

## 2: The fathers of Khun Chang and Khun Phaen

The king, ruler of the world, heard from Suphanburi that there were many wild buffalo, and announced he would go to the forest.

He ordered Khun Siwichai: 'Go quickly to Suphan. Tell the valiant Khun Krai to get his men to make the preparations.

Five days from now, I will go to stay in the forest to round up wild buffalo. Have him find a big raised clearing near a stream to set up camp and a royal lodge.

Find about 500 volunteers to chase the buffalo herd in to me.' Then the king turned to give orders to the gallant Phraya Decho.

'Organize this expedition immediately. Choose only your own soldiers, along with horsemen and elephant troops. Be ready to move out in five days.'

Phraya Decho acknowledged the order, went straight to the guardhouse of the palace, and issued orders for the officials to convey the king's command to all their subordinates forthwith.

'The king will proceed to the forest to valiantly round up the buffalo.' The head palace clerks heard him and wrote out orders in a flurry.

They sent for messengers to take the orders and get things moving without delay. The orders were sent to the head clerks of Mahatthai who immediately had them distributed to everyone.

They went to inform their superiors: 'According to orders received, in five days time the king will travel to Suphan.'

As soon as he learned of the matter, Chaophraya Chakri summoned Phan Phut and Phan Jan to meet immediately at the inner assembling hall.<sup>1</sup>

He called Phan Phao and Phan Phan to bring the registry rolls immediately. 'Call up elephants, horses, and people all at same time. Get everyone's people here without delay.

Phan Jan, prepare the path. Clear away the undergrowth and make it level and around 8 wa [16 meters] wide. Be ready without fail within five days.'

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<sup>1</sup> *sala luk khun nai.*

Khun Siwichai, along with his son, rode his elephant across the fields towards Suphan as the sun's rays sank behind the forest.

He directed the elephant towards his house, then briskly wrote out instructions for his lieutenant to take to the loyal Khun Krai.

The lieutenant took the order, ran to his destination, and delivered the instructions to Khun Krai.

The valiant Khun Krai took the instructions, read them, and promptly ordered his overseer to chase down his men and bring them in immediately.

Once the orders were sent, it was time to light the lamp. Khun Krai went into his house with his wife Thong Prasi and his talented son, Phlai Kaeo.

That night was filled with ominous sounds of spiders beating their chests incessantly,<sup>2</sup> scaring everyone until their hair bristled and their hearts were gripped with a chill cold.

In her sleep, Thong Prasi dreamed a fearful dream which made her body tremble and her heart sink. She started awake in a state of fear, and anxiously awoke her husband.

Khun Krai asked, 'What's up dear.' She described the dream in detail. 'My tooth broke and flew out of my mouth. I don't think it's good. Please tell me what this dream means.'

Khun Krai listened and felt he was being destroyed. Oh no! Something is going to happen, a big thing. But if I interpret this as something too bad, Thong Prasi won't let me go off anywhere.

'It's not bad. It's a good dream. Something good will happen. Don't get worried. Just listen to your husband.' But in his heart he thought, This time I won't survive. I fear I'll die because of the wild buffalo.[15]

At break of dawn, he washed his face and picked up Phlai Kaeo. 'It's light already, why aren't you awake yet?' He cradled the child lightly in his two hands, and kissed him tenderly.

Phlai Kaeo opened his eyes and flung his arms around his father's neck. 'Papa, where are you going? Tell me. Why are you up when it's still not morning. It's like you're running away from me.'

Khun Krai listened to his son, and lifted him up above his head as his own tears flowed down. He hugged his child tightly with a sigh. 'Daddy doesn't want to go away at all.

But the king has commanded it, singled me out. There's nothing I can do, dear Phlai Kaeo. Probably, I'll be gone from now on. Things

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<sup>2</sup> The sound of spiders beating their chests must be very quiet. But it could be heard in the dead of the night and so was considered a bad omen indeed.

are strange and not to my liking.’

Then he turned to talk to Thong Prasi. ‘This is our only child, look after him. He’s still little. Take good care of him, day and night. Raise him well.

If he is naughty, set him right. Don’t alienate him so he gets fed up and runs away. Make sure to teach him whatever there is to be learnt, so he can carry on this fine family line.’

Thong Prasi sensed her husband’s instructions were different from anything in the past, and she was worried. The way he hugged and kissed the child betrayed a sense of loss. He seemed to be telling his wife something over and over again.

He had left many times, but not in this way. This goodbye was strange and wrong. She embraced her husband’s feet and raised them onto her head, with fires licking at her heart.

The more she thought, the more her heart cracked with trepidation. My dear husband is going far away from home. She gazed into his face with her hair bristling, her heart sinking, and her mind full of strange thoughts.

The valiant Khun Krai quickly got dressed and picked up his sword. He stole out of the house full of remorse, concern, and longing for his wife.

He look back to see Phlai Kaeo. ‘You are everything to me.’ His heart broke, tears welled in his eyes, and he felt confused. Then he quietened his heart, steeled himself, and set off.

He led his men out of Suphan town to Phra Hill just as the sun was setting. He ordered men to keep watch, while waiting for the king to arrive.

The king, the fount of prosperity, the source of everyone’s wealth, reclined on an ornate seat with glittering upholstery.

Surrounded by heavenly angel-like maidens who ministered to the king, the upholder of *thamma*, he listened to the singing of gentle lullabies, and felt contentment and joy in his heart.

Refreshed by the scent of flower garlands, and the brilliance of shining crystal, he pondered the affairs of state, until he fell asleep in the night.

At dawn, the attendants made preparations according to routine in every detail. The department of elephants prepared mounts of good form with a mahout assigned to each.

The armorers, right and left, carried the equipment to place out front for distribution.

The elephant handlers harnessed their mounts, putting on the saddle cloths, the **star-patterned** [??] face cloth,

yak-hair tassels on each ear, and the forehead-cloth [??] with a pattern of gold mesh. Several royal mounts, both female and male, were drawn up in the elephant brigade.

