

### 3: Phlai Kaeo ordains as a novice

[37] When Phlai Kaeo's father died, his mother, Thong Prasi, fled with him to Kanchanaburi.

They lived there until he grew up to age fifteen. He could not stop thinking of his late father, Khun Krai. For over a year, he could not get him out of his mind.

He wanted to be a valiant soldier like him, so begged his mother, 'Please, I'd like to gain knowledge.'<sup>1</sup>

Mother, please take me to a learned monk and put me under his care so he can be my teacher. Let me ordain as a novice.'

Thong Prasi had no objection at all. 'If you want a teacher skilled in the inner ways<sup>2</sup>, the abbot of Wat Som Yai is good.

You have the right idea, dear Kaeo. I'll take you to Master Bun. You'll learn about martial arts and invulnerability. You can be a real descendant of Khun Krai.'

She gave orders to the servants without delay. 'My son, the light of my life, is going to be ordained. Go out and get some good-quality cloth

to make his *jiwon*, *sabong* and *sabailat*.<sup>3</sup> Also get the right sort of cloth-bag and a bowl. Get on with this all today. Ai-Thi and I-La, come and help me.'

The servants went off shopping. They already had betelnut, pan, and banana leaves. They stitched leaf cups, peeled betelnut, arranged the pan leaves, and rolled wax candles.

They measured and cut white cloth, and sewed it into a *sabong* with a nice flat hem. They cut out the *jiwon* and *sabailat* neatly with scissors, and sewed the pieces together.

---

<sup>1</sup> The word in Thai is *wichakan*. At the time of King Taksin of Thonburi there was a *krom wichakan*, with the duty of distributing charms for invulnerability to soldiers. This department was also a keeper of magical *montra*, texts about warfare and other sacred things for the military. To gain knowledge here thus meant to learn about how to chant *montras* and to be invulnerable, a necessary knowledge for soldiers. KP noted that Thai soldiers in those days did not wear armour like in Europe. They tied up their bodies with cloth emblems with various types of charm (takrut, *prachiat*, etc.) and rubbed themselves with enchanted oil, powdered their faces with enchanted powder for invulnerability. They fought with bare chests and no armor. Because they fought with faith that they were invulnerable because of the charms and enchanted *montra* that they wore. See KP:41-2.

<sup>2</sup> Meaning supernatural arts including spells, invulnerability, and so on.

<sup>3</sup> The three cloths of a monk.

They made the inner cloth<sup>4</sup> with soft chicken-skin silk, and sewed on silk toggle buttonholes.<sup>5</sup> They all sat round in a circle, making lots of noise, but working busily with devotion.[38]

Some went out to get turmeric, pounded it all up, then went back for some more. ‘Oh, have you never done this before? You have dyed the cloth too light. It doesn’t look good.

Pour some vinegar in. That’ll make the color look deeper and brighter. That’s fixed it.’ They laughed. They tied a clothes line for the dyed cloth to dry, then put the triple cloth on a pedestal tray.

The cooks, the very best, steamed and boiled frantically, their faces burnt black from the wood-stove. They cleaned the rice and put it in pans.

They boiled, made panaeng, curried river-snails, mixed yam-salad, made sweets, arranged fruit for offerings, and set everything out on trays in rows.

When everything was ready, Thong Prasi shouted at the servants in a tizzy.<sup>6</sup> ‘Ai-Mong, I-Ma, why are you so slow? Take the big bowl and fill it with water.

What have you done with the turmeric and dinso powder? Yesterday I put them in the crock.’<sup>7</sup> She bathed her son, getting rid of all the sweat and grime, than rubbed him with turmeric,

powdered his face, and combed his hair. Phlai Kaeo was dressed in a *phayok* lower cloth with a pleated front like folded leaves, a tunic (*suea krui*) with gold embroidery,

a conical hat (*lompok*) with waving flowers, a belt embroidered in two rows, and a diamond ring with a beautiful bright stone. He was given incense, candles, and lotus flowers to hold in a folded pouch.

Strapping Nai Dam was summoned to carry him aloft with an umbrella protecting overhead. Thong Prasi walked along beside. The gaggle of servants carried the offerings.

At Wat Som Yai, the offerings were placed in the front sala. Mother took bright-eyed Phlai Kaeo to pay respects to the abbot.

‘Lord abbot, I’ve brought my son to be ordained. Please teach him to be something of substance so he can make merit and share some of it with his father Khun Krai whose time was up.

Also, teach him to read and write so he can learn from an early

---

<sup>4</sup> *angsa*, red 656.

<sup>5</sup> This is a guess and needs to be checked.

