

### 35: Khun Chang petitions the king

[III/214]

After winning the case against Khun Chang, Phlai Ngam went back to living contentedly at home with his two wives.

He began to feel unhappy that all other relatives were around but his mother alone was missing. 'Oh, mother Wanthong, you must be miserable. You shouldn't be living with Khun Chang.

Bad karma has led things astray. It's shameful you fell out with father. He now has the merit to become a noble, but you're stuck beside that villain.

He looks awful and strange. He's feeble, evil, and ill-intentioned. His heart is vicious and cruel. How did you fall for him?

On the day he lost to me in the ordeal by water, the king was angry enough to have Khun Chang killed. I'm furious that mother had pity on him, and made me go and beg for his life.

And if I'm furious at my mother, I have to do something to make this fury disappear. I must repay Khun Chang in some way. I haven't achieved this because his luck has still been good.

I'd like to pry mother away from that evil fellow and bring her back to live here happily with father.' The more he thought about this, the angrier he got,

fuming with frustration. When the sun dropped, he went into his room and waited restlessly until the sun disappeared behind the mountains.

All the animals fell quiet. The moon shone and the stars came out. A cool dew fell. No sound of talking disturbed the quiet.

He heard the tolling of the palace gong floating on the wind over to his house, and counted until the third occasion. He saw the time was free of any concern or inauspiciousness.

The sky was white. The stars were clear. A bright haloed moon shone in a cloudless sky. He made offerings of liquor, rice, and fish for the spirits to eat. He enchanted a potion of turmeric and *wan* herbs and applied it to his body. [215]

He put a Racha yantra on his chest, raised a lucky thread onto his head, blew a mantra upwards into the darkness to urge his spirits to go along,

and picked up the sword once used in battle. When everything was ready, he chanted a formula, descended from the ruan, and hastened to Khun Chang's house.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As he is in Ayutthaya and Khun Chang's house is in Suphan, he must have been carried by his spirits, though this is not explicit.

He saw people sleeping all around in a circle. There was a fence, gates securely bolted, and bonfires making it as bright as daytime. He made straight for the gate,

and chanted the Great Sleeping mantra. The *atthap*<sup>2</sup> spell buried there lost its power. Khun Chang's spirits fled en masse. People in the house collapsed.

Men and women felt drowsy and fell asleep tumbled over one another in a heap. Fish roasting on the fire leaked oil. People dozed off and dropped unconscious.

Phlai Ngam sent his spirits to pull the bolts and turn the locks. The latches slipped out of place. He walked in without anyone challenging him.

Everyone just slept, dreamt, murmured, and sleeptalked. At the bonfires protecting every opening, the only sound from the people was snoring. He arrived at the ruean of Khun Chang.

He lit a candle, enchanted rice, and scattered it. His spirits jumped on top of the ruean, shaking it with a bang. He used the unlocking formula to open the windows wide, and walked up to where the pot-plants were.

Fragrance billowed, flowers bloomed, stems intertwined, branches flowed, pollen wafted.<sup>3</sup> He walked up silently.

The servants lay asleep tumbled on top of one another. He magically sprung the bolts to the third level. Light danced off several overlapping mirrors and screens. The flickering light from crystal lamps caught his eye.

He admired the curtains, muli, screens, half-moon tables, and abundance of crystal, while walking through, glancing around. He opened the mosquito-net and saw the face of his mother, Wanthong,

fast asleep on the bed beside Khun Chang who lay close beside her, hugging her as a couple. Phlai Ngam felt hurt enough his heart would burst. He drew his sword and raised it with the wish to chop him dead. [216]

He wanted to kick Khun Chang in his middle, but feared he would hit Wanthong. He sunk down, wai-ed to pay his respects, and sobbed in anger and frustration with tears flowing.

'Oh mother, mistress of your child! You shouldn't have been

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<sup>2</sup> See note on *atthap* in chapter 30. Here it refers to the formulas written on cloth and buried with the main pillars of a house or gate to ward off enemies. Phra Wai neutralizes this, or else his own magic would lose its power after he entered (Red: 493-4).

<sup>3</sup> An elegant quick reprise of the famous passage in chapter 17. Khun Wichitmatra suspects it is the same author (Red:510).

separated from father. Karma led you on with no hesitation, but it's not right that you must be apart.

This baldie dragged you here by force with no respect. That makes me angry enough to repay him in full.' He asked his mother's forgiveness, and then released his spirits.

He blew a spell to wake her up easily. He sheathed his sword and stood still while Wanthong came to and opened her eyes.

Very drowsy from the mantra, Wanthong woke, looked around, and saw someone beside the bed.

