

34: Khun Chang is found guilty

[III/192]

The almighty king, supreme pillar of the world, resident of the heavenly palace, when the chariot of the sun rose and shone,

woke from sleep, came down from his bed, and walked out of the chamber. Inner ladies attending on the king all prostrated and waited to perform their regular duty.

He bathed in fragrant water, applied sweet perfumes, grasped his glittering nine-jeweled sword, and went out to the audience hall.

He seated himself on the throne. All the officials prostrated in rows. The king pronounced on government matters, and then looked over to the side where the pages were.¹

Khun Chang saw the opportunity. ‘My liege, dust over my head. My life is under the royal foot. Since I became a servant under the dust

in the pages for over eight years, I have not felt the crack of the rattan. Just now, this excitable Jamuen Wai almost elbowed me to death.

Besides beating me, he said provocatively: I’m not even afraid of your master. Over a hundred of his men hit me again and again. Some nobles came between us, or else I’d have died.

While elbowing me, they also disparaged me in front of all the nobles. Others witnessed this event and tried to stop them. If this is untrue, may I offer my life.’ [193]

The king quietly pondered what Khun Chang had said. ‘It’s probably true they beat him up, but the provocative reference to his master is probably invented to create a big issue.

The reason this incident blew up so messily is because this fellow thinks he’s a big boss, and when he got drunk he started being insulting. Wai was shamed so he started a quarrel.

Each went a bit too far and the thing escalated. Khun Chang was disparaging, and deservedly got thumped.

If I ignore this matter and don’t conduct an interrogation, Meun

¹ The word *mahatcha* is used several times in the sepha. It is assumed that the authors meant *dekcha* which were one type of pages on duty at the throne and royal residence. They also had to be on duty during government meetings. In the Fifth Reign, a department of *dekcha* was formed, with duty to look after the Jakri Mahaprasat throne, to provide the oil and light the lamps throughout the palace, to look after various royal properties associated with the throne during ceremonies, and to carry things at night. [The only footnote in the Wachirayan edition]

Wai will get too big for his boots. He'll think the king loves him, and he'll get worse. If anyone angers him, he'll abuse them badly and beat them up.'

With these thoughts, the king gave orders to the inner guard to fetch Jameun Wai. The guard ran off to Phra Wai's house and informed him.

'The king has sent for you immediately. Khun Chang has put his case to the king, so it's a big issue.' Phra Wai called his servants, descended the stairway, and walked into the palace.

He put on his sombak, wrapped a prostration cloth round his waist, and hurried along to the royal audience. He prostrated and waited for the king's command.

The king bellowed like a lion. 'Hey, Wai! At your marriage, why did you high-handedly commit violence on Khun Chang?

Kicking, beating, and even making a provocative reference to his "master." Exactly who is the "master" of this Chang that you claim you don't fear? Who?

Some nobles came between you, but you still didn't listen – went on kicking, elbowing, and punching him down the stairs. What's true and what's false? Tell me.'

Phra Wai addressed the points raised. 'My liege. I do not lie. What Khun Chang said is all invention to put himself in a good light.

The allegation about a provocative reference is serious. If it's true, execute me. Khun Chang went to the wedding yesterday. After drinking liquor, he got tight, [194]

and said many insulting things. I tried to stop him many times. He made fun of my mother in front of people. I could not tolerate that, so we quarreled.

He began spewing out insults, and addressed me improperly. I was greatly shamed in front of people. Then he made things up to publicly accuse me of past ingratitude.

At that time, I was seven years old.² Khun Chang took me off to the forest to beat me to death. I collapsed on the ground. He worried I might not die and disappear,

so he kept on hitting me. He clobbered my head with a stick, dragged my body into the undergrowth, and piled logs on top. Then he went home.

By the power of merit, I didn't die. I recovered and staggered off to

² In chapter 24, where this incident happens, it says he is nine or ten years old.

find a monk.³ I hid with teacher Non, in fear for my life.

Yesterday Khun Chang referred to the past. He spoke very loud so all could hear. I have told everybody everything. If it's not true, let me offer my life.'

The king, preserver of the world, listened to everything Phra Wai said. 'The beginning seems to be a criminal matter, but the latter part becomes a matter for the city court.'⁴

The defendant's plea makes it a major crime. It will be necessary to examine the plaintiff to clarify matters.' 'Hey, Khun Chang, Phra Wai has given evidence that when he was around seven years old,

you lured him into the forest, piled logs on him, and ran off. This case has lain quiet for over eight years – until yesterday when you made it public.

This incident is the original reason for your quarrel. That is what he told everybody. And he denies the allegation about making a grave insult. So, hey! What is the real reason?'

Khun Chang realized the king's question meant the old incident had returned, and he was truly taken aback. His body was bathed in sweat for fear of the king's power.

He steeled himself to address the king. 'Great power over my head. Everything Phra Wai told you is invention and false. [195]

It's not true that I beat him to death. He's made this up to create a big issue. If I'd done so, there would be evidence, and how then would the case have lain hidden from the king?

Since I accused him of assault, he's trying to cover up his evil deeds

³ In Phra Wai's version, Wanthong's role has been elided. In chapter 24, she came searching in the forest, found him, and took him to stay with the monk in the wat.