<sup>6</sup> this is a guess, jai jai

<sup>7</sup> Red 656. *Kam* a pottery or lead container used to retain fragrance and exclude damp, mostly used for tea.

age.’ Abbot Bun sighed heavily before he spoke.

‘Such a pity Khun Krai passed away. His son Phlai Kaeo is very much like him. [39] His looks makes me think of his father. I’ll look after him, don’t worry.’

He turned to give instructions to novice Kong: ‘Call the monks downstairs. Lay mats and arrange the seating. Shave Phlai’s head and then bring him back.’

Then he went down to the big sala. The monks all came down together. Phlai Kaeo carried his triple cloth and paid respects. Master Bun initiated him as a novice.

When the ordination was over, Thong Prasi chivvied the cooks so loudly her body shook. All the monks’ bowls were lined up, and the pots of rice were carried in.

Everyone helped place food into the monks’ bowls, and then present the usual offerings. After eating, the monks chanted a blessing.<sup>8</sup> Novice Kaeo and Thong Prasi poured water on the ground.<sup>9</sup>

After the ordination, novice Kaeo studied diligently. He had a quick and nimble mind. Whatever he studied, he got quickly.

The teachers were dumbfounded by his cleverness. Among all the many elders and novices there, none could match novice Kaeo. Within less than one year as a novice, he had things by heart,

every book without exception including translated texts. The abbot had nothing left to tell him. He patted Kaeo on the back and the head and said, ‘That’s all I’ve got,<sup>10</sup> my dear novice Kaeo.

There’s only the big treatise about the important sacred formulas. I’ve been collecting them since I was a youth. Up to now in my old age, I haven’t shared them with anyone.

This is the limit of my knowledge. Because I love novice Kaeo, I’ll pass it on to you. There is everything—invulnerability, robbery, raising zombies<sup>11</sup>—something for every occasion.’

Novice Kaeo studied the master’s treatise. But thinking of himself, he still wanted to study further. So one day he went to pay respects and beg leave to go to Suphanburi.

‘I want to study further.’ The abbot was pleased and laughed heartily. ‘The abbot of Wat Palelai is very diligent. He and Thong

---

<sup>8</sup> *yatha sapphi*, a Pali formula chanted after monks have been fed or received offerings (Red 656).

<sup>9</sup> see Red 656

<sup>10</sup> The Thai is more expressive: that’s the end of my gut.

<sup>11</sup> *hong phrai*, ghosts resulting from a violent death.

Prasi know one another.’

Novice Kaeo took leave to visit his mother. Thong Prasi rushed out to welcome him. ‘Why have you come, dear son?’ ‘Mother dear, the abbot sent me.’[40]

My studies there are finished. He told me that Wat Palelai is really good. He said you’ve known the abbot there for ages. Please take me and put me under his care.’

Thong Prasi laughed with pleasure. ‘That’s right, dear novice. As I recall, in Suphan there are two good at the inner ways.

The abbot of Wat Palelai and the master at Wat Khae. I used to send food over there. He and Khun Krai loved one other a lot. I can take you to be under his care, no problem.’

She immediately instructed the servants to bring elephants: ‘Harness the female elephant Bu for me and male elephant Kang for the novice.

Give us enough to feed the monks both morning and noon. Ai-Sen and Ta-Pum will look after things.’ Within no time, food and other things were arranged and put in the howdah.

Everything ready, they all left the house at Cockfight Hill Village and crossed the grassland towards the forest. In three days they reached Suphanburi.

Entering Wat Palelai, they went straight to the kuti of Master Mi. Thong Prasi paid respects to the abbot. ‘I haven’t come to see you for a long time.’

The abbot was pleased and laughed heartily. ‘I have not seen your face for many years. Whose son is this novice, I don’t know him.’ Thong Prasi said, ‘Sir, my own son.

Since Khun Krai passed away, I’ve been a widow on my own. I had my son ordained so he could study and be something.<sup>12</sup> But he’s far away shooting up like a beanpole and going nowhere.

I want to put him under your care, master. Please give him knowledge and look after him. If he’s lazy and doesn’t study, punish him and cane him.’

The abbot said, ‘Don’t be impatient. If he doesn’t listen to the teaching, why should I look after him. But I’m not the sort of person to use threats. I’ll teach him what his own mind can take.

If he’s good, he alone will get the praise. If bad, they’ll blame the teachers. He has a respectable name and pedigree. If he sullied that, it would be a mistake.’

Thong Prasi laughed heartily at the master’s words. ‘Dear novice

---

<sup>12</sup> *pen bot phleng*, and be a lyric.

