

## 7: Phlai Kaeo marries Phim

[I/122] Once Phim disappeared from sight, Phlai Kaeo felt stunned. The spirit sped across the grasslands,

soared and swooped on the wind past lakes, roads, and landings, and gleefully entered Kanburi. They arrived at the house just as the light came up, and the spirit disappeared.<sup>1</sup>

Phlai Kaeo quietly entered his mother's house and peered around. His heart was still in Suphanburi, and thinking of Phim made him gloomy.

'Oh Phim, my friend for life. By now, you'll be forlorn and tearful because we're far apart. How I miss you, Phim of mine!

If you'd come with me, you could come and wai mother. You must be suffering beyond belief, my darling. Who'll cheer you up?' He walked into the rucan.

He embraced his mother's feet with tears flowing. Thong Prasi was surprised to see him. 'Oh Kaeo, why did you disrobe?

What happened to you, my dearest? You can't stop crying and won't raise your face. Where did you get this money?' Her own tears fell for her beloved son.

Phlai knelt and paid respects at her feet. 'Mother dear, I'm going through a very bad time. Worse than bad – unbearable. Phim and I are in love.

The money came from her. When I left her, she gave me five chang as capital so I can go to ask her mother Siprajan for her hand. Don't tell anyone or there'll be consequences.

Please be kind to your son, mother. Phim is miserable, waiting for me. Have pity on her. Don't treat all this lightly.'

Thong Prasi said, 'Karma comes, karma goes! Oh Kaeo, my darling, stay in the monkhood. Don't take a wife yet. Let your mother admire you in the robe.

Your father died a long time ago. Make some merit for him first.<sup>2</sup> Be a monk for just two rains-retreats.<sup>3</sup> Don't worry; after you disrobe, I'll allow you to get married. [123]

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<sup>1</sup> Such spirits appear only during darkness.

<sup>2</sup> By being in the monkhood, a man makes merit for his parents, especially important for the mother who does not have the chance to enter the monkhood herself. According to belief, if a man has already married, the merit will go to the wife rather than the parents (Red: 65).

<sup>3</sup> 'Buddhist Lent,' a four-week period in October-November, when forest monks 'retreated' to a wat because of the rains. Monks traditionally count their time in the monkhood using this unit, which is equivalent to years.

I'll make you the son-in-law of a chaophraya.<sup>4</sup> Listen to me and forget all this. Someone like Phim is not suitable for you.' Wearily she sobbed and soothed her son.

'There are more beautiful girls than Phim. If you want a court lady, I'll ask for one's hand for you. I'll make offerings on a silver and gold plate to the king<sup>5</sup> and get you a gorgeous court lady.'

Phlai Kaeo paid respects to his mother's feet. 'I don't want some heavenly maiden. The only beautiful thing about court ladies is their manners. They're no match for my lovely Phim.

Her face, her breasts, her complexion – she's perfect. And she's sharp and witty too. There's nobody in Suphanburi who can rival her beauty.

Oh mother and mistress of mine, there's no bar on entering the monkhood after marriage. Please don't raise these objections. If I can't follow my heart, I'll surely die.'

Thong Prasi was very angry, but she had pity on him too. She said soothingly, 'Don't be miserable, my darling. If you won't listen to me, then I'll fall in with your wishes.

If I ask for Phim's hand, Siprajan can't refuse because we were neighbors for a long time. Stop worrying. You'll have her as your wife. Please don't cry. Have something to eat.'

These words made Phlai Kaeo stop grieving and cheer up. He went down to the landing stage to wash, and then ate a meal. Thong Prasi called the servants, 'Come here quick!

Take these 3 chang. Go to the timber wharf, buy everything for building a new ruean, and bring them back here.

Get the pillars and everything to build the rooms.' The servants caught the buffalo and yoked two carts. They went off and made the purchases.

Thong Prasi organized the buying of lots of sugar, savories, sweets, and betelnut. By sunset, ten carts were loaded and ready.

Thong Prasi assembled all the servants and made arrangements for guarding the house. [124]

Men were assigned to stay and watch over the house and its contents. 'Look after things properly, Nang Mi and Nang Muean.' She went into her ruean. Phlai wandered through the central hall,

entered his room, and closed the door. Alone, his thoughts turned to

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<sup>4</sup> The highest rank in the official nobility.

