

## 19: Khun Chang follows Wanthong

[II/66]

Khun Chang could not wake up. There was a bare track across his head. When Khun Phaen's spell wore off, he revived and opened his eyes.

His head hurt. He felt where the hair had been pulled out. 'This bit shouldn't be bare like this. My whole body is covered in soot. Eh! How did I come to be under the bed?'

He got up and saw Wanthong was missing. He shouted out for her at the top of his voice. 'In the evening I asked her to sleep beside me. Just at midnight, I turned over and gave her a hug.'

He saw the door standing wide open and leapt over to look out the window. There was no sign of her around the central hall. Seeing the ruins of the curtains scattered about,

he gathered a pile of them in his arms and roared, 'Khun Phaen came and took her away!' He summoned the servants and shouted at them, 'You hid your faces and let this villain come up here!'

The servants up in the house protested loudly, 'We were frightened. A tiger came to bite the dogs.' Khun Chang lashed at them with his eyes closed, and cried, 'No! A wild tiger came to eat people.'

Ai-Thong opened his eyes and said, 'What's that? A tiger? Can't be, it's got no hair. It's a ghost or a butting goat. But it's got hands and feet like a person. Oh! Must be the abbot.'

He raised his hands in wai. 'What is your wish?' Khun Chang angrily chased him away. He went round looking for Wanthong, even getting down on hands and knees. He was surprised to see trays scattered around.

He opened a chest and found many pieces of cloth had disappeared. He lost his composure and began sobbing. Then he found many rings had also gone. Looking round, he saw the letter on the wall.

In the letter, Wanthong said, 'I'm sad and miserable. Make haste to follow me into the forest. At cock crow, Khun Phaen came,

cast a spell, came up to the house, and entered our room. I tried to shake you awake several times. I resisted him over and over again, but he raised his sword to kill. [67]

I'm just a helpless woman, with no one to help me, so I had to go with him. Truly, I didn't go away because I'm fed up. Don't leave me to suffer. Hurry after us immediately.'

He raised the letter reverently above his head and writhed around in distress. ‘Why couldn’t I wake up? I’m a bad husband, my precious.

How come I slept through all this? Khun Phaen had fun shaving my head like a dog. You shook me but I didn’t wake. Those five spirits were hopeless.

It’s a waste of effort feeding them with offerings of liquor, rice, turtle, fish, chicken, and pork. They didn’t do anything to protect us. They let that villain take us by surprise and make trouble.

I’m throwing you out, the whole lot of you five spirits. May you drown, die, go to hell.’ He called Son Phraya. ‘Why did you hide away and sleep?

Khun Phaen came right into the room and kidnapped Wanthong away. Why didn’t you bolt the door of the house? Cloth, silver and gold have disappeared too.’

Son Phraya said, ‘Why are you getting angry with me? I was in the other ruean. He shaved your head smooth and *you* still didn’t wake up.

Why did you let him? Why are you getting angry with me? And why are you so upset? She doesn’t love you so she ran away.’

Khun Chang replied, ‘I’m not head-over-heels about *Wanthong*. I’m angry because he stole my silver and gold. If I catch him, I’ll cut him so the blood flows.

I’ll chop that Khun Phaen with my sword into piles of little pieces, seize all his property, and bring back Wanthong – Ow! I forgot.’

Son Phraya laughed uproariously. Khun Chang turned to order the servants. ‘Go and talk to the forest people we’ve had dealings with in the past,

those Karen and Lawa who came to sell eaglewood.<sup>1</sup> Send people to bring them here. When there are five hundred, we’ll go.’ [68]

When these Lawa troops had arrived en masse, Khun Chang gave orders to feed them. He had liquor given to the elephants until his own mount, Phlai Kang, had had enough.

Then he hurried over to his mother’s ruean, prostrated at her feet, and told her everything with no concealment. ‘Last night Khun Phaen came.

He cast a spell and came right into our room. He stole a lot of things, and took away Wanthong too. I’m taking leave to go after

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<sup>1</sup> A fragrant resin secreted by the tree *aquilaria agallocha/crassna* (Tree:685), possibly as a result of a disease which kills the tree. For centuries the resin has been exported (mainly to China) for making aromatics.

him.

If I catch him, I'll slash him to pieces and bring Wanthong back. It's my right to fight over her.<sup>2</sup> Please give me your blessings for success.'

Thong Prasi replied, 'Why are you in love with her? She's no good. She went off with another man. Why should you go after her?

You can choose from all Suphan. There are plenty as good as her. Listen to your mother and don't run after her. She won't come back, son.'

