

36: The execution of Wanthong

[III/233]

Wanthong trembled with fear and her hair stood on end. Khun Chang, Khun Phaen, and Phra Wai were all stunned.¹

The officials in audience all felt their heads swell and hair bristle. Nobody knew what to say to the king as they were in awe of his authority.

Phraya Yommarat gave orders for Wanthong to be detained and taken out front. Phra Wai and Khun Phaen rushed after her, both bathed in tears of feeling for her.

Khun Chang stood up, slipped, and fell over, banging into one of the pillars. He picked himself up and staggered after Wanthong in tears.

Thong Prasi, who had been waiting to hear the result, beat her breast and hung her head in shock. She too hurried after them on wobbly legs with her body trembling and tears flowing.

She sent news to Laothong, Kaeo Kiriya, Soi Fa, and Simala who all arrived in shock, beating their chests and blubbering like bird chicks.

Khun Chang tripped over a brick and fell headfirst into a pile of dogshit. He got up and dashed ahead without wiping it off. A swarm of flies buzzed around the stink.

A servant called, 'Master, wipe off the dogshit first, I beg you.' Khun Chang turned round and said, 'You villain, where's this dogshit that's got stuck on me?'

The servant pointed it out. 'All the way from your face over the top of your head. There are flies all over the stinking stuff.' Khun Chang would not listen. 'Leave me be!' People following behind cried out, 'What a stink!'

They arrived at the execution ground.² Men and women came to watch. Wanthong sat down at the end of her strength. Phra Wai ran up and embraced her.

Khun Phaen sat down beside Wanthong with tears flowing. He was overwhelmed with pity and rendered speechless by the shock.

[234]

¹ 'There is no sadder scene than this in Thai literature.' (Red:514)

² ตะแลงแกง, *talaengkaeng*, original meaning of 'four ways' or crossroads, probably because executions were located where they would have a crowd.

Kaeo Kiriya, Laothong, Soi Fa, and Simala, all consumed by sorrow, went off to gather flowers to beg forgiveness.

Watchers surrounded them like a wall. There was no standing room left in the execution ground. Khun Chang pushed his way through the crowd saying, 'I beg you sir, for your merit.'

People started away from him. 'What a terrible stink of dogshit, sir!' Young men appalled at the stench shoved him forward. He stumbled up to Wanthong.

Phra Wai looked up and saw Khun Chang. In anger, he leaped up and banged him with an elbow. Then he got a lock on Khun Chang's head, getting both hands covered in the shit. He picked up a stave and hit down with a thud.

Phraya Yom said, 'Don't, Phra Wai. Why hit this lost fellow?' He dragged Khun Chang outside the circle then sat down, angry at having got the stink on his hands.

'You villain! My hands are covered in dogshit. If I'd known, I wouldn't have tried to stop him.' He got up and kicked Khun Chang who cried out, 'I die this time!'

Khun Phaen rushed across and hit him over and over. Khun Chang fell down, hitting his head on Thong Prasi. She cried out angrily, 'Oh, this is impossible!' Khun Chang ran away.

Wanthong hugged her son and sobbed sadly, the tears trickling down.

'Today I'll say farewell to Phlai. I must be parted from you. This evening I'll die and be covered with earth. Turn your face. I want to look at you.

Your life hasn't been like other people. We didn't live closely together. Since you were tiny, you've been floating on the wind. Sadly you were parted from me since seven years old.

I could only suffer and yearn for you. I thought I wouldn't see your dead body. But it's not you that has lost your life. Instead, you have come to cremate your mother's corpse.

It was worth it to have carried you in my womb, trekking across streams, ponds, and forest. With you in my belly as a companion, I could put up with the hardship of the deep forest, [235]

the heat of the sun, the rain, leeches, gnat bites, and the thorns all along the way. I had to be careful with you in my womb.

