

17: Khun Phaen goes into Khun Chang's house and gets Kaeo Kiriya

[II/27]

Khun Phaen's powers were by now unmatched. His skill, courage, and knowledge made his enemies' hair stand on end.

But losing Laothong left him depressed, listless, and pensive about the past. He had young Thai and Lao girls in his service, but none of them made him happy. He pined for *her*.

He slept alone and lonely through each phase of the year. In the hot season, his heart burnt like fire. In the rainy season, he grumbled like the sky.

In the windy season, the draught blew through his heart. Wrapping himself in a shawl only made him more soulful. Not seeing her for over a year left him dispirited, dismal, distraught.

In the dead of night, he sobbed softly, lying awake growing ever more gloomy, tossing and turning and never sleeping deeply. 'How many years before she'll come back?'

Listening to the crickets around the ruean made him think back to the time he brought Laothong down. 'I got you to enjoy the forest, my darling.

Oh dear, I'm not used to being away from you. The room seems chilly cold without you. The bed and pillows seem gloomy. Are they like this because you're sick with fever?

The lamp hasn't been lit for over a year. Do you think of me when the side pillow rolls far away from your body, like you away from me?

Your powders and perfumes lie unused. Your mirrors are closed or broken. The mosquito net is torn and fallen. The oil you used to perfume clothes has lost its fragrance.

I feel I've been shot with a poisoned arrow.' He grieved and groaned until almost dawn. 'Right now in the city, you'll be starting awake but feeling down.'

He was too upset to go back to sleep. After tossing and turning, he opened the mosquito-net and got up to look outside. Hearing a coel's call, he quickly opened the door, [28]

but she wasn't out there walking up to the little house. There was only the moon, shining so dazzlingly bright he felt even more wistful. A cool wind rustled the banyan leaves,

bathed in a chilly dew. 'Sadly I can't see you so far away, but this dew reminds me of your tears. Morning, evening or night, if you lie

down you'll be lost in thought.

If you eat, it'll only be tears. If it's late at night, you'll pine. If it's morning, you'll brood. The more I dwell on this, the darker I feel.

Oh why did karma do this? How did this mess happen? How could a friend do such wrong to me, and how could I allow him to take advantage of me yet again?

I'm angry at Khun Chang and want revenge. I haven't said one word to annoy him. But first that blackguard seized Wanthong, then he deviously thought up a way to fix me again

and please himself by misleading the king to have Laothong seized and taken away. He could do all this! If I don't take revenge I'll harbor this resentment until death. Why is it he broke our friendship?

There's a saying they crafted: with someone crooked, oppose him hard; with someone honest, be honest till death.¹ He's supposed to be a friend but he didn't act like one.

My karma is to be destroyed by the authorities. Whatever the future has in store, let it be. I'm known as a good person. Tomorrow I'll go to Suphan,

split open his chest to get my revenge, and kidnap Wanthong away into the forest. For sure!' With this thought he leapt up in a rage,

and burst out, 'I'll go immediately at dawn.' His chest felt on fire. By first light, he had arranged everything, and went to see his mother.

Thong Prasi was pounding betel. She stopped with pestle raised, and looked up. 'Oh, Phlai of mine, where are you going this early in the morning?' Her heart shivered with trepidation.

Khun Phaen prostrated to his mother and said, 'I've been depressed for ages, and I can't stand it any more. So I've to come to take my leave. [29]

I'm going to get even with Khun Chang and give him what he deserves. I'll take Wanthong off into the forest. If he follows I'll chop him dead.'

Thong Prasi tried to cool him down. 'I don't think you should do this. I hate him too. But aren't there any other women in this town?

If she was beautiful in both body and mind, I wouldn't object. If she was worth running after, then you should do it. But Wanthong is beautiful in body, not in mind so I don't think you should run after her.

¹ need to make this rhyme

She's tarnished. She's like a diamond ring that's broken into two or three pieces. Even if you put it back together in a new setting, it doesn't look good. I object to you running after her because you'll only get hurt.'

Khun Phaen replied, 'What you say is right, and I can't contradict you. If you want to call her bad, then she's bad totally. But I've thought it over and come to the conclusion she's not bad.

The day I reached Suphan, her jealousy was actually proof that she hadn't broken up with me. What she said was all true. But I made a mistake, accused her, tried to harm her,

and went off in a huff. Wanthong felt heart-broken, cried endlessly, and tried to hang herself.

That too showed she was still in love with me, still true to how we were. Saithong pointed all this out to me, but I wasn't listening.

While I had Laothong to sleep with, I forgot Wanthong completely. Then Khun Chang abused our friendship and had me separated from Laothong. So let us try out our powers and talents against one another.

Mother, please give me your blessing so that I'll succeed. And don't worry. Even if they raise an army of three thousand to chase me down, I'll chop them into dust.'

Seeing opposition was pointless, Thong Prasi fell in with his wishes. She gave the blessing he wanted. 'May your powers be sufficient in combat so you succeed in your aims.

When you find Wanthong in her bedroom, may her heart agree to go with you. Don't be fooled by her wiles, or get carried away by love. Be successful and come back to this house.' [30]

Khun Phaen was buoyed by this blessing. He circled his mother three times,² and took his leave.

He went up to the household shrine, composed himself, and made offerings of candles and incense to both left and right. He ground sandalwood on a stone, mixed it with oil, and anointed himself so anyone seeing his body would be charmed.

He put on inner leggings in a purple color with a bird pattern, covered with a bright gold yok tightly pleated around his body. He put on a short inner shirt with yantra,

and an outer shirt with a floral pattern in gold. He tied a sash round his waist, fixed with a medallion.³ He put on a *phirot* ring

² *Prathaksin*, circling to the right, a saiyasat practice which gives blessing to both parties (Red: 672).

³ *Traphong*, usually used for the lozenge decoration on the forehead of an elephant.

plaited from enchanted thread,⁴ and a breast chain with amulets interleaved with the hair of spirits.

He carefully tied an enchanted headscarf round his forehead. Finding the auspicious moment he needed, he grasped Skystorm, stood holding it aloft, and turned away from the direction of the Great Spirit⁵ and the Prince of Hell.⁶

He descended the stairway, mounted Color-of-Mist, and summoned all his spirits. He left Kanburi and entered the forest with his spirits following noisily behind.

They passed Huai Rong and Nong Taphan, crossed Crocodile Stream,⁷ and made their way through the forest to the glistening pond of Ban Phlap. He hurried close to Khun Chang's house,

then cut wood to build a shrine, make some quick offerings, and marked his forehead with krajae sandal powder. At an auspicious moment, he lit candles and incense,

summoned up powerful deities, and concentrated his mind to make a prayer. 'May the gods be my witness. Let me destroy Khun Chang, this bad friend,

who snatched my wife away for his own pleasure. Grant me the power to benumb people so I may take what I want. If I have ever been disloyal and caused great trouble for a friend, do not let me succeed in this endeavor.'

Then he took up Skystorm and stood, hardening his mind to be brave and ruthless. He looked at the brightness of the stars and checked which direction his breath flowed easily.⁸ Then he spurred his horse to gallop ahead.

⁴ *Waen thak phra phiroi*, a ring made from plaited thread that has been enchanted, sometimes hardened with lac (Red: 672; Mat:625; Pix in Anuman, *Essays*, 324).

