern of the little boat, almost hidden by the foam and the turbulent waves of the flood water. "However, that youth makes me think of another story of thirty years ago. That other young person tried to cross the river at this very place during the flood season just like this, only it was much more dangerous, since it was on a moonless night. She was a girl."

"A girl?" queried my wife with knitted eyebrows. When Harsa does that, it means that she is highly interested. "Whatever made her cross the river?"

"She did not cross over to the plantation village yonder," the pilot said, "but she came over to this side, to this very monastery. But her boat capsized and she disappeared."

"Was she alone?"

"Yes, alone."

"She deserved it," I said. "What made it so necessary for her to risk such dangers crossing the river in such a condition? It's terrifying enough doing it even in the day-time!"

The pilot became silent for a while. His eyelids flickered over his clouded eyes, the colour of the cream of rice, as though he was deep in thought. Finally he spoke slowly as usual, and in a low tone.

"No, it was not at all necessary. As a matter of fact, nobody thought that she would have had the courage to do what she did. The man who made the appointment to meet her at this monastery did not think so either, or else he would not have asked and an innocent young life would have been spared from falling prey to the mother of waters." He paused again a little and went on : "But human nature is a complicated thing. What we think is a small matter for one person may be a matter of life and death to another. Sometimes meaningless words pour forth from our lips, because we think that they are of no real importance... but the other party may take them as seriously as life itself."

Harsa was gazing at the old man's face, puzzled. Her eyes showed that she did not understand.

"Of whom are you speaking, Nai Chune?"

"Chome...that girl, of course. The girl who was drowned, because she took the meaningless words of the man she loved too seriously." His face became quite serious without his knowledge, "The pity of it was the man who spoke those words was a monk in holy orders!"

"A monk!" we, Harsa and I, exclaimed almost at the same time. "That girl and a monk?"

The old pilot smiled sadly and nodded.

"Yes, a monk...but it was not like that. I know what you are thinking. No, it did not happen because of the affair between Chome and that monk. There was no breaking of the Holy Discipline nor of any good customs for that matter. It was all due to the defeat of the girl by her own heart or, to put it more correctly, it was due to the foolishness of a man, who did not understand the true nature of woman."

Harsa may have kept silent throughout, but her eyes that were full of questions seemed to warn the old man that she wanted to know all the details of the story in full. These details, let me now put together anew, in the way I have been accustomed to do with stories from life, told by other people.

From the account given by the old man, whom I had only met since we embarked at Pak Nam Pho, I could draw up a picture of Chome, the peasant girl, somewhat vaguely at first in my mind's eye. The figure became clearer later, however, and I could see her as though she was standing before me...a daughter of a country farmer just like any other. Chome at sixteen might look fully developed physically, but in the depth of her heart...who knows? The little heart that had grown up among natural surroundings, untouched by human hands; the mind that was pure and simple, as merry as a child, or as a little bird singing freely in the wilderness...She would have gone on living such a life, proud and satisfied with her condition and her surroundings until later perhaps, a young man of the same neighbourhood would step into her life and they would have lived happily together to the end of time according to custom, with a house full of many, many children just like any other happy family in the same village.

I know not whether it was a god or some stars that influence human destiny, who altered Chome's life from the ordinary course. Her story, which sounds more like a fairy tale than what could actually happen in real life, began at the annual preaching festival at Pak Aow Monastery, during which the Great Birth Story of Lord Buddha was told. It was then that Chome met her first love in the form of a monk preacher, who had come to stay at the monastery. Nobody knew where he came from.

You can never tell the deciding factor that makes a person fall in love with another. It's true that in most cases love is due to youth, with its fleeting electrical passions, and to the beauty of face and form. But in the case of Chome, she fell in love with the voice of the monk, whose age was two full cycles of years different from hers and whose personal appearance was uglier than that of all the young men of the village who had their eyes on her. Chome, who surpassed other girls of the neighbourhood in beauty, could choose any of them by a single passing smile.

"I really could not see why she was so much in love with that monk," Nai Chune said. "Some said that she fell under some magic spell, but knowing that monk, I can guarantee that such stories were false. It is true that people of my own age believe in love's magic spells, but then there must be someone to cast the love spell on another person to make that person love him in return. It was not possible in the case of Chome, for the monk was not attracted by her, nor wanted her. He was not even interested in her. She, however, was on the contrary infatuated with him...so infatuated that she was without shame. She would paddle across the river from the plantation to bring food to his cell every day, for the sole purpose of seeing his face and listening to his voice and to be near him. Her conduct became the subject of widespread gossip in the neighbourhood.

Seeing that the affair would cast a shadow over the good name of the Buddhist Religion, the old monk wanting to give her something to think about, said to her one day, when she came to offer the midday meal to him:

"My good sister, I think it best for you to stop coming to the monastery at least for a while, or else unfounded gossip will be believed by some people. That will be bad for your good reputation and mine and it will destroy the good name of the monastery."

But the good preacher was struck dumb by Chome's uncontrolled emotions when she heard his well-intended and kind warning. She looked down and cried. Between tearful sobs, she confessed her love for him and told him that she could not possibly remain alive in this world if she could no longer come to the monastery to look upon his face, to hear his voice and to be near him. She told him, in short, that life would be worthless without him. Because of her great love, or infatuation if you like, that was overflowing her heart, she begged him to forsake the yellow robes and to re-enter the world with her, to spend the rest of his life with her.

The representative of human goodness and purity remains for a long time in disturbed silence. When he gave her his answer, his voice was without emotion and straight and as firm as a stone pillar:

"Good sister, you do not know what you are saying. But I will not hold it against you, since you are still very young and without knowledge of the world. I want to help raise the dark veil that now closed your true vision and bring you out into the light. What you now regard as happiness is but a chimera formed by an emotion that is based upon the senses. When the emotion is passed, you will regain one's sense of morality, which is the true substance of oneself. Go home now, sister, I beg of you, and keep yourself in a quiet place, so that you can meditate upon this thing which you call love and which you have for me, and try to find out by good reason what really caused it. I do not think that it is my physical appearance that attracts you, since I am old and I know full well that I have nothing to inspire physical love. Think well, my sister, and you will clearly see in the end that your love for me is but a trick played upon you by your own mind, which makes you see me not as I really am."

I could guess the feelings of Chome at that time and realized how much she must have suffered. The reasoning of a reasoned and disciplined mind cannot easily be understood by a young person influenced by emotions, especially to the mind of a country girl deeply in love like that of Chome.

She disappeared from the monastery for so many days that the Abbot and other monks in the monastery thought with relief that the gossip on both banks of the river would at last come to an end. But Chome's silence on that occasion proved to be but a quiet period just before a great storm. One moonlit night, she paddled her boat across the river from her home to the monastery to see the monk.

The celibate one was greatly moved when he saw the change that had taken place in Chome. During the few months that he had not seen her, she had lost all her quick youthful movements. Her bright cheerful face had changed to something pale and haggard. Her body had become so thin that she appeared to be but skin and bones. But none of these was as moving as that pair of eyes...so deep and vague...eyes that told of great sufferings...eyes that showed clearly the hopelessness and the complete loss of interest in life.

"If it had not been against the Holy Discipline," said the old pilot, "the monk would have rushed forward to hold her in his arm and

to whisper words of endearment to her, so that she would be free from her sorrow...No, not with the feelings of a man towards the woman he loved, but with the feelings of a father towards his child, or those of a nun to the little birds without home or help from anybody."

Chome was ill. Her voice that told of her sufferings all this time could hardly be heard, like that of a man suffering from consumption of the lungs during his last days. It was no use for the monk to give her any kind of admonition. Chome had definitely decided that there were only two ways left for her to choose: either to live with the man she loved or to take leave of this life.

"Do you mean to be so adamant about it?" asked the monk.

For reply, Chome slowly nodded her head.

"Nothing in this world can ever change my decision," she finally spoke.

The monk fixed his eyes on the Mae Ping River, whose banks were disappearing under the flood from the north. He knew very well that soon the shallow waterway would become a turbulent sea. He also knew that from that time onward, the swift current, the foam and all the floating objects would flow cluttering down from the north, to be much feared by the boatmen. Even the streamers that plied for passengers between Pak Nam Pho, Kamphaeng Phet and Tak had to stop running during the night. There were too many dangers in the Mae Ping River during floods to risk the lives of passengers. The monk was silent for a while, then he said:

"Can you promise me one thing, sister?"

"I can promise you anything," Chome spoke quickly, her cheeks reddened "if you would only leave your Holy Order and this monastery, I would follow you to the very end of the earth. I am a woman of one word and one desire, please believe me. If I should ever fail in my promise, I would never annoy you with my face nor my presence again."

"I cannot give you my decision now. I need a little more time. Come back again on the night of the fifteenth day of the waning moon. In the meanwhile, look after yourself well. Do not forget that I will tell

you of my decision on that night. If my conscience tells me I must part with Religion, I would forsake my yellow robes and go away with you at once."

I am not quite sure whether the actual words of the monk would correspond with what I am trying to put down, according to what was told to me by the old pilot, but he must have said something to that effect. One thing I know for sure and cannot be mistaken is that Chome was supremely happy. It was as though she had been helped up from a bad fall, or as if she had been restored to life from a hopeless illness. When the young fall ill with love, they grow worse quickly, but they recover as quickly too. From what the pilot said I could see a new Chome while she was waiting for the date fixed by the monk...Chome then was happy, healthy and bright, full of expectations and sweet dreams. Everything that she had been dreaming of all these sixteen years of her life would be fully realized within twenty days. Either by some instinct or imagination of her own, she felt sure that her dreams would come true in every detail.

At last came the fifteenth day of the waning moon, the most important day in the life of Chome. All day long the north wind, starting early in the morning, blew hard against the leafless branches filling the whole area with severe cold. A heavy fog hid the river, so that nothing could be seen even within the distance of a few yards. The fog cleared in the early afternoon, and in the evening only ribbons of light were seen floating across the water.

The young girl braced herself against the cold wind and went down to the landing to wait for the appointed time. Her eyes seemed to penetrate the cloudy darkness of dusk to fix themselves upon the landing of the monastery on the opposite bank, which was where she had made up her mind to go. She did not notice the coldness of the wind, nor the darkness that was upon the water. She had no fear of the dangers that were facing her. Her eyes were fixed and her heart was ceaselessly calling out the name of her lover. As soon as it was dark, she stepped into her piggy boat and pushed it from the bank.

"It was the maddest decision that I have ever come across," commented the old pilot. "Nobody would dare risk his life like that, no

matter how well he could swim. The worst thing, you see, was that Chome could not swim at all..."

"The Lord preserve us!" my wife, who had been long silent, said in a whisper. Her face, already paled by the sight of the young man balancing himself on the boat in the middle of the river a few moments ago, became even paler and her hand, which was resting on my arm, began to tremble.

Let us close our eyes and try to picture a young girl, who could not swim, sitting in a flimsy boat which was, even by itself, difficult to keep afloat, her small hands closed tight around the handle of the paddle with which she was trying to take her boat across the swift current full of floating objects, water plants and logs, all alone in the wide expanse of water, covered by total darkness. You may think that Chome's action was madness itself, if you dare to call love madness. But isn't love on some occasion, indeed, but madness in another form?

I did not get from Nai Chune's account what exactly caused Chome's sad and pitiful end that night. Her boat may have capsized because of the strong current or collided with the floating objects and logs. Unable to swim, she was probably too frightened to have sense enough to hold on to the boat or to a log and call out for help as one should do. For no one living on the river banks heard anything out of the ordinary that night. But the next morning, Chome's empty little boat was found washed up on an islet called Ko Khi Lek, a few bends down the river. When I close my eyes, it seemed I could suddenly see Chome struggling in the current. Her head would go under water and then would come up again for a short while gasping for air, only to disappear again, leaving above the surface only hands that waved quickly and with all their might at first, but that seemed weaker and weaker until they disappeared under the water and into eternity.

"In all my seventy years of life, I have never been as moved by anything as by her death," said Nai Chune finally. "No one in this village was ever so hated by the people of this village as that preacher monk... I can't say whether it was just for people to feel that way against him. But, when you come to think of it, if he made a mistake, it was no doubt without intention. He had been a monk for many rains and his disciplinary

conduct was beyond reproach. In my opinion, the reason why he made an appointment with her on the night of the fifteenth day of the waning moon was that he felt sure that she would not have the courage to risk her life to keep the appointment. But there again, if you think that it was his fault, then the fault was caused by a man's ignorance of the true nature of woman!"

We kept silent for a long time after that. I felt an indescribable tremor in my heart. Finally Harsa broke the silence. Her voice was strangely hoarse and tremulous:

"And the monk...or...that man, what happened to him?"

The old man struck a match and slowly lit his cigar wrapped in banana leaves. He took some time to exhale the smoke, all the while his eyes gazed in front of him, but in the end he replied:

"He tried to hang himself the next day. I am not quite sure whether it was due to his good fortune or misfortune that someone saw him and saved him in time. After that he disappeared from Pak Aow Monastery."

Some instinct in me as a writer gave me a sudden thought. I looked hard at the old man and said quickly:

"You seem to know all the details of the story very well, Nai Chune"

The pilot looked at me straight in the eye; politely and guilelessly and with a sad smile, he said:

"I ought to know better than anyone in the neighbourhood, at least, as much as the preacher monk himself."

"Then you are..." Harsa broke in.

But the old man seemed to anticipate what she was thinking and hastily said:

"No, I am not that preacher monk. I was the Abbot of this monastery. It was I who advised him to tell her to come on the fifteenth day of the waning moon..."

The Mae Ping River keeps on flowing. Many millions of lives depend upon her as a channel for existence, but the life of a poor and innocent girl once turned into the channel of love...and death!

By Riem-Eng

DHEB MAHAPAORAYA



Born around 1902, Dheb went to Vajiravudh College, the only public school in Thailand founded by King Vajiravudh, Rama VI. However, he was sent to Penang before graduation where he pursued further studies for 4-5 years.

Before Dheb became a serious writer and translator when he finally worked with the magazine "Daily Mail", he had held several jobs in a wide range of enterprises, from an export company, the Immigration Department, the State Railway of Thailand to a lumberyard and a cinema. He settled and became established in writing, with features, translated stories and novels to his credit. His best known novel was "CHAMPOON", named after a flower with sweet fragrance, of a climber of the family Annonaceae, also a girl's name. It was translated into English by a foremost linguist and writer, M.L. Boonlua Dhepayasuwan, and was first published in the February 1962 issue of the Asian Magazine.

His son, Dhamnoon Mahapaoraya took up the career of journalism and was a co-founder of the Nation, the first Thai-owned English language newspaper.

CHAMPOON

Before we went to the building and to the special ward, the director of the hospital stopped and warned me.

"This patient comes from a good family and the story with I have pieced together from relatives and friends of his is connected with people who are still living, wealthy and...and influential. And his symptoms and signs are such that, well, we, the doctors of this hospital...we cannot come to any definite conclusion. You see, we hesitate to call him insane, especially from the legal sense.

"Officially, I can only state that this patient received a violent shock. It's five months now, and yet, he cannot get free of it. The whole world is shut off from his consciousness. Only what led up to the event causing shock is remembered. His brain cannot accept any other impressions. This is the whole trouble. We have tried everything we can to bring him back to normal consciousness, to make him react the normal way. If we can do it, he will be a normal person, we think, but if we can't, then..."

The doctor shrugged, spread out both his hands in front of him in a rather hopeless gesture, then went on:

"I have told you something of the background of the main actor in this drama. It is up to you to decide if it is to be staged before an audience."

The patient was a young man of about twenty-seven or twenty-eight. He was well built, and his illness had in no way affected his looks. He was not pale or emaciated as one might be led to suppose. In fact, he did not look like a patient of that hospital at all. He was good-looking

and had an intelligent face, and his clothes were good. He got up to greet us with dignity, like a well brought up person who had moved in good society. He also revealed by his manner the personality of a leader and not of a follower.

But after the usual introductions performed by the doctor, he gazed vaguely at me and maintained a disturbing silence. Nothing that I did or said elicited a response, until I remembered the doctor's observations and began:

"You must have lived some time in Phuket?"

"No, not for any long time. It was at Thai Muang, in Phangnga that I stayed many years."

"Thai Muang is the meeting point of many mining districts, isn't it? It must have been great fun."

"It was hell."

I was alarmed. "What? Did it have anything that other places didn't have? Like Hat Yai, for example?"

"Hat Yai and other such places had women, drinking and gambling. But Thai Muang had champoons, crocodiles and iron chains."

"I don't understand. What had champoons, crocodiles, and iron chains to do with the three vices you mentioned?"

"I will tell you," he said.

From thence on, the current flowed. I had succeeded in breaking the dam and the flood poured forth. What follows is the story I got from him, except here and there, where I have helped with the sequence of the narration. In some places, there were gaps which I have had to fill from information gathered elsewhere. The names, of course, of all the persons and places are fictitious.

"My father was governor of Phangnga. I was educated in a boarding school, said to be one of the best educational institutions in

Bangkok at the time. However, when I was sixteen. I began to run a little wild. My father wired for me to go back to Phangnga, then he sent me to school in Penang. I was there five years until I finished my schooling. It was about the same time that my father retired.

"My father was one of those rare persons who realized long ago that we Thai should do something towards freeing ourselves from foreign economic domination. He had always tried to encourage me towards going into business rather than to work with the government, and I fell in with his view quite easily. It suited my character better. When my father went back home to Bangkok after he was retired, I separated from him and took a clerical job with an Australian mining company in Phangnga. My rather irregular life and education had equipped me for this job, because I spoke Malay, Hokkien, and Hainam. The firm was ready to pay any price for someone who knew these languages in addition to a knowledge of English and Thai. I was paid two hundred baht, a salary I couldn't dream of getting if I went to live with my father in Bangkok.

"However, I worked only two years with the Australians. An American company, the Yukon Gold Mining Company, opened a mine near Thai Muang and wanted someone who could supervise all its Asiatic labourers and also act as liaison with the government officials for it. I applied at once and, out of more than ten applicants, the company chose me, the youngest man of all. I was paid a salary of one hundred and fifty American dollars, which was about four hundred baht. Besides this, the manager allowed me to handle all its buildings and other contracts, so that in a very short time I came to earn, on the average, about eight hundred baht a month.

"For a young man of twenty-four to earn eight hundred baht a month, though it was not unusual for Phuket, the way lay open leading to a significant change in my outlook on life. When I earned two hundred baht, I had always had enough money left to put into the savings bank at the end of the month. I led a quiet life, I read, and listened to the radio after work.

"But when I began to earn eight hundred, my money rarely lasted through the month. It was not at all anything to wonder about. Nai Amnuey had made a reputation for himself, a reputation for all the vices

there were in the region. Yes, I was always in the forefront where women, drinking, and gambling were concerned.

"I was also in the forefront in other things. I never allowed anybody to be superior to me. I was always leader, never follower, in any society. And I carried it off well too, because, I believe, it was my social background that helped. I felt at home in any company, either Thai or foreign. And what is more, there was my money which opened all doors to me.

"The places I loved best to spend my time in were the many clubs in Thai Muang. The town was the centre of land communication of the region, from which roads went in all directions. From there one could go to many places by land, and my company's headquarters were only a short distance away. All the most interesting dens were to be found here, too.

"I would like you to pay great attention here, because it's important on what follows.

"There were two ways of travelling between Thai Muang and the mouth of the river where the company's headquarters were situated. From here you could go upstream in a boat until you found the Takua Pa-Thung Maphrao Road on the other bank. You waited until you could catch a bus and then you went again downstream to Thai Muang, and towards the mouth of the river. This took a lot of time. It meant sitting stiff in the boat for five or six hours, and then you could never be sure whether you could catch a bus or how long you would have to wait for one.

"The other way was to get a boat that would take you across the river right to the area near the mouth. Then you trekked on foot across the jungle to Thai Muang. This would take about three hours before you reached your destination. There were serious disadvantages travelling this way. You could easily lose your way in the jungle unless you knew the paths very well. And oh, there were crocodiles in that part of the river, in the greatest number and the fiercest that I have ever seen. When my father was governor of Nakhon Si Thammarat, I accompanied him on crocodile hunting trips in the Pak Phayun district, which was said to be the worst infested area. But it could not really compare with this river near

our mines. Here in this river the crocodiles would jump right on men in a boat. It was no wonder that part of the country was deserted with only a few habitations on the banks of the river; and very few people would venture to cross it, especially in a small boat. This district was notorious all over the province of Phuket. Thai Muang people who wanted to visit our mines would refuse to cross that river even at the narrowest part, unless the boat was strong enough with good close sides.

"I, of course, used the company's boat, which was sufficiently big, and so I was able to cross even at places where the river was at widest, and from the bank I would cut across the jungle. I got to know the paths very well and used them as often as I wished. But even so, I would time it so that I would get out of the jungle before dark, because tigers' foot-prints were not a rare sight in the district.

"You see how attractive vice is. Even tigers and crocodiles could not keep us away.

"I don't want to boast, but I have to say that I was very popular at Thai Muang. I was in fact quite a distinguished person. Quite a guy, perhaps, as some might say? And this led me into a clash with an important person of Thai Muang, in fact, of Phuket. The man was Taokae Soon.

"Taokae Soon was known also as Big Brother Soon. Now if this man had prospered in Bangkok, his name would have been pronounced in a way so the Chinese meaning would be always kept. But in the Southern dialect, it was made to sound local or foreign, as suitable to the occasion. Taokae Soon was a friend and acquaintance to every man in the region round Phuket, big men and small men without exception. But the areas where his influence was felt most was Takua Thung, Takua Pa, Phangnga, Khok Kloi, and Thung Maphrao. It could be said that every case, legal and illegal was tried by some means by Big Brother before it was tried in court, or was settled outside of court. All VIP's travelled over what roads there were in that area in Big Brother's cars, and stopped at places where he thought he could best provide them comfort.

"All the luxuries obtainable in the region would then be put at the VIP's disposal. If a VIP made a wish known, it was fulfilled at once. Big Brother had the reputation of being the most lavish entertainer.

Young government officials easily succumbed to him and were soon turned into useful instruments.

"It was this kind of success Big Brother won that brought me into conflict with him. Big Brother was strongly nationalist, for his own fatherland, of course. This was in no way blameworthy. But what made me grind my teeth was when he would insult Thai young manhood in general, when any young man made a slip and misbehaved himself in any way. I, too, was violently nationalist. Taokae Soon, of course, was never openly insulting. He was always sarcastic and subtle. I thought I could match his subtlety, and was never openly hostile. He was a veteran gambler, while I was young and new in gambling circles, but I managed "to erase the tiger's stripes" several times with some original tactics. People began to talk about it and laughed. And this was something Soon could not forgive.

"Even though we did not get into open conflict, it soon became known all over the area, and it was always incomprehensible to me how everyone, both Chinese and Thai, could manage to give us opportunities for a clash. It seemed to be some kind of a game for them to see me, a green horn, at war with an old tiger like Soon. I began to worry that one day they might force us into open battle. Soon had been the king of the jungle so long that it was impossible for him to tolerate the situation. How could the lion allow a strange animal to invade his territory without doing anything about it? I warned myself that something would happen to me, if not in daylight, then at dark of night. I walked more and more warily. Until...

"Do you know the champoon?"

I was startled out of my train of thought while following his narration I felt afraid. Goodness! The doctor has left me alone with this patient. Am I safe? I quickly replied. "I have heard of it, but have never really seen one.

"It's a rare flower in Bangkok, but in the southern provinces it is quite common, especially in the area around Thai Muang. I will describe it to you.

"It's of the family of champa. It looks something like a champee, but with a velvety calyx which at first wraps up the petals inside while the flower is a bud. Then this velvety part opens out first and later the petals. The fragrance is then released. The petals are waxlike, thick and stiff. They don't fade like those of a champee. After it opens, the champoon lasts several days. The scent is overpowering, compelling and unyielding.

"Isn't it strange that Soon with all his nationalism should name his only daughter after this flower? Champoon. He probably knew how it suited her. At nineteen, Champoon was a bright and attractive girl. She did not attract at first sight, just like the flower she was named after. But once you took a careful look, her beauty was revealed to you. Her emotions were exactly what you would expect from a girl with that name. They changed frequently, and they had the same power as the scent of that flower. They made Champoon an overpowering, compelling, and unyielding personality. Champoon was a girl, who, once her mind was made up, nothing in the world could change or stop her from carrying out what she was determined to do.

"Champoon went to school in Phuket until she was twelve years old. Her father thought it was now time she should stay at home like a good Chinese girl. But Champoon was at that time in Matayom IV, and had tasted enough of the freedom of a Thai girl to rebel at the idea of spending her life the way her father had planned for her. Soon was a strong-minded person, but he somehow realized and appreciated the fact that Champoon had inherited her strong mind from him. He compromised by allowing her to go and continue her education at a convent in Penang. This shows that it was not education for girls in itself that he objected to, but what he wanted was to prevent Champoon from becoming absorbed into Thai life. It means, of course, that he did not wish his daughter to marry a Thai.

"It was not long after Champoon's return home from school that her father's will clashed with hers. Taokae Soon could not get rid of the idea of keeping his daughter caged up. And Champoon would not accept that sort of treatment. There was some kind of a cold war waged

on between father and daughter. Champoon would yield in some ways to a certain degree, such as refraining from going out by herself and not appearing in the front part of the house, which is against the custom of the Chinese. This would appease her father somewhat, but should Champoon decide that she had to go anywhere, or her presence was required at any place, she would not let her father's conservative ideas stand in her way. And her father would pretend he knew nothing about it, because his courage failed when faced with her stubbornness, and he would not press for obedience whenever it was more convenient to seem amenable.

"I must describe to you the way houses are built in the south, so that you will understand what I mean when I say Champoon agreed not to appear in the front part of the house.

"Lodgings in the southern provinces are built so that they look more or less like rows of tenement houses in Bangkok, one built next to another, along the side of the street. The houses seem of the same depth from the street as tenement houses in Bangkok, but they usually stretch much longer along it. Each house may be thirty or forty wah* in length. To obtain sufficient light, the roof is open in certain places. The openings are covered either with glass or tin, depending on the wealth of the owner. The glass or tin sheets are movable so that the openings can be closed when it rains. The wealthiest Chinese in the region lived in this kind of house, because Chinese businessmen build beautiful mansions only for show, but they prefer to live in the places they have prospered in.

"Taokae Soon's home was built in the way that I have just described. But the house was outside the town and did not face a busy street, while the back of the house was on the fringe of the jungle. In Chinese homes, girls were rarely seen in the front part, and though Champoon did not approve of the custom of keeping women secluded, she did not care to show herself there and be conspicuously different from her neighbours. She really enjoyed keeping busy with all kinds of housework

*wah : Thai unit of length = nearly one metre.

and homecrafts. She read a great deal, having books sent to her from Penang and Bangkok, and she enjoyed going on excursions into the jungle.

"We met by accident, and fell in love, as if it had been planned by long ago Brahma. Our love was sudden, strong and deep. The fact that we had to keep it secret, and that it seemed hopeless, served only to intensify it. We knew very well that Taokae Soon would rather see Champoon laid out in a coffin than to see her married to the man whom he had hated and regarded as his worst enemy on earth.

"I want you to take note of this. Champoon was a very determined girl. She loved with a strong and deep love. It was like life itself to her. But try how she might, she saw no ray of hope of our love ever being fulfilled in the customary way. Still she refused to elope with me. Her education and upbringing prevented her. As for me, I can swear by all the gods that I loved her truly and deeply. And I, too, could not take undue advantages of her. Although we saw no way to escape we preferred to adhere firmly to tradition, and Champoon chose to suffer longing and pain rather than to take the easy way out.