The Hibiscus royal mount for traveling, harnessed and furnished with royal weaponry, looked awesome. The royal mahout of great skill wore his fringed robe of office, and a lower cloth of patterned silk (*sombak lai*).

Another royal mount was harnessed with a golden tent, its round opening [?] drawn closed by two cords, a mat with gold-and-silver embroidery in raised pattern, and a cushion to support the royal back.

Another royal mount was harnessed for the king to ride into action,<sup>3</sup> with a padded seat on the neck for comfort. Another royal mount was prepared for overnight travel. Many mounts for different purposes, all equal in magnificence.

The mahouts wore patterned lower cloths, shirts instilled with charms to inspire diligence, belts with pendants, and sashes tied on top. Only the best were chosen.

Behind them came the mounts of other nobles. Servants milled around noisily getting them ready. There were many attack-elephants and many defense-elephants, each with its mahout aloft.

Ahead of these magnificent steeds, came a throng of soldiers, as if to make war with the heavens. Once the elephant brigade was ready, then the cavalry was drawn up with fine steeds.

Phraya Si Saowapha took care of the king's horses. Luang Songphon arranged the whole brigade. [17] The grooms harnessed the mounts, all nimble and swift.

The king's horses were outstanding, alert, and spirited, two magnificent black-and-yellow [piebald] dapples standing about three cubits (*sok*) tall,

with their harness inlaid with French filigree, glittering in the foreign fashion; the king's guns placed to left and right of the gallant steeds; the saddles embroidered with shining gold;

the gilded stirrups hanging down encrusted with jewels, glittering against velvet covers; the bridles exquisitely embroidered with gold thread; all befitting such beautiful mounts.

One royal horse was named Palahok [clouds, rain], and the other Kranok Pusa [Kinnari-tail-design garment]. Their grooms led them both attentively. Junior officers [*khun mun*] rode horses in the main

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<sup>3</sup> lit: sit on its neck

procession.

Nobles rode elephants following the king. Everything was prepared down to the last detail. The sergeant-major [*hua phan*] took the roll-call. Near to the time, all the troops were ready.

At the first light of the sun, the mighty king, before whose reputation all countries trembled, proceeded to the bathing place.

Water sprayed, sprinkled, and foamed from the showerhead, bathing the royal body in a delicate spray like rain drops, blended with fragrant rosewater. Then he was anointed with perfume and majestically aromatic unguents.

When he had finished his ablutions, he was fanned by throngs of concubines from the inner palace. He grasped the weapons at his side and went out to the hall of victory.

Promptly those in charge of the royal garments and headgear entered prostrate, one after the other, bringing the garb appropriate to dress the king for entering the forest according to the auspicious time of day:

hose with curved ends and double cuffs; lower cloth in dark blue with a gold stripe; a magnificent robe to be worn that day in indigo velvet,

cinched with a majestic sash in flower pattern with a gold stripe; his short-sword tucked on his left side; a royal ring with a brilliant diamond;

a royal hat decorated with yellow topaz against a black background; and the royal sword carried in the teeth to destroy the city.<sup>4</sup> He walked with poise to the mounting platform.[18]

The victory drum sounded to announce the departure. The vanguard of the procession, drawn up in ranks, dropped to their knees in unison to prostrate and *wai* the king, who promptly stepped up from the gilded mounting platform,

and sat on the Golden Hibiscus elephant. Horns, gongs, and flutes sounded, echoing loudly throughout the land, telling the troops to move out in columns.

The air was filled with the tolling of bells on the elephants' necks, and the clip-clop of horses galloping with long strides. Royal umbrellas rose here and there above the procession. Flags and banners fluttered and flapped overhead.

The brave, robust troops rolled out in a noisy, hectic, rumbling tumult which reverberated the earth as if it would soon collapse.

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<sup>4</sup> Meaning the sword from the tale of King Naresuan scaling the walls of the Burmese camp, an event which of course post-dates King Ramathibodi II (Red: 13).

To front and rear of the procession marched the infantry units with shields, swords, arm-guards, spear and lance; the cavalry, cheerful and imposing; the elephant brigade with vanguard [??] elephants and flanking elephants;

artillery soldiers carrying guns with bayonets; sword troops with their blades held aloft, glinting; lance troops on the flanks of the procession; with shield-bearers [arm-guard troops] in red shirts seemingly everywhere.

The noisy hubbub, along with sounds of gongs, drums, flute, shenai, and other instruments, echoed around the plain as they headed for the forest, crossing the river at Warin Landing.

All around, people, elephants, horses, and herds of animals took fright. Birds of all kinds took off in fear, swooping nosily this way and that through the woods.

The king traveled along the path of the golden mountain, looking out towards the hills, lofty, stark, and shading. Dense forest obscured the sunlight. Birds and geese cried out their warning calls to the forest.

Parrots perched squawking on *tumka* trees.<sup>5</sup> Bulbuls perched on a big ivy gourd (*tamleung*) vine.<sup>6</sup> Mynahs perched on palu (*ket*) trees,<sup>7</sup> hiding among the leaves; red turtle doves perched cooing on laurel trees.

Phoenix (*wayuphak*) perched on a branch of the giant *salaeng* vine.<sup>8</sup> Five-colored giant parrots perched on the jambolan trees<sup>9</sup> in pairs. Barred owlets<sup>10</sup> perched on the water jasmine (*mok*) tree<sup>11</sup> glancing sideways. Mountain imperial pigeons perched up on the banyan tree.

Doves perched on the *khoi* tree,<sup>12</sup> cooing loudly. Indian coel perched on the java plum tree, called out and flew away. Pelican ibis perched on *hiang* trees<sup>13</sup> in rows. Herons perched on *krasang* trees,<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *strychnos nux-blanda*

<sup>6</sup> *coccinia grandis*

<sup>7</sup> *manilkara hexandra*, sometimes called *khirni*, *pala* or *palu*

<sup>8</sup> *bauhinia bracteolata*

<sup>9</sup> *syzygium cumini*, java plum, jambul, jamun, jaman, black plum, faux pistachier, Indian blackberry, jambol, doowet, jambolan.

<sup>10</sup> *glaucidium cuculoides*, Asian barred owlets.