Your father didn't gallop the horse, but went gently for fear you might be frightened. When the sun was burning hot, we found the shade of the hills. When he saw I was tired, we'd rest and drink some water,

but only a little. He always warned against swallowing a lot for fear you might choke. When we were sent down to Ayutthaya and jailed,

I was very worried about sitting and lying down,
because of concern for you. I feared walking a lot would shake my belly. If I sat down a lot, you might be uncomfortable. If I lay down a lot, poor you might be tired.

Then I gave birth safely and felt better. I brought you up and cared for you for seven happy years. But lousy Khun Chang kidnapped you in the forest,

beat you up, and abandoned you. By merit, you recovered and I saw you again. But immediately, we were separated and it was a long time before we met again.

Good deeds from the past time helped give my darling child added merit. You traveled to find your father and mother and bring us together again. But it turns out now you must do my cremation.

It's like when you struggle to find a way out of the deep forest. When you see the moon shining bright in the sky, you think you'll be happy for ever. Then the lightning strikes and you fall buried deep in the earth.

You have only half a day to see me. After that there'll be nothing but ash and cinders. You'll only be able to think of me in your mind. Go home, my son. Don't wait for evening.

When I'm executed with my neck severed it'll be a pitiful sight. You shouldn't see it. Look on my face while I'm still alive so that'll be what you see when you think of me.'

She hugged Phra Wai with her face lowered and tears flowing. Her mind swam, and she collapsed down on the ground and lay motionless.

Phra Wai was desolate to see his mother collapse. He cried by her side and frantically massaged her to recover. Gradually she came round, and he spoke to her sorrowfully. [236]

'Oh mother and mistress of your child, you raised me and taught me. You made the cradle, lullabied me to sleep, fed me, bathed me, suckled me.

You cuddled me and kissed my forehead, washed my hair and coiled it in a topknot, put on turmeric, and laid me to bed. You were always wary of dangers.

When I got sick, you were sad and took great care over my food and medicine. You put up a mosquito-net to keep the flies, mosquitoes, and bugs away so I wouldn't be bothered.

When I'd grown to seven, bad fortune loomed. Khun Chang lured me into the forest and piled logs on top of me.

My whole body had aches and pins-and-needles. I thought I'd die, eaten up as prey by the wild animals. But the gods of the forest had mercy.

They helped drag away the logs that Khun Chang put on me, so I managed to come back alive.³ I had to separate from you after that. I worked through the forest, bothered by the thorns,

all on my own from Suphan to Kanburi. By merit, I survived the animals in the forest. Grandma brought me up and so I'm still alive.

Hundreds and thousands of difficulties everywhere! Nobody has suffered as much as your little child. Nobody has been poor quite like me, **deprived of both father and mother.**

I had you only when I was a child, and I didn't see father's face since I was a little kid. I had to ask grandma who helped me understand things. Then I left grandma and came through the hills and forest again⁴

with lots of elephants and tigers, and swarms of biting mosquitoes, midges, and flies. I had to go without food and was scratched by thorns and branches hundreds of times.

Sleeping in the deep forest was scary. The dew was chilly. The wind blew the leaves. I was lonely walking to the city. [237]

I found father in a terrible state – in jail and so poor he had no lower cloth. So I struggled to study and gain knowledge to improve myself. I went to war, was victorious, and moved up in the world.

I got piles of money, servants, a house, rank, and happiness. I saw father's face every night. The only thing missing was mother, living far away.

I missed you and so I went to fetch you. I meant to make you happy. I didn't know I was leading you to your death – like a child killing his mother.'

He turned and said, 'Hey, executioner! It's better to come and chop me. Don't let my mother die. Let me die in her place.

It all happened because I brought her back, and the king handed her a grave punishment.' He sobbed, shook, and thrashed about at his mother's feet.