Kaeo, remember this well.’ She left her son, took her leave, and returned home to Cockfight Hill.[41]

Novice Kaeo had an agile mind like none other. He was diligent without being told. After three months of practice, he had sermons down by heart.

Whether it was the Mahachat, the thamma, or anything, he spoke beautifully with peerless choice of words, and a voice as charming as a cicada. Wherever he gave sermons, people loved to come and listen.

He soon gained a reputation for his proficiency. Villagers and market folk were nearly crazy about him. Elders and novices would skip the noon meal to sit chatting while waiting to hear his words.

He studied hard—reading, writing, recitation, and questioning. He absorbed the big treatises on the art of war, the sun and moon, auspicious times of day,

immortality, invulnerability, invisibility, and illusions used in fighting. He also liked studying love magic for captivating a woman’s heart without any chance of escape.

His master laughed, ‘Young Kaeo, I know you’re interested in the stuff about being a lover. Don’t do damage to people’s wives. But old maids and widows, take them!

I will teach you everything about sacred mantra and formulas. Your style will be as good as a precious stone.’ He spat out the betel he was chewing and gave it to novice Kaeo

to eat the remains. Then the master hit him with a pestle, almost chipping his skull. ‘There, it didn’t crack or bruise. Like hitting a stone.’ The master rolled about with laughter.

Kaeo fanned and attended to the master, who loved him more and more, day by day. He taught and tested the novice until his mind was quick.

When Khun Chang was in his youth, his head was as bald as a crane, while his chin whiskers and hairy chest were a mess, and his face looked like a forest monkey.

He fell for Kaen Kaeo, the daughter of Muen<sup>13</sup> Phaeo in the house with a big fence. He asked the parents for her hand and they consented. So Khun Chang got himself a wife.

She came to live in his house as bedmate, sharing pillows side-by-side for over a year. Then she fell sick with fever which lasted a long time, and developed into dysentery and piles.

---

<sup>13</sup> *muen*, a low military-official rank, roughly ‘sergeant’.

She grew thin, and her face turned hard and scaly. She had a huge craving for duck, chicken, [42] and unwholesome things. Her eyes became sunken. Khun Chang was lonely and miserable.

Watching his wife ache with fever, he gradually lost heart. In desperation, he sent for doctor Don, and left money on a tray beside the bed. He prayed and pleaded with him to give her medicine.

The doctor said, 'The disease has passed into the fatal stage. Treatment would be useless. The fever is so heavy she is close to death. Why didn't you send for me at the beginning?'

The doctor took his leave and departed. Khun Chang was depressed and full of remorse. He felt he was burning inside, and did not know what to do.

Before long, Kaen Kaeo's life was snuffed out. Khun Chang sat and cried. He arranged a noisy cremation, and frequently made merit to share with her.<sup>14</sup>

In Suphanburi, at Songkran time, everybody came to Wat Palelai wanting to make merit and give alms with devotion.

They crowded in, men and women, young and old, shuttling back and forth with sand to build sand chedi all around the wat. Monks would be fed on the next day.

In the afternoon, they chanted prayers. Everybody celebrated the sand festival noisily, then returned home to prepare food for the monks. They got everything ready, grilling, roasting,

making fish curry (*nam ya*), river snail curry, plain soup (*tom kaeng*), and red chicken curry (*phanaeng*). They sliced gourd and carved marrow.

They made *ho mok* [wrap and hide] in the ground. They boiled eggs, fried dried fish, and curried pigs gut and pork rind [kaeng buan].

They made jelly, tea, sago, and sticky rice with pork topping. On benches there were rows of rice fritters (*led*), young rice in syrup, oranges and other garden fruits,

maprang, langsat, rattan fruit (*luk wai*), banyan fruit, pomelo, sour orange, and finger bananas. Every house was in commotion until late at night when they all fell asleep in a trice.

At dawn, golden sunlight lit up the sky. Everyone got dressed quickly. Young and old, men and women, crowded noisily into Wat Palelai.

---

<sup>14</sup> She performed some deed or ceremony believed to make merit (such as feeding the monks), and prayed that part of the merit be shared with Kaen Kaeo to improve her status in her next life.

Phim and her mother were among them, followed by their servants carrying food to put in the almsbowls, and trays set out ready with incense, candles, and flowers.[43]

At the wat, they all sat down at the sand chedi and paid their respects. The wat was full of people laying out mats to wait for the monks.

The monks arranged their robes and came down to the big sala. Elders and novices sat in order. The faithful paid their respects happily.

Each monk was presented with medicines on a tray. They arranged their *sapai* [shoulder cloth] properly, and the initiation chant (*aratana sin*) began. Next, Abbot Mi chanted precepts.

