

28: Phlai Ngam gets Nang Simala

[III/36]

At the third watch,¹ Phlai Ngam was asleep on his pillow, so troubled by the randiness of youth, the gods sent him a premonition.

He dreamt that a girl, just come of youthful age, peerlessly beautiful with fair skin and two breasts like plump lotuses, stood smiling and then walked towards him.

She greeted him in a friendly way, then turned as if to go away. He ran and caught up with her, but when he grabbed with his hand, she disappeared.

Dozily he reached out and hugged his father, saying, 'Don't you have any mercy?' Khun Phaen woke up and pushed his hands away, crying, 'Hey Phlai Ngam, what are you doing?'

Phlai's heart trembled in fear of his father. He said, 'I dreamt I saw a stunningly beautiful, fair, young girl but she ran away. I got carried away. Sorry. Forgive me.'

Khun Phaen said, 'Eh, you have very funny dreams. There's an ancient saying about dreams like these: whoever has them gets a good wife. Maybe a governor's daughter, huh?' With that, he walked off and told everyone, 'Today we'll reach Phichit before evening.'

They called one another to eat, and hastily set off on the march, not stopping in the heat, and covered in sweat. When the city came in sight, they turned into Wat Jan.²

On that same night, Simala³ dreamt she went down to play in a lake, and saw an attractive single lotus flower

rising out of the water. She plunged gaily in, picked the flower, and swam back feeling happy. She sniffed it and cuddled it close to her breast. [37]

When she opened her eyes, the lotus had disappeared. 'What a pity! I'm so disappointed.' In consternation, she woke I-Moei to interpret the dream. I-Moei said, 'Mistress, this is a good dream.'

¹ Midnight to 3 a.m.

² See note in chapter 21.

³ The daughter of Phra Phichit and Busaba, who was pregnant when Khun Phaen and Wanthong left Phichit in chapter 21.

The lotus is a husband, nothing else. Tomorrow or the day after, he should turn up here. If things are not as I say, you can beat me. I've interpreted dreams like this for many people.'

Simala said, 'Hey! You lousy Mon. Saying a husband'll turn up is nonsense. That's a silly, indecent interpretation. If anyone turns up, even a god,

with the cheek to court me, it'll be in vain. Don't fantasize. I've no desire to have a man come along. They say they're lords of your heart. I'm fine on my own.'

I-Moei perkily cried, 'Good Heavens! Don't say that, mistress. I don't believe you. You haven't met him yet, so leave off talking until you've seen him.'

Mistress and servant taunted and teased one another. Next morning, Simala went off to see to household affairs as she did every day, but was still unsettled by the thought of her dream.

Khun Phaen stayed in the wat until late afternoon, then called his son to go to the governor's residence. They walked along followed by their crowd

of servants and phrai, carrying a betel tray and water jar as marks of rank. Phlai Ngam was in turmoil about his dream. They went into the market for a look around.

Shops selling cloth had barrels out front stacked with Surat⁴ patterned cloths and upper cloths. Other shops were full of crockery, pretty silk, and various other goods

including brassware and glassware in lines with crowds of people looking. The shop girls were smart and pushy in the manner of people from the capital.

They used yellow turmeric and shaved their hairlines. Some were sewing sacks. **There was almost every kind of face, but every one** was fair and charming. The perfume they wore wafted along both sides of the street.

They all wore cheerful patterned lower cloths and colored upper cloths. They powdered their faces and applied soot just like people down below.⁵ One with a girlish figure and an attractive fair complexion looked like the lovely lady from the night before. [38]

Phlai went for a closer look and found she was only similar. She was not slender like the girl in the dream, and her breasts drooped a bit – and besides that really was different in every way.

The dream girl was imprinted on his mind, and he was becoming ever more worked up and carried away. He tried to walk along

⁴ A port and weaving center in western India.

⁵ Meaning Ayutthaya.

looking straight ahead and not thinking about it. They left the market and went into the governor's residence.

Phra Phichit sat relaxing in the central hall. He was perturbed to see a crowd of people walking towards him. 'Eh! What are lots of royal retainers coming here for? The one at the front looks like a phraya.'

Then he recognized Khun Phaen. He happily rushed down, and dragged Khun Phaen by the hand up to the residence to talk. Khun Phaen and his son wai-ed him.

Phra Phichit called Si Busaba, 'Khun Phaen has come! Where have you disappeared to?' Busaba stuck out her face, saw the two of them, and came out wreathed in smiles.

She sat down and asked about their problems. 'Since you left us, it's been all tears. We didn't know who to ask for news. Because you were so far away, we had no idea

whether you were alive or dead for many years. Only today we can see you're still here. Seeing you again is like **being given a jewel**, because we love you like our own beloved child.

And Wanthong? When she left here, she was heavily pregnant. Was the birth easy or painful? Was it a son or daughter? Where are they now? You haven't brought them?'

Khun Phaen told the story. 'When we were sent from here, it was fine. They were lenient with us until Ayutthaya. The king pardoned me from execution.

I won the case against Khun Chang. I went to live in Pramuen Si's house. But then karma caught up with me. I had a bad idea which I wrongly thought was good.

I asked the king for Laothong, and was jailed. I suffered punishment almost as bad as execution. Wanthong was left on her own, heavily pregnant and in terrible difficulty.

Khun Chang abducted her, and there was nobody to stop him. She gave birth to a son – this guy. When he was ten, [39]

Khun Chang took him off into the forest to kill him. My spirits saved him from death. He fled to the house in Kanburi. My mother Thong Prasi brought him up and educated him.

When a war broke out, he dared to volunteer. I was still in jail. He took the opportunity to petition the king to let me out. The king had a reason to be kind,

so he granted Phlai Ngam's request, and appointed me to act as his adviser in the war. We were given thirty-five convicts who have knowledge, and seventy porters.

We came here on our way to Chiang Mai to capture the Lao and

beat them to dust. I thought of your kindness during my hard times, so I dropped in to pay my respects.'

Phra Phichit and Busaba felt sorry for Khun Phaen. 'What a pity. Such bad fortune you almost died. What a long time to suffer.

Your dear son hoped to repay his debt of gratitude to his father, and took his courage in both hands. If he hadn't dared to petition the king, you'd have died in jail. He made his father happy. That was worth the effort.'

Phra Phichit and Busaba lavished praise on Phlai Ngam. 'He's good-looking and brave, and he's from a military line exactly like his father. He looks slim, likeable, someone you'd talk to.

It's a great pity that when Busaba was pregnant, the child was a girl. I was desperately disappointed. Now I'm thinking it's a pity because, if the child was a man, he could've gone along with you.'

He called to his daughter. 'Simala, why are you sitting in there? Come out to meet your brother. Don't be shy.' Simala hid and peeped out in consternation.

'Are these some relatives I don't know from somewhere?' She slowly pushed the door open and looked through the gap. She saw two people, a father and son she did not know. The young man with a fair face excited her.

I-Moei came and stood beside her. She nudged her teasingly and giggled. 'What's the matter? Praying to the god? I predicted this already. Don't say I was wrong.'

Simala said, 'Hush, you lowlife! Don't go on about it. If you say anything else, I'll give you a tongue-lashing.' She glared at her, then turned her face aside to conceal a smile. [40]

When Phra Phichit called again, she replied, and slowly opened the door-panel, hiding behind it shyly. She felt embarrassed about walking in. She kept her face bashfully lowered and went to sit hidden behind her mother.

When she raised her hands to wai Khun Phaen and Phlai Ngam, her heart lurched and she quickly lowered her face. Phlai Ngam returned her wai, looking from the corner of his eye. Their eyes met, and he felt a tremor of excitement.

'This is the one in the dream, I'm sure. She looks exactly the same. Oh, how lovely! Even girls in the capital can't compare.

Like a full moon shining pure, clear, and brilliant. Her cheeks look so alluring. She's beautiful and poised like a real aristocrat.

Her manners are proper too. She looks clever in a feminine way, and delicate as if begging me to care for her. When she smiles, her eyes are even prettier.

Wherever you look, there's nothing out of place. Is this the one

destined to be my partner? When our eyes met, it was like she was cutting out my heart to take away.

I've seen thousands of other girls, but none that grabs me like this. If I could make love with her for just one breath, I could die without giving it a thought.'

Phlai recited a formula, caught her eye, and blew it to entrance her. Touched by the mantra, Simala felt her hair stand on end. She glanced across in a fluster.

When their eyes met, her heart leapt. The longer their eyes were locked, the more she fell in love. Her heart felt as if it was melting with fire. She could not stay, and went into the ruan.

She hid inside, looking through a chink. The more she stared, the more her heart yearned. Love was arousing her and befuddling her like madness. She could not tear her eyes away.

'This man is no waste of time! He's like the most handsome, most brilliant. His face and body look like they're painted with gold. Handsome to perfection.'