He recovered and apologized. 'Mother, please give pardon on my head. When I was a kid, I didn't know anything. I annoyed you by

³ In the account of this incident in chapter 24, Wanthong comes into the forest and rescues Phlai Ngam. In Phra Wai's account here, and during the trial in chapter 34, Wanthong is not mentioned. During the trial, it could be argued that Phra Wai is cleverly keeping Wanthong out the account told to the king. But here it is obvious that the author of this chapter is working with a different version of chapter 24 in which Phlai Ngam finds his own way out of the forest. See also the difference over the role of Thong Prasi below. This chapter is probably a very early composition. When Sunthon Phu wrote chapter 24, he evidently embellished the story quite a bit.

⁴ The chapter on 'The birth of Phlai Ngam' said Thong Prasi brought Phlai Ngam to find Khun Phaen, but this chapter says Phlai Ngam ran away from Thong Prasi. This is because the authors of each did not know the other. [Note in Wachirayan edition]

running wild⁵ –

pinching, biting, swiping, hitting, and then answering back. Mother, please forgive me. Don't make this my karma into the future.

Oh sun, why are you hurrying across the sky? You're hastening the time my mother will be dead and gone? If mother were sick, I could find the medicine to treat you and ease any discomfort.

I could sell off things like the betel box and bowl. I could take lots of servants, oxen, and buffaloes, and pledge them to the doctor as fee.

I've never nursed and tended you. Now karma has caught up and you'll die by execution.' Phra Wai felt his breast was licked by fire. He sobbed miserably as if he would die too.

Khun Phaen felt great pity for Wanthong. He sat listening quietly and feeling helpless. She turned to clasp his feet, sobbing. Khun Phaen buried his face on his wife's back.

He shook with sobs, his mouth open and his tears streaming down. 'It was a waste to have gone through such suffering, scratching the earth to feed one another like birds, [238]

living in the deep forest, using a lower cloth as a mosquito-net, digging up taro and wild potatoes. Despite the hardship, we were together.

I had to cross streams and crags, make shelters out of leaves, and destroy an army of thousands to protect you, but we weren't separated for a single day.

You put up with extreme hardship to be with me, even eating lotus roots when other plants were difficult to find. We hadn't a single grain of rice.

For eight months we didn't see a house. Taking you away to hide created great hardship. Then you got pregnant and we always had to take special care of the child that had come to join us.

I had to ride the horse at a walking pace so as not to disturb your womb. Every morning and evening I had to support you carefully. Then when you were very pregnant, I feared a disaster,

so I took you to Phra Phichit and we all survived. If they'd killed us both in the forest, I wouldn't have felt as bad as now.

At that time, we were suffering so much we could have bowed our faces and gone to our deaths. As it happened, we stayed alive. We came to Ayutthaya and faced trial.

The king decided in our favor and we won. I felt happy that our troubles were over. All the effort had been worth it. But fate caught

⁵ Speculative: literally, reaching high and low.

up with me and I was put in jail.

Again I had to suffer, day and night. On top, I was worried about your pregnancy. Khun Chang seized you and that made things even worse. I felt there were around six fires burning in my breast.

It's like you've died and left me once already. For you there was only the torment of missing me; for me in jail the sorrow of longing for you. Sorrow piled on sorrow piled on sorrow –

the sorrow of being parted from my companion in suffering. I was not there when you gave birth. For many years, I didn't know whether the child was boy or girl, alive or dead.

Only later, Phlai Ngam found me and told me. Then I knew you were still alive. When I got out, I meant to come after you, so we could try again, come what may. [239]

By the power of merit, Phlai Ngam came to ask for my release. Then I was busy with the expedition to Chiang Mai. When I came back and things got better, I happened to forget about you for almost a year.

Then our son brought you here. It was like you were born again for me. I felt relieved our troubles were behind us and we could live together happily until our dying day.

We met and talked from the middle of the night, went to sleep and didn't wake until the sun was high. Then everything went terribly wrong, and in the end my darling has to die.

What a mess! We've been through such suffering, fighting with enemies many times. Even against hundreds and thousands of troops, I wasn't defeated.

Even though the sky rained spears, I stayed alive with no crisis. The skills of the Chiang Mai Lao were not too much. They broke and scattered because of my magic.