"Thai Muang was a small community, and nothing remained secret for long, especially a love affair like ours, with me the man and the daughter of Taokae Soon the girl. Talk swept the town like a forest fire, and soon reached the ears of Champoon's father.

"Our contacts and meetings were suddenly stopped. I could not see her. I knew that she was imprisoned in the house, and had not been taken away because I had men placed so that they could tell me. Don't let me tell you of what I went through, all the agony and suspense. I tried by every means in my power to contact Champoon. It became an open secret that if anyone could succeed in taking my letter to her, there was a reward of three hundred baht, and if anyone could bring her letter to me there was a reward of five hundred baht. No one, however, succeeded although several persons made attempts, and most of them met with strange calamities. Taokae Soon had not ruled the region for decades for nothing.

"During the period of our underground hostilities, Taokae Soon and I had observed certain rules of civility. We were polite to each other

on the surface. But now it was open enmity. We looked daggers at each other if we happened to meet, though we tried to avoid each other. As for Champoon, I got some news of her from some of my agents. She had been whipped and tortured, and was imprisoned in that long dark house of her father's. It sounded like an old Arabian tale.

"I had been kept away from Phuket for a long time. This became a topic for talk in many circles in the region. A group of friends, therefore, hired a motor boat and came on a visit. The object wasn't only social in the ordinary way. They wanted to throw a wild party in order to console me.

"That party was a memorable one, in just the style that Phuket was famous for. Food, drink, and women. I don't have to tell you about the quality of the food and the wine. It was what one would expect from a party where expense was no consideration. But there was something else which no amount of money could have bought. For every man there was a woman, chosen and assigned, and there was one brought especially for me. I was told that this special import from Penang usually cost two hundred dollars a week, but, on this occasion, it was a special invitation she had accepted.

"On a dark night, when the sun did not shine, a little resin torch was light enough for a darkened soul. So when one suffers because of a woman, it is appropriate that one should get consolation from a woman. My friends, after all, had some sense. That was how I rationalized and so I accepted the gift of the devil.

"She was called Anita. She was a Filipina with a dash of Portuguese blood. She looked exactly like a Thai. Her Caucasian blood only made her figure more elegant, and her movements more graceful. Her face was beautiful, her whole personality attractive. It was unbelievable that with her beauty she should be what she was. Or it might be because of that beauty she had become what she was. I don't know.

"My friends spent three days and three nights on the boat, and I was with them. They wanted to take me to Ranong but I had important business and could not go with them. They, therefore, went on their merry-making way, but left Anita with me. In five or six days they would be back

to pick her up again, when she had to go back to Penang, or go to some other employer, as the case might be.

"I suggested to Anita that she should go on with my friends to Ranong. But surprisingly she chose to remain in that wild remote place with me. When I asked her the reason later she said she liked my youth, my looks, and my good manners!

"How destructive those attributes of mine were to me! But how could I know what lay in store? How could I know what beautiful Anita's decision would do to my life and my soul?

"As soon as my friends left, Anita and I went to my house to enjoy full delights of the flesh. Our newness to each other was still something exciting for us.

"My house was a wooden bungalow, roughly built. There were three rooms all open on to the verandah from which steps led down to the ground. One of these rooms, the first, I used as my bedroom; the centre one was where I had my meals. From the centre room there was a passage that took you to the kitchen and the bathroom. The last room I kept always under lock and key because it was where I kept my documents. I seldom locked my bedroom, even at night.

"My bungalow was a little way apart from other houses belonging to the company, about halfway from the river and the fringe of the jungle. It was quiet and usually deserted. I had a servant and a cook, who worked for me only in the daytime. In the evening, the workmen would gather at their own quarters, gambling or enjoying themselves some way. All this suited my purpose very well, and my bangalow became a veritable love nest for me and Anita.

"The evening before Anita was scheduled to be fetched away by my friends, I received an invitation to a dinner at the house of the company's engineers, which was near the sea. After dinner, we danced and the two engineers had a very good time.

"I knew that the reason for the invitation was Anita. The two engineers had been cut off from the society of women for a long time. The nearness of a beautiful woman was too much (of an attraction) for

them to pretend indifference. But they knew proper limits and respected proprietorship. They danced with her and enjoyed touching her and flirting a little with her following Western customs. We had a pleasant time it was almost dawn.

"I am usually a light sleeper and it always takes some time for me to go to sleep. That night, however, I dropped off to sleep almost as soon as my head touched the pillow. It must have been because I was very tired, due to the orgies that I had gone through for several consecutive nights. I felt that I dropped off only for a while, really, before I heard the creaking of the front door; the hinge was never properly oiled. I woke up immediately. I was sure that I had closed the door before I went to bed.

"I opened my eyes. The morning sun shone into my face from the open door. I could see a vague outline of someone moving in the middle of the doorway. I was not sure if I was seeing right. I raised my head from my pillow and rubbed my eyes.

"God! Was I dreaming! Was I gone stark crazy! That vision is still before me every time I close my eyes. It was the vision of Champoon all nude, without a single piece of clothing on her. Her rich black hair fell all over her shoulders, wet. The sight was made more grotesque by the presence of an iron chain, about half an inch thick, one end of which was wound round one of her ankles, the other tied round her waist.

"The vision stood in front of me and we gazed at each other. We kept quite still for a little while, then I saw its eyes move slowly away from my face and I followed them as if hypnotized.

"Then we both held our breath, our eyes rivetted on the same sight. It was Anita sleeping, breathing softly, her body pressed against mine, in that fine, gauze-like expensive mosquito net.

"I don't know why the naked form of Champoon did not stir up any shameful feeling, but that of Anita sleeping lightly clad so shamed me that I quickly piled a coverlet on top of her body.

"I could not look up to meet Champoon's eyes. I waited for her to say something. All that went on in my head was: Was I crazy? Was I dreaming? Was it a dream or reality? In the end, the silence seemed too

long for me. I collected my presence of mind, pressed both my hands on my eyes and looked up.

"Champhoon was gone!"

"Champhoon had confessed to her father that she was in love with Nai Amnuey, and that she had met him secretly several times, but assured him that her lover had respected her woman's honour, and that she had never thought of doing anything that would bring shame on herself or her family. But it was something beyond the understanding of a man like Soon. In his way of thinking, woman could only suffer one consequence from secret meetings. Soon had six concubines in his home, and he believed Nai Amnuey to be a quite normal young man. And Nai Amnuey was his enemy, the only man who had dared to stand up against his will in that part of the country over which he had ruled for decades. His daughter had been a traitor to him. She had allowed herself to love that very man whom her father hated bitterly. He could not bring himself to listen to her.

"When both father and daughter are as obstinate, and when they are determined not to meet each other halfway, the result is obvious. Soon became violent. He snatched up a big piece of firewood and aimed a blow at Champhoon. She dodged and he missed. He succeeded in giving her a severe beating, however.

"Champhoon was afraid the noise would attract the attention of neighbours. So she uttered only faint moans when the pain was too great for her to bear in silence. But she asked for no quarter. And when Taokae Soon had finished beating her, she raised herself from the floor."

"I told you I am still innocent, and you won't believe me. You cursed and beat me. I will now do everything in my power to go to Amnuey and give myself to him. Heaven be my witness."

"Everyone knew that Champhoon would keep her word, because she had never said anything that she did not intend to carry out. One week later, she walked out of the house while her father was absent from it.

"The word of the head of a Chinese family was law unto his house. Especially in the case of Taokae Soon, it was known that his power was absolute. Soon had threatened to whip everyone, wives, sons, and

servants, if Champoon should ever get away. Champoon therefore could not escape. The whole household literally dragged her back, while some ran for the master of the house. Champoon's first attempt at escape was followed by severe punishment.

"She tried again several times, but failed. In the end, Taokae Soon, who would brook no opposition, gave an order for her to be chained to a post in her bedroom. At night, to permit her some freedom, he allowed the chain to be loosened from the post, but it had to be kept on her ankles. Finding that Champoon tried to escape in spite of the chain, he ordered one of her stepmothers to go in every night and remove every piece of clothing from her before she went to sleep. This last measure, he felt certain, would be more effective than any other. He had sworn, too, that he would not give in to Champoon even if the conflict between them destroyed one of them.

"But one morning when he unlocked the door of Champoon's bedroom, he found it empty. The roof was open and the glass that had covered the opening was pushed to one side. Taokae Soon had not realized that Champoon could have used her bedsheet to help haul herself up. He had relied too much on the chain. No one knew why or how he reasoned he would carry out his orders regarding his daughter's escape. The fact, however, remained that Champoon was gone.

"Champoon had escaped to Nai Amnuey, the man of her love. It was never known what pains and dangers she went through to reach him. The local authorities could only guess.

"Champoon must have pulled up her chain from one of her ankles and tied the loose end round her waist somehow. She must have climbed on to the top of her wardrobe and hauled herself up on to the roof. She most probably used her foot to push open the roof, and succeeded in getting out through the opening. She was a strong and healthy girl, and it shouldn't have been too difficult for her to escape the way it was guessed.

"But it was miraculous how she found her way to my house. How did she cross the crocodile-infested river? No one could answer these two questions. It was believed, of course, that the bedsheets which

Champhoon must have used to clothe herself in had been washed away from her by the currents in the river.

"So it was really Champhoon that I saw in the doorway of my bedroom. I knew that she had really been there when I found that she had disappeared. The opened door assured me that it was not an illusion. I jumped out and was on the verandah in a flash, but I saw no trace of her. I found my voice and called her name. I ran calling her all the way to the bank of the river. I ran back and forth until the sun was high in the sky. I realized then that she had intentionally hidden from me, because it was impossible for her to go far enough in those few minutes that it took me to get out of my bed for her not to hear me calling her.

"I ran to the workmen's quarters and collected about twenty men. I made them spread out in a long line, one end of which touched the river. I made them march upstream until dark. We failed to find anything and at sunset we returned home.

"I set out for Thai Muang without going back to my bungalow. I would grovel at Taokae Soon's feet just to hear him tell me that Champhoon was safe at home.

"When I reached Thai Muang I learned from one of my secret agents that Champhoon had not been home. Even then I humbled myself and went to Champhoon's father. After all Champhoon was his daughter and though I and Soon hated each other, Champhoon had been dear to both of us. But the wretched Chinaman was a beast in human guise. He laughed to my face and said that if Champhoon were shameless enough to return he would beat her to death and send me her corpse in a coffin.

"So I went back home and got together again about thirty men. I separated them into two groups, and ordered them to march again along both banks of the river, because I thought Champhoon couldn't have gone in any direction without following its course. She might have crossed the river somewhere where it was narrow. We started about nine o'clock. I followed both groups of men in a boat which I rowed upstream.

"I had been either walking or running for the past twenty-four hours. I do not remember eating anything, only taking four or five gulps

of brandy. I must have dozed off, but I came to with a start when the bow of my boat was pushed hard against a place on the bank of the river. I asked what happened and one of the boatmen pointed to something...

“Do you know how crocodiles make a meal of a human being?”

“I told him no.”

“However big a crocodile it cannot swallow a human body. Even though its mouth is big it cannot bite pieces off, and its legs are too short to help it tear. It must always take it on land to make a meal of it. It takes hold of a part of the body in its mouth, and beat the body against a tree. It eats whatever part falls off from the body. It eats one of those parts each time and goes on beating and eating until the whole body is in shreds.”

The patient stopped talking at this point. He gazed away into the distance as if he saw a sight which no one could share with him. The silence made me nervous, so I blurted out:

“Did the boatman find Champoon?”

“No”, the patient said. “What he saw was a piece of chain tied round a human leg that was torn away at the knee. It was on a low branch of a tree...”

“Sir, can you tell me? Did Champoon go into the river on purpose in order to be eaten by a crocodile? Or did she try to swim back to go home to her father and confess to him that she had loved the wrong man?”

By Dheb Mahapaoraya

MANAS CHANYONG



Born on June 10, 1907 in Phetchaburi Province in Central Thailand, Manas had his formal education in the province and continued his upper secondary education in Bangkok. He joined a Chinese acrobatic troupe for a brief period, then returned to his hometown to work as a clerk in the district office, but not for long. He became a private classical music teacher and fell in love with the daughter of the Governor. They eloped to Bangkok. Manas turned to his writing skill to earn a living. The hardship and drama of real life made him a prolific writer, with journalistic work, short stories and novels. His story-line and dialogue are masculine, featuring scenes of gambling dens, gun-fighting and adventures. A short story "CHAB TAI" (Shoot to Kill) was translated and published in an Australian magazine SPAN in 1958.

Manas was a heavy drinker. He was hospitalized many times, and died on November 7, 1965.

SHOOT TO KILL

A hundred and forty men lived on the ridge of the hill in tiny huts roofed with rattan leaves. They all kept on with their task; they went on determinedly, felling big trees and small trees. Some of the trees were so huge that when they were chopped down they fell like thunder. Of the one hundred and forty men, only fifty or sixty could go out to work at a time. The rest were in bed shivering with malaria.

Every one of them was a great criminal. They had been sentenced to over ten years' imprisonment. They were serious, not given to much talking. They were men of deeds, not of words. When they were not working, they were thinking. Their thoughts—and their words, whenever they spoke—turned to their homes, their bits of land, their fathers and mothers, their wives and children. For them at such moments their wives were more beautiful than all the stars in the sky, more beautiful than all the flowers in the world and rarer than the most valuable pearl at the bottom of the sea. When would they see their beloved wives again? For one it would be in another seven years; for another, twelve. That was a long time to wait.

They were sent out from "Ayukadong", the headquarters of the convict settlement, a government office in the jungle area which was about 90 kilometres from the town of Yala, and the place where they were clearing the jungle was about 20 kilometres from headquarters. They had to chop down trees so that the Highways Department could press on with the Yala-Betong road. When they first arrived, they found it was quite a good spot. There was a small plateau there, the size of a football field, overgrown with spiky cogon grass. So they took it to be their home and called their little village, "Cogon-grass Hill".

They got rice from the office and were allowed eight satangs a day to buy food. A small co-operative shop there—only the size of a tiny grocer's shop in the capital—sold cooked food. Supplies were brought up to the shop by elephants. In the evening when they finished their work, they all helped themselves to cooked rice in small pots. Some got out salted meat to broil, and those who were rich from gambling ate tinned fish. They had never tasted fresh fish. If they made curry they would use tinned fish for that too. In fact, it was quite a treat to eat tinned fish curry deep in the jungles of the South. Some had for roasting birds called gawas or white peacocks, trapped at the top of one of the high hills. They used red chillies as baits. The white peacocks, with their tails spread out, would strut gaily up to the chillies and then get trapped. Sometimes they caught wild frogs as big as newborn babies. It rained there all the time so there were small yellow frogs and tree frogs as well which they also ate.

When the stock of food was very low, they borrowed my shotgun to shoot langurs, or leaping deer, as they were known locally, but they were really monkeys. Then they would make delicious langur curry. Real deer they used to get quite often. They got quite a number of tapirs too, and sometimes even bears. They shared the game out equally among themselves. Sometimes they fried grubs, insects and crickets and enjoyed these as delicacies. When they finished their meal they sat in groups and chatted, those with a bout of fever lying down and those who were just getting over one, sitting up. Who would envy them such a life?

I can still remember Porn, a man from Mae Hong Son, quite well. He was a good cook. He knew his way about in the jungle. Porn was not at all big, but he was extremely strong. Besides being industrious and loyal, he was a good musician. He took great pleasure in playing the seung in the dead of night, singing in such a piercing voice that your hair would stand on end. This seung which was a sort of mandolin shape, he sometimes played like a Spanish guitar, strumming his own accompaniment, and sometimes when he fancied a "gniew" tune from the North, he would slide his finger up or down the string, producing quite a Hawaiian guitar effect. His face was always smiling in spite of my ticking him off sometimes, but his eyes always looked sad.

I could not figure out why this sadness was lurking there. It could not have been anything else but his longing for home. No word is so sweet as the word "home". At times, I found myself pining for it too.

Whenever I was free, I would ask for two elephants from the Elephant Section and load them up with provisions and guns. I usually invited my colleagues to join me on my expedition. Prasit, a close friend of mine, often accompanied me. He was the youngest of us all. He was only 24 years old and a good singer as well as a good talker. Whenever he talked no one could help laughing. Ever since his school-days he had always been keen on sports. But he was a bit hot-headed: he often boasted he had been awarded a cup for boxing and a gold medal for marathon running. Also, his friends sometimes found it hard to swallow his habit of contradicting and mimicking people. He could take off the voice and gestures of the person whom he had chosen as his victim with cruel accuracy. But by and large, most of the convicts loved him. He could not drink much, but whenever he did, he drank until we had to carry him to bed. He was a young man who craved for adventure, and that was why he had come out to work with me in the jungle.

Prasit had little weaknesses. He had been brought up in a missionary school and his curt manners and pettish irritability often caused misunderstandings. I knew him well and often gave him a long lecture on these points. However, his bad moods lasted only a short time. At heart, he was good.

One day we rode the elephants out into the jungle. It was a dense, pathless jungle. There were leeches everywhere underfoot. Except for the stream bed, there was no open ground, as the jungle was choked with thorny rattans. The elephants had to wade through the stream. Once they had climbed out and left the stream bed, they had to start climbing the hill, grasping the trees firmly with their trunks and at each step making sure whether the rocks could bear their weight. This they did by cautiously stepping on them and over some considerable time slowly letting their full weight down. When they were certain, they moved on. We passed the villages of foresters which had rarely been visited. We went to Banmaeward and pushed on to Wanghin,

Puloa and Wangsai.

These were villages of real foresters who had never been anywhere, not even to Yala. Each village consisted of about twenty to thirty huts. These foresters used long bamboo stems to keep drinking water. They often had several of them in each hut. We bought some chickens and coconuts from them. They had fruit in plenty: durians, rambutans, bananas, and many other kinds, but we were tired of them all as we had been seeing such a lot of them on our way up. At night, the foresters took us shooting. My flashlight picked out a deer, and I shot it. The unfortunate animal was a large-sized deer. Its blood-red eyes were staring at the light. I shared the meat with them all.

At Wangsai we met a very pretty girl. I found out that her father was a Chinese who had come there to trade with the natives, so his daughter had a beautiful complexion. She would have looked very attractive if she had had better clothes to set off her figure. Porn had fallen madly in love with this girl some time ago. He loved her truly. Once he told me that when he had served his term he would stay on with me and marry Wan.

"Well, sir," he said, "Wan is pretty and a hard worker. At first, I was thinking of taking her to Mae Hong Son but I don't think she'll go."

"Has she become your wife?" I asked.

"No, sir, but I can bet you a hundred to one she will be mine. Her mother likes me. Every time I get my money I buy her things."

I very much doubted whether the girl's parents would give their daughter to a convict. But it was possible they did not know the truth. I believed Porn had lied to them that he was a labourer, not a convict, because when he went out into the jungle he was well-dressed. He wore brown shorts, a good shirt and the sun hat that I had given him together with some canvas shoes. The girl's family might well have thought that he was an ordinary decent man.

One night, when I did not go shooting, I heard voices under the coconut palm. I went out stealthily on to the veranda and saw a man and a girl talking. I had to turn my face away from this loving couple. I thought of loneliness, of love which could not be found anywhere. I could hear crickets singing. Now and then a tiger roared angrily or a deer started barking. When the wind blew against the leaves of the wild bananas and elephantcanes at the foot of the hill it set up a drumming noise like the yells and cries of a huge army that echoed from flank to flank. And yet, between times, I could even hear the lovers' breathing, and it was then I felt that their lives were so sweet—so sweet and so blissful.

I heard footsteps coming up the stairs and turned my head to look. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw that it was Porn. Who was it then, that talking to the girl under the coconut palm? I went up to Porn and whispered: "So it isn't you down there then, Porn?"

He shook his head listlessly. Although it was dark, the light of the stars made it possible to see faintly. He looked dejected. His hair was falling over his forehead. He had the look of a criminal who was hearing his death sentence pronounced.

"Who was it then?" I asked.

"It's Nai Prasit," he answered in a voice so hoarse and faint that it was almost inaudible.

"Oh, Prasit," I moaned wearily. It was Prasit then who was plucking his wild jasmine. Prasit must have met this jungle girl and fallen for her. But Prasit did not realise that he had taken Porn's life.

"Doesn't she love you, Porn?"

Porn heaved out a deep sigh, he tried with great difficulty to swallow his sorrow.

"I will win, sir. I have never lost yet."

"Don't speak like that Porn," I told him, "you ought to know that 'one bad deed brings many sorrows in its wake'. Winning or losing, a man must take it as a man. If we don't win, we must put up

with losing. If all men wanted to be the winners who would be the losers then?"

He only sighed. I did not know how much he understood my words.

"I believe in you—but I have never lost. I'd rather die," he said. "But you know, sir, when you come to think there are plenty of other fish in the sea. I think I'll survive this."

I patted him on the back. A little while later, Prasit took that innocent jasmine for a walk along a narrow path bathed in the dim starlight. They stopped at a rickety old fence. How happy they were. But my own thoughts and feelings were running rather strangely along other paths. What about Porn—wouldn't he feel like a fish that had had its head bashed?

It was probably my words that had got him to lie down to sleep. But I knew he was not sleeping. How could he sleep when all his nerves were taut and fully awake? Nothing in this world could soothe and take away the burning sensation, except that wild jasmine, but she was not coming back to him. Prasit was thirty-eight and quite a tough customer. Compared with my young friend he was just like an oak to a sapling.

One morning Porn came to me and asked for a day off. He smiled a very dreary smile.

"Are you going to see her, Porn?" I asked.

"Yes, sir—today we'll know," he answered. "I have bought her some sugar and a few sweets that she likes."

I let him go. He had done his work well. It was a fine morning. Gibbons and langurs filled the jungle with their cries. Those who had not got fever went into the jungle to find food. Some sat cutting rattan stems to make walking sticks. Some sewed rattan leaves for roofing. I was writing a letter to my mother. After Porn had been gone for a little while I heard an elephant making its way through the grass. I turned my head and there was Prasit, with beaming face, astride the elephant's neck, one hand holding a rifle, the other hand holding the elephant's ear. He called out to me boisterously.

"Sakon—aren't you coming?"

"Where to?"

"Wangsai," he shouted, "I have fallen for that girl. Isn't that just too funny!"

I was frightened. I did not want Prasit to go. I had a premonition. But Prasit was a generous, good soul; the convicts loved him. I did not think Prasit would dare cause any trouble. Nevertheless, I could not help being worried. Porn's words about losing and winning were still fresh in my mind. However, I left things to take their course and went on writing my letter.

In the evening, I heard the bad news I had half expected.

Porn had grabbed the gun from Prasit and what was more, he had hit him in the face with the butt. Then he had fled into the jungle. He left me a note which read:

Dear Sir,

I have to leave you sir, I have always believed in you, but I told you that I have never been beaten. He hurt me first. He did it in front of Wan. So I hit him back. For your sake, sir, I didn't kill him. I have to take the gun. They will probably issue a death warrant but I won't let them get me. I will escape through Saiburi. I beg you, sir, not to come after me. Let Nai Prasit do it.

Porn

P.S. Sir, will you be kind enough to write to my wife up North that Porn the Tiger has gone into the jungle again. Let her warn Teng to be prepared to answer for it if he steals my wife. If Porn dies in the jungle like a tiger then he will vow to have his revenge in the next life.

I folded the letter and put it away. That evening Prasit came back and I learnt more details. Prasit went on the elephant so it took him a long time. He arrived after Porn. On his arrival he saw Porn

with the girl. Prasit tried to get rid of Porn by ordering him to go and buy drinks and chickens. Porn would not go and he talked provokingly, so Prasit slapped him in the face. Porn flew into a rage. He snatched the gun from Prasit and hit him with the butt. Prasit's face was swollen.

The head-warden was terribly angry. He came from Ayukadong himself the morning after he had received my report.

"Well, Sakon," he said, "is this Porn such a terror?"

"Quite a terror, sir," I answered.

"Get him dead then. Is that clear? We can't let him live. Here are the bullets; I have brought you some rifles as well. You've only got shotguns here, haven't you? They're always jamming, these Browning bird-guns! Get moving now. He can't have gone very far. We've told all the local villagers not to give food or shelter to any runaway."

I took the order, but in my heart of hearts I did not want to go at all. I was not afraid of Porn but I did not want to shoot him. I could recall the scene when I shot Yab the Tiger. Before he died he fixed his bright, clear eyes on me and his eyes stayed bright right up to his last moment. However I had to go. It was my duty to shoot anyone who violated the prison regulations. I dressed myself neatly and put leggings on to protect myself from leeches. I had a rucksack in which I stuffed some preserved food. The convict carried rice and other heavy things. I would have been much happier if I were going hunting a tiger, but I was going after a "man" tiger, a tiger that had been as good to me as a kitten.

I went off in the direction of Wangsai. No matter what happened, Porn could not leave his sweetheart's place. The idea of escaping by way of Saiburi was just a trick, as every convict that had gone out that way had been sent back to us. He must have hidden himself in that neighbourhood. Furthermore, Porn had only five bullets. I had to get him back alive. I did not want to shoot him unless in self defence.

I split up our party into small groups and sent them along the main streams. He could not very well keep away from the streams,

the highways of the jungle. Four days passed and still we did not hear anything. On the fifth day, we heard that a local villager had been ordered by Porn to boil rice for him. He did not take away anything, not even one satang. When he had had his fill, he had gone away and left the man some money. Whenever there was news of plunder, we followed it up but Porn was so quick that he managed to escape us every time.

One evening, a villager came up panting, and informed us that Porn was hiding in a deserted hut in the rubber plantation of a local man who had moved to Tarnto. It was certain that he was starving and in the grip of a deadly fever. I had my gun and my men ready. We set off without delay. I ordered my men to take separate routes and surround the hut at a distance. We all believed that this time we would get him.

Because of our old friendship and trust, I firmly believed that Porn would not shoot me. I walked towards the hut alone, carrying a Mauser rifle. As I got nearer and nearer my heart began beating faster and faster. I told myself he wouldn't shoot me. But his own character had such strong power over me that when I was at the door, I did not dare push it open.

"Porn, come out and let's have a talk."

My heart was thumping when the rickety door opened. I expected to see Porn emaciated by fever and hunger. But I was taken aback as if I had seen a ghost. It was not Porn but a girl, the lovely jasmine.

"Wan," I called. "Tell Porn to come out."

"He isn't here, sir," she answered in her southern Thai accent.

I flung myself through the door. It was true, Porn was not in the hut. I looked hard at her. I must have looked so fierce and brutal that the girl was frightened.

"He is very ill, sir. He went out a moment ago," she said. "He told me to ask you for quinine and cigarettes."

I turned away. I had never been so sad and depressed as I was then. I could not look at the lips of the innocent girl, lips that were delicate and soft as petals, trembling like her body. I pitied her love. I pitied Porn who had to fight danger from so many sides—from me as an official, from malaria, from hunger and from the bitterness of his love. How could he overcome all these? He was bound to lose. And yet, in a way, he hadn't really lost. Hadn't he got the jasmine of the jungle?

I had to go back, overwhelmed and tired. He had not shot me, but he wanted medicine from me. This made me think of various medicines that I had with me, quinine, atabrine, guinoplas, moquin. How delighted I would have been if I could have given them to him. But hadn't I been ordered to shoot him?

We all slept in mosquito nets and still every one of us had fever; we were all moaning and groaning. What about Porn? Where could he get a mosquito net? Soon he would have to give in.

I sent my men to shadow this wildflower. Now we knew she met Porn from time to time and sometimes by appointment but she was as quick as a wildfowl. I knew full well that she was a friend of the Negrito. They did not walk, just vanished. They jumped from one bush to another. We could never see them. This wild jasmine of ours travelled like a Negrito, so we all shook our heads in despair. If we followed her, we were bound to lose our way.