<sup>11</sup> *wrightia religiosa*, water jasmine, wild water plum, pendant ochna

<sup>12</sup> *streblus asper*, Siamese rough bush

<sup>13</sup> *dipterocarpus obtusifolius*

turning their heads to look for fish.

Partridge perched on the truck of a *dinso* tree. *Bakko* fluffed up their feathers and shrieked. [19] Crakes perched at the foot of the mountains. *Sroi ira* flew carrying *phumriang* fruit<sup>15</sup> in their beaks.

The range of hills rose up in tiers with overhanging rocks, curving cliffs, and streams flowing down glinting brilliantly like diamond or black sapphire.

The cliffs of the gorge converged above them, ending in an overhang that necks craned to see. Sal,<sup>16</sup> *rang*,<sup>17</sup> *pring*, *pru*,<sup>18</sup> and *pradulai*<sup>19</sup> trees sprouted in rows at the foot of the hills.

Some bloomed in lovely sprays of flowers, their fragrance wafted on the wind. Some bore fruit which lay everywhere on the ground, pecked by flocks of birds, and fought over by troops of monkeys.

Monkey, lemur, langur, and gibbon whooped and howled. Tigers crouched to stalk [elds] deer. Rabbit, porcupine, bear, gibbon, and monkey gamboled, swung, and leapt away in fright.

The way led through hill and thick forest, twisting and turning through the landscape. Moving quickly, the mighty troops reached a broad upland, and made a halt.

A royal lodge was erected in the forest for the king to spend the night. The king summoned Khun Krai to attend immediately, and ordered him to drive the buffaloes in.

Luang Ritthanon was deputed to make a stockade of stakes driven into the ground close together. Both received the orders, took their leave, and hastened to make the arrangements.

Luang Ritthanon called out to his men who were laying around all over the place. The corporal (*nai muat*) checked off people in a rush, and divided up the work of clearing and checking.

Orders were issued to clear bushes, level thick forest, and lop away the thick brambles. Some shaped the stakes. Some went off to clear grass. Some set fire to the forest and cleared paths.

Some hacked, some trimmed, some dragged and pulled. Some dug holes, some drove in the posts to form the stockade. Some cut, cleared, and chopped.

Some fetched creepers to bind the stakes tightly at intervals. Some

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<sup>14</sup> *peperonia pellucida*

<sup>15</sup> *otophora cambodiana/fruticosa*, *chammaliang*

<sup>16</sup> *shorea obtusa*

<sup>17</sup> *shorea siamensis*, a dipterocarp, Mc: *pterospermum acerifolium*

<sup>18</sup> *alangium salviifolium*

<sup>19</sup> *dalbergia errans*

trussed up lengths of wood. Some ached and collapsed with exhaustion, but overseers beat and pushed them back to work [must make long strides].

Some were so tired, they stopped work and fell asleep snoring. They woke with a loud thwack on the arse from the corporal [*nai muat*] and ran off in fright. All shouted in unison 'heave ho.' [20]

Some hefted, some hauled, some dragged. Some heaved to tighten the ropes. The stockade of massive stakes took shape amid shouts and cries echoing through the woods.

The supervisors kept strict watch, handing each person a blow or two. Men raised their hands in wai, until they could stand it no longer, their tears fell, and they stumbled into one another trying to escape.

A heavy rain fell on the forest. The men lost their way, fell down, and lay there shaking. Some crept away into the forest to sleep until sunset when work stopped and things cheered up.

Then some went off to gather vegetables, break off firewood, and hunt down ducks and chickens, while others stood around peeing. Some cooked rice and fell asleep around the stove, bathed in sweat, exhausted, and snoring.

At dawn, Khun Krai Pholphai summoned his lieutenants [*tanai*] en masse, then led his 500 volunteers out with great fanfare to seek the buffalo.

They slipped along the paths through the forest, twisting and turning between the hills and mountains. Their shouts and whoops resounded around the woods and hills. They set an arc of fire.

Murky dark smoke spread through the forest. Flames licked at the trees, burning them to the ground, killing cobras and turtles.

Spotted deer, sand deer, tiger, bear, boar, rabbit, and other animals could not stand it. Monkey and lemur leapt and swung away from tree to tree. Birds took fright throughout the forest.

Scared by the forest fire and the shouts of people advancing, the wild buffalo, big and small, in great numbers, were seized with panic, and ran around in all directions.

Some raised their heads, as when challenged, and stared with heads swinging. Others used their horns to butt a way to the front. In the melee of mad excitement, the sound of horns clashing echoed through the forest.

Packed together, the buffalo crashed into one another. The forest was in uproar with men's shouts, the crackle of fire, and the racket of gongs, cymbals, and drums, so loud that everything trembled.

King Phanwasa went up to his pavilion and looked around. He saw the hordes of buffalo, packed together, milling around, and crashing into one another. [21]

He called out, 'Hey, Khun Krai. Why aren't you driving them into the stockade. Do you trust the men alone to chase the buffalo while you stand around doing nothing, you useless idiot!

Khun Krai heard the king's command. He leapt up, grabbed a spear, and rushed out to the front. The men roared in unison, making the herd of buffalo even more agitated and confused,

plunging all over the place in panic. A buffalo with curved horns, bold and enraged, charged forward, butting people all over the place. Khun Krai rushed out to face the beast,

leaping, kicking, and stabbing like a windmill, thwack-thwack. Buffalo fell to the ground, dead as doornails, to the tune of one hundred beasts.

The remaining herd, even more panicked, maddened, and hurt, broke away, and charged off into the forest in all directions, leaving only the dead lying all over the place.

The mighty king was inflamed with rage, as if the prince-of-hell had blown a wind across his heart. He bellowed like a thunderclap:

'What are you up to, Khun Krai? Why do you spear so many buffalo? Do you mean to offend me? I saw it with my own eyes! Because of your fooling around, the buffalo have all fled away into the forest.

Hey, hey! Bring the executioners here immediately. He does not deserve to live. Off with his head! Stick it up on a pole and raise it high! Seize his property and all his people, right now!