<sup>5</sup> Kukrit notes this was the practice for requesting to marry a palace lady down to the Fifth Reign. In his *Si Phaendin* (Four Reigns), Prem sends a relative to present a gold and silver tray to the king to ask for permission to marry Mae Ploi. (KP:80)

gentle Phim, and he embraced his pillow in a fit of passion until he fell asleep.

At sunrise, Thong Prasi came down from the big ruean. Some fifty servants, male and female, were coming along. They loaded up the carts.

Phlai Kaeo mounted one of the carts and led the way off into the forest, all creaking noisily along. In the heat of the sun, they rested the buffalo

and took a nap. In the afternoon, they yoked them again and drove off. In the coolness from evening until dawn, they ate and then drove on until late.

When the sun again beat down, they lay down in the edge of forest until the sun dropped behind the mountains.<sup>6</sup> Cicadas chirped loudly around the lamduan trees.<sup>7</sup>

Phlai Kaeo listen to the plaintive whooping of the gibbons. A little baby gibbon hanging from a branch reminded him of Phim.

A pair of langurs sitting side-by-side made him think longingly of sitting close to little Phim and chatting. ‘My darling, what is happening to you right now?’

They reached a cart stop and rested the buffalo. The servants fetched wood to build a fire. They slept beside a lake.

They traveled another night, sleeping on the way in the middle of the forest. When they reached Suphan, they halted the buffalo just beyond Siprajan’s garden, and ordered the servants to build a lodge.

They cut wood in the forest, dragged and carried it out, set it down with a bang, trimmed it to shape, and dug out postholes.

They drove in the posts, hung the floor-beams,<sup>8</sup> fastened the roof ridgepole, cut elephant grass for the walls, fashioned latches, and thatched the roofs of five houses. Thong Prasi went inside and was pleased. [125]

In the evening, Phlai Kaeo was in a very good mood. ‘Phim must be fed up being apart and waiting for me for so long,

feeling insecure and uncertain. The poor thing must be miserable.’ He decided to go over to see her. A bright shining moon

floated across a star-spangled sky, flooding the earth with light, as he walked across to Siprajan’s house.

Wild animals called out of the surrounding silence as he slowly crept to the side of the central hall. He rolled a mortar over and climbed up on it. He cast an unlocking spell, springing the bolts.

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<sup>6</sup> Literally, the great Meru

<sup>7</sup> *Sphaerocoryne clavipes* or *Melodorum fruticosum*, a tree with a fragrant yellow flower which often appears in poetry more for the soft, melancholy sound of the word than the attributes of the tree.

<sup>8</sup> *Phreung*, the beams under the floor of a house.

Opening a window, he climbed in. Phim's room was lit by a hanging night-lamp. Everyone in the house was fast asleep.

Some snored, some talked in their sleep, some scratched a rash, some lay with their legs raised and uncovered. He went to her door, **magically unlocked** the bolt, and walked in.

He quietly drew the curtains apart and saw her sleeping. He sat down beside her and hugged her awake. 'Don't stay asleep. Please wake up.'

Phim woke with a start. In the dark, she panicked that a thief had got in. She screamed and tried to run away.

Phlai held tight onto her hand. 'Why are you squirming and trying to escape? I've come, my darling. Don't be afraid. I was worried about you.'

Since the day we parted, I've been obsessed with worry whether you would wait. As soon as I got home, I pleaded with my mother to come. At first she was angry and wouldn't listen.

But I cried and cried until I fainted, and then she gave in as I hoped. We came from home through the forest and arrived here today.'

Phim's doubts disappeared. She smiled brightly and shifted close to him, leaning against his chest. 'If your mother hadn't been kind, I'd die. [126]

If you weren't sincere in your words, I didn't want to see anybody's face again. I didn't want to live with the shame. Phlai Kaeo, please be kind.'

He soothed her. 'I love you, light of my life. Don't doubt my heart is true. If I could, I'd cut open my chest to let you see it.'