Fifteen days passed, I still had nothing to report to headquarters. Whenever we heard that Porn had appeared at various places to grab food, we dashed over, but had to come back disappointed. I thought of the hot-headed Prasit with anger. He should have known that he was not living with ordinary human beings. He was living with creatures that we all called "giant's children". How could he range himself alongside a man who had really lived according to "the luck of the game"—a real sportsman.

In my last attempt to get Porn I went to the rubber plantation of a Chinese near Tarnto. Here Porn had snatched food again and this time he had also taken 3 baht weight of gold. I knew well that

the gold was for Wan; but he had disappeared in spite of our blocking every possible way of escape.

That night I left Tarnto, thinking of going back to Wangsai again. I had been away from "Cogon-grass Hill" nearly one whole month now, hidden away in the villages of the jungle people. On the way, our guide who was picking out the path by flashlight, stopped short.

"Sir," he whispered.

My men and I stood still, looking straight ahead. We saw two eyes as red as fire, so different from the eyes of all the usual wild animals.

"It's a tiger," he said.

"No, it can't be," said one of the men, "it's a tapir or a bear."

"Well," I thought, "whatever it is I'll shoot." I aimed between the two eyes. When the trigger was pulled, we heard it running off as fast as it could. It looked like a huge black bear. We flashed the light after it and saw the dark and bulky form stumbling away. Without light we examined the small plants on the ground that were wet with rain and found a trail of blood. We were not going to follow him. We would come back the following day. I ordered my men to move on immediately.

When I arrived at Wangsai, I caught the fever. After seven days in bed, I felt just about up to going after Porn again. On the eighth day, I began my work by coaxing the girl to give us information. It was no use: she did not give us any help, at all. I went out inspecting deserted huts and barns at night. I did not think he would have the nerve to sleep alone in the jungle. Besides, it was the beginning of the rainy season; how could he sleep in the rain?

A little while later, two of my men came running in out of breath to tell me the news.

"Sir," said one of them, between gasps, "I smelt a very nasty smell. I believe the big thing that you shot the other night is now stinking."

"That bear? How could it come and die this far away?"

"It's quite near the spot where you shot him that night, sir," he reported.

"Well, let's go then—I want its skin and gall-bladder."

We went over the hill following the smell. At the foot of the hill there were wild bananas and giant plantains. The stream was overhung with rocks. There were ferns of strange species and orchids hanging in long clusters. We saw an overgrown bush ahead of us. This must be the place? The bear that I had shot, the one which had spilled blood on the leaves, must have come to hide here and died. I quickened my pace and reached the bush. We pushed aside the branches. "Porn!" we all cried out together.

I felt stunned. His body was decaying all right. He must have been dead for several days—of malaria and hunger. My eyes filled with tears thinking back on how he had told the girl to ask me for medicine.

I could not be callous to him. I had really liked him. I told my men to dig a grave at once and we buried him. We stuck up a sign on the grave and stood still for a minute.

"I *have* given you medicine, Porn." I said in a subdued voice. "I dropped it on purpose at your Wan's house."

By *Manas Chanyong*

English translation by *Manit Varin*

M.R. KUKRIT PRAMOJ



A former prime minister and leader of a major political party whose father, H.H. Prince Kamrob was a grandson of King Rama II, M.R. Kukrit was born on April 20, 1911, the fourth and the youngest child of Prince Kamrob and Mom Daeng, a legendary court dancer. He loves to tell the story that his birthplace was a raft-house moored by the bank of the Chao Phraya River in Ayutthaya, the former capital.

M.R. Kukrit went to study in England after finishing his secondary education in Bangkok. He became an Oxon graduate with honours in Philosophy, Politics and Economics. Coming back to Thailand he was drafted into the army as a corporal. He later got a job at the Revenue Department, then moved to work at the Siam Commercial Bank and eventually the Bank of Thailand. After World War II he resigned his post to run for parliament. He was elected for two consecutive terms and became a cabinet minister twice.

M.R. Kukrit was one of the pioneers in journalism of modern-day Thailand. He founded the Siam Rath Company, publishing the Siam Rath Weekly Review and Siam Rath Daily Newspaper, as well as the Chao Krung Monthly Journal. His articles, features, short stories and novels are numerous, establishing him as an author of high stature. His love of music and the performing arts were also well recognized. He once accepted a guest role as a prime minister in the well-known Hollywood film "The Ugly American" playing opposite Marlon Brando. This film role became a reality in 1975, when he became Prime Minister of Thailand as leader of the Social Action Party he founded some years before. Under his administration, U.S. bases in Thailand were closed, and diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China established. He took pride in being among the first few leaders of the free world to have met Chairman Mao Tse-Tung and has always been highly regarded by the Chinese.

In his 70s, M.R. Kukrit is as outspoken as ever. His column "Soi Suan Phlu" has loyal followers, and is often quoted in other newspapers and journals. In 1986 he was honoured as Thailand's National Artist in Literature.

SI PHAENDIN

Now it was time to take leave of Sadech.

Climbing the stairs to Sadech's apartment, Ploi reminded herself again to behave calmly and sensibly. After all, she would be coming back here as a regular visitor. This was by no means the final parting, and she did so much want to show Sadech how well she could conduct herself, so that Sadech should have no worries as to how she would carry on the rest of the day.

Sadech was seated in front of the mirror combing her hair. She turned and smiled.

"Well, Ploi, all set to leave? I got up early to say goodbye to you, as you can see."

Ploi's good resolution chose to desert her at this very instant. She lowered her head to the floor and burst into tears. This was not the sensible performance she had planned and she did try to correct it, but the long-suppressed tears, once given an outlet, kept on coming despite herself.

Sadech said to Khun Sai, "One would think she's being taken away to be executed."

"Poor Ploi," Khun Sai, sniffing, muttered in a tremulous voice, and earned a reprimand from her Royal Mistress.

"It's for you to cheer the girl up, Sai, not make her feel worse. And why should you be crying? It's not your wedding."

She let a few moments pass before saying to Ploi, "This is an auspicious day and you mustn't spoil it with so much weeping."

Stifling a sob, Ploi stammered out: "I—I don't want to leave

Your Highness."

"Ploi, oh, Ploi, you can cry until your tears turn to blood and still I won't be able to keep you with me. Come, stop crying, I have something to say to you."

At last Ploi recovered enough composure to sit up and pay attention.

Smiling, Sadech said, "My dependable Ploi, I can always count on you to listen to me."

After the briefest pause she went on: "I want you to know that I have enjoyed having you under my care. Looking after you has been an easy and gratifying task because you're so easy to teach, because you're amenable to reason and apply yourself diligently.

"Time and time again you have proved yourself a person of steadfast nature with a strong sense of gratitude worthy of your birth and upbringing.

"Your gentleness and tolerance should stand you in good stead in your new life. You are marrying a Royal Servant. Consider yourself as one also and live up to the honourable calling.

"Conduct yourself so that you'll be a great help to your husband and not a hindrance. Give him your support, Ploi. Praise him when he's praiseworthy, but don't be afraid to tick him off when he deserves it.

"Your husband's happiness, your children's happiness, the good name of the family—all this should come before your personal comfort.

"I thank you for all you've done for me, and for giving me your love and loyalty. I wish you all the best. May you prosper in every way, live in good health to a ripe old age, and attain all that your heart should desire."

She picked up a small box from the dressing table and handed it to Ploi. It contained a brooch in the form of roses made with diamonds

and rubies, and a pair of bracelets also encrusted with the two gems.

"—A souvenir from the Palace. Or call it some compensation for all the boring lectures I've made you listen to. They go with your wedding clothes, so you can wear them today if you wish. And if you should fall on hard times you could always sell them. Nobody would have the right to criticize you, for they are your own property and you can do whatever you want with them."

With her eyes full of tears Ploi made a *kraab* at Sadech's feet.

"It's getting late," Sadech said. "You'd better go now, Ploi. Come back and see me any time you want to."

Going down the stairs, Ploi and Khun Sai overheard through the open door Sadech's voice calling the name of one of the maids-in-waiting, and then her complaint:

"As usual, I call and nobody comes. Now that Nang Ploi's gone I'm never going to get any service in this place!"

"You see?" Khun Sai whispered, "she misses you already. She's going to be in a bad humour today and I'm glad I don't have to face her."

Choi and the other bridesmaids had been ready and waiting in Khun Sai's room. At Khun Sai's bidding, Ploi freshened up and tried to look more cheerful. Then off they went, out the gate of Sadech's Residence, threading their way through the familiar narrow streets, turning this and that corner, passing familiar houses and gardens shimmering in the morning sun. They were the star attraction of the Inner Court this morning, and people came out to watch them go by, to greet them and shower the bride with best wishes. The bride was not responding very gaily to the cheering remarks. She was in a daze and could hardly see or hear them. Yet at the same time she was intensely aware that she was being taken away from them, these people, these voices, these houses and trees and stones, and she was filled with sorrow that it should be so. If she heard anything it was the voice of the whole place saying, "Don't go, Ploi. We'll never meet again as we do today. When you come back it will not be the same. It will never be the same again." How she longed to do the impossible—call off the trip, turn back and

retrieve all that had ever been, but of course she kept going forward, plodding on, walking the path her karma had built for her.

"How pretty you look, daughter. How pretty you all look.— Ah, I smell the lovely perfume! When there are Inner Court ladies present, the air becomes so fragrant." Thus Chao Khun Father complimented the girls. They had come out from under the arch of the Outer Gate. They paid their respects to him and exchanged greetings with Khun Choey, who was just as delectably turned out and delicately perfumed as any Inner Courtier. Chao Khun Father did not neglect to include Khun Sai in his eulogies. With his eyes twinkling he said, "You look like one of the girls this morning, my dear Khun."

And Khun Sai reciprocated with: "What about you, sir? Those guests at the wedding are going to mistake you for the bride's brother, you know."

Chao Khun had brought two carriages. Ploi rode beside her father, facing Khun Sai and Khun Choey on the opposite seat. She spoke very little during the rather long drive from the Palace to Klong Yom. She smiled at her three companions from time to time and replied to remarks addressed to her but otherwise contributed nothing to their continuous and pleasant chatter. Most of the time she listened to them with only half an ear while gazing out the window at the passing scenes. She became somewhat more animated when at last the carriage turned into the drive of her new home and did observe to herself, in an objective way, that this was a large property, and the main house quite imposing with its wide marble staircase in front and a smaller one in the rear, with its colourful porcelain jars and blue-and-white pots standing round the front lawn and on the stairs. She saw many people walking about carrying things and looking busy and noted, gladly, that there were plenty of tall shady trees in the compound. The carriage went past another building or two before coming to a stop in front of Khun Nui's two-storey wooden house where Pit, who had left the Palace earlier, was standing at the foot of the stairs with a broad grin on her face, looking very much at home, very sure of herself.

Choi, descending from the second carriage, went up to Pit and said, "Excuse me, am I speaking to the lady of the house?"

Pit let out her famous guffaw. "Oh, oh, Khun Choi! Don't get me into trouble today of all days!"

Upstairs Khun Nui gave them a warm welcome, calling out for tea and betel to be served and talking non-stop to Chao Khun and the others. She presented Ploi to her sister Khun Nien, who was frail and pale, and full of gentleness and charm. Ploi felt drawn to her, as Khun Nui had predicted she would.

Khun Sai would allow only a short rest from the journey. It seemed they had barely sat down when she started making everybody get ready to go to the big house. "Hurry, hurry! We must get there before the monks start chanting!" The girls giggled—they had never seen her so excitable.

They went up to the first floor of the big house, using not the front but the back stairs to make a suitably discreet entrance. The monks and some of the relatives and guests were in the central room with all its doors opening onto the front and the back verandas. Chao Khun Father was ushered in there, while Khun Sai and the girls, in accordance with the programme, settled in a smaller room adjoining it, also with the doors open.

When the chanting began, Ploi's thoughts flew back across the years to her tonsure ceremony. Pi Nueng's boyish face took shape in her mind, blotting out everything else. It was smiling at her, an encouraging smile, giving her the needed sense of belonging in a room full of strangers. With an effort she chased away Pi Nueng and that event of long ago from her remembrance and concentrated on the present moment. The rhythm of the chant had a calming effect and she felt thankful for the comforting nearness—of however brief duration it might be—of Choi, Khun Sai, Khun Choey and her other bridesmaids from the Palace. Now the monks, having finished the Mangala Sutta, were going on to the Ratana Sutta and the Bojjhanga Paritta. Ploi listened to every word of them though she did not understand all the meaning, and became so absorbed that she lost sense of time. When the chanting came to an end she was

a little taken by surprise and only made her triple *kraab* on the floor when she saw her companions were doing it.

A hum of conversation rose in the rooms and on the verandas in place of the chanting. Some of the guests were moving about and the servants were carrying more food trays from the kitchen below.

Khun Sai went to a door, spoke in a low voice to some people outside, then returned to instruct Ploi:

"You may go out now, my dear. To present food to the monks."

Ploi's composure suddenly melted away leaving her hands and feet frozen. Everyone else was getting ready to leave but she herself seemed to have become paralysed. Khun Choey was whispering gently to her:

"Don't be shy, Mae Ploi. We're all coming with you."

While Ploi was still summoning up her courage, Choi said:

"Let's go, Ploi. It's the monks' last meal, you know, and they are not allowed much time over it. Or do you want to commit a sin by making them starve?"

With Khun Sai at the head of the group and Ploi surrounded by her bridesmaids they proceeded to the front veranda on their hands and knees, weaving their way past the guests in the central room in a prim mannerly way demanded by the occasion, looking neither to the right nor left but keeping their eyes on the space directly before them, and seeming to be oblivious of the complimentary remarks about themselves made by admiring guests in voices varying from the clearly audible to the discreetly murmuring.

Khun Prem was waiting for the bride on the front veranda. Close to where he sat was a large silver bowl of steaming rice with a matching serving spoon resting in it, and there were ten monks' bowls standing in a row in front of him, one a votive offering to the Lord Buddha and the rest for the chanting monks.

A whispered last-minute advice from Choi: "Keep calm, Ploi, and make sure you get to hold the upper part of the spoon so that he'll

never be able to bully you."

Prompted by Khun Sai, Ploi went to sit beside the groom, but took care not to get too close to him. Without glancing at her, Khun Prem moved a little nearer her, and automatically Ploi inched away from him, whereupon the groom made another slight movement which brought him closer to her still. Now he reached for the spoon. Ploi could hear the sound of his breathing and saw that his hand now holding the spoon was shaking, not conspicuously but definitely shaking. Mentally gritting her teeth she put out her hand and as she did so Khun Prem slid down his own to the lower part of the handle. Whether he had overheard Choi and therefore was ashamed to show himself as a would-be bully it was difficult to say. Perhaps—and this was how Choi interpreted it afterwards—he wished to let Ploi know that she could bully him any time and he wouldn't mind it one little bit.

Ploi did not actually hold the handle but only touched it lightly, not to say gingerly, letting her fingers travel with it as it was maneuvered by Khun Prem from the silver rice bowl to the monk's bowl, scooping rice from the one and transferring it to the other, back and forth, again and again, until all the ten black metal bowls had been served. Such a long drawn-out operation, or so it seemed, but at last it was over and Ploi was free to retire to the room where she had been sitting before.

Once they had all got back safely inside this temporary refuge, Choi heaved a long heart-felt sigh.

"Oh it feels good to be back in here! I was shaking like a leaf out there. And it's not even my own wedding."

"Same here!" Khun Choey joined in fervently. "When I saw all those people I nearly turned back. Did anyone bring smelling salts? I need something to revive me."

Everyone—even Khun Sai—admitted how nervous they had been. But now they reverted to enjoying themselves, chatting and giggling (except Ploi, who was dreading other ordeals to come), not too loud of course, mindful of the monks at their meal and of the other guests scattered about in the central room.

Suddenly Choi cried out, "Look, Ploi! Look who's here!"

Ploi's heart leapt up at the sight of the newcomer, who greeted her with great effusion.

"My darling Mae Ploi! I'm so happy today! I can't tell you how happy I am!"

The newcomer was none other than Choi's mother Mae Chan. She came in full regalia befitting the occasion. She looked happy and excited. The silk sash over her frilly blouse kept slipping from her shoulder and she had to swish it back every other minute, which did not seem to bother her at all.

Nor did she bother to defend herself when Khun Sai demanded, rather sternly, "Where have you been all this time?", but with a broad guiltless smile explained away her lateness: "It took me such a long time to get ready. It's not everyday that I put on these fine clothes, stockings and all. Believe me, I was very careful to get everything right."

Choi laughed. "Is that why your sash keeps falling down, Mother? I must fix it when we get back to Khun Aunt Nui's. But don't get tangled in it now."

"It is rather a mess," Mae Chan conceded. "I don't understand it. I looked all right when I left the house." Returning to Ploi she said, "I'm very happy, Mae Ploi. It is as though my own daughter were getting married. But then if this were Choi's wedding, she would be jumping about like a monkey and making me feel embarrassed."

"That's not fair, mother." Choi protested. "Give me a chance and I'll surprise you yet. Matter of fact, I've been watching Mae Ploi closely so that when the time comes I, too, can be a perfect bride. By the way, has anyone turned up to ask for my hand?"

Mae Chan gave a hearty laugh, but Khun Sai found it quite unfunny.

"That's enough, Choi! Save your antics for some other time and place."

"I'm so happy," Mae Chan said it again for the third time. "And to think that Chao Khun himself came to invite us to be the bed-makers at this wedding. Such an honour! At first Khun Luang was very reluctant, you know, because he felt we were not grand enough. And we aren't! But Chao Khun insisted. He says rank has nothing to do with happiness. He wants us to do it because we are a happy couple, he says, and this would make it propitious for the bride and groom."

"And be sure you do it well," Khun Sai warned.

"Trust me, Mae Sai," said her sister-in-law emphatically.

Ploi kept silent while feeling immensely cheered by all this: by Mae Chan being so pleased about the marriage, by Chao Khun Father personally asking Mae Chan and Khun Luang to play an important role in the wedding and by their acceptance to do it. For she loved these two very good and kind elders and wished to remain close to them always.

The sound of chanting rose up again in the central room. The monks had finished their meal and were now blessing the congregation. When this was over the morning ceremony came to an end, and Ploi was escorted down the back stairs back to Khun Nui's house, to have lunch and to rest before the water-pouring in the afternoon.

At the start of lunch, Chao Khun Father made some explanatory remarks in self-defence about the wedding arrangements. "...We could have done it at our house—perhaps it would have been more convenient. But not for the guests, though. They would have had to come by boat..."

Khun Choey and Ploi exchanged a glance that lasted but an instant, while Khun Nui said brightly and sincerely, "Oh but it is so convenient to marry them here, sir. I've told everybody at the big house not to come near here today because this is the bride's house. Please do treat it as your own, sir."

Nothing more was said on the subject, and very little about the water-pouring which was to begin in a few hours from now, except that it was bound to be a lengthy affair with so many relatives coming to give their blessings; and that the bride and groom would certainly get all stiff from having to sit in the same crouching position through the whole

ceremony. That was all they said about the water-pouring. The rest of the time they just chatted pleasantly about this and that, nothing consequential, enjoying the food and the companionship, all except Ploi, who had grown nervous again and had no appetite for either food or conversation.

Later on, in the commodious room set aside by Khun Nui for the use of the bride and her retinue, while the girls were trying unsuccessfully to make Ploi feel easy and relaxed, Mae Chan came in to say that she and Khun Luang would be going home now, but would return before long for the water ceremony and stay on until the auspicious hour to make the bridal bed. Before leaving she said to Ploi:

"Remember this. When the last guest has poured water and the ceremony's over, take care you're the first one to remove the Mongkol crown from your head and the first to step down from the bench. Be sure you do it before he does. That way he'll be afraid of you forever. So don't forget. Remind her, Choi," she added, and went.

"I don't believe it," Choi said. "And even if it were true, the question remains whether you ought to want your husband to be afraid of you or not. Do you, Ploi?"

"I don't know," Ploi replied. "I haven't thought about it."

"Then start thinking," Khun Choei suggested. "Time is running out. You're already half-married."

"I don't feel up to thinking about anything," Ploi confessed.

Choi nodded understandingly. "I don't blame you. To find oneself a bride is enough to upset anybody. But to get back to this question of who is going to be afraid of whom. I don't see why it is necessary that the husband has to be afraid of the wife or the other way round. Can't they just live together without the one fearing the other?"

"I agree with you, Choi," said Khun Choei. "Some wives are so cowed by their husbands that they become like slaves. I don't like that at all. On the other hand, hen-pecked husbands are worse. They've turned themselves into most peculiar creatures!"

"If I had a husband," Choi went on, "I think I'd like to fear him a little. But the chances are he'd be frightened of me before I could do anything about it."

"Too true," Khun Sai joined in, chuckling. "It *would* be frightening having you as a wife."

"I'm going to shut up," Choi announced to the room at large. "I hate it when people take my flippant remarks seriously. Don't they know I'm going to be a spinster anyway?"

Khun Choe laughed. "You and me both. Never mind, Choi. We'll make ourselves useful by helping Mae Ploi take care of her children."

Ploi blushed, to be sure, but after a while found herself thinking about it with joy: to have one's own children to love and care for, to play with them, to watch them grow up day by day...She thought of Mother. She remembered her sense of wonder when as a little girl she learned from Mother how she had begun life inside her stomach, sired by Chao Khun Father (Mother had always been more straightforward than most grown-ups on the facts of life). And then about her birth. "It hurt more than I can tell you," Mother had said. "Then you came, and it was as if the pain had never been. Nothing remained but joy, the greatest I had ever known, when I looked at you."

If marriage consisted only of having children there would be no problem at all, Ploi thought. It was this role of a wife that filled her with anxiety. To go through life with this man who was a virtual stranger to her—how long would it take her to get to know him? To love and cherish and revere him. But what if he should turn out unworthy of love and reverence...

That question belonged to tomorrow, to the months and years to come.

Now time was the immediate present. It was time to start getting ready again.

Time to dress for the water-pouring. Put on the pendant her father had given her when she had had her topknot cut. The bridesmaids said it was too old-fashioned, but she loved it and Khun Sai was all

for it.

Then time to leave for the big house again. Another walk among the trees, up the marble stairs, the sound of rustling silk accompanying them everywhere, past the central room full of murmuring guests through one of the open doors into another room.

The ceremonial bench stood gleaming in the middle of the room.

Ploi took up her place on one side of it, got into position, legs tucked under, arms forward, head bowed, hands joined in a respectful gesture, and smiled a wan smile at Choi, who had put herself close to the bench and was offering up some whispered words of encouragement.

She did not turn when Khun Prem came up to occupy the space by her side.

Chao Khun Father entered escorting His Highness the Prince, who proceeded to place the twin Mongkol crowns round the heads of the bride and groom, uniting them, and then to anoint their brows, after which he poured drops of water from the conch-shell on their heads while giving his blessing and wishing them happiness and prosperity in their conjugal life.

He left, and the other guests started to file in one by one. Ploi was too bashful to look at them. She saw their hands and the conch-shell, heard their voices, and felt the water on her hands and on her head—mostly on her head since the majority of the guests were rich in years and held in high regard by both families.

Choi's continuous whispering, delivered rapidly during the short intervals between comings and goings, kept her informed on what the guests looked like and what they wore—"Pity I don't know their names!"

She did not feel any ache or stiffness from all this sitting. The strain concentrated in her mind, leaving her arms and legs unaffected.

Time passed. The last guest had come and gone.

Ploi hesitated, not quite sure of what to do next.

Khun Prem remained quietly by her side.

At last, Ploi took off the crown.

Khun Prem followed suit.

He waited, and did not get down from the bench until she had done so. His best men were tittering, very much amused by it all.

Ploi had another change of costumes after the water ceremony.

The spirits of Khun Prem's ancestors were enshrined in another one of the numerous rooms in the upper floor of the big house. Ploi was taken there to make offerings and to pay the respects to them.

The afternoon wore on, it was getting late and the sun would soon be setting—time for Choi and the other Inner Court girls to take leave of the bride and return to the Palace before the closing of the Inner Gate.

They were all on the brink of tears, Ploi in particular.

"We'll see you in a few days, Ploi," Choi spoke quickly and, not trusting herself to say any more without getting emotional, fled.

Khun Choey and Mae Chan kept Ploi company until evening came.

At about nine o'clock Mae Chan went, saying it was getting near the auspicious time for the bed-making ceremony. Then about ten minutes to eleven Chao Khun Father and Khun Sai took Ploi to the big house to present her to Khun Prem.

Ploi would not be able to tell you afterwards how she ever got there, or what that night-walk was like from Khun Nui's bungalow to the big house. All she would be able to recollect afterwards was the sound of Piphat music coming faintly from somewhere, and the impression she had that most of the guests had gone home.

Khun Prem was seated on the floor in front of the Chinese-style bed. He lowered his head, making a *kr̥aʔab* salutation to Chao Khun Father and Khun Sai on seeing them enter the room. The two elders

and Ploi sat down and Chao Khun told Ploi to pay her respects to Khun Prem. When she had done this, he began to give the pair his blessing and counsel. He spoke in a low voice, but even if he had spoken louder Ploi would not have been able to distinguish the words, since at that point she could hear nothing clearly for the whirring in her own ears. After Chao Khun had concluded his talk it was Khun Sai's turn to give hers. She, too, spoke softly, but more briefly than Chao Khun. Then they both got up and left the room, shutting the door behind them.

Khun Prem and Ploi were thus left alone for the first time. Khun Prem had not glanced at Ploi once while the two elders had been blessing them, but had sat with his hands deferentially clasped apparently paying full attention to their words. Now he turned to her and saw that she was looking down at the carpet. Moments passed in total silence. Then he moved closer to her, and addressed her directly for the first time. What he said was most astounding. It was the last thing Ploi expected. He said: "Mae Ploi my dear, have you ever been to the Shrine of the Buddha Footprint?"

By M.R. Kukrit Pramoj

English translation by Tulachandra

KAMSINGH SRINOK



Better known as "LAO KHAM HOM", a pen-name taken from the title of a classical Thai tune with Laotian inflection, Kamsingh was born on December 25, 1930 in Bua Yai District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province in the Northeast. He had his formal education at the district school of Bua Yai, and passed an examination for the pre-university level. He enrolled in Chulalongkorn University as a journalism major.

Kamsingh started his career as a journalist in 1957. When press censorship was imposed and many writers and journalists were arrested, he looked for an alternative job and became a Forestry official in the North for some time. He later acquired a plot of land in Pak Chong District of Nakhon Ratchasima Province, tending his plantation and a ranch. He kept on writing for some elite journals, gaining a large following. His collection of short stories entitled "FA BO KAN" (Sky Is No Limit) was widely acclaimed. The story "KHIAT KHA KHAM" (Golden-Legged Frog) was printed again and again. It was also translated into English, and selected as a school text for upper secondary level.

Kamsingh became a Communist suspect in the events of October 14, 1976. He disappeared into the jungle for almost a year, and in 1979 sought a political asylum in Sweden. He later returned to his ranch and plantation in Nakhon Ratchasima Province. He has been highly regarded by the young generation, especially activist students.

BLESSING FROM THE SKY

Afternoon, late in the dry season. In a field dusted yellow by the waning sun, a few water buffalo calves occasionally bleated for their mothers. Once in a while their calls were returned. As on previous afternoons, Chom trudged after the buffaloes with the slow motion of an old man, waving a cloth to shoo his animals and those of his two grandchildren away from the rest of the village herd.

"Get a move on, grandpa," the two kids taunted, "Can't you speed it up? We're tired. We want to go home."