Hearing the order, the fearsome executioners strode up and dragged Khun Krai away. They tied his hands behind his back, brought him to a stake driven into the ground, and told him to bow his head.

Khun Krai felt crushed to dust. His body trembled with fear. His *khwan* left him, as if a spirit (*phi*) had visited him. He yearned to preserve his life.

The blood drained from his face, leaving it white as a sheet. The feeling in his body ebbed away. Knowing his life would soon be extinguished, he lost his mind and shuddered.

'Oh, poor me! What a mess! Why did this all have to happen? On the day before coming here, I had a premonition – that ominous racket in the house. [22]

And my dear Thong Prasi had a bad dream. I pretended to

interpret it wrongly. But my bad karma has caught up with me, darling housemate. If you count the days waiting for me, they will turn into years.

I've had it, my dear, my darling. I won't come back to love you. My fate is to go far away from you. I'm devastated that I'm condemned to death.

A great pity, my son is still small. Will he know his father came to disaster?' Khun Krai collapsed on the ground, shaken with sobbing. Then he spoke,

begging the executioners: 'Now that I am about to die, please show me some kindness and consideration. Please inform Thong Prasi, so she understands.

My time was up. The king ordered my execution. Tell her to look out and fear the worst.' Then he broke down again in tears.

'Oh, oh, cruel world, poor me! What did I do so bad that I have to come and die in the forest, where my corpse will be prey for vultures and crows?

My dear son will not see my body. Thong Prasi will not see my face.' He called his friend Ritthanon over. 'Please tell my wife so she understands.'

Hearing the instruction, Luang Ritthanon could not contain his own tears. 'Dear friend, do not get worked up. Why be so upset? Try to concentrate and pray. When the time comes, that's it.

Who lives to pop up the sky, year in year out? Even Siva, Indra, and the moon must be annihilated, and descend from the heavens, from the sky. Those who are born cannot escape death.'

Listening to his friend telling him the way things were, Khun Krai gathered himself, and gradually curbed his grief. He put his hands together and concentrated on prayer.

He thought of the virtue of the Buddha and the dhamma. He paid respects to monks who uphold the precepts. He honored his father and mother who brought him into this world and raised him.

He begged for the power to proclaim to the gods that it be known throughout heaven and earth that he, Khun Krai, had made a mistake and paid for it with his life, [23]

yet he died with integrity, in the manner of a line of valiant and victorious warriors.<sup>20</sup> He stopped speaking, closed his eyes, composed his mind, and signaled with a finger for the chop.

With one blow of the executioner's razor-sharp sword, the life of Khun Krai turned to dust. His heart stopped beating. The jailer took the body away to impale on a stake.

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<sup>20</sup> lit. male elephants

After witnessing his friend's death, Luang Ritthanon straightaway wrote a secret letter, and promptly instructed Nai Mi:

'Hurry to Suphanburi. Tell Thong Prasi as I now tell you. The king has commanded that their property be seized, and she be fetched forthwith. Tell the dear lady not to treat this lightly.'

Nai Mai acknowledged the order and took his leave. He found a Lawa pannier, grasped a big spear, put a knife in his back sheath, and shambled off. In a short time he entered the forest.

King Phanwasa traveled in the forest, staying in his forest pavilion for many nights, and then resolved to return to the capital.

He ordered Phraya Decho to announce immediately to the troops of all ranks that they would return from this forest expedition at the first light of the sun.

Phraya Decho sent out written orders for all officers and men to make ready the procession, harness the horses and elephants, and draw up in column order to await the arrival of the king.

At the break of dawn, the king left his bed, bathed, dressed, arrayed himself with jewels, and ascended the mounting platform.

He mounted the elephant with a golden roof and curtains tightly closed on both sides. He issued orders for the troops to move out, followed by the defense-elephants and messenger horses,

the artillery, the infantrymen with sword and golden lance, all in ranks. The sturdy troops marched at a brisk pace, reaching the city of Ayutthaya in good time.

Nai Mai arrived at the house of Thong Prasi. She immediately asked, 'What are you here for? Come in to take some betel. Don't stand on ceremony.' [24]

Nai Mai opened his mouth to speak, but the tears welled up in his eyes and flowed down his cheeks. 'I'm here because Luang Ritthanon asked me. It's all here in this letter, everything.'

The letter was addressed to Thong Prasi. 'Your husband and my good friend, Khun Krai, was condemned to death by the king, and stuck on a post in front of the buffalo camp.

The king has given orders to seize his property, and fetch his wife and child. Don't stay at home. Run away! Get out of Suphan! This letter sent to you today makes things clear.'

Thong Prasi understood from the letter. She beat her breast with both hands and cried. Grief seemed to be tearing her apart. Racked with sobs, she collapsed in a faint.

She lamented over and over, in despair. 'Oh my dear, you are lost. You have died and become a spirit. Before you left, you were not sick but hale and hearty. It's not fair that you are chopped to death.

You were eternal and invulnerable. Nobody could beat you. But now your power has gone. On that night I had a dream, a premonition. When I asked you to interpret it, you said it was good.

Never before had you made such a mistake. Why were you so careless? Now your time has come. You have abandoned your wife and son. Who would you have us turn to?

Our property will be seized. What a disaster! Where will your wife and son find a place to sleep? We've had it.' She sobbed and sighed again and again.

She turned to look at Phlai Kaeo. 'Do you know your father is no more? You are your father's orphan now, mother's jewel.' She hugged him, racked with sobs.

Phlai Kaeo whimpered and sighed plaintively. He could not sleep until he had cried his eyes out. In grief, Thong Prasi lamented over and over, 'Karma has caught up with us. What can we do?

The house will be cold as a graveyard. The servants will be scattered to the winds. The Suphan officials will trample all over us. We cannot stay here any longer, mother's jewel.'

The servants heard Thong Prasi and could not hold back their tears. They came all together and wailed loudly. [25]

All of them missed Khun Krai. Some beat their bodies and lamented about him. 'He never got angry or held a grudge. We servants could always depend on him.

Wherever we went, nobody dared meddle with us, because everyone feared Khun Krai. But now they will all come and push us around.' The servants wept and wailed all over the place.