But it's beyond my power to pluck out my heart. Though my body was far away, my heart was still here. I'm worried because Khun Chang is our enemy. I tried to come quickly to arrange the wedding.

Don't be miserable. Tomorrow it'll be fixed for sure. My mother will come to your house and ask for your hand in the old way.' With these words, he tugged at her shoulder cloth,<sup>9</sup>

peeled it off, and lifted her onto his lap. They cuddled closely together, passions rising. A storm wind arose, big enough to destroy an era,

howling and booming as if to cleanse the earth. Oceans churned, forests shook, and Mount Meru heeled over trembling. Sun and moon were obscured by chaos.

Thunder echoed around. Beautiful flowering trees along the riverbanks came crashing down. When the rain fell, the storm subsided.

After it was over, he went to open the window. 'Oh, it's light already.' He put his arms around her. A cock flapped its wings and crowed loudly.

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<sup>9</sup> *Saphak*, a cloth worn across the breasts, hung over the left shoulder (Mc).

The cry of a coel announced the approach of the sun. ‘I must get out of the house. Look after yourself. I must say goodbye. Please come to see me off at the stairway.’

Phim took Kaeo by the wrist and walked to open the door of the central hall. The pair walked past the female servants sleeping quietly.

They reached the terrace and opened the gate. Phlai turned back, reluctant to leave. ‘Look after yourself. I must say goodbye.’ Then he turned and hurried down the stairs.

The moon was already fading as he went out through the main gate in the fence. In a short time he reached the lodge, feeling in a good mood. [127]

As the dawn lit up the earth, Thong Prasi opened her eyes. She washed her face, pounded betel, and put a piece in her mouth. She sat chewing while pondering what to do.

She called on the neighbors, Grandpa Son, Grandma Ming, Grandpa Sao, and Grandma Mao.<sup>10</sup> ‘I would like to request you to help me ask for the hand of Siprajan’s daughter.’

The elders agreed, and immediately went off to get dressed up smartly in *ta maklam*<sup>11</sup> lower cloth and upper cloth of attractive embroidered silk.

Thong Prasi wore a *ta buabok*<sup>12</sup> lower cloth and an upper cloth with white *phut* flowers<sup>13</sup> which suited her face. As soon as all were ready, they set off with servants carrying baskets with betelnut set, mortar, and pestle.

Phlai Kaeo cast a spell on beeswax which the elders accepted and spread on their lips, so that they would put their heart in it and perform their duty well.<sup>14</sup> Thong Prasi led the way.

In a short time, she reached Siprajan’s house and nervously called out for someone to take care of the dogs. Siprajan opened a window and saw them. She shouted at the servants,

‘Hey you, and you! Why didn’t you tell me guests have arrived, you rabble?’ Shaking with fear, the servants tumbled down the stairs to escort the guests up into the ruan.

Mats were laid and a tray of betel and pan hastily prepared. They all sat around in a circle to talk. Siprajan made a greeting.

‘I’ve been thinking and thinking of Thong Prasi. We’ve been away from one another for many years now. You look thinner and paler than before.

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<sup>10</sup> Elders brought in to help argue the man’s case. They should be credible and persuasive.

<sup>11</sup> A tree, *adenanthera pavonina*, but no idea what this is as a pattern.

<sup>12</sup> Eye of peeled lotus. No idea, nothing in Matichon, Mc, Px.

<sup>13</sup> The name of several flowers in the Gardenia family, especially *Gardenia collinsae*, a fragrant white flower imitated in patterns for cloth and carving.

<sup>14</sup> To give more persuasion to their words spoken on his behalf.

Your hair is white and some teeth are broken. Things must have been tough.

When the king was angry at your husband and punished him by death, where did you and your son disappear to? Now we meet again after eleven years.<sup>15</sup>

How are things now? Are you settled down and making a living? Or are you in any difficulty or trouble? What brings you to my house today?’

Thong Prasi answered Siprajan, ‘Every day, we face difficulty. Happiness is hard to find. You must have heard that we were destroyed and became absolutely poor. [128]

When Khun Krai passed away, all our property was seized – cattle, buffaloes, lands, and house. Everything. Disastrous. We fell on hard times and had to leave Suphan.