Khun Chang answered plaintively, 'Wanthong is not wicked, mother. She tried hard to wake me up. But he raised his sword to kill,

and she's just a helpless woman so she really had to go. She wrote a letter telling me everything. I'm very upset. Don't stop me, mother, give me your blessing.'

Thong Prasi knew she could not stop him so fell in with his wishes. 'May you have victorious power like a poison arrow. May you find Wanthong in the forest, and get her to return with love in her heart.

If Khun Phaen resists, don't fight him because you'll lose hands down and get killed. May things go as you desire.' Khun Chang received the blessing, took leave, and went out to the central hall

to get dressed. He put on a yok hitched up with the end hanging free,<sup>3</sup> belts across his chest, and a cord round his head hung with amulets, mercury charms,<sup>4</sup>

an inguinal gland in copper from Kamphaeng Phet, a duck egg in stone, powdered turmeric, and a single takrut from Teacher Khong.<sup>5</sup>

In his mouth he put an amulet to make his speech stun.<sup>6</sup> [69]

On the back of his neck, where his hair was sparse and curly as a conch, he put a Ratcha yantra cloth. He picked up a goad and pike,

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<sup>2</sup> Literally: In war I'm not crossing anyone's boundaries.

<sup>3</sup> โจงหาง, *jong hang*.

<sup>4</sup> พระปรอท, *phra prot*, because of its fluid quality, mercury incanted with sacred formulas, was believed to give the wearer invulnerability to weapons by flowing to any point of the body to prevent a weapon penetrating. (Suphon: 180-1).

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the same abbot of Wat Khae who instructed Khun Phaen in chapter 6. With the exception of the takrut, these are objects found in nature which are considered powerful (*khlang*) in themselves because of their strangeness or deformity.

<sup>6</sup> Total guess, and no help from dictionaries etc. *ongphra kawum lam jangngang*.

and stumbled over to mount the neck of his elephant, Phlai Kang.

Son Phraya rode swaying behind him, looking as fine as a molded doll. The servants, all merrily drunk with glazed eyes, waited together in front of the stairway.

At an auspicious time for victory, they struck gongs to signal to the Lawa, and set off into the forest, waving banners, firing guns, and shouting rowdily.

The Karen and Lawa carried crossbows with bolts dipped in powerful poison. Khun Chang drove his elephant forward at a jog-trot, and the troops hastened along.

After leaving the city of Suphan, he was anxious and uncertain about where to aim for. Seeing some forest hunters coming towards them,

Khun Chang called out, 'Have you seen anything? Two people fleeing on horseback? A villain has kidnapped my wife.'

Hunter Rod paid his respects. 'I saw them. I'll tell you about it.' Khun Chang dismounted from his elephant and happily poured liquor for them to drink together.

Rod sunk nine cups of his liquor, and dizzily told him the whereabouts. 'I definitely saw them crossing the river at cockcrow.

They were riding a horse, laughing and flirting. He grabbed her breast. I couldn't look. The woman had very beautiful, soft arms but hard legs, wrapped round his in the saddle.

A while ago they went to sleep at Banyan Landing. I'll take you there.' Khun Chang was seething with rage and bathed in a cold sweat.

He grasped his goad and mounted back on the neck of his tusker. Rod led the way through the lofty forest almost up to Banyan Landing, then pointed out the spot.

Khun Phaen's Goldchild spirit was keeping watch. Seeing this big troop arrive, he ran in to wake his master. [70]

Khun Phaen, both powerful and handsome, was lying in the shade of the glossy banyan, happily snuggled up to Wanthong, cooled by a fresh breeze.

The afternoon sun slanted through the trees. Crickets chirped and churried all around them. Both were fast asleep, but Khun Phaen woke when Goldchild came.

He rolled over and gripped his fearsome sword. Seeing so many troops coming through the forest, he softly stirred Wanthong. 'Darling, please wake up,

wash your face, and get dressed. You're about to see the battle of your lover versus your husband. If you're unhappy and scared, reveal

yourself to him. It's up to you.

Khun Chang has a huge force with hundreds of men. I have only little me. Your husband is famous and powerful. This could be my dying day.

I'm concerned for you. Khun Chang is very upset and angry because you did him wrong. That's why he came after you in this dense forest.

Now he's found you, if you don't reveal yourself but try to get away, he'll be furious. If he catches you, he'll slit you open and leave you for the crows.

Think again about how things are. He loves you, so if you go over to him and speak nicely, he shouldn't be angry. He'll take you back and enjoy you.

I won't fight. I'll make good my escape in this forest and save myself. What do you think? Will you stay or go? Don't get upset over this.'