That evening, officials from the capital,<sup>21</sup> along with members of the left and right divisions of the guard and their retinues, arrived in strength, numbering almost one hundred men. They surrounded the fence of Khun Krai's house.

The acting governor of Suphan said, 'It's sunset already. We should make camp. It's the wrong time to make a seizure. We will draw up the inventory of goods tomorrow.

Light fires and immediately post guards all around to prevent people getting away. We will deal with this matter tomorrow.'

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<sup>21</sup> Literally, 'city, palace, treasury, land' the main ministries or 'four pillars' of the administration in the capital.

<sup>23</sup> There are several villages of this name. Given the reference a few lines below to Kamphaeng, this might be the one in Tak.

Thong Prasi saw crowds of people surrounding the house. In a panic, she got up, fell down, and stumbled around. She picked up Phlai Kaeo,

grabbed two bags of money, found an old basket with a hole, and lined it with a piece of cloth. In haste, she jumped down from the house, put out her hands to feel her way along a cat path, and hid in the shadows of the house pillars.

Bending down, she spied through a hole in fence, then squeezed through, getting her face dirty. She grabbed her son's hand, and ran off, avoiding the moonlight. She met a neighbor and begged her:

'Oh please, I'm all out of rice and fish. The whole house has been seized and we have nothing to eat.' The neighbor was kind enough to share what she had. Loaded with rice, vegetable and fish, they set off.

Outside the village, they climbed a tree, looking for somewhere to sleep. She tried to comfort her son so he would not cry. 'They want to truss both of us up and take us away.' She hugged him and grieved.

'Oh my dear Phlai Kaeo, mother's darling. Since birth you have never slept in the forest. Now you and your mother are in real trouble. You have lost your father, my husband, and I pity you.

That golden peacock crying out in the forest sounds like the spirit of Khun Krai. Oh father, please look after us tonight. Don't let a tiger, bear, or other animal chance upon us.'

Sitting on the branch in the darkness, she had a hollow feeling of fear in her chest and throat. [26] Worried that her son would fall out of the tree and kill himself, she tied one end of her cloth around his waist,

and made the other end fast around a branch of the big tree. There was no cloth to fashion a cradle. She stroked her son to sleep.

But Phlai Kaeo was too upset. His life seemed torn into a hundred pieces. He thought of his father and whimpered distractedly in self-pity and agitation.

He tossed and turned, scratched his head, and puckered his face in anxiety. Itchy red ants scurried over every inch of his body. Midges and mosquitoes buzzed around.

He yawned, 'I'm so tired but I can't go to sleep. My bum is so itchy, mummy. Come and do something. I'm being eaten alive by big bully ants, about five of them.

My daddy is dead. We couldn't stay at home because those officials surrounded it completely. I had to follow you here and I'm scared. We only just squeezed through the fence.

It's impossible to sleep with the mosquitoes and midges buzzing around and the ants biting. Mummy, come and slap them for me.

As soon as it's light in the morning, let's get away from here.'

Thong Prasi listened to Phlai Kaeo and cried out of pity for him. 'Dear child, this is karma, what can we do. There, I've chased the ants away darling.'

Both stretched out on the branch of the banyan tree. They soon nodded off from exhaustion and slept through the night.

Promptly at dawn, the officials and guard from Ayutthaya, along with officials of Suphanburi, went into Thong Prasi's house.

They seized the cattle, buffalo, elephants, and horses. All the servants, man and woman, young and old, took fright and ran all over the place in a confused uproar.

They got the housekeeper, I-Phuan, beat and questioned her until she blurted out that the mistress had fled. Silver, gold, and all of the property, including the staff, were entered on the inventory.

They went up into Khun Krai's house and seized the furniture scattered around, carried it all out to the verandah, and made a list so that the various officials would not get things mixed up. [27]

Spears, swords, old weathered daggers, niello bowls, silk, carpets, felt, velvet, white gold, brass, crockery, and anything of value was written down as found.

Five thousand in cash was put in a chest and bound with a thread and large seal. Two trunks of silver and gold items were locked by key, and carried out to load onto the elephants.

Looms for cotton and silk were put into carts. Mortars and pestles, pottery jars, and bowls were placed on rafts, taken for inspection at the provincial office, and then loaded onto elephants.

Within one night, the officials reached Ayutthaya. They went to report to their superiors, 'Handing over the goods seized from Khun Krai!' 'Put them in the warehouse according to the inventory.'

By break of dawn, Thong Prasi had resolved to take Phlai Kaeo to Kanchanaburi, and quickly dropped down from the tree.

Carrying the basket on her waist and leading her son by the hand, she could not help feeling afraid and in peril. They skirted the edge of the woods, looking for paths, and pushed a way through the forest.

Phlai Kaeo caught sight of papaya and wild olives scattered all over the ground, and his heart leapt. He begged his mother to run over there.

'Mummy, look over there, forest fruit. Please go and get them. I really, really want to eat them all.' She rushed over, gathered them up, and gave them to him

Soon they reached a lake and stopped to rest and recover. She took out the cold rice left over from the previous evening which she had wrapped in cloth for the child to eat.

Phlai Kaeo broke off some with his hands and popped it in his mouth. But it was so dry and chewy, he lay down on the ground and cried.

Where's the curry, mum? Give me something to taste. The rice gets stuck in my throat.' He screwed up his eyes, 'I won't eat it.'

Thong Prasi heard him and burst into tears. 'Where can I find curry, dear Phlai Kaeo. We're on the run, and on the lookout. The only thing left is some fish.'

Phlai Kaeo said, 'Cold rice and dry fish! How will we have any strength, mummy? If there's no curry, then just give me some fermented fish (*pla ra*) mixed in a bit of water. Quickly please!'

Thong Prasi hugged the child and cried. 'Your mother doesn't know where to get it. Darling son, we are in big trouble, so big I'm at my wit's end.'

At that, they set off along a path through the forest. Seeing her son so hot under the glaring sun, she wrapped a cloth around his head.

Phlai Kaeo walked behind, clinging onto her waist, in low spirits, with a face grim from hunger and thirst.