I put some money in a basket and fled in fear into the wilds with my dear son. We staggered around the forest for over a month. Then we found some friends who gave us a hand.

They welcomed us and were all so kind. They gave us a house to live in. Times were unbelievably hard. Now I’m going to risk my face in an effort to overcome another hurdle.

I have come to ask you for seeds of gourd, marrow, cucumber and bottle gourd to plant in my field.<sup>16</sup> But we’re poor and short of cash, so I’ve come to sell you young Kaeo so you may use his services.

Think of him like a pair of leather shoes. If you don’t believe me, I’ll find a guarantor. I’ve made the effort to come to your house. Please don’t turn me away. Please say yes or no.’

Siprajan laughed. ‘So you have come specially to beat around the bush. We were neighbors for a long time. Why should I be possessive about my daughter.

Even if he’s poor, it doesn’t matter. As long as he comes with a big knife slung on his back,<sup>17</sup> I’ll give her to him. He can work to make a living. He either knows what to do already or can learn easily.

The silver, gold, and goods that parents give vanish if someone doesn’t know how to look after them. Let me ask you one thing: in what way is this son of yours any good?

Does he gamble, drink liquor, or get stoned on ganja?<sup>18</sup> Does he smoke opium at all? Is he tall or short, dark or fair? So far I haven’t seen him with

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<sup>15</sup> This would make Phlai seven in chapter 2. Chapter 8 it says he was five when Khun Krai died.

<sup>16</sup> With this sentence, Thong Prasi shifts from her account of the past into the formula for a marriage negotiation.

<sup>17</sup> Another stock phrase, meaning a prospective son-in-law should have the ability to clear new land.

<sup>18</sup> A similar line appears in King Rama II’s version of Ramakian (KP: 83).

my own eyes. Please tell me the truth.’

At this point Grandpa Son, Grandpa Sao, Grandma Mao, and Grandma Ming spoke up. ‘In the future you’ll be able to rely on him. This son of Thong Prasi is a very good lad.

It’s said he’s clever and a good learner. He looks neat and handsome. He’s young and well-mannered. There’s not one bad thing about him.

He’s very diligent. When he was a novice, he could recite Matsi so eloquently it was captivating. Last year, you yourself were sponsor of this episode. On that day Phim enjoyed listening. [129]

She took off her cloth as an offering for the recitation of this episode. It created an incident because Khun Chang did the same thing. He took off his cloth and put it down over Phim’s. Don’t you recall?’

Siprajan was pleased and replied, ‘I do remember now. We felt annoyed for a long time. Because she’s my only child, she’s like my own heart.

I want to see her married and share out the property with my own eyes. I’m getting old, and I tend to get sick. How long does anyone live? I’m not so rich but will do according to what I have.

I’ll give my daughter 15 chang. I’m not fussy about the size of the dowry. One set of cloth<sup>19</sup> for offering is about right. The bridal house should have five rooms<sup>20</sup> and timber walls.

On Saturday the ninth day of the twelfth waxing moon, we’ll fix the wedding. I’ll give it some thought.’ Thong Prasi accepted immediately. ‘Up to your judgment. I’ve no objection.

It’s time for us to take our leave.’ Thong Prasi went back to where they were staying and told her son the outcome.

Siprajan instructed the servants to get busy preparing food and other things. They purchased betelnut, coconut, and palm fruit. They hastily made sweets and savories.

They arranged betel and pan on trays. Siprajan called all the servants to board a big boat. At Wat Khae, they disembarked and entered the kuti. Siprajan sat down, paid her respects, and started talking.

The abbot was sitting with his back turned, enjoying a game of chess. He picked up a bishop<sup>21</sup> and banged it down. ‘Lured into check, right in the middle square!’ Siprajan called, ‘Your honor.

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<sup>19</sup> This would consist one upper and one lower cloth which Phlai Kaeo will present to his new mother-in-law (KP:84).

<sup>20</sup> A ‘room’ is the space between two pairs of pillars, and was not enclosed by walls. Each would be around 4 meters square. So this would probably mean a unit of 4 by 20 meters. (KP:85)

<sup>21</sup> He is playing the Thai form of chess, and this is the *khon*, roughly equivalent to a bishop. In the following lines, the king is the *khun* and the rook is the *ruea jun*. The layout and principles are the same as western chess. The queen-equivalent and bishops make more restricted moves, but other pieces act the same as western counterparts.