She was overwhelmed by shyness, and slipped away to hide in her room. I-Moei followed with a big smile on her face, and asked, 'Today you don't look well. What's up? [41]

You go out and wai the men from the capital then run back into your mosquito-net as if you had fever. Or has some evil spirit alarmed you by coming to say hello? If so, I'll make some offerings for the spirit to eat.

Does this spirit come from the city or the provinces? We should get rid of it before it haunts you. Wait a bit until sunset, then I'll swat the mosquitoes and we can make the offerings here inside the mosquito-net.'

Simala thumped her head. 'Stop going on. It's shameful. This here is a *phrai* of the worst kind. Making offerings to a spirit in a mosquito net! You evil Mon!'

They teased one another until the sun cooled. Simala was getting further carried away. Busaba saw it was late and asked, 'Why aren't you lending a hand with the food?'

Simala got up and went to help supervise the servants preparing a fine meal, including making curry. The food was put under red covers and carried in.

She carried the crockery and the rice, while the servants brought the other food. Her heart was leaping and she did not want to pass the partition. Once inside, she put everything down on her father's side. She could not raise her head to look at Phlai Ngam's face.

Phra Phichit invited them to eat. Phlai was seething with excitement. He gazed at Simala with only an empty bowl in his hand. Swallowing rice felt like he had a thorn in his throat.

He was in panic that others would realize. He stole glances at Phra Phichit and his father. Phra Phichit knew what was happening and pretended to complain. 'What's up? You don't seem to be enjoying the food.'

'Is nothing to your taste? Our northern food is not like down there. Is the taste of our cooking too mild?' He laughed while teasing Phlai Ngam.

Then he invited the two of them to spend the night there. 'It's more comfortable. Don't stand on ceremony. You have a house here, why stay in the wat? Come and stay as you please in that hall.'

When they had eaten their fill, he told Simala to arrange mattresses, blankets, and everything. 'Get out those two little velvet mattresses and the soft double mats.'

Khun Phaen asked Phra Phichit, 'Is Color-of-Mist well?' Phra Phichit replied, 'The horse is well, but very old. [42]

His hide is wrinkled with age. He gets plenty of grass and water, morning and evening. I go to see him on my rounds, and I've assigned Ai-Jan to look after him.'

Khun Phaen called his son, 'Let's go and visit the horse together for a moment.' They went out the door and arrived at where Color-of-Mist was kept.

Ai-Jan saw them and raised his hands to wai. 'I feed him well so he's good and plump.' Khun Phaen and his son went up to the horse, and Khun Phaen enchanted grass for the horse to eat.

Under the effect of the enchanted grass, Color-of-Mist could recognize the words spoken to him perfectly. He tapped his hoof on the ground, and jiggled with joy so much he almost escaped his stall.

He licked and sniffed Khun Phaen all over. Khun Phaen hugged the horse with tears flowing. He stroked Color-of-Mist's back, saying, 'I had a royal punishment and was only just released.'

'I was in jail until my son asked for a pardon. After the king released me, I came to see you. Phlai here is the son of Wanthong who you carried into the forest with me.'

Color-of-Mist looked round for Wanthong, and seemed sad at not seeing her. He had no way to ask, so just kept looking at the two of them with tearful eyes.

Khun Phaen said, 'I'm going with the army. I'd like to take you with us to help because you were of assistance in the past. Will you come, or has your strength gone?'

Color-of-Mist was happy to go with the army. He pranced around, stretched his legs, and whinnied as if saying, 'I'll go, have no

doubt.’ Khun Phaen understood perfectly and was pleased.

He picked a handful of grass shoots, enchanted then with the Great Way formula,⁶ and gave them to the horse to lessen his infirmity.

With the power of the formula, Color-of-Mist’s old strength returned. Khun Phaen put a fine, glittering harness on him, and trotted him out.

He tried the horse out by galloping back and forth, fast and slow. His speed and agility were perfect in every way. Even a young horse could not compare. [43]

Khun Phaen dismounted feeling happy. He called Ai-Jan over and commanded him, ‘Make sure he’s well fed and happy. I’ll ride him tomorrow at dawn.’

Khun Phaen called his son and said, ‘I fear we’re slow and it’ll look negligent. We march at dawn tomorrow.

It’s a splendidly auspicious time with Saturn at nine levels and no inauspicious obstructions – with determination we’ll defeat our enemies. How do you feel?’

Phlai Ngam was thinking of Simala and did not want to leave Phichit. But he feared his father would not be sympathetic if he asked him, so tried to manage the situation with subterfuge. He said,

‘The troops are still tired and weak. Why are you in such a rush to march? Let the soldiers rest for a bit. When their fatigue has gone, then we can leave.’

Khun Phaen said, ‘Look here, Phlai Ngam. We can hang around here enjoying ourselves, and not bother about the king’s orders, but what place is the same as one’s own home?’

‘Nowhere,’ replied Phlai Ngam. ‘But I want to enchant our equipment one more time. The power is still weak. Let’s rest the troops and enchant the equipment a bit.’

Khun Phaen said, ‘If we want to be in time, tomorrow is both a day of great power for enchanting the equipment, and an auspicious day for setting off.

It’s better to do the ritual for enchanting the equipment in the forest. At the house is not the same, because in the city there are crowds of people and it’s not good for composing the mind.’

Phlai said, ‘The powers from enchanting in the forest are not as effective as in a graveyard. In the city, there are graveyards which are quiet enough.’

Khun Phaen knew he was hiding something, and was angry. ‘Why

⁶ *Muk yai*, a mantra which combines the key portions of several important mantra (Sup: 358).

do you want to stay in this city, huh? What business makes you want to delay? You're not listening to anything I say.'

Phlai Ngam was afraid of his father and did not argue. He said evasively, 'I've no business here.' They went into the governor's residence, with young Phlai thinking of the girl. [44]

Khun Phaen, Phlai Ngam, and Phra Phichit chatted happily together about warring and about the routes for travel – talking and laughing on and on.

In the evening, the sun went down. The moon came out from behind the mountains and slowly floated across a bright, cloudless sky.

The breeze wafted a soft, refreshing fragrance of flowers. Simala lay moodily hugging and stroking her side-pillow.

'Oh Phlai Ngam of mine, how can you know that I'm thinking of you? I feel like an arrow has pierced my breast, and I'm miserable.

When your eyes met mine, did you know or at least have some inkling in your heart that I wanted to be your friend? Or did you wrongly think I didn't care?

It's hard for me because I'm a woman. I have to sit quiet and hide my love. If I was a man and you were a woman, I'd go to find you tonight, come life or death.'

She lay unable to sleep with her mind in turmoil, heaving great sighs and shedding tears, until she finally nodded off.

Phra Phichit, Khun Phaen, and Phlai Ngam talked without a break until the first watch. Then Phra Phichit said, 'You two are leaving in the morning. Please get some rest.'

He got up and went into the rucan. Phlai Ngam was very agitated. He suggested to his father they should turn in. 'Father, isn't it late?

Somehow today I'm not well. I feel very tired and my back's stiff. I'll make it an early night to get my strength back ready for the march tomorrow morning.'

Khun Phaen thought to himself, 'What a loverboy! He thinks I don't know. Karma, karma! How's this going to turn out? Will he make us adults fall out?'

Worried about what his son might do, he decided to play a trick. He closed his eyes and lay perfectly still, waiting to discover his son's plan. [45]

Phlai Ngam lay still on his pillow as if asleep, but his heart was on fire, his stomach churning, and his patience gone. He fretted with randy passion. 'Oh, my plump-breasted Simala!

Right now are you fast asleep, my lovely? Or is your heart feeling love? By the look of it, you'll have mercy on me, but you're staying quiet because you're a woman.

I have a great love in my heart, but do you know that or not? I'd guess you're thinking of me, and I shouldn't face a setback if I come to find you.

They say that if you feel love for someone, that person should feel love for you. I love you like my own life. How to make this happen?

I'd go round in circles trying to put it in words. It's difficult to have an affair because tomorrow I have to go away. There's nobody I can depend on.

If I delay asking for your hand until the way back, I think I'll die because this huge feeling of love will just get worse and worse, day by day, until I collapse.

I must think about getting close to you tonight as I desire, and then I can think about making war later. If I don't get my darling Simala, I won't go to Chiang Mai for sure.

It's in the lap of karma, my darling. Everyone's asleep. I'll sneak in to find you. If you don't have mercy on me, my love, then let fate take its course.'

The more he thought of her, the more he fretted. The moon shone brightly. The dew was falling. The sound of a wild cock crow meant time was pressing.

He listened to his father and went over for a closer look. Still full of doubt, he called out a question. Khun Phaen knew Phlai Ngam's game. He did not answer, and quietly waited.

Phlai concluded his father was asleep. He slowly got up and walked away. Once outside the room, he felt good. He went away from his father, hiding in the shadows.