'Mummy, I've had enough. I'm fit to drop. My throat is so dry. I don't want to go another step. Walk slower, mummy, don't go so fast.

If I try to take long strides, I'll fall over. My feet are aching and all swollen. The ground is as hot as a furnace.' She lifted him up and dangled him from her waist.

When she got too tired, she hoisted him onto her back, and carried the basket out front as shade. Then she got stiff, and lifted him up onto her shoulder, holding his legs with one hand.

Her feet swelled up with blisters, so she hobbled slowly. Her attention wavered, she tripped and fell down, sending the child tumbling off her shoulder to roll along the forest floor.

Phlai picked himself up in a daze, and cried out, 'I almost died! My legs are stiff and hurting. I'm all in. From here on, don't pick me up, mother!'

The mother and son reached Kanchanaburi. Thong Prasi said, 'Son, there are people I know well in this town.' They walked about asking for information.

Her husband had once told her that that he had relatives on the upland at Cockfight Hill. They went there and found them. Without any delay, the relatives built a house for her.

Bit by bit, she began to earn a living, and to acquire some gold, silver, and property. She redeemed some slaves and phrai so they could farm. She bought land, elephants, horses, cattle, and buffalo.

People looked up to her with respect. She acquired wealth through trading. She gradually established herself and settled down there with her son for many years.

Nai Janson, whose home was in Red Saltlick village,<sup>23</sup> had long been brave as a lion, bold, and invulnerable. [29]

His expertise was robbery. He would burst in making an uproar and plunder everything. He attacked boats from north or south with takings worth the effort. At the same time, he made allies in Kamphaeng.

These thieves feasted together, got staggering drunk, and then played unruly games, fooling around slashing and stabbing one another day after day, with no cause for fear due to their invulnerability.

They loaded guns with bullets, lit the fuses, and shot one another, bang-bang! The bullets never entered the bodies of those hit, and they all ran wild in uproar.

Janson the fearless said, 'Hey, you lot, I have an idea. Today we'll go and attack Khun Siwichai in the house with a big fence at Suphan.

He is father of that Khun Chang, and his wife is called Nang Thepthong. He's a fat cat, many thousands. We'll carry off about five loads.

A fat cat like that has lots of servants, but our gang is big enough to match them.' Everybody agreed with him. They all got dressed up to look as fierce and fearless as possible.

They armed themselves with spears, swords, flintlock guns, powder horns, fuses, and Chinese lances. 'Bring up the elephants now! Don't hang about!' The servants grabbed their goads and brought the elephants along.

Nai Janson had climbed half-way onto his elephant, and was dangling there. His mate drove a spear-end into his rump, and shoved him up into the howdah, whump! The elephant trundled off — ba-dum, ba-dum!

They arrived at the edge of the forest near Suphan, and released the elephants to stay among the trees. Nai Janson made an eye-level

shrine with a white cloth tied above as a canopy.<sup>24</sup>

All the gang brought their cloths marked with mantra, lucky charms, spears, and swords, and put them up on the shrine. They made offerings of liquor, rice, food, sweets, incense, candles which glinted in their eyes,

sandalwood powder, and fragrant oil. The robber gang gathered around. Nai Janson raised his clasped hands in prayer,<sup>25</sup> calling on the gods from all eight directions:<sup>26</sup>

‘Iswara, Narai, Brahma, Buddha, powerful yogi and rishi, teachers with expertise in supernatural power, the moon, the sun, and other powers;

Wirun of the south, Wiru of the west, Kuvera of the yaksa, and Totharot, all the four directions;<sup>28</sup> [30] the gods of travel, Mae Thorani, and the Lord of Pali City.<sup>29</sup> We call you to action!

Oom, great lords of every land. Empower the tusk of a female elephant on the shrine.’ As they prayed and chanted incantations over the liquor, dark clouds shrouded the earth.

When the liquor was enchanted, each took a drink. Hearts flashed, ears burnt, flesh thickened. The power of the liquor visibly invigorated them. Each decorated his body all over.

Each had his own clothes and weapons. They tied bandanas with auspicious mantra around their heads, and hitched up their sarongs to look bare-legged and awesome. Janson, as fearsome as the others, led the way off.

The robbers walked behind on both sides. They urged the mahouts to drive the elephants ahead and arrived at the house with a

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<sup>24</sup> Robbers in those days must go through a ritual of Wai Khru (paying respect to their teachers). According to KP robbery in those days might be considered an occupation or a sport, and must have teachers. Ordinary people, after completing their rice growing in the rainy season, they became idle in the dry season. Honest people did other things but those less straight might take up robbery. Janson was a professional robber with a big gang of people. He looked out for news of any rich households for him to rob. Some of these robbers were so arrogant that they would make prior announcement whose house they plan to rob. This was like regarding robbery as a sport, so the robber challenge the house owner to a fight like a sport. The ritual they performed not only paying respect to their teachers, but also to boost their morale, to make their weapons effective and to invoke invulnerability. See KP:32-34.

<sup>25</sup> *Tang namo*. Must find this translation. According to KP:35, Chanson Tang Namu three times, this is a mark of being Buddhist.

<sup>26</sup> Red 644: Kuwera, Soma, Inthon, Akani, Yom, Suraya, Warun, Wayu

<sup>28</sup> deities of the four directions, Red 644.

<sup>29</sup> Red 644: In Indian months Thewabang and Chaloeutraiphop, formerly a city of yaksa called Asuramulakini which made trouble for tevada and rishi, so Iswara came down to stamp on them and drown them in the ocean, then renamed the city Pali and entrusted inhabitants to guard the earth. Lord of Pali City is worshipped in house foundation ceremony.

big fence in quick time. With axes, they chopped at the gate in unison, dung!

It splintered and fell with a loud crash, thump! They rushed in whooping and pounded loudly on the house. 'Ok tigers, let's go!', firing off their guns, bang! The uproar made the villagers tremble in fear.

In the chaos and commotion, the robbers surged in one after another. The villagers woke up in a daze. 'Grab them! Light the torches!'