Lastly came the pre-offering chant, ending '*namo.*' All the women scurried to fetch pots and get ready to offer alms to each monk one after the other.

They placed the offerings in front of the pupils, elders, and novices, then watched and waited to ladle another portion wherever the curry was finished.

Nang Phim devoutly brought bananas, sweets, and sharp oranges on a large tray. She carried a pot of rice and walked gracefully to offer from the seniors downwards.

Coming to novice Kaeo, she glanced at him and hesitated, remembering something from the past. 'This novice and I seem to know one another.' She ladled a big scoop of food.

She put in a big pile of fried pork, dried fish, chicken curry, halved boiled eggs, sausages, dried fish, watermelon, and a pot of curry, enough to fill him up.

Novice Kaeo had his head bowed and did not know who it was. Seeing so much food, he lifted his head with eyes opened wide and saw Phim's face, smiling with her eyes averted. 'Is she teasing me or what?'

'You're giving me so much my bowl is packed and overflowing. How can I pick it out to eat? Both sweet and savory, too much. But you don't give me what I really like.'

Phim broke into a smile. 'Oh novice, when I saw the empty bowl, I thought it was an old beggar.<sup>15</sup> So I put in heaps. Would you rather have me lose merit?'

Phlai thought for a moment with his heart thumping. 'I think you used to play with me. I can remember. Your name is Phim Philalai. You have grown up so beautiful it makes my eyes hurt.'

---

<sup>15</sup> *then*, an old person who stays in the wat in order to eat from the alms donations.

The monks finished eating. The abbot said the post-prandial prayer, and the monks chanted the prayer of gratitude. The lay faithful poured water on the ground.[44]

Everybody merrily and noisily bustled off home, singing songs and dancing to celebrate the almsgiving.

Time passed. In the tenth month of the year of the cock ending in a seven,<sup>16</sup> just one day short of the Sat festival,<sup>17</sup> the Buddhist faithful in Suphan had the idea of staging a devotional recitation

of the Mahachat<sup>18</sup> in all thirteen episodes at Wat Palelai on the next holy day. The lay elders held a meeting at the wat.

Some agreed to sponsor the Thotsaphon and Himaphan episodes. Others with lots of kids took over the Chuchok episode in daytime. Siprajan was allotted the Matsi episode.

The Great King of a Thousand Lives (*maharat phan chat*) episode, which had the audience rolling with noisy laughter, was scheduled for the middle of the night. Old Muen Si agreed to take on the nicely quiet and restful Chokkasat episode.

Nang Wan took the Julaphon episode, to be recited by Novice On, a new performer and very accomplished. Senior monk Jai would recite the Mahaphon episode, and Grandpa Tai immediately agreed to be the sponsor.

Grandpa Phat and Grandpa Kli took on the Wanapawet episode by the abbot of Wat Khae. 'Eh, who should we give the big episode to? It's not easy for someone to sponsor.'

'Kuman? Yes. that's true. Give it to the bald fellow in the house with the big fence. Nai Bun, you know him well. Pop over to Khun Chang and present him with this request:

'The Mahachat in thirteen episodes will be performed at Wat Palelai on the next holy day. As a devotee, this will be a chance for you to make some merit.

Siprajan and Nang Phim have the Matsi episode. There is still no taker for Kuman.' Khun Chang was pleased and laughed heartily. 'I'd be happy to have the great, great episode.

Don't spare a thought about the cost. Even if it comes to five chang I won't run away. I shall be born rich in my next life. I'm only too willing to make merit in such a way.'

---

<sup>16</sup> Guess, no idea what this means.

<sup>17</sup> Autumnal merit-making festival at end of tenth month.

<sup>18</sup> The 'great Jataka' meaning the Vessantara Jataka (*wetsandon chadok*) recounting the last of the previous lives of the Buddha when he achieved the Perfection of Giving. Such recitations became popular in the late Ayutthaya era and, especially, in early Bangkok.

Nai Bun hastened back happily. The villagers all began making preparations. Monks were asked to distribute the notice: ‘All thirteen episodes in sequence.’[45]

Khun Chang was expansive and generous to the point of extravagance. ‘You lot, go and fetch wood and don’t be long about it. You, weave some baskets in preparation.

And you, take this cash and buy all the everyday stuff to offer to the monks, everything. Find some good-quality cloth to make triple robes. You women, go and find the offerings for the episode.

You pound the rice and sift the flour to make round wheel sweets (*khanom kong*). Do it straightaway. And don’t stint. I want a hundred of everything. Don’t worry about using lots of oil. Just go and buy some more.