Fearing it was a criminal, she clutched her husband, and cried out at the top of her voice. She fell down into a crouch, peeping out. Phramuen Wai went up beside her and said,

'Why are you shouting to fill the bedroom, mother? I was feeling upset so I came to see you. Why shout? I'm not a criminal. Don't be scared. Let's talk.'

Knowing it was her son, Wanthong was not afraid. She got up, and Phra Wai went to clasp her feet.

Wanthong embraced her son gently, buried her head in his shoulder, and cried. 'Why did you come at this time, my son? There are guards everywhere in the house,

bolts on the doors, and bonfires all round. How did you sneak in here so bold and fearless? Did father send you or did you come yourself?

If Khun Chang wakes up, there'll be trouble. He'll attack you and I fear something bad will come out of this. If there's a fight and you slip up, it won't be good.

What's on your mind? Please tell me and then go home. This is wrong. Don't make me upset. Don't be impetuous like your father.'  
[217]

Jameun Wai prostrated at her feet in apology. 'It was wrong to come, I can't argue. I don't want to get myself into trouble, but I'm ignoring that because I love mother Wanthong.

At present I'm comfortable with a rank, two lovely wives, servants at my bidding, money, and all father's relatives around.

The only thing missing is mother. You're alive but might as well be dead and gone. Just this point is a matter of great sorrow. If mother was there too, happiness would be complete.

I came here with the aim of taking you away. Come back to the house, mother. If any bad consequences arise from this, that's a matter of fate.

Why stay with this ill-intentioned, jealous minded lowlife? You're

like a gold rim on a coconut shell. He looks as black as soot.

It's like a fly buzzing around the garbage and then bothering a sweetly fragrant lotus. Does a *madue* mingle with a *phayom*?<sup>4</sup> My words must be making you miserable.

You brought me up until I was seven. Then, as fate would have it, we were separated. Do you think of your son sometimes? Maybe you don't at all.

If you care for your child, come home straight away, so I'll get over this feeling, and things will be like the time when you were raising me.'

Wanthong felt very unhappy for her son. 'Oh Phlai Ngam, mother's beloved. I'm sad almost to death.

It's not true I'm wallowing in money. These things are not mine from way back. Among all these elephants, horses, and servants, there's no one I love like Phlai Ngam.

It's not true I'm happy. Every day now I feel sad and hurt as if I had a thorn stuck in me. I have to put up with the karma that's following me. I can't go against these thoughts.

When your father went to jail, I was very pregnant. Khun Chang dragged me off. Don't harbor suspicions I ran off with him. I didn't know what became of your father, good or bad. It's now many years since I came to live with Khun Chang. [218]

When your father came back from Chiang Mai, he didn't take the matter to the king at all. At the time I was in the middle between them, the king gave a ruling returning me to your father.

You've become a *hua muean* of the pages. You're not a child so please listen to my words. Please go back and think it over with father. Take the matter to the king.

He should grant in your favor because of your rank and valor. As to kidnapping me without any discussion, I'm not willing to go that way.'

Phlai Ngam thought that his mother would not go and was putting up evasive arguments because she loved Khun Chang more than his father.

So he said, 'What a pity. I came to get you but you're resisting strongly as if you don't love your son at all. I took the trouble to fetch you, but you won't go.

It's a waste of effort to be a gentleman and be shamed before one's peers. I'm taking you home, no matter what. If you won't go nicely,

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<sup>4</sup> *Phayom* has spectacular yellow blooms, while the *madue* fig is often associated with evil because flies lay eggs in the fruit which are consequently often full of worms,

that's up to you. Whatever the sin and karma, let it be.

I'll cut off your head and take that, and leave just the body to stay here. Don't take too long to reply. It's almost light and we must hurry away.'

Wanthong saw her son was gritting his teeth in frustration. He stood waving his sword Skystorm to and fro. She was scared he would slash her dead,

and so she pacified him. 'Phlai Ngam, my beloved. Don't get worked up and do something rash. Try to see the main point. I'm only afraid this will create an issue.

All this kidnapping will create a rumpus in the future, so I oppose it. But if you think it'll be fine and won't get out of hand, then I'll go along with you.'

She left the room with tears flowing. Phra Wai took her to reach the house as dawn streaked the sky.

As Khun Chang lay asleep snoring loudly, a strange dream crept over him. His whole body was leprous. [219]

A doctor treated him with a medicine of mercury which ate away his lungs, liver, kidney, large intestine, small intestine, and appendix. His teeth broke and fell out of his mouth.

In fright, he woke and grasped for Wanthong, calling out, 'Help me, my dear!' He got up trembling in fear that the mercury would kill him.