Wanthong gave him a black, wounded look. 'So you no longer love me? I mean to entrust my life to you. I broke it off with Khun Chang to come with you.

How come you don't think of the past? You're famous for having enough power and knowledge to turn the world upside down.

He has just these troops here. With all your powers, aren't you ashamed to run away so easily? As for me, I'm not going back. I'll fight to the death according to my merit. [71]

Whatever happens, my name will last. Don't imagine I'll go back to die in that house. If you're afraid, hide in the banyan and give me Skystorm so I can fight myself.'

'Oh! These words I like! I'll dress you up properly with a shirt, helmet, and cloth leggings dyed in *wan* herb. I'm just a bit worried that you're not used to being on a horse.

You'll have to be good at spear-play, hit the rhythm right. Khun Chang's spear is huge, and he has a good rhythm. You'll probably get stabbed by him.

I'm a man. If I die, then let it be. But you, my darling, stay out of trouble.' He quickly dressed and prepared himself for battle in the way he had done before.

He chanted a special formula, blew on his hands, and grasped Skystorm in his right hand. He chanted a powerful mantra to make Wanthong invisible to anyone who came,

and to concentrate her mind so no enemy weapon would touch her. Then he leapt on Color-of-Mist and galloped off with Goldchild and his spirits in train.

He sent his spirits to cut Bermuda grass, then composed his mind and intoned a formula which transformed the grass instantly into people, all equipped with pikes and spear.

He gave them orders, 'Stay here in the forest and keep out of sight until I give the signal. Then come out and fall upon Khun Chang's troops.'

He spurred Color-of-Mist away. The spirits surrounded the enemy on the front and flanks. Seeing the horse racing towards him with Skystorm flashing, Khun Chang called out, 'Prepare to defend!'

They drew their swords and lances, raised their guns, pulled the triggers and fired amid shouts and hollering. But there was no flash, no bang. Khun Phaen rode up in front of Khun Chang,

and bellowed a special mantra. Some took fright and ran away, abandoning their guns. Some stood stunned, their swords slipped from their grasp. Khun Chang was frozen in a defensive posture.

Both officers and men were dazed and confused by the mantra. All feared his powers. Seeing Khun Phaen almost on top of him, Khun Chang took fright, fired his gun, and urged his troops to advance. [72]

His gunners and lancers advanced en masse, sending a rumbling sound through the forest. They swarmed around the horse, adding the sound of their crossbows to the uproar.

Color-of-Mist wheeled around, kicking and biting. People tried to dodge but were kicked on the chin. A Lawa said, 'This is a mighty animal!' He clumsily tried to catch hold of the horse.

Khun Phaen shouted and slashed with his sword, sending a head tumbling along the forest floor. Khun Chang danced up and down on the back of his elephant, crying out, 'Forward! No retreat!'

Why be afraid? There's only one of him. Soon I'll dance all over him and chop him in two like a banana stalk. Son Phraya, advance the elephant so I can stab him.'

Son Phraya said, 'Eh? **You're mad.** You'll get knocked down in the shit. Don't you think it's a good thing our elephant is far away from him? There's no need to go closer.'

Khun Chang saw that was true and quietly offered no argument. He urged his troops forward instead. 'Hey! Split up and form the crow's wings abreast. Shoot him off his horse!'

Khun Chang's Lawa troops poured forward in tight formation like an army of ants, swarming around Khun Phaen, stabbing, and firing their guns.

They attacked Goldchild and his spirits on the right and left, but none of their slashing and thrusting met its mark. Khun Chang backed his elephant further away crying, 'Forward! Don't let up!'

Khun Phaen could now see how large the Lawa forces were, so signaled to his spirit dummies to attack Khun Chang's troops in mid

battlefield.

The dummies joined the fight, shouting, yelling, and stirring up a cloud of dust. Lawa dead piled up on Mon corpses. Some revived and stabbed back.

But the dummies were elastic, so nothing pierced them. They responded by slashing and chopping. Khun Chang's men broke and scattered in defeat. Khun Chang turned his elephant and fled away.

Khun Phaen spurred Color-of-Mist to give chase. 'Where are you going on that elephant, you son of a slave?' Khun Chang replied, 'What?' and drove his elephant pounding into the forest. [73]

The howdah caught on some thorns, teetered, broke apart with a crunch, and slid down the elephant's side. Son Phraya jumped off and ran into hiding. Rattaya leapt after him.

Khun Chang fell from the elephant with a thud, and ran hunch-backed straight into the forest undergrowth, snagging and grazing his flesh so the blood flowed. In fear he blundered ahead to find a hiding place.