⁴ Ayutthaya had a complex system of courts. Section 3 of the *Phra thammanun* (Law of procedure) in the Three Seals Law stated: 'Any case in which, without deed of authorization, someone commits violence to seize, assault, tie up, beat, put in chains and cangue by force and without consent; *or* takes any property for their own benefit; *or* intimidates the party to a lawsuit, it is a matter for the department of criminal justice.' The dispute and assault at the wedding assault was thus a matter for the criminal court, which at that time came under Kalahom. Section 5 of the same law states: 'Any case in which someone commits robbery of property or gold and silver; *or* kills a householder in day or night time; *or* steals wives, children, phrai, servants, elephants, horses, boats, carts, cattle, buffaloes, cloth, noodles, vegetables, duck, chicken, or any other article; *or* commits adultery with a wife; *or* commits murder; *or* uses filth-eating spirits; *or* makes love philtres or abortion medicines causing death; it is a matter for the department of the city.' The 'latter part,' meaning the accusation of attempted murder in the forest, would thus be tried in a court under the department of the city (*KTSD*, I, 162-3; Red:473).

by making things up and petitioning the king on the basis of lies and supposition.

I can state this is untrue. Phra Wai deliberately got me drunk, lured me to speak under the influence, and now wants to smear me with wrongdoing.

His provocative reference to the king is a grave matter. If I'm not sincere, let the king punish me. If things are not true as I say, punish me with death.'

The king, ruler of the world, slapped his thigh. 'I'll get to the bottom of this. Hey, nobles attending in audience, don't take sides. Anyone who went to the wedding yesterday

and saw what happened, speak out. Don't make allowances for the rich and noble. Khun Chang says Meun Wai assaulted him and made an improper reference to the king.

Meun Wai says Khun Chang referred to a past incident, and spoke so loudly everyone could hear. When he was tiny, Khun Chang took him off to do away with him, but by his merit he survived.

When Khun Chang mentioned trying to kill Meun Wai, was he or was he not totally drunk? Don't take sides. Speak out without deference to anybody.'

A noble who had attended to the wedding responded to the king. 'I can recall everything. It began when Khun Chang arrived at the wedding.

He drank until he was drunk and then spoke rashly. He danced around as Hanuman, and spoke improperly about Wanthong.

Phra Wai felt ashamed and told him off, but Khun Chang didn't listen. They got uptight and had an exchange of blows. Khun Chang blurted out about ingratitude in the past. He was raving

that when Phra Wai was living with his mother, Khun Chang took him off to kill him in the forest. He split his head at the hairline with a stick, piled logs on him, and left him to die. [196]

In a rage, Phra Wai summoned his men who beat Khun Chang until he fell down flat. As for the improper comment about the king, none of us heard that.

But Khun Chang was totally drunk. He even stripped off his clothes quite shamelessly. I'm not taking sides, lying, or playing tricks. I beg to inform the royal foot.'

The king astutely appraised the testimony of the witnesses. 'The important point is the improper reference.

The plaintiff's allegation is serious. If true, it's punishable by death. If not true, the plaintiff is liable to the same punishment. The other

point about beating to death,

if it is proved by testimony given under oath,⁵ the wrongdoer must be executed. But some allowance may be made on grounds he was totally drunk and not fully sensible when he spoke.

It will be necessary to interrogate Jameun Wai for clarification. Khun Chang cannot yet be found guilty.’ Thus the king said, ‘Ha, hey, Meun Wai! Back then when Khun Chang tried to beat you to death,

why did you sit on the case and only bring it out when he accuses you. It doesn’t look right. In what forest did it happen? Are there people who know anything about this? Tell me properly.’

‘My liege, over my head. I was only little when he did this, and I cannot recall anything except the forest was beyond Suphan. Also nobody was around to be a witness.

I shouted out but there were no people’s houses nearby. I couldn’t escape, as it was deep in the forest. I survived by the power of merit, and was too young to consider bringing a charge.

I didn’t know what district it was, what officials to see, where the court was, so I didn’t speak of this matter for a long time, until the gods⁶ prompted me.

There is no evidence since it happened in the forest. It’s beyond my ability to prove it properly. Should I be proved dishonest in the ordeal by water, let me offer my life to the king.’

The king heard Meun Wai out, and then bellowed like a lion. ‘What Wai says is correct. [197]

Ha, hey, Khun Chang! Relate the matter from the start without concealment. If you did wrong, I’ll be lenient. Tell everything without holding anything back or lying to me.’

The king’s question made Khun Chang greatly distressed. He raised his hands in wai, and bowed his head. Sweat poured down him, front and back. After a pause, he addressed the king.

‘My liege. Dust under the royal foot. Great patron, Narai. Jameun Wai’s words are untrue, invention, all of it.

I did not beat him as claimed. He brought this up to cover up the charges I made. All the nobles are siding with Phra Wai because they are all the same bunch.

⁵ Guess. The phrase *phae kap than bon jonkap phayan*, recurs later and looks like a standard formula.

⁶ อารักษ์, *arak*, protective deities.

I have no allies so I'm at a loss. To stay alive, I must prove my case to the king. If I lose, do away with me. Let me offer my life.'

The king carefully reviewed the evidence. 'Khun Chang is telling lies. His account is suspicious on every point.

Even his witnesses all have doubts. **This is different from a case in the royal court.** Right now the evidence is against Khun Chang, and he's turned round and contradicted his own witnesses.

Though he spoke in the manner of a drunk, his words can still give rise to suspicion. If I ordered the department of the city to use the stick,⁷ we'd sort truth from falsehood in no time.