Khun Phaen looked up, and walked after him. Coming upon him, he asked, 'What did you come out here for?' Phlai Ngam mumbled an excuse. 'I'm going out to pee on the terrace. [46]

I've been aching to pee all today. I've been many times already. I've got *klon*⁷ and it's killing me. I was going to wake you for some medicine.' Khun Phaen said, 'No use, Phlai.

The kind of *klon* you've got is terrible. Hundreds of doctors could treat it and it wouldn't go away.' He pulled his son's hand, and walked carefully back into the room.

⁷ กล่อน A disease in old medical texts caused by impurities in the bladder; 'a condition characterized by infiltration of serum into the tissues of the scrotum' (Mc:59); 'hernia, lumbago, swelling of the testicles' (Pal:401).

Phlai Ngam was unhappy. He lay down, then got up and sat. He resented his father so much his chest felt like bursting. ‘Why’s he pushing me around with no mercy?’

Okay, he wasn’t asleep, he was just waiting to catch me. No problem!’ With that, he chanted a sleeping mantra, meditated to enter a trance,

and blew it onto Khun Phaen. His father grew drowsy under the formula, and fell fast asleep, flat out, as Phlai Ngam hoped.

He crept out of the room under the bright moonlight with the breeze wafting the refreshing scent of flowers.

He came to the ruan where Simala was, and hid in the shadows full of uncertainty. ‘Is it this one?’ As he stood weighing things up, the light of the lamps flared up.

He decided to chant a sleeping mantra. Everyone went to sleep, leaving perfect quiet. He used an unlocking mantra to spring the locks, peered in, then crept into the room.

It was lit by a hanging brass lantern.⁸ ‘You decorate the ruan a lot.’ There was a powder set on a stool;⁹ the sort of washing bowl on a tray as used by gentlefolk;

two food tray sets, one in nak and one in gold, placed neatly in order; jars for beeswax, face powder, and tani oil, and a comb stand¹⁰ placed beside them;

trays, footed trays, and chests all piled up; cloth all neatly folded; equipment for worshipping a Buddha image on a half-moon table; a looking glass¹¹ carved from ivory with Brahma’s face;

and hair-pins by a big mirror hung with flower tassels which looked refreshingly beautiful. Everything was neat, tasteful, and impressive. He also admired the curtain hanging across the bed. [47]

The base was silk embroidered with gold in a delicately executed design. It depicted Raden in his fever of passion for Busaba,

when he burnt the city and abducted her away.¹² Raden lifted her

⁸ *Attaklap*, a hanging brass lantern, in the form of a globe suspended by four chains. It was a mark of status because it was laborious to light and clean (Kuk: 316; Sup:361).

⁹ Literally ‘on horseback.’ Several sets of jars and bottles containing powders and oils, placed on a tray and then on a stool (*ma*) (Sup 361).

¹⁰ The receptacles were called *phan* if they had a raised rim, and *to* if they were flat. Because a comb was used on head, the stand for the comb would be higher than others (Sup: 362).

¹¹ *Khanchong*, a mirror with an adjustable frame and stand, usually carved and ecorated (Sup:361; Mat:179, pix).

¹² This is the Inao story, part of the Panji tales which originated in Java some time before the sixteenth century, and came to the Ayutthaya court in the eighteenth century, possibly via Pattani, transmitted by Malays taken as servants or war prisoners. The story was probably greatly transformed in the process. It became one of the most

in his arms into the royal chariot, then transformed himself into Joraka. Busaba was depicted sobbing helplessly.

The prince drove the chariot quickly into the hills, and entered the jewel cave to enjoy her. The prince and princess made love. At dawn, he left her

to return to the city and deceive the others. He ordered the maids to stay close with her. They had to part because of karma. By chance, Busaba had the idea

of going out in the chariot to admire the flowers. A huge celestial being¹³ made a great storm wind howl through the trees, blowing the princess' chariot

far into the depths of the forest. Busaba grew increasingly sorrowful from thinking about the prince, almost dying of grief.

Raden was depicted traveling in search of her from place to place. His kinsfolk separated away to several localities, and disguised themselves as forest bandits.

'You embroider so well it's beautiful. The main thing is I can make out the story without any mistake. If I think about it, Princess Busaba is just like Simala,

and Raden Montri's heart is just like mine yearning for you. We're just like Raden and Princess Busaba. The only difference is that we have no Joraka.¹⁴

If someone like Joraka interferes, I wouldn't transform myself like Raden here, I'd just grab Joraka's head and chop it off.' He laughed, and turned to look around.

Her Chinese bed, with feet shaped like lions and prettily carved paneling, was magnificently gilded, along with various accoutrements. The mosquito-net was in yellow silk with a pattern of scattered flowers

and a front flap in a multicolored pattern – the sort of net used by gentlefolk, with a horsetail whisk hanging beside. He opened the net and stared at her sleeping form with his heart racing. [48]

Her face was lovely, as if she was smiling in her sleep. The lamplight caught it enticingly. 'You sleep so gracefully, like no other.' The more he thought, the more he seethed with excitement.

He gently embraced her and planted a kiss on her sleeping form. Her fragrance made his heart leap and tumble over. When he touched her breasts, he trembled in utter confusion. He kissed and caressed her, totally mesmerized.

popular sources for court literature after the *Ramakian*. King Rama II was responsible for the most famous version. See Robson JSS 84, 2, 1996.

¹³ *Patarakala*, a great deity. The word comes from Javanese.

¹⁴ Actually, the two stories are very different (Sup:362).

He picked her up, then put her down, growing ever more tormented. He was young and had never been with a woman. He worried that if he woke her up, she would cry out and run away. He released the mantra, and coughed to wake her.

Simala came to hearing the sound. She looked up and recognized Phlai Ngam at the end of the bed.

Thinking she was dreaming, she smiled unguardedly and greeted him. 'What's this? You dare to come in here. This is shameful.'

Phlai came close and embraced her. In surprise, she realized it was a real person. Shocked enough to writhe to death, she screamed and fainted.¹⁵

I-Moei, who was sleeping on the balcony, recognized her mistress' cry. She got up in alarm, went into the room, and looked towards the bed.

She saw a young man lifting Simala onto his lap. She knew it was Phlai, as expected. Realizing what had happened, she took the washbowl over to Phlai Ngam.

'Take this cloth, soak it and wipe her face back and forth until she revives. Then comfort her in case she comes to and dies in the blink of an eye.'

I-Moei then walked off, and closed the room. Out of concern for Simala and Phlai Ngam, she went and sat out front, smiling sweetly, and keeping guard for people coming.

Phra Phichit was fast asleep when he was startled awake by his daughter's cry. Not knowing what was happening, he called out to I-Moei, 'What's up?'

I thought I heard Simala's voice. Did you wake up and hear it or not?' I-Moei replied straight back, 'My mistress called me to go and swat mosquitoes. [49]

While I was doing it, I didn't see there was a jingjok¹⁶ in there. While I was swatting, it fell down from the net onto her tummy, and she cried out loud.'

Phra Phichit said, 'You lousy Mon. Soon she'll have ringworm. Busaba already reminded you, but you didn't taken care of this during the day.'

¹⁵ Kukrit notes that Prince Damrong probably wrote this part under the influence of Western literature, as Thai heroines do not usually faint in this way (Kuk:266-7).

¹⁶ Common house lizard, similar to a gecko.

In the sitting hall, Khun Phaen started awake, and listened with concern. 'Phlai's gone off, that's for sure. The beggar's probably in her mosquito-net.

Oh son, what troublesome karma are you making? I think this'll be a mess tomorrow.' He lay through to dawn, not going back to sleep and trying to think up a solution.

Simala slowly revived, still feeling tired and weak. When she finally came to and opened her eyes, she found Phlai wrapped round her whole body,

with one hand bathing her face. Her hair stood on end in fright. Her heart leapt around with fear and arousal. She was still dizzy and did not know how to escape.

She slowly disengaged herself and slid down from his lap. She lay there shyly and uttered a big sigh. Then she slowly turned over with her back to him so he could not look at her.

For a moment, Phlai Ngam did not know what to say because of some feeling he did not yet understand. Watching her lying there so quietly, he gradually gathered up courage.

He picked up her fishtail fan, and softly fanned her. 'Lie there. I'll fan you. Just now I was so shocked. If you'd died, I'd have died too.

I prayed to the gods to help. You survived because of them. They came to my aid, because they care for you and me. They can see the love I have for you.

Since I came here and our eyes met, I feel like a fish stuck in a creel.¹⁷ I'm boiling with love and craving. If you don't consent, I'll die.

I'm so sick and sad from love. Please give me some care to cure it. Turn your face towards me and say something to give me heart.'
[50]

Hearing this, Simala fell even deeper in love, but feminine manners forced her to say, 'I'd like to know who gave you permission to come here.

You're a gentleman, but you have no manners, no respect for my parents at all. We've only just met, not even a day, and you come to kill me with an excuse about love.