Their weapons didn't even pierce my horse. Their fire, I could put out on the spot. My reputation spread throughout the city. But what's happening now is demeaning.

I've helped thousands and millions of others to survive. It's only my greatest love I can't protect. It's only my darling that will be lopped and taken away from me.

If an enemy came to besiege the city, he should have no illusion he could take our king. I'd volunteer single-handed, and not quail in the face of tens or hundreds of thousands.

I'm at a loss because the king has given his command and forbidden any intercession. He went back into the palace with no hesitation. Your neck will be lopped off because of the royal command.

Oh my king! Why were you so angry? If you would give a pardon and grant her life, whatever city you desired –

Khaek, Farang, Lao, Lue, Mon, Burmese – I'd truss them up and present them to you. I would ask only for my beloved Wanthong. But what will happen is up to fate.

Stay here. I'll go to beg the king.' Wanthong said, 'Don't! Don't be rash! The time you begged for Laothong, you got clapped in irons. This time, I'm condemned to die.

You'll stir up an old matter that's not been settled and forgotten. You'll be condemned along with me and we'll both die. Don't imagine that I'll live. [240]

If you die too, when will you be born again? Live on and make merit for me, my lord. Hell is a dark place and I fear it. If you live on, you can do good deeds.'

Hearing these words, Khun Phaen could say nothing more. He felt bewildered and helpless. Overwhelmed by feeling, he collapsed flat on the ground.

The crowd of people who had come to watch could not swallow their sadness. Everyone cried. Both young and old were streaming tears. The only sound was weeping and wailing,

like a forest blasted by a fierce gale which blows the leaves, branches, and twigs in trembling turmoil. The weak-hearted fell down in a faint, because the sun was dipping almost into the forest.

Kaeo Kiriya, Laothong, Simala, and Soi Fa grieved for her. They put *miang* and betel on a tray, and crawled up to pay their respects and ask for forgiveness.

Kaeo said, 'I beg your forgiveness so that I do not carry the karma into the future. We gave ourselves to the same husband. If there's any matter that has angered you,

I beg your forgiveness so it doesn't add to my karma.' Wanthong said, 'I hold nothing against you. Besides, I offended you some times. Please forgive me, Kaeo Kiriya.'

Kaeo Kiriya accepted the apology with tears flowing. Laothong sorrowfully went forward. 'I've offended you in the past. Please absolve me of blame from today.'

Wanthong accepted Laothong's apology. 'My dear, I complained about you a lot. I beg your forgiveness. Don't be resentful.' All of them were in tears.

Soi Fa and Simala grieved for her and begged her forgiveness. 'Whatever wrongs we've done you, from the past until the end of your life today,

don't let them be our karma.' They bowed their faces and wept. Wanthong accepted their apologies, growing ever more sorrowful, her face bathed in tears of compassion.

Wanthong called for flowers, and crawled over to pay respects to Thong Prasi. ‘I take leave of you today. Please forgive me. Don’t let there be anything between us. [241]

If I’ve made you angry in any way, since I was with Khun Phaen until the time they chop me dead, let the karma lapse, mother.’

Thong Prasi raised her trembling hands in acceptance, and fell down faint in the dust. When she recovered, she said, ‘Do not abandon merit. Be intent on prayer, dear daughter.

Find some flowers for your mother, Wai. It’s better to appreciate the goodness of the Buddha. Why are you crying, Phaen? Go and find a bowl to pour water on the ground.

Simala, fetch some raw and cooked rice and make offerings to the spirits. It’s nearly nightfall. Then we can make merit.’ Thong Prasi mumbled on.

Her grandson, Chumphon, crawled over to her. She lifted him onto her shoulder with tears flowing. Thinking of Wanthong, she wept while cradling Chumphon to suckle her breast.

‘She’ll fall dead, my little Phlai. Don’t cry, wee thing. Drink some milk.’ She took a piece of betel from her mouth and gave it to her grandson to suck. She wanted to cuddle him but was not fully conscious.