And every type of orange and garden fruit. Cheap or expensive is not a problem. Don’t be stingy and create gossip. I’m considered gentlefolk.’

Siprajan called out, ‘Phim, come over here and give some help.’ She shouted at the servants, ‘Come in here and lend a hand at once.’

They mixed the sweets, coated them in flour, and fried them in sputtering oil. ‘Hey, this fire is too hot! Pull some firewood out.’ I-Khong scooped them up saying, ‘Done to a turn!’

The sunset-hibiscus (*chamod*)<sup>19</sup> and wheel sweets were laid out neatly. Candles were cut and lined up so they would not get crushed. Shortbread (*khanom krup*) and crackers (*khanom krop*) were tossed in Phetchaburi<sup>20</sup> sugar and placed alongside, looking good.

Young rice mixed with flour was deep fried, then hollowed out with a stick for inserting egg, coconut and sweet palm sugar. ‘When they’re done, pierce them on sticks, Ai-Luk-Khon.’<sup>21</sup>

The crowd of servants milled around, scooping flour, helping one another with this and that, and making a racket like a khon mask-play. Siprajan shouted at them and chivvied them, ‘Bring that over carefully! Don’t throw them, they’ll break!’

The sponsor of the Thotsaphon episode woke and got up before the cock. Before dawn, he rushed over to Wat Palelai with all the offerings for the episode,

---

<sup>19</sup> Mc: musk mallow

<sup>20</sup> *Phripphri*.

<sup>21</sup> guess, especially last bit about ai luk khon.

and laid it out on trays in the preaching hall. He lit incense and candles before the Buddha and left them burning. A senior monk chanted precepts and spoke sharing the merit. The Pali *junniyabot*<sup>22</sup> was said.

The Thotsaphon and Himaphan episodes were soon over, and the stage was set up anew for the Mahaphon episode by senior monk Jai. When that was over, the monks returned to their kuti.[46]

Khun Chang woke late and washed his face in a panic. ‘You lot, come over here everybody. Eh, I’ve forgotten the offering for the performance.

I’ve been a widower for many years. There’s nobody to do these things. I can’t carve papaya into animal shapes. Is there anybody here who can do it?

If there’s nobody in our household, we’ll have to go and find some carvers elsewhere.’ Nang Muang spoke up, ‘Me. I can give it a try and I’ll soon get the hang of it.’

They bought a Chinese basket of papaya. She cut, carved, and trimmed them all in no time, and decorated them with bunches of *yo*<sup>23</sup> seeds and leaves<sup>24</sup> set in lines on the top.

She carved an abbot riding on an elder, novices side by-side, placed in front, and vultures eating a corpse. It all looked odd. *Dok rak* and *dao ruang* flowers were slotted in among them.

Khun Chang was delighted. As reward, he gave her a ring made of brass which was not that expensive but several fucang. Nang Muang took it and put it on her finger.

He then ordered the servants to carry along the offerings for the episode. They made a noisy procession along the road, making people talk. ‘Be careful with all the offerings for the episode.

If you drop or lose anything, I’ll kick you along like a ball.’ The servants hefted the offerings along, shouting as they went to Wat Palelai.

The offerings were set down in rows in front of the big sala. Everybody had come to watch, and people milled around in a noisy crowd.

Phim summoned the servants. ‘Make the usual offering for the

---

<sup>22</sup> Phrases from the Pali version of the story, pronounced at the start of the episode and other break-points, perhaps to allow listeners to follow in the Pali text, or just as a stylized reminder of the Pali version considered more meritorious to listen to.

<sup>23</sup> *morinda citrifolia*, noni, Indian mulberry

<sup>24</sup> this line very difficult, and this is a guess

episode for me.' Samli went off to fetch betelnut and pan leaf.

Others brought lots of papaya to slice up and carve. They added color to make the figures bright and attractive. They set up the whole display as a mountain range.

They carved a lion with a full face standing in a majestic pose; deities worshipping Brahma; Indra soaring through the air holding a crystal;

and Narai mounted on Garuda, leaping across the sky.[47] 'Carry them along for everyone to see.' The servants set off immediately,

and put them on display in the sala. The lay faithful crowded around to look. 'Oh, they did everything and so beautifully!' 'All that hard work was certainly not wasted!'

'The animals look real, both the standing ones and the sitting ones.' 'Outstanding! As clear as a painting.' 'They know how to carve!' The whole preaching hall was full of loud praise.

Approaching the time, Khun Chang ordered his servants to fill a big bowl with water. The servants carried water one after another and filled the bowl to the brim.