If you truly loved me, why not ask for my hand, tell my parents, let the adults know? You've already gone too far, and now you ask me to talk. Who would agree to it?'

¹⁷ *Khong*, a basket for keeping fish.

‘What a pity you talk like this, jewel of my eye. Don’t you see I’m in love. I dare to come with no fear of death because I love you more than life itself.

If I can, I may ask for your hand from your parents. For sure, I’ll ask Phra Phichit. He should be agreeable, because he’s been a friend of my father for a long time.

When we we’re eating this evening, didn’t you see? He was teasing me like a son. But I couldn’t think because I’m on royal duty. I have to leave tomorrow in command of the soldiers.

If I part from you love-lorn and broken-hearted, I’ll be miserable all day and night like having a sore. I’ll probably die before we have a chance to be lovers. My intentions are good.

But because of the obstacles, I couldn’t see any other way. So I *had* to come and see you. If you’re not kind, I’ll die. Let me entrust this body to you in this room of yours.’

Simala pondered that everything Phlai Ngam was saying seemed honest, but she was even more shy and fearful about herself. It was like she had invited a man into the house.

How to get him to leave without things going farther? It would be difficult to delay his advances. At the same time, love was tugging at her heart. She got up and turned to give Phlai Ngam a disdainful look.

‘Are all Ayutthaya men like this, with tongues as clever and sharp as thorns? However you tell them off, they always find an excuse. No wonder girls run after them in droves.

You come up to Phichit and hit on a girl, then say you can’t ask for her hand because of military service. Although you’re going with the army, you haven’t left yet so you wait till her parents are asleep and slip into the ruan. [51]

If I don’t fall in with you, you say you’ll die. Country bumpkins are the same everywhere. If any girl is soft-hearted enough to let you enjoy her, in less than a month, you chuck her away and go with the army.

She’s left here with nothing, and she can wait a hundred years but you won’t return. She’s defiled and ruined because she got carried away by the deceitful lovemaking trickery of you Ayutthayans.

I thank you for helping tend my sickness. Now go. It’s near dawn. If my parents find out, this will all blow up in anger and confusion and you won’t get what you crave.’

‘Don’t imagine I’m leaving. I’ll die in this room. I’m not deceiving you. We’ll be partners in marriage until death.

Be kind to me. Don't stay so stubborn. Now that I've touched you like this, I've no intention of running away.' With that, Phlai moved close against her and touched her to see how she would react.

Simala tried to dodge and ward him off. 'I've told you already but you won't back off. Promises with words alone are easy. Don't be impatient, and you'll get me. Please weigh things up.

If you're sincere, give me your word that you'll definitely be honest with me into the future. If I believe you, then I'll agree to be lovers. But if you're lying, don't keep on pleading to no avail.'

'Is that true, my darling? If so, I won't make you have to tell me off again. I'll give you my word on oath. Let the gods come to hear me.

If I should abandon you and not look after you in future, may I for certain descend alive into hell, right down to the Lokanta hell.¹⁸

There! I've given you my word on oath. Do you still have any doubts? Please accept my love. There's no further need for fear.'

'I can see you love me. I'll probably consent to be lovers. But I'm still shaking with fever. Please delay for some time, and I'll follow your will.'

Phlai understood feminine 'fever.' With no delay, he hugged her tight to him, kissed her, and slipped his hand inside her sabai. She pushed him away, until they collapsed on the bed. [52]

For both of them, it was the first time to make love. They had not experienced passion before. Now their lust heated beyond tolerance, and when they came together on the pillow it was wondrous.

A fierce storm arose, making waves. The sky rumbled and raged, flickered and flashed, crashed and smoldered. The heavens shook and shivered in chaos.

Streams were thrashed into foam, and the sky broke out into rain. In their minds, the world throbbed and shook. Both felt the taste of love in their hearts.¹⁹

¹⁸ The very last hell described in the Three Worlds cosmology. It exists in the gap between universes, and hence is totally devoid of any light. Each person there cannot see the others and believes himself the sole inhabitant. Those who have harmed their parents, monks, or Brahmin teachers are reborn in the Lokanta hell. See Reynolds and Reynolds, 80-4.

¹⁹ This 'wondrous scene' was probably written by Prince Damrong or one of his co-editors, and has a rather derivative feel. Red:375 reproduces what is claimed to be Khru Jaeng's version, which has the same kind of literalness which Damrong found 'obscene' in Khru Jaeng's version of Khun Phaen with Buakhli. However, Khru Jaeng tries, more than in the editors' replacement, to portray the lovers' inexperience rather than just stating it. (We are not sure how this passage fits in, because Red quotes only these lines. Where did they get the Khru Jaeng version?)

Simala was swept away by passion. She hugged him tightly, and used her sabai to mop the sweat that swathed his skin.

She fanned him and, fearing he was tired, asked, 'Are you hungry? I'll find something.' Phlai wrapped himself around her. 'Hugging your soft flesh, I'm divinely full.

No need to talk of food. I went up to heaven and saw the palace flash before me.' They caressed and whispered secretly together until they dozed off to sleep.

Almost at dawn, the light came up and the crow of the wild cock hastened the break of day. Simala woke first with a sigh, remembering she had to part from him.

She washed her face, powdered, and combed her hair. Then she nudged and shook him. 'Wake up. The sun's almost up. If we stay here together for long, we'll be shamed.'

Phlai woke up, intent only on kissing and caressing her, not wanting to leave. Being far apart from her was going to be miserable. Listlessly he got up and washed his face.

Simala took him to her powder table, and made him up with powder, water distilled with flowers, krajae floral scent, and sandal. She got him dressed and ready.

Once he was all dressed and powdered to leave, Phlai heaved a big sigh. He sat down again and lifted her onto his lap. 'I'll miss you so much, I don't want to go.'

Simala softly sobbed in sadness. Then she had an idea and turned to plead with him. 'Think about this. You're going far away from me. [53]

The parents don't know about us. We must think how to plug the hole made by the thorn.²⁰ Suppose someone asks for my hand after

He was young and had just been taught to mount a horse. And the filly had never been ridden before. They swirled around chaotically at full force. They fell and got back up, not releasing one another.

When he cracked the whip, the horse changed to a lame hobble. He also limped along with trembling legs, afraid of falling off on such a bumpy ride. Then the horse got stirred up, and lit off, panting heavily,

as if she was being hit big not small, leaving tracks not yet as straight as a chopstick. The rider was unskilled and kept falling. He hung onto the mane as the pace became wilder.

They bucked against one another wildly for a time, then the horse quietened down and he thought its rhythm was spent. But her strength was undiminished. She reared up and set off at a fine pace.

Now she knew the way, she was as good as a trained steed. Now they knew one another, there was no limit to their energy, no need for him to urge her onwards, just follow the rhythm, until the sweat soaked down to her hooves, and he unharnessed her.

²⁰ If you have done something wrong, don't leave the opportunity for someone following also to do wrong (Sup:

you've gone. If I refuse, I'll come in conflict with my father's word.

Though I might have some difficulty, it doesn't matter. I'll wait for you. When your military service is over, please come back. Don't delay so I get depressed.'

Phlai Ngam was already despondent over the parting, and her words made it impossible to swallow his tears. 'I'm hugely concerned about you. I'll go to tell my father to ask for your hand.

Whatever he can give, let's at least get betrothed, to prevent anyone else getting involved. If father doesn't consent, I'd rather cut my throat and not go to war.

Don't get burned up with worry, my darling. Though I'm gone, I won't forget you. Remember my word I gave you. As soon as the war ends, I'll hurry back here.

Don't cry. Please listen to me. If someone sees you tomorrow, they'll think something's up.' He helped wipe her tears, kissed her on both cheeks, and left.

Simala felt heartbroken. 'I may not see his face again, just like before.' After he left, she went back to the bed and lay grieving with her face buried in the pillow.

Phlai Ngam looked plaintively back towards her. He desperately wanted to go back inside with her, but was desolate because the sky was already light.

He suppressed his feelings, walked out of the room, and crept along the wall in the shadows, intending to lie back down in the sitting hall. He was shocked to see his father awake.

Khun Phaen asked Phlai Ngam, 'Where have you been?' Phlai acted innocent and replied, 'I had a belly ache. Went downstairs to the loo.'

Khun Phaen said, 'Which loo in this city has a powdering service? Your face is covered in it. I know a lie when I see one. Don't try to deceive me.

We came to stay in Phra Phichit's house. His kindness has been enormous. But you've had the bad manners to take liberties with the daughter of someone of such kindness. [54]

If we didn't have this little matter of the army, I'd take you under the house. You're lucky not to get caned and your reputation tarnished. Having caused this trouble, what do you have to say for yourself?'

Phlai Ngam did not argue with his father's rebuke, but happily

saw it as an opportunity. He prostrated and said, 'It's true, I did wrong.