At present, Phra Wai is in royal favor, and the ordinary people talk about that. If I side with Phra Wai and accuse Khun Chang, who will know what's true and what's false?

The case must be examined by due process, to get to the bottom of the competing claims, and let people see who's telling the truth and who's not. That way I'll escape gossip.'

Thus the king said, 'Ha, hey, Khun Chang! About the allegations you made in front of government servants. I have interrogated on the matter of improper comments, and all the nobles said they heard nothing.

This is a serious offence. Yet all of the witnesses for the plaintiff turned out to be for the defendant. When they didn't support you, you changed your tune and turned against your own witnesses. [198]

I think your whole case is lies. If I went by the book, your head would be chopped off. You have lied about the improper comment without fear, and wrongly disparaged Phra Wai's name.

I accept the charge that he assaulted you. On disparaging his name, the two of you could reach a settlement. On the improper comment, you are guilty and liable to the death penalty, but I pardon you, Khun Chang.

The charge of beating to death has lain hidden for a long time. There are no witnesses and no clear proof either way. It is not certain on either side, Meun Wai or Khun Chang.'

Having pronounced, the king gave orders to the four Phra Khru.⁸ 'Arrange for the plaintiff and defendant to undergo trial by water. Have the posts set up in front of the Floating Palace.'⁹

⁷ ตีไม้, *tit mai*, meaning to whip (Supon:492).

⁸ Meaning the two Phra Maharatchakhru in charge of the two sets of judges, and respective deputies, Phra Ratchakhru Phichet, and Phra Ratchakhru Phrakhraphiram (*KTSD*, I, 265; and note in chapter 22).

⁹ Literally the raft royal residence, *tamnak phae*.

Have both of them enter confinement tomorrow until the day of the ordeal on the seventh waning. Keep them under guard, and have them ready by one o'clock in the afternoon.¹⁰

Officials from every department will come to watch. Phra Khru, issue the summonses. Detain the two of them in the palace.' Having given these orders, the king went inside.

The Phra Khru came out and sat in the main guardhouse to prepare and distribute the summonses. They sent for the posts belonging to the city department,

and had the prison warders reserve two of them. Then they defined the zone, created the court, had clerks write out the charges and testimony, and found judges to serve as neutral observers.

'Do not let any food be sent from their homes. The court officers will provide the food for both of them. Get both the plaintiff and defendant to provide some thin white cloth to spread in the court for placing offerings,

betel and pan in a well-made leaf tray, along with incense, candles, flowers, baisi, kaffir lime, soap nut,¹¹ krajae, and sandal, all to be offered to Krung Phali.¹²

Have them wear upper and lower cloths in white. Lay out carpets and mats. Arrange the sacred thread. Place a bowl of rice, bowl of curry, water pitcher,¹³ spittoon, and water bowl under a shade,¹⁴

along with a flask of liquor, rice, a new wood stove, galangal, lemongrass, onion, garlic, dry chili, mortar and pestle, ladle,¹⁵ and chicken *phanaeng*. Arrange the same things at each place.' [199]

¹⁰ The law on trial by fire or water went to great lengths to ensure that the two parties would prepare for the ordeal in the same way: 'Judges (*tralakan*) will detain both parties; buy chickens from the same place; buy beeswax; undyed thread; soap nut; kaffir lime, new rice pot, new curry pot, upper cloth, lower cloth, all from the same place; materials for a baisi, also from the same place; the judges will detain both parties; have them dress in white upper and lower cloths; remain in confinement for three days without walking outside; have the judges cook rice for them, and look after them.... Do not allow anyone to talk with either party, or else that party will lose. If either party goes outside, that party loses.' (*KTSD*, II, 106–7; Red: 477)

¹¹ ส้มป่อย, *som poi*, acacia concinna, Indian name shikakai, looks a bit like a tamarind pod.

¹² See note in chapter 2.

¹³ หม้อก้าน, *mo kran*, a long-necked earthenware water container (Red: 688).

¹⁴ *Krachaeng*, a shade made from atap

¹⁵ คนช้ำ, *khon chai*, a euphemism for a ladle used because the normal word (*kraja*) was considered vulgar (Sup:494.).

Khun Chang and Phra Wai took the command and sent for their servants who promptly arrived with all the requirements.

They went into confinement until the seventh waning. Workmen set up the posts at the boat dock of the Floating Palace. Prison warders found a gong to be beaten.

A scribe¹⁶ read the oath.¹⁷ Judges read the full court record. Ropes were readied for tying their waists. Everything was in place for the arrival of the king.¹⁸

Crowds of people rushed to see the ordeal – young men and women, adults and kids, Chinese, westerner, Khaek, Kha, Mon, and Lao.

Young girls at home saw their friends on the way and jumped up to join them. They called on other friends to hurry along with them to see Phra Wai and Khun Chang undergo trial by water.

Old folks who wanted to see it left their homes, dragging and carrying their children and grandchildren. The boat dock was overflowing with people chaotically crammed together.

In the palace, all the lords and ladies, male and female guards, royal retainers, and everyone else knew that Khun Chang and Phra Wai would enter the water that afternoon.

They bathed, powdered, combed their hair, and put on smart lower and upper cloths. Some popped two or three mouthfuls of betel in a packet. Some dragged their friends along by the hand.

When they reached the Floating Palace, it was jam-packed. Rafts were swarming all over the surface of the river, waiting for the time of the ordeal.

Boatmen had moored everywhere, upstream and down. Smaller boats floated around. The whole river was chock-full and raucous.