I came to invite...’ ‘It’s not check,’ said the abbot, ‘The king can escape!’ Siprajan said, ‘I want to make merit...’ ‘The rook attacks,’ said the abbot, ‘check!’

He turned to see Siprajan and tried not to laugh. He asked why she had come. Siprajan replied, ‘I wish to ask for about ten monks to chant prayers.

Young Phim Philalai is getting married. Please calculate a good date, and don’t make a mistake. I’m getting old. I want her married now so I can see it with my own eyes.’ [130]

The abbot said, ‘Is she old enough to have a husband? Only last year I saw her coming to bathe, taking off her cloth, eyes red from crying.

I saw her running around the wat with a *jap-ping*<sup>22</sup> tied on her. They dashed around after one another and used to cut and break the trees. I shouted at them every day and chased after them with my walking stick.

I haven’t seen her face for a couple of years and now she’s to have a husband! You and I have to think about ourselves. You’re getting older, bit by bit, and so am I.’

Siprajan said, ‘You and I are the same. In old age, health is never really certain. In a little bit, we’ll all be dead.

The appointment is fixed. Please remember it. I’ll take my leave.’ She descended from the kuti, and returned home in a short time. She went up the stairs and busied herself arranging lots of food and other things.

Nearer to the appointed time, Phlai Kaeo organized his male friends to come to Siprajan’s home to help build a ruan.<sup>23</sup>

All the materials for the construction were brought and left at the site. Holes were dug to the right depth to plant the main posts. At an auspicious time in the eleventh hour<sup>24</sup> nearing dawn, they did the soul ceremony for the posts, finishing in seven minutes,

with repeated sounding of gongs. The posts were raised and put in place. The floor-beams and roof-beams were shaped to fit together snugly and nailed in place.

Mortices were cut to insert the roof-beams, and the rafters set up to support the central roof ridgepole.

Roof-battens were nailed on, and thatch busily passed up. The gable ends

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<sup>22</sup> A protective ornament tied on a chain or cord round an infant girl’s thighs (Mat: 225, pix). The implication is that he remembers her as a small infant.

<sup>23</sup> Traditionally, the groom went to reside with the bride’s family, and a ‘bridal hall’ was built for them, usually as an extension of the existing building. This was used for the wedding ceremony, and then for them to live.

<sup>24</sup> don’t know what this means

were raised, and the walls fixed in.<sup>25</sup> Then they all wiped their faces.

They drilled, hewed, planed, cut, chopped, pierced, and argued in a noisy swarm. In one day, the task was completed successfully.

Siprajan called servants to bring food, sweet and savory, to feed all the workmen. When they were full, they went home.

Dawn came up on the auspicious day. Thong Prasi arranged a large kanya boat<sup>26</sup> and supervised the loading of the dowry.<sup>27</sup> A mahori ensemble<sup>28</sup> was installed at the stern of the boat. [131]

A good-looking person was chosen to lead the dowry procession. She wore a yok and sapai which went well with her complexion. The boat set off and reached Siprajan's jetty in a short time.

It moored in front of the big wharf. Ta-Phon came down with a big stick to obstruct the procession.<sup>29</sup> Silver and gold had to be paid to be allowed passage. The dowry was carried up the stairway.

Elders from the host's side had gathered to count the money and cloth against the promised amounts before it was carried into the ruan.

Then the food appeared and everyone ate their fill. The party returned to the boat moored at the wharf and departed.

In the afternoon, Phlai Kaeo fetched a jar of liquor. Snacks and plain soup were already prepared. He called Ai-Thai.

'Go quickly and find Khun Chang. Tell him I'm inviting him to be part of the groom's party.'

Ai-Thai took off, rushed to Khun Chang's house without stopping, and walked straight up into the ruan.

Khun Chang was sitting relaxing. Ai-Thai raised his hands in wai and said, 'Phlai Kaeo has asked for the hand of Phim Philalai in marriage.