⁵ *Phi luang kalathai*. *Phi luang*, the great spirit, is a device for discovering auspicious and inauspicious directions. On a 3x3 grid of squares, the numbers 1 to 8, meaning 1=garuda, 2=tiger, 3=lion, 4=dog, 5=rat, 6=goat, 7=naga, and 8=elephant, are written around the rim. The grid is then rotated and transposed to produce seven diagrams for each day of the week. The original sequence of the numbers and the method of rotation are known to teachers and prescribed in manuals. The directions are then interpreted by reading from the middle square, with north at left and east at the top. (Eade, *Calendrical Systems*, 111). The inauspicious directions of the *phi luang* are: on Sunday, the horse, in the northwest; Monday, the cow, in the east; Tuesday, the lion, in the northeast; Wednesday, the yaks, in the north; Thursday, the buffalo, in the south; Friday, the pig, in the west; and Saturday, the elephant, in the southeast. The inauspicious direction of the Iron Spear is in west on Sunday and Friday, east on Monday and Saturday, north on Tuesday and Wednesday, and south on Thursday. (Sup: 127; Red:155-7).

⁶ *Kalathai=phrakan*. The inauspicious direction is in the north on Sunday, southwest on Monday, south on Tuesday, east on Wednesday, east on Thursday, northeast on Friday, southeast on Saturday. Some manuals assign by the position in the waxing/waning cycle of the moon, rather than day of week (Red: 157).

⁷ In full, *Than jorakhe sam phan*, Three Thousand Crocodile Stream, which now runs parallel to the Kanchanaburi-Suphan road to the south of U Thong.

⁸ If the breath passes through the left nostril, then he should step off on his left foot (Sup: 127).

Arriving⁹ at Khun Chang's house, he saw the huge compound was now surrounded by a strong embankment and a moat with guards sitting by lights. He reined in Color-of-Mist and stopped to take his bearings. [31]

Khun Chang's five female spirits were patrolling around the boundary. They said to one another, 'Enemy! Let's have fun thumping him and chasing him away.'

They soared through the air, bellowing, hurling sand and earth, dangling their heads, waving their bodies to and fro, lolling their tongues, and pulling fearsome faces.

Khun Phaen's spirits responded by rushing at them, hurling rocks, and swooping down lashing out with *tamyae* vine. The two sides were well-matched and the battle was awesome.

Khun Phaen drew Skystorm and stood looking slim, handsome, and imposing with his powers. He scattered rice grains to weaken the opponents,

then opened a packet of herb¹⁰-coated fragrant rice, and flung it, hurting like hard gravel. The five spirits jeered, and hid behind a door to consider the situation.

They could see he was young, handsome, and obviously well-versed in magic, so they transformed their bodies to appear as lady attendants of the palace and walked out to meet him.

They approached him, made eyes, and retreated. They walked up to touch him, and then acted scared. One cocked her face, looked at him out of the corner of her eye, and asked, 'Why are you standing here blocking the way?'

Khun Phaen knew very well they were spirits transformed. He stood smiling at them and said, 'I'm not a villain or thief.

I have business here, and I ran into you by chance. I've been very badly upset, but I feel a lot better since you said hello. Still, love will have to wait a little.

I'm Wanthong's husband. Khun Chang took her away from me for himself. Without her, I've been miserable. Now I've met you five lovely ladies,

please help me by opening the door. I'll be grateful to the end of

⁹ According to Prince Damrong, King Rama II's composition began with this line and included most of the rest of this chapter. See Damrong's preface.

¹⁰ *Wan*, a whole category of medicinal herbs, and more generally a catch-all terms for herbs believed to have supernatural powers. These include be *wan phrataba* or *wan kamphaeng jet chan* which spirits are supposed to fear greatly (Red: 158).

my days.' At the same time, he blew a mantra and said, 'Don't hide. Come and have a mouthful of betel each.'

The spirit ladies tilted their faces away from him with a smile. One said, 'Khun Chang looks after us. [32]

You shouldn't come sweet-talking us, talking about love and wanting us to help you. It's tricky, and it won't do.

Khun Chang feeds us well, and we should repay his kindness. You didn't come here for love, but to do him injury. But you won't get what you want in ages.

You don't go wanting for spirits yourself. You've got crowds of them. **But love is already upsetting us enormously. That mantra of yours went unbelievably deep.'**

'Now, now. Don't complain and get angry. If you were human I'd "take care" of you. But I don't know what to do about loving you. I could only enjoy your false form.

If you'd return to human form, I'd couple with you for sure. I'd "take care" of you to the utmost. But now please show me the way to Wanthong.'

He scattered more rice, making the spirits flee off in all directions. He spurred Color-of-Mist along the dike across the moat towards their goal.

He drove away the spirits, chanted a spell to send people to sleep, snore, dream, and mumble, and another spell to spring all the bolts. Then he urged Color-of-Mist to bound ahead again.

All the people guarding the house nodded off and lay motionless. The axemen standing at the guardpost hit the ground already asleep and snoring.

Those cooking rice and grilling fish around the stove dozed off, heads drooping, eyes closed, mouths mumbling, one holding a pot lid against another's arse.

A fellow who had been chopping ganja dozed with one hand wiping the sleep from his eyes. Another lay asleep with his head flung backwards while the rice pot boiled over.

They looked pathetic. Khun Phaen urged Color-of-Mist ahead through two gates. People lay asleep all over the place.

One lay mumbling with his cloth slipped off his body. Another was dreaming and trying to climb up a post. Another who had been drinking liquor waved his liquor cup drunkenly and lowed like a buffalo. [33]

They entered a third gate and crossed another moat. The moonlight was hazy not bright. People slept motionless here too. 'That fine house must be Son Phraya's.

This must be the house of that grilled turtle with the totally smooth, bald skull. He's got some nice lush plants with some lovely blooms.

Tomorrow morning Khun Chang will lie hugging only a pillow and groaning miserably. He took my Wanthong to sleep by his side, and today I'll take my revenge.'

He put a yantra cloth over Color-of-Mist's face. 'Don't go prancing off on your own. Hide here in the shadow of the pillar, and don't look around.' Then he gave orders to his spirits.

'Cast subduing spells to keep the whole house asleep. When I tell you, take off from here.' He chanted a mantra, scattered rice,

bellowed, and threw more rice up onto the roof. A pack of guardian spirits came out and swarmed around. People mumbled and crawled about in their sleep. He threw limes around, making the house shake.

All the bolts and locks sprung open. Khun Chang's soul took off into the wilds. He hugged Wanthong and dreamed vividly. Khun Phaen climbed up the wooden wall and stopped standing on the top.

He jumped down onto a verandah full of flowers planted by Khun Chang. Even past midnight, the fragrance wafted by the breeze was very pleasing.

There were rows of pots with orange jasmine,¹¹ ket,¹² phikun, Mon rose¹³ and masang,¹⁴ all beautifully trimmed; myrobalan¹⁵ tied and trimmed into elegant shapes; takhop¹⁶ and kloi shaped and nicely displayed;¹⁷

a tako¹⁸ weeping on both sides; flowing taengtui;¹⁹ in, phrom, and angelbreast, some blooming in sprays of flowers, beautifully catching the moonlight.

¹¹ ไม้จันทน์

¹² Manikara hexandra, milkey tree.

¹³ *Yisun*, *rosa damascena*, known as *kulap mon*, Mon rose.

¹⁴ *Feroniella lucida/java feoniella*, a shrub with spiny branches and a small sour fruit, similar to *makhwik* (Tree:188).

¹⁵ *Samo*, *terminalia cherbula*, myrobalan, sometimes called wild olive because of fruits ripening from green to black (Tree: 390).