He opened his eyes and turned to find Wanthong, but she was not there. The sun was high and the room bright. He was taken aback to see the curtain was damaged. His cloth slipped off his body.

He shouted out, 'Wanthong, my dear!' Not a word came in reply. Several things had disappeared. The gate was unbolted and open wide.

He frantically summoned the servants. 'I-Un, I-Im, I-Chim, I-Son, I-Mi, I-Ma, I-Sakhon! Why are you asleep? Come to see me.'

The female servants ran up trembling, and found their master naked with his legs apart. They all sank down aghast, hidden behind the door, looking but not entering.

Seeing his servants would not come close, Khun Chang got up angrily and stood naked with his legs astride and his face raised in a daze. He walked forward in a stupor.

Yai-Jan shakily raised her hands in wai. 'Where are you going, master? With nothing on, you look frightful.' Khun Chang looked down at his body in shock.

He covered his legs with his two hands like a hungry ghost. ‘Who came to give a sermon<sup>5</sup> and took my clothes?’ He felt ashamed in front of the servants. ‘Yai-Jan, go and fetch me a cloth.’

Yai-Jan was totally shocked. She went in, grabbed a cloth, unfolded it, and passed it to him quickly. She ran out, averting her face in embarrassment so as not to look at her master.

Trembling, Khun Chang said to the servants, ‘Where has Wanthong gone? Why has she disappeared? Go and find what’s up with her, and when you do, ask her to come here without any fuss.’

On Khun Chang’s order the servants busily searched the whole house from top to bottom, inner rooms and outer rooms, without finding her. [220]

They saw the gate in the fence open wide, people sleeping upright, and the first post damaged.<sup>6</sup> In consternation, they returned to find Khun Chang.

They told him they could not find her, and related all the details. ‘I think it’s very strange that Wanthong has disappeared.’

After hearing the servants, Khun Chang’s shiny bald skull was bathed in sweat. He felt angry and very hurt. ‘She truly can do all kinds of everything.

Two times, three times now she’s run off. This is a mistake this fine lady won’t get away with. That time, Khun Phaen seized her. This time who has she gone with?

I didn’t think this would happen now she’s old. But she still goes out of her way to run off somewhere. Enough! What will be will be. If I don’t get her back, then it’s not me.’

Phlai Ngam began to have second thoughts. ‘Khun Chang is our enemy in every way. If he knows I took mother away, he’ll send spies, make up stories, and go to tell King Phanwasa. We’ll be suspected of being in the wrong, and mother will be punished.’

He summoned Meun Wisetphon. ‘You’re someone who gets along with people. Please go immediately to Khun Chang’s house, and placate him so he doesn’t get angry.

Say that I’ve had a fever for many days – there’s a lot of it about. I was worried mother wouldn’t come in time to see me before I die, so I sent people to fetch her.

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<sup>5</sup> Not sure if this is an idiom, or just nonsense.

<sup>6</sup> The main post, which would have been invested with magic at the time of building. Damage to this post is a sign that the protective magic has been undermined, and something bad has happened in the house (Red:499..

Just at that point, mother came out to relieve herself. They called to the room to wake you, then hurried back as ordered. She tended me until daybreak,

and I was able to recover without dying. I asked mother to stay so I can see her face, but when a few days have gone by, I'll send her back.'

Meun Wiset took leave and hurried to Khun Chang's house. On arrival, he hid and spied from afar, seeing people hustling and bustling all over the house. [221]

He saw Khun Chang sitting at a window of the ruean looking bitter, angry, and vexed. Meun Wiset thought walking in would not work, so he got down and crawled through the gate.

From the window, Khun Chang saw someone crawling in and glancing around. 'Is he coming to play tricks on me or what?

In broad daylight too. Kids! Catch him and elbow him at will.' He leapt up, tucked up his cloth,<sup>7</sup> and shouted, 'Tst! You common lackey, trying to trick gentlefolk!'

Wisetphon stood his ground and quickly raised his hands in wai. He called out in reply, 'I'm not a criminal.

I'm a servant of Phra Wai, a *khun muean* in his house. He sent me to pay his respects and tell you that last night Phra Wai

had a stomach ache – currently there's a lot of it around – and didn't think he could be cured. He was wailing and writhing on the point of death. So he sent me here to give the news.

I ran into his mother when she came out to relieve herself. I called to wake you in the house. Going back up into the house would waste time, so she hurried off in the middle of the night.

She nursed Phra Wai to allay the fever. Don't have suspicious that matters are otherwise. He gives you his word for certain that when he's cured, she'll return without delay.'