He's short of people for the groom's party. He sent me to pay respects and beg you to go over today. Please don't refuse. Don't delay, sir, please get

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<sup>25</sup> *Phreung* (พรง) are beams under the floor, *khuea* (ค้ำ) support the roof, *baelan* (แปลาน) are beams running lengthwise to support the roofing material, *janthan* (จันทัน) are rafters, *ok-kai* (อกไค) is the ridgepole, *klon* (กลอน) are roof battens, and *jua* (จั่ว) is the triangular gable end. There is a labeled sketch by Phya Anuman, reproduced in several places including Putsadi Thipthat, *Ban nai rattanakosin 1* (Housing in the Bangkok era, I), Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 2002.

<sup>26</sup> A long boat with prow and stern curved up, and a canopied area amidships (*kanya* means canopy). Such a boat conveyed status. (Red 664).

<sup>27</sup> The Thai is *khan mak*, a betel tray. It would consist of a betel tray with betelnut, sweets, money, and the agreed gifts (KP: 84).

<sup>28</sup> A musical group with a mix of instruments including flute, fiddle, drums and a singer.

<sup>29</sup> This is part of the clowning of the ceremony, known as the 'gold and silver gateway'. (KP: 86)

dressed.’

Listening to Ai-Thai, Khun Chang felt someone had cut off his head with a sword. Tears flowed down in disappointment over Phim, and he turned to the wall to hide them.

‘Oh what a pity, my darling! Things haven’t turned out as I hoped. But I won’t give up. Even though you’re married, it doesn’t matter.’

With these thoughts, he bathed and dressed in a golden yok which Phraya Lakhon had given him,<sup>30</sup> and an upper cloth of wool embroidered with gold. The servants followed in a gaggle. [132]

At the place where Phlai Kaeo was staying, the members of the groom’s party had already gathered and were sitting around eating, pouring liquor, and chatting in a tipsy hubbub.

Phlai Kaeo said, ‘Dear friend, don’t feel bad because Phim and I love one another. Knowing you wanted to marry her, I must show my respect. But please leave her to me.’

Khun Chang listened, looking uncomfortable. ‘It’s a pity. If you weren’t my friend, I wouldn’t concede. If you don’t love her, I’ll take her away.’ He knocked back the liquor and got merrily drunk.

Late in the afternoon, Phlai Kaeo left the house and boarded a boat together with his friends to go to Siprajan’s house.

Accompanied by the groom’s party, he walked up to the bridal hall. Monks were waiting quietly to chant. The bridal party came out of the ruan gathered around Phim.

The couple sat down in front of the abbot who placed the auspicious thread on their heads.<sup>31</sup> Khun Chang saw Phim looking elated and stared at her fixedly.

He picked up a tray meaning to take betel but missed his mouth and put it in his ear. He chewed and chewed wondering why he had only leaf. Others in the groom’s party saw him and burst out laughing.

Monks chanted prayers to a slow rhythm, then sprayed water all around.<sup>32</sup> Nang Mun, a loud-mouthed old maid<sup>33</sup>, pushed in to get splashed. Khun Chang pushed in too and took her wrist.

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<sup>30</sup> This title indicates the head of the royal drama troupe. In the preface, Damrong suggests this chapter was written in the second reign as this officer held a chaophraya rank in the first and third reigns, but phraya in the second. This is a reminder of Khun Chang’s court connections.

<sup>31</sup> A white cord made into two circles with a connecting strand.

<sup>32</sup> The water was sprinkled as a blessing over the couple, and then over the guests. Often the presiding monk splashed lots of water, creating an opportunity for horseplay among the guests. (Red: 68)

<sup>33</sup> A *mae praek*, the leader of a group of old ladies (Mat:571).

She gave him a thump on the head. ‘Don’t be pushy, you savage,<sup>34</sup> let me go!’ Khun Chang grabbed at her cloth but instead poked her in the navel. ‘You don’t give up, you rascal!’ She rapped his head again.

The chanting of prayers came to an end. Tea was offered to the monks who then took their leave as planned and descended the stairway to return to the kuti.

Siprajan had savory and sweets brought in to feed the groom’s party. After they had eaten their fill, gifts were brought out as mementos.