¹⁶ *Flacourtia indica/rukam*, governor's plum.

¹⁷ These are all trimmed bonsai style (Kukrit: 162).

¹⁸ *Diosporos rhodocalyx*, a type of ebony.

¹⁹ *Mallotus philippensis*, kamala, monkeyface tree.

Then came Mon roses, roses, double jasmine, and sonsu,²⁰ with alluring fragrances; lamduan which stirred him to move along, and saoyut²¹ which stopped him dead in his tracks.

Further on he found an ornamental pond with goldfish. They swam around, caressing against one another, blowing bubbles, diving down, and gliding up. Some swam together charmingly like loving couples. [34]

They nudged through the water lettuce, and slipped around the artificial hill, waving their tails seductively. They ate the waterweed,²² and chased one another chaotically. Further on he found a yoke and plough of prettily curved wood;

animal bells, elegantly carved and polished smooth, under a felt blanket patterned with a profusion of bright stars; coils of rope piled together;

several harnesses for horses and for elephants neatly lined up; and goads with gold-patterned handles. He walked ahead, glancing around.

He chanted a mantra to open locks, and drew the curtains to look in, seeing many young girls. He walked past their sleeping forms and arrived at the room of Kaeo Kiriya.

He saw a slender body sleeping on a low bed. She looked beautiful, cute, and fresh. Her eyebrows were fine and softly curved; hair parting nicely shaped;²³

hair loose and falling down over her shoulders, the wavy ends prettily framing her head. The bed was small but looked soft and comfortable, with side pillows either side of her.

She had a little mirror with clear glass, and a hair pin with a handle of beautifully lucid ivory. Beside the bed was a screen. A row of half-moon stands were placed along the little room.

Though the room was small, she knew how to arrange things not to look cramped. Her spittoon, water bowl and cup looked small and beautifully befitting to their owner's figure.

'Oh! This is not Wanthong. Maybe a sister but I'd be surprised. Her manner is not that of a poor person, and her betel set²⁴ is wrong for that too.

²⁰ Polianthes tuberosa, tuberose, same as *sonklin*.

²¹ Desmos chinensis, usually *saiyut*, ylang ylang.

²² *Khlai*, bryophyte.

²³ Fashion at the time was to have a parting running horizontally around the head about the level of the hairline on the forehead. This might be emphasised by plucking or shaving, and using color. (Kuk: 172, pix)

²⁴ *Khrueang kin*, see Red: 672

Is she a minor wife of Khun Chang? But why wouldn't he put her in a room worthy of her status.' He examined her face which was fair and loveable. 'If some man had had her, she'd have lost that sheen.'

He stole in close to her, felt her breast, and wanted to enjoy her. He leant over on top of her, and drove away his spirits.²⁵ He chanted a Beguiler mantra to make her infatuated.

Kaeo Kiriya, who had been sleeping soundly, started awake in shock and surprise. 'Eh! who is this?' [35]

She wanted to cry out but was held by the spell. She began to tremble with fear, and recoiled away from him and down from the bed. She looked at the handsome figure and thought he was not a villain.

She hid behind the screen, mouthing words, and nervously thinking what to do. 'If I say nothing I'll never know what's happening.' She summoned up the courage to question him straightaway.

'Sir, please don't think I'm complaining, but who induced you to stray in here? Your looks and manner are not those of some evil fellow.'

Khun Phaen listened quietly to her voice which was sweet, clear, and commanding. 'I'm a soldier.

The king bestowed on me the name of Khun Phaen Saensongkhram according to the royal wish. I came to find Wanthong because Khun Chang brought her here as his wife.

Khun Chang and I used to be friends. He took an oath of loyalty and then broke it. When I peered in here, I thought it was Wanthong so I came to sit beside you. Only then did I know it was someone else.

But you're exactly like her. So thinking it was her, I'd already had no trepidation about kissing, caressing, and feeling you all over. I've taken liberties with the wrong person. Please don't be angry.

You're not Wanthong, but please excuse me. Don't take against me and don't shyly turn your face away. What connection to the people here brought you to be in Khun Chang's house?'

Kaeo Kiriya was feeling passion but still shy. 'This must be Khun Phaen for sure. He's very slender and cute. There's no getting away.'

She was gradually falling for him. 'How come Wanthong left him? He's obviously got great powers from a good teacher. Khun Chang

²⁵ To wake her, he drives off his own spirits who are keeping her asleep (Red: 163; Kukrit: 167)

would lose to him in a contest.

He's walking around all the rooms here at will! Her mind raced, her hair bristled in fear, and her heart skipped a beat. 'This is Wanthong's husband for sure.

If I don't answer his question, he might get angry and turn nasty. Fighting him or running away would be as much use as flinging money into the wind.' [36]

She said, 'This is laughable. You get the wrong person and the wrong room. It won't do. I'm furious you sneaked in here and had fun fondling me. It's degrading.

A low turtle can't grow long legs. I'm no peacock and it's not amusing to paint me as one. A firefly can't compete with moonlight, and water can't be shaped into a statue. It's illusion.

I'm not Wanthong, I'm a slave. This is just a little bedroom, not what you're after. Don't get mistaken. I'm the daughter of the Sukhothai lord.

My father met with some difficulty and so mortgaged me into service here for fifteen tamleung.²⁶ My name is Kaeo Kiriya.

You're a freeman so don't think about consorting with a slave. I shouldn't be so bold as to look you in the face. Whatever is making you angry from the past, please take your revenge in the manner of a gentleman.'

'It's no small thing to speak cutely in sweet sounding words with irony too. I find it very refreshing. I feel sorry for you not having a lover yet.

Any man who could have you would hold on tight. I'm after love not a one-night stand. I'm not trying to trick you so don't draw away from me.

Don't tell me you're in this spot because of fifteen tamleung. I can help you up to five chang. Some merit I made in the past must have caused me to meet you specially by chance.'

He snuggled close to her. 'I'm over the moon. Don't tremble and turn away.' He took out a packet of money, gave it to her, and said soothingly, 'Don't be upset. Please be kind.'

Kaeo Kiriya turned to hide her face and pushed him away to stop him fondling her. 'I know you talk of "love" and "being kind,"

and you'll give heaps, cartloads of money. I raise my hands above my head to thank you for your goodness. But I still think of my father's words of warning. Out of kindness, he instructed me

²⁶ The original says only fifteen at this point with no unit, but Kaeo Kiriya specifies fifteen tamleung in chapter 38 when she is relating the story to her son.

repeatedly on several matters:

suffer poverty with humility; don't make mistakes in the pursuit of ecstasy; love your back and avoid the lash. I gave my word to my father. [37]

If you love me truly and won't throw me away, don't be hasty. Hold off now for good things ahead. Don't make me break my promises. Please go and talk with my father as it should be.

If you love me, then I'll return your love. But if you want a secret affair, I fear it'll be wrong in a thousand ways. I love myself, and fear shame. Leave matters as they are and don't plead.'

'Oh, because your words are few, they're really sweet, my darling. Your skin is as fresh and fragrant as cinnamon. Raise your face. Don't try to hide.

I've got this close to you now, please have some mercy, Kaeo Kiriya. I'll give you my love. Don't be angry.

Should I deceive you into breaking your promises, let me suffer endless difficulties, let all my impressive learning go to waste. Your skin looks coated with gold.'

He took off his belt with all its gear, and hung it over a screen. He lifted her up in his arms and put her down in his lap resting against his upper cloth. Then he laid her down gently like a piece of gold, and covered her.

