

21: Khun Phaen gives himself up

[II/110]

Khun Phaen, renowned for his powers and skills, was living in the forest with Wanthong, just the two of them.

He enjoyed the hills and the forest, the absence of any threat from their enemies, and the intimacy with soft, fair Wanthong. Though their bed was only logs, they were happy.

There was no mattress to cushion Wanthong's soft flesh, yet it was like sleeping on a resplendent golden bed. They enjoyed listening to the soothing strains of the forest's orchestra of crickets.

In the dark, their candle was the bright shining moon. Blossoms bathed them in pollen. Plants jostled with one another to put out new young leaves and blooms.

The breeze was heavy with the soft, sweet fragrance of flowers as they hugged one another to sleep.

Wanthong dreamed in her deep sleep. She awoke immediately the dream ended, with its content still fresh in her mind. In alarm, she aroused her husband to interpret it.

'I dreamed that I reached up into the sky and amazingly was able to pluck the sun like a flower. I brought it down, put it in my mouth, and swallowed it, making my whole body shine brightly.

Then a strong man came along, boldly gouged out my right eye, and threw it away. I was in the dark, and dismayed.

He did not return the old eye, but offered me another one which was not as good, less bright. Please tell me if this is good or bad.'

Khun Phaen felt anxious because he could see both great good and great evil in the dream. 'Oh, my heart, you'll have a child, just like you had the sun.

That will overcome our hardship and misery. All our problems will disappear. The child in your womb will have powers, and will be like a partner we can rely on. [111]

But the part of the dream where your eye jumped out means there'll be a lot of difficulty in the future.' He worried that telling the full meaning would make Wanthong miserable,

so he suggested instead they bathe, wash their faces, and feel refreshed. They boiled yam and sweet potatoes, and went looking for fruit, rambutan, *phlap*, water chestnut, and lotus

Dwelling on the dream made Wanthong apprehensive. She agreed

that he was right and she must be pregnant. She squirmed at the thought of the problems from the earth, dust, and wind.

‘We have nothing already, so being pregnant on top is going to make everything worse.’ Multiplying their problems weighed down heavily on her heart.

‘If we were living safely in a house, having a child would be like having a jewel, and we’d be only too happy to look after it. But when I think it through, having a child here makes me worried.

The child will be born like a condemned man. It’s not something to be even a little bit happy about. How to bring up a child in the forest?’ These thoughts made her miserable.

Khun Phaen was surprised that being pregnant made her cry, but on reflection he could understand why. He comforted her and suggested she get dressed.

‘We cannot remain here any longer. The cause of our danger has not gone away. The king will be angry, and I think he won’t give up the idea of sending troops after us.

We have to leave the forest where we’re living now and make for the hills. There we can hide where nobody will find us until matters quieten down with time.’

He summoned his spirits, harnessed Color-of-Mist, and prompted Wanthong to take leave of the forest. Then they mounted and went off into the trees.

In the shade, the ground was carpeted with colorful flowers that looked elegant and pleasing to the eye. Khun Phaen urged the horse ahead and before long they came to Thammathian hill.¹

Around the hills, many colorful trees swayed in the wind.²
rokfa khanang yang takhian kankrao trabao trabian lae chingchan
son sak krak-khi ton kamyian chanuan chanan khla khlak jakjan [112]
maprang pru pradu duk mukman hiang han kraphrao sadao daeng
tang taew kaeo ket inthanin roi lin tatum chumsaeng
khwit khwat rachaphruek jik jaeng samunwaeng taengtuai klui mai
krapho ngo rangap krajab bok kratok-rot kalam-pho samo khai
phak wan tan tam lamyai mafeung fai kha-nao sadao na

¹ Possibly this is เขามะยมภู, Thammamun hill about 7kms north of Chainat town (Red:238).

² The next nine lines are a tour de force of the ‘admiring the forest’ genre, with the names of 69 trees fitted into the metrical pattern, and only two other words (*lae*, and; *ton*, tree). (Red 239). Since the point of the passage is the sound, rhyme, and rhythm, here it is given phonetically.

³ The end of this line could mean a *khla* tree crammed with cicadas. But *jakjan* (cicada) is also the name of a tree, and so according to Red is *khla*, but cannot find it in any *dix*. *Chanan* also not identified, but could just be a playful bit of alliteration.