King Phanwasa, peak of Ayutthaya the great heaven, resident of the

¹⁶ อาลักษณ์, an official scribe, clerk, or secretary.

¹⁷ Red:479-80, has the oath (summarise). It calls on the gods to ensure the result of the trial is as it should be according to the true facts of the case.

¹⁸ The law on trial by ordeal stated: 'In case of trial by water, a scribe will read out the two testimonies to the gods, then the plaintiff and defendant will wash their heads and present their bodies. The posts will be placed 6 cubits apart. Judges will tie a rope round the waist of plaintiff and defendant, and attach it to the post, place a plank on their shoulders, strike a gong three times, then press their neck under water and pay out the rope. Each will submerge together to the base of each post. A clock will be placed. Once they have submerged, the first to emerge will have a rope placed round his neck, and the other's rope will be tugged to bring him up. If after 6 *bat* [*bat*=6 minutes], neither plaintiff or defendant has emerged, the ropes will be tugged to bring them up.' (*KTSD*, II, 112-3; Red: 479)

glittering crystal palace where masses of palace ladies wai-ed and prostrated,

thought back to the big case involving Phlai Ngam. ‘How will the ordeal with Khun Chang turn out?’ Close to three o’clock in the afternoon, [200]

he bathed, arrayed himself in a brilliant nine-jeweled costume, gripped a glittering filigree sword, and left the golden royal residence .

He stepped into a royal palanquin, accompanied by senior officers and royal poets. To the sound of horn, conch, and drum, he came along the screened passageway down to the river.

On arrival, he ascended the throne while senior officials prostrated and bowed. The main guard boarded *kanya* boats and went to lay buoys and stand with guns to ward away people.

Many craft were moving up and down river in confusion. The prison warders boarded boats and went upstream to push away anything floating dead in the water so it would not disturb the proceedings.

The king, lord of the earth, issued an order to the Phra Khru to start the trial quickly before sunset approached.

The Phra Khru acted on the king’s order. ‘Following the ancient manual of judicial procedure, it is fitting for Meun Wai to take the upstream side, and Khun Chang the downstream.’¹⁹

It is true that originally Khun Chang was the plaintiff. But after thorough interrogation, the evidence was judged to be in favor of Phra Wai.

Besides, he is a noble. Khun Chang must take the downstream side.’ Having agreed on this point, the two were brought out from confinement,

and led along under heavy guard. They washed head and body,²⁰ faced off against one another,²¹ and then went down into the water.

Clocks were placed at the water’s edge.²² At each side, guards grasped the end of the rope, held a bamboo across the shoulders, and posed ready to force the head under water.

¹⁹ Normally the plaintiff would be upstream.

²⁰ Possibly to avoid the upstream person having some substance secreted which could float down on his rival (Red: 481).

²¹ This part of the procedure was called *chon kai*, cockfight, and perhaps was a chance to check whether the two were in a fit state for the ordeal (KTSD, II, 112; Red:688; Sup:495).

²² Half coconut shells pierced with holes so, when floated on water, they will sink in a specified time (Red:485).

When the gong sounded, both submerged. But as soon as he ducked under, Khun Chang shot back up again. The watchers shouted and booed. Guards put a large chain around his neck,

and crowded around to hustle him away. Khun Chang called out, 'Please have mercy, sire. This fellow Phra Wai has knowledge. He blew something onto me. [201]

The power of the spell gripped my heart unbearably, and my hair stood on end. Giving the defendant the upstream side allowed him to blow a mantra down on me. And there's more.²³

The king responded to Khun Chang. 'Dammit, you loudmouth! You lost to him, and immediately try to turn it round that Wai is using **magic**.

Because you were beyond hope, you twist things in front of everybody. You force us to have another submersion. The only thing I'd like to do with such a great liar and tongue twister is thrash you to smithereens.

But your saying about the defendant being upstream is fair. If I make a decision, I'll be blamed because the case arose because of you.

Go upstream and submerge again. Arrange it immediately. If you lose to him again, I'm not listening. You'll be taken away for the chop you deserve.'

The Phra Khru took the order from the king. 'Come and submerge again immediately, Chang.' He tied the string round Phra Wai's waist, and led both of them to the posts.

He put the wood on their shoulders. The gong sounded. Both sank down, paying out the string. The watchers crowded round in excitement. Boats jostled to get a view.

Because Khun Chang was in the wrong, when he had been under for only half his breath, he imagined snakes were twining round his body. He shot above the surface shaking with fear.

Phra Kanburi jumped into the water, and lifted Phra Wai out in front of everybody. The city guards clapped the baldie in irons and dragged him off.

The king stamped his foot in anger. 'Yommarat! Clap him in jail! This disgrace to the realm has a crafty tongue.²⁴ It's no small thing to

²³ According to Suphon, *thitjai* at the end of this line means Khun Chang says he has more on his mind (Sup:596).

²⁴ Actually, thorn in the realm, and then *lin langka*, a Lankan tongue, derived from South Asians' rapid speech (Red: 688).

be able to kill someone without a thought.

You lied even to me. You seemed to imagine there was no authority. You pranced around, issued challenges, and offered your life, but now you have lost to him twice over.

You made bold to kill someone but were still not satisfied and dared even to lie to me. Don't leave him to pollute the earth. Cleave open his breast as an example to deter others. [202]

He took Wai off to kill in a forest. Go and impale him in that same forest.' The king left his throne and returned by palanquin to the inner palace.