Khun Chang sat some distance away on his own, weeping with his face white as a ghost, and babbling unhappily. ‘This time you’ll die for sure, my dear.

My god! Just now we were living together but then you left. Oh Wanthong, you’ll die because of me. Your flesh will turn to dust because this stupid mole went to talk to the king.

Your son was sick so you went to see him. I wrongly thought you’d run away from me. They came to tell me what had happened, but this hairless chalkhead⁶ took against them,

even told the king the whole story from beginning to end. In truth, I’m not the reason you’ll die. The king asked you who you loved, but you were two-minded and **wavered**.

The king got angry at your befuddlement. If you loved only Chang, it would be yummy.⁷ You could live in a house with huge pillars, eat *thepho* fish curry, and be at ease.

But you’re going to die in full public view. Where will I find another like you, **my heavenly, holy hamper**?⁸ If I can’t, I’ll have no

⁶ หัวปูน, *hua pun*, meaning bald (Red:518).

⁷ Literally, *khanom ko*, a Chinese sweet.

⁸ Literally, my peak of heaven, lid of begging bowl, big basket. But the point of the line is the sound, conveying

wife. [242]

I'll donate my house and possessions to the monks. I'll give up this world, shave my head, and go into the monkhood. Even though the daughters of aristocrats would consent, why should I have a wife if she's not the same?

I'll pray, count my rosary, and grieve from nightfall until cockcrow for a hundred lives, a thousand lives, with no relief. **Just my own five fingers, until death.'**

Thong Prasi heard him and felt mad. 'Why are you weeping, you disaster, you bald-headed, pattern-skulled lowbirth? She's going to die and you're wittering on.

What's this you're weeping and blathering about – "my heavenly, holy hamper"?' Phra Wai strode over in a rage. 'You bald son-of-a-slave insulted me,

speaking like a dog and flinging shit around. Go away, or you should fear I'll hit you. If you don't go, see how I'll elbow you.' He dragged him away by his ear.

Khun Chang screamed and wriggled. 'I truly love her absolutely, Phra Wai, sir.' Phra Wai elbowed him down to the ground. 'You low life. Haven't you gone away yet?'

Khun Chang loped off, barging into some people watching. They drew back then kicked him on his way. Khun Chang leapt out of the circle, crying out, 'This has never happened to me before!

I love my wife. I cry for her. And he elbows me for nothing, folks. You never stop playing around with me.' Phra Wai called out, 'Hey baldie!

Get yourself out of here, and press some charges somewhere.' Khun Chang said, 'Why should I? I'm going home.' But he skulked back, and trod on I-Tham, the daughter of I-Tae, who shouted out.

I-Tae rushed at Chang and scratched him. 'This baldie has come back, I tell you!' Khun Phaen called out, 'Stop it! Enough!' He took his daughter back into the sala.

Jameun Wai was grief-stricken over his mother. He tried to ease his distress by talking with his father. **'I don't see any point**

in just weeping and wailing. Do you think he'd kill me?' Father, please stay here. I'm going to talk to the king. [243]

I'll plead with him to soften his anger and pardon her. I don't care about the consequences. How can I repay her goodness after she's dead? That's my idea. What do you think, father?'

Khun Phaen agreed with his son. But then he looked at the horoscope and got a clear indication, so he said to Phra Wai Phlai Ngam,

‘There’s a lot of obstruction in the eight stars.’⁹ He spoke as if to deter him. ‘If you go to appeal to the king, the stars say he should grant the pardon you request for sure, but your mother will not escape death. Look at her face. She looks close to death. It’s nearly time, four o’clock.’

He scratched the horoscope on the ground for him to see. ‘The fortune is very bad. It looks like a violent death. Saturn is covering the good qualities. There’s a crow perching on a coffin. The monkey puts its paw in a hole and the crocodile eats it.’¹⁰

Someone with this horoscope cannot survive.’ Phra Wai saw the whole picture. Tears trickled down his face. He turned to say to his father, ‘According to karma.