Khun Chang bathed cheerfully. Servants crowded around scrubbing him until the grime flowed away, then rubbed his body all over with turmeric.

But his skin was still as green as water hyacinth. 'Quick, the Mahaphon episode is almost finished.' Back in his room, he dissolved dingo powder in water and patted all over his body so his belly had a pattern.

He scooped up pomade and shaped his hair like a wing, parted to hide his bald pate. But in the middle it was still as bare as a buffalo's water-hole. 'My head is a disaster! I'm so ashamed.'

He put on a *yok* lower-cloth in a *kanok* pattern with golden Hongsa like a royal garment that nobody else could possibly have. He added a wool sash (*kiao*) embroidered with gold and garlands of flowers, and a pink handkerchief.

'Today, I'll dress to the hilt. I'll show off to Phim and make her smile.' On his little finger, he put a snake ring in wasp-nest shape; on his index finger, a diamond ring;

and on his wedding finger, a ring decorated with rubies. 'Like this, Phim, is almost mine! This set of rings with five jewels belonged to my father. The people of Suphan must admit that I'm a rich fellow.'

He crept over to look at himself in the big mirror. 'Ugh! My head is awful. Like Long Khi.<sup>25</sup> Yet a bad head can still have good status.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> no idea whether this is right, or what it might be a reference to

You lot, come here and take the mats.

About ten of you, come with me. But follow my arse and don't go off anywhere. Ai-Jit, carry the water jug and the bronze<sup>27</sup> betel tray, and don't give yourself airs and graces.'

Khun Chang came down from the house. He strutted along with his head in the air, nodding in greeting to bystanders. Before long he was bathed in sweat like a butting buffalo.[48]

At the big preaching hall, the lay elders were all gathered in front. They made way for Khun Chang to enter. His servants laid the reed mat, and Khun Chang sat, striking a dignified pose.

A group of friends came over to greet him and chit-chat. Some of them had big mouths and talked too much: 'My god, why are you sweating like this.'

Khun Chang was offended and snapped his face away. 'People should not pass remarks.' He looked away and called for pillows, pointing his hand, 'Hey you!'

He gave instructions for his servants to arrange the offerings for the episode: 'The taro, the potato, heaps of it, white sugarcane, red sugarcane, water melon, pomelo, maduk, mafai,

sunset-hibiscus and wheel sweets, red sticky rice, *hin fon thong*, clam savories (*khrong khreng*), big melons—pile things up outside the sala! Put them in order! Don't muddle things up!

Bring in the monks' robes and bowls, the mats, mattresses, seats and cushions! And don't hide away the offering for the episode! Carry it out in front of the tray for the monk's robes.

Now light the incense and votive candles. The inauguration of the recitation is coming soon.' The lay elders and others lit candles and offered flowers in worship.

Phim said, 'It's almost time for our episode. Let's go, mother.' She hurried off to bathe and change her clothes.

She briskly rubbed turmeric all over her body, shaped her hairline, put oil on her hair, and powdered her face so it glowed like the sheen of a gourd.

She polished her teeth shiny jet black so they glinted in the mirror. She put on a *yok* lower cloth in *kanok* pattern on red background with a glittering golden floral (*kanyaeng*)<sup>28</sup> motif.

---

<sup>26</sup> *phu di*,

<sup>27</sup> *nak*

<sup>28</sup> 'branches competing', flower and stem patterns inside a mesh grid.

She put on a *sabai* breastcloth in soft pink, overlaid by an elegant ruby-colored cloth with gold stripes and brilliant floral garlands, bound to delight the men.<sup>29</sup>

She added a diamond ring decorated with rubies and gems, and on her little finger a snake ring with a moving tongue. ‘Come here everybody, bring the bronze betel set and the enamel bowl.’

The servants powdered themselves, got dressed, combed and oiled their hair, and trimmed their hairlines.[49] Everything was ready in front of the house in good time.

When Siprajan saw her daughter, she said: ‘I’m already white-haired and past it. Why should I get dressed up. A Tani<sup>30</sup> lower cloth and shawl with gold flowers are enough.’

Her daughter laughed heartily. ‘Mother dear, aren’t you ashamed you’ll look out of place?’ Siprajan looked at herself and cried, ‘Karma, karma.’ She changed into a lower cloth in black check, and wrapped herself in a pakoma.

Siprajan led the way with Phim following, looking as beautiful as a court lady. The ranks of servants brought up the rear, hefting the offering for the episode.

The preaching hall was bright with incense and candles. Mother and daughter laid out their mats, sat down, and prostrated to pay their respects.

The monks finished recitation of the Kuman episode. The bald-headed sponsor rushed to make his offerings while the *piphat* music ensemble played.