But only because my heart was overflowing with love beyond endurance, and I was almost completely off my head. I didn't know how to get over it. If I kept quiet and went to war, I thought I'd die.

I depend on your merit and kindness to please ask for her hand. By afternoon, we'll be gone. I thought I'd die before it's over. So I climbed into Simala's room.

She's my heartmate, there's no doubt. You saw the powder on my face. I gave her my word that I'd get you to ask for her hand.

If at least we could be betrothed, it'd guard against falsehoods. Leave the proper marriage until the way back. Father, please consent to help me, so I can go to war with a still heart.'

Khun Phaen quietly watched his son's distress. 'The whole thing has come to this! To abandon her would not be good. Unjust.

Young Ngam got totally carried away. If I don't help, there'll be trouble down the road. If you fall on the stairs, you have to leap and trust to your luck.' He pretended to be angry at Phlai Ngam.

'You foolish child! I'm furious. Why didn't you ask me earlier? A young heart is never satisfied. Now it's happened, why come pleading to me?

If I didn't love Phra Phichit like a father, I couldn't find a way to talk with him. He loves his daughter like his own heart. You ravish her like some villain,

and now we have to find a way out of this which doesn't make him lose face. If you ever abandon her, I'll kill you or else I'm not worth considering as a man.'

Phlai prostrated and wai-ed his father in delight. 'I won't disappoint you on this.' They both washed their faces and walked out in front of the ruan. [55]

Fair Simala felt nobody could feel as sad as herself. She hugged her pillow, heaving troubled sighs, and lay there listlessly until morning without rising.

I-Moei noticed her mistress had not appeared, and crept in to wake her. She found her looking vacant and upset. I-Moei dumped herself down beside her with a thump, and sighed.

'What a pity! I'm so poor and can't find anything to put in my mouth. And I dreamed again that the god came last night,

and departed just before daylight. On his way, he'll want betel and tobacco. I haven't even a hundred cowries. Where can I get the things to give to the god?

When you get up, you must give me an advance, because I'm very

worried about this god. It was nice of him to fly down, and if my mistress has no mercy, he'll be disappointed.'

Simala was not paying attention to anything, but I-Moei's interpretation of dreams was more than she could bear. She got up and thumped her head. 'You criminal! Don't you have anything better to do than poking your nose in other's affairs?'

Don't talk so much, you sweet mouth. Come here and help a bit.' Simala sliced betelnuts and made rolls of pan leaves. 'The tobacco's in the cupboard. Bring it out and pack it.'

They sewed leaf packets to make a food container, and put in the betelnut, pan, and tobacco she had arranged, along with snacks to eat along the way. They put in a bottle tied with a cloth carrying a seal,

then put everything in a basket and covered it with a cloth over the top. 'Take this carefully.' I-Moei received it. 'Offerings to the god who came to visit you...'

Until around half past one, Phra Phichit and Busaba were ordering people to arrange the food for a boisterous meal. When that was done, they came to find the two commanders.

As soon as she sat down, Busaba called out, 'What's up with Simala? Where's she disappeared to? Khun Phaen is leaving this morning. It's already late and she hasn't brought the food.'

I-Moei went out with her heart in her mouth. 'Dust got in my mistress' eye while she was washing her face. It's still stinging badly. I saw her rubbing her eyes.' Busaba said, 'You're just a chatterbox. [56]

You leave your mistress and come here putting on airs. Any moment it'll swell up. You lousy Mon, you're only after what you can get. Why don't you give her turmeric water as eye-drops?'

Phlai was amused. 'This kid is quite something. She's in cahoots with Simala. I recall her face from last night.'

She came to lend a hand when Simala fainted, and helped by fibbing to her parents.' He sat waiting for an opening, and then said to Busaba,

'If you open the eye underwater and lift the eyebrow, it helps get the dust out. That gets rid of the irritation.'

Busaba laughed. 'You're very considerate. I-Moei, remember this method, and go tell Simala what Phlai said.'

Then she turned to speak to Khun Phaen. 'I'm eternally annoyed with myself that I have a child but no son. I'm still disappointed,

and would like to have one.'

Khun Phaen saw the opening, picked up the thread and ran with it. 'I depended on you when I was in dire straits and you showed kindness in countless ways.

I've thought and thought every possible way how to repay your kindness, but couldn't come up with anything until I came up to Phichit.

I've been dwelling on this since we arrived yesterday evening, and have now found something totally appropriate. As the two of you have no son, I will offer young Ngam here to be at your service,

to repay the kindness I have received from both of you. Beat or scold him at will, I'll not complain. How do you feel sir? My son loves and respects you.'

Phra Phichit was delighted to give his daughter. He smiled and replied, 'No need to go through the formalities.

To what you say, I can see them as friends. In truth, to my mind they're perfectly suited. But being provincial, I have some trepidation that my daughter doesn't know anything. [57]

She's just a straightforward girl, not stubborn, but not up to city people. If in the future my daughter doesn't please you, whatever you do, don't cause any shame.'

Khun Phaen replied humbly to Phra Phichit. 'I've given considerable thought to these points, and I've got young Phlai to give me a promise. Only when this worry was removed, did I speak to you.

As for Simala, even in the capital, no match for her can be found, either in appearance or manners. As soon as I saw her, I liked her.

Even were young Ngam to become a chaophraya, she could receive anyone as guests. As long as I'm alive, I'll make sure no shame will attach to you.'

Phra Phichit said, 'If that's so, we can trust one another. But Busaba will say I'm too easy. Simala is her child, so you must ask how she feels.'

Busaba was sitting listening with a smile on her face. 'I was eager to tell you how pleased I was. But second thoughts make me a little ill at ease. We are big people. Rushing into something will look suspicious.

I have only one child, and I've looked after her since she was little. When she's gone, what will I have in her place? Khun Phaen came

specially to make this request.

Because I love him like my own flesh, I can't oppose and must fall in with his wish. But if I'm to speak out straightforwardly, I'm still a bit concerned about Phlai.

He has business far away in the Lao country. There are lots of young girls there. If your son takes a fancy to someone, whatever we've said today will be meaningless.

That would cause loss to the parents and give rise to distress. They'll say I'm an oaf and addle-brained and don't know how to judge a man.

But what I'm saying is not that I want to break it off. I have loved you greatly for a long time. But if I'm to gouge out my darling eye to give to Phlai, some means has to be found to make it secure.'

Phlai Ngam gave it some thought and said, 'If you, the parents, can agree, have no doubts about me. [58]

Even if I go beyond the sky to the Himaphan forest, you need have no suspicion that I may be unfaithful.²¹ It's like I've given a promise under a red seal or signed with a cross.²²

Though I'm young, I know of your kindness in the past because my parents told me a lot about it. Allow me to be a golden shoe to support your foot.²³ Don't be concerned.'

Khun Phaen took up from Phlai Ngam. 'He should keep his promise. I don't think he's lying. But going away for a long time isn't good.

I think if they were betrothed, though he might be far away, his concern would be here – in body somewhere else, but in heart here with his partner. This would be prudent.

Today is a very auspicious day. Please accept a gift of betrothal. All the business of fixing a day and making a house, I'll leave to you, sir.

Because we must go with the army as volunteers, our future is still unclear. Please have mercy, kindness, and consideration for me as in times past.'

Phra Phichit and Busaba agreed with delight, and accepted the betrothal gold immediately. Phra Phichit said, 'There's no problem.

If the war to take Chiang Mai goes smoothly, I think it'll be over around the second month. Then you'll have to bring the army back here, so the marriage can be around the fourth month.'

²¹ The original has a nice wordplay between *nok jai*, outside the heart = unfaithful, and *nok fa*, outside the sky.

²² The signature of an illiterate. Phlai Ngam is of course educated, but still uses the saying of the time (Sup:366).

²³ A formula phrase for a prospective son-in-law, or similar dependent.

Everyone was pleased with this agreement. As food was ready, they sat round in a circle to eat, chatting merrily.

After the meal, Khun Phaen and Phlai Ngam took their leave. Phra Phichit came to send them off at the foot of the stairway. They left the residence and went to Wat Jan.

I-Moei intercepted them on the way from the house. After Khun Phaen had walked past, she coughed as a signal to Phlai who looked round and understood.

He nipped off the road into the trees, and asked, 'Why did you come here?' I-Moei said, 'This basket of goodies is for sale to Phlai Ngam.' [59]

Phlai smiled and said, 'I'll take it. There's no need to ask how cheap or expensive it is.' He passed the basket to a soldier to carry, and gave three tamlueng to I-Moei.

He whispered to her, 'Go straight back to the house. If your mistress is still sad and crying, you're the person who's been serving her regularly.

Console her not to be so sad. Look after her. Keep her happy morning and night until I return. I'll give you more cash in reward.'

With that, he hurried after his father in a good mood, and helped organize the troops at Wat Jan.

The men were summoned for inspection. The head and rear of the column were assigned. Phra Phichit came to give his blessing. Then the troops moved off.