I can see it all – bad fortune, life and death. But I must still repay her goodness and support. I’ll appeal for just two more nights for her. Then it depends on her merit and karma.

Father, please stay and look after mother. Don’t let them kill her first.’ With just these words, he went up to Phraya Yom and paid his respects.

‘Sir, delay the punishment, please. I’m going to attend on King Phanwasa to beg a reprieve for my mother. Have mercy and don’t let her die.’

Phraya Yom was pleased. ‘Go! Don’t delay. Hurry. If you take too long, it’ll be beyond the time. I fear royal authority too much not to do it.’

Phlai Ngam heard him and took leave. With his servants, he rushed to the palace and sat waiting for the time. He composed his mind, turned his face to the east,

and chanted the Great Beguiler mantra to charm and inspire love. He made a **Thepnimit**¹¹ yantra from powder, then closed his hand and wiped it away, leaving no trace. [244]

He uttered a prayer for blessings to beg that the king’s anger would subside. He waited until he had a **moon wind** as a signal, and then crawled into the jewel audience hall

He saw the king was in a good mood, and speaking with a merry smile. Phra Wai prostrated elegantly three times, and crouched waiting and glancing around.

⁹ See note in chapter 35.

¹⁰ All this is obscure and has a lot of guesswork.

¹¹ Heavenly omen. No idea, and nothing in commentaries.

The mighty king, pinnacle of the holy city, saw Phra Wai come in to pay his respects. He felt merciful.

‘How come this fellow is so assiduous. They’re executing his mother but he still comes round to see me.’ He asked, ‘What’s up, Wai? Have they executed Wanthong yet?’

Phra Wai Woranat listened to the king’s questions with tears flowing. He saw his magic was working and the king was not badly disposed. He prostrated to pay respects and then said,

‘My liege, almighty king, most excellent in all the worlds great and small, **with authority on every matter**, my life is under the royal foot.

You raised me to be *hua muean*. Every day and night your goodness is over my head. I am eternally happy, and have never betrayed the royal foot.

Your humble servant’s mother is a very bad woman who has gone astray as a result of excessive sexual desire. The king has rightly shown her no favor.

If this were a sister, aunt, or grandmother, I’d leave her to die without pity. But this is the mother who suffered to carry me in her belly. I was born and live long because of her.

I owe her countless favors. It would be very unfitting to abandon her. In addition, since birth I’ve not had the chance to tend her at all.

Now she faces the ending of her life. I appeal to the king to bestow on me a favor, so the reputation may spread that Meun Wai repaid his debt of gratitude to his mother.

I beg you to pardon her and grant her life. Instead of execution, have her thrashed and confined in pitiful circumstances as is appropriate to her improper sexual conduct.’¹² [245]

The king heard Jameun Wai out, was pleased, and felt compassionate. ‘I have pity for Meuan Wai.

You’ve done well and gained royal favor. I’ve already repaid you in many ways, but you’re not yet happy with my thanks. I’ll lift your mother’s punishment as a reward.

If it were anyone else but you, I wouldn’t grant this. Whoever pleaded would die along with her. Hey, Thainam, go quickly with Meun Wai.

Tell minister Yommarat not to chop Wanthong to death as I’ve I pardoned her for Jameun Wai. Hurry before the execution takes place!’

¹² ผิดประเวณี, *phit praweni*.

Phra Wai was delighted to have achieved his wish. He prostrated in front of the throne to receive the royal command, and rushed off.

He consulted with Phra Thainam. 'It's evening, almost nightfall. We can't delay or Phraya Yom will chop her dead. Call the servants to harness horses.'

They mounted a horse apiece and galloped along the middle of the road with servants and phrai flocking behind. They waved a white flag as a signal.

Phraya Yommarat thought something was unusual and trembled in fear. Because Wanthong's karma was to be executed, he misconstrued what was happening.