"Tired! From playing conkers the whole afternoon?" he snapped back. "I'm taking it easy for the buffaloes' sake. They're hot and tired. Water buffaloes are meant for water, and where are they going to find it this season? You can't find a blade of grass that's not shrivelled at midday. You watch them. Even when they're lying around in the shade, they wheeze like bellows. Farm boys should feel for their animals."

"Get off it, grandpa. Tell us what you ate for lunch."

The white-haired old man squatted down on a low paddy field wall, annoyed that the youngsters should remind him to be grateful to them.

"The bird we had for lunch didn't fall from the sky by itself," the boy continued. "Lawm and I chased it until it dropped. So did we, almost."

At the end of the afternoon, the few beasts culled from the herd were nibbling their way from withered grass blade to dry rice

stalk, the two boys zigzagging after them, looking for crickets. Calves caked with brown mud the colour of the fields played along behind. The sun reddened as it touched the horizon. The children rounded up the animals and urged them on towards the village. Chom remained on the dike swathed in cigarette smoke, gazing at the grey curtain of dust kicked up by the distant herd. Suddenly the kids' raucous squabbling brought him back to the scene. As he approached, each of the boys was indignantly stating his case.

"It was my buffalo. I saw it myself; it was mine."

"But it's my land."

"What's it all about? What's the fuss?" The old man was breathing heavily with the exertion of catching up with them.

The boys looked at each other and remained silent, but it took only a moment for Chom to guess the cause of the quarrel; and when he did, his face fell.

"Iang, Lawm..." His tone of voice changed.

"I saw it with my own eyes. It was my buffalo," Iang, the first boy, insisted.

"Yeah, but it's my land and I won't give it up," Lawm, the other, persisted as he squatted down with his eyes fixed on the object of their quarrel.

The old man ruminated on the problem for a time before pronouncing judgement in an agitated but controlled manner.

"Now what do you say to this? The buffalo is Iang's and the field belongs to Lawm. So we divide the pancake. Right?" he asked the first boy who averted his eyes and refused to reply. He turned to the other; "What about you, Lawm? I'm asking you to divide it in half: half for you, half for Iang. Agreed?" Lawm rubbed his stomach a few times and nodded instead of speaking.

"All right, Iang. Lawm agrees. What do you say?"

"Okay!" The answer was firm.

The old man sighed with relief. "Good, now split it."

The boys' eyes met and they smiled as each broke off a twig to mark his portion.

"That's the way to do things. We live together, eat together, go hungry together; and when we do get something, we share it. Tomorrow morning when the sun's up and the mists have cleared, we'll meet here to divide up our shares." When he finished, he told the boys to drive the buffaloes on into the village.

"Why the face, Iang? Aren't you well?"

The boy said nothing and started to walk on.

The old man was concerned. "If you've got a stomachache, hold your breath and chew a few of the new leaves over there; and in a second it'll be gone," he said, pointing to a bush.

"It's no ache; I'm just hungry."

Old Chom rested his hand on the boy's shoulder and said softly, "Come on, let's get back home. You know, feeling hungry's just another kind of sickness."

The sun dropped below the earth, the sky turned grey, and a cool gust of wind blew from the north. The grandfather and the two boys went in single file back to the village.

"Grandpa, did you say being hungry is just being sick?"

"Yes, I did."

"Are there medicines and doctors for it then?"

The old man looked at the eyes of his grandchild, but his faltering reply was lost in the rustling of the bamboos. It appeared that he had forgotten what he had asked. When the wind gusted again, both hugged their chest and scampered on ahead.

Before going off to sleep that night, Iang recounted the events of the afternoon to his mother and father. After the second run-through, his father commented acidly, "There wasn't any reason to go and divide with Lawm. Not only was the buffalo ours, but you got to it first, didn't you? So why did you have to agree to divide it with him?"

"Well, I started running first, but Lawm's legs are longer; he caught up with me, and we got there at the same time."

"Never mind that. I'm sure you saw it before him. Just as our own buffalo..." the father's voice drifted off.

Poor Iang turned over and faced the wall feeling miserable.

"I'm not sure, Dad. Lawm could have seen it the same time as me 'cause we were walking together and when I started to run, he came right after me. If he hadn't tripped, he might have got there before me."

In the dark, the boy heard his father sigh.

"Did you say you were supposed to meet him there when the sun's up and the mists have cleared?"

"Yes, Dad."

"That's fine. But don't you be stupid and wait for him. The buffalo's ours so it's ours too. I'll get you up before dawn tomorrow, and you go out there and dig them out first, hear me?"

Iang closed his eyes and imagined he saw a million succulent beetles as big as thumb nails swarming from everywhere until they made the whole sky as black as themselves.

Lawm's mother, a chill wind ruffling her thin hair, shoved her head under the eaves of the roof and reached out to shake her boy sleeping on the low porch...

"Lawm, come, get up; it's already getting light."

He rubbed his eyes drowsily and noticed his mother's cool smile, which he returned conspiratorially. He threw his bathing cloth over his shoulders, came down the few steps, and grabbed a hoe and an old pail.

The fog hung cold and heavy, and the old man's heart beat fast as he walked along by the thicket of bamboos. Greed, pity for the boys, shame, and his conscience collided. As he turned the corner at the end of the grove, he stopped short as he saw, through the fog, the two boys, each shouldering a hoe and carrying a pail, running towards each other from opposite directions.

"Lawm! you dirty cheat."

"Iang, you're the cheat."

"Damn you, it's my buffalo."

"Stuff that. It's my field. If it's your buffalo, why don't you tell it to shit in your field."

"Go easy on that 'my field' stuff, Lawm; your father's gone and pawned it. The time is about up; maybe he won't be able to pay and get it back."

"Fuck you, bring my father into it, will you?" Lawm rammed his fist at his friend's eye. Iang ducked. Lawm missed his footing and fell over on his head. Iang raised the handle of his hoe to full arm's length.

Old Chom was forced to intervene with a sharp shot. The boy stopped and turned to look.

An off-season rain began to fall. Iang and Lawm drew apart and took shelter under the bamboos. The rain fell more heavily. The boys caught a glimpse of a hoe and a pail in their grandfather's hands before running off to their homes.

"Thank heaven for the rain," the old man reflected as he stood there shivering. "Our luck held out for another day. No dung beetles maybe. But the sky has blessed us. At least we'll have shoots and sprouts for the boys to eat in a day or so—when the earth has cooled.

By Lao Kham Hom

English translation by Damnern Garden

ARCHIN PANCHAPHAN



Archin was born in Nakhon Pathom Province to the south of Bangkok on October 8, 1927. Completing his secondary education in the province, Archin furthered his studies at Triam Udom Suksa School in Bangkok, and enrolled in the Faculty of Engineering, Chulalongkorn University. His college days, according to him, were spent in the neighbouring Turf Club. At the end of the fourth year as a sophomore, he was dropped for his poor grades.

Archin temporarily worked as a census-taker, before leaving to take up a job in a tin-mine in Phangnga Province in southern Thailand for four years. Next he became an employee at the Thai Television Company, a state enterprise under the Public Relations Department, running commercial radio and television services. His writing ability served him well in this job. In the meantime, he sent articles and short stories to be published in leading magazines. He later became the editor of the Thai TV Journal.

*In 1965 Archin became the first writer to publish and market his own works, in pocket-book form. This brought about a new era in the country's literary world. Four years later, Archin founded his own weekly magazine, *Fa Muang Thai*, which became the birthplace of many famous writers in recent history. He later expanded into other substantive magazines in his 'Fa' genre, namely *Fa Muang Thong* and *Fa Achip*.*

HEAT AND HEART

In tin dredging, summer is right in front of the boiler of the dredge, and people who have summer all the year round are the firemen who throw firewood into the furnace.

Not everybody can be a fireman. The job requires skill and art, really. You must be able to throw, with accuracy, large pieces of firewood, each one as large as the calf of a football player's leg and as long as a carrying pole, straight into the window of the furnace which is slightly wider than a ticket window at a movie theatre. And those pieces of firewood must pile up in such a way as to make cross pieces with just enough of an opening in between to help keep the fire burning. You don't learn all this from textbooks. A good fireman must master the trick of making an opening between the pieces of firewood. If the pieces are thrown in too close to each other, the fire won't burn well; if too far apart, you waste your furnace space and the heat is low, and you waste time throwing in more firewood. Every time you open the furnace window you lose the heat for nothing.

The working outfit used on the dredge by a fireman was that in use locally; that is, only a loincloth, a pair of rubber shoes just in case you stepped on sparks from the fire, and a tattered hat with the brim turned down. The hat was to keep your brain from melting and your eyebrows from burning. In each hand was a rag to protect it against splinters. A fireman usually lacks eyelashes and hair on the shins, because they wither away under the heat and finally vanish altogether. His eyes are the least gleaming in the world, because the fluid in them always evaporates under the intense heat.

Let's introduce Ben, a senior fireman. His body was lean and hardened like the wood for making a pipe to smoke. He was a true

Malayan, small and with shellac-coloured complexion. His naked body at work was the living image of the comic character in the shadow play of the south.

The guy was a born fireman, capable of working doggedly. He had been at this kind of work for nobody knew how long. During the war, the mine was shut down, he worked for rice farmers transplanting rice seedlings. When the mine was reopened, Ben was the first fireman in the row to be selected. Everybody wanted him on his shift because of the great heat. It meant terrific steam, and steam was the centre of power on a steam-driven dredge.

Our shift had Ben on it.

He was not a melancholy guy. Work was hard enough and he was always bullied. But he could still keep his face saucy and playful. Sometimes when the job was done and nobody bothered him, he turned on the other guys and the result was he was bullied, coming back grumbling and cursing. Anyone who attempted to act the bully towards him in his own ground, in front of the furnace, which was his office, would be stopped short because Ben would pull out the poker for poking the fire tubes and used it as a ready spear, and a really hot one at that. He would laugh with delight when his would-be attacker winced and made a hasty retreat. In the day-time nobody wanted to go to Ben's office, but at night the place was jammed. It was like being warmed up by a fire in winter. At night, especially, some people even went there to sleep.

Ben was a bachelor by necessity, due to his nearly deformed physique and his almost unintelligible Thai. Anyone who wanted to learn Thai grammar of the worst kind had only to listen to Ben. But since Malay was the common language of mining circles in the south of Thailand, due but grudging respect was reserved for Ben, otherwise he might go to the boss to tell of the wrong done to him. Should any argument follow, it would be in Malay. And who could argue with Ben! He could talk so fast it was as if he had a fan in his mouth to blow out a steady stream of words, especially curse words.

Normally, two buckets of drinking water were required for one shift. There were altogether 30 workmen aboard the dredge. They drank only two buckets. But two firemen on a shift would need an extra bucket each since they were terrific producers of sweat. They must drink a lot of water. Firemen drank water as if they had just walked through a desert. Although addicted to tobacco, they would drink water more frequently than they would smoke.

Then came Ramadan, the period of fasting for the Islamic Malaysans. From sunrise to sunset they eat and drink nothing—no food, no water. Even saliva has to be spat out, not swallowed. But after sunset they have a festive, heavy meal. At four or five o'clock, just before dawn, they get up and eat delicious and nourishing food with plenty of vitamins. They eat enough to make up for hunger during the day-time.

Poor Ben! He had to work at the furnace on the shift. He couldn't drink any water; he couldn't even swallow his saliva. Eight hours in front of the furnace. Eight hours of heat. Eight hours of waiting.

We tempted him. We peeled some oranges and crunched them noisily on purpose. We bought a large block of ice, put it in the water bucket and placed the bucket for him to see. We drank from it, and we ladled some water and poured it on our faces and our bodies. Ben stared at us like a dog staring at a bone in the hand of his master, with an open mouth and with his tongue so dry it looked like a dried banana and almost drooping. The easiest and most natural way out was for him to turn his face the other way. But the ordeal didn't end there. Somebody dipped out a little water in a small can, walked nonchalantly to face him, and drank it. Faced with this kind of torture, Ben closed his eyes.

That was when we decided we'd had enough. We couldn't go on with this form of mental torture of the poor guy. It was like a grown-up bullying small boy, bullying him again and again, and then beginning to feel sorry for him. You wanted to put some medicine on the boy's wound. You wanted to take him to sweetshop and let him pick anything he fancied. It was just like that. Our throats seemed

dry as though they were lined with sandpaper. We pitied Ben and wanted him to drink some water. Go ahead and drink it, boy, we thought, we'll just pretend not to see. Then we moved somewhere else and left him alone with the bucketful of ice-cold water, so cold that small dewy drops clung around the bucket. Ben was not entirely alone, though, because one smart Aleck among us hid nearby to see what would happen.

And what happened, as he came to tell us, was that Ben busied himself throwing pieces of firewood in the furnace for a while and then walked to the water bucket. He scooped up some water with a can, not to drink but to wash his face and pour on his head. He then walked towards the bow of the dredge to get some fresh air. We began to worry about him. We were afraid Ben would become tired, and that would mean the steam power would go down. And what could we dredge with the steam power down? If we couldn't dredge anything we just couldn't hold out during our customary coffeeshop conversation. We'd simply lose face to the other shift. And besides, the boss would jump on us.

Eight hours for Ben to wade through the desert! When the shift was over we felt relieved. Not many more hours now and the sun would set. The poor guy could then drink water as though he had never drunk before. He could eat to his heart's content. But then tomorrow he would have to go through the same torture again. We had to be on the day shift for seven days before we moved to the night shift. We went into a huddle to think what to do about Ben.

"That's a cinch," one of us said. "Let him take the place of somebody on the night shift who doesn't have to fast, and get that guy on our day shift."

"That's it."

We went to negotiate with the night shift foreman. He was just delighted, because nobody could beat Ben at throwing firewood. Everybody wanted him. The foreman said, "You trade him for one of my firemen and let me keep him. He has to be with me on every shift and not go back to you guys."

"Oh, no!" we protested. "We trade him only this week. Next week, when we are on our night shift we will take him back."

"If you want him back, no deal."

"Aw! Have a heart, will you?"

"I do. That's why I want to make a deal."

"He's one of us. He's been with us for God knows how long. We can't let him be on any other shift."

"No? well, no deal, then."

We came away disappointed. Ben didn't realize how important he was to us. He didn't know how we banded together to help him. It was evening now. He had probably drunk the whole well dry and gorged on his *musman* and *khurma* dishes up to his throat for all we knew. But tomorrow we would have to worry again. Before dawn he would probably scoop up all the water there was in the village and drink it as a reserve for the whole day's fast. But how could he possibly do this? How long could a fireman go on without drinking water?

Next day we walked in a group to take over the shift. Everybody was carrying food in a *pinto*, a multiple-decked food container with a handle, and a bottle of water flavoured with *choomhed* (cassia tora) leaves. Ben went empty-handed. We felt sorry for him. We wanted to carry him in our arms. We felt bad about it. First we bullied the poor guy and then we were so concerned about him.

When Ben finished putting firewood into the first furnace, we went into another huddle. Now we had got an idea, and we cheered. Our cheers were heard all over the dredge. This is what we'll do. We'll let our boy lie idly on the cool tin trough doing nothing. We will ourselves take turns throwing in firewood. If the steam power goes down, so be it. If we dredge only a little tin, so what? If the boss jumps on us, to hell with him. We'll just live through this miserable week.

So we helped with the firewood. The heat in front of the furnace made us realize that human tears were not meant for crying but for keeping the eye-balls from bursting under the heat. And more than anything else, we all agreed to forego drinking water in the day-time throughout that week.

By Archin Panchaphan

English translation by Manjit Varin

SUPHA (LUESIRI) SIRISINGHA



Born in Thon Buri around 1945 as the youngest of the six children of Mr. Thien Luesiri, a migrant from China before the Second World War, Supha finished her secondary education at a local school. She continued her pre-university level at Triam Udom Suksa School and later graduated from the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University in 1966. She went back some years later and obtained a Master's degree from the same faculty.

Supha took up teaching for a while, before working as the secretary to a French expert attached to the Department of National Energy. Finishing her post-graduate studies and graduating with an M.A., she began working with the editorial staff of Satsirarn and Chaiyapruet magazines. She married Viriya Sirisingha, a publisher, and launched her career as a free-lance writer, while successfully managing the Chom-Rom Dek, Children's Press.

Supha started writing short stories during her college days. Her first published story was "AI DAM" in the Kwanjit Journal, and she has been writing regularly ever since. Her novel "CHOTMAI CHAK MUANG THAI" (Letters From Thailand) - the description of a migrant's life in Thailand, won the SEATO literary award for 1969. Her recent works have been mainly produced for her Children's Press. Nevertheless, Supha has short stories and others published regularly, many of which have been made into television series and films, and acclaimed for their crisp dialogues and social overtones.

LETTERS FROM THAILAND

Introduction to the Letters of Tan Suang U

by

*Police General Sala Sintutawat
Thai National Police Department*

The letters you are about to read were originally written in the Chinese language. They were translated into Thai at my direction, and I have worked with them further; it is my sincere hope that this collaboration will distress neither eye nor ear.

I should warn you, dear reader, that you are about to be startled, perhaps even alarmed; for the view of our great nation expressed in the letters which follow cannot be entirely palatable to Thai people. Is it not true, however, that the clearest glass may not give the reflection we like best?

Two months ago, these letters were seized by the Thai National Police Department from a Chinese communist defector named Lee Buan Sun. According to our investigation, Mr. Buan Sun is a member of the Chinese intellectual class, formerly an official censor at Shanghai. It has been the policy of that government, since its establishment in 1948, to control all personal mail from abroad which suggested that those citizens who had emigrated to other lands might have found a more satisfying way of life. But the censorship system, in the case of Lee Buan Sun, proved a double-edged sword, for the man empowered to stop the treacherous flow was at last tempted to flee himself.

Of course, the true owner of the letters is the man who wrote them, a Chinese immigrant to Thailand whom I shall call "Tan Suang U." He is a wellknown businessman of Bangkok whose name would be instantly recognised, and whose privacy we shall continue to protect. Suang U mailed all the letters to his mother in Po Leng village, Teo Chiu province, southern China; the first in 1945, the last in 1967.

In 1945, there was no communist government in China and Lee Buan Sun was not a high official at Shanghai. He was a simple letter carrier in the district encompassing Po Leng village, and Suang U's mother lived on his route. Perhaps he was unable to locate her farm; or some other circumstance may have prevented his delivering the letters; but the fact is that he did not deliver any of them. (We may gather from the content of the letters that money was enclosed in most of them, but it would be fruitless to enlarge upon this aspect of the matter today, so many years hence and so far from Po Leng village). What does matter is that Suang U's mother never knew the letters existed, and in my opinion the greater part of Lee Buan Sun's crime may be considered to lie here...For all she knew, her son had left her forever, without a word beyond the note he left on the kitchen table the night he boarded a ship bound for Bangkok.

After the Communists came to power, Lee Buan Sun rose to prominence rapidly, but even after he became official censor at Shanghai, he never lost his love of letters. He loved to write them, to receive them to collect them. He made arrangements to continue receiving all the letters of Tan Suang U, among others. These as he told me himself, he had come to think of as his private collection, his chief form of relaxation. In the evenings, after tea, he read them over and over again, and year by year the life and fortunes of Suang U unfolded before his eyes.

The letters were in my hands for several weeks before it occurred to me to take this peculiar course of action. How did I come to this decision? Why do I invite numberless strangers to read the private letters of a man who is neither famous nor, even, unusual? I am well aware that the letters are often offensive, occasionally foolish, and certain to make Thai people angry. It is even possible that they may harm the cause of Chinese integration in our society, a process which in its continuing success has marked us favourably among the nations of Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, I am convinced that our people will profit by reading them, and that making them public is not only a service but a responsibility which I must not shirk.

I have met Tan Suang U. He is a man of unquestionable sincerity and integrity, and made no excuses for his letters when, to his amazement, he saw them on my desk two months ago. His only reaction was grief—grief that his beloved mother had never read them. What he has to say about our people (and his own) is without doubt a far more honest statement about the experience of the Sino-Thai than any you might elicit from, say, a proper survey of the attitudes of the Thai-Chinese minority in Bangkok, the sort of thing our university students these days delight in.

Do not suppose, now, that I agree with his every opinion and observation! I am a Thai, a patriot, and a man concerned with the honour of the Thai people, as you surely are yourself. But I recommend that you read his letters with an open mind, and think fairly about what he has to say. I do not think you will be disappointed, and I am sure that you will not be bored.

S.S.

Letter # 1

The Ship Hai Wang
Swatow to Bangkok
Sixth Day of the Waxing Moon
Seventh Lunar Month
Year of the Cock*

My most Beloved and Respected Mother,

Before you read this letter, your son will already be in Thailand. I plan to write every few days while I am on the ship and mail the letters when we arrive, in about two weeks. Each letter will be numbered, so that you may read them in the proper order.

I raised my head from the pillow on my cot only today. I've been terribly seasick. Seng is the least affected of all of us, and after the first day he was well enough to make fun of everyone else, especially me. You know how he is. How strange some people are, to laugh at others when they are miserable.

Poor Gim is the sickest—wouldn't you know it? He's sure he'll die before we reach Thailand, no one has ever suffered so before, and on and on.

When I was sick, memories of our family and the village kept spinning around in my head. I thought of you and Younger Brother constantly. I couldn't bear to say goodbye to you, but now I feel guilty about running off as I did. Can you forgive me? You have read the note I left for you on the kitchen table. Please try to understand my dream. I shall do my best always, as you have taught me, and send you the first bit of money I earn. You gave me so much, Mother. Henceforth I shall make my own way and strive to honour our ancestors by the conduct of my life.

*August 13, 1945

The ship is as big as all of Po Leng village and there are a thousand people on board! My friends and I sleep in the belly of the ship, stuffed in together like pigs in a pen. Not like the second or third group of Chinese who went to Thailand with enough money for cabins and good food. We have nothing left over for such luxuries after paying our fare and the immigration fees, which rise each year. I pray that some day, when I return to Po Leng to fetch you, we will make this voyage together sharing a real cabin. You will have pork to eat everyday, dear Mother, not dried pickled vegetables like they give us.

The air at sea is different from our mountain air, salty and bitter and not particularly pleasant. Today, the freight manager on the ship told me that salt water is the best medicine for skin ailments and cuts, and he also said that sweet foods are bad for you. What do you think of that?

"It is so, Little One," he said. "Sweets are no good. The Thai have a proverb, 'Sweet sickens, bitter heals'."

"My name is Tan Suang U, not 'Little One'," I retorted irritably. I was then still seasick.

"I beg your pardon, Suang U!" he said with a kindly smile. "That's a fine name. It means 'diamond'—may four fortunes follow your name!"

"I hope so, too," I replied, sorry that I had spoken disrespectfully to him. His name is Law Yong Jua. He is a big man of about forty or so, with a square face and strong features. He's good natured in spite of his stern appearance, and when we boys were sick he gave us medicine. Everyone likes him.

"What are you going to do when you get to Bangkok?" he asked.

"I'm not sure. I left our farm and boarded this ship because of a letter my friend Seng got from his uncle in Bangkok. His uncle says that a man can start a vegetable farm or a small business, and if he's thrifty he can send money home to his family and still have enough left over to live on. So I decided to come along..." Suddenly, without warning, I felt as if I might begin to cry! For the words I had spoken

to him were almost the same words I wrote to you when I left home... homesickness is worse than seasickness. I excused myself and hurried below deck to hide my shame. But later in the day Law Yong Jua called out to me and waved cheerfully as I was going to eat supper with Seng and Gim, and after supper I felt brave enough to go up to the freight office and chat with him again. He made a friendly remark about my "seasickness", then invited me to sit down while he copied figures into a gigantic ledger.

"Have you been to school, Suang U?"

"I don't even know what a school looks like, sir."

"That's too bad. If you could read and write, I might be able to help you. I have a cousin in Bangkok who's looking for a boy to help with his bookkeeping chores. He imports dry goods and foods from China and sells them wholesale. I told him I'd keep an eye out for a sharp lad this trip, someone who might be able to fill the job. You know, Suang U, if you can't read or write, I'm afraid you'll only find work as a coolie."

"But I can."

"Can what?"

"I can read and write. My mother taught me."

"Your mother, indeed! I thought you said your mother was a farm woman. She teaches reading and calligraphy? What kind of peasants do you have in that village?"

"My father was a farmer—he's dead now. But before my mother married him, she was a companion to the daughter of a noble family. They allowed her to study with their own children, but when the daughter married and moved away, they didn't need my mother anymore. They married her to my father, and she's lived on the farm ever since. She started teaching me to read and write when I was five, and I've read many books, but I've never had a chance to use the education she gave me. Sir, that's why I've come to you. To seek your advice."

He looked at me curiously for a long time. Then he closed the ledger, stood up, and began to pace slowly back and forth behind his desk. At last he spoke. "A remarkable story," he said quietly, still regarding me with a peculiar expression. "Go get yourself a pen and some paper. I want to see what kind of job that mother of yours did."

I hurried off to do as he said. It seemed the worst thing that had ever happened to me when I discovered that my pen was missing. (Things get "missed" on this ship very easily). Frantically, I gathered up some scraps of paper and hurried back to Yong Jua. When I began to apologize for having no pen, he waved his hand as if to dismiss my worry and presented me with the one I am using to write this letter. You can see what a fine line it writes. Inside it, there's a thin tube full of ink that leaks out just a little at a time. It is a wonderful pen, and I am going to keep it with me always. I know that if I ever lay it down while I'm on the ship, it will be "lost" instantly; I even sleep with it tucked under my arm!

Yong Jua dictated and I wrote. The first part of his dictation was hard, some passages he had memorized from *Three Kingdoms*.^{*} Then he dictated some business letters he made up about parcels of dried plums, almond candy, dried linchees, Chinese flowers, and all kinds of things. I had to add up all the prices at the end. It was so easy! You used to dictate the very same kind of thing to me in the evenings at our kitchen table, for calligraphy practice. It always seemed a game, nothing to do with real work.

"Fine hand!" he said, smiling as he checked my work. "If your calligraphy were any better than this, you could easily pass yourself off among Teochiu people as a graduate of the upper school."

How proud I felt, and prouder of you. Most of the boys on the ship can't read or write at all. Seng can write a little, but his calligraphy is poor—every line wobbles. Thank you, Mother.

^{*}TN: A very popular Chinese novel about warfare in ancient China, also popular in the translated Thai version.

A few days after Yong Jua's dictation, he came down to the boys' quarters looking for me. I was alone for a blessed change, reading.

"Suang U, I've been thinking about that bookkeeping job with my cousin. His name is Law Nguan Tong—a good man, I know you'd like him. If you wish, I'll write a letter of introduction for you. You deserve that job...unless, of course, you have relatives in Bangkok—"

"No sir, no one. Only my friend Seng's Uncle Teh Lim. If you would write that letter for me, I would be—extremely grateful, sir".

"You needn't be embarrassed, Suang U. You see, I have no family; that is why it is my pleasure to look after you boys. Allow me that pleasure, will you?" He smiled. "My—my wife and son died in Thailand after the great flood three years ago. No, no—don't look sad; I have had time to accept it, though I confess I could not when it happened. You see, when the flood waters receded, there was disease; for some of the survivors, drowning would have been a kinder death than—than typhoid." I opened my mouth to speak, but he raised a hand to silence me. "These days, I am beginning to feel like my old self again. Because of you, for one thing...don't look so startled. I enjoy talking with you, teaching you. You're a smart boy, and you make me laugh, generally in spite of yourself. Not many boys who make this journey are like you—very few have both determination and ability, and only one of those is not enough. Those are things your excellent mother couldn't give you, but she didn't have to. Now—however am I going to say what I want to say to you..." He frowned and rubbed his chin nervously. "You have no father, and I have no son. I want you to become my adopted son, Suang U; I want to help you make a good life for yourself in Bangkok." He turned away from me quickly then and said, "Think it over, please. Don't say anything now." Then he hurried off.