Khun Chang was angry enough for blood to spurt from his eyes. But he hid his rage and said, 'I don't complain. It's all for the good.

At present this fatal and remorseless fever is all over the capital. If there's anything you need, please come and take from here. Don't be shy.'

He banged the window shut. With his stomach seething, he lay down on the pillow and sighed. 'Oh no! Can this be, Wanthong?

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<sup>7</sup> ពាក់កណ្តាល, *thok khamen*, tucking up in Khmer style.

Because I lost the case to Jameun Wai, he's acting high and mighty. Like father, like son. Now this has happened twice! [222]

The father won a victory in Chiang Mai, and carried himself like the lord of the lions.<sup>8</sup> His son got to be Meuan Wai, and now thinks I'm a condemned criminal,

so he can use violence without showing respect. Who can I depend on over this? All the nobles will stick together. I could lay charges but it would get smothered.

Let it be according to the merit and karma I've made. I may get thrashed to death but I'm not thinking of my own life.' The more he thought, the more he seethed and raged. He fetched a slate,

and drafted a charge in full at some length. Then he put it down on paper, and folded it up. He bathed, changed his clothes, and set off.

That day the king had gone lotus viewing<sup>9</sup> and had not yet returned.<sup>10</sup> When Khun Chang arrived at the inner palace, he found a place to wait under the Water Pavilion.

The almighty king returned to the palace almost at nightfall, speeding along with a full boatload of oarsmen and the usual flotilla of boats following noisily.

When the king's boat touched, Khun Chang rushed down to the jetty, and waded doggedly out with the letter held above his head. He popped up his face and gripped the gunwale of the boat,

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<sup>8</sup> Phya Ratchasi, also known as Singhto, Singharat or Siharat, a mythical beast of great power.

<sup>9</sup> Lotus viewing in the rainy season was a popular pastime for kings and common folk. The main destination for the kings of Ayutthaya was along *Khlong sa bua* (Lotus Pond Canal) running northwards from opposite the palace. In Bangkok in the second and third reigns when this chapter was probably written the popular places were Sam Khok to the north, and an area to the east of the city. These were later named Pathumthani (abode of lotuses) and Pathumwan (Lotus grove; the pond was on the current site of the police department) respectively. (Red:503)

<sup>10</sup> This is lucky, as the Palatine Law, clause 21, specified that the king may receive petitions when traveling 'When the king is traveling by boat, accompanied by guards, boatmen, gate-boats and *dang*-boats, whether stationary or in motion, should a criminal, rebel, drunk, madman, or someone presenting a gift or petition enter past the Mahathai, soldiers, or guards upto the *dung*-boat, wave cloth as warning; if this is ignored, obstruct them with bricks, sticks, and swords; and if this is ignored, swim over to take the boat away; *if the king sees and calls the boat to approach, the service boat will receive them*; but if anyone enters without obstruction, the soldiers, guards and boatmen will be punished by slashing the neck and seizing the house.' (KTSD, I, 78-9, emphasis added.) Most of the time the king remained within the palace and hence was inaccessible. The main occasions for travel was kathin journeys to present robes to monks, but then the procession would be large and difficult to approach. Khun Chang was 'lucky' to find the king traveling in a small party. An announcement from the Fourth Reign stated: 'Ordinary people could not enter the palace. There was only the time, once a year in the kathin season, when he traveled a long distance by boat. Presenting a petition from the river bank would not be heard. It had to be on land, and thus in the area around the palace where the king landed. But here people could not approach. The only place was by the hall in front of the Thewaphirom gate.' (Red:502-4).

right by the coxswain<sup>11</sup> at the front of the boat's canopy. The coxswain thought the bald head was a water monster spirit<sup>12</sup> and hit it with a coconut shell. Some pages on duty fell out of the boat, shouting 'There's a big tiger swimming towards us!'

Khun Chang doggedly gripped the boat and said, 'It's not a tiger, it's just my bald head. I'm desperate. Let me present a petition. I'm angry beyond endurance.'

King Phanwasa was furious. 'Tst! This fellow is awful, inhuman. On land, on shore, there's no one like him.'

This is not the way to do it. Perhaps this Chang is mad? Hey! Someone take this fellow's case. Give him thirty strokes then let him go.<sup>13</sup>

The page took the petition. A guard held on firmly to Khun Chang, and delivered the punishment as ordered. The king then issued an edict. [223]

'Henceforth from today, should anyone on guard duty neglect their government service by allowing anyone into the vicinity of the palace,

that person shall be liable to miscellaneous punishment of seven grades<sup>14</sup> including execution, under this edict for the protection of the king.' Then the king disembarked and entered the palace.