A breeze blew through blossoms, scattering the pollen and filling the room with fragrance. The end of her embroidered sabai rippled in the wind. The shimmering moon bounded into the sky.

The sun vied with the moon to shine more brightly. Stars glittered too, though those near the moon were extinguished. Fireflies danced and winked among the trees. A marching army of emerald beetles²⁷ shook the whole forest.

Kaeo Kiriya was lost in passion. Love made her feel fatigued and confused. She clung to him, weak with love,

softly sobbing and sighing, tears falling onto her lap. 'I resent the way you forced yourself on me. And now you'll go and steal Wanthong away into the forest.

For you it'll be all happiness and smiles, while I'll be counting the nights waiting for you. How many years before you've enjoyed the forest enough to come back? Meanwhile Khun Chang will take it out on me.

²⁷ *Malaeng thap*, see footnote in previous chapter. Here it is probably used because *thap* is a homophone for the word for army, hence an army has been worked into the English translation.

Whether my father²⁸ comes back to get me is another matter. You've brought me no small amount of karma and difficulty, made me worried about being tainted.' She shot him a pleading look from the corner of her eyes. [38]

Khun Phaen comforted her. 'Don't be afraid. I won't forget what's happened. I'll feel for you enormously until the end of my life, from today until my dying day.

There'll be a day I'll return so we can taste ecstasy together again and make your sorrow disappear. Cheer up, and please make plans to get yourself out of slavery.'

He hugged her, wiped away her tears, and took off his diamond ring. 'Don't cry. Look at this ring instead, it should brighten you up.' He slipped it on her finger,

put his arms round her neck, and began to think about leaving. They were locked together, hearts pounding, and reluctant to move. Yet he lifted her arm and asked, 'Please help me by pointing the way to Wanthong.'

Kaeo Kiriya felt even more abandoned, but steeled herself to show him the position of the room. 'Go straight that way. Don't look either side. Go through two partitions and into the inner room.

The house is lit with lanterns and there are people sitting and lying everywhere. Avoid the light. Please, for my sake, don't go at all. I'm worried what will happen and I feel my heart is breaking.'

'Don't worry, Kaeo Kiriya. You're apprehensive because you've never seen my powers. Would I have come here alone if I couldn't handle it? It was wrong to abandon Wanthong.

Take heart, and go to sleep. Close your room tight, put out the light, and stay here. Don't be tempted to come out for anything. I'm going into the inner room.'

He soothed her then crept away, searching to find which room Wanthong was in. Kaeo Kiriya watched him disappear and reappear, several times. She was so tense and overwrought, she could not hold herself back.

She ran after him because of her love. 'Have you forgotten me already? Can't find her room, huh, is that what's taking so much time? Past the hall and in a bit, it's right *there*.'

Khun Phaen turned to see her face. 'You told me already but I couldn't see it exactly. I can find the way. Don't make so much noise. I was afraid I might get it wrong, so I was being careful.

²⁸ Guess; she uses the preposition *than* which she earlier used for her father, but it could mean Khun Phaen.

It's late, Kaeo, and you haven't slept. Don't worry, I won't take long.' He led her back into her room and soothed her to sleep on the little bed. [39]

He embraced and covered her. 'You're not sleeping, huh?' He put his arms round her neck and then began to move away. Though she looked asleep, her eyes winked and fluttered. 'Though the sweat trickled down, you still don't sleep.'

He blew a powerful spell to put her asleep, and got up to leave. But he was still concerned, so stood waiting with his heart pounding.

He saw her turn over and feared she would run after him again. He went back and kept hugging and fondling until he saw her slip into a deep slumber.²⁹

Then he disentangled himself, arranged the side pillows to support her body, tiptoed softly from the room, and locked the door, feeling very happy.

Holding Skystorm, he walked up to the central hall which Khun Chang had built brand new. It was a sitting room arranged with folding screens. A myna in a golden cage was placed to catch the eye.

A large frame held a picture of a seated westerner, looking out sideways in a pose which suited the face.³⁰ He admired it in passing, but hurried on in excitement to find Wanthong.

Seeing the slave girls asleep on the floor, he blew an unlocking spell and walked past them into the room. There were piles of glittering crystal, double screens,³¹ curtains, and blinds.³²

'This curtain is Wanthong's handiwork. I can remember perfectly in my mind's eye. Her embroidery looks so realistic. Ultimate workmanship. Only she can do this.'

She had embroidered a forest scene. Around the borders were mountains wreathed in lush greenery. Plants of all kinds with masses of leaves flowed elegantly across the scene with blooming flowers scattered prettily among them.

²⁹ In the older version of this chapter, on which this version was closely based, they make love again. Here it is rendered more ambiguous.

³⁰ This picture has provoked lots of discussion. Kukrit (176) thought immediately of the Laughing Cavalier. Noranit argues it was probably the picture of a woman. Khun Wichitmatra notes that the picture also figures in the earlier version of this chapter which he argues from internal evidence was written by Chaophraya Phrakhlung (Hon). Hon was *phrakblang* when a Portuguese was received as consul in Bangkok in the first reign – the first diplomatic contact with the west in the Rattanakosin era. Khun Wichitmatra surmises that Hon would have received gifts destined for the king and probably for himself too, among which might be a picture inspiring this passage, perhaps a likeness of the Portuguese king. (Red: 166-9)

³¹ Screens placed inside and outside a doorway. (Kukrit:183)

³² *Muli*, blinds made with slats of bamboo or other wood.

A peacock floated down to disport itself on the peak of a big mountain, spreading its tail and extending its wings voluptuously. Gibbons hung from branches, glancing sideways.

The Himavanta forest dominated the scene beautifully with a splendid depiction of Mount Meru, surrounded by Winantok, Hatsakan, Karawik, Isinthon, and Yukhunthon.³³

Then came the heavenly rivers,³⁴ the Mujalin³⁵ with all its five streams, and Mount Kailash standing out magnificently. Troops of kinnorn and skilful khonthan³⁶ [40]

dived and played in the clear, cool waters of the Anodat lake.³⁷ At the edge of a cliff, a posse of dragons played with glittering crystal. As he admired the scene, he thought of Wanthong,

and slashed the curtain into ribbons. Once it was destroyed, he stepped through into the second partition and found another embroidery, adorably beautiful and brand-new. 'Oh my dear, your skill is super-human.'

She had embroidered the illustrious Phra Lo at the Kalong river,³⁸ pining for the two princesses and asking the waters to give him an omen.

Through his desperation over the two princesses, Phra Lo saw the waters as red as sappanwood. He took leave of Laksanawadi³⁹ at the wat spire, thinking only of the two sister princesses.

The old lord used a crystal cock⁴⁰ to lure Phra Lo who gave chase and got lost in the garden,⁴¹ feeling even more grief-ridden.

³³ All among the seven mountains or ranges surrounding Meru. See footnote in chapter 10.

³⁴ อากาศคงคา, *akat kongka*, the systems of waterways around Mt Meru which flow back to the heavens (Sup: 146).

³⁵ A river flowing down from the Himalayas.

³⁶ Gandharvas, heavenly musicians. In Hindu mythology, they were born from the body of Brahma as he sang, and became husbands of the Apsaras (*Hindu Myths*, 45, 342).

³⁷ Anottata, one of the seven lakes in Himpahan, meaning 'unheated' because the sun's rays never penetrate to this lake 'and thus this water is extremely cool' as well as clear (R&R, 292-5). It is the source of the five rivers, including Ganga (R&R, 296).