I was stunned. I never dreamed he was thinking of anything like that. He was good to me, it is true, and taught me many things but he was good to everyone, and helped everyone who turned to him. I felt a great lump growing in my throat. When am I going to stop crying every time I'm very happy or very sad?

I have said yes to Law Yong Jua, and hope that you will not be angry with me. I shall call him "Father", but I shall always use my own sae Tan, not the sae Law, for I have ancestors of my own to revere and honour, and the memory of a real father whom I loved dearly.

Yong Jua is teaching me many things about life in Bangkok, and I am learning to call him Father, which is less difficult than I feared.

One bright, breezy afternoon, we pulled a table and two chairs out onto the deck for my abacus practice. After an hour's work, we pushed our chairs back, relaxed, and Father began to talk to me about Bangkok, as he does every day, one way or another; everything we do or see reminds him of something about Bangkok that I ought to know.

"Don't tell anyone you haven't been to school," he said. "Just say that you can read and write, and let them guess. I'm teaching you how to use the abacus well, and you already know a fair amount of bookkeeping. That's enough. Nobody will doubt you've been to some kind of school."

"Shouldn't I be proud that my mother educated me?"

"That isn't what I said. I said you shouldn't talk about it; there's a difference. You see, in Thailand they have more respect for diplomas than for skill. They like to see a piece of paper that states you've sat in such and such a school for so many years. With that, you can get a job anywhere, even if you can't count to five. Among the older Chinese, it doesn't matter so much, but the younger ones were educated in Bangkok—some of them have begun to think like Thais, heaven help them. There's something to be said for sending our children to Thai schools, that I don't deny. But when they start to look down on hard work, I say it's no good.

"And don't tell anyone your mother worked as a servant, either, because Thailand is full of people who'd rather steal than be servants. They don't want to feel 'inferior' ...I want you to be able to get along with the Thai and with the Chinese—both the fathers and the sons."

The next day, a shameful incident occurred. I don't even want to tell you about it, but I am afraid Seng will write to his mother, and then you will hear only his version of it.

Gim and I had come up on deck for a breath of fresh air and a stroll. Seng approached us, followed by a group of tough Swatow boys he has taken up with. "Hey, Suang U!" he shouted, "I guess men who spend all their time at sea don't see many girls. You have such a pretty face—maybe 'Father' thinks you're a good enough substitute!"

He laughed and turned to his friends, who laughed too, like a bunch of trained monkeys. I tried to ignore him, though my head was pounding. Father was at work in the hold and Seng must have known it, for he never would have dared say such a thing otherwise.

"Seng, you know that's crazy," Gim said through clenched teeth. "Talk like that can only cause trouble, big trouble!"

Seng ignored him. "Hey, Cutie!" he persisted, "how's the abacus practice coming? When you get the right answer, does he give you a big kiss?"

That was when I ran across the deck and punched him in the face. Before I knew it, we were rolling around on the deck pummeling each other, surrounded by cheering boys.

"Get him, Suang U!" Gim shouted at the top of his lungs. "Show him who's a real man!"

I won the fight, but I'm not proud of it. Seng has always had a bad temper, but until now I managed to get along with him by ignoring it. I should have realized immediately that he was only jealous; perhaps in a day or so he would have got over it. But now we are enemies, and he's the only boy here from Po Leng, besides Gim.

He crouched on the deck with his face in his hands after the fight, the blood from his nose dripping through his fingers. "Go and die in Thailand!" he sobbed. "Go and starve there! I'm finished with you, and your friend Gim, too. My uncle Lim won't help anybody who insulted his nephew, I promise you—"

"Keep your Uncle Lim to yourself, Seng," I said. "But don't expect me to bear a grudge about this. We're from the same village, and that matters more than your temper—more than a fight. We've fought before—"

"You go to hell!" he bawled. "I'll never forget this! You sold yourself to Yong Jua like a crate of dried plums." Then he struggled to his feet, wiped his bloody hands on his shirt, and lurched away.

Don't worry, Mother. I have Yong Jua's introduction to his cousin in Bangkok, and I'm not going to starve to satisfy Seng's wrath, not in Thailand or anywhere.

Father apparently hasn't heard about the fight, because he came by a few minutes ago to see what I was doing and never mentioned it. "Ah, writing to your mother again," he said. "Good, good—one must never neglect such duties. And don't forget," He added with an odd smile, "mothers like to hear all the little details..."

It is nine days since I last wrote. I am up on deck this evening, watching the sun set. If I write for very long, I shall have to borrow an oil lamp. At sea, night is different. How shall I describe it? It is frightening to be surrounded so entirely by darkness. Back in Po Leng, even on a moonless night we could see the friendly glow of a neighbour's lamp shining in the distance. But here, there is nothing, and it is easy to imagine that we could sail around in the endless dark forever.

Many of the boys have had a vacant and anxious look the last week or so, and I think they feel the same kind of fear. They complain constantly about the length of the voyage. Those who left their wives back in China are sorry now, and those who brought theirs are smug.

This is the day of the Autumn Festival, and I have many interesting things to tell you. We didn't pay respect to ancestors, as we do at home. Instead, everyone got up just before dawn and gathered at an altar at the prow of the ship, where we paid respect to the Lord of the Sea, the Spirit of the Ship, and the spirits of those who died without descendants.

I noticed that only ducks and geese were placed on the altar, though there are huge baskets of chickens on board. When I mentioned this to Father, he chuckled. "Chickens, Suang U? Have you ever seen a chicken swim? Not much of an offering to the Lord of the Sea!" What a fool I am. They offered something else I had never seen before—pickled eggs! Father says this is an old Chinese custom; perhaps we never had enough left over at home to pickle any.

Our New Year celebration in Po Leng seems just past, although six months have gone by since that wonderful day. I remember getting up very early, tiptoeing about the house so as not to awaken you, and preparing our morning tea. Then I prayed alone at our family altar, in the cool stillness of dawn. Later in the day, we made a rare trip to town, together, a trip I shall never forget. I still have the money you gave me as a New Year gift, and I shall not spend it. For my fare to Bangkok, I used only the money I have earned helping our neighbours with the rice transplanting.

The lights of the ship are glittering on the sea as night begins to fall, but I think I will be able to finish my letter before darkness enfolds us once again. All the little waves below are shining like the scales of a fish as it leaps from water into sunlight, and I am reminded of the gigantic carp Younger Brother caught in our stream last spring... do you remember how he ran home across the field leaping and shouting? I'm willing to bet he will never eat a more delicious fish in his life, and each year that carp will grow a little longer, a little fatter, (I can see him now, hopping with indignation.) I send my love to you both across the wide black sea, and suddenly I feel afraid, for all the things I have loved are beyond it; shall they ever be part of my life again?

Shame on me! I must force myself to think of the future. It is exciting to realize that soon I will be a bookkeeper! (Well, anyway a clerk.) Who would have thought it? And you will be able to afford a few luxuries when I am able to send money home.

We Chinese carry our homeland with us in our hearts and minds. I have no reason to feel sad, for even if I should some day live among red-haired foreigners, I would still be Suang U from Po Leng village. When I feel lonely, that must be my first thought.

As I wrote the last few words, Father appeared beside me, told me that we are within sight of Thailand, and rushed off again. Is it possible?

"And we have had luck, too," he called back as he hurried away. "We're touching bottom—that means that until the water rises in the morning, we stay right here. The mosquitoes are going to be terrible!"

Suddenly I realized that mosquitoes were clustering on my neck and arms. Even before I came up here, other boys were complaining about them. How could I not realize we must be near land! So, this is the first sign of Bangkok—mosquitoes, clouds of them. If they were organized, they could carry us to shore one by one.

Letter # 90

Soi Chai Chara

Thon Buri

Sixth Lunar Month

Year of the Horse (July 20, 1966)

You see a new address above, for your son is now a resident of Thon Buri.

I have met almost all my neighbours; that is to say, all the Chinese, many of whom have lived in this very lane for forty years. They are a thrifty, honest lot who gather in the coffee shop at the end of the lane every evening to enjoy each other's company. The comforts of their homes are few, and no television aerials roost on these modest roofs.

Their talk is of China, many old stories and some new, or of the current news; they are the easiest people to talk with I have ever met. Checker games are picked up each evening, games that began decades ago, yet they accepted me without suspicion—if not without curiosity.

"You're new," the owner of the coffee shop declared with a friendly grin, "down at the new store, right?" (The 'new' store is 25 years old.) "Married?"

"My wife died recently."

"Oh...I am sorry." He polished a glass slowly and set it before me. "Any children?"

"Four. All married."

"What, at your age? Oh, Ho! No one would think it, my friend. Don't you have a son you could live with, instead of building your own nest down here?"

"Yes, but I like it here. I can manage."

He inquired after my *sae* and a few other details of my personal life, then launched into what appeared to be a well-rehearsed speech on the difficulties of raising ten children, for ten he has, all ages. Soon the place began to fill up and he left me to wait on his old customers, who had finished their suppers and were ready for the evening routine of gossip and checkers.

"You ought to have one of your children here with you," insisted one fellow who had been filled in on the salient features of my background by our host. "To be alone here is no good; the neighbourhood is quiet, sure, but so are the thieves. Some night you'll go home to find nothing."

"I have nothing in there that would tempt a thief."

"No radio? No refrigerator or television set?"

"No sir, not so much as an electric fan."

And that is the truth, for all that I gave gladly to Weng Kim, all the luxuries Mui Eng needed to make her life bearable.

"I don't think even the poorest thief will be tempted by what I have," I said, whereupon another fellow sitting nearby said, "One cannot be sure...almost anything can be sold. You know, a young fellow like you ought to find himself another wife."

As the conversation developed, it appeared that marriage was this man's solution to all the world's problems, but I cannot agree. Happiness can mean many things; in my case it is time to recover from sorrow, and the peace that comes with freedom from striving.

"Are there many of us here?" I asked.

"Chinese? Not many real Chinese..."

"Where are all your sons?" I asked, puzzled that I had seen no young men in the place.

"This is the old duffer's retreat; the young ones go up the street, where pretty girls wait on the tables."

The regular customers continued to meander in, two or three at a time, as dusk clouded the narrow street and lamps began to flicker in open doorways. What a gentle tempo life has here, compared to Yawarat Road.

One new arrival began to shuffle a deck of well-worn cards on a tabletop dappled with old cigarette bums. "A cop told me today there are only two hundred people left in this district to pay the alien tax this year," he said with an expert flip of the deck. "What do you think of that?" Then, turning to me, he asked, "Where did you live before?"

"Yawarat Road."

"Many Chinese there," he nodded. "Must be a lot more than 200 paying the alien tax over there, eh?"

"Not really. Many are Chinese sons who were born here. It seems a Chinese neighbourhood because we have kept many of the old ways, and the temples are there...but it is changing. Go to one of the temples on Yawarat now and look at all the dark young women who pray to our gods. Who are they? One parent is not Chinese, that's certain. We used to marry our children to our friends' children, but now—they have other ideas."

Several men nodded in commiseration.

"In the old days, few of our children went to the Thai schools, but now they all do," I continued. "They want the kind of lives their Thai classmates have—or the lives they think those children have. But your sons, they are probably no different, for they have lived even more among Thais than mine."

My guess was correct, as it turned out, for many of their sons have married Thai girls and live as Thais. But if their children are far from the large Chinese neighbourhood, they are also far from the nightclubs and massage parlors of the city, from most of its vices. The two exceptions are gambling and fortune telling, which flourish and thrive here.

Since my coming, visitors have been infrequent. Meng Ju comes faithfully every other Saturday to clean house, do my laundry and cook a few things that will keep several days; she is careful not

to ask after the others. Winyu came only once, for he must not only study and teach, but correct his students' homework, and his Sundays seem to be busier than other men's Mondays.

"Papa, I still can't get over this place!" Meng Ju exclaimed. "Look at it—everything in a mess, no decent food to eat; this just doesn't seem like you..."

"I eat all right. I make boiled rice and pork in the morning; that doesn't require any special talent. Then I have noodles from a wagon at noon, and some sort of stew for supper. You know, I'm not a fussy eater like the rest of you."

"Do you ever think of the bakery, since you left?"

"Why should I sit and chew over what is past?" I returned irritably. "Weng Kim and Rose are doing a fine job there."

"Won't you consider living with them, Papa?"

"With them? Tchah! Don't you think they could have brought that up when I moved here, if they wanted me so badly? Oh, no...they turned their noses up at this and told me I ought to stay in your mother's shop, but did they ever say, 'Stay near us, Papa!', 'We'll worry about you over there, Papa'? Hah! It doesn't work anymore, the parents with the children."

"Why, that isn't so. Winyu's mother lives with us and we all get along fine. Every morning Winyu and I do the washing up and sweep the house while she starts her candies, and then we all hurry off at about the same time."

"A man washing up and sweeping floors? Those are a woman's duties; I never heard of a man doing such things. What if the neighbours should see him, eh? Just because you work, you shouldn't expect him to get down on his knees with a scrub brush."

"If he didn't help, Papa, we'd all be in trouble. But it depends on the day, too; whoever has extra time at home does extra housework, and sometimes Winyu has a whole morning free. Then he does many things, but I can never be late at the office, so I seldom get to return

favour. My boss is very firm about punctuality, and I don't take any chances. You always used to say that a new sprout needs more care than an old tree, and this job is a new sprout. I want it to last."

"Last for what? It isn't your business."

"It certainly isn't!" she laughed. "That would be nice, it isn't worth dreaming about."

Ang Bui came to visit me yesterday afternoon, and by the time I reached the coffee shop last evening all the old men were eyeing me with ludicrous curiosity.

Who was she? My wife's sister? If she was single, what was I waiting for?

That's all they ever think of. One of them, who's at least sixty, had a marriage broker find him a buxom thirty-year-old widow, and another married a divorced woman with three children. Lonely old men, Mother, and sad.

Letter # 91

Eighth Lunar Month
Year of the Horse
(September 24, 1966)

I have lived alone for three months, and I too am becoming a lonely old man. Even writing to you does not help much.

The society of the coffee shop I can no longer bear, and the other place, where the young men congregate, is more depressing. All day they lounge about, teasing the waitresses with bad jokes and gambling, and some of them have more education than my own son. They cannot find a job, they say, or they are waiting for a place at the university. All this talk is nothing more than justification of plain laziness; one hears it even from the sons and grandsons of the Chinese. Some of them, I have discovered to my horror, are addicted to heroin, and many nights their lamps flicker in the darkness among the trees behind my house, for they go into the swamp to commune with their evil sickness.

Youths of twenty or so ought to be the strength of a nation. Whenever education can no longer be pursued, that is the time to go to work. But they scorn the work they can get and, I am told, refuse all jobs which are far from Bangkok. I should think that would be a positive factor from a young man's point of view, a chance to see more of his own country than he might otherwise, but the crowded streets of the capital exert a stronger fascination than the countryside, where there are no television, running water, or girls with the citified beauty they are used to.

Winyu told me that his classmates at the university are scarcely more eager to live outside Bangkok.

"If they go out there to work, their chance to earn a higher degree is lost. Even so, some of them would go if their parents didn't prevent them. I have a friend who trained to be a nai amphoe and wanted to live in the South, but his mother made such a fuss about it that he's never gone more than fifteen kilometres from home."

"They need teachers out there too, I should think."

"Of course they do, desperately, but conditions are very bad. Imagine—one teacher for seventy or eighty children, often without books and sometimes without paper or pencils."

When Winyu did accompany Meng Ju to my new home, he brought his books and studied while she hurried through her work, then fell asleep with his face on an open book just before supper time, poor fellow. It is quite obvious that he gives his utmost to the goal he has set.

I have thought of going to visit the others; to see how the bakery is doing, whether Chuey Gim's dress shop is thriving, how Bak Li is managing with the house full of old tin cans...but it is not the business of elders to go visiting. They ought to come to me! Then, occasionally, it would not be improper for me to return a visit or two.

Meng Ju has tried another angle of attack in her campaign to marry me off. She will do all the arranging, she says, if I will consent. Incredible! I told her that no man would agree to such a plan.

I have repaid Ang Bui's visits, though, and I enjoyed myself pretty well over there. She has two servants living with her, but what are servants! I think she is as lonely as I am.

"You're wrong there," she said when I broached the subject. "I put on a pretty dress every morning, make up my face, and get my mind in order. 'Ang Bui', I say to myself, 'today is an important day in which good things will happen!' And I don't let trivial matters put wrinkles on my face."

I wish I had the ability to enjoy life alone, but in spite of what she says I believe it must be a special talent, one I don't have.

By Botan

English translation by Susan Fulop

NIMIT BHUMITHAVORN



Born on February 15, 1935 at Ban Rai Sub-District, Si Samrong District in Sukhothai Province, Nimit had his early education and secondary schooling in his native province. He was trained as a teacher at Utradit teachers college and apart from a few years working as a clerk in Chiang Mai and Bangkok, Nimit had been teaching in a number of rural schools until he became the principal of the same primary school which he studied as a young boy and where he still works.

Nimit's talent was recognized relatively early. As a secondary school boy, he won an essay contest on Sukhothai's legendary King, Phra Ruang. Since 1967, when he was successfully launched in Fa Muang Thai Journal, Nimit has been writing short stories and novels, a number of which are award-winning masterpieces. His tragic death in a road accident came as a shock to readers.

Nimit portrays lives of the working classes, adventures and drama in real life. He is among leading contemporary realistic writers who deals effectively with rural life in Thailand.

THE HAPPINESS OF A VILLAGE TEACHER

The villagers call me "*Kru Dej*." They just don't go for Viradej Bangyom, which is my full name. Yes, I'm an ordinary run-of-the-mill rural municipal-school teacher. It's the status of headmaster—or "*Kru yai*" (big teacher) as they call it—that gives me the touch of glory.

Well, 'big' I certainly must be, holding as many jobs in the school as I do—headmaster, staff-teacher, janitor. It's not that I am following the popular practice of hogging all these jobs for my relatives and offspring. The truth to be told is that no one else wants them. Why? Well, may be the morsels aren't big and cheesy enough to trigger the rat-race!

Working alone is lonesome, but it has its compensations; one gets to rely on oneself, there are no trouble-maker, and there is no need for know-how in administration and management.

The name of my school has a sweet and pleasant ring to it—Ban Don Prai...sounds like Don Muang, Don Wang and the like.

It was that pretty ring to the name that misled me right from the fatal day I first heard it—the day I applied for a teaching post. The selection of the "lucky" candidate was done at the provincial governor's office. There were over fifty vacant positions to be filled and the candidate with the best examination marks had the right to the first choice. By fluke, my name topped the list; the choice was mine! I read through the list of schools. There were names like Ban Rai, Ban Na, Ban Suan, Ban Lum, Ban Kok. I didn't know any of them, but the names conjured up bleak visions of drab schools isolated by fields and jungles. Then my eyes reached Ban Don Prai, and the sound of it went right to my heart. It sounded so like Don Muang there in Bangkok that I opted for it...blindly...how blindly!

It turned out to be as remote as the end of the world! The remotest of all the fifty-odd schools listed—50 to 60 kilometres from Sukhothai, and so deep into the jungle that it was almost sitting on the Burmese border.

Now, to its history. It was opened over ten years ago. In all that time it was only once honoured by a visit from "The Boss" and that was during my early days there. But then who in their right mind would ever want to come! The trip is through dense jungle and during the monsoon you'd have to slog on foot through mud and mire for days to get there. You can make it by bicycle in the dry season, but, mind you, the ground is sandy and slopes upward most of the time. Walking may be easier for those whose calf muscles aren't extremely well-toughened.

The compound of Ban Don Prai School is vast and unconfined. It can be expanded as far as you want, no one would care because the surrounding area is bare and unwanted. The immediate terrain is a knoll gently inclining towards the south; after a downpour it dries off fast without leaving muddy puddles like in Bangkok. The school building stands proudly at the foot of a low hill that serves as its back drop. In front of it different species of bamboos grow in profusion while on either side stand young timbers, survivors of a ruthless deforestation; these young trees will probably be ready for use in half a century's time.

No energy need be spent on decking the place with flowering or ornamental plants, for they already grow in great variety and abundance all around the school—wild orchids flaunting their fragrant blooms, wild ferns sending up bright-green curved shoots, and leaves that move as if on springs. One had only to cover the ground around them with small red and white pebbles to create charmingly natural flower beds. Shedding their leaves, *tumca* trees show off their colourful fruit—red, yellow, green—mixed in wonderful cascading bunches as if some fun-loving fairy had tied together bright billiard balls and hung them up to flirt with the passing breeze. Multi-coloured vines look just like lines drawn by an artist, an aesthetic work of nature that also serves as swings for the children.

The schoolhouse itself is put together with the greatest economy, the materials being entirely local. The sixteen pillars are made of timber, debarked but unpared, leaving the knobs and eyes that give an artistic

effect. The framework of the gabled roofs is of bamboo; palm fronds stitched together in thick rows form the roof. A lighter variety of bamboo, cracked and woven into patterned panels, makes walls and partitions that are bright as gold, polished, and...elegant!

In front of the school are railings made of crooked branches, driven into the earth, alternating in zigzag fashion—a valiant attempt to achieve a nouveau art effect. Whether the aesthetic value is appreciated remains an open question. The ground is natural lump laterite with shallow channels dug under the eaves all around the building to drain away any rainwater that may flood the ground. Doing my best to bestir dormant artistry in the little breasts of my pupils, I got them to put colourful stones in two parallel lines in the form of an “S”—making a natty path leading to the school building.

Stones, irregular in size and shape, decorate the foot of the flagpole that stands as high or higher than any other in the province of Sukhothai. As high as Chulalongkorn University's, I'd say. Actually, I wouldn't wonder if it's the highest school flagpole in the whole of Thailand.

There's no way the children can break the classroom desks no matter how hard they rock them. They are solid timber as large around as a paddy mortar, sawn into lengths of about a foot, and set up like a pork vendor's chopping block, only thicker. The children sit on them, write on them—they are multi-purpose. The only thing is to avoid having them fall on your feet.

More than sixty children are stuffed into the bamboo structure called schoolhouse—grades 1 and 2 in “the left wing,” grades 3 and 4 in the right. It's my routine to start the school day by chalking up three math problems on grade 4's blackboard and doing the same thing for grade 3 before rushing on to grade 2 to write Thai and Arabic numerals from 1 to 10. After that I get down to the first graders, writing up some elementary spelling for them to repeat aloud two or three times before I shout the order:

“Copy it down.”

Then it's time to get back to grade 2. The brats have finished copying their 1 to 10 and are carrying on scintillating free-for-all con-

versations. An imperious bash on the table with the ruler puts an abrupt stop to that, and they queue up to hand in their exercise books. I put a tick on each book with great speed and utter indiscrimination. That never fails to put a smile on every child's face because everyone is right! Then I chalk up three subtraction problems for them to work on and slip back to grades 3 and 4 to write the solutions to their problems on the blackboard, telling them to check their own work. As a matter of routine, there is some chanting of the multiplication tables and a little explanation of the problems, then:

"Who has got all of them right?"

"Good."

"Who has got any wrong?"

"Copy the solutions." This is followed by more explanations for those who have made mistakes.

The first-graders have by now finished copying the spelling, and have gotten into vigorous fist-fights, with tearful screams from the injured. The cane always comes in handy here and silence ensues, at least for a while. Back to grade 3 with solutions to their problems, but the fourth-graders are talking so animatedly that I have to dampen their spirits a bit by telling them to read the only book they each have for their own — the "Thai" text book. Now is their chance, and they take it with a vengeance, chanting the poetry loud enough to drive me nutty.

"Hey kids, go out and read under those trees."

That accomplished, I turn to the teacher's manual that combines every subject in one volume, open it at "The Principles of Democratic Government," and write a whole page of it on the blackboard.

"Copy it!" I shout my order and the children obey as meekly as all good pupils should.

By this time, my throat is as dry as dust, my head throbs. I gulp down two aspirins with the rainwater from the earthen jar in the corner of the schoolroom, cough a bit to clear my throat, take a puff at my cigarette, and walk back to look at grade 2's math before writing some

more spelling on the blackboard for the first-graders to read aloud in unison. Then—

“Copy it, kids.”

Now the time is ripe for Grade 4. I scrawl a part from the Constitutional Freedom and Rights of Thai Citizens on the blackboard.

“Copy it down, kids.”

By the time I get through my cigarettes, it's time for the lunch break. And that's my school morning session.

Anyone can call my teaching method hopeless, backward, downright bad, or anything they like. My own education wasn't all that high or that good. How can I be expected to teach like an intellectual academician? I teach the way my teachers taught me—what need is there for sophisticated planning for a school like mine?

I have lived in Ban Don Prai for nearly five years and sometimes wish I could move to somewhere more urban where I could at least get a good strong *oliang*¹ to quench my thirst, but they still can't find a satisfactory substitute. You see, Ban Don Prai folks and I get along like ducks and drakes.

The style of life led by Ban Don Prai villagers is quite something to be envious of — it's so free from care. About sixty-five houses stand in rows along the foot of the hill. The basic livelihood is rice-farming; and it's the period stretching between the planting and the reaping that makes me think their lives are enviable. They spend their days gathered together to drink, and the way they drink you'd think their throats and stomachs were lined with copper. One can't really call it extravagance because all their booze is home-brewed. Each household reserves a patch or two in their paddy fields to grow sticky black rice for brewing their fiery drinks to be shared by all on such occasions. This is their daily social gathering, their entertainment, and their recreation. It represents their

1. A Chinese word for sweet, strong, black iced coffee.

simple society which has little need for treachery or backbiting. What they feel, they say out loud over their drinks, and the worst that can happen would be a Thai style fist-fight. Murders don't occur here because hostilities dissipate like dreams once the drinkers sober up, and revenge is unheard of.

After four years I have become something of an addict myself; I can tell by the way my stomach does summersaults and cartwheels when drinking time arrives in the afternoons. It's the result of my own weakness, not knowing how to say no. In the first year, little sips of the liquor were enough to catch fire and burn my throat to cinder. Came the second year I managed to gulp it down—had to do it to keep the women from hooting and taunting me. By the fourth year I was such a veteran that none of the women dared challenge me to “drinking duals;” only the hardest drinkers would take me on. Even Ai Dua, toughest of them all, isn't so confident now after a dual that left us both rolling on the ground.

Speaking of Ai Dua, he has become one of my staunchest friends. I don't think I like anyone better than Dua in the whole village, and I think he feels the same about me. He is only twenty-two—five years younger than I, but rural people at twenty-two—have the look of forty-year-old townfolk. I don't know if it's the hard work or the alcoholic content of their moonshine that ages them so. Ai Dua is short, his body disproportionate; the distance from the waist up is amazingly long and contrasts ludicrously with the shortness of the lower part of his body, giving his gait the top-heavy clumsiness of a water buffalo. His head is grotesquely large though he hardly ever exercises what is inside it—well, except for making up earthy rhymes and *likay*² songs for tart and lecherous banterings with Ee Waan.

Now, even if Ai Dua's ugliness is such that even dogs would disdain, it must be known that his powercharged body and his quick tongue have drawn the romantic interest of many a maid and widow. His

2. A song-and-dance folk drama, known for its witty and lively lyrics.

honest and generous heart is an antithesis to his physical ugliness. He loves me like a parent, ready to lay down his life for me — all because of his gratitude. Note that education has very little to do with Ai Dua's simple shining qualities, for his reading and writing skill is barely above the line of literacy.

Ai Dua probably thinks he owes his life to me ever since the day he nearly died from malaria.