His leg tangled in a vine and he fell rolling on the ground. 'I'm caught in a trap! Release me! Why has Grandma Mo abandoned me here alone? Oh dear, I've had it!'

He sat exhausted in a thicket with his blood spattering down like drops of rain. 'This time, I won't live. If he catches me, I probably won't escape being crushed to death.'

'Because I love my wife, I lose my life. The more I think about it, the more I lose heart. There's not a scrap of clothing left on me. I came to die for nothing.'

Khun Chang's men who had fled away realized the enemy was not following them. Rattaya came to find Son Phraya, and they each called their servants to search around for their master.

They fanned out through the dense forest, cutting away the thorny rattan. It was a long, weary time until they found their master looking as if he had been mauled by a tiger.

They hugged him and wept affectionately. 'Such bad fortune, lord and master. If your wounds disappear, we'll kill and roast a couple of monkeys as an offering.'

He had been stripped of his shirt, hat and everything else by the rattan thorns. Blood spattered around like drizzle. They brought clothes for him,

mopped away the blood with their upper cloths, washed off the mud, and pried out the thorns. The Karen, Lawa, and his own people went off to find medicines to treat him.

Khun Phaen's anger cooled and he ordered his men not to give

chase. Thinking of Wanthong, he rushed over and told his spirits to keep watch.

Close to the shady banyan, he dismounted. Pretending to have an injured leg, he walked forward with staring eyes, intending to test Wanthong's feelings. 'What will she say?' [74]

Hiding in the shade of the big banyan, Wanthong was happy to see him return. She rushed out to greet him lovingly.

Khun Phaen leant his arm on her shoulder and whispered, 'I'm badly wounded. I got shot in the side. It hurts. Please don't walk unevenly.'

Wanthong was shocked and upset. Under his weight, she could hardly walk. At the banyan tree, Khun Phaen pretended to collapse on the point of death.

He said, 'I was shot at the top of my leg and nearly fell off my horse. Terrible! Khun Chang had countless men. They followed and almost killed me.'

Khun Chang stabbed me so hard, my innards almost spewed out. His spear play is good. Please staunch the blood for me a bit.'

He picked up Wanthong's hand and put it on his belly. 'There's blood or something gurgling here. Please staunch it. This damn muscle is twitching. Press it hard.'

Wanthong then knew he was fooling. She turned aside, withdrew her hand, and shoved him away. 'What's this, my good fellow? Too much! I'm tired from the journey. Is there anything to eat?'

Khun Phaen replied, 'The rice crackers aren't finished yet, my darling. If we loved one another like we did in our house, you wouldn't be thinking about eating.'

If you loved me like I love you, then you'd ignore your stomach pangs like I do mine. I brought food from the Kanburi house but when we left last night I forgot it.

Just looking on your face, my stomach pangs disappear. I think only of holding you close with a heart of unending love.

My heart is full to bursting for you. I hope you feel the same.' Wanthong exclaimed, 'What a talker! You're very smart, lord of a hundred tricks!'

Khun Phaen, famed everywhere for his powers, turned to look at the sun about to disappear behind the mountains, [75]

its light softening and turning bright red as it was hidden by the trees. He suggested to Wanthong, 'My love, let's go and bathe. You'll feel refreshed.'

Wanthong tossed her head in annoyance and replied, 'My legs ache. I can't walk. All those lies about being shot hurt me a lot. I'll go down to swim in a bit.'

Khun Phaen said, 'Don't take long, or you'll shiver with cold when evening approaches. I know why you're hurt and irritated. It's because you went to war no-holds-barred,

fighting with me so urgently in the shade of the banyan. Do you have to lean on me to walk? I'll carry you. Let's try. Come on, I'll pick you up.'

'I dislike this, I really do. Leave off. I'm not a hunchback who can't walk. When have you ever carried me before?' She got up and went off in a huff.

Khun Phaen coaxed her to enjoy the stream. A breeze rippled the water, and wafted pollen from the graceful, blooming lotuses.

Bees buzzed around the flowers, bathing themselves in the pollen. The wind rustled the leaves, and blew ripe petals to drop into the stream

where their fragrance suffused the water like fresh-tasting celestial waters. She nipped off a lotus flower and leaf with her fingernail, and fashioned them into a little boat.

Khun Phaen broke off a lotus stalk and coiled it round her like a necklace. Wanthong gathered floating lotus petals and gently blew them to fly in the wind.

Under the clear water, fish could be seen swimming prettily through the lotus stalks. Some hid near the bank. Others fed in the mud. Khun Phaen and Wanthong watched them, then went down to play in the water,

both laughing and giggling, merrily teasing one another. Khun Phaen suggested they play hide-and-seek. Wanthong cried, 'I'll be it.