³⁸ *Lilit Phra Lo* is one of the oldest works of Thai literature. Phra Lo is ruler of Seuang, and a man of exceptional beauty. His father Mansuang defeated the neighboring city of Song. Phuean and Phaeng, daughters of Phichai Phisanukon of Song fall in love with Phra Lo because of songs in his praise by balladeers, and use magic to lure him. He leaves his home in Suang and his wife, Laksanawadi, to travel to Song to find Phuean and Phaeng. In stanzas 296-7, at the Kalong river, he asks for an omen whether he should continue or return. 'As soon as his words had passed from his lips, the waters circled,/And turned deep red, as though mixed with blood./His heart was beset with a terrible suffering,/As though crushed by a tree a hundred spans in girth.' [Bickner:23] Even so, he goes onwards.

³⁹ Wife of Phra Lo.

⁴⁰ A cock of unusual perfection, provided by Samingphray, the ascetic who works magic for the two sisters (Bickner:23).

⁴¹ The royal pleasure garden of Phuan and Phaeng

Wanthong had embroidered Phra Pheuan and Phra Pheng in gold, entering the garden of love and looking around. Phra Lo caressed and coupled happily with both of them. The ladies-in-waiting, Nang Reuan and Nang Roi,⁴² waited on either side to support and give service.⁴³

'Your efforts aren't wasted, Wanthong, but why did you get lost in lust with Khun Chang?' In rage, he cut down the curtain, ripped it to shreds, and tossed it aside.

He found a third curtain. 'Beautiful! I recognize Phim's handiwork.' He stood looking at her curtain captivated. She had cleverly embroidered the story of Khawi⁴⁴

as he made his way through the forest to the holy city of Jantaprathet, and killed the eagles, spattering the ground with their red blood.

She portrayed Khawi playing in the river with the exquisite Jansuda, whose fragrant hair floating away in the water and was placed in a golden casket.

And she showed daring old Thatprasat coming to lure her away from her home, and presenting her to the king of another city for his pleasure. The story reminded him of Wanthong and inflamed his rage.

'That hag of a mother Siprajan is no different from this daring hag.' The more he looked at the king, the more he was mad with anger. 'It's like Khun Chang seizing Wanthong from me! [41]

That king would have no difficulty getting ten thousand ladies. Khun Chang is a rich man too. He's loaded.' Looking at the curtain, his heart seethed like a roaring fire. He suddenly raised Skystorm, slashed the curtain to pieces,

and chopped it into a heap of hundreds of little shreds. He slashed

⁴² Ladies in waiting of the two sisters.

⁴³ Bickner (summary:26) says the servants are so over-awed by the meeting of the Phra Lo and the two princesses that they withdraw before the lovemaking, but then help smuggle Phra Lo into the palace. When they are later discovered, the king's mother arranges for all three to be assassinated in revenge for her husband's death when Song was defeated. The king is so appalled, he has her flogged to death. Subsequently the two cities are reconciled.

⁴⁴ Khawi is the hero of a tale taken from the Panyasa Jataka (*Banyat chadok*, the 'fifty lives' of the Buddha), and adapted into Thai in various forms as the tale of the tiger and the cow. King Rama II composed part of the tale as an outer drama entitled *Khawi*. Khawi is a calf who is transformed into a human by a rishi who recognizes his qualities. He travels to Jantaprathet, a city which is being terrorised by two giant eagles. He kills the eagles, rescues the king's daughter Jansuda who was hiding inside a drum, and falls in love with her. While they are swimming in a river, she sheds some of her fragrant hair, collects the hair from the water, places it in golden casket, and lets the casket float down the river. King Sannurat of Phathawisai opens the casket and falls in love with the owner of such special hair. Thatprasat, an old female retainer of Jansuda, offers to find her. She almost kills Khawi and abducts Jansuda to present to the king, but Jansuda's body is too hot for him to touch. Eventually Khawi is revived, the king is killed, and Khawi replaces the king on the throne. See *Bot lakhon nok phraratchaniphon ratchakan thi 4* (Outer dramas of King Rama II), Bangkok: Sinlapa bannakan, 2002, 387–482.

away the curtain and mosquito net on the bed, and saw Khun Chang's stout form lying with his arms around her. He was filled with black feelings of anger, hatred, and disappointment at her.

'Little Wanthong, the one and only! Beside him you're not even half his size.' He drew his sword, raised his head, and approached to cut them to pieces.

Goldchild intercepted the sword, then prostrated in apology, making Khun Phaen even angrier. He kicked Khun Chang off the bed, but Goldchild came between them and would not let go.

'Hold off! Cool down. Don't kill in anger. Don't you fear the power of the Lord of Life?' Khun Phaen gnashed his teeth and growled angrily back, 'No. I don't fear his power.

The wrong Khun Chang did me deserves something this strong. I'll split open his chest with my sword. Back off! This is not your business. Don't interfere. If I kill him secretly who'll catch me?'

Goldchild replied, 'Don't kill him. Just hurt him enough to be so ashamed that blood will flow from his eyes. If you chop him dead, the gods may cause you to be arrested, and the story will get spread around.'

Khun Phaen's anger cooled. He stood looking at Wanthong with his heart heaving.

'You black woman. You feel as much shame for your own body as there is dirt under your fingernails.

You float your face over to be with lover Chang. Scraping your forehead with a ray-skin⁴⁵ probably wouldn't hurt you. To embroider those curtains, you sit leaning on your elbow, with your elegant waist, making cute tiny stitches,

just like your own figure. Now you're involved with Chang, looking at his head doesn't upset you. A new pleasure makes you forget me. Such a loving couple!

I look at your cheeks, but they've totally lost their sheen. I see no fairness of turmeric. I look at your breasts but they're flabby. I can't feel even a little firmness.

You've lost your old beauty, **my poor lady**.⁴⁶ I can't tolerate this any more, dear Wanthong. If I do nothing, it would be remiss.' He drew his sword, but the spirit jumped forward. [42]

He angrily batted Goldchild away. 'Don't stop me. I'm going to finish it off.' Goldchild seized his sword and would not let go. Khun

⁴⁵ The skin of a ray, a flat fish. In the Ayutthaya period, the skins were a major item of export, especially to Japan where they were used as a form of leather for sheaths and other military equipment

⁴⁶ **Nang ngonrot, might be a literary reference?**

Phaen hurled the sword away in anger and disgust.

‘Oh my Wanthong! I didn’t think it could be like this – that you could sacrifice your rank and your dignity to this extent. It’s like a jewel ending up with a monkey

who just lets it fall in the dust and swings away. I’ll slice your body into a hundred pieces and feed them to the crows and vultures on the uplands. I’ll enjoy slicing up Khun Chang too.

All this happened because Siprajan didn’t fear my sword and looked down on me. I’d like to cut her skin, slit open her chest, and sprinkle it with chili and salt!’

He grabbed Khun Chang’s head. ‘On top, you’re as bald as a pond snail. Round the bottom, you’ve shaped what straggly hair there is with oil into a single rounded wing. It looks like the tasseled umbrella of a Mon noble.

‘You jailbird, the middle of your skull is a wasteland.’ He grabbed Khun Chang’s hair together into a topknot and combed it upwards into a curving wing. Round the topknot, he pulled out all hair making a space two fingers wide.