While Thepthong and Khun Chang were still asleep, Khun Siwichai woke up with a start and jumped out of the house with no clothes on.

Robbers chased after him, beating left, thrashing right, throwing spear after spear, thrusting, stabbing and twirling torches. Others rapped loudly on the wooden walls.

Others ran around catching people in the melee. At the sound of gunfire, the villagers woke trembling and quaking, ran off in all directions, breaking down fences, falling out of their houses, and fainting.

Some stumbled around in fright and confusion. Some picked up their kids and grandkids and ran off, carrying baskets, bags, side bags, and whatever they could.

Grandma Lao jumped up with her sarong still over head, got in a tangle, and groped about for her husband. Grandma Tao ran round in circles inside the fence crying, 'Oi, chief, I'm afraid of you!'

Grandma Mon fell down and her basket rolled away, 'Ow, ouch, what the hell is going on!' Men and women ran this way and that, getting their backs and shoulders as dirty as if they were out in the fields. [31]

Kuai the Chinese scrambled up the riverbank, lost his trousers, stumbled along naked, slipped and fell headlong into the water. He crashed out-of-breath into a fish-trap,

mistook it for a crocodile and cried out, 'Machi bai sai buai suai ai-yaaaaaaa.' Grandpa Fang, bumbling along blearily, got his neck stuck in part of a fish trap,

and thought the robbers were squeezing him with their legs. Goggle-eyed, he kicked out. A morinda fruit<sup>30</sup> dropped and hit his back. He sat down, pleading, 'Don't hit me. I've got a bad back.'

I-Khaen ran and bumped into one of the forest robbers. She grabbed his wrist, thinking it was Grandpa Som. The robber said,

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<sup>30</sup> yo, *morinda citrifolia*

‘Eh!’ and kicked her to the ground. She got up and ran off frantically.

The robber gang swarmed all over the place. They tapped the house walls,<sup>31</sup> broke the water jars and storage jars, searching everywhere, whooping and hollering. They caught the mother and son and tied them up by their necks.

Thepthong cried, pleading for her life. Khun Chang was so frightened his body trembled and his eyes popped out. ‘Fear me, you hag. Had enough?’ Thepthong begged them to punish her alone.

The robber gang hauled them to the centre of the house. ‘Is this baldie your husband?’ Thepthong cried, ‘This is my son. My husband took fright, abandoned me and fled.’

The robbers brought fire to burn her bottom. ‘Can you stand this, or will you tell us everything? Where are the silver goods and valuables kept?’ They tied her arms behind her back, arching her body. ‘Don’t tell us lies.’

Thepthong cried out, ‘I’ve had it!’ The robbers put gunpowder in her ear. Khun Chang fell to his knees with hands clasped and begged them, ‘Sorry, please spare my mother.’

The silver, gold, and valuables, five thousand worth, are in the chests. I’ll tell you.’ The robbers whooped in glee. They broke open the big chest and brought out

so much treasure they could not carry it all, and dropped stuff on the ground all over the place. Janson said, ‘Gang, bring the women over here. Get them to sing chicken-flapping songs (*prop kai*).’

Janson sat on an upended mortar. The servants danced and jiggled around energetically. Some stood watching, holding torches to give light. Some sang, cha-cha, ha-hai, like the rhythm for a Manora.<sup>32</sup>

‘Hey, mother and child, get up and dance. If you stay still I’ll pound you into frog spawn! [32] If you don’t believe me, try it just once. I’ll poke you with a spear butt and then you’ll dance!’

Khun Chang and Nang Thepthong said, ‘Can’t dance without a flute and drum.’ The whole robber gang called out the rhythm, ha-hai, ha-hai! Some made flute noises, tootle-tootle-toot!

Khun Chang and Thepthong danced, jong-ja-ka jong-kram, looking forced and clumsy. The robbers said, ‘The boy is jiggling around okay, but the mother is hopeless. Her waist is stiff as a board.’

Thepthong took fright and jiggled in all four directions, jong-ja-ka jong-krum, without let-up, da-ding-dong, ding-dong, [kapong sai?],

<sup>31</sup> Looking for things hidden in wall panels [Prem 32]

<sup>32</sup> *mano phruat*, = *manora phruat*, the sound of percussion in a Manora ensemble

swinging her shoulders and bottom around to the rhythm,

waving her arms clumsily like a *khon* player, so her droopy breasts swung, du-nat, du-nang. Khun Chang leapt up and down, this way and that, frenetically, like a big monkey.

Khun Siwichai had no intention of running away. He rounded up the villagers, altogether a troop of about 200. They staked out the paths and stood watch.

They brought along guns and bows, fire ready to light gunpowder, and masses of lances, staves, swords, and spears. They split into many groups, and hid crouching in ambush.

Nai Janson, with the assurance of a big boss, shouted out to his forest robbers, 'Pick up the loads now. Let's get moving!'

The servants and phrai carried the loads all together. Nai Janson was out front. The mother and child, owners of the property, followed along, roped by the neck. She was made to call out, 'Nobody follow us,

or they'll kill us dead.' The robber gang guarded them in three rows. They fired off their guns threateningly — flash, bang! — and their loud whoops echoed around.

Khun Siwichai and the villagers, waiting in ambush, watched the robbers approaching. Then they too whooped, hollered, fired their guns, and bellowed at the robbers who rushed towards them.

Khun Chang and his mother slipped free. The robbers were startled and dropped their loads. Then they roared back at the villagers and leapt into the fray, slicing, thrusting, and hacking — thwick, thwick!

Blades clashed, cling-clang! Guns boomed, bang-bong! All was uproar and confusion. The villagers' thrusts were useless. They did not pierce the robber's bodies, but made them more enraged. The robbers rushed on hitting and hacking. [33]

Villagers fell dead in heaps of bodies. The injured, covered in blood, cried out 'Aaaaaah!' Khun Siwichai ran up slashing around, and came upon Janson. They rushed eagerly to fight.

Each thrust and feinted with their spears; stomped around, windmilling their arms and feet; measuring one another up, then pulling back and charging on, battling face to face.