*sai sok ulok phokphai phobai krai krang oi-chang wa
phlap phluang muang man janthana*

Birds called out noisily.

A laughing thrush pecked a grub. Its young called out pleadingly to their mother with mouths open. A coel perched on a tamleung vine, spied the ripe-red fruit, and took a peck.

An oriole perched on a cummin vine with prey in its beak for its young, and then flew away. A flock of myna dashed around the sky. Doves cooed together in pairs at the edge of the undergrowth.

A partridge poked around looking for its mate, clucking, raising its neck, spreading its wings, and flicking its tail. Coppersmith barbets called out to one another, 'Bok, bok.' Quail flapped their wings and flew swiftly away.

A wild cock crowed loudly through the forest, scratching here and there for bamboo seeds. It found a nest and called out to its mate on the ground, which stopped feeding and rushed off cackling.

At dusk as the sunlight faded, they rode beside a flowing stream down to a pool and landing. He asked Wanthong to dismount,

took the harness off the horse, shed his own gear, and walked her down to the landing. They drank and took a cooling bath among the blooming flowers.

Khun Phaen picked lotuses, and pulled up a root which popped out of the earth looking tangled and naked. He stripped the peel, leaving it white and curly. He begged her, 'Try eating this, my love.'

'I've never eaten the root. I'm worried it'll make my mouth itch and my tongue sting. I'll just eat the seeds.' 'Try it. Believe me. It's delicious. I just fear you might get hooked when you know the taste.' [113]

'There's only one lotus pod, and you're giving it to me? Oh no, you shouldn't go without. If you're not having any, nor am I.' 'There's more lotuses, don't worry.'

'In that case, you dive down to pull them up, and I'll pick out the seeds, that's easy.' They picked the lotus and flirted happily, both gradually shedding their fatigue.

Then they left the landing and went up to find somewhere to sleep in the forest. At dawn they set off again. Life was hard but they were free from danger.

Khun Phaen realized it was many months since he had brought Wanthong into the forest, and she was now at the end of her seventh month.

He faced a sad dilemma. They had had to come and live in the forest because it was remote. But giving birth there would be

difficult. Medicines would be hard to find, and there was nobody to turn to for help

Thinking about it made him feel oppressed. He was very worried about the child in her womb. 'This time could be a disaster.' He sobbed sadly in the forest.

Wanthong was puzzled by his gloominess, and asked him straight out, 'What are you thinking? Tell me.'

Why are you crying? Do you have doubts about our love? Will we not stay together? Have you had enough of me? Tell me.'

'Oh, utmost of my heart, don't have such thoughts about me. You are equal to my own heart. There are no doubts. Don't pierce my heart like that.'

I love you as much now as when we were first in love. Because I know you well now, there's not a single reason for doubt or worry. I'll tell you the truth, but don't be upset.

I'm crying with heartbreak because of the difficulty we're in. I keep looking at your belly growing bigger. You'll give birth before long, and there's nobody to help.

We've got nothing, no place to live. Finding a cradle will be difficult so far away from home. There are no medicines in the forest; no mattress, pillow, mosquito net, or curtain; [114]

no bedding or anything else for the child. I'm saying this little child will be unhappy – will have to brave the rain and endure the sun throughout the year. We're already going without eating.

The baby will wail for food. Thinking about this is what brings tears to my eyes.' Both were so extremely desolate they hugged one another tearfully.

As they gradually got over their sadness, Khun Phaen pondered and said, 'Did you ever here talk about Phra Phichit and Busaba being kind people?'

Anyone who's poor can go to them for help. Anyone condemned to death can rely on their mercy. Let's go there.

I'm someone with knowledge, so I don't think there'll be a problem. Don't worry, darling. Even if he sends us down to Ayutthaya,

the king will hold an enquiry. My past is still very good, and I'm optimistic because of the power of my knowledge.' He harnessed the horse and summoned his spirits.

He lifted Wanthong up onto Color-of-Mist, and they rode out of the forest late in the morning. He kept the horse to a steady gait so as not to cause her belly any discomfort.

Out of concern for her condition, he hugged and stroked her gently to keep her spirits up. They took short cuts, stopping at every stream and pool.