He inserted a stick and bound it with cotton to stick out. ‘You creep, your empty skull makes the fleas go hungry.’ With soot he drew *siw fish*⁴⁷ on his skull, a turtle⁴⁸ riding on his neck,

and a catfish⁴⁹ poking out of the water at the top of his leg. He stood back and laughed at his handiwork. He kicked Chang off the bed to lie face down in a heap on the floor, and found two pots to tie round his neck.

Finished with Khun Chang, he stepped onto the bed beside Wanthong and sighed deeply. ‘Oh, Wanthong, you’ve lost your luster.’ He stroked her softly with his hand.

‘Only my hand should touch you like this. Only I should hold your soft flesh. Only I should be the one to love and cherish you this gently, and touch you with palms as soft as gold leaf.

It’s a pity your flesh and breasts are sad and wasted. That louse has squeezed you sore already.’ He kicked Khun Chang in the stomach. ‘You evil monkey, you’re so drunk on money.’⁵⁰

He looked angry enough to cut off Chang’s head, but Goldchild intervened again. ‘Don’t kill him, father. Chop him up just enough he gets what he deserves and you feel satisfied. If you kill him, the wrong will cling to you.’ [43]

⁴⁷ *Rasbora argyrotaenia*

⁴⁸ Kukrit (185) claims *kriw* can mean a phallus, but the context makes this unlikely here

⁴⁹ *Tepho*, *pangasius larnaudi*, black ear catfish.

⁵⁰ This assumes that ๓๗ *nai* in the original is a misprint for ๓๗ *ruai*.

Khun Phaen calmed down. He stood looking at Wanthong and hating Khun Chang ever more. He drove off his spirits and chanted a mantra to revive her. 'Wake up and take a peek at your husband.'

Wanthong, who had been knocked out by the mantra, started awake with a shock and lay, still drowsy, not opening her eyes. She cuddled up to Khun Phaen and lay still.

A shiver of fear ran through her body, and she pinched what she thought was Khun Chang to wake him. 'Let me tell you my horrible nightmare. You built a fire in the mosquito-net.

It flared up to catch the tip of the thatch. The flames went up in several lines then came back down and burned your gut and belly. I jumped down onto the floor.

The curtain, pillow, and mattress went up in flames, and I was scorched in several places. There was no one to help beat it out. I felt very scared.

Please interpret this for me. I've never had a dream like this. What terrible thing is going to happen?' She hugged him tight without opening her eyes.

Khun Phaen was angered by her words, but replied, 'This is a good dream, my darling. Don't be upset. When you dreamed the fire consumed the mattress, pillow, and curtain, it means someone else will bring these things to you.

As for feeling upset, it means you'll hate some bad, interfering person. Dreaming you cried out means something loved and lost will return. An old friend will hug little Wanthong, and lessen all her troubles and woe.

My cool flesh, you and I will be happy. Don't be sad and afraid. The auspices are good. Lift your chin and let me give you a little kiss.'

Wanthong realized she did not recognize the voice. What he was whispering made her even more nervous. She felt the softness of his chest and the slimness of his waist

and was startled. She was too scared to say anything in fear of provoking him. She realized his chest was hairless and his chin too. The fragrance of krajae sandal made her even more suspicious. [44]

'Is Khun Chang this slim? I can't even get my hand round his wrist.' She revived in shock and, groping around, found Khun Chang.

'Why are you lying there on the ground with your eyes closed?' She tried to shake him awake, and started to cry in fright.

Her words had deepened Khun Phaen's anger. 'Wanthong, my love, open your eyes and look what's happening.

I'm not a bandit. There's no need to cry and get upset. Why are you shaking him awake? He doesn't have to get up, so leave him be.

You're trying to shake a sleeping person awake while ignoring the one who's already awake. Do you hate me or just don't know me? Raise your face and say hello. Stop pushing and squirming.

It's a pity, Wanthong. I can remember every inch of your face and body, but you've changed. You feel me with your hands but you have no idea.

You've forgotten lying under a low krathum bush in the cotton field, and picking a **bon**⁵¹ leaf to scoop some water. I was chewing betel and you wanted some, so I gave you what was left in my mouth. My left arm went stiff because you were lying on it.

You've got yourself a good husband with lots of wealth, and forgotten the old house and your poor friend. You're infatuated with that Khun Chang who pestered you so much. You're hugging a log that looks like a person.

If he wakes up and sees me kissing you, I'll die for nothing with my throat shredded. Go on, shake him awake to knock me down dead, really.'

Wanthong's doubts disappeared. She felt as hurt as if shot by a poisoned arrow. 'He's sharp at using words to hurt me.

He's dragging up the cottonfield to confuse matters. This is Khun Phaen for sure, it couldn't be anybody else. He's so stubbornly sure of himself and fears nobody. With his powers, he'll create havoc.

Stay still and think! He's unbearably sarcastic and playful. What will be will be, according to karma. He may trample me to pieces but I'm not going to be afraid of him.' [45]

She turned to shake Khun Chang awake again. 'Get up, my dear husband. Why are you lying there, eyes closed and oblivious? Don't you fear this Prince-of-Hell from Kanburi?'

She knocked over the betel tray, got up with tears in her eyes, and stood behind the screen in a rage. 'Struth! I thank you for your goodness.

You're true to your word in everything. But in reality, never in full measure.⁵² You can even spit saliva out of your mouth and swallow it

⁵¹ Got caladium, but can't find where from. Does this just mean a leaf high up?

⁵² There is a complex metaphor about measurement. *Sat* (honest, true to word) is a homophone of *sat* (a measure of volume). At the time, *sat* and *tung* were both used as volume measurements, with *tung* only 4/5ths the volume of a *sat*. She says: You're *sat* (honest), yes *sat* (measure). But in reality a *tung* is not a *sat* (measure). (Red: 174-5)

back again. That's really good.'

Khun Phaen replied angrily, 'Struth! You're good with words in every way. Trumpeting away, so sharp and so eloquent. Don't stop. Today let's hear one another out.

Just now you said I wasn't true to my word. You make lots of insinuations. You're very self-righteous. But when it comes to keeping one's word, it's you who give short-change.⁵³

You broke your word first, and I caught you out.⁵⁴ It's you who are clever at being honest in short measure, but you shift things around to look nice.⁵⁵

As soon as you had Khun Chang, you weighed things up and became very, very light with the truth.⁵⁶ Your words are very biting. Flaunting your beauty just annoys me.

You've no qualms about waking your lover to fight with your husband. You don't fear even a little. Why do you want to shake him awake? How long has he been enjoying you in my place?

Haven't you had enough of him yet? If you keep on with this and don't listen to me, your back will be thrashed. Your twisting in the wind and you don't know it yet.'

Wanthong was cut to the quick. 'Say what you like, I'm not afraid. It all comes down to saying I'm bad, over and over and over again.

You're taking one tiny little hair and trying to slice half of it into seven strands. You're the one who's so self-righteous.⁵⁷ I've never experienced anything like this in my life.

Why are you pointing the finger at me? Only recently you came with a raised stick and a clenched fist. I still remember the past perfectly. It was you who called that woman to slap me with no respect. [46]

You even hung posters full of abuse. You broke things off. You wanted to rip open my old mother's chest. You said you wouldn't support me, like Kaki.⁵⁸

⁵³ Continues the measurement metaphor: your hand fails to fill the measure.

⁵⁴ More of the metaphor: I came to check the scales.

⁵⁵ More of the metaphor: you're clever at scooping it out and shifting it around to look nice.

⁵⁶ More of the metaphor: you repay each *sat* with only 25, when it should be 80 (Suphon: 159).