You see, all the villagers believe in spirits. The whole village is dotted with small wooden shrines dedicated to various resident *Chao Paw*³ and *Chao Mae*⁴ who they think can drive out any evil spirits that cause sickness from the body of a sick person. The way to go about it is to bribe *Chao Paw* or *Chao Mae* with tempting offerings, such as a bottle of moonshine with a boiled chicken, or a jar of the moonshine with a boiled pig, or, in case of serious sickness, a whole cow accompanied by five jars of the liquor. These offerings are later consumed by everyone with the greatest merriment and appetite after the *Chao Paw* or *Chao Mae* has presumably enjoyed it in an intangible sort of way, conveniently leaving the food and booze apparently untouched. Of course, they only appear untouched to human eyes, which are spiritually unrefined.

In the case of Ai Dua, the spirit was damned obstinate despite the offering of two buffaloes and ten jars of moonshine. I couldn't stand it any longer when it became obvious that he was going to die; I fed him some pills I got from the anti-malarial unit that came to Phitsanulok some time ago. After a few doses of it he got better, for him it was almost like returning from death itself. This, coupled with the fact that Ai Dua never had any real respect for *Chao Paw* and *Chao Mae* made him think I was his saviour, and he has since become grateful enough to let me kick him in the pants anytime I wish to.

3. A male spirit.

4. A female spirit.

Other people didn't believe that Ai Dua was cured by those tiny little pills. They said *Chao Paw Khao Thong*⁵ and *Chao Mae Raerai*⁶ were the ones responsible for his amazing recovery. So two of Dua's buffaloes were killed and washed down the villagers' throats by ten jars of moonshine—enough to make everyone drunk for three days and initiate no less than three fights.

Pu Yai Plod, the village headman, fell and cut his head. His daughter, Raya, cooked so many pots of rice that she cried with exhaustion. The merry widow, Ee Waan, changed bed-partners five times in a row. Ai Dua sang *likay* songs and *Pleng Choi*⁷ in a tart dual of earthy lyrics with Ee Waan until he was as hoarse as a dying drake. Pa Yai, Pu Yai Plod's wife, lost her appetite in the excitement, forgot to eat, and fell in a fainting fit on the third day of the festivities. That caused Perm the exorcist and Pa Yaem the spiritual medium to be summoned for consultations on exorcism of the evil spirit that had gotten into Pa Yai. This procedure naturally entailed more bribery to supernatural beings of the upper echelons, requiring one more pig and five more jars of rice liquor. It was, however, decided that the offering of these should be postponed until the following month, presumably because *Chao Paw Khao Thong*, *Chao Mae Raerai*, as well as the ghosts of Ta Sa, Yai Mee, Ai Pun, Ai Tui, and Ee Pan had already been stuffed with food and wine to their utmost ethereal capacity!

Having gotten used to the life here, I've come to enjoy it in a way. The fly in my ointment is simply the regular trips I have to make to town for meetings and for my monthly pay. These trips are a real pain in the ass, and each round trip takes at least seven days.

Today, I got back to Ban Don Prai — seven days after I had left on one of these trips, arriving at the school neither too early nor too late. Saying this, I have to explain that there is no fixed time for starting the

5. A specific male spirit.

6. A specific female spirit.

7. A folk entertainment performed by a team of men against a team of women, bantering each other by freshly improvised songs with tart and lecherous lyrics.

school day because the children's homes are scattered far and wide—mostly several kilometres away from the school. What's more, we have problems about time. On some days I arrive early but the children get here late; at other times it's vice versa. Telling time is rather confusing because we go by the strength of sunlight and the position of the sun. On cloudy days, no one comes to school until nine or ten o'clock, and on sunny days they turn up as early as cock's crow. I have now found the perfect solution; once all the children—and I, of course—have all arrived, school starts and goes on until our stomachs start to rumble. That's the signal for me to announce the end of the school-day. The reason for all this lies in my "gold" wristwatch, which has a will of its own; it works when it wishes and stops when it wants. If and when I get a raise in my salary, as I've heard rumoured, I shall get a new one.

Today, something is wrong. No children are to be seen in the vicinity of the school, not even when I clang an iron rod against a rusty old spade in sonal imitation of a proper school-bell, and send its "cragg—cragg" sound echoing through the valley. No one appears though my wrist aches with the force of the effort.

"What on earth are you beating that thing for, *Kru*?"

I turn and find Ai Dua standing there, exposing his enormous spade-like teeth in an out-sized grin.

"Why shouldn't I?" I counter tartly. After all this effort to give the children knowledge; here I stand, sans pupils.

"The Village Headman ordered the school closed for a whole week," Ai Dua replies with his customary good-humoured laugh.

"Well, what is it all about?"

"Yesterday the children were all here waiting for you. They played until they were exhausted."

"But I ordered them to come on the seventh day."

"That's none of my business. The Headman passed by on his way to shoot barking deer and saw that you weren't here. So he ordered the school closed for a week."

"Well, the cheek!" I exclaim in exasperation.

"Don't you like it? Oh, can I have a cigarette?"

I fish out a cigarette from the last package bought during the meeting in town and hand one to Ai Dua. He lights it and inhales deeply, grinning good-humouredly.

"Let's go for some fun," he says.

"Where?"

"To Ee Waan's, to take some booze, of course."

He takes my hand and leads me away from the school. So here I am with another holiday ahead of me, enjoying life on Government's salary for another week.

Well, it's part of the happiness of a rural teacher!

By Nimit Bhumithavorn

English translation by Chamnongsri L. Rutnin.

USSIRI DHAMMACHOTE



The third SEA Write awardee for Thailand was born in Hua Hin District, Prachuap Khiri Khan Province on July 10, 1947, the youngest child in a fisherman's family. He studied at the Klaikangwon School in his district, and left for Bangkok before completing his secondary level. He first sat for the university entrance examination in 1967, but failed to get a place in the Faculty of Political Science. His family, in the meantime, ran into financial trouble. Ussiri decided to find a job as an employee of the National Statistical Office. He did surveys in the Northeast for two years, gaining invaluable experiences.

Ussiri returned to his studies when he successfully enrolled in the Faculty of Mass Communications of Chulalongkorn University. He started writing some short stories. His first published story won the literary award of the University's PEN Club. He also ventured into the magazine business, producing a number of movie magazines, all well-known and popular, but not viable.

After his graduation, Ussiri joined the publishing business concentrating on magazines and newspapers. He is currently with the Siam Rath Newspaper. He handles news, articles, and short stories. He resorts to his childhood days at sea and experiences gained about rural life in the Northeast in writing his short stories, in strong and terse language. He has been dubbed "prose poetry". His first collection of short stories "KHUNTHONG, YOU WILL RETURN AT DAWN" won him the SEA Write Award for 1981, making him the third Thai awardee.

NIGHTFALL ON THE WATERWAY

Unhurriedly the man paddled his empty boat homeward against the current. The evening sun had sunk behind the uneven outline of treetops above the banks of the *klong*,* but its portent of night seemed lost on the paddler; for he continued to keep his boat moving with the same slow, tired strokes. His spirit was leaden and inert though he felt a dull longing to be home before nightfall.

The man had been heartsick from the moment he pushed away from the market pier. His full boatload of heavy green watermelons had brought him a sum so pitiful that he couldn't bring himself to buy the cheap lace blouse that his wife had asked him to bring her from the market—not the blouse, not even a plaything for his little daughter. Already he could hear himself telling his waiting wife, "Wait till next time... We got too little money this time." Sad and disheartened she would be as always, and he would have to soothe her disappointment as best he could, perhaps telling her: "Let's save it for a rainy day."

He had made countless trips to the market pier to sell his watermelons to the wholesale buyer, and each time he had been left with a sense of futility, a sense of wasted labour. His toil—and his wife's—had seemed as worthless as the sweat that evaporated at the touch of a sultry breeze or dripped and dissolved into the ever-moving current of the *klong*, leaving only its moist and sticky residue that oppressed rather than vitalized. But that was the way things were—the one buyer monopolized the watermelon market. As soon as the man's boat moved alongside the pier, other melon growers would whisper to him in a kinship of defeat, "Better to sell at his price than letting them rot."

*canal.

"We'll just have to grow more, maybe two or three times more. Then you can have something new to wear to the temple and the little one can have dolls like other children." That was what he would have to tell his waiting wife. He couldn't see any other way of earning enough to buy all the simple things that they dreamed of enjoying. It of course meant more back-breaking drudgery, more stoic patience, and above all—more waiting. But then the woman was no stranger to waiting; it had become part of her life. She had always waited for things she wanted—a cheap radio transistor to bring music into her drab life, a thin gold chain she could show off to her neighbours. These belonged to the promises he gave her in their courting days before she came to live with him.

Just above the horizon of the darkening paddy fields, homing birds flew in flocks across a sky gloriously bathed in the gold and orange lights of the sunken sun. The trees on both banks darkened and grew patches of deep shadows that spread with a gradual ominousness. Ahead, just where the *klong* widened and curved, thin curls of white smoke twisted softly upward from behind a dark clump of trees and disappeared into the fast paling sky. As the man paddled on in the stillness of the evening, a motorboat approached from the opposite direction, passed him, and was gone in a rush of roaring speed, churning the quiet water into a commotion of foaming trails and ruffled waves.

As he started to manouver his lurching boat to the bank for shelter, the rushing afterwash of the motorboat rammed a mass of refuse that was floating nearby against its bow with such force that the light craft tossed and rocked precariously. The man held his paddle still and stared hard at the offending mass of flotsam; caught in it was a rubber doll bobbing to the rhythm of the disturbed water.

The man used the paddle to push away the floating garbage and picked the waterlogged doll out of the water for a closer look. The little thing was there in its entirety, not a part of it was missing—a naked female baby doll with red smiling lips, pale rubber skin, and big, black-painted staring pupils that somehow suggested cold eternity. He moved its limbs back and forth with great satisfaction. This little doll was going to be a companion to his lonely little girl who would no longer be ashamed of not having a doll to play with like other kids in their neighbourhood. He

imagined her bright-eyed excitement with pleasure and was suddenly impatient to be home with this precious gift for her.

The brand new doll came with the current. Who its owner was was beyond his interest and speculation. The klong had made its meandering way through so many villages, fields, and towns before it had reached this point. Who knew how many eyes and hands it had evaded as it drifted with this collection of refuse past countless other paddle boats and wooden piers that led down from water-side houses. He couldn't help imagining its little owner crying over her beloved doll as she watched the water carrying it irretrievably away. He could see the pathetic touch of childish helplessness that he had seen in his own little daughter when she once dropped a juicy piece of watermelon on the dust-covered ground, and he felt a flutter of pity for the unknown child.

With a heightened sense of urgency he skillfully manouvered his way, avoiding the vines and branches that trailed into the water. Motor-boats that monopolized the centre path of the waterway sent waves of disturbed water towards the dark banks on either side. Occasionally he had to stop paddling and hold the paddle against the unsettled water to steady the boat, but it caused him no anger or resentment. Home was not so far away now, and the rising moon would soon be high enough for him to make his way more easily.

He continued to keep his boat close to the shelter of the bank even when its overhanging vegetation had been swallowed by the velvet blackness of night. Now and then his movements startled nocturnal birds from their klong-side thickets. With harsh piercing shrieks they rose in agitated flight, flapping their wings over his head, and disappeared into the darkness of the opposite bank. Their stirring scattered airborne congregations of fireflies which flashed like intermittent sparks from a kindled fire before settling behind dark clumps of klong-side reeds like soft luminous showers. Whenever he drifted too close to the bank, the drones of the myriad of waterside insects sounded to his ears like plaintive wails of human miseries; and waves of aching loneliness would sweep over him.

In a timeless moment of aloneness on the lightless klong with no passing boat to keep him company—a timeless moment in which the

moving water made soft sounds like the breath of a dying man—he thought of death and suddenly realized that the quiet klong breeze brought with it the smell of putrefaction.

A rotting carcass of some animal, he thought. A dead puppy, or perhaps a piglet, that klong-side inhabitants never hesitated to throw into the waterway, relying on the current to bear it away while nature completed the process of decay and water finalized the disintegration of the once-living flesh. There... there it was... the source of this nauseating smell, held by that mass of floating garbage under the shadow of an over-spreading banyan tree.

A momentary glance, and he was about to navigate his boat away from the stinking repulsive thing when something about it arrested him. His unbelieving eyes were drawn back to it—a rotting human corpse floating there with that mass of lifeless garbage. He was frozen with shock and fear, his paddle held in mid-stroke.

It took him more than a few moments to gather his courage and with his paddle push aside part of the floating garbage so that the pathetic nauseating thing could move closer. With the help of the pale moonlight that trickled coldly through the banyan leaves, he scrutinized the lifeless body with morbid curiosity.

Like the doll that he had just picked out of the water, it was a nude baby girl about the same age as his daughter. Not a part of the little pitiful dead thing was missing, yes—like the doll except for the absence of the doll's fixed smile and black vacant stare. The child's body was horribly bloated and, in the palor of the fugitive moonbeam, had taken on a nauseating tinge of green. It was hard to imagine what this little girl had been like in the freshness of life, what bright innocence must have been hers before she became this festering corpse in the course of the sad, inevitable process that would finally make her one with the ever-moving current of this klong.

The man was sharply conscious of the poignancy of the sadness and loneliness of man's individual destiny. He thought of the child's parents, of their reaction to this cruel turn of fate. What could he do to let them know? He started to turn his boat this way and that to call for

help, covering his nose with the palm of his hand to block out the sickening stench of the corpse that became unbearable each time a breeze moved from its direction.

Turning away to look for a passing boat, he involuntarily glanced back and caught sight of a glint of something that made his eyes widen. Almost entirely buried in the bloated flesh of the dead child's wrist was a slim chain of yellow metal. The sight of it in the moonlight inflated his heart and made it miss a beat.

"Gold!" he cried inwardly, stretching out his paddle to move the pathetic swollen little body closer. The sudden roar of a motorboat and the light from its kerosene lamp made him jump with guilt. He turned his boat so that its shadow fell on the corpse, hiding it from view, and waited until he was alone again in the silence that followed. It would have been a gross injustice, an unforgivable stupidity, to let someone else take the prize away from him. He would not let anyone take advantage of him now as they did when he sold his watermelons. After all, he was the discoverer of this treasure, he had gone through the ordeal of fearful aloneness with this bloated corpse, he had borne its unbearable stench in this moon-blanching darkness. Even if the fortune weren't all that large, it would still be worth more than what he was paid for his boatload of watermelons; and the current bore it here to this spot to be found by him.

He was elated by visions of his care-worn wife wearing the lace blouse she had so long waited for; perhaps he would even buy her one of those prettily coloured *panung** from the north to go with it, and he would get clothes for their child and for himself. For the first time he would enjoy the happiness of spending without twinges of pain from parting with hard-earned money. What did he have to do to earn it but paddle home against the current — which he had to do anyway? The happiness that would light up the drained face of his wife and the eagerness that would shine in his child's eyes, short-lived and transient though they

*A Thai style wrap-around skirt.

might be, were blessings as precious to his joyless life as a shower to a drought-parched paddy field.

The moonlight lay like a rippled silver sheet on the moving water, and the seemingly interminable hum of insects now resembled prayers chanted for the dead. He held his breath and, with the thin blade of his melon-knife, cut into the soft swollen flesh of the fingers and hand of the dead child. Piece by piece the decomposing flesh fell away from the white bones and was carried away by the drifting current, gradually exposing the bright chain of gold that it had almost hidden from view by its ghastly swelling. The stench was so strong that he gagged for air; and by the time he had the prize in his hand, he could no longer refrain from retching. The horrible smell of death clung to his knife, his hand, and his entire body. Vomitting copiously into the water, he washed his knife and his hands, letting the water carry away every disgusting trace of what he had done just as it had carried away the pieces of the dead child's flesh.

The corpse, freed by a push from the paddle, was drifting slowly downstream, further and further away in silent finality. The man pushed his boat away from the bank, guiding it to midstream. The doll lying face up in the middle of the boat caught his eyes. It was lying there with the fixed smile on its red lips and the blank stare in its painted black eyes, its hands stuck up in the empty air as if begging for pity. "It's haunted! It's that little girl's," he thought and hurriedly pitched the doll into the water so that it drifted away in the same direction as its owner's. "So what!" he thought, his heart filled with elation. He could buy another one or even two such dolls for his daughter to play with and amuse herself. He was no longer depressed with what he had thought was a futile trip. Thinking of his wife and child who were as yet ignorant of their unexpected luck, he paddled as fast as he possibly could with new-found energy until the lights from his home emerged from behind the bushes not so far ahead.

He no longer had any time for thoughts about the poor little corpse. He no longer consciously cared where it came from or whether the parents would learn of their child's fate. The little human tragedy receded to the back of his mind where only a trace of it lingered.

The man accelerated the strokes of his paddle with an unaccustomed vigour and exuberance.

By Ussiri Dhammachote

English translation by Chamnongsri L. Rutnin

CHART KOBJITTI

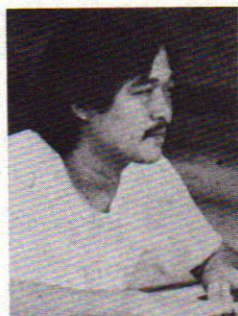


Chart Kobjitti was born in 1954 into the family of a small shop-owner in Samut Sakhon Province near Bangkok. His writing ability became apparent as a secondary student, but he opted for a career in fine arts, studying at Poh-Chang College of Fine Arts. Together with his wife, Chart set up a family work-shop producing trendy bags, belts and shoes for shops catering for young people. His merchandise was in great demand. Chart, however, remained true to his original wish—to be a writer.

His education in art and the pursuance of an independent career provided ample materials to write about. His vision of life and everyday events was also sharpened in the process. He submitted short stories to magazines and newspapers and had them published. In 1979, his first collection of short stories was published by Khon Wannakhham Press. His short novel entitled "CHON TROK" came out in the following year. Chart Kobjitti became the hot property of the quiet and passive literary world in Thailand overnight.

His second novel "KHAM PHIPHA KSA" (The Judgement) won him the SEA Write Award in 1982, after winning him the first prize for novels from the Book Contest Sub-Committee for 1981, and from the Book Development Committee of the National Committee of UNESCO for 1982.

Chart pursued his career as an independent fashion goods manufacturer and a writer, while extending his skill and talent to cover the works for television and eventually emerged a film director. He is a fine example of a thinker and a dreamer who successfully realizes his visions and dreams.

THE JUDGEMENT

He didn't know for how much longer he could put up with the agony. The cord with which Luang Pho had bound him was beginning to break with each twist until all that remained was the smallest thread...

In the early hours of the morning he could hear the sound of dogs running around his hut barking. 'Is it because they have seen your soul leave your body that they're barking?'

The barking of one of the dogs was more distinct than that of the others and it sounded like the black dog which Fak had killed at the school. 'Has it come back to settle the account?' The sound surrounded the hut and filled him with fear. Fak slammed his hands to his ears but the sound didn't go away as he had hoped it would. It just made it seem further away. When he removed his hands, the sound came back, louder than before.

Fak could not sleep at all that night. Throughout the entire night he had to fight his craving for alcohol. This was the longest night in his life, but it was probably the last night that would be so long. The night had wrecked him...it was a night of torture...

The battle was over...

In the early morning he told Nang Somsong to go and buy a bottle of wine. Fak was willing to accept defeat. (But from that day onwards he was not willing to go into battle again.)...

It was morning...the morning of the day for paying homage to the ancestors.

In the early afternoon the villagers began to gather beneath the blazing sun. They walked towards the temple carrying the urns containing the relics of their ancestors. The brass urns had been polished

until they glistened, sparkling and flashing in the sun. Before long the pedestal which had been prepared to hold them was full, waiting for the monks to come and chant the verses for paying homage. The lids of the urns had been removed, revealing the relics which they held inside.

A burning joss stick had been placed by each urn and the lids had been removed so that the lustral waters could be poured over the relics. All the relics had been placed together without giving preference to favourite ancestors. When the people finished pouring the lustral waters over the relics in their own urns, they poured the remaining water over the relics belonging to their friends as though everybody was closely related. These relics were the only thing that remained of the deceased, some of whom had been companions and close friends of the living. The ceremony was carried out in the same way that children would pour water over the older relatives and elders of the village during the Songkran festival and though the atmosphere was one of communal mourning, it was done in good spirit and everyone was in a happy mood. Suddenly everything went silent...

After Fak had gotten himself suitable drunk, he had gone back to sleep and had only woken up again when the sun was directly over the roof of his hut. His stomach was rumbling for food, so he got himself something to eat. When he had finished, he took a bath and told Nang Somsong to get dressed and go to the sala with him. He didn't forget to have another swig of the wine to accompany him as a friend.

The couple walked together along the concrete path beneath the mid-day sun. Mai Somsong was dressed in black while Fak, who was carrying a beer carton and was staggering a bit as he walked, was wearing a white shirt and khaki trousers.

A deathly silence fell across the people gathered in the sala as Fak and Mai Somsong appeared. The manner in which Fak was walking enabled everyone to note,

"He's drunk!"

Everybody stared curiously at this pair carrying the beer carton. Hardly anyone knew exactly what was inside it. Of course, Lung Khai

was amongst those who did know.

Fak went inside the sala, not the least bit perturbed by the eyes staring at him suspiciously. To the contrary, he felt quite proud that he also had some relics. Fak walked straight over to the pedestal where the relic urns had been placed, Mai Somsong following closely behind him. He shifted the other relics urns closer together so as to make enough room to put down the cardboard carton containing the relics of his father. Standing there on the pedestal, it looked quite beautiful.

Nobody said anything, but simply carried on chatting with each other paying no attention to what Fak was doing. And even though they carried on with their conversation the glances which kept going over to the direction of Fak were able to tell each party what the other was thinking.

When Fak had put the box down, he lit a joss stick which he placed in with the relics, then glanced around. Out of the corner of his eye he spotted Saproe Khai, so wandered over to have a chat with him. Mai Somsong, not daring to be separated followed closely behind at his heels.

Fak didn't bother to look back. He had left his father's relics on the pedestal placed in an equal position with the relics of the others.

There were about one hundred urns on the pedestal. Some were made of brass, some of silver and others were made of ceramic. Some had been elaborately engraved, others ornately decorated. Some sacred thread had been wound around the pedestal leading to the asana. Smoke from the joss sticks drifted gently in the breeze. From time to time the wind would blow more strongly and the smoke would drift out of the sala. Many eyes stared at the pedestal and more than one person wanted to get up and remove the cardboard carton and put it on the ground, because there was just no way that the carton could fit in with the relics urns, no matter which way you looked at it, not even from the point of view of design. Moreover the cardboard carton had no value and could not compare with the brass and silver urns. And further more, the relics inside the carton just had no value when compared with the others. The battered old carton was really an eyesore...

But for Lung Khai and Fak, it was a different matter...

"Where did you buy that urn?"

"Yonder... in Bangkok, Hey... really had a lot of difficulty in picking it out..."

"Hmm... You've got pretty good taste. It's really unusual design." Lung Khai admired the carton on the stand.

"I had to have it specially made. That's the only way I could get what I wanted." Fak was really enjoying the effect of the wine. His voice was getting louder.

"Was it expensive? I might buy one for myself to keep my own relics in."

"More than seven thousand."

"Hey... that's not cheap. I don't know if I can afford it..."

The two to them sat there joking with each other. Lung Khai had never felt shy when speaking with Fak. It had always been fun for him; more fun than if he had to speak with someone he didn't like or didn't want to speak to.

But there was something about Fak which bothered him... Fak's drinking habit. On many occasions he had tried to draw Fak's attention to it. Whenever Fak went to his place to drink and he felt he had enough, Lung Khai would stop and invite Fak to have dinner with him. He would talk with Fak about his drinking and tell him not to overdo it. He should have just enough to make him feel good then have some dinner and go to sleep, but he shouldn't drink so much that it made him lose his senses. But Fak never took any notice of him. Sometimes he would answer back saying, 'Then why did you introduce me to it?' This question always made Lung Khai regret that he has been the one who had offered Fak some wine in the first place.

Fak wasn't aware that while he was chatting with Lung Khai the people in the sala were looking at him and gossiping.

"I saw it with my own eyes. Yesterday he promised Luang Pho that he would stop drinking. Now look at him. He really is despicable..." Lung Mee spoke loudly enough so that everybody in the group could hear.

When the monks entered the sala, the groups broke up and each person went back to his own place. The gossip had to be left aside for the moment. It was like a class of school children who had to stop their chatter when someone shouted "The teacher's coming." Everything fell silent as it had been before.

The monks chanted the verses for paying homage to the ancestors and carried out the customary rituals without anything untoward happening to offend the custom.

The groups began to separate and the villagers return to their homes, taking with them the scandal about Ai Fak...

"He's lost all respect for Luang Pho now..."

"Luang Pho himself told him to stop drinking for his own benefit..."

"There you are, you see."

"He's still not ready to listen, even though he knows that Luang Pho is the most respected person in the village."

"Quite so."

"He's deliberately gone and made a fool out of Luang Pho. He tricked him just to save himself."

"Yes."

"Luang Pho has helped him so much. He's given him a place to live, food to eat and looked after him since he was a boy until the time he grew up."

"Quite so, quite so."

"He doesn't care about the help he's received. How does he show his respect and gratitude?"

"He's got none."

"Just look at him. Luang Pho is a monk and he still goes and lies to him. What do you think he would do to us. He's so deceitful. It's a good thing that nobody wants to have anything to do with him..."

"Hmm. Yes...it's just as well..."

Everything that had happened that day made it appear that Fak had deliberately gone and trampled on the respect which the people in the village felt for Luang Pho and the hate which the people in the village felt for Fak increased. It was as though a group of clouds had been forming together waiting for the right time to burst and let the rain fall...

Fak carried the box with the relics back to his hut feeling quite satisfied with himself. This was the first time that he had had relics and was able to take part in the ceremony. This was the first time that his father's relics had been able to listen closely to the chanting of the monks. And, Nang Somsong hadn't given him any trouble, either.

In the evening he sat there drinking as much as he wanted and as soon as he began to get drunk, he began to make a vow to himself that he would give it up...

But on the days that followed, he didn't stop. He carried on as normal telling himself that,

"I want it. I don't want to stop."

Later on he mumbled to himself that he would make another a vow to stop, but as soon as he wanted a drink, he would have one. Finally, his good intentions passed on as there was no way that he could stop and later on he simply stopped making his vows to give up drinking. Occasionally he felt a bit ashamed that he still got drunk.

Luang Pho knew what was going on, but never called Fak for a reminder as he had before. Instead, he cited Fak as an example for others and always mentioned him in his sermons on drinking. Fak was a clear example for the monks to use, and Luang Pho summed it up as follows:

"Each person has his karma. We can point the way for those who have eyes to see, but as for the blind...even if we place them directly in line with the path, they would not see."

The days passed by without leaving any trace behind to show

where they had been. No matter which part of the village they visited, they came and went and did not return. The only thing which was apparent was the change they brought to the people. The passing days came and brought with them new things to replace the old and took the old things away...

By *Chart Kobjitti*

English translation by *Laurie Maund*

VANICH CHAROONGKIJ-ANANT



Born on August 9, 1948, in Suphan Buri Province on the Central Plains, Vanich got his education in his hometown, and went to Bangkok to study at the School of Fine Arts. He pursued his art studies at the Faculty of Paintings, Sculpture and Prints, Silpakorn University, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree. He furthered his studies at the University of California, and earned a Master's degree in Fine Arts.

Vanich took up writing before his college days, concentrating on poems. The rich heritage of folk music in Suphan Buri, his hometown, serves as a solid base for his artistic and literary endeavours. He became famous among college readers, with his linguistic skills and great sense of humour. His first short story was published in Lalana Magazine in 1972. Three years later he began writing a regular series, CHOTMAI THUNG PHUAN (Letters to Friends.)

Vanich worked briefly with a magazine and a commercial bank, before furthering his studies in the United States. Coming back to Thailand, he took up a job with a publishing house, but launched himself as a free-lance writer and columnist in a short time. He is now fully occupied with writing assignments which also include songs and television scripts.