Don't go too far away. If I can't find you I'll get scared of crocodiles.' Khun Phaen said, 'It's not yet time for you to come leaping after me. If you play it like that, I'm not having it. [76]

If you don't close your eyes because you're afraid of a poisonous snake, then may you run into a puffer fish or a siw fish that bites hard and sucks your flesh and blood.'

Wanthong said, 'Playing with this sort of cursing is very scary to me. I've never done it before. Forget it. You come back and close your eyes.

I'll go off and you seek. If I manage to touch base, I'll have a good laugh.' She walked off, glancing around, then plunged in and swam to hide among the lotus leaves.

Khun Phaen looked up and could not see her. He swam right past where she was hiding in the lotus clump and spying on him.

He glanced all around and called out, 'Little Wanthong. Where are you hiding.' His nose touched her cheek. 'Ah! This is little Wanthong's cheek.'

He grabbed hold of her and squeezed her breasts with both hands.

Wanthong pried off his hands and cried, 'If you catch both sides, the eggs are broken.'<sup>7</sup>

Khun Phaen was over the moon. He sat close beside her and nuzzled her. 'I'll scrub your back. Let's take turns.' Wanthong turned and flashed him a sharp look.

She sat beside him shoulder to shoulder and stretched out her arms. He slipped his arms around her immediately and softly massaged her breasts.

'You're supposed to be scrubbing my arms. Why are you squeezing there instead?' 'I thought there was some stubborn dirt so I was rubbing it. I was about to blow it away but the bump turns out to be just you.'

Wanthong cried out, 'Don't be sarcastic. It's not nice. So this "bump" doesn't please you? It's not like when you climbed the palace wall.

That one was like a heavenly montha flower. But now it's floated away. How maddening for you! The heavenly flower has gone into the palace, so you have to make do with a grass flower instead.'

Khun Phaen was stung and embarrassed. He mumbled, 'Don't get at me. There's no woman I love as much as you.' [77]

He suggested they go up and get changed. They walked back through the forest shoulder-to-shoulder, went under the shade of the golden banyan, and tasted ecstasy together.

At that time, Khun Chang was lying in the forest, aching badly and crying. After sunset and nightfall, his men collected wood, lit fires,

and made shelters to sleep in the wilds. The injured lay around groaning. Some went off in bands to gallivant around the forest until late. At cock crow, they awoke still in the forest.

Khun Phaen slept with Wanthong under the shade of the banyan. At the end of the third watch, he woke up,

chilled by the cold dew, and hugged Wanthong's sleeping form. He took her hand, raised her chin, and suggested they lie on their backs to admire the moon. The moonlight filtered through the banyan leaves and fell on her breasts.

They looked like a pair of red lotus buds. Drops of chill dew scattered on them, glittering like diamonds. He hugged her and stroked his hand back and forth.

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<sup>7</sup> In the Thai version of hide-and-seek, if the seeker tags two people at the same time it is called 'breaking eggs,' and the seeker loses (Red: 207-8).

In the dead of night, animals made no noise. Only the ring of cicadas echoed around like an orchestra of java flutes. The more he listened, the more bleak he felt.

At early light he said to Wanthong, 'I can't hold you close for too long. Good or bad, that villain Khun Chang will go back and accuse me before the king.

He'll get his lordship angry enough to send an army to arrest us. Things will blow up like a raging fire. I think he'll send a huge army.

We must leave this banyan and go deep into the forest.' He prompted Wanthong to take leave of the golden banyan,

and quickly went off to find Color-of-Mist at the path beside the marshy stream. He harnessed the horse then rode off with Wanthong through the forest.

Goldchild led the way, wending through the hills. The wind spread the pollen far and wide, cloaking the forest in fragrance. [78]

Flowers bloomed all around where the way opened out to an area of cliffs. He pointed out to Wanthong, 'Look at all the lovely flowers

in the bright moonlight. There's a smiling lady<sup>8</sup> beaming in the forest fringe, just like you smiled in the cottonfield.

There's an elegant bunch of hidden lover,<sup>9</sup> just like we used to hide away as young lovers. There's a secret scent,<sup>10</sup> perfuming the air, like the fragrance of your delicate cheeks when you were sent to me in the bridal house.

And a lady's fingernail<sup>11</sup> with its tiny petals open, like your hands when you fan, comb, and tend to me. See the evening bloom<sup>12</sup> all over the bank of the lotus pond, like I'm all over you, evening and morning too.