⁵⁷ The original is เงนค่อน, which refers to the hooded look of someone being angry. The term is used repeatedly in this exchange, and 'self-righteous' seems an appropriate (if liberal) translation. Here it is emphasized by a phrase meaning 'with eyes alive.'

⁵⁸ Kaki is the heroine of a tale taken from the Nipata Jataka (Nibot chadok, part of the second book of the Tipitaka) and adapted into a poem by Chaophraya Phrkhlang (Hon) in the 1790s, and then into an outer

The posters made me very angry. Accusing me of being obscene, destructive, bad through and through. Like picking and scratching a crab to draw blood.

I tried to stop Khun Chang's advances. He's ugly. It was shameful. I cried floods, but mother threatened to throw me out, and then forced me in here.⁵⁹

So he had the opportunity to do the damage. When I've been through this much, don't *you* come back and pick at *me*. I'm fallen because you're no good. If you had some mercy, nothing would have happened.

When things are going your way, you're over the moon. You get a good new wife and have no complaints. All lovey dovey. You even teach her how to abuse me and make trouble.

Now Laothong has left you, hasn't she? That's why you turn up here in a rage in the middle of the night. You're starved of water so you turn to drink mud.'

'You're so eloquent and self-righteous. I can see changing your name was right on. The name "Wanthong" must be popular. Before long your cheeks and breasts will be gold.

Yes, this is it. You don't want me to say anything. You want me to stay at home and close my eyes like an idiot, while you do whatever you like. When I criticize you a bit, you claim you've never experienced anything like it.

But that's not enough for you, is it. You're just getting into your stride, so you start making a lot of noise and dragging up the past to help you. Just who did I tell to slap you?

In the row with Laothong, she jumped down from the boat and you insulted her to her face, making all kinds of noise. You were unbelievably abusive that day.

Who wouldn't take offence? You did wrong and then you took off. Because I had mercy, I didn't chop you dead. I was angry at you, yes, but I didn't break it off.

Two nights later, I came to the house and found this wild elephant all over you in bed. Then I was as angry as if burnt by fire, and on that day you nearly died on the bed. [47]

If I'd used my kris, by now you'd be ash. Though I was angry, I still loved and missed you so I overlooked the fault and stopped thinking about it.

Next morning when I kept asking you to come out of the room,

drama by Chaophraya Mahasakdi Phonlasep during the Second Reign. The name is used to refer to a woman with many lovers. In the tale, Kaki is a very beautiful woman. Her fragrance lingers for seven days with any man who makes love with her. She is first married to King Phrommathat, and subsequently has five lovers.

⁵⁹ This whole stanza rather speculative.

you wouldn't even look at my face one little bit. I'm still wavering and thinking of our relationship, but your twisting everything to blame me.

If you still loved me you wouldn't get at me. But now you don't love me, you'll make anything up to blame me. What are these posters I hung up? The handwriting was Khun Chang's!

Because your lover pleases you, you'll make up anything to make me look bad and create animosity. Lots of posters were put up along the road by our house, but I tore heaps of them down and threw them away.

You got caught by his bait. Once you were in the cage, you couldn't wriggle free, so you decided to take against me. Thinking about it, this is all a matter of bad fate.

It's like the story of Kaki. That bird Khun Chang flies off with the lady, and I'm cast as Khonthan. Don't sweet-talk me so you can go back to the palace.⁶⁰

It's a pity I still love you. I can see clearly now how it all happened from the beginning. I come to find you but you act as if you hate me. On top of that, you want to wake your lover to try out his power.

For pity's sake, Wanthong! How can you cut me off like flicking something away? With no cover from a bishop, my rook was taken without warning. Then the knight went too, and my position was chaotic.

The knight had advanced too far so the rook was exposed. Out of carelessness, I lost not one piece but two, slashed and scattered in the dust. Now I'm cornered, you can pick off the pawns.⁶¹

Thinking about it, I feel sorry for myself. It's tragic, like a story from the mask-play. Sida, alone and lonely, goes off with the villain. Ram trails after her with a broken heart.

If only you were honest and true to your word, a little bit like Sida, but you're not. You've lost any morality completely. How come in the past you said

you'd rather die than let another man touch you? That you'd keep your feelings only for me? But now you sit still and let him fondle you. Is this your lover or not? You tell me! [48]

Things have already gone too far, but you still want to wake him

⁶⁰ See footnote above on the Kaki tale. The mythical bird, Krut (Garuda), disguises himself, abducts Kaki from King Phrommathat, and flies away to his palace at the foot of Mount Meru. Khonthan (Gandharva), King Phrommathat's musician, goes along, disguised as a midge hidden in Krut's feathers. When Khrut leaves the palace, Khonthan becomes her next lover. He later returns her to the palace to win the king's favor.

⁶¹ Bishop=เม็ค, *met*; rook=เรือ, *rua* (*ship*); knight=ม้า, *ma* (horse). These chess analogues were common in the literature of early Rattanakosin when the game was popular at court. They are found in *Rachathirat*, and *Ramakian* (Suphon: 160).

up to kill me. Where are his lance and sword? Bring them in! But don't wake him just yet.

If he woke and saw me kissing you, I'd die for nothing, topped at the neck. If he can do it, then let him. It doesn't matter. Good men do not die every day.

In the old days, they said women had three hundred wives. They weren't making it up. I've just learned how true it is. I'll mould a figure of you for all to see.

It'll be an example to show that a good appearance can go with a crooked heart, lovely round black eyes but sharp inside. Now I understand the whole thing.'

Wanthong was very hurt by this verbal pounding, and tears welled up in her eyes. She tossed her head. 'So, you don't remember your own words.

On the day of the quarrel with Laothong, you roared and bellowed on and on. I blocked the way to stop you, and you wanted to slash me down dead.

I was so angry I went to hang myself. When Saithong told you that, you cursed her, then mounted your elephant and took Laothong off, like Phra Suthon getting Manora.⁶²

I'm sleeping with Khun Chang, it's true. But I put up a huge fight first. I didn't fall with my eyes open. His spirits came and put a spell on me.

If my husband had had mercy and protected me, who could've done this to me? You just cast your net and take whatever fish is in front of the trap.⁶³ Because you have no mercy,

you mounted your elephant and went off with little Laothong. As for me, I had to wait and pine. But your new wife was possessive and wouldn't let you come. And now you have the nerve to say I don't keep my word.

You say I've three hundred wives and you want to make a figure as an example. How come you didn't do it back then? Because you were fondling me to your heart's content and didn't open your eyes.

⁶² Another tale from the Panyasa Jataka which was adapted into an outer drama entitled *Manora*, or *Manora and Phra Suthon*, in the late Ayutthaya period. Suthon (Sudhana, a bodhisatva) is a prince looking for a bride. A hunter comes across a group of kinnari bathing. He manages to capture one of them, Manora, and brings her to court where she marries Suthon. When he goes off to war, a counselor persuades the king, Suthon's father, that Manora is inauspicious and will bring disaster. She is condemned to death, but the queen gives her back her kinnari wings, allowing her to escape. Suthon returns from war, and sets off to search for her. With help from a hermit, he travels for seven years and seven days, crossing mountains swarming with monsters and rivers blazing with fire. When he reaches his goal, Manora's father sets him three tests to win her hand, the last of which is to identify her among seven identical girls. He succeeds when a golden butterfly alights on her.

⁶³ In other words, you always do the easiest thing (Suphon:160).