Minister Yommarat issued orders to the minor officials. 'Don't trust someone who's been condemned to death. Send him to the head of the royal department of corrections.

Have warders put him in all five irons immediately so he cannot run away. Put chains, yoke, cangue – have no mercy.' Four warders dragged him off to jail,

locked in three chains. Though he used to walk with long strides, just a small step made him tumble over. The guards crowded around hustling him, but he would not get up. He pretended to be winded in the stomach, and wailed loudly.

In anger, the warders belabored him with fists and canes until he fell flat. 'Die, you wretch! If we're in the wrong, we'll just pay one fucang to the court.'

Khun Chang heard them but ignored them. He leapt up and started acting crazy, gaping his mouth open, lolling his tongue, and rolling up his eyes. He threw off his lower cloth and ran to and fro.

He picked up a lump of dogshit and chased after people to hit them with it. He bashed his head against a post, and danced wildly, with his chains clanking along the ground, and his mouth shouting a song. Watchers hit him with the cangue.

The warders threatened him, 'You mongrel. This cane will cure your madness. It's disgusting to chase people with shit, and run around with nothing on.'

Women averted their faces and ran away, shouting, 'He's had it. I'm fed up with him, worse than a beggar.' Young men ragged him, 'How come you don't tie your cloth *jongkraben*?'

The servants who had come with Khun Chang were ashamed. They ran over to pick up his cloth and wrap it around him. The warders dragged him off and clapped him in jail.

They put on a proper wooden yoke fixed securely with nails, chains fastened tightly, a brick under his arse, his head bent over the yoke, and fetters fastened tightly on his hands.

The manacling of Khun Chang was severe. His hands were trussed, and then he was suspended round the waist, with his head lolling. His heart trembled so much he could not remain still. ‘Oh, I’ve reached my dying day!’ [203]

He spoke a prayer, but it came out muddled.²⁵ ‘Pattisangkha ye phle phlai kan ranang yang mura kusalai mo lo ko kho khai khat chai mi

hiru pak kha hira pak khe sam tan san te ye tasi mut takang thung krata khan kathi toi pata tok kati pak taek tai.’ The warders scolded him angrily.

‘Why are you praying like this, you bastard? After the inspection, then we’ll give you trouble. You’re too noisy. Don’t you know the power of the cane?’

Khun Chang called out, ‘Beg pardon. Don’t be angry. I’ll give you seven tamleung, ten salung. Please loosen the chains so I can breathe. I’ll give you ten tamleung for the reduction fee.’²⁶

‘Okay. Don’t be angry. You’re condemned to death. So as not to annoy the overseers, keep quiet until the inspection, then we’ll turn the key to loosen them a bit.’

At home, the beautiful Wanthong could not sleep. She tossed and turned, not knowing the outcome of the case involving her husband and son.

Then Ai-Phlap came back, bent over from crying. ‘The master lost the case, mistress. He’s been sent to jail, and locked in the yoke and cangue. King Phanwasa lost his temper and sentenced him to death.

They put him at the end of the row of people with arses suspended. He has to sit from dawn to dusk, hanging with his arse off the ground. I feel sorry for the master. When I left, they hadn’t loosened him at all.’

News of her husband made Wanthong lie down almost collapsed in tears. She writhed around as if her life would end.

The servants beat their breasts in dismay. Everyone crowded around to help Wanthong, massaging her by foot, giving smelling salts and floral water. Gradually she returned to her senses,

and awkwardly crawled into her room. She brought the key to unlock a chest, opened the lid, and took out two or three bars of gold.

²⁵ This is gibberish, but in the rhythm of a prayer chant. It starts almost sensibly: good deeds compute askew deviant. Then becomes total gibberish. Then concludes: duck under monkey including skillet squeeze coconut milk hit box kick fall break mouth die.

²⁶ Fees to have constraints reduced or removed were quite open, and were a chief source of remuneration for the prison warders (Kuk:332)

She scooped handfuls of cash into a bowl with a carved rim,
 then put it in several small baskets and covered their tops over with
 cowries. She sent them to I-Khiat to carry on her waist. She also put
 food in a large bowl, [204]
 and things for presents including deer meat and half a pitcher of
 honey. She sent servants off to buy *thepho* fish, then loaded a
 watermelon boat²⁷ and hurried off.

On arrival, she moored the boat and went along trailed by many
 servants carrying tables of presents and bowls of food. At the jail, she
 went up to find the chief governor,

and gave him presents. ‘Sir, have some mercy for me. May I send
 food to Khun Chang? I’ve had no experience of jail and don’t know
 how things are.’

The governor summoned warder Niam. ‘Kindly take her to see her
 husband. The warder led her away through the inner gate²⁸ into the
 inner prison.

Wanthong appealed to the warder, ‘Please release him so he can eat
 something, can’t you?’ The warder said, ‘Go in to see him. There’s no
 release for a punishment like this, Wanthong.’

Wanthong steeled herself to enter the jail. She saw people suffering,
 and looking ugly and frightful, with skin swollen on their skulls, and
 thin bodies like animals in hell.

In a yoke, no food passed through their gut. Seeing Wanthong, they
 went up and wai-ed her imploringly. She threw a banana and they
 shakily fought over it, the strongest hitting the others and eating it.