Little boxes of nielloware plated with gold and baskets of *miang*<sup>35</sup> were laid out in rows to be given to everyone. As the light faded and evening came, Khun Chang left to return home. [133]

Phlai Kaeo went to see Thong Prasi along with the groom’s party, and said sweetly to his mother, ‘Now the marriage is over today, will you stay here?’

There is nobody looking after the elephants, horses, cattle, lands, and the house.’ Thong Prasi replied, ‘I’ll go by and by, maybe in about five days.

It’s only just over. Everyone is tired from working hard. There’s no need to set out immediately. You go to eat and sleep in Siprajan’s house, Phlai.’

In late afternoon, Phlai Kaeo got dressed up smartly and walked to the house of Siprajan.

He climbed the stairway into the bridal hall, and then at sunset went to sleep there, pining for Phim through the specified period.

After three days, Siprajan talked gently to her beloved daughter about the devices of being a wife.

‘My gentle fair Phim, you’ve never experienced a man’s love. You must listen to your mother’s words, my precious. He’s your partner from previous lives.

Hundreds and thousands of people didn’t inspire you, but specifically this Phlai Kaeo. I brought you up not to have to work hard. The cane has never once touched your body.<sup>36</sup>

Now you’re grown up and leaving my bosom. I’m concerned because you now have to look after a husband. I fear you’ll do something wrong or speak rashly. Don’t do anything bad that will turn the man against you.

A cool head is mistress of the house. Follow what I have always taught you. Both inside and outside the house, standing or sitting, be careful to pay

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<sup>34</sup> *Ngo*, name of a hunter-gatherer tribe from the hills of the peninsula.

<sup>35</sup> A snack consisting of various items wrapped in a leaf.

<sup>36</sup> Of course this statement conflicts with chapter 6.

respects to your husband and heed him.

Don't be jealous and make accusations which cause a scandal. **Don't try to get one-up on your husband**, it's not appropriate. I brought you up in the hope you'll do well. I pray you'll be blessed with constant happiness.

I've taught you up to this point. Now Phlai Kaeo is waiting for you and thinking of you.' She embraced Phim and encouraged her to go into the bridal hall to see Phlai.<sup>37</sup> [134]

Hearing a sound, Phlai got down from the bed. Phim hid behind her mother peeping out. Her face seemed to float in the lamplight. When their eyes met, she looked demurely down.

They sat down and Siprajan said, 'I'm bringing Phim to you. Please live in harmony, and look after one another for ever, until the ends of your lives.

If either does anything wrong, talk to one another, don't fight or argue, it's not good. Stay here. I'm taking my leave.' Phim hung on and would not release her mother's hand.

'Is mother abandoning me here?' They pushed, pulled, and circled around until Siprajan persuaded her to drop her hand. Then she opened the door of the room and walked out.

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<sup>37</sup> Kukrit (925) claimed to remember another version of such maternal advice from a volume of Khru Jaeng's version of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* which he had mislaid:

Late at night when all were sleeping quietly throughout the house, the mother consoled her beloved daughter. 'You're going to sleep with your husband.

My beauty, make an effort to listen to my instructions and remember them. If you minister to him well, a man will not tire of you.

Humbly minister to him. When he's hard, don't go against his wishes. When you know how much he wants to love, move and shake to satisfy one another.

First, boiled pig's feet. Make sure the meat is truly tender. Add peanuts fried golden brown. Moist tamarind is not enough. Add vinegar to complete the taste.

Second, chicken's eggs. Roast at some distance from the fire until they are thick and cloudy as *madum* sap when cracked open. Stir with a stick until white as jelly. Pour in some Japanese soy sauce and chopped onion.

Third, eels. Grill on the fire until they have drops of sweat. Coil into a pot with peanut, and add cleaned white rice. Add pounded lemongrass and simmer

on high heat until the soup is white, the rice swells, and the peanut is soft enough to be stirred into the eel. Pick a kaffir-lime leaf, strip out the stalk, and add. Scoop into a thin farang bowl.

Stir with a stick until the rice and eel are thoroughly mixed. Grill chili, shrimp paste, and garlic until brown, then pound together like medicine for a good taste.