There's climbing jasmine<sup>13</sup> twined round misery<sup>14</sup> and parting

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<sup>8</sup> This whole passage depends on wordplay about the names of flowers. นางเข้มน, *smiling lady*, clerodendrum fragrans.

<sup>9</sup> ซ่อนชู้, *son chu*, polianthes tuberosa, tuberose.

<sup>10</sup> ซ่อนกลิ่น, *son klin*, hidden scent, another name for polianthes tuberosa.

<sup>11</sup> เล็บมือนาง, *lep muea nang*, lady's fingernail, quisqualis conferta or indica, Rangoon creeper.

<sup>12</sup> บานเข้มน, *ban yen*, evening bloom, mirabilis jalapa, marvel of Peru.

<sup>13</sup> มะลิวัน (มะลิวัลย์), a name for several kinds of jasmine, jasminum bifarium, adenophyllum, gracilimum, etc

<sup>14</sup> ระกำ, *rakam*, suffering or hardship, salacca wallichiana/rumpii.

palm.<sup>15</sup> We had only three days before we were parted by karma. There's a jampi<sup>16</sup> beside a heartache tree<sup>17</sup> hanging with lantana flowers.<sup>18</sup> I suffered heartache and gloom hanging over me for two years.

The fragrance from the cinnamon tree<sup>19</sup> mingles with that of the happyfruit.<sup>20</sup> Today I sinned with you to the height of happiness. The air is bathed in the scent of roses and waiting ladies.<sup>21</sup> My lady, let's wait a little and enjoy a kiss.'

Wanthong cried, 'Oh you're hateful! I was enjoying listening to you carrying on. When it comes to joking around, you're the expert. Please let me listen to you admiring the forest a little more.'

'I'd rather admire you than anything else. It overcomes the lonesomeness at this time of the night.' The moon slid down to hide in the forest, followed by the stars as the dawn came up.

Golden light tinged the foliage a hazy yellow as the sun strode into the sky. Packs of animals opened their eyes. Birds left their nests in a chorus of calls.

Monkeys scampered wildly around. Female gibbons let forth plaintive whoops. Pairs of rabbits leapt after one another exuberantly. Khun Phaen spurred the horse to gallop through the forest.

In the hills, they came to a broad area cleared for cultivation next to a pristine forest. Lawa houses clustered at the foot of a hill. They entered a field of gourds.

Several layers of bamboo fences surrounded areas where the Lawa had planted sweet potato and taro. On the hill-tops were fields of ash-pumpkin,<sup>22</sup> aubergine, chili, dry plantain, and sparrow's brinjal.<sup>23</sup> [79]

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<sup>15</sup> จาก, *jak*, *nypa fruticans*, *nipa palm* or *atap*, homophone for 'parting.'

<sup>16</sup> จัมปี *jampi*, *michelia alba*, white champaka.

<sup>17</sup> โศก, *browea maculata*, a homophone for *sad*.

<sup>18</sup> ผกากรอง, *phokakrong*, *lantana camara*.

<sup>19</sup> อบเชย, *opchoei*, a name used for *cinnamomum iners* and several related trees. There's a play between *choei* and *choeichom*, fondle.

<sup>20</sup> สุกกรม, *sukrom*, a fruit tree that I can't yet identify.

<sup>21</sup> สาวหยุด, *saoyut*, stop-lady, *desmos chinensis*, ylang ylang.

<sup>22</sup> ฟ่าง, *faeng*, *แตง cucurbita pepo*.

<sup>23</sup> มะแว้งเครือ, *mawaeng khruea*, *solanum trilobatum*.

Some wild Lawa, a race of forest people, were walking in file. The young girls all wore shirts and put on turmeric to make their skin yellow.

Some were sitting, smiling and joking together beside a rock. When they saw someone coming on a horse, they ran away. Khun Phaen galloped the horse over to stop outside the terrace of a house.

An old Lawa lady who was looking after the house was agitated by the sight of people coming on horseback. 'What are officials coming to my house for?'

Khun Phaen and Wanthong dismounted and greeted her. 'We've come looking for the medicinal herbs and roots said to be in these hills.

Where have all the men gone to? Just now we saw only women tending the vegetables. May we please stay in this village for about five nights, and then we'll move on.'

Wanthong gave her a bead wristlet appreciated by the hill people.<sup>24</sup> The old lady was pleased by it and called the girls to come back.

They stood looking shy and peeping furtively. When they were given beads too, the shyness disappeared and they laughed gaily. They promptly arranged a hut and brought them sweet potato and taro in gratitude.

Khun Phaen flirted with the girls. 'I'll come back and give you necklaces, ear-rings, bracelets, and phiro rings to put on both hands.'