He took what he could get, with no choice, not bothering to peel the
 banana but chewing it whole. He had scabies, boils, running sores, a
 bad odor like a corpse,

and lots of hairy lice crawling on his skull. Wanthong could not look
 and stepped awkwardly away. She struggled to bear it until she was in
 the inner jail. Khun Chang saw her and wailed out loud.

Wanthong saw him and threw herself down. He was bent over,
 exhausted, and covered in snot and tears like a calf. ‘Oh you
 abandoned me with no pity!

Go and hand out bribes, quickly! Have mercy. Don’t let me die in
 chains. Put some money in a huge sack. Then go to Chinaman Lo and
 buy some liquor for me.

Oh, you’ve forgotten me already! Help me out of this. Go and hand

²⁷ *Rua taengmo*, the name for a type of boat.

²⁸ *Hup phei*, the same gate where Khun Phaen and Kaeo Kiriya lived in chapter 23.

out inside and at the front.²⁹ Choose some presents and bring them along. And get me food, liquor, knick-knacks, pork, and Vietnamese sausage.’ [205]

Wanthong was angry. ‘You stumblebum! You’re so brainless your head’s going to be lopped off. Drinking liquor is what got you in these chains, and you’re still drooling after some more.’

Seeing her anger, Khun Chang begged forgiveness. ‘Hit me on the head, I won’t complain. I’m so dejected. I didn’t watch what I was doing and made mistakes.

Scold me as much as you like, I won’t complain. But bring me cash to pay the jail fees, and ten tamleung for the reduction fee, to please them. Whatever expense there is, pay it, my dear.’

Wanthong replied. ‘Don’t babble. We have lots of gold and silver. Don’t worry. I’ll take it to distribute among the officials. Though you’re a provincial lord, they should be kind.’

The warder had Ai-Rot remove the yoke and cangue. ‘Eat, Chang. Stop moaning. Life or death is normal. Why be afraid? You can’t disappear into the earth.’

Khun Chang grasped a bowl of rice, and put a handful in his mouth. His throat was too dry. Chewing turned the rice into flour, and he could not swallow. He had to moisten his throat with water first,

for each mouthful. Thinking of his situation, he put down the bowl and sobbed. Wanthong consoled him. ‘Try to swallow. Force yourself to eat in order to have some strength.’

Seeing that he just sat and grieved, Wanthong helped feed him with spoonfuls of lizard curry to ease his dry throat, along with meat yam, eels, and chicken phanaeng. Khun Chang managed to finish the whole bowl.

Then he shook his head and said, ‘That’s enough. It’s very awkward. Don’t force me.’ Thinking of his situation, the tears welled up. He threw himself round his wife’s neck, and pleaded,

‘My dear, hurry off with the money and bribe the inner officials to talk to the king to petition for my pardon so I can get out of this.’

Wanthong said, ‘I can’t go to anybody. If I run after them, I’ll probably fall flat on my face. To extract a thorn, you must use another thorn to pry it out. I’ll plead with Wai to see to it.’

Khun Chang said, ‘Truly, my dear? I’ll survive because you help me. If I’m pardoned and stay alive, wherever you go, you can ride me

²⁹ Meaning in the palace, and among officials, respectively.

instead of an ox!' [206]

Wanthong said, 'Don't overdo it. People like me never ride on their husband's neck. Should I die, I won't feel dismayed. Don't worry. I won't abandon you, no matter what.'

She took money from the baskets, distributed it to the warders from senior to junior ranks, and gave alms to all the convicts.

She left her husband in their care, went out of the main cells, gave money to the prison governor, and then hurried off to Phra Wai's house.

She threw herself into Phra Wai's arms, and cried on his shoulder until she almost collapsed. Phra Wai felt very sorry for her. He paid his respects and asked,

'What is troubling you, mother? Don't cry. Tell me. Has one of the grandparents died and you burst out crying before you could tell me?'

Wanthong said, 'My dear, my problem is as bad as dying. I can't see anyone to turn to help me survive this time

except my darling Phra Wai. You can solve the problem. Khun Chang is so crooked and ill-intentioned that he's a danger to himself.

I'm weighed down with care just like my sagging breasts weigh on my chest. For better or worse, he became my husband. If I stand by and let him die, the shame will follow me, and I'll have a bad name for a whole era.

For this reason, I can't abandon him. I'm at a loss so I reluctantly came to you. Sir, please have mercy on your mother. Please ask the king to spare Khun Chang's life.

The king is merciful. He should not object to Phlai. Khun Chang asks to beg your forgiveness. Don't create sin for yourself.

Apart from you, I don't have anyone else to ask. Please help save his life so he may be your servant. He did wrong in the past, but don't bear a grudge from now on.'

Phra Wai, Phlai Ngam, replied immediately. 'Why do you come pleading with me, mother? I didn't lay charges against Khun Chang. [207]

Rather, he wanted me dead. He went and told everything to the king to get me on a capital charge. I got off because there was evidence.

Earlier he took me off to beat me to death. You know full well about that. Don't you have some concern for me? I survived because I recovered.

You don't think about the times your son nearly died. You care only about the life of your husband. So you come around here weeping, not thinking about yourself, because you're afraid Khun Chang will die.

The king is angry. What can we get from asking for a pardon? It'll

be like throwing myself on the fire. Hopeless, mother!’

Wanthong embraced Phra Wai, racked with tears. ‘What you say is true. When Khun Chang almost killed you, I knew all about it.

I took you and entrusted you to the wat, and offered them cloth to **make into flags**.³⁰ Not seeing you for just one day, I was on the point of death. Every night I lay crying out of love.