When the gong boomed, the vanguard under Nai Jan Samphantueng led the way, hollering. Then came the main brigade, the commissary, and the rearguard **by royal command.**²⁴

Villagers and market people rushed up in crowds to see them. At the wat, monks sprinkled them with sacred water. Outpost guards escorted them until they passed the frontier.

Phlai Ngam rode his horse behind Khun Phaen. He was very sleepy, and swayed in the saddle. In his chest, he felt both randy and sad.

'Oh Simala, my darling! Right now you must be miserable, just like I'm thinking of you. Who'll soothe your sadness away?

After what we said this morning, if you know that I've asked your parents for your hand and they agreed, then I think that'll overcome

²⁴ ราชอาญา, *ratch-aya*, no idea what this means here.

your fears. Sit and count the days until the ceremony.

Think of me morning and night. When you have a chance, give some thought to decorating our house. That'll take your mind off things and cheer you up.

When you have some ideas, I'd love to know what they are. What style will you decorate the house in? Who will you talk to about it? [60]

There's only I-Moei. She's just a *phrai* and probably never contradicts you. She'll suggest you buy everything new and forget about the old stuff, some of which is good.

Lots of the furniture in your room is fine. I saw it with my own eyes. There's no need to find new stuff.

The bed is a bit narrow for sleeping, but that's good for love. Hot or cool, we'll not sleep far apart. There's no need to find a new bed, my darling.

The curtain that you embroidered in gold and many colors about the story of Raden Montri is just like our own story. There's no need to make a new one.

If you want to embroider some more, continue with the episode about the nun disrobing. Then your powder and make-up things are peerless. The bowls, trays, and bottles are very cute.

I still remember late last night when you took me to sit beside one another there. The betel tray, the nak and gold stuff, everything is charming. It's all still in my mind's eye.

I'll build a big new house for you, where we can put both your things and mine. I've got lots of different things – good weapons and arms,

charms and yantra cloths. But perhaps you don't like spirits. No problem. I'll keep them somewhere else. I'll make a little Buddha image room.

In our own room, we'll have a carpet and a pair of pillows placed neatly beside one another for lounging morning and night. I'll always be hugging and stroking you.

When we dine together, it's better not to let anyone see, so we can fool around and canoodle and chat while we eat our fill.

What's with furniture anyway? With just a soft mat, a pillow, and our love, we should be happy every night and day.'

Phlai's sleepy mind began to wander. He became befuddled, as if he was dreaming, and imagined his lover was there with him. He became excited and giggly, and began to talk with her. [61]

'I'm still a bit upset. Can't think it out. Suppose you have a child in future. I've seen the belly pains and the screaming. Will you be like that, darling? I don't know.

They say midwives tend to be careless about massaging, and do it

in a rush. If you don't watch over them, they've killed many people by just yanking.

I'll stand by with a stick. If they get up to their tricks, I'll smash them like *this*.' Dozily he whipped his horse [*pa pradon*]²⁵, but instead hit the rear of his father's mount at full strength.

The horse got a fright, and Khun Phaen almost fell off. But he had a good seat and hung on. When he got the mount back under control, he turned round, his face red with anger. 'Did you mean to do that, or what?'

Phlai was shocked. He told his father quickly, 'Honestly, I was dozing and dreaming of Simala. She was giving birth, in pain and groaning,

and I thought the midwife was taking the easy way by pulling the child carelessly when it was sideways, so I feared it would be dangerous to let it happen, and hit her, but I hit the horse.

It was because I was dozy and dreaming, not because I meant to hit him, honest. Color-of-Mist has been good in the past. Father, please forgive me.'

His son's words made Khun Phaen's heart soften. 'See! Love gets you into trouble, whether you're awake or asleep, night or day.'

Then he pondered quietly to himself. 'Young Ngam is dreaming about Simala because he's just known love for the first time, and he's seeing everything from the good side.

Oh son, you haven't had the bad taste when love changes and takes flight. The worst pain of all doesn't match the pain and misery of love.

Why talk of others far away? Just your mother gave me great distress. I had to suffer a lot several times as if blood would almost spurt from my eyes.

When people are young, they can almost swallow one another quite seriously, live together, and spend all the time canoodling with no thought they'll ever part. [62]

When I came back from the army, and saw her just for a moment, she wrecked our love. I almost writhed to death in anger. I was miserable for over a year.

Then I went after her, and we ran away into the forest. We had to put up with poverty and hardship, but we didn't care about life because of love.

Just when I thought we were out of danger and could be happy

²⁵ ปาประดอน, *pa pradon*. Mc:499, *pradon*, to add more

together in a secure place, big problems arose as a result of karma. That devil destroyed our love.

I was so hurt and furious, I didn't know what I could do. I had to suffer miserably in the inner jail for over ten years.

My darling Wanthong, you've probably forgotten me because we've been totally apart for such a long time, and you'll now be carried away by the merit of Khun Chang.

Or do you still think of me, your old, lost friend-in-hardship, like I think of you, day and night, all the time?' He sighed and grieved, on and on.

The army left Phichit and had to skirt around lakes which lay across their path. Some of the lakes were huge, and home to many kinds of fish.²⁶

Seen from horseback, the water was teeming. Fish jumped and dived, surfaced and ducked back under. Giant snakehead,²⁷ catfish, and *dong*²⁸ floated up. Schools of sweetlip²⁹ were dimly visible.

Thepho,³⁰ *thepha*,³¹ snakehead,³² whisker sheatfish,³³ mud carp,³⁴ striped catfish,³⁵ leaf fish,³⁶ grey featherback,³⁷ java carp,³⁸ and spotted

²⁶ Phichit is still surrounded by lakes, though there would certainly have been more in the past before the canal-building of the modern era. The biggest is now Beung Si Fai, just south of the modern town of Phichit. It would have been close to Khun Phaen's route from the old town of Phichit towards Phitsanulok. It still teems with fish, birds, and plant life. Close to the city this is not so obvious as it has become more like an open lake. But around the perimeter, there are large expanses of lotus which, in the wet season, would match the poem's description. Also in these remote areas, the sky can fill with flocks of birds, mostly various kinds of egret, heron, darter, and duck. The passages of appreciating nature in other chapters are more exercises in the *nirat* genre in which the sound of the words and the cleverness of the associations is more important than the reality of the scene. The passages in this chapter have a different feel, and are clearly based on the author's experience of an actual place.

²⁷ *Chado*, ophicephalus micropeltes

²⁸ *Parasilurus cochinchinensis*

²⁹ *Sroi*, dangila leptocheila.

³⁰ *Pangasius larnaudi*.

³¹ *Pangasius sanitwongsei*, Chaophraya giant catfish.

³² *Chon*, ophicephalus striatus.

³³ *Nuea oon*, krypterus limpok/trachinotus bailloni/russelli, there's a simpler name??

³⁴ *Nuanjan*, chanos chanos.

³⁵ *Sawai*, pangasius fowleri

³⁶ *Salit*, trichopodus pectorales, snakeskin gourami

³⁷ *Salat*, notopterus notopterus

³⁸ *Taphian*, puntius javanicus, actually a group with many variants, mostly called some kind of 'barb.'

featherback³⁹ – many species swam around the lakes.

In some places where fish were abundant, crocodiles chased after them, thrashing their tails as if in a rage. When they heard the sound of people above, they dived down and lay low in the depths.

All around, many different kinds of birds were looking for fish to feed. A golden pelican floated in the current, its food-sack hanging from its beak, open to scoop the water.

Oriental darters⁴⁰ plunged underwater to catch fish. Common herons⁴¹ bustled about. Egrets stood looking intently. In the evening, night-herons croaked.⁴² [63]

Flocks of hawks hovered above, then swooped down to eat fish from the lake. Bald-headed adjutant storks waded around on long legs, looking to catch fish.

Painted storks⁴³ and openbills⁴⁴ scooped up shellfish. Flocks of birds of many different species were scattered all around as far as the eye could see.

Plants were just as many and various. The blooms of foliage of so many different kinds made the lakes beautifully attractive.

Some of the lakes were beautifully carpeted with an unbroken cover of red lotuses. In others, the lotus blooms had already turned to seed pods, leaves had grown, while red lotuses stretched beyond as far as the eye could see.

Clumps of lotus poked up stems here and there, and at daybreak bloomed into brilliant flowers. In the water there were many different species such as water chestnut, *taptao*,⁴⁵ and ottelia vine.⁴⁶

In the early morning, bees flew around with a sleepy hum, probing into the flower stamens for their spectacularly sweet taste.

The light breeze blew the water into lines of ripples which glistened beautifully in the light. Though the sun was hot, the wind was cool and refreshing. Both officers and men walked along entranced by the view.