Wanthong put a smile on her face. 'So you're going to be a Lawa son-in-law, are you?' She stretched out her hand for the old lady to read her palm. She went on and on, relating many, many things.

Meanwhile Khun Phaen ordered Goldchild to be on the alert for an army coming. 'Come and inform me when they're still far away.' The spirit wai-ed in farewell and went off immediately.

Khun Chang was still crying and moaning in the forest. At dawn he was reunited with several servants who retrieved the hat and clothes he had lost.

Khun Chang was nursing revenge. 'Khun Phaen really did me in. I'll go to tell the king and get an army sent to arrest him.' [80]

With this in mind, he ordered Son Phraya to harness his elephant and hustle everybody to get ready to leave.

Son Phraya rushed off to harness the elephant. Porters followed

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<sup>24</sup> Text says *kariang*, Karen, here being used as a general term for hill people.

behind, along with the injured supporting one another.

Khun Chang mounted the elephant and lay groaning. His arms and legs shook with aches and pains. He had the elephant hurry along the shortcut.

In the howdah, he had a fever. He felt the wounds all over his face, and cried buckets. 'Oh, karma did this. Wanthong,

my darling, now you'll be in a pitiable state. Are you trekking through the forest, even across streams and lakes? Your legs and feet will be sore. You'll have to exchange the gold rings for sweet potato and taro.

Khun Phaen has a lot against you. Maybe he's killed you already, my darling, taken all the gold rings and left your corpse in the forest.

Your flesh and blood will melt away there. Who will cremate the body? Your bones will be scattered around pitifully.' He sobbed heavily.

Son Phraya consoled him. 'Don't cry. Why are you so very concerned? Wanthong ran off because she doesn't love you. On top of that, she urged her lover to slice you up.

After she's done all that, don't you feel bad? Why are you crying so much? You almost collapsed and died from thousands of rattan thorns. All this happened because of Wanthong, didn't it?

If you say you don't love her and break it off, then you can sleep happily at home. There are lots of servants at the house. Aren't they as much fun as Wanthong?'

Khun Chang said, 'I'm not in love with her. I'm hurt and crying because of the property that's been lost, because they stole the gold rings and cut the curtains to shreds.

I want revenge. If I find them I'll leap on them and slash them to death, man or woman, because they took my property. All I want back is Wanthong – Oops! Forgot.' [81]

Son Phraya doubled over with laughter. 'Oh really? You said you weren't in love. The mouth and the heart seem to have a slight disagreement here.' He urged the elephant forward.

They crossed field and forest, rivers and rapids. Making good time, they reached the house just at sunset.

Arriving at the ruan and not seeing Wanthong there made Khun Chang even more gloomy and desolate. He entered the house in a daze. 'I'm going to hang myself to death here.'

He went into the room and looked around. The ruined curtains were still scattered around. The mattresses and pillows were strewn all over the room. Betelbox, bowls, tables, and trays lay in disorder.

'She's gone only a short time and nobody is taking care. My merit is up, Wanthong. Why bother hanging onto things. I'll smash them to pieces.'

He grabbed a lance and raised it above his head. 'I'll stab myself to death. May it enter easily and may I die well. All the goods here can be put in my coffin.'

Then he threw the lance down and ran out to the kitchen. He picked up a pestle and bludgeoned some fermented fish. He ran around throwing pots all over the place. 'I'll die and follow my wife.'

He went back round to his room, and found a rope. He tied one end to a roof beam, the other round his waist, and swung out into space, shouting 'Help! Untie me!'

Son Phraya was alarmed. He looked up and saw the rope tied to the beam. Thinking Khun Chang's neck must be broken, he pushed open the door and saw him Chang hanging by his waist.

'Eh, all this household hang themselves, but this one thinks he'll die hanging by the waist!' He pushed Khun Chang's hand and feet so he swung around, and left him there tied up.

On that day Siprajan had heard the news that her son-in-law had lost the battle and returned injured. 'I-Tai, come along with me.'

They went to the house, entered the big rucan, and saw Khun Chang swinging from the roof. She asked Son Phraya, 'What's going on here? Come and look at this. What *is* Khun Chang doing?' [82]

Son Phraya said, 'Haven't you seen this before? Khun Chang is playing the game "crow sits on egg".' Khun Chang called out wearily, 'Don't believe him.' He managed to untie his waist and got down.

He raised his hands to wai his mother-in-law. 'This is the end. Khun Phaen wronged me beyond belief. He's kidnapped Wanthong away into the forest,

and stolen silver and gold articles, valuable things including lots of cash and cloth. I followed and caught him at a banyan tree. He was staying in a lair with Wanthong.