He has many collections of short stories, poems, features and children's stories to his credit. His collection of short stories, SOI DIEO KAN (Living on the Same Side-street) won him the prestigious SEA Write Award for 1984.

THE SONG OF THE LEAVES

After finishing her libations, Granny dedicated the merit of her actions for the benefit of all beings, then went to wash the libation bowl.

Her eighteen-year old granddaughter, Somchao, went to keep an eye on her, afraid that she might stumble and fall into the river and drown. She's told Granny many times that it wasn't necessary to go to the river every day to wash the bowl, she could just as easily wash it in the house. Granny had tried to reason with her that there was no need to waste the water stored in the jar. The river was so close and very easy to reach, particularly now, as it was the rainy season and the water was right up to the top of the bank, so she didn't have to climb down the stairs. It was much more convenient.

Granny was not as frightened as Somchao. She never had any fears about falling into the river and drowning, not even when the river was flowing at its strongest. Granny knew this river well. She was born of this river.

When Granny was a young girl the edge of the landing was not where it is now. She could still remember how she used to have to walk from the house to get to the landing. There used to be a large guava tree and a casuarina standing by the water's edge, but they had now disappeared. She couldn't remember just when they had disappeared, but she knew that it was a long time ago.

Every year the water washed away a bit more of the river bank, particularly during the eleventh and twelfth months when the river flowed swiftly that the level of the water reached right up to the front of Granny's house. The soil on the opposite bank of the river had begun to pile up causing the Suphan River to become more meandering than it had been when Granny was still young.

Houses on Granny's side of the river which had once been some distance from the bank, were now right at the water's edge. The pillars of the outer buildings were already immersed in the water.

Granny thought to herself that they'll probably all collapse one day.

She was worried about her granddaughter Somchao. If the houses were to fall down, where would she go to live.

Granny walked back from the landing, not forgetting to fill the bowl with water so that she could water the jasmine plant standing at the top of the stairs. She liked to gather the flowers from the jasmine plant and thread them into rather meagre looking garlands which she used in her worship before the Buddha image. Granny's garlands often brought sarcastic remarks from Somchao. She said that they were so shabby looking that they could hardly be called garlands; in fact, they were so shabby that she didn't know what to call them.

"Your Granny's not one of them court ladies. She's just an ordinary village lady."

Granny would reply to Somchao in such a manner and carry on threading the garlands in her own way. She threaded the garland by whittling the end of an incense stick into a fine point in which she made a slit to thread the cotton through. Somchao had urged her time and time again to use a needle, but Granny always argued that there was no way that she could see the eye of the needle.

When Somchao offered to thread it for her, Granny would refuse saying that whenever she wants her to do something, she won't do it, but if there's something that doesn't involve her, she likes to come and stick her nose in.

Granny wanted Somchao to practise singing. But Somchao wouldn't. No matter how much Granny tried to persuade her, she wouldn't have anything to do with it. She said Granny's songs were too old-fashioned and she was too embarrassed to sing them in front of anyone. She didn't dare sing them. Granny said that it was not that she didn't dare sing them, but rather that she couldn't sing them. She'd

tried for many years to get Somchao to practise singing, but had now given up.

Granny would try to encourage her by giving the introduction to a song and asking Somchao to follow on.

Granny would give the lead in... "Oh, jasmine tree, old jasmine tree, your branches filled with white flowers..." then stop and wait for Somchao to follow on. But Somchao would just sit there. If she didn't laugh she'd just remain silent and the more Granny tried to coax her, the more annoyed she became. She'd already said that she didn't want to practise singing and she meant it. She doesn't like it and, besides, she can't sing. The only type of songs she likes are folk songs. Besides where has she ever sung before? All she'd ever done was mumble a few incomprehensible sounds. Somchao rarely spoke and some people even went so far as to say that she was dumb.

So Granny would just carry on by herself.... "Oh, jasmine tree, old jasmine tree, your branches filled with white flowers, you stand beside the banyan tree, showers of berries falling all around..."

Even though more than seventy years had passed, Granny could still remember this verse from the *Ee Saew* song very clearly. She was about twelve or thirteen years of age at the time and had run away from home to practise singing with Pho Petch who lived behind Wat Lao Thong at Ban Rua Yai. Pho Petch would give the introductory line starting with the words... "Oh, jasmine tree, old jasmine tree, your branches filled with white flowers..." There were altogether three people, including Granny, practising under Pho Petch. None of them, except for Granny, could take up the lead. There was an old jasmine tree covered in white flowers growing at the edge of Pho Petch's garden. Beside it was a large banyan tree. Scattered everywhere on the ground around the two trees were berries which had fallen from the banyan tree. Granny was thus able to follow on with the line...you stand beside the banyan tree, showers of berries falling all around..."

Granny went back outside and set the ladle and the upturned bowl on the open verandah. The verandah shook as she walked across to fetch the two brightly coloured sarongs which had been hung out the

night before to dry. When she left them, she saw that they were still damp so put them back on the clothes line where they had been before and left them to dry.

There was going to be a merit-making ceremony in the temple that evening. Mae Khwan Chitt had been telling Granny for a month now that she had arranged for an *Ee Saew* group of singers to come and perform, so Granny had begun to prepare her clothes. They had been folded up and put away for some time now as it was only once in a while these days that there would be a festival. When she got them out they smelled a bit musty so she took them and washed them.

Granny had told Somchao the day before that there was going to be a festival that evening and told her to go and get herself ready. Somchao complained that if she's told her once, she's told her a thousand times. She won't forget. Somchao had to go along with her. If nothing else, at least she could be an accompanist. Her hopes in her as a singer had already been disappointed, but she didn't care any more.

The Suphan River was quiet at this hour. Few boats ever passed by these days. Not too long ago it was a busy access, noisy with the deafening sounds of long-tail boats, but nowadays there were roads running everywhere and nobody ever used the long-tail boats any more. The only water traffic to be seen these days were the-tug-drawn rice barges, but it was not often that a convoy would pass.

The river was quiet and peaceful like this when Granny was a girl. In those days there were only long paddle boats and row boats and it was only once in a while that there would be any noisy festivity. That was when there were temple fairs and merit-making ceremonies. The biggest and most enjoyable festival in those days was the festival for Luang Pho To, held annually at Wat Pa. It was when the singers from her village went to perform at this festival that Granny first got her desire to train as a singer. Each year the people from Granny's village would row to the provincial centre and Granny was one of the kids who would tag along. Flotillas of boats rowed along with them, singing as they went, their gongs echoing across the river.

The boats would moor side by side forming a pontoon in front of Chao Phraya Yomaraj's home which stood by the river's edge. There they would sing for the pleasure of the great man. On many occasions the people from Granny's village were rewarded with prizes.

Granny won a prize herself once. She was a young lady at the time and already quite an accomplished singer. She could still remember that a boat carrying some young men from Ang Thong had moored at the edge of the river. She couldn't remember the lead singer's name, but she could remember that his skin was very dark. She responded to his introductory line by singing.

"Oh, I heard a lot of noise so I looked out to see,
Where, oh where is he, the man from Ang Thong?
Seeing him I almost fell into the water with fright.
Your skin's as black as night, oh brother, dear brother.
Your home's in Ang Thong, so you say?
Tell me, pray, are you a coal maker or a farmer..."

His excellency the Chao Phraya was so delighted by this verse that he rewarded Granny five baht.

Granny's whole life revolved around her singing. She's been to a thousand and one different places. She'd travelled from the north to the south—Ang Thong, Sing Buri, Uthai, Ayutthaya—she'd been to them all, and there was no one she feared when it came to singing, shanties, improvisations, rounds, accompanied or unaccompanied—she knew them all.

Granny went into the kitchen and got herself a plate of rice which she began to eat with her fingers. She had some chilli sauce, which she'd made the day before, to go with it. There was also some blanched morning glory and some sola leaf, plus some salted fish which Somchao had prepared. Granny ate until she was full. After washing the plate she filled the bucket with water, took a rag from the top of the stairs, dampened it, and began to wash the floor.

Granny washed the floor every day, morning and evening. Squatting down she'd wash a bit at a time until the job was thoroughly done. Somchao had told her so many times not to do it that she'd now become tired of telling her. She said that Granny was worse than a kid the way she refused to listen to her.

"I can do my own cleaning. The house is hardly big enough to swing a cat in and you go and get all excited." Granny told her.

The house was very old. It was built by Granny's parents. Time and the continuous washing away of the river bank had caused it to lean so much that it was now almost toppling over.

Granny was born in this house. There had been two other children, but they had both died by now. When she was eighteen she'd married a young man from Ban Makham Lom who had come to watch the troupe that Granny was with. He'd seen Granny when she was singing at Wat Suan Hong. They had one child together, Somchao's mother. But Granny stayed with him for only one year. He wanted her to give up singing, but her love for singing was too great.

"...Though into evil's hands I may fall,
I will always recall my singing.
Of leaving my husband I have no fear,
But many a tear I would shed before I could give up my songs..."

Granny could still recall quite well the song she had sung with her friends at the time she left her husband. Many times he came and tried to persuade her to return, but she always refused. He could do anything he wanted. All she asked was that she be able to continue her singing. Her husband took her child to look after.

Somchao's mother returned to live with Granny after her husband died. A short time later she followed him, leaving Somchao in the care of Granny. Granny told her friends that her daughter was too old when she married and had had a child too late in life to be able to get any use out of her. Somchao was about five or six years old when her mother died. She and Granny lived together, just the two of them. Granny

earned enough money for their needs by working as a singer. If nobody came to hire her, then she would gather fruit to take and sell in the market place.

Granny worried about Somchao. If anything happened to her, if she died or something, then who would look after Somchao? How would she be able to support herself. She tried to encourage her to practise singing but she wasn't interested. At least if she could sing she would be able to earn a bit of money. If worse came to worse, she could always leave her with Mae Khwan Chitt. But here, all she could do was act as an accompanist. That wouldn't be of much help to her.

When she'd finished washing the floor she would sleep. Granny's remaining years were divided almost equally between sleeping and waking. She never ventured far from home, except to go and sing. She'd managed to save a small amount of money which she gave to Somchao to look after telling her to use it to cremate her body. The little moeny that Granny had came mostly from singing rather than from anything else, particularly during the past year when she had gathered almost no fruit from the sumac tree. As a result, the money which Granny had put aside had almost run out.

Granny had been able to earn quite a bit of money during the days when her friends were still alive, but she never thought that she would live to such a ripe old age and she never expected that she would have to take care of Somchao. So whatever money she got she used in making merit. In fact, she used so much that she now had to be very frugal. She didn't even want to buy any new sarongs.

Most of the singers from Granny's days had now passed away—Mae Tuan, Phi Phrom, Ee Chua, Nai Tom, Mae Ning. Ee Thonglo was still living. So was Ee Thongyoo. Even though Ee Thongyoo talked a lot, Granny still looked forward to seeing her, but they only saw each other when she came to invite Granny to go singing. She'd aged a lot and looked old and frail now, just like Granny.

It was Somchao's habit to go the neighbours' homes and browse through movie magazines whenever Granny was asleep. She'd always go along with Granny whenever Granny went out to sing, though, but

it was just Granny had said, the best she could do was be an accompanist. She could play the cymbals or clap the rhythm with her hands, and she only agreed to go because of Granny. If Granny wasn't going, she certainly wouldn't go by herself. However, it was a rare occasion that Granny did not go when someone came after her to sing. In fact, it only ever happened once. At that time Granny was so sick that she couldn't even get out of bed, and even though she wasn't up to it, she insisted on going. However, Somchao refused. She'd told the person who'd come after her that it would surely be Granny's death if she were to go.

Somchao rarely spoke. She was never interested in Granny's songs and never took much notice when people praised Granny as being a master of song. Somchao liked folk songs and dreamed of joining a chorus line, but it was only a dream. She wasn't pretty and perhaps it was because of Granny that she didn't do what her heart desired.

She finished fourth grade at Wat Manao Primary School, but didn't study any further after that. She didn't have a job. Once someone invited her to go and work in a factory. She wanted to go, too. It was at the time that the song Chantana My Dear was popular. Granny wouldn't have said anything if she'd gone, but, even though she didn't know why, she later changed her mind. Maybe it was because the neighbours had asked her how she could leave Granny when Granny was getting so old.

But Granny had always said to Somchao, "If you want to go, then go, there's no need to worry about me."

By that time Granny had accepted the fact that Somchao was not going to follow in her footsteps as a singer.

The only work which Somchao did on a regular basis was gardening. She grew chillis and gourds and a few other plants, but not many. Granny's plot of land was very small. She used to have a lot more, but the land by the edge of the river fell away bit by bit each year. There were four or five sumac trees growing in the garden plus a few

mango and sapodillas. When the fruit season came, Granny and Somchao would help each other gather the fruit and send it to the market so that they could get themselves some money.

Granny also earned some money from singing, but it was never very reliable. Many years ago, Mae Khwan Chitt came to Granny and asked her to join her troupe. Granny was so overcome with joy that day that she cried. Somchao went with her and Mae Khwan Chitt taught her the rhythm and trained her as an accompanist.

Before Somchao's mother passed away, Granny was living in Bangkok. She stayed with a relative who had a house near Nonthaburi and helped to look after the children. She went to stay there so that she could be close to her friends who worked as singers. It would be easier for them to come after her if there was any work. In those days they would always go together whenever any work came along. Those were the happiest days of Granny's life, she had plenty of work as a singer and was able to earn enough money to make merit with.

When Mae Tuan and Phi Phrom passed away, Granny began to feel lonely. Then, one after another, the friends that Granny had sung with began to die off. Some died before Mae Tuan and Phi Phrom, some after. Before too long, there was almost nobody left. But Granny continued to live at Nonthaburi until Somchao's mother died, and it was only then that she returned to live in Suphan.

Granny went back to Suphan to look after Somchao. She didn't have any close relatives anywhere. All she had were the villagers. Whatever relatives she'd had of the same generation were now dead and the only living relatives she had now were those of the younger generation and they were not very close to her. Granny was not rich, so nobody wanted to come and bother her, just as she didn't want to go and bother them.

Granny earned her living by gathering fruit and by singing. Once every now and then she would go to sing in Bangkok and she had even appeared on television. But in the later days, Mae Khwan Chitt was about the only one who came after her. Sometimes Pho Wai would

come too. Even though Granny was now quite old, she could still sing along with them. They didn't have to worry and they knew they wouldn't go hungry, Granny's voice was still good. It hadn't become hoarse or gone flat. It was as good as it had been when she was a young girl.

When she woke up in the afternoon, she took a piece of areca nut and began chewing on it. She chewed on it for a moment then thought that there was something wrong with the taste. Granny enjoyed chewing areca nut. It didn't matter what type it was, it could be fresh, dried or mixed with cloves, she liked them all. But she felt that there was something wrong with the areca nut she was chewing today. It didn't taste good. She took another piece, put it in her mouth and adjusted her position so that she could get up. But she fell back down.

She spat out the areca nut she was chewing on. She didn't feel too well and figured that there must be something really wrong because this was the first time that she had ever chewed areca nut and not liked the taste. However, she didn't get excited or feel afraid. Granny had been living close to death for a long time. Most of the people of her generation had all passed away by now and there was hardly anybody left. She had been living so close to death that she had got to know it well and had been preparing herself for it for a long time by making merit.

Granny remembered that she had agreed to go and sing this evening, so she forced herself to sit up. It was a good thing that she would be able to go by car. She used to have to walk everywhere, regardless of where she had to go. Sometimes she had to walk for days. If work came during the tenth and eleventh months, they would be able to go by boat.

Granny felt sorry that she had to go and get sick right now. She forced herself up, but each time she did so she felt dizzy. When she was finally able to sit up she felt a rush go to her head. It was a good thing that she could support herself by leaning against the wall. Granny lay back down and closed her eyes. She felt so tired that she thought her heart would give out.

"How would it be if I didn't go and sing with the others?"

Granny talked to herself before drifting off to sleep. She wasn't worried because she knew that she had left some money with Somchao to cover the costs of her cremation.

"...Oh, jasmine tree, old jasmine tree, your branches filled with white flowers,

You stand beside the banyan tree, showers of berries falling all around.

Yonder in the ground stands the breadfruit tree with new branches sprouting out.

Who cut down the old persimmon tree?

Now the only thing I see is a stump by the coxcomb plant.

No longer the banyan leaves enchant as they did in days of old.

When the wind blows cold it scatters the leaves far, far away..."

The sound of singing came drifting to Granny's ears compelling her to open her eyes and sit up. She looked towards the top of the stairs but there was nobody there. She looked all over the house but couldn't see anybody. Perhaps her ears had started buzzing by themselves, but at least it had helped to remind Granny that she had to go and sing in the evening. She had no idea what time it was now.

Granny tried to pull herself up slowly. She didn't want Somchao to see that she was not well. She'd only begin to fuss and would refuse to let her go and take part in the singing tonight.

Granny called out to Somchao. She heard a reply come from the back of the house. Granny called out again and told her to get herself ready because the car would be coming to pick them up to take them to Wat Pa. She said that they were going to stop in and pay their respects to Luang Pho To, too. Had she forgotten that they had to go and sing this evening? Somchao called out that there was no need to rush as it was only just one o'clock.

Granny sat back and gazed dreamily out through the open verandah towards the river. The waters of the Suphan River swirled

around the bend in front of Granny's house. Clumps of Java weed bobbed up and down at intervals on the swirling waters. Some clumps floated in front of Granny's house before joining the waters to be carried further on downstream. Some were extremely large and threatened to topple Granny's house if they smashed against the stilts of the open verandah.

Strains of boat songs drifted to Granny's ears as though the sound was coming from the bend yonder.

"...When you talk of leaving my eyes fill with tears and in my heart are fears for my father, my brother, my loved ones.

For when the twelfth moon comes the banks of the river are full and from here I must pull myself away and sadness tears my heart.

While rowing in the dark of night, dear father, be sure that you ply the oar with care lest the river should take you away..."

The sound of the song rose and then drifted away. Granny smiled to herself as she sat gazing dreamily at the river.

Granny arrived at Wat Pa with the other members of the troupe and began to make herself up. When Somchao first saw Granny's condition, she tried to stop her from going, but Granny assured her that she was all right. "There's nothing wrong with me. I can go. I'm going to pay my respects to Luang Pho."

As soon as she had finished dressing and had thrown the sash across her shoulder, her eyes began to light up. It seemed her fever had vanished completely. Somchao, who had been keeping a close watch on her, now began to feel a little better, only a little because she knew that Granny always looked like this when she was about to sing. When the car had come to collect them, Granny's condition had been rather strange. Somchao had gone to wake her up and had found her completely unconscious. She had to shake her for a long time before she opened her eyes.

Somchao kept fussing over Granny, but Granny sent her away telling her to go and get herself ready, not forgetting to hand her a

small gold bracelet as she did so. Granny thought that Somchao had grown up now and was a young lady so should have some gold to show off before the others. Granny didn't have any for herself. She told Somchao that there was no need to worry about her. Somchao dressed herself in a brightly coloured costume similar to Granny's.

Granny stepped out onto the stage. It seemed that she had been born on this stage, had grown up here and that it was here that she had become an old lady. Everything around her was familiar to her. She could sing and dance with ease and it was so much fun. Granny knew every speck of dust on the stage and it all belonged to her.

That's exactly how Granny felt.

*"I raise the tray with incense and candles high above my head
and pay my respects with offerings to the Triple Gem.*

*I take the Bai Sri offerings then worship in four quarters the
spirits of the land.*

*I place my hands together and the celestial beings, I worship
them all.*

*I remember my teacher, Pho Petch, who taught me how to sing
and helped to bring to me the name Kamchai, the Singer
of Suphan".*

The resonant strains of Granny's voice sang verses in respect to her teachers, mesmerizing a section of the audience into motionless silence. Some people paid no attention to the words of the song and sat around drinking and chatting amongst themselves. But Granny neither cared nor took any notice of whether people were listening or not. Every ounce of feeling she possessed was confined to the stage. Her attention was concentrated solely on the lead singer, waiting to see what he would sing. Don't let your mind wander too far.

She didn't want to look at the audience because she felt that her vision was becoming so blurred that she couldn't see.

With determination, Granny forced herself to remain there and listen to what the leading man and lady were singing. She set her mind on listening so that she could pick up her cue.

She stepped out onto the stage and sang a short line as a feeler

then stepped out again and sang a short verse. The sound of amused and sympathetic laughter came from the audience as the old woman danced and bumped into the leading lady. Granny didn't care. The only thing she was concerned about was going out onto the stage and giving the leading man his cue.

The people in the audience thought that Granny's old age had caused her to bump into the leading lady. But it wasn't that. Granny could no longer see.

Nobody on the stage noticed anything strange about Granny's behaviour, not even Somchao, because her face was filled with life and her voice was so resonant and clear.

"...Hey, Chan, you look like a bit of a scamp and a rover.
Has anybody ever hit you over the head with a stick
For being so slick, so cheeky and burly?
Your hair is so curly, your manner so rude..."

Even though she bumped into the chair as she moved back, nobody thought that Granny's actions were unusual. Granny took hold of the chair and sat down. The way she groped for the chair and sat down appeared so natural the everybody thought that it was part of her performance. Granny's old now, they thought. She probably can't stand up for too long. Somchao stopped beating out the rhythm and went over to Granny to ask if there was anything wrong. Granny smiled at her and said, "I'm going to have some areca nut."

Somchao led Granny to the side of the stage, sat her down on a chair and placed the bag of areca nut on her lap. Granny began to prepare some areca nut for herself. Her eyes were sparkling and fixed on the leading man as he acted out his part. Broken laughter came from the audience as the leading man and lady performed their roles.

Granny could no longer see anything, but she was still strong enough to pick up the areca nut and place it in her mouth.

But she didn't chew on the areca nut and she no longer knew if it tasted good or bad. Granny remained seated at the side of the stage.

Somchao stumbled back to the wings, put down the rhythm sticks

and danced out onto the stage.

The story had reached the part where the performers were walking in the forest admiring the trees. The men were leading their wives back home.

"...Oh, jasmine tree, old jasmine tree, your branches filled with white flowers.

You stand beside the banyan tree, showers of berries falling all around.

Yonder in the ground is the breadfruit tree with new branches sprouting out.

Who has cut down the persimmon tree?

Now the only thing I see is a stump by the coxcomb plant.

No longer the banyan leaves enchant as they did in days of old.

When the wind blows cold it scatters the leaves far, far away..."

This is as far as Somchao was able to sing. The leading man and lady and the members of the chorus rushed over and grabbed her. Mae Khwan Chitt rushed across to Granny and called out her name over and over again.

The voice which had come from Somchao's mouth clearly belonged to Granny.

By Vanich Charoongkij-anant

English translation by Laurie Muand

ANGKARN KALAYANAPONGSE



Born in the southern province of Nakhon Si Thammarat, on February 12, 1926, Angkarn came to Bangkok upon completing his secondary education in his hometown. He enrolled at the Poh Chang School of Fine Arts, and went further to Silpakorn University. Finding the college system and curriculum too confined for his artistic leanings, he left during his junior year and turned his back on the institution.

Poetry has been in his blood. "I was a poet in my previous life", he once declared. One finds poetry in his drawings and writings, even in the characters and spacing in his hand-writing. His poems appeared in various magazines and specialized publications during his college days. He struck the reading public with his individual style, deep thoughts, and powerful words. He was honoured as the first distinguished contemporary poet by the Sathienkoses-Nagapradip Foundation in 1972.

By the time he was selected as the SEA Write Awardee for Thailand for the year 1986, Angkarn had become an institution, highly regarded by fellow painters and poets. The award was an overdue honour because his reputation had already transcended any form of prize-awarding, be it official or unofficial. When asked how he felt about the award, he gave a terse reply: "I am not after worldly recognition. My ultimate goal is spiritual liberation."

A POET'S PLEDGE

- 1 Who would dare trade skies and oceans?
 Wondrous creation is this world of ours.
 These corporeal parts shall be laid
 Betwixt earth and sky in the final hours.
- 2 We are not owners of clouds or air,
 Or the heavens or any elements of earth.
 Man has made neither moon nor sun
 Nor a single atom in a grain of sand,
- 3 Man cheats and kills to grab empires;
 Galvanized by greed, the breathing corpse
 Spurns goodness and forgets its grave
 Abdicating dignity of the human soul.
- 4 Components and elements of this earth
 Are worth all celestial treasures
 Cherish forever soil, sky and water
 Make the world brighter than the heavens.
- 5 Fields, forests and impenetrable wilds
 High mountains that challenge the clouds
 Gibbons, buffaloes, tigers, elephants
 Ants and all species in this universe
- 6 Are like man's intimate beloved friends
 Companions in circling current of rebirth
 Priceless existences in Time's ageless span
 Radiant treasures of immeasurable worth.

- 7 Let others soar beyond the infinite skies
Or tread cosmic paths of moons and stars;
But to this living world my heart is pledged
To Earth bonded in all my lives and deaths.
- 8 I shall even refuse Nirvana
And suffer the circling wheel of rebirths
To translate the multitudes of wonders
Into poems dedicated to this Universe.
- 9 To cleanse the human world of sorrows
Until peace glows into a golden age.
Then, my ashes with earth will integrate—
A calcified fossil keeping watch.
- 10 If men grew deaf to poetry's charm
What treasures could replace the loss?
Ashes and dust would abhor
The dryness of the wretched human soul.
- 11 If this world were barren of poetry
Then farewell dear human race.
I would go and build a realm of the mind
With jewels of rainbow verses.
- 12 I shall enchant the celestial realms
With priceless wealth of poetry.
My spiritual merits in the arts
Shall last Time's infinity.

Poet: *Angkarn Kalayanapongse*
Translator: *Chamnongsri L. Rutnin*

THE EYE OF TIME

Moment gazes at the stars and spoke silent language of the eye:

“Listen, denizens of Eternity:

High on a cliff, a spider of long ago wove shapes of seductive flowers into the centre of its web. The queen of golden-winged flies, together with throngs of dainty butterflies fell in love with the gossamer flowers, and foolishly flew to their deaths.

The spider devoured his fill; and yet, so much was kept in his store that other spiders lauded his wealth and called him ‘millionaire’.

They said to him, ‘If you had woven gossamer bags of gold and diamonds, pearls and gems, human beings would rush to their deaths like those poor, foolish flies. Let us try it.’

But, an old spider intervened. ‘No. Soil not our soul with deception. Do not face them with smiles of flowers and bite their backs with venomous fangs, for it would mar the purity of our souls. Do not make goodness servant of evil.’

Through to the end of Time, spiders and other animals believed the old spider’s words.

By chance, some primitive human dwellers of the forest overheard the conversation. They marvelled at the cleverness of the spiders. Carefully, they garnered the craftiness and deception. These they treasured, and passed down the generations as inheritance of the human race to this very day.

By Angkarn Kalayanapongse

English translation by Chamnongsri L. Rutnin

“GRANDMA”

One twilight during the rainy season, the downpour has come to an end, leaving a trail of clean white clouds moving in gentle procession. The bushes and the flowering trees turn a brilliant and refreshing green. The setting sun, a ball of red, radiates its beams, bringing forth the rainbows that dine on the droplets left behind. Behind the high mountains, the wind blows gently, shaking the glistening raindrops off the leaves of the mahogany and rubber trees. Down there is a lonely hamlet, a great distance from the centre of things.

An old woman, crumbling from her years, lives in an old hut in the middle of a deserted field. Her hair is the colour of fog and her face is wrinkled and dried, though the centre of her eyes still sparkle. But she is in the dusk of her day, over eighty years of age, her body bent over into a widow's hump.