'Phra Wai went away on foot and now someone is coming on horseback, flying a white flag. That's suspicious. It can't be Phra Wai returning.

It must be like this: Phra Wai went to address the king, and the king was angry to find she'd not been executed. I'll be in the wrong because of the delay. Quick, there! Bring her and carry out the execution!'

The executioner and royal guards dragged Wanthong over. Shaking with fright, she turned to call to her husband, 'I fear they're going to chop me!' Khun Phaen barged his way in front of the guards,

gnashing his teeth, and embraced her as protection. Khun Chang called out, 'Grab her!' The executioner walked up with a long sword. Khun Phaen threw himself on top of his wife. [246]

They pushed and pulled at one another. The executioner chopped down, hitting Khun Phaen, but the sword bent and crumpled without piercing him. The guards crowded in and hauled Khun Phaen off her.

He gnashed his teeth angrily, twisted his body into a coil, and cried, 'Let me go!' The executioner brandished the sword, flashing in the light. He stepped forward, raised his arm, and struck down,

severing Wanthong's neck. Her life was snuffed out instantly. At that moment, Phra Wai galloped up, leapt down from his horse, and embraced his mother's feet in a faint.

Khun Phaen collapsed down flat, as if he would never rise again. Khun Chang fell rolling on the ground at a distance. All the servants were in turmoil.

Thong Prasi writhed in agony. Soi Fa and Simala fell flat on their backs. Kaeo crumpled, dropping her son. Everyone was shocked senseless.

In the packed crowd of watchers, some collapsed in a faint, some

ran off, some busily tried to help their friends by massage.

Royal doctors treated Phra Wai, Phlai Ngam, and Khun Phaen with smelling salts and water to revive them. Everybody gradually came round.

Khun Phaen, Phra Wai, Laothong, and the two daughters-in-law grieved for Wanthong. Thong Prasi, Kaeo Kiriya and the others went up to embrace the body and lament.

Khun Phaen said, 'Oh Wanthong, it's tragic you had to die. However much I tried to prevent it, this was the karma you made.'

Phra Wai said, 'I was determined you shouldn't die. I appealed to the king and rushed here but – my god! – I didn't arrive in time for the chop.'

Kaeo Kiriya's tears fell. 'Oh, it's like my own breast was cut open!' Laothong wept miserably. Simala was smothered in tears.

Soi Fa thrashed around in agony. Thong Prasi stood up and let forth a keening wail. The whole circle echoed with the sound of weeping. Khun Phaen fell down and embraced the body. [247]

Everyone wept, wailed, stumbled, and collapsed. Everywhere was stained red with blood. Phra Wai dementedly hugged her, his heart leaden.

Seeing his father, he flew into a rage. 'I left you alone to look after her, but you carelessly let this happen. I'm blaming you even though it'll make you angry.

You're not going to miss her because you have plenty of other wives? If you had some concern for her, she wouldn't have been chopped.

You're so skilled in magic. In the face of hundreds of thousands of Lao, you're not afraid. You have stunning mantras powerful enough to immobilize hundreds and thousands of people.

Why didn't you blow one to stun this executioner and stop him? She died because you didn't help her. Or have you lost your powers?

You're crying only because you see me here. If that wasn't so, you'd look the other way.' The more he spoke, the more he choked with grief. He turned to minister Yommarat.

'What happened to your promise? Did you have to sever my mother's neck? You worried we'd return, so you rushed to chop her first. Have you got something against me?

It seems you hate me, but why take it out on my mother? Do you enjoy chopping women dead? Where do they wage war on the female?

When I was leaving, I said don't carry out the execution. You agreed to take care of it. I appealed to the king and he agreed.

But just now my mother died. What more do you have to say?

You rushed to chop her to show off your attention to duty. You see me empty-handed¹³ and act big with fear of nobody.

On top of that you chopped at my father too. He survived only because it didn't pierce him. What's he being punished for? Or was there a royal command for you to execute him too?