To have a loving husband is not as important as having a child. A husband can disappear just going down three stairs.³¹ Though I truly love him enough to swallow, it’s not like a son.

You’re angry at him for trying to kill you, but it was a long time ago, my son. Make some merit. Don’t wish him dead and bear a grudge. If you ignore this now, the king will kill him for certain.

For your mother’s sake, help him get out of this, like releasing fish or turtles to make merit. I’ve taken the trouble to feed and look after you since you were still in my womb.

When you were born, I took care of you – pounding rice three times a day to feed you, bathing you, putting you in a cradle, singing you to sleep – from when you were very little until grown up.

Khun Chang found some little servants for Wai, gave gold to make bracelets and a *sema* chain, and a single niello *takrut* – all good quality.

At new year, at Songkran, he took you to the wat grounds and dressed you in all kinds of things, with your crowd of little servants tailing along, and a wet-nurse to carry you in her arms. [208]

When Khun Chang loves someone, there’s nobody like him. The only thing he doesn’t give is the moon and the stars. If you took a liking to anything which was available in Suphan, he wouldn’t make you unhappy by objecting.

He may be bad, but he’s good too – very good. You were a kid and didn’t know everything. Don’t bear a grudge. Please let him live. It’ll be like repaying the debt of gratitude to your mother.’

His mother’s plea softened Phra Wai. ‘I pity her extremely. If I stand by and let Khun Chang die,

where will she find happiness? She’ll just be sadder and sadder until she gets ill, and might even hang herself to death. Then the sin and karma will really attach to me.

Though Khun Chang is as bad as a pig dog, it’s known everywhere

³⁰ Sentence ends with *kae songsai*, cure doubt, which I don’t understand. Maybe just filler.

³¹ Kukrit claims a husband could divorce a wife by walking down three steps and making a public declaration, but he offers no evidence for this claim. He adds, ‘The world of that era truly belonged to men. Too bad I wasn’t born in time.’ (Kuk:333-4)

that he's my mother's husband. If I just stand by showing no concern, people will gossip.'

With these thoughts, he said to his mother, 'It's hopeless because it's the king. But opposing you will be like not having consideration for my mother. I'll try to make the king take pity on me.'

So swallow your tears and don't cry. I'll petition the king for a review. If the king pardons him, he'll be released alive. But if he's fated to die, it's beyond my power.'

'Oh, my lord, please secure this mercy. I'll give you two chang as payment for the petition. If you help, I truly believe he won't die. The punishment should be eased because you're in royal favor.'

'What's this you're saying, mother? Do you think I'm a chicken that can be tempted with rice? You think I'll make the plea because your rich man has lots of money?'

With this two chang I can build a house with five rooms and wooden walls, and support lots of wives and servants – all because of a bribe from my mother!'

'Oh my lord and master, don't get angry. Your mother's like a lunatic. My mind has deserted me. I spoke terribly without thinking. I made a slip.'

Don't delay. Go and ask for the pardon as if you were helping your mother go to heaven.³² You'll gain merit which will last the whole era. Darling, don't delay.' [209]

Phra Wai's tears flowed out of pity for his mother. He consoled her, 'Don't lose heart. I'll make the petition and then it's up to merit.'

He called out to Simala to find the betel box, a bundle of cloth, bronze kettle, Japanese umbrella, a red pipe tipped with gold which a servant filled with tobacco, and a water pipe.³³

Then Phra Wai bathed his body clean, went into the house, took off his old clothes, and put on a *muang*³⁴ lower cloth of yellowish green imported³⁵ silk, and upper cloth of plain chicken-skin silk, genuine

³² An allusion to the belief that a son entering the monkhood creates merit for the parents.

³³ อุดเตา, *ut-tao*, a word that usually means an iron, but here probably is some smoking equipment, and possibly a pipe which, like an iron, uses charcoal (Sup:502).

³⁴ Silk in dark blue, purple, or green, generally used for *jongkraben* (*Thai Textiles*).

³⁵ ตะเภา, *taphao*, which Suphon says comes from *samphao* (junk), and means imports (Sup:503).

Pakthao.³⁶

He fondled Simala and pinched her cheek, went to the hall to take leave of his mother, then hurried out of the rucan followed by a crowd of servants.

He soon arrived at the palace where all the government officials were gathered. At the appropriate time, they went in to wait on the king.

The king, ruler of Ayutthaya, the great heaven, resided in a glittering crystal palace where masses of palace ladies,

all just of age, radiant, fair, tender, and beautiful, with figures like those in a painting, serviced the royal footsoles. The king slumbered in the golden palace.

When dawn streaked the sky, he woke from sleep and came to bathe in cool rosewater. Then he put on splendid raiment,

grasped a diamond sword in his left hand, and went out to the main audience hall to sit on the sparkling crystal throne, surrounded by senior officials and royal poets.

Chaophraya, phraya, phra, and luang from all the ministries paid their respects, and waited silently in the audience hall to hear the royal commands.

The king questioned about petitions from the people on matters great and small, and the nobles holding the relevant positions in some department responded to the king.

Meun Wai Woranat saw the government business was over, and prostrated three times. 'My liege. Dust under the royal foot. The royal power is fathomless. [210]

Whether or not it may gain approval, allow me to seek for a royal pardon. May the king grant favor over my head. Khun Chang is condemned to death and is now in the main jail under royal punishment.