Khun Phaen, whose powers were known throughout the world, was living happily at home with his two beloved wives,

Laothong and Kaeo Kiriya, who ministered closely to his needs. He was cheerful all the time. In the middle of that night,

when both Laothong and Kaeo Kiriya were asleep, he woke up with a start. The moon was shining bright, and the breeze wafted the fragrance of jasmine.

His thoughts turned to his old partner. 'It's a pity she's been far apart and devoid of love. Twice she was separated from me, like plucking the heart from my body.'

It was bad of me to get lost in love with two others, and abandon

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<sup>11</sup> บโฑน or เมาะโฑน, *baton* or *boton*, the boatman who calls the time for the rowers (Sup:513, Red:688).

<sup>12</sup> *Phi seua*.

<sup>13</sup> I think this was standard practice to deter frivolous petitions.

<sup>14</sup> The seven grades in the law of royal punishments were: 'First, reprimand; second, single fine; third, double fine; fourth, quadruple fine; fifth, plough on neck according to rank for public mockery; sixth, seize property and put to work cutting grass for the elephants; seventh, execution; according to the severity of the crime.' (Red: 503 gives no source. There are several similar lists in the *Phra-aiyakan acha luang*, the crimina law code, in the fourth volume of the Three Seals Law, but none matches this one.)

her to sorrow. When I took Chiang Mai and had royal favor, if I'd petitioned the king it would have gone smoothly.

Whatever I said, Khun Chang would not have been able to answer. I shouldn't have neglected her. Now Wai has been to fetch her,

I must go to make love to her. Wanthong will be waiting for me with longing.' He dressed, doused himself in fragrant water,

left the room, and walked to his son's ruan. He went into Wanthong's room and found her fast asleep.

He sat down beside her, and shook her lovingly, 'Wake up. I've come to see you. Don't sleep.'

Wanthong came to and realized it was her husband. She pretended to lie still to see whether his mood was truly loving or he was just going through the motions. [224]

She lay still assessing his mood for a long time, unable to find a reply, because both love and anger jammed her heart, both regret and uneasiness inflamed her soul.

'Apple of my eye, why are you so fast asleep. Are you too upset to talk, or angry that I abandoned you?

Love weighs heavily on my breast. My love for you has not lessened one bit. Truly I've been in the wrong, but why lie still and hold a grudge?'

He lay down close beside her. He kissed to kindle her love, and fondled to soothe and please her. 'What's up? Why don't you wake up from sleep.'

Wanthong got up from the bed, and entreated him tearfully. 'Are you miffed that I won't talk. I'm not complaining about anything.

What's right or wrong, you please think for yourself. This body of mine is completely tainted. It seems Wanthong is two-minded. Wherever you go, that's what you hear.

The truth is, though I went to stay in another house, I thought of you all the time, because I love my child and my husband very much. I went away then because I had to.

I was angry because my partner didn't love me. When he'd got another to enjoy, he ignored me completely. It had been a waste of effort to go through hardship together in the forest, eating fruit instead of rice every mealtime.

As soon as you found happiness, you forgot the bad times because you already had what you wanted. But I'm saying too much. I'll annoy you. Have a care for me, and don't make me ashamed again.'

'I was in the wrong, truly, Wanthong. I seemed to forget you and ignore you. But it's not true that I was carried away because of other loves. Raise your face and I'll tell you. Don't go on being angry.

When I was in jail, I grieved for you every day and night. I had to swallow an enormous sadness. On top of that, Khun Chang took a crooked revenge. He looked down on me as poor and ruined.

I missed you as much as my own heart. I thought of escaping to come after you and get you back, but I feared that would just pile another problem on top. Then later when I went to Chiang Mai, [225]

on return I meant to come after you, but Wai's case caused delay. Nobody else in this land is wronged and tormented as much as you and me.

I thought of speaking to King Phanwasa, but it would be slower than bringing you here. So I sent my son to fetch you home. If there's another case, then that's life.

Dead or alive, easy or hard, I won't be apart from my love. I'll look after you just like when we were in the wilds. I'm sorry. I was in the wrong. I'm not covering up. My love, please be tender.

I was wrong so I've come to admit it. Harboring resentment is pointless. My love is still a passionate love. Don't push me away and make me die of sadness.'

He hugged her to his breast, and carefully took off his important charms with intentions. 'Heavenly flesh, fulfill a man's feelings. Please cheer up a little bit rather than being angry.'

'My heart doesn't want to hurt your feelings. I don't mean to push you away and disappoint your love. If I wanted to break it off with you, I wouldn't have come. Don't say that I don't think of you.