Spear clashed with spear, sparks flying. Both were men of strength and fearlessness. They stabbed and sliced in a melee, using all their might and endurance.

Fell over. Advanced. Fenced with their spears. Jigged back and forth. Tried to twist the weapon from the other's grasp. At the end

of their strength, they grappled at close quarters, wrestling one another to the ground, and rolling around.

The robber gang gathered round and grabbed Khun Siwichai. They tried to chop off his head with a sword, but the blade did not enter. They tied his neck and stabbed it like piercing a log, but the blade bounced off, *teung!*

They chopped at his shoulders, *chup!* But the sword crumpled and broke off at the hilt. The robbers said, 'This guy is good! Look what he has done to these weapons!'

So they tied his feet together like a roasting pig, shot and stabbed him, but still nothing pierced him. The robbers were getting fed up 'Hey! What to do? Ah! I've got it!'

They took a stave and pierced his anus. Khun Siwichai's life was snuffed out. He died in the forest, eyes closed tight. The robbers celebrated their victory by firing guns

and whooping through the woods. They dropped lots of the plunder but did not bother to pick it up. The villages were too afraid to follow. They crept into the forest to hide and sleep.

At break of day, Nang Thepthong asked her people to go into the forest and look for her husband. She and her son shivered and shook. They went to search along the forest rim,

and came upon him. She beat her chest so hard her sagging breasts slapped against her tummy. She cried without let-up. 'My friend in hardship, you have gone and left your wife and child all alone.

Truly, what karma made you die such a violent death, naked in the middle of the forest, thrown on the ground? Maybe in a previous life you skewered a fish, and in this life you have been skewered to death.

You look pitiful, dreadful. Someone please pull the stave out of him.' [34] Khun Chang hugged the corpse, whimpering, rocking back and forth in sorrow.

'Oh poor daddy, my friend in hardship. Dead and gone from me. I won't see your face again. You've made me an orphan. Why should you be killed by forest robbers?'

The servants ran up in a great mass, and fell to weeping and wailing floods of tears over their beloved master.

Boo-hoo-hoo! Waa-waa! resounded through the forest rim. Some went mad with sorrow, and beat their breasts, *peung-peung!* They cried out in lament, 'Our master is dead! We have lost our protector!'

As the sorrow gradually abated, they hastened to carry the corpse

back and bury it at the cemetery, then returned to the forest to look for the property.

They gathered up all the goods which the robbers had left behind strewn all over the forest, and quickly carried them back.

Now to tell about Phan Sonyotha. He went to trade with the Lawa and returned with a fever. Siprajan nursed him until she was fed up. The fever abated only to return more serious each time.

A spirit-demon had entered his body, making him crave pork, beef, and raw sausage which he swallowed in incredibly huge lumps, lolling his tongue, rolling his eyes, nearing death.

Siprajan was in great distress. She went to call the abbot but it was too late. Phan Sonyotha breathed his last. The servants set up a loud lament.

Phim wept and wailed, wiping her tears away with her hands, and running around in distress. Siprajan collapsed to the ground, thump! and beat her breast, pang-peung! 'Oh my darling!

Your father gave no thought to young Phim Philalai. He made up his mind to abandon you. Poor, forlorn little child. Your father has left his wife and child all alone.

In the past, father, you went off in every possible direction, but you managed to stay alive so we could see your face again. This time you have been careless and met your death. From now on, we won't see you ever again.'

Phim was bent double with sobbing. She hugged her father's corpse in grief. 'Dear father, we used to see one another every day. Even though you were down with a fever, that was still alright. [35]

I could still grind your medicine. But now you are dead and gone to the land of the spirits. I can't do the job of fanning you. This evening, your dear daughter will not see you.

The house will be as cold as a cemetery. Father's medicine pot will grow mould, I fear. The mattress, cloth, mat, all of them, who should we lay them out for, oh father?'

The relatives of the clan also wept and wailed in sorrow, lamenting together to and fro, until the sorrow finally abated.

They bathed the corpse, anointed it with turmeric, wrapped it tightly in white cloth, and placed it in a wooden coffin in the big house. Monks prayed every evening for many days.

Siprajan and Thepthong both pondered deeply and then had a discussion. 'Our husbands have met their deaths. Doing nothing would be wrong.

We should have the bodies cremated in the best way possible, so

we do not make trouble for the spirits of the dead.’ Of like mind, they promptly asked monk<sup>33</sup> Som

to arrange the cremation at Wat Khao. Many craftsmen helped to make the *meru*.<sup>34</sup> They carved wood and crafted bamboo for the decorative panels and ceiling panels; hung curtains from the top;

and built a frame for fireworks. They arranged cooks for feeding, with nothing stinted. They had fireworks, crackers, and catherine wheels, to light up above, and plunge in and out of the water;<sup>35</sup>

a canopy (? *baep rong*) made with English gold, studded with artificial flowers waving on wire stems, and a pattern of intertwined *kanok* in glittering white and green clear glass.

On the front, they fashioned a brilliant image of Indra riding a three-headed elephant, wearing a beautiful crown of gold, surrounded by a *krajang* pattern combined with blooming lotuses.

When the work was finished, the two bodies were drawn a complete circuit then placed on the grand *meru* while flute and drum played a dirge. At evening, the fireworks were lit.

Bangers exploded, bing-bang! Catherine wheels whizzed up into the air, bong-bip! Strings of crackers crackled, krik-krak-krang! Screens were lined up for entertainments. [36]

As the golden light of dawn brightened the sky, the monks promptly stepped down from the small chanting sala. A puppet play was still going on energetically. People offered food, alms and robes to the monks.

After three days, the bodies were cremated, in the presence of crowds of relatives who paid their respects to the ashes, offered food to the abbot, and then promptly returned to their homes.

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<sup>33</sup> *สมเี*, which nowadays means a monk accused of breaking monastic rules, but Noranit:6 suggests it probably did not hold this connotation in the past.

<sup>34</sup> In Indic cosmogony, Mount Meru is the centre of the universe. The platform for the cremation is imagined as such a mountain.

<sup>35</sup> Prem 35 has water squibs