My mother is so distressed she is almost to the point of death. She grieves every morning and night. She does not eat.

If I did not agree to address the dust, she would certainly die or go mad. I am extremely concerned for her. Since I was born until now,

from the age of seven years, we were parted from each other. I have not yet repaid my debt of gratitude to her in full measure.³⁷ Please pardon Khun Chang this once. It will be the same as saving my mother's life.'

³⁶ Suphon thinks this is a weaving centre in China (Sup: 502).

³⁷ เท่าทศิ, *thao kesi*, equal to head, with the head being the highest and most important part of the body.

The king of royal line knew the meaning behind Muen Wai's words. He quietly pondered back and forth. 'If I don't grant Khun Chang's life,

Wanthong will waste away to death with grief. Her son then will be miserable and resentful. He'll feel awkward and shamed among his fellow nobles, and will become increasingly detached, day by day.

I was hoping to rely on him for service. He's only little but very effective in battle, a true offspring of a valiant military lineage. I shouldn't make him sad and dispirited.'

So the king said, 'Ha, hey, Meun Wai! I greatly detest this mother of yours. She did not think of your face when she took this dreadful Chang as her husband.

If Chang drops dead, she could go and make up with your father. You're whining at me to pardon this evil-minded badmouther

who would even beat his stepson to death. Aren't you angry about that? Asking for his life will be a weight on the earth. I want to kill him as an example to deter others.'

'My liege. Dust under the royal foot. Lord of all power and creation. I am very angry at Khun Chang for trying to do away with me,

and I intended to take revenge. But my mother has made a big thing of preventing me. To leave her to grieve to death would be the same as ignoring my debt of gratitude to my mother. [211]

So I've swallowed my anger and addressed the royal foot. May the king pardon his crime. May the king have mercy for me, his loyal servant.'

The king looked at Muen Wai. 'Khun Chang's punishment is death. But I grant a reprieve. Because I care for you, He won't be executed.

Your mother's sorrow will disappear because her child has done well and is someone she can depend on. A criminal who is deeply guilty and under penalty of death –

I'm not happy about giving such a person a reprieve. I grant the pardon so that you repay the debt of gratitude to your mother.' He ordered the city deputy³⁸ to go and release Khun Chang immediately,

and send him to Jamuen Wai. 'Don't let anyone charge reduction fees.' The king left the audience hall, and walked into the palace.

The city deputy took the royal order and rushed out, followed by a

³⁸ Luang Intharabodi-sirat, the *rong muang*, head of the right division of the city patrol, sakdina 1000 (KTSD, I, 229).

crowd of servants. He invited Phra Wai to go along to the inner gate of the jail.

A *thanai* was sent in to summon the governor to order warders to release Khun Chang. They crowded around, cutting his chains,

removing the yoke, and breaking the cangue by bashing it with pieces of wood. Before long, everything had fallen off Khun Chang's body. They supported him to limp along with feet crossed.

The warders took him out to the inner gate. He raised his face and saw the city deputy and Phra Wai sitting close together. Trembling he prostrated and crawled forward.

In love and fear, he prostrated down until his head rested on the thigh of Phra Wai who was too embarrassed to speak, and took leave of the city deputy immediately.

Khun Chang was in a daze and could not walk. Phra Wai had a litter made for his servants to carry along behind. Khun Chang sat with his **bushy**³⁹ beard

looking like a pot-bellied Cantonese doll. The bald top of his skull glistened red in the sunlight. Crowds came to watch all along the way. [212]

They soon arrived at Phra Wai's residence. Wanthong was very happy to see them. She supported her husband and dragged him along. Khun Chang hugged his wife and babbled.

Wanthong said to him, 'You survived because of him, didn't you?' 'Oh, yes! I'm alive because your lord helped me survive.

From today into the future, I offer myself as his servant until my dying day. If he goes to war, to north or south, I'll follow along to attend on him closely for anything.'

Phra Wai ordered Simala and Soi Fa to arrange food, which all arrived in an instant. He invited Wanthong to eat,

and Khun Chang also. Trays of food were placed in a row. They happily ate their fill, and trays of sweets arrived immediately.

Both Khun Chang and Wanthong were satisfied and happy. They went into the rucan to see Phra Wai. Khun Chang said, 'May you be eternally happy. In time you should become a very important person.

May you be free of care and royal punishment. May you be enormously happy. May your good name rise higher and higher and be known throughout the land so we can depend on you as a shelter in the future.'

Phra Wai acknowledged their blessings. Khun Chang took out a pile

³⁹ พุ่มพราหม, *phrum phram*, can't find in dix.

of money to give him. 'I hope twenty chang will repay your kindness, Phra Wai. Use it to buy new rice.'

Phra Wai said, 'Keep it! At present I have enough for my needs. It's not good to give money like this. It'd be like taking a bribe from my mother.'

Wanthong knew his character. She scooped the money into a basket and passed it to a servant. With the day almost to evening, they took their leave and boarded a boat full with their servants.

With both men and women paddling energetically, they reached Suphan by nightfall. Granny Thepthong danced in joy at seeing them. 'I'm truly happy he's out of jail.'

She rushed to welcome them up into the ruan. Neighbors came to visit, and sat jam-packed in the hall, talking from evening until the last watch. [213]

Khun Chang sent Son Phraya to fetch some sacred water, and pour on him to get rid of evil. Monks were asked to come and chant to get rid of bad fortune, and sprinkle water to cleanse his body, for three days.