They dug up taro and sweet potatoes for survival rations, and slept in the forest. After ten days travel through hill and forest, they rode into Phichit,⁴

and reached Wat Jan⁵ at sunset. They went in to pay respects to Phra Chinnasi,⁶ then stayed in the big sala beside the kuti. At the time for lighting lamps, they left.

Khun Phaen enchanted powder with many devices and pasted it on their foreheads to make them all invisible, including the horse. Then they went straight to the residence of the city governor.

After the sun fell to earth and the light disappeared, Phra Phichit was happily sitting in his house in the bright moonlight. [115]

He had his young servants come to play chase, giggling and enjoying themselves. His wife and heartmate, Si Busaba,

was at the end of the fifth month of pregnancy. She came out to sit with him and laugh along with the children. 'Hey, kids, come and play chase.' The house was jolly under the moonlight.

⁴ Phichit in *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* is the old town, now the site of a small historical park about 9 kms to the south of the modern town along route 1068. This is believed to be the town referred to as Sa Luang in Sukhothai inscriptions. The moat and walls are still clearly visible. The only significant surviving monument is Wat Mahathat, a moderate-sized bell-shaped chedi with the base of quite a large wihan in front. It has been restored by the Fine Arts Dept, which also concluded from excavation that there were both Sukhothai and Ayutthaya era periods on the site. Around a kilometer further south is Wat Nakhon Chum, probably also dating back to Sukhothai, but significant for a surviving, beautiful, Ayutthaya-era ubosot with inward-sloping walls and slit windows. It has s. Possibly this was an important wat of the town which appears in *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*. The Nan river used to run about 100 meters in front of the wat, and the river course (beside route 1068) is still a significant khlong. The modern town of Phichit was relocated to the current site in the Fifth Reign because the river had shifted.

⁵ The monastery of the moon, which features again later in chapters 28 and 31 when Khun Phaen billets his army in the wat. There is no sign or record of a Wat Jan near Phichit. Possibly there is some confusion with a wat of this name to the south of Phitsanulok. More likely, the site referred to is the Wat now called Wat Sama Bap (วัดสมานบาป), the monastery to atone for sin. This is around 2 kilometers south of Wat Nakhon Chum, the site of old Phichit town, in the village of Ban Wang Jan. In one corner of the wat, there is a small restored wihan with wooden pillars, and a handful of small brick and stucco chedis. These are claimed to be the remnants of a wat that goes back 700 years. Wat Sama Bap would be the right distance from the old town of Phichit to fit the role of Wat Jan, and is big enough to have camped Khun Phaen's modest army. It is not unreasonable to imagine that an old name as Wat Jan has been forgotten, or that the text collapsed 'Wat Sama Bap, Ban Wang Jan' into 'Wat Jan'. There is also a legend of a 'Phrachao Sua' billeting an army close to here during some campaign, and using land adjacent to the wat for his horses. Further up the road is a Wat Rong Chang (elephant shed), further suggesting that this was a strategic area where armies often made camp.

⁶ Name of a famous Buddha image, cast in Sukhothai in the mid-fourteenth century by King Loethai, brought to Bangkok by King Rama I and now installed in Wat Bowonniwet. Here the term is being used with poetic licence to mean a Buddha image.

Khun Phaen and Wanthong, went without challenge and were delighted at their skill in becoming invisible.

They dismounted and tethered Color-of-Mist at the gate of the house. Then he released the spell of invisibility, and they went in on all fours to pay respects.

Prostrate in front of the pair, Khun Phaen chanted a mantra and blew it hard towards them, while believing in his magical knowledge and thinking of the merit of his teacher.

Phra Phichit and Busaba peered at this couple come to pay respects and guessed they were from another city. To find out, he asked,

‘Here, young man and beautiful lady, where are you traveling to? Where’s your home and what’s your position? Is she your wife, or are you brother and sister?’

Khun Phaen, still prostrate, replied, ‘This child’s name is Wanthong,

and mine is Khun Phaen Saensongkhram. We came here through the forest.’ Then he told the whole story. ‘In the past, Wanthong was called Phim Philalai.

Khun Chang seized her from our bridal house, so I kidnapped her away into the big forest, and defeated, killed and dispersed an army. We had to be in the forest for many months.