Add just enough fish sauce to moisten the chili. When the garlic is cooked, add and pound further. Garnish with an onion boiled and chopped slantwise, coriander leaves, and fresh green lime for a truly good taste.

Try to remember these and cook for him to try. All three are for increasing strength. Cook them for him often and he'll become more active. This is true and certain.

If you make for him to eat every day, even a flabby one will be as stiff as a pole. When evening comes, he'll climb aboard without sleeping and paddle along at a steady lick until the temple bell tolls.

After she left, Phlai Kaeo became more cheerful. He smiled broadly at Phim and went to sit close beside her. He said, plaintively,

‘Precious, why are you sitting so still. Please join me on the pillows inside the mosquito net. Are you hot? I’ll fan you to sleep. I’ve been here three days waiting for you.’

He shifted to sit touching her, put his arms round her, squeezed, stroked, and kissed. ‘Why are we sitting here? Let’s go and lie down together.’ He tickled her so she jumped.

Phim squirmed and giggled. ‘Hey, don’t play around like that. I can’t stand all that pinching and tickling. Go to sleep if you want. I’m not sleepy yet.’

Phlai Kaeo got up and went inside the net. ‘Lots of mosquitoes! Light a candle and bring it in here.’ Phim stood up with a smile and unbolted the door. ‘It’s too hot. I’m going to sit in the cool.’

Hearing her footsteps, Phlai got up and tugged the end of her cloth. ‘Strike a light! This Kaeo always makes trouble. **You never give up. You’re good at that.** It’s not that I’m running away, not consenting.

But you grab my hand. You’re so rough and pushy. Are you starving, my dear? It’s so hot and sweaty, I’m wilting. I’m going to freshen up with scented powder and water.’

‘Oh good, let’s put it on together. Nice and cool, you’ll feel better.’ He pulled the cloth off her breasts. Even in the dim light, they stood out, round and full like lotus flowers. [135]

‘If you’re looking for the powder, why are you tugging at my breastcloth. What is this? Is it dawn already?’ Earlier in the evening she had been listless and drowsy. Now she tossed her head and ran across with nothing on.

She opened a pot of scented water, releasing the aroma. She poured lots to give to him. Phlai crept up behind her back. ‘Oh, are you pouring it all away, Phim?’ She smiled sweetly.

‘I didn’t ask you. Don’t interfere. If it’s spilt, there’s more. Don’t bother me. Go away. I’ll put it on myself, then come over.’

‘Bring it here. I’ll do it for you. What’s the problem about doing it for one another? Believe me.’ He dissolved the powder. ‘Turn your face here. I’ll make you even fairer.’

He picked up a fan and fanned the powder dry. ‘You look as fair as the sheen on a gourd **shaded by a leaf from the sun.** **He hugged and stroked to arouse her. He powdered her breasts making her heart jump.**

‘Oh dear, you’re too much. I can’t even sit and powder myself. I just want to cool myself down. What’s the problem? It’s irritating to be bathed in sweat.’

‘The sweat is not the problem, is it? No way. You’re really a big tease. Let’s go and lie down. Don’t make me beg for so long.’ He hugged her and kissed

her sabai softly.

Phim smiled but shot him a sharp look. 'Hey, my cheek is already dirty with sweat.' 'What sweat? You're just guessing. Look in the mirror. What's up?

The net is full of mosquitoes. Let's go and see to it, or we won't be able to sleep.' With that, he swept her up in his arms, but she tried to push him off for a long time.

He lifted her onto his lap so she could not struggle, and pressed her close with his heart bursting. Phim continued to twist and squirm until they entered the curtains, when she prostrated to him.<sup>38</sup>

Phlai Kaeo nuzzled her and smiled passionately. He caressed Phim as his heart flooded with love. He kissed her hair, elated, giggling, and carried away.

Hugging and stroking, he told a tale. Ram, the avatar, followed Sida into the depths of the forest. He crossed the ocean to Lanka island, and devastated the whole clan of giant demons. [136]

He suffered countless hardships for his beautiful lady, wasting away and turning yellow with grief. Only fourteen years later did she return to the city. At the end of the story they both fell asleep.

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<sup>38</sup> According to traditional noble etiquette, a wife should prostrate to her husband every night before sleep.