Phim and Siprajan had their servants carry in the offering for their episode—almsbowls, cloth-bags, articles for everyday use, trays, triple robes, oranges and many other fruits,

and various sweets. Everything was set out in rows with the offering for the episode in front. The *piphat* ensemble played louder.

The abbot called novice Kaeo who responded, ‘I’m here.’ ‘I’ve been sick for several days. I’m not up to it. You give the Matsi recitation instead of me.’

Novice Kaeo paid his respects and rushed off in a flap. He grabbed Matsi and began reading. He memorized the words and practiced reciting in the style of his teacher, until he had got it down pat.

---

<sup>29</sup> In the old way of clothing the top half of a woman’s body, there were two layer of cloth. In this case Phim wore a soft pink silk *sabai* as the first layer, overlaid by a second *sabai* of red ruby colour. The inner layer was probably wound round the breast tightly like a modern day bra. See KP:54-5.

<sup>30</sup> Presumably Pattani.

He even committed the Pali verse and *junniyabot* accurately to memory. Then he called novice On: ‘Come and carry the text for me.’

Novice On agreed and went off to arrange his chicken-skin colored upper cloth. Then he picked up the bundle of texts and waited ready at the stairs.

It was evening. To give the recitation, novice Kaeo changed clothes, putting on a novitiate robe (*dong krong*) which clung tight to his body. He went to pay respects to Master Mi. [50]

Leaving the abbot’s room, he prayed and recited a spell (*sek*) over colored beeswax. With novice On carrying the text in front, they walked from the kuti to the sala.

He sat below the monks and composed himself. His eyes slid sideways and saw Phim’s soft face. She glanced up and their eyes met. Shyly, she bowed her head and kept still.

Novice Phlai repeated a love formula (*rai lalua*) to join their hearts and eyes by special power (*wisetsi*). The power of the mantra made Phim succumb and drew her gaze irresistibly to meet his.

As their eyes met, he nodded to her with warmth and desire welling in his heart. ‘Please come closer. The abbot is not coming. He’s sick.

So he had me come to give the recitation. As patron of this episode, what do you say?’ Phim smiled and replied, ‘Whoever. To me it’s the same. I’m indifferent.

I’m not saying whether master or novice is bad or good. As long as it follows the Pali.’ While speaking, she smiled, and met his eyes. She handed the betel tray to Saithong,

who knelt and placed the betel tray as offering. He went up to the pulpit, picked up the text, cradled it carefully in his hands, and read faultlessly from the *junniyabot*

up to the passage when Queen Matsi met the lord of the tigers and lions and begged to pass by on a bright moonlit night.

She reached the ashram, and was chilled not to find her beloved children. She sobbed with grief, and set out to search for them.

The sound of ‘*sathu*’ rose from the audience in unison as all were inspired to devotion. Nang Phim took off her ruby shawl,

folded it, paid respects three times, and joyfully laid it on the offering tray. She remained kneeling with hands clasped offering prayers full of devotion.

‘I salute the almighty power. I offer alms. May I have rank and servants into the future, and be rich and joyful in every way.’ She returned to her seat and listened attentively.

Khun Chang watched her offer the cloth. ‘Oho! Even a woman can do that! If I sit quiet here, I’ll lose face by comparison. People will gossip.’[51]

He spoke out: ‘Salutation and rejoicing (*sathu mothana*)! Such deep devotion! Even though I’m not the patron of this episode, I feel moved to great devotion.’

He turned to look at Phim with a smile, and took off the embroidered cloth he used as a shawl. He folded it, raised it above his head in clasped hands, and made a prayer:

‘I salute the almighty power who has a heart of loving kindness. Please grant fulfillment to my mood of love, quickly, as my heart desires, within this evening, without fail.’

He placed his cloth beside that of Phim. ‘May the ruby cloth not escape me. May it miraculously float this way, before too long, within the evening of this day.’

Phim felt greatly offended and disgusted. She clicked her tongue and spat in shame. She ordered servants to pick up the tray.

I-Phrom and I-Bu understood their mistress’ feeling. They walked straight over, picked up the tray with the cloth, and passed it over the head of Khun Chang in the middle of the sala. Khun Chang stared fixedly ahead, feeling angry.

Saithong cried out, ‘Hey, I-Phrom! The end of the cloth brushed his head. Didn’t you see? Such bad manners! No trifle! Let’s go Phim. Don’t listen.’

Phim strode out. ‘I’m so ashamed. Really and truly. Oh dear me. He’s not a farmer’s son but he knows no better!’ She returned straight home, calling him names.