Wanthong’s pregnancy is now advanced, and we’re concerned something could happen in the wilds. But coming to this house, I fear may be like making karma for one’s mother.

I know that you, sir, are kind to people, so we made our way straight here through the forest. We put our two lives in your hands. Sir, please be merciful.’ [116]

Phra Phichit and Busaba were touched by this story, and also affected by Khun Phaen’s expertise in **magic**. They loved the couple like their own children.⁷

They called servants to take the horse to tether, and led the couple by the hand up into the residence. ‘Listen to me. You have no need to fear. For better or worse, I’ll try to ease things.’

He ordered the servants to organize lots of food. Khun Phaen and Wanthong bathed happily.

Si Busaba gave them clothes to change, and sent over some krajae powder. They went to sit in the central hall, and Phra Phichit

⁷ In their conversations, Phra Phichit and Busaba refer to themselves as parents, and Khun Phaen and Wanthong as children, and this language is reciprocated.

invited them to eat.

When the four had finished, Phra Phichit arranged for the couple to stay in the ruean which extended out beside the central hall. Khun Phaen and Wanthong grew more cheerful.

Kaeo Kiriya had redeemed herself from Khun Chang with the fifteen tamleung Khun Phaen gave her. She lived in Ayutthaya, in the house of a friend from her old home who she helped look after. Any man who saw her could not help eyeing her up, but she made the effort to say modestly that she had a husband.

She did good business selling low-price goods such as fruit, sweets, oranges, and lychees from a grocery store with a sign for good astringent betel, Phetchabun tobacco, and fresh banana leaves.

With the affection, protection, and support of Phra Phichit, Khun Phaen lived in the new ruean beside the residence. After a full month he began to worry.

‘Phra Phichit and Busaba love me like their own true son. But how long can things stay covered up when the king is still enraged?’

He’s ordered the officials of the guardposts to keep a tight watch on all the hideouts. Anyone who catches us must send us to the capital for the offence of killing several thousand people.

Phra Phichit has been like a father in having the mercy to look after us and let us live here, but this will get him into trouble and expose him to punishment. He says he’ll speak to the king to plead for us, [117]

but with the king still angry, he’s not going to favor us with a pardon. If we stay quiet but news reaches the capital and an order arrives for us to be sent down there, we’ll be at a disadvantage.’

He consulted his love and life partner, Wanthong, about these thoughts. ‘I fear that staying here in Phichit will create trouble.

I’ll ask Phra Phichit to order us sent down to the capital. We must confess our guilt, and think of how to counter Khun Chang’s charges.

Because we gave ourselves up and were not captured deep in the forest, the punishment should be light and I think there’ll be ways to ask for a pardon.

If he wants to punish me in some way, that’s up to him because I’m his servant and I drank the water of allegiance. There’s no reason to run away and hide.

As the old saying goes, “Swim towards the great crocodile.”⁸

⁸ A saying meaning, confront a problem head-on.

Whether it's heavy or light, life or death, let it be according to the karma I've made.

I love you and I'll give my life for you. If I'm destroyed this time, I won't complain. I'll find a way for you not to face a criminal charge. We have to bow our faces. Don't be upset.'

The beautiful Wanthong's tears flowed. She made an effort to swallow her sadness and said, 'I've also considered everything.

We're in the wrong and could die because so many officers and men were chopped down dead. We disobeyed a royal order, and on top of that we fled like crooks.

The defeated army probably went back and told the king that we were planning a rebellion. Even though we had nothing treacherous in mind, it won't do to sit on things.

It's tough but necessary to go and find out whether we'll live or die. I don't cling to life. If the king is not merciful, then we'll die.

There's only one thing I'm afraid of – that he'll send me back to Khun Chang. I couldn't stand the shame and I'd rather die.' She sobbed, rocking back and forth. [118]

Khun Phaen cradled her, and wiped away the tears which bathed her face. 'Why are you sad?

If the king isn't merciful and has us executed, we must bow our faces and be born again well. In this life we've made some karma.

If he sends you back to Khun Chang, I'll come after you and kill him before he can get you. Don't be upset. Please cheer up.'

He consoled Wanthong and prompted her to scoop some water to wash away her tears. Then they went into their patrons' room and paid respects at their feet.

Phra Phichit and Busaba were puzzled to see the couple so gloomy. They enquired, 'What has suddenly happened since this morning to make you worried?'