Though my body went away, my heart still counted you as my husband. I'm afraid the sin will weigh on me when I die. One woman, two husbands. Unless this damage can be sorted out, I won't follow your wishes.

Back then when I followed you into the forest, my face was black as if smeared with soot. After you won the case, my face was as bright as a candle. But when he dragged me off, it was like going deep down into the sea.

Phlai Ngam came and brought me back. This time, my face will be as black as ink. It's worse because Wai is very forceful, and he'll take me down so deep I must die.

You're not a young man. Don't get tormented and excited over love. Think of what you've done wrong and suppress your passion. If you love me, protect me from shame. If I change my mind again, you can slash me.

Go and inform the king. I'll arrange a *baisi* to call back the soul.

Don't go on pleading to sleep together. I'm having none of that. You'll get too used to it.'

'What a pity. You're hurting me like cutting open my breast with a kris. You have fears about wrongdoing and sin. **I'm bad because I'm careless.** [226]

**It's not as if I'm someone distant. I'm not listening to your refusal.** It's a waste of time to plead with you. Don't try to hinder or delay our love.'

He hugged her close, kissing and caressing to soothe her. His body twined around her. Wanthong would not consent, and tried to push him away.

He pulled her close, urging her to intimacy. Trembling with fright, she obstructed him and refused to make love. Then the breeze wafted the fragrance of flowers.

Bees caressed the plants in the deep forest. But the flowers did not bloom, the stems rotted, and the pollen wept. The celestial waters only sprinkled the sky.

Thunder rumbled and crashed. The rain missed the flowers and scattered around the rim of the ocean. After the heartquake, he slept on the bed.

Late at night, all was quiet except for the rustle of dry leaves. The breeze wafted luscious scents. The moon shone bright.

A coel called out loudly. Bells tolled in the royal palace. Wanthong slept deeply. Her drowsy mind drifted.

She dreamt she was transported into a wild forest. She wandered along, twisting and turning, until she was lost in the depth of the forest, not knowing the way back. Fierce tigers came to attack her.

Two crouched watching at the edge of the path. When she came to that point, one pounced, picked her up in its jaws, and dragged her quickly away into the forest.

At the end of the dream, she woke in fright. She shrieked and hugged her husband, sobbing. Fearfully she related the dream to him. 'I'm surprised to dream something so frightening.'

Under the bed, a mouse squeaked. A spider beat its chest beside the wall. She grew even more scared to death, as if her soul would leave her body.

Khun Phaen was shocked by the omen. 'This is likely to be a dangerous time. That's a seriously bad dream according to the manual.' [227]

He examined by the eight phases<sup>15</sup> and found an extremely strong force but could not tell her the full story. He hugged her, averting his face welling tears,

and fabricated an interpretation. ‘A dream like this is not foretelling trouble. It came because you’re very unsettled. Stay with me and don’t worry, my darling.

Tomorrow I’ll fix the inauspiciousness<sup>16</sup> of the dream and comfort your soul to cheer you up. I’ll not allow any bad thing to happen to you.<sup>17</sup> Don’t worry. Relax.’

When the sun touched the hill tops and dawn lit up the sky, the king, who lived in the jeweled palace

with consorts and palace ladies on duty to prostrate, attend on him, and fan him in great numbers, had been feeling angry about Khun Chang since the middle of the night.

‘Is there anyone as vile as this vile fellow? Everything about him is bad, this slippery head. It’s hardly a night since the last case, and now he presents another, even though the water was too deep for him.

Last time he sued over Wanthong. Who’s this low-life suing about this time?’ He went out to the Chakkaphat throne hall,

which was jam-packed from front to back. The curtain was drawn back to reveal the king. The nobles all prostrated, crammed tightly together in rows.

The king looked round and saw Khun Chang. ‘Where is his charge?’ Phramuen Si presented it. The king took it, opened and looked at it.

When he knew all the points of the case, he lost his temper. ‘What is so urgent about this? It’s as if Wanthong is the only woman,

and they’re fighting over her because there are no others. **Or else she has a jewel.** Chang looks terrible with his comic eyes. I can’t see any reason she’d love him.

Anyone taking him as a husband would face shame. His head looks like a buffalo fallen into a bog. At the time of the old case, I conducted the interrogation and the problem turned out to be old Siprajan. [228]

I sent Wanthong to live with Khun Phaen. Why did she rush off to live with this Chang? Jameun Si, fetch Wanthong, Khun Phaen,

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<sup>15</sup> อัฐกาล, or อัฐเคราะห์, *attakan, attakhro*, a form of astrological reckoning based on eight stars (the day stars plus Rahu) (RI: 1351).