Only now you think I'm bad and won't support me. Who will argue with you to say I'm good? If someone is bad, people run a mile. If someone is good, who wouldn't love them? [49]

You're ashamed because you made the mistake of becoming my husband. You got infatuated and fell in a pit. Because you mixed up a love potion, and mated with a bad person, it detracts from your virility.

Back when you loved me and lived with me, the mantra in my body made your complexion turn dark and blotchy.⁶⁴ I'm sorry. But now those freckles have disappeared.

Since you went with little Laothong, your skin is as bright as a sparkling diamond, your complexion glistens as if it contained gold. So why do you come philandering back here?

Little Wanthong is bad, evil, a disaster – so bad that Phlai Kaeo can't keep her. Aren't you afraid to sit so close to an evil person? Oi! Leaping away are you?

It's not right for you to eat leftovers. It's beyond the call of duty, not befitting your status. Don't keep circling round, back and forth. Release me like giving freedom to a bird.

If you want silver and gold, maybe a couple of baskets, I won't object, I'll give them to you. Or is it losing Laothong that's making you gloomy? Don't be sad, I'll find a squeeze for you.

Would you prefer a Thai or a Lao? If it's a Lao girl, should she have a chignon or a topknot? I prostrate and beg you to stop pestering me. Don't get mixed up with me, or you'll be soiled.'

'So sharp, so eloquent. Bang! Bang! Full of hidden meanings. Not bad. I'm furious you accuse me of distorting things. Please look out for your head!

You float your face to challenge me with your sharp eloquence. You speak as if nobody had a clue. You're weaving quite a tale, miss storyteller.

You think I'm poor, hard up, and in difficulty so you can mock and tease me totally. Don't float your face to abuse and hurt me. Don't question my words to cause me pain.

I know your lover is a rich man with heaps of silver and gold to give you to spend whenever you like. You keep saying how good you are to me.

I've got nothing. I've got nobody to support me with gifts. Your husband has wealth of thousands of *dun*.⁶⁵ He's a real aristocrat, this

⁶⁴ It was believed that someone subject to a love charm would develop freckles and blotches on the face. Wanthong is accusing him of using a love charm to get her, and being affected himself (Red: 178).

⁶⁵ จุลย, a weight equal to 20 chang (Red: 674).

husband of yours. [50]

You say you'll find another girl for me. You go on about it in a hundred ways. You just want to foist someone on me to keep me happy so you can hug Khun Chang in comfort.

Don't bother thinking about it. Even a lady from the Dusit heaven won't make me change. I'll never cool down. If I can't have you alive then I'll have you dead.

Don't ever think I'll give up. This goes very deep and won't change easily. However much I criticize you, you're not ashamed. You say you fell because his spirits got into you.

You're really good at lying and making things up. Your mother had a part in it too. She wrestled you in with Khun Chang. Although I was far away, I know everything.

My spirits told me it all. Though your body was squirming, your heart was right in it. My love is still sincere and hasn't faded. Don't hide. Let me take you away.

Though you're fallen and ruined now, it doesn't matter. I won't complain about it. It's almost dawn and time to go. If you won't come, I'll cut you in two.'

'Why are you bullying me, going on at me in a hundred ways? I'm fallen and ruined because I slept, but you say I'm hiding things. Your spirits are intent on false accusations.

I squirmed and shouted enough to break the house apart. I got away but he dragged me back. I ran into my mother who bashed me over and over. Your spirits ducked in to look and thought I was willing.

Because I'm a woman, I had to stay still. Who was there to help me? I'm fallen and ruined because he forced me. What your bad-mouthed spirits say is aspersions, all of it.

They're good at making false accusations. I'd like to slap them with a durian thorn. You're spirits are not truthful, the villains. They deserve to be knocked out.

You say if you can't have me alive you'll have me dead. Hit me, I'm not afraid. Whatever I say, you won't believe it. Why should I bother to live and put up with this.

Don't gnash your teeth and growl for nothing. Do it! Why don't you kill me, slash me to death?' She pushed, pinched, and scratched him relentlessly. [51]

'Hold off! Don't do that. I'll draw my sword and cut you to pieces. Are you really that stubborn? Well, what will be will be.

You bad-mouth my spirits to bash me. If I don't knock you out, it's not me. You won't come back to me. Aren't you afraid to put up

a struggle?

If you won't go, today I'm not listening.' He made a fist and hit her. He pulled her over, and drew his sword as if to cut her dead. 'Why do you keep hanging your lover? Look out!'

He blew a Beguiler spell onto Wanthong's face. Waving Skystorm, he said, 'Don't underestimate me. Quick, let's go!'

Hit by the Beguiler breath, Wanthong felt drowsy, her anger ebbed, and she stopped struggling. The sword made her heart skip a beat, and each time he raised it, she squealed.

'What is this, my lord? Don't hassle me. I'll fetch some things. Now I know I'm going, I'll take some savings – rings, gold, silver, cloth.'

The more she twisted, the more he tightened his grip on her wrists. 'Both my arms will break if you don't let me go. Why raise your sword as if to kill me? I'll go quietly. Let go of my hands.'

'Oh, miss sharp tongue, are you losing your eloquence? No more sounding off and waving your hands around? Good. If you're still stubborn, I'd like to hear it now.'

Go and pick out some clothes and come back here.' He blew a mantra onto his hands and stroked her back. 'I love you, really I do. I teased you because I was angry.'

Hit by the love-breath, Wanthong forgot her anger. She sat next to him with one hand on the floor and her head bowed. 'Did I say I wouldn't go? I'll fetch some clothes and then leave with you.'

She walked into her room to find things. She unlocked a chest, and the fragrance billowed out. It had silk and cotton, all brand new in many colors,

glossy and fragrant with the aroma of sandal oil. She picked out pieces and folded them neatly, then closed the chest, relocked it, [52]

and wrapped everything in a European silk handkerchief. She unlocked another chest full of gold, dazzling diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, and *phirot* rings.

She picked some out and wrapped them tightly in a shawl. 'I'm taking time and Khun Phaen will be waiting.' She put her cloth bundles on top of a little basket, and walked out.

She came to the bed and sat next to Khun Chang's sleeping form. As the mantra was weakening, she began to feel for him again. 'Leaving you, I feel like a kite that's lost its wind. Don't wait expecting me still to be alive.'

She bent down and embraced his feet. He did not move. 'Oh your

merit has run out, my dear. However much I shake you, you don't stir. Why do you sleep and abandon your wife?

How can I let you know that Khun Phaen suddenly turned up and would've chopped my head off if I didn't go? I didn't run away because I'm unfaithful.'

She wrote a letter relating everything as she saw it. When she was finished, she closed it tightly and stuck it on the wall of her husband's ruan.

Again she tried to shake him awake, crying 'Oh Chang, why are you sleeping so deeply? Are you under the control of bad spirits? I'll make offerings to them.

If my darling husband should awake, I'll prepare turtle salad, fish salad, duck, chicken, strong liquor, and sweets, along with silver candles, gold candles, and dazzling things.'

One female spirit heard her and her mouth watered. She wanted duck and chicken terribly. But Goldchild called out in a fearful, forbidding tone, 'I'll lop your head off right now. Don't even think about it.'

The female spirit knew to fear Goldchild. She came up and kicked Khun Chang away, grabbed his arms and legs and bent him up backwards. He slept on, knowing nothing.

Wanthong hugged him again but he didn't respond. 'Oh my lord, your merit has really run out now.' She blacked out and fell unconscious.