He had several hundred forest bandits under his control, hiding in the forest in ambush. I stabbed piles of them to death. But I wasn't in time to seize Wanthong

because my elephant was stabbed and ran amok. They sped away on a horse. I chased them covered in sweat and almost got them, but the elephant veered off trumpeting into the forest.

I was caught by the undergrowth, knocked off, and bloodied by all the thorns. Khun Phaen's horse sped off into the forest, so I couldn't bring Wanthong back.'

Son Phraya tried to interrupt, but Khun Chang added further lies. 'I gave chase without any thought for all the thorns sticking in me, and let off a warning shot. If I'd been in time, I'd have seized Wanthong,

but he was protected by his forest bandits. They stabbed me maybe twelve hundred times. There were about five piles of lances broken because of me.' Khun Chang cried out, 'This is the end!

For better or worse, I'll see him dead. He fled because my men were good. They're all invulnerable warriors. Stabbing them nine or ten times didn't matter.'

Siprajan pursed her lips. 'I don't believe you. It's a pack of lies. Phlai Kaeo is a skilled and experienced fighter. Anyway, what are you thinking of doing?'

Khun Chang said, 'I still want revenge. I intend to go after Khun Phaen and kill him. I'll go to attend on the king and ask for a big army to chase him down.

Strike a light! Why don't you believe me? I'm daring and fearless. If you could've seen me in the fight, you'd have admired my fine spear play.' [83]

He gave orders to Son Phraya, 'Harness my elephant quickly. It's urgent. I'm going straight to Ayutthaya. I can't stop thinking about Wanthong.

I'm going to bathe and change my clothes.' He went in and took up a mirror to look at himself. His face looked as if it had been minced. It was bathed in blood. He could see where his hair had been shaved in rows.

'Oh dear, when is my hair going to grow back? This head of mine is hopeless. If I could, I'd exchange it for someone else's.

Even if it cost 10 chang, I wouldn't complain. I'd bow my face and hand over my head to him. Oh dear, who is there like me? No wonder Wanthong is in two minds.'

He left the mirror and put on a brand new golden yok which cost twelve<sup>25</sup> to buy, and an upper cloth of yellow wool. He walked over, mounted the neck of his elephant, and jogged off.

He crossed field and forest, rivers and rapids, taking short cuts through the thick forest undergrowth. He reached Ayutthaya in one day and left the elephant at the graveyard of Wat na Phramen.<sup>26</sup>

He walked down to find a ferry. People addressed him like an old

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<sup>25</sup> No unit given.

<sup>26</sup> On the north side of Ayutthaya, opposite the palace on the other (northern) bank of the river. This was the funerary wat for the palace.

monk.<sup>27</sup> He crossed to the city at the time of the forenoon feeding. Hitching up his lower cloth,<sup>28</sup> he walked along in a daze with his head down.

Kids who saw him danced around excitedly. ‘Mummy, mummy, what’s that coming over there with a red head like a vulture in a paddyfield. Will it eat my liver?’ They peered up at him wide-eyed.

The mother reprimanded him. ‘You son-of-a-slave, fancy coming to scare my child, you creep.’ Khun Chang looked away and walked on, shaking his head. He made for the inner court sala.

Seeing him enter, a noble friend said, ‘Sir, my bushy-haired official! Where are you going? What’s happened to your skin and your head? Looks like you’ve been mauled by a cat.

Your chest hair has been plucked out. Did you go on a romantic escapade and get bitten by a toad? **How come you’re dolled up**<sup>29</sup> in a yok and a wool upper cloth? What problem brings you here?’

Khun Chang doubled over in tears and said, ‘Sir, this time it’s the end. Phaen exceeded the limit. He kidnapped my Wanthong, [84]

and stole gold rings and valuable things including lots of cash and cloth. I went after him and caught him at a forest banyan. But Phaen had made friends with lots of forest bandits

who came out en masse all carrying spears, lances, shields, staves, and javelins. I charged with my elephant and scattered them. Several hundred dropped dead like flies.

I would’ve caught Khun Phaen, but he galloped away and hid in the forest. I followed him but couldn’t find him. Then night fell so I came back to attend on our king.

I’ll ask for an army to arrest him. Sir, please help me. I don’t care about the silver, gold and other things. All I want is Wanthong.’

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<sup>27</sup> Luang Then.

<sup>28</sup> *Jongkraben*, meaning he passed one end of the cloth between his legs so it became pantaloons style.

<sup>29</sup> ปกชั้นชุด, no idea what this means so this is just a guess. Maybe, got kicked