<sup>16</sup> แก่เสนียด, *kae saniat*, the first time the concept of *saniat* has appeared, I think.

<sup>17</sup> กัลยุก, *kaliyuk*

and Meun Wai immediately!’

Phramuen Si promptly backed out, and gave orders to a guard of the Department of the Palace, who rushed off

to Phra Wai’s house and told them of the order. ‘Khun Chang has petitioned the king. All three of you are sent for.’

Wanthong and Phlai Ngam were frightened. Khun Phaen called Wanthong into an inner room. Because of uncertainty, he used magic.

He put beeswax on her lips and made her eat a betelnut specially enchanted to overcome a range of difficulties. He enchanted a mixture of spirit oil and sandal oil. ‘This used to help protect me many times.’

He made *ithije* powder and put it on her forehead so anyone meeting her would love her. He enchanted krajae and sandal oil and applied them. When he had finished, he led Wanthong off.

Mother Thong Prasi heard about the case and could not sit still. ‘Kids! Run along with me. Quick!’ She went down the stairs trembling, and fell down on the terrace.

Phlai Chumphon<sup>18</sup> hugged her bottom. ‘I’m not an elephant for you to ride, grandson.’ She got up, bottom in air, and crawled along, wheezing through her open mouth.

They arrived at the gate of palace. Officials made them hurry along. Khun Phaen, Wanthong, and Phra Wai went in to attend on the king.

When the king, peak of the resplendent city, saw the three arrive, his mood improved and he took pity on them like a child in the womb.

Because of the power of the magic, the king’s attitude became warmer and more sympathetic. He interrogated in the manner of a case involving the populace. ‘Ha, hey! Look here, Wanthong,

when you came out of the forest, I ordered you to live with Khun Phaen. Then I was angry and had him jailed. Where did you go? [229]

Why did you not stay with Phaen, but rushed off to live with Chang again? Earlier, you loved Phaen and chased after him. Then when I gave you to him, you danced over, flaunting yourself,

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<sup>18</sup> Phlai Chumphon Ronnarong, son of Khun Phaen and Kao Kiriya, born on the day Khun Phaen left with troops to Chiang Mai in chapter 27. He would be a bit short of two years old.

to stay with Chang. But then you began to hate him because of his awful head, and couldn't stay. You seem to chop and change, keep swapping around. It seems you've become bad. Why so?'

Wanthong did not know what to do. She wai-ed and bowed her head. Her hair stood on end with fear. She addressed the king.

'My liege. Dust under the royal foot. Great Narayana, ruler and creator. When I came out of the forest, the king gave me to Khun Phaen.

After a time, Khun Phaen was imprisoned. I was very pregnant, and staying at the house in front of Wat Takrai. Khun Chang came and said that the king

had given an order granting me to him. I didn't want to go, but he used force and dragged me off – a despicable act. Neighbors wanted to help but it seemed hopeless

because Khun Chang claimed there was a royal order.<sup>19</sup> They feared they would be in the wrong if they made any obstruction. I was at a loss. It was beyond my power not to go with him. My life is under the royal foot.'

After hearing her out, the almighty king was very angry at Khun Chang. He roared like a lion. 'You madman! Tugging a woman back and forth. You obscene monkey!

It turns out I'm not the Lord of Life. You think I'm just the lord in a mask play with no authority. You have obstinate ideas, and go around acting in an arrogant fashion like a thief.

I can't feed you, you blackguard. You should be thrashed with a pair of canes down your whole spine.' Then the king changed the subject and asked Wanthong, 'Eh, the time he dragged you off

was a long time ago – around eighteen years. How did you come back just now? Did you run away from him or did someone go and fetch you?'

The question frightened Wanthong. She wai-ed and bowed her head. 'My liege, powerful king, power over my head. [230]

I was able to come back because Jameun Wai came to fetch me. But I've not been unfaithful. Khun Phaen hasn't had sex with me.

I got here only around the second watch. Khun Chang charges that I ran away. May the king have mercy. My life is under the royal foot.'

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<sup>19</sup> There is no hint of this claim in the passage at the end of chapter 23 where Khun Chang seizes Wanthong, but it relates only the kidnap from an Ayutthaya street and does not relate what happened when he took her back to Suphan.

The king became very angry. 'Meun Wai has acted arrogantly. It seems the country has no master.

People don't pay attention to the law but just do whatever they like. If they happen to chop one another dead, it'll be a danger to the populace, and that angers me.

I gave Wanthong to Phaen. Chang acted rashly by dragging her off on an elephant, citing my name, and shouting threats to frighten her.