With his head bowed, Khun Phaen explained as they had planned. 'I'm afraid I'll bring punishment on you.

Because there are arrest warrants to stop us at every guardpost, the district officials are on the alert. You've hidden us for many days and I fear it's risky.

The *phalat*, *yokkrabat*, and other officials will pass on the news, and that won't be good. You'll be an associate of criminals, and that will bring down the king's anger on you.

Sir, it would be better to avoid this risk. Send us down. Just help

by explaining in your report that we gave ourselves up nicely,
and convey my testimony including my wife's words in full. That
will help us to confess and ask the king's favor. Beyond that, things
are up to the karma we've made.'

Phra Phichit saw the truth in Khun Phaen's words, and pondered
quietly. 'At first I thought I'd plead for you

on grounds you're expert in warfare and have defeated enemies
from all directions. I wanted to put you in charge of the guardposts
on the forest side. But then I realized this didn't suit the situation.
[119]

Because you're under charges, the king will say I'm an accessory.
But the thought of sending you down made me extremely worried,
so I was really at my wits end and did nothing.

But your idea is exactly right. Your whole approach to the matter
is very good. Because you came to confess to me, it's clear you had
no crooked ideas of rebellion.

Under examination, things appear to be in your favor in the old
case. When you went with the army, they made up that you were
dead, and your mother-in-law took away your wife who was very
upset.

Who wouldn't get angry? There've been much worse reactions. All
you did was take your old wife back. Who can say that's criminal?

There's only your fight with the royal army that lays you open to
charges of rebellion. But an army of thousands came and
surrounded you, a single person.

You restrained yourself from attacking, and they acted first, giving
you no option but to stand your ground. The fact the army couldn't
match you, but broke and scattered, is not your fault.

When you go down, the king will be angry, but should submit you
to questioning before punishing you on the major issue. Don't stay
quiet but tell him the truth, and I think that will overcome his
suspicion and anger.

The royal order is very insistent that, if you're caught, both of you
must be imprisoned with no leniency and sent to Ayutthaya.

Along the way, things needn't be so strict, but if you're not under
restraint when reaching the capital, I'll be in the wrong too. I'm
concerned and sad like being licked by fire. But don't be
despondent, either of you.

It's not difficult to help rectify matters in the report, because
there's a lot of good on your side. I won't prejudice you in any way.
Only you must give evidence that's true in every detail.

Clothes and food will all be arranged. Shed your worries. I think
you'll get clemency, then come and live up here with me.'

Busaba said farewell, tearfully hugging Wanthong. 'I love you like the child in my womb. It's a pity you're being parted from me. [120]

Oh my dear Wanthong, you're going away even though we love one another. I'm very worried because your pregnancy is so advanced. It's never good facing a court case.

I'm worried enough for my heart to break. I don't know how the future will be. By the power of your merit, may you survive. When the case is over, please come back here.'

Wanthong hugged her own chest and shed despondent tears. 'Though my body leaves, my heart stays here with you. I won't find anyone like you.

Even though we're criminal suspects, you helped us by not putting us in jail, but looking after us and loving us like your own children. We slept in the warm, ate our fill, and had no anxiety. May you earn merit.

At the capital there'll be no mercy. We'll have bricks and stones from the road instead of pillows, and the bamboo mats and slats of the jail instead of a mattress. Who's going to bring us water to bathe and drink?

There'll be no relatives to send food so we may starve, and not a gnat's wing of money. We'll be subject to questioning in the city.

They'll demand judicial fees. We'll be tied up and put in the pillory, which won't be good. If we lose, there may be a fine on top, equal to our flesh and blood in gold and silver.

The more I think about it the more I'm downhearted and miserable in every way.' She writhed around with tears flowing and her sobs echoing through the house.

When their sadness subsided, Busaba gathered things together in piles all over place. She sat giving instructions to the servants, 'Don't be so slow. Arrange the things they need –

mattress, pillows, mosquito-net, soft mat, the good clothes we have in the house, pots and pans, jars, stove, food supplies, plates and bowls,

a box of betelnut, nak and gold utensils, a niello container for lime – put all in bags. Facing a court case is expensive.' She gave three chang of silver to take for food.