³⁹ *Krai*, *hototerus chitala*

⁴⁰ *Ngua*, *anhinga melanogaster*, Bird:19

⁴¹ *Krasa*, *ardea cinerea*

⁴² *Khwaek*, the black-crowned night-heron. "Call: a throaty *kwok*, often heard at dusk when going from daytime roost to feeding grounds" (Bird:37)

⁴³ *Fak bua*, *ibis leucocephalus*, Bird:45

⁴⁴ *Pak hang*, Asian openbill, *anastomus oscitana*, Bird:46.

⁴⁵ *Porana bialata*.

⁴⁶ *Santawa*, *ottelia alismoides*

Leaving the area of lakes and waterways, they turned to cut their way through the forest. To both left and right, the way was screened by dense thickets of wild sugar⁴⁷ and giant reed,⁴⁸ and clumps of lalang grass.⁴⁹

There were no animals of any sort, only weaverbirds⁵⁰ carrying material in their beaks for building nests. The forest path was difficult with water everywhere. They marched quickly,

left the forest, and went along a path on the riverbank. At Pak Phing⁵¹ they crossed over to the right bank, and entered the forest. Arriving at Phitsanulok-Okburi,⁵²

both officers and men went to Wat Mahathat⁵³ to pay their respects to Phra Chinnarat and Phra Chinnasi.⁵⁴ They asked for victory and well-being. Then they went to the central hall to present their sealed order.

Chaophraya Phitsanulok and provincial officials busied themselves to feed them and look after everything. When the soldiers had rested enough to lose their fatigue, they marched onwards to Phichai.⁵⁵
[64]

At every city on the way, the governor and officials welcomed them and made themselves busy. From Phichai they crossed to the

⁴⁷ *Khaem*, *Saccharum arundinaceum*.

⁴⁸ *Oo*, *arundo donax*.

⁴⁹ *Ya kha*, *imperata cylindrica*

⁵⁰ *Krajap*, a name used for many different types of small bird, especially the *ploceus* genus of weaverbirds, but also bushlarks (neither of which likes a forest habitat).

⁵¹ On the Nan river around 20 kms south of Phitsanulok. Until recently, this was still a crossing point with a ferry service. Now there is only a suspended ropeway at Wat Pak Phing, large enough to carry a few people, or a single motorcycle.

⁵² In a preamble to the Ayutthaya Chronicle (British Museum version) which reproduces several early legends from the *Phongsawadan Neua* (Northern Chronicle), Phitsanulok is founded by a King from Chiang Saen. "And when the King was about to bestow a name on the city, he asked the Brahmans, "What name shall we give it?" The Brahmans answered, "Your Majesty arrived today during the watch of Vishnu." So he gave it the name of the City of Phitsanulok [Vishnu's World]. And the King said, "As the lord Buddha came here to gather alms, the western part of the city is to be called Okburi and the eastern part is to be called Canthabun." (RCA:6-7. *Phongsawadan Neua*, 21). *Ok* means an expanse of water, probably referring to wetlands to the west of the river, but also a reference to the Four Floods of desire which pollute the world in Buddhist philosophy.

⁵³ Wat Phra Si Rattana Mahathat.

⁵⁴ Two of the most renowned Buddha images in Thailand. According to the *Northern Chronicles*, they were cast at the foundation of the city (*Phongsawadan Neua*, 22-4; RCA:7). King Ramesuan (1388-95) visited Phitsanulok and paid respects to Phra Chinnarat. And on King Boromracha II's visit in 1438, tears flowed from the eyes of the image (RCA: 13, 15).

⁵⁵ This would be the old town. When the Nan River shifted its course, the town was separated from the river by a bank of soft mud, and abandoned by most of its population. The new site was chosen in the Fifth Reign. Pornpun, Provincial towns, 20-1. I think the old site was slightly north of the current one.

other bank, marched to Ban Krai Pa Faek⁵⁶ then turned,
 and in one day reached Satchanalai.⁵⁷ All the big local officials
 welcomed them and looked after them, following orders. They
 stayed three days in the town.

Marching from Sawankhalok, they crossed an upland and entered
 the forest. Phlai was extremely randy, thinking of Simala.

‘If my darling could come with me, I’d invite her to admire the
 forest trees.’ He mused as he made his way along the path, crossing a
 shallow ford in a hill stream.⁵⁸

He looked up at the mountain, shadowed by a steep overhanging
 cliff. Below, a stream surged down from the peak, splashed through
 a ravine, and slammed loudly against the rocks.

Far below lay rock pools, overhung by promontories and jutting
 crags. Everywhere was rock, some drop-shaped and shining like jet
 gems, some like garlands with rows of hanging tassels.

The overhang jutted out like the rock roof of a lean-to shelter.
 They craned their necks to look up. In the valley, the stream ran
 through a deep gorge of crumbled rocks, gouged with pools and
 shallow caves in a haphazard pattern.

In some places, broken rocks were piled up in jumbled mounds.
 Stalactites began as uneven bulges and narrowed to points dripping
 with water. Some looked sharp and glistened with many colors.

Stalagmites stuck up like barbs, some rounded, some swollen in a
 mass of knobs and lumps, some thin in ridges in the distance. The
 gorge opened out to a distant view of nothing but mountain peaks.

Pretty trees and weeping banyans stood on the bank of the stream.

⁵⁶ The modern place carrying the name Pa Faek is too far south for this to make sense. Perhaps it has moved, or was old Phichai farther south? In the Thonburi chronicles, when Burma attacked Ayutthaya in 1775, its army passed Ban Danlanhoi and camped at Pa Faek (Sujit:127)

⁵⁷ Here this means Sawankhalok, not the modern amphoe further to the north.

⁵⁸ As with the the wetland above, this description has the feel of real life rather than poetic wordplay. Kukrit also found it realistic on grounds he had personally seen a matching scene, but failed to mention the location. The site is hard to locate. It should be on the Thung Saliam route which is the route used by all the other comings and goings from Chiang Mai in the poem, and is still the only road (Rte 1048) crossing the watershed between the Yom and Wang valleys in this area. The road further south (to Tak) crosses open plain, and the one further north leads directly to Lampang rather than Thoen. There are some fine crags around Thung Saliam. There are caves. There are marble quarries. But there is no combination of crag and cave with a strong stream. The Huai Mae Mok which flows through the Thung Saliam gap is a modest stream, possibly because it has been dammed for water supply. Near the head of the stream is the Mae Mok waterfall. Here the stream cascades over a large convex rock formation, and is impressive in the rainy season. However, there are no crags above or pools below, and the fall is not on a route which would lead to Thoen. Further north, in what is now Satchanalai National Park, there are three waterfalls (Tat Duean, Tat Dao, Huai Sai Khao). Again, they do not have the combination of features in the poem’s description, and there is no route over the watershed to Thoen from here. There are two other falls in more remote areas of the park, but the terrain westward from there consists of two high ridges, and is unlikely any route traversed these. Perhaps the author described a scene which is not on this route at all.

The wind blew leaves to float in the current. The water was clear enough to see the stream bed. Flowers in bloom hung down and released their fragrance.

White and red lotuses poked up, with their seed pods nestling behind, and with many kinds of plants woven among their stalks. Water primrose⁵⁹ shoots tangled with ottelia vine floating on the water all along the stream.

Pondweed⁶⁰ lay intertwined with water chestnut and water lettuce.⁶¹ Water spinach⁶² sprouted in neat clumps. Bees flew around, caressing the flowers. The stream seethed with brilliant fish. [65]

The route led into the hills. Dense foliage offered refreshing shade. They viewed the birdlife. Mynahs chattered in a relentless hubbub.

The calls of dark blue quails and doves echoed through the forest. A heron called out loudly from a *krasang*. Parakeets⁶³ looked out from perches on a *pralong*⁶⁴ branch. Cottontail geese sat under a *khang*⁶⁵ tree beside the path.

Coppersmith barbets perched up in a *kathin*. Parrots sat eating on an orange jasmine (*kaeo*), and then flew away. Peacocks on a *yang* spread their tails and strutted. Golden pelicans perched on a *krathon*,⁶⁶ gently swaying their heads.

Weaverbirds babbled softly on a *krajao*. Black drongoes perched on a pine looking shabby. There were woodpeckers, pheasants, and grey-peacock-pheasants. Bulbuls whispered lovingly on the branch of a *jan*.⁶⁷

Pairs of doves caressed on a steep hillside, cooing ju-huk-koo, ju-huk-koo. *Anchan*⁶⁸ perched on the branch of a blackwood.⁶⁹ Giant parrots perched quietly on a *priang* vine.⁷⁰

Junglefowl flew boisterously around cackling. The males called out ek-i-ek plaintively. They scratched for food, with the females beside

⁵⁹ *Phaeng phuai*, *Jussiaea repens*.

⁶⁰ *Sarai*, *najas graminea*, pondweed or water nymph, but also used more generically.

⁶¹ *Jok*, *pistia stratiotes*.

⁶² *Phak bung*, *ipomoea aquatica*, a common vegetable.

⁶³ *Kraling*, grey-headed parakeet.