He deserves to be knocked unconscious right here, thrashed countless times, and have a ripe coconut stuffed in his mouth. Meun Wai has also committed a serious crime.

You think that because Wanthong is your mother you can act crazily without fear or hesitation. Why didn't you fetch her during the day? Your father Phaen is behind this.

**You're like an ox used to the leg, and a horse used to being ridden.**<sup>20</sup> Even if you tell me something's good, I can't believe it. Chang has laid two charges. Wai kidnapped his mother on behalf of his father.

This is a serious crime and a major blemish on his record. If Wai wanted his mother, he should have asked his father to make a case. No problem.

We do have courts of law. Or perhaps you think I can't make a judgment. You should be whipped painfully with wire, and fined on par with an adulterer.

This affair arose because of a woman, and grew with jealousy and rivalry. It's necessary to prune a root so the fruit and flowers are all on a single branch.

Wanthong is like a taproot. If the base is cut, the leaves will wither. It must be known definitely from today who she'll live with in harmony. [231]

Hey, Wanthong! What do you say? You must decide finally today. Don't be indecisive. It taints you. Your having two husbands angers me.

If you love the new one, go and live with Chang. If you love the old one, go beside Khun Phaen. Don't go round in circles and have people slander you. Tell which one you love.'

Wanthong was very hesitant. If she spoke, she feared the king's authority. Khun Chang looked across, winking and raising his eyebrows.

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<sup>20</sup> A proverb about two people who have done things together so long that they know one another well, often used in matters about sexual relations (Mat:803).

Phra Wai signaled to his mother by pursing his lips towards his father several times. Wanthong was confused and her head spun. At a loss, she remained silent and did not address the king.

Hearing no reply from Wanthong, the king promptly asked, 'If you love neither, then say so.'

If you go with the lover and reject the husband, you fear shame. If you want to be with your son, it's up to you. I'll order accordingly from now into the future, for certain!

Something blocked Wanthong's mind and she could not think. Her demerit clouded her mind because she had reached the years she was born for.

Her mind was stunned as if she had fallen off a mountain. Her breast was pent-up with confusion. She was so afraid of putting herself in the wrong, her mind went blank.

'How can I say I love Khun Chang when in truth I don't love him even a little. I love Khun Phaen and his son like my own life. If I say the wrong thing, the king will be angry and have no mercy.'

Don't do it. Stay neutral. Let the king decide.' With only these thoughts, she quickly bowed her head and said,

'My love for Khun Phaen is a great love because we faced hardship together going into the forest. We had to do without everything but cherished one another.'

All the time I've lived with Khun Chang, he hasn't said one harsh word to vex me. He's given gold and silver to nobody but me, and servants at my beck and call as if they were mine. [232]

Jameun Wai is my flesh and blood. I love him as much as my husband.' Her body began to shake in terror at the king's authority.

The king, ruler of the world, was as angry as if gunpowder<sup>21</sup> was engulfed in flames. 'How can you be like that, Wanthong?'

You cannot say which one you love! Your heart wants both of them, so you can switch back and forth. You have reserves deeper than the deepest sea.

How many weeds, rafts, masts, and great junks could be thrown in without you feeling it? You're like a great ocean, so deep, the bottom is beyond fathoming.

Bring bricks and cloth and dump them in and they'll sink from sight. So base, evil, and black-hearted, like a jet gem found in a pile of faeces.

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<sup>21</sup> Actually potassium nitrate, one of gunpowder's ingredients.

You look beautiful and have a sweet-sounding name, yet your heart is so dishonest it's not worth a strand of hair. Even animals know what they want and mate only in the season.

You're baser than base. **The pits.**<sup>22</sup> You're no good for anything. Insatiable, lustful, and oily-eyed. Give you a hundred thousand, and you'd still not be satisfied.

Even a fallen woman has only one husband at a time. Nobody else has so many sniffing around as you do. You're a burden on my land. Why should you live? Wai, don't reckon her as your mother.

I raised you to be *hua muean*. If others know she's your mother, it'll shame you. Khun Chang and Khun Phaen, don't miss her. I'll find wives for both of you.

There are plenty of suitably attractive ones. This evil woman,<sup>23</sup> this harlot, is not worth loving. You must cut her out of your heart.

Phraya Yommarat! Go and execute her immediately! Chop her with the axe without mercy. Don't let her blood touch my land.

Collect it on banana leaves and feed it to the dogs. If it touches the ground, the evil will linger. Execute her for all men and women to see! Having given the order, he returned to the palace.

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<sup>22</sup> ท้ายเมือง, *thai muang*, back-end of city. This may mean prostitute.

<sup>23</sup> กาลกิณี, *kalakini*, goddess of adversity.