She belongs to the age of grandmothers, but is without relatives or friends. For many years she has been picking greens in the field and splitting logs to sell for a living. Now she has grown thin and is constantly ill, missing her meals when there is nothing to eat. One day, after recovering from her most recent illness, she had craved some rice and liang curry, a curry made of the greenest vegetables. She noticed the tamlyng shoots quivering seductively in the wind. Just at the moment she was reaching toward the vine to pluck one of the shoots, another shoot spoke out:

“Grandma, please pick me first. That shoot there is my younger sister. Wait until tomorrow, and maybe then she'll have something to talk with you about.”

Grandma was at first dumbfounded and then perplexed, but she gathered her courage and answered, “Of course, for most people on this earth, there'll be a tomorrow, but for me, today is always

the last day. Nothing is certain. Tomorrow morning when the cock crows close to three o'clock maybe I will have breathed my last. I have already come that close, many times. So today I want to eat some liang curry to my heart's content."

The tamarind shrub, entering the conversation, asked her "Do you have any rice?"

"Well, some. I bought about four or five litres a few days ago. But there's only a little more than a litre left, and it's full of weevils. I'll have to pick them out first. By the time the rice is cooked, the night spirits will be out and it will be time to light the torch."

As soon as the old woman finished her words, the yellow papaya, so ripe that it was ready to fall, said in a loud but trembling voice, "Grandma, take this rich ripe papaya to eat first." Grandma had not yet recovered from her amazement, but she expressed her deepest gratitude to these plants.

The papaya said repeatedly:

"Take me first to eat. I have a laxative that will clean your intestines and will make you feel more relaxed. Then you will make yourself forget your concerns and worries, feel in a pleasant frame of mind, enjoy the rainbow or the seven gleaming rays of the morning sun, wake up early in the morning breathing in the pure and fresh air, welcoming the deity of the new day, who will bestow upon you the divine ray of happiness and will prolong your life span. Grandma, you will have a tomorrow that will go on and on for as long as you wish."

Grandma asked, "How can plants talk? In earlier days you were so quiet as to be mute. Or perhaps your compassion lies secreted deeply within you. You are able to bring forth your generosity and your magnanimous mercy so that I can feel the delight of the divine power that has revived my strength and vigor."

At that moment, all the plants of the field declaimed in chorus: "Although we share the same world with human beings, we are immune to the influence of mankind's basic character and thought, which is composed of selfishness, small-mindedness, and avarice. By no means

do we follow the human example of pretense, deception, and intrigue. Other than grandma, we communicate with nobody. We see that you are deserted and ignored uncompassionately by the rest of mankind. Because of the deep pathos we feel for you, we can no longer refrain from speaking.

"In fact, the deities have bestowed souls on all living things, but we prefer to be mute. Even though we have our own language, we act as if we did not. We sometimes communicate with each other in our own language, but it is too mystifying to be understood by any human being. At first, we thought that grandma would breathe her last tonight. But we were fortunate to realize that through the intercession of Divine happiness you have regained your strength, prolonging your life much further."

Grandma listened intensely, deeply moved by the chorus.

Immediately, the watercress in the pond behind the hut said, "Grandma, I will put forth new, fresh leaves for you to pick and sell every day in the market. In the future there will be more people in this area, so my price will increase. Grandma, proclaim to everyone that watercress is a superb medicine. After eating me, people's eyesight also improves."

The old woman was so touched that tears streamed down her cheeks. She kneeled down, lowered her body, and raising her hands to her forehead to pay respect, she expressed her gratitude to Mother Earth and all the vegetables and plants, saying: "Grandma really doesn't want to be any trouble at all to you."

"When I pick you, don't you feel any pain?"

The watercress quivering in the wind laughed and said, "Only the Deities in heaven have such exquisite compassion. Grandma, do you think that the Gods that created us would have also bestowed upon us the feeling to know pain? The whole world then would be filled with the cries of our mourning and the screams of our agony as a result of the way we are treated every day and night by human beings. We do speak and we do feel many things, but this is because of the wondrous power of our souls.

"Fortunately, we plants have a nervous system that does not know pain. If we were any different, the torment and misery would be too great to bear, and we would just die. Come, Grandma, please pick me. I am always happy to produce fresh, new leaves."

After that day, the watercress in the pond grew longer and larger, putting forth beautifully more stems and fresh leaves. The old woman picked them to sell at the market, earning enough to pay for her rice and other food and continuing to live in the old hut. Portions of the palm leaf covering the hut were torn, making a hole through which the twinkling stars glittered. The constellation Orion passed in the sky and the frogs and tadpoles croaked melodiously. It was deep into the night.

This time the old woman has been sick with malaria for several days. Her temperature has risen very high, making her deaf in both ears. She feels dizzy and is talking as if delirious in her sleep. The weather has changed, and it is hot and humid everywhere. The dark, sad clouds are hiding the moon. The wind blows stronger, becoming turbulent and shaking the whole country. The trees are like swings swaying in the rain. Flashes of lightning and thunder strike down with a deafening clap that shakes the whole world. The old woman is panic stricken and loses consciousness. Her body is soaked with rain. After a few hours, the storm tapers off. The sky begins to fill with the silver and golden rays of morning. The joyous chirping of the Boradok birds and Malaysian parrots can be heard clearly in the distance.

She has regained consciousness, but her fever has not abated. Poor dear, she is delirious. She is confused and goes down to pick some watercress. The watercress cries out in warning: "Grandma, don't come down here. There are dangerous snakes near the edge of the pond. They are mating." However, she does not hear the entreating voice and walks on down, straight ahead.

So it happens that, in a moment of fate, she steps on the tip of the tail of a vicious cobra. The cobra is startled. It swings around and bites her fully. The fangs are buried into her. She feels a sudden pain at the back of her foot, so she moves to soothe it with her hand. The cobra strikes again, this time at her hand, and she begins to realize that she has been bitten by a snake. Panic stricken, she loses consciousness,

and falls at the edge of the pond. Before long, the deadly poison of the cobra works its way against the current of her bloodstream. In old age, the woman has little resistance. The poison forces itself through the blood into the depth of her heart, bringing her pulse to an end. The old woman breathes her last. But her eyes are still opened wide, as if to express her concern for the vegetables, trees, and flowers who are her companions. Their friendship has no comparison. A portion of the waning moon still shows faintly and then disappears behind the trees. The day is beginning to dawn. The rain has abated some time ago. The air is calm and chilly, creating an atmosphere of solitude and silence, except for the reverberations of nature. Exploding dewdrops crackle on leaves. Only one lingering star still glitters in the immaculate womb of heaven.

For anyone having the power to hear beyond the range of the human ear the sobbing of the trees and flowers in that field would be very clear. The watercress, the papayas, the tamarinds, and the tamlyng shoots are all lamenting and weeping.

A tiny flower with a trembling voice said: "Older brothers and sisters, I am so unhappy because I was hoping this morning to bloom into a bright violet flower. If Grandma could have seen my brilliant colour it would have helped to relieve her pain. It is so sad." The tamlyng said: "Look at that. An army of fire ants is eating away at the pupils of Grandma's eyes. They are chewing away at her eyes in swarms. In a few days her corpse will rot and swell. The vultures and crows will peck at her body and feed from her flesh. Her bones will be scattered over the soil and sand. It is so pitiful."

After its lamentations, the tamlyng again begins to sob until tears come forth from the centre of its pure white blossoms. The tears blend with the dew and overflow the petals, as if they are a stream of remorse mourning the death of this old woman who has said farewell to the world and has disappeared forever.

NAOVARAT PONGPAIBOON



Naovarat was born on March 26, 1939 in Phanom Thuan District in the western province of Kanchanaburi where he remained until he finished his secondary schooling. He came to Bangkok for pre-university level and went to read law at Thammasat University where he graduated in 1965.

After graduation, Naovarat entered monkhood during which he journeyed south to study Buddhism with the renowned Buddhadasa Bhikkhu of Surat Thani Province. After a brief interlude of two years as a publisher and a year as a lecturer, Naovarat joined the Bangkok Bank Ltd. in 1973, first as a public relations officer and later as the director of the Bank's Music and Drama Centre, a post which he still holds.

Meanwhile, Naovarat has been writing both prose and poetry which appear regularly in newspapers and magazines. A keen flutist, Naovarat transposes melifluous music to his poems. He is a naturalist at heart. Buddhist and Zen doctrines also play important part in his poetry. He won the coveted SEA Write Award in 1980.

MERE MOVEMENT

A mere flutter of an eagle's wings
tempers the heat of the sun.

A mere trembling of a single leaf
announces the coming of the wind.

A mere glint in reflecting ripples
to proclaim clear water; no, not glass.

A mere little pain shining in the eyes
to declare the existence of the heart.

The clanking chains at the locked gate
make great the moanings of misery
while a pale light flickering yonder
whispers: "There's a way. There's a way."

The first long-waiting, sweaty, heated,
strikes at last—what bliss!—strikes and falls,
heaves and falls again, each time knowing
what it is to taste of bliss.

The stricken fingers, feebly clinging, move
strong enough to impart strength
like the slim weed blades that sway
their honoured heads above the rocky cracks.

An emptiness of four-zero years.
A stillness from four zero million.
Soil turned into sand, wood into stone.
Wholly still, unseeing, heedless.

As the bird heedless of heaven,
the fish unaware of water,
or the earthworm wrapped in earth
or the maggot blind to the filth.

Decay over the quiet bog does creep;
Yet out of the rot there arise
the first faint stirrings—the merest move
and a fine field of lotus awaits.

A promise astir, of nothing evil,
But of grace, and beauty, taking shape.
There amid the stillness murky,
the beginning is begun.

Listen to the temple drums.
Observe another Holy Day.
Hear the booming of the guns
mark the people's battle-cry.

Poet : Naovarat Pongpaiboon

Translator : Chancham Bunnag

DON'T RIPPLE THE WATER

Don't ripple the water
I want to see its infinite clarity
see deep to the moving depths
as deep as depths of the mind
as deep as end of the skies
or deeper than my eyes
on gleam of sun-glint bamboo leaves
whispering flute spins soft sweet songs

Little insect, do not fidget
don't ripple the water
breeze, don't ruffle the surface
let me drink the depth of thought
who is disturbing the water?
my mind, do you quiver so?
clarity disperses
life ripples like water

From "Whispering Songs of the Flute"

Poet: Naovarat Pongpaihoon

Translator: Chamnongsri L. Rutnin

COLD MOUNTAIN

Cold mountain
always swaddled in white
so tenderly cradled
to keep out the cold
one hand holds the moon
one hand moves a star
draw a white flannel
to shade flame of the sun
Cold sea
also mantled in white
rocking loving lullabies
to keep loneliness away
wait just a while
the sun hasn't lit his torch
bear a bit with the cold
soon it will be dawn

From "Whispering Songs of the Flute"

Poet: Naovarat Pongpailboon

Translator: Chamnongsri L. Rutnin

KHOMTHUAN KHANTHANU



Thailand's fifth SEA Write Awardee is known to Thai readers as the poet KHOMTHUAN KHANTHANU, but his real name is Prasartphorn Bhususilphorn. He was born in Thon Buri Province in 1950. Prasartphorn finished his secondary education at the Suan Kularb Boys' School and enrolled in Thammasart University studying journalism. His original love of poetry, combined with his journalistic traits, pushed him into the front row during the events leading to the 14th of October 1973 students' uprising. Years later, in 1976, his poems appeared in magazines. The name KHOMTHUAN KHANTHANU is used for poetical works, and KOSUM PHISAI for short stories. They are known and loved for the harsh and sarcastic tones. His associates named him, "The Iron Poet"

Since 1979, Prasartphorn took up writing as his career, working as a full-time columnist. He has had many books published as collections of short stories and poems, such as SAENG DAO HAENG SATTHA (*The Star of Faith*), SAMNUEK KHABOT (*Conscience of a Rebel*), NATTAKAM BON LAN KWANG (*Drama on An Open Space*) and KHON TOK NGAN (*The Jobless*). The collection of poems, NATTAKAM BON LAN KWANG, won him the SEA Write Award for 1983.

SONG OF A TITLED BEGGAR

Ten fingers i humbly join
head i humbly bow
down on the ground
at passing feet i bow
O spare me a coin
for my feeble frame
my sickly wife
my children all lame
I have only tears
tears are my
rice

O passing feet
should you hear me
throw me a rag
and fill me with glee

(chorus)

O passing feet tra-la-la
should you hear me
throw me a rag
and fill me with glee
tra-la-la

like a sparrow straying
from my ricefield
i stray
my accent's all wrong
but turn not away
you who look so fresh
so prettily clad
half a bowl of rice
i ask
some bananas
perhaps

O make merit for once
one coin for me to gain
your compassion i seek
beholden i shall remain

(chorus) O make merit for once tra-la-la
one coin for me to gain
your compassion i seek
beholden i shall remain
tra-la-la

lazy we were not
me and my pals
we sowed our ricefields
and we gathered debts
the year opens
and the year closes
and nothing but losses

money makes a brother
no-money makes a cur
i sing my song
my throat is sore
my tongue is dry
my belly groans
a rice farmer
begs for rice and moans

(chorus)...

SUCHIT WONGTES



Born in Prachin Buri Province, to the east of Bangkok on April 23, 1945, Suchit came to Bangkok for his secondary education. He enrolled in the Faculty of Archeology, Silpakorn University and graduated in 1969. Suchit started his career at the Siam Rath Newspaper. He got a one-year scholarship to observe and get a training in journalism in the United States. Upon his return, Suchit left the Siam Rath Newspaper and, together with his close friend and colleague, Khanchai Boonpan, he founded the Phikhanet Printing House, of which he was the manager. At the same time, to became the Assistant Editor of Prachachat daily newspaper, and the Editor of Prachachon Journal. He later turned over the management of the Phikhanet Printing House to his friend, and joined another publishing house. After a brief period, he set up his own printing house, called Ruen Kao, and has been ever since the owner and publisher of Sanamluang Press, and the Managing-Editor of two prestigious magazines : "Doen Thang Thongthieo" ZTravel and Pleasure Trips) and "Sinlapa Watthanatham" (Art and Culture).

Suchit took up writing in his school-days, focussing on short poems and stories. During his college days, he collaborated with Khanchai Boonpan and produced many joint works, songs, poems and poetic prose. An articulate speaker and folk singer, Suchit puts colour and melody to his writing. His archeological background also helped make his work meaningful and substantial.

THE SAGA OF KHUNTHONG

Wat, oh Wat Bote
With seven palm trees,
Khunthong went to plunder
Hasn't returned, why hasn't he?

Packed some cooked rice
Rowed off a boat to look 'round
Rumours came from afar
Said Khunthong is dead.

Riding in a car
Riding on a train
Crickets and parrots chanting
Said "Khunthong—Khunthong."

When Khunthong left home
The sunlight was dim,
Turned back to bady-sis he told
I'll be gone for some days.

To fight for freedom
For the dignity of Bang- Rajan,
And the dove was cooing
When Khunthong left home.

Shouldered a bag from Haad-Siew
Full of books called Saeng-Duen
And books with ink fading
Washed by last-night's tears.

Yes Khunthong'd been crying
Until late at home
For Dok-Champi gunned down
(Fallen and scattered), floating down Chao-Phya.

Son, oh dear son
Don't you keep silent (and loiter away).
Mother's come calling (and searching)
Father's sat up waiting.

You are no warrior
With no wounds nor scars.
You are small and slender
From years of book-learning.

Mother knows that her son
Is committed and faithful.
Father knows that his son
Is grateful to his land.

But who else will know this?
They aren't God-Indra.
Some mortal may've heard this,
But power blinds them.

You'd said that you knew
And your fight'd be peaceful,
But Mother and Father've waited
Many hours, many days.

Dok-Sanoh bloom in the morn
Oh, Dok-Cudcoa bloom at night.
After Pansa, (they've gone 'round
Around that Monument.

But no sign of Khunthong,
Only the constitution.
Mother and Father deeply saddened
But proud of their son.

*Poet : Suchit Wongtes
Translator : Savitri Suwansathit*

BUDDHADASA BHIKKHU



Born in 1906 in Phumriang Sub-District, Chaiya District in the southern Province of Surat Thani, as Nguam Phanich, a merchant's son, he was fully engaged in the family business after completing his lower secondary education. At the age of 15, his father died. Nguam became the mainstay of the family and carried out his obligations conscientiously.

At 20, he entered the monkhood in keeping with Thai tradition. During the three-month period, he heard the call of life. He did very well in the ecclesiastical examination, and was known as an outstanding preacher in the area. With his family's support, he decided to stay on in the monkhood, under the acquired name as Buddhadasa, the Servant to the Lord Buddha.

Buddhadasa furthered his study of Buddhism and the teachings of the Lord Buddha at Wat Pathum Khongkha in Bangkok. He passed the examination to pursue a career of a senior and learned monk. Instead, he travelled back to his hometown and settled down at a deserted temple in the jungle. His followers, monks and laymen, grew in number. At his temple, all monks and supporters must adhere to the Law of Nature, and observe the teachings of the Lord Buddha strictly. He named it "Suan Mokh" — the Garden of Liberation.

After ten years, Buddhadasa moved his temple deep into the forest, against the backdrop of peaceful hills, rich in trees and plants, and watered by sparkling brooks. He and his disciples carefully developed the place with a keen sense of conservation. From this peaceful temple in the jungle, Buddhadasa preached to the outside world, in his clear and forceful language. His preachings and lectures became widely published, and further translated into English, French, German, Laotian, Khmer and Indonesian. In his peaceful and quiet way, Buddhadasa differentiated the right and the wrong concepts, the misinterpretations of the Lord Buddha's teachings and launched a spiritual campaign to bring about peace in the world. His 80th birthday anniversary in 1986 was celebrated by followers in Thailand and other parts of the world.

DHAMMIC SOCIALISM

If we were to use the earth's resources according to the laws of Nature and within its limits, we would not need to use as much as we do now. There would be plenty for everyone for years to come, or even indefinitely. Nowadays, however, we are squandering the earth's minerals so destructively that before long they will be gone. Acting in such a way is contrary to the *Dhamma*, to religion, to God. If we were to use them as we should, according to the laws of Nature, there would always be an abundant supply.

A story about Jesus comes to mind. Jesus was able to feed thousands with just two or three loaves of bread and five or six fish and still have some left over. If people would use only what is necessary, the world would have sufficient resources for all. This is not the case, however, and already we are seeing critical shortages. If we were to eat and use only what we actually need, our material needs would be adequately met, and we would also reap the spiritual benefits of living according to the way of Nature (*dhammajāti*). We would feel calm and fulfilled, and we would not be under the power of unbridled desires (*kilesa*). In modern society, however, people are ruled by desires that know no limit.

If we were all to live together according to Nature's plan, we would see that Nature's way is one of peace. When people go against Nature, the result is confusion and turmoil. The role of religion is to solve our basic human problems in order to bring about peace, to put an end to turmoil and confusion. It performs this role by showing us the perfect, absolute power of Nature. We need to live in harmony with the way of Nature. When we do not, we are not fully human in that we cannot experience peace and fulfilment in a way that only humans can. When such is the case, we are no better than animals. Animals at

least live according to the way of Nature, and so they experience relatively little suffering. Humans have used their advanced intelligence to take advantage of one another, going against the way of the *Dhamma* and the way of God. Actually, we should experience fulfilment on a higher level than animals, but we make our condition a kind of living hell, a suffering (*dukkha*) even worse than animals, when we go against the way of Nature. Animals, on the other hand, do not experience this particularly human kind of dissatisfaction or pain..

These days we are lacking those special qualities of mind and spirit that make us human. We are only creatures with human forms. If we consider the human race in the best possible light, we would say that we are God's children, as it is written in the Bible. The reason humans are given the special position of being God's children and not the offspring of Mara or Satan or something similarly undesirable is because the world "human" implies a mind and spirit of a high level—higher than the rest of the animal kingdom possesses. When the mind is truly on a higher level, it is above all problems, above all kinds of anxiety and suffering. We are so far off the path now, though, that we can hardly be called human in the fullest sense of the word. Indeed, we cannot even be called the offspring of humans, let alone the offspring of God. We have strayed so far off the path that we are only creatures with human forms. We are no better than animals. We only have the feelings and desires of animals—eating, sleeping, procreating—and so we are basically on the same level with them. We are not living according to our human potential, according to the way of the *Dhamma*. In order to do so, we must go backwards and get onto the right track.

Every religion claims that degradation and death constitute suffering (*dukkha*). Today, however, we are in a state worse than death and the most excessive degradation because humankind is under the domination of *kilesa*. Physical death cannot equal the cruelty of suffering brought about by the power of the most overwhelming *kilesa*. Solving social problems really means going to their basic cause : *kilesa*.

It is almost laughable simply to speak of solving the problems of hunger, illiteracy, and illness, because these are not the real problems at all; they are only symptoms. The fundametal problem is the lack of religion (*sāsana*) and moral principles (*sīladhamma*) in modern society.

If we were to solve these basic problems, would illiteracy, hunger, and illness disappear? Even if they did not, people who had never learned to read could still be happier than the most literate among us. We might point out that at one time when no one could read, people were fundamentally happier than many modern people whose minds are full of book learning.

What use is food if one's life is but enduring suffering and anxiety? Would death not be preferable to such an existence? Instead of talking so much about food and hunger, we must understand that life in the truest sense is sustained by the *Dhamma* not just by food. If we do not live according to the *Dhamma*, we are not fully human. All religions hold this to be true. Not only are we losing our humanity, but we are in a condition worse than death, because at least in death there is no suffering (*dukkha*).

Because people have deserted religion and the way of the *Dhamma* numerous problems arise, making social work necessary. If people would just hold firm to the way of the *Dhamma* and to religion, none of the social problems we have been talking about would exist. Modern society lacks compassion, because people have become selfish and are attached to the idea of a self and what belongs to it. They are ignoring God's wish that we love one another, that is, that we consider the good of society before we think of our personal gain. For this reason, society's problems will continue to increase, and social work will be even more necessary. It is pitiful and even laughable that we will continue to deal with these problems by treating the symptoms and not the basic cause.

I have been speaking to my first major point: that is, that the highest form of social work one can perform is to help people back up and get onto the right track. That would be a true service to society, because people nowadays have gone so far off course that the world seems headed for disaster.

My second point is what the term "social work" or "social service" should really mean. Social service means service to society. The Council for Social Service was set up to carry out various kinds of social work. Why do we use the word "social," which clearly implies service to society as a whole? Why do we not use a term that

emphasizes service to persons or to individuals? When we emphasize instead the social-ism of such work, are we talking about the socialism that seems to be so feared and hated? These days if someone talks about socialism, that person is thought to be a Communist and is arrested and taken away to prison, but when we talk about the Council for Social Service, does anyone think of Communists or so-called Socialists?

Social service is a kind of socialism, but not the kind associated with Communism. Do not be deceived by the usual associations of the word. Many problems in the world occur because people misunderstand the meanings of words in their own language. Words have great power to deceive. On the one hand, socialism is despised, but here we are about to perform what we call social service. Social work is, in fact, a kind of socialism.

All the religions of the world, furthermore, are socialistic, not individualist democracies where people can do whatever they like. The founders (*sāsqādā*) of every religion have wanted people to live according to socialist principles in order to act in the interest of society as a whole. Whenever anyone puts personal interest before the good of society, *kilesa* takes over—that is, one becomes ruled by selfish desires. The teachings of Buddhism make it a particularly socialist religion.

A good way to look at the meaning of socialism is to think of it as not taking more than one's fair share—using only what is necessary so that the rest is available for others' use. Both in the teachings of the *Dhamma* and in the rules for the monastic order (*vinaya*), it is written that Buddhist monks must live with only the bare necessities.

In the *vinaya*, for example, a monk is allowed only three pieces of cloth for his robe. Having more than three is considered a breach of monastic discipline. If a monk has extra pieces, he must give them to the *Sangha*, the community of monks. The extra cloth cannot belong to any one person—only to the *Sangha* or to the community at large. As for a dwelling, the *vinaya* allows a monk a structure no larger than seven feet wide and twelve feet long. It is a serious violation of monastic rules to have a dwelling that exceeds this size. Such a rule is to ensure that a monk will use no more than he really needs so that the community as a whole will have enough. A monk, furthermore, is allowed a

single bowl for his food. If he is given more than that, it must be given away, because to keep an excess is to break another rule of the monastic order. All of these rules are simply to guarantee that monks will not take more than their share, so that others will be sure to have enough to meet their needs.

The *Dhamma* also teaches us to be content with what we have, that is to accumulate and own just enough to take care of our material needs. Accordingly, it places great emphasis on being generous with what we have. A true Buddhist community, even of lay people, would be content with the basic necessities of life. Whatever a person did not really need would be left available for the use of the entire community.

Let me give an example. A person of great material wealth (Sanskrit : *śreṣṭhī*) in the Buddhist tradition differs greatly from the capitalist (Thai : *nai thun*) of today. Outside of Buddhism, *śreṣṭhī* has the same meaning as *nai thun*—one who keeps accumulating material wealth far beyond what he actually needs. In the Buddhist tradition, however, the status of a *śreṣṭhī* was measured by the number of *rong than* that person had. A *rong than* was an almshouse, a communal place where those in need could find what they lacked materially. The more *rong than* one had, the wealthier one was considered to be. Because of the surplus produced by the *śreṣṭhī* and the large number of servants and labourers they employed, they were able to build *rong than* as a kind of social service. *Śreṣṭhī* in the non-Buddhist sense, however, are strictly *nai thun*. They accumulate endless wealth and reinvest all the profits for themselves, while oppressing their workers. A *śreṣṭhī* in the Buddhist sense, on the other hand, employs workers in a cooperative effort for the welfare of the entire community.

All members of the Buddhist community—monks and lay people—are not only taught but are required to consume no more than their share of material goods. Excessive consumption is wrong and demeritorious. Buddhism, therefore, is truly a socialist religion, both in its principles and its spirit. The Buddha said, “I was born into this world to help all beings.” He was not born to benefit any one person or even himself. The founders of all religions have affirmed that they appeared for the benefit of all beings, and all have spoken out against excessive consumption.

In this sense, all religions are socialistic. The word, socialism, however, inspires hatred. Socialists are said to be Communists and are arrested. How stupid! We have become enslaved to a deception generated by our own language. To carry out our task of social work, that is, service to society, we must embrace the socialism of our work; otherwise we are advocating individual-ism, or service in the interests of specific individuals. Then we are no longer serving society as a whole.

If you preach democracy, it must be a socialist form of democracy, not a democracy of individualism which fosters self-centeredness. Many constitutional forms of government, such as liberal democracies, allow individuals to accumulate vast amounts of material wealth. A socialist democracy, on the other hand, has to put the needs of society as a whole first. In socialist societies, therefore, individuals cannot appropriate excessive amounts of wealth for themselves. A socialist democracy is, then, in keeping with the principle of Nature (*dhammajāti*) that would have us take only what we need, thereby respecting the rights of all beings.

The problems we have been discussing arose as societies formed. When people lived isolated from one another or in small groups, as in the Stone Age, these problems did not exist. As the population increased and people began living together in larger and larger groups, social problems began to appear. As societies grew and multiplied, people oppressed one another and the problems grew to crisis proportions.

Because the context of all these problems is social and not just individual, we must turn our attention to the source of the problem: society. Whatever system is laid out for the functioning of a social group, the principles of such a system must be for the good of society as a whole and not just for individuals or for any one person. In a society that puts the interests of any one individual above those of the community, social problems cannot be effectively addressed, because the context of the problems is the way society operates as a whole.

The spirit or essence of socialism is the *Dhamma* of Nature (*dhammajāti*). The goal of socialism is the way of Nature. By living with only what we really need, we are living according to the way of Nature whether we are aware of it or not.

By Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

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