⁶⁴ Unidentified.

⁶⁵ *Albizzia lebbekoides*, woman's tongue tree.

⁶⁶ *Sandoricum koetjape*, Tree:227

⁶⁷ *Dispyros decandra* or *pakmannii*.

⁶⁸ Unidentified.

⁶⁹ *Chingchan*, *dalbergia oliverii*, Tree: 366.

⁷⁰ *Derris* (or *dalbergia*) *scandens*, hog creeper.

them. Seeing people, they darted away to hide in the bushes.

A partridge spread its wings, cooed, and pecked around, chuckling. Seeing its mate eating a cricket, it went over to strut around in courtship, looking lovely.

They traveled along admiring the thick forest, guiding the horses under the shade. The sun dropped hidden behind the hills. At the time the wind dropped, they came out onto a smooth path.

The bamboo had been burnt and the grass recently flattened. The ground stretched away to the distance looking flat and open. Many animals were moving around. Some played together, turning to look for their partners.

A powerful tigress loped along and thrust its feet to spring and pounce. Timorous deer watched with bodies stooped, or ran off helter-skelter to hide.

Golden deer stood on tiptoe beside the path, looking innocent, and bleating brightly. A sole young gaur made a way through the forest. Buffalo chased one another through the trees.

There were porcupines, bears, and civets. Mouse deer stared, feet looking frisky. Elds deer peered warily out from a thicket. A rhinoceros⁷¹ made some gaur run and scatter. [66]

A leopard stalked some elds deer. Elephants crashed through the bamboo. Schomburg deer peered out from the bushes before coming out to taste a saltlick.

They cut across the Rahaeng region and through Thoen district without visiting the towns. After fourteen days travel through the forest, they were within two days of Chiang Mai.

They halted at Khok Tao lake.⁷² They did not enter the village but made a camp to rest the troops at the edge of the lake, driving in a boundary circle of stakes to prevent anyone wandering in.

Khun Phaen called his son Phlai Ngam over to talk. ‘We’re nearly to the city of Chiang Mai. It’s not a good plan to rush into battle.

They’ve captured Phra Thainam. If we go straight in, they may kill him. We should sneak into the city and look around for a way to bring the Thai out.

Then we can attack the city. This roundabout way is better. You and I, just the two of us, will go to find where the Thai are.

⁷¹ *K(r)asu*, *dicerorhinus sumatrensis*, sumatran rhinoceros, now virtually extinct in Thailand (Mammal:123).

⁷² Turtle mound lake. Unidentified. The route from Sangkhalok onwards is not clear. Most likely they followed the route through Thung Saliang towards Thoen taken (in the other direction) by the Chiang Mai message carriers in the previous chapter. Since there is no mention of Lampang or Lamphun, they possibly then took one of the passes into the south of the Chiang Mai valley, such as modern-day routes 106 or 1184. Two days’ travel from Chiang Mai would be around 30 kilometers, putting them around Thung Sieo or Pa Sang.

We must disguise ourselves as Lao locals. We'll find the clothes from a village. We must hurry in there now. Or do you have any thoughts?

Phlai Ngam agreed with his father and replied, 'I can't find fault with what you say. If we take the troops in, as soon as they see any Thai, the Lao will raise the alarm,

and the news will spread all over the city. Before long, the prisoners will be in danger. They'll execute them all and we'll lose.

If we sneak in and find them first, we can release them. Then we'll have about four to five hundred people, Thai and Lao⁷³ combined, to fight against the Lao city people.'

The two agreed, and then went back to give orders to the troops. 'Keep hidden, rest up, and keep a good look out for people coming and going.'

When all the troops had their orders, the father and son got dressed to impress, decked out with charms, anointed with herbs, and their heads tied with bands infused with power. [67]

Phlai Ngam grasped his sword and stood up. Khun Phaen grasped Skystorm of special power. They turned their faces in an easterly direction and concentrated on the aim of killing some Lao.

They stood with eyes closed, praying according to an ancient teacher's manual. Seeing the augury that breath emerged from the right nostril, they set off with the right foot.

They cut through the marsh and bushes rather than turning onto the road. As soon as they saw a field of gourds, they hid in the woods. Some Lao farmers were walking beside the road.

This Lao father and son had been to plant a field at the edge of the forest with vegetables, gourd, cucurbita pepo, cucumber, beans, sesame, and banana – many different things.

As their time of death was approaching, they felt uneasy and thought of returning home even though it was still daytime. They invited one another to walk along.

The father carried a fine sword and a cloth bag slung across his back. The son had a spear on his shoulder, and carried a bottle gourd stuck on a pole. Their pink headcloths stood out as they walked along.

The old father led the way, and the young son followed close behind. By fate it was the day of their death. The son dreamily took up his fiddle, and the father raised his khaen.⁷⁴

⁷³ Meaning those from Lanchang who were captured along with Phra Thainam.

⁷⁴ Amultiple pipe made from bamboo tubes of varying length.

‘Oh young lovely golden lass
 I want to **court**⁷⁵ a Chiang Saen girl
 seeking a lass from another town
 I’d die for you, my darling
 I pray to the ancestor spirits in the hills
 To bring the city girl to be by my side
 I’ll bring hard liquor, chicken, and pig
 as offerings to invade your heart’

The Lao father and son came singing towards the wood where Khun Phaen was. He had been watching them from afar. He whispered to his son to look out.

‘Don’t you see it? The Lao with the fiddle has no head. He’s reached the time of his death. Don’t be afraid. Grab their heads and chop them off at the same time.’

They both unsheathed their swords and stood hitching up their lower cloth. When the Lao walked up to them, they burst upon them as boldly as Ongkot and Hanuman.⁷⁶ [68]

Khun Phaen sliced and Phlai Ngam struck. The heads of the Lao father and son were lopped off, and the blood spurted from the necks in a torrent. They fell to the ground dead.

Their eyes rolled up, their faces blanched, and the blood streamed out. Khun Phaen and Phlai Ngam were pleased as could be. They picked up the heads, stuck them firmly on the necks, sat composing their minds, and prayed.

Khun Phaen scattered rice and chanted a mantra. The spirits of the Lao rose up in front of them, and made obeisance at their feet. Khun Phaen said, ‘What are the names of you two spirits?’

The spirits, who were already prostrating, flattened themselves on the ground. ‘I am Khanan Mano Yai. This is my son, Noi Siwichai. What brought you up here?’

Khun Phaen said to Khanan Mano Yai, ‘We came with the aim of taking the city. Help lead us in there.’

The spirits paid their respects in acceptance, then fell down. Khun Phaen and Phlai Ngam stripped off and took the spirits’ clothes. They cut off the spirits’ hair with a sword, and took the pink headcloths.

Khun Phaen and Phlai Ngam put on the upper and lower cloths, attached the hair pieces, and wrapped the headcloths like tribal Lao from the forest. Khun Phaen took the big sidebag and put it over his shoulder. Phlai Ngam grasped the spear.

⁷⁵ Guess. Can’t find ๕๗ in any *dix* (incl *Mc*, *Pal*).

⁷⁶ The two monkeys whose martial exploits make up much of the Ramakian.

The two of the them laughed loudly. They walked off together and reached Khok Tao at dusk. The volunteers were shocked.

Thinking these were Lao farmers, some went to hide in the bushes nearby. Khun Phaen went in with no hesitation. The volunteers thought they were really Lao.

They looked at them without recognition, and all kept themselves quiet and hidden. Khun Phaen called out, 'Why is nobody moving?' The soldiers recognized him, and rushed out to salute.

'Sir, with those clothes and the long hair, you really look like a Lao, no doubt. We hid to take a good look at you, and you were really unrecognizable – changed into black-bellies!'⁷⁷

The father and son took off the hair and clothes, and gave orders. 'We'll go at nightfall. If we delay, the Lao will tumble us and spread word to the city.' [69]

The soldiers readied the horses and elephants. They marched across the plain. When almost dawn, they went into the forest so as not to make themselves known to people in the city. They dismounted from the horses and elephants,

and slept hiding in the bushes until evening. In the night, they forged ahead until nearly light. After traveling for two nights and two days, they reached a broad lake.⁷⁸

They halted the army, cut timber, and drove in a boundary of stakes beside the lake. The army stayed their quietly. It was only about half a day further.

The elephants and horses were fed grass and water. The soldiers rested and slept. They arranged howdahs and saddles side by side for the two army commanders to rest.

⁷⁷ The Siamese liked to call the people of Lanna the *lao pung dam*, black-bellied Lao, on account of the male custom of profusely tattooing the abdomen, and in distinction from the untattooed white-bellies from Lanchang.

⁷⁸ In the next chapter, a horseman rides out from Chiang Mai to spy on the camp, and returns by nightfall. The only lake of any size found today in the Chiang Mai valley is just to the southwest of Sanpatong, around 22 kms from the center of Chiang Mai.