Phra Phichit came out to the central hall and sent for all the nobles to assemble. He composed his report, and read it aloud to them so it would have no mistakes. [121]

The testimony of Wanthong and Khun Phaen was tied and sealed

by fingernail.⁹ The written papers were put in a cylinder and handed over to a warder.

A boat was moored at the landing, and the servants carried everything down. Phra Phichit summoned the warders and impressed on them not to lock them up until they were nearly there.

‘Don’t lock them up until you get close to Ayutthaya. If they want to visit somewhere on the way, that’s up to them. Look after them well.’

Khun Phaen and Wanthong prostrated and took their leave with tears flowing. Phra Phichit and Busaba cried equally in sympathy.

The couple left the residence and descended the stairway in a miserable state, with the governor and his wife following. They went to find Color-of-Mist and tell him what was happening.

‘Color-of-Mist, the governor is sending us down. I don’t know whether we’ll live or die, so we’ve come to say farewell. If we don’t die this time, we should meet again.’

Wanthong said, ‘Oh my Color-of-Mist, when we were in difficulties, you came with us into the forest and got eaten by gnats and mosquitoes for many days. You helped me be able to ride.

You had to get through thick forest and dense thicket, going without grass or straw for many days and nights.

When we reached this place there was somewhere to stay, but now we have to part. That makes me cry. You’ve been our friend through trouble, friend to death, through many rounds. Leaving you, my heart will collapse.’

Khun Phaen said, ‘Farewell, friend through trouble. We may die apart or meet again some day. If I’m still alive, I’ll never stop thinking of you, even from jail.

If a time comes that I’m released, whether sooner or later, I’ll come to fetch you at Phichit. I’d like to take you with us, but then I thought that if our lives ended suddenly,

you’d be sent to be a work horse, tied up tightly and left without water or grass. If our merit came to an end while far away from you, I’m worried there’d be nobody to love and look after you.’ [122]

The mantra meant that Color-of-Mist understood. He shed tears, shook his head from side to side, trembled sadly, and lowered his face onto the couple’s feet.

Khun Phaen implored Phra Phichit, ‘Sir, please think of me. I’m very concerned about my faithful horse, and I want to leave him in your care.’

⁹ Documents such as records of testimony were folded flat, pierced with a hole, threaded and tied with string, and the knots sealed with clay and marked with a fingernail. (See Red 247)

Phra Phichit replied, ‘Don’t worry. We have plenty of boys to look after him, and plenty of grass, straw, and water. Don’t worry about the horse.’

They set off. Color-of-Mist felt heavy-hearted, and both Khun Phaen and Wanthong shed tears. They boarded the boat under its awning.

Phra Phichit and Busaba said farewell. Khun Phaen and Wanthong wai-ed them. After the boat left the landing, they stayed staring at one another thoughtfully until they were far distant.

Phra Phichit and Busaba went up into the residence, grieving sadly. The boat floated along quickly past a succession of villages and towns.

They stopped by villages to levy supplies of rice and other food. They forked at Bang Phuthra¹⁰ and passed in front of Lopburi.

Beyond that city in the early evening, they saw a settlement with lush trees. As it was almost night, the warders halted the boat there.

Khun Phaen picked up Skystorm and disembarked. Walking up through the thick bushes, he saw a hollow under a big banyan tree. He placed the sword inside, and chanted an *athap* concealing formula.¹¹

He prostrated, and prayed to the guardian deities to look after the sword. ‘When I return, let me make no mistake. In future if a village is established here,

let it be called Sword of Drawn Bow¹² because Skystorm is hidden here.’ He went back aboard and they continued the journey, waking as they neared Ayutthaya.

The warders prostrated and asked his pardon. ‘Please don’t be angry with us.’ Khun Phaen followed their wish to put them under restraint. They stretched out their legs to put on chains fastened with a bolt. [123]

Khun Phaen felt sorry for Wanthong. He wound a cloth around her. When they landed, he carefully supported her. He tied a string¹³ to lift her chains so she could walk.

Little Wanthong carried her basket on her waist, and gingerly

¹⁰ The old name for Singburi. This fork takes them along the Lopburi River (Red 247).

¹¹ เวทอาถรรพณ์, *wet athap*, the fourth veda.