After Phim left, novice Kaeo was love-struck and in turmoil. He skipped through the rest of the recitation, cutting it short.

He reached the final verses of the episode, brought the recitation to an end, and came straight down from the pulpit. The Sakkarabap episode followed, and the recitation continued until all thirteen episodes were complete.

The lay faithful, male and female, poured water onto the ground from cups and bowls, expressed their appreciation of the abbot, and left at 2 a.m.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> *song yam*

Deep in the night, the wind blew softly and the moon shone brightly. In the quiet stillness of Wat Palelai, the little novice could not get her out of his troubled mind. [52]

‘Oh my soft, fair Phim. After you left, did you think of me at all? Or did you forget me just like that, my gorgeous?’ He moaned and groaned over half the night.

‘What must I do to get Phim?’ His mind would not stay still. He sobbed, ‘I love Phim so much I want to swallow her. All the millions of other women don’t interest me at all.

If we can share a pillow, I’ll sweep you up and adore you so there’s not a single night without love. What must I do, precious Phim, to talk with you just two words?

I don’t even know where you live. When I met you it was almost dark. I saw your face only in the middle of presenting the thamma. That damn Khun Chang messed things up.

You took the servants off home in a boiling rage. I lost my cool and made lots of mistakes in the recitation. After you disappeared, I felt so miserable. I’ll find you by guesswork.

Even if you’re hidden away in some hill or valley, I’ll find you, wherever.’ The more he thought of her, the worse it got. The cock hastened the passing of the night.

He hugged Phim’s ruby cloth, kissing it, stroking it, inhaling its fragrance to bathe his heart. He pined his way through the night until the first streaks of the sun before dawn.

Near dawn, while Phim was sleeping soundly, she began to dream. She and Saithong were swimming briskly across a stretch of water.

At the shore, her feet touched and she stood up. Saithong handed her a fragrant golden lotus flower. She wrapped it in her breastcloth, awash with joy, then made her way back across the water.

As the dream ended, she woke up. Missing the golden lotus, she groped around for it. ‘Oh what a pity! It’s gone.’

She promptly shook Saithong awake and told her the dream. ‘Something is going to happen. Tell me what it means, please, pretty please!’

Saithong knew the meaning without a shadow of doubt. ‘I have been noticing things for some time. Don’t be worried, my darling.

Dreaming about having a lotus means you are going to have a lover. It seems this man isn’t far away. Perhaps you’ll get him very soon.[53]

The fact that you dreamed I picked the lotus and handed it to you probably means you’ll depend on me in the time ahead. If you get

what you desire, be kind to Saithong and you'll get good in return.'

Phim cried out, 'Oh, Saithong! Why do you come up with this interpretation? We've been together for years. Where did you see any hint of such a thing?

Have you ever seen me all het up and restless and irritable? Is that why you're teasing me? I may have dreamed of a golden lotus and it may still be there in my mind's eye, but I don't agree this means a man for me.

In the dream it was you who picked the lotus. If the man goes straight for you, I'll laugh. Please give me a better interpretation. Just a pot of silver or a pot of gold would do.'

Thinking of Phim, Khun Chang could not go to sleep. He tossed and turned, pined and longed, 'Oh my Phim Philalai!

When you shouted at me, it sounded so mellow, so crystal clear. You are so graceful, elegant, slender. Among thousands of girls, there is none other quite the same.

You were wearing a ruby shawl trimmed with gold over your green *sabai*. Your arms are elegant. Your bottom is enchanting. When you glanced my way, your eyes were beautiful.

What must I do to hold you tight! I'll lift you over my head. I'll fondle and caress you all the time. I'll put food in your mouth to eat.

For traveling, I'll invite you to ride an elephant. For sleeping, I'll give you a fragrant perfume. For bathing, I'll make a shower to spray. I'll not allow the earth to touch and irritate your body.

I love you as much as my own life. But I fear I'm wasting my thoughts. Your intentions are not the same. I fear you'll hate my ugly body. Even if you loved me, you'd worry about your reputation.

Stop thinking about it. Why fret now? Whether it turns out well or badly, let's find that out first. If she's free, I'll use some tricks. A good wind may soften her up.'

He opened his mosquito net. 'Is it dawn yet? Oh, the moon is still high in the sky. Tomorrow I'll go to find my radiant Ketsuriyong<sup>32</sup> for sure!'

538/6323/Kyoto

---

<sup>32</sup> [Red 658] name of heroine in Suwannahong. Hero Suwannahong flies a kite which comes down in Mattan land at the palace of Queen Ketsuriyong. Suwannahong follows the string, meets her, and has her.