¹² บ้านดาดก่งธนู, Ban Dap Kong Thanu, is on the bank of the Lopburi river in the south of Amphoe Muang Lopburi.

¹³ Kukrit (208) notes that the sepha uses a special term, สายทอก, for the string used by prisoners to lift leg-chains to allow walking. He believes this and other evidence shows that the authors of the sepha knew about prison life, and that the sepha was originally a genre developed in prison.

lifted her feet. Her hands trembled holding the string. By mistake she took too large a pace, and fell down

with a shriek, spilling the contents of her basket. Khun Phaen lifted her back upright, and dusted her off. Tears bathed his face in sympathy.

Kaeo Kiriya had been miserably waiting for her husband for almost a year, and did not know he was coming.

As that day was the 15th, a holy day, she was going as usual to hear a sermon. She bathed, powdered herself, dressed, and oiled her hair nicely.

She put on a *ta let nga*¹⁴ lower cloth and a quilted upper cloth which were not cheerful because she was unhappy to be without a husband,

and did not want to offend him should he return. Also she was far from her family with no friends to think of her.

She descended from the house carefully holding her upper cloth not to expose her breasts. In her hand she had the sort of betel basket the poor carried, with flowers, incense, and candles.

She arrived by the end of the wall at the head of the street, and saw a big crowd of people. She stood craning her neck from a distance and saw the faces of Khun Phaen and Wanthong,

but did not recognize them because their faces were dark with freckles. Both seemed strangers. She noticed Wanthong was pregnant and in great difficulty.

Khun Phaen looked over, saw her, and was not sure whether it was her or not. She looked familiar and he wanted to greet her, but was afraid the person would be angry if it was not his old love.

Wanthong saw Kaeo Kiriya and wanted to greet her because they had known one another some time ago, but she was shy and apprehensive.

Then Kaeo heard someone say, 'They've got Khun Phaen!' and her doubts disappeared. She pushed her way through the people, and sank down to wai them with tears streaming down. [124]

She clasped the feet of Khun Phaen and Wanthong. 'Oh what a pity! You look so different I almost missed you. Then I heard them speaking and knew for sure. You disappeared into the forest as if you were dead.'

Khun Phaen recognized her voice. 'I thought it was someone else, but it's you, Kaeo.' Wanthong stroked her with her hand. Kaeo said, 'When your name was called, I knew it was you.'

Because of their poor condition and unhappy state-of-mind, she

¹⁴ A woven cloth with intricate flower pattern like sesame seeds.

spoke then turned her face away in embarrassment. Khun Phaen walked off in his chains, leading Wanthong. Kaeo Kiriya followed along behind.

They soon came to the inner guardhouse¹⁵ where lots of nobles were gathered. Phrameun Si saw Khun Phaen coming and happily called him over.

He broke open the canister, took out the report, and read it in full. Then he spoke in a friendly tone, ‘The king is unbelievably angry.

But now I’ve examined this report that you gave yourselves up to Phra Phichit, put your lives in his care, and admitted guilt, I think it’ll be alright.

You went to the forest with Wanthong alone, so where did this spare seat¹⁶ come from? Oh friend! Even as a prisoner in extreme hardship, you come back with something in reserve!’

Khun Phaen said, ‘She’s my wife from a long time back, before we went to the forest. I left her with her mother.’¹⁷ While coming back, I met her on the road.’

Phrameun Si was kind enough to give them a big meal. They chatted away like old times, with no bad feelings.

Then towards five in the evening, the nobles went into the audience hall. Phrameun Si changed his clothes¹⁸ and went to attend in audience on the king.

¹⁵ ทิมดาบใน, *thimdap nai*, inner sword storehouse, colloquial name for the ดึกหลังยาว, *teuk lang yao*, the long brick building, who was in command of the royal guards known as *tamruat*.

¹⁶ ที่นั่งรอง, colloquialism for a minor wife (Kukrit 210)

¹⁷ A mistake by the author or a white lie by Khun Phaen? She was left as a slave of Khun Chang.

¹⁸ This means changing their clothes into the outfit for attending audience, consisting of a lower cloth called a *sombak* (สอมปัก), probably all of the same color and pattern, and *pha krap* (ผ้ากราบ) or ‘prostration cloth,’ a narrow sash tied around the chest, a sign of respect. (Kukrit: 211).