I'm your sworn enemy until my dying day. My wish for revenge will never weaken, *ever*. Enough! Let's see who has the skill. If I don't chop my enemy, I agree to die.' [248]

He turned to the executioner who had despatched her. He rushed upon him, kicked him down flat on the ground, and drew his sword to kill him. Crowds of people ran off in turmoil.

Khun Chang was shocked when Phra Wai confronted him too. He raised his hands and shouted, 'Why me?' Phra Wai kicked him in the neck. In fear, Phraya Yom bowed and asked forgiveness.

Khun Phaen rushed over and pulled Phlai Ngam away. 'Listen to me. Don't lose your temper. She had to die as a result of her karma. I was sitting close by but I forgot to think of that.

I leaped up to protect Wanthong, but it didn't help one little bit. They swarmed over me and dragged me off. I was powerless. Wanthong's life was at it's end.'

Phra Wai angrily pushed his hand away and growled, 'I'm going to slash him.' His father grabbed the weapon out of his hand. Phra Wai collapsed down beside his mother's body.

'Oh, patroness of your darling child. Now you're gone and I won't see your face. I went against royal authority to appeal to the king, with no thought for my own life.

The king granted a pardon. I was happy that you wouldn't be done away with, and my reputation would spread. I didn't know you would die because of bad karma.

I rushed here with Phra Thainam, riding horses like flying. But in truth, karma had to lead to this result alone. I saw them sever your neck.'

He grieved and hugged his mother's body, his heart trembling in turmoil, until he lost control of his senses and collapsed in a mute faint.

Khun Phaen felt great pity for Phra Wai. He watched him crying over the loss of his mother, and sorrowfully hugging her body, until he collapsed and lost consciousness. In shock, Khun Phaen

¹³ Presumably meaning, without a weapon.

helped massage his son

who gradually came round. Khun Phaen consoled him, 'Jao muean, listen to your father. A dead person never rises again. It's no use to keep grieving. [249]

Try to compose yourself, Wai. Don't cry, and listen to my advice. All of us born in any shape and form must follow one another to death. That's natural.

Men and women have a life, but when they reach their line of destiny,¹⁴ they can't stay. Even the earth, sky, and oceans are destroyed when burned by hellfire.

There's no point crying yourself silly. Think about making some merit to send to her. Your mother's body is still lying out here. Think about her cremation, my son.'

Phra Wai agreed with his father's soothing words. He swallowed his sadness and lessened his tears. He turned to give orders to the servants.

'Bring the white cloth required to wrap the body. Cut some planks to make a coffin, and line it with banana fronds.

Then lift the body and place it in the wood, and have it carried for burial in the graveyard. Assign some people to guard the body closely.'¹⁵ Then they all returned home in tears.

The whole house was as chilly as a graveyard, and the only sound throughout was people grieving – melancholy, suffering, turmoil. The neighbors and market folk were sad too.

After he saw them chop her, Khun Chang could not stay. He promptly called his servants and boarded the boat to Suphan.

Moving quickly, they reached the house just before dawn. Khun Chang feared his mother-in-law would hear about the case, so he quickly sneaked into the house where he sobbed tears from glistening eyes.

Khun Phaen thought and thought about his beloved wife. When dawn lit the sky, he sent a servant to find Siprajan

and tell her that Wanthong was dead. Ai-Sa hastened across the plain to Suphan and went into Siprajan's house.

Just at that moment, Saithong¹⁶ was walking out. Ai-Sa sank down

¹⁴ พรหมลิขิต, *phrommalikhit*, line of Brahma.

¹⁵ Newly dead bodies were considered to have special power which could be transferred into objects or potions for application of magic.

¹⁶ Saithong has disappeared from the story since chapter 14. We can imagine from this reappearance that she has

and raised his hands in wai. Saithong asked why he had come. 'Khun Phaen sent me to convey the news [250]

that in the middle of the night before last, Phra Wai very rashly kidnapped Wanthong away. Khun Chang angrily went to the king.

The king was enraged and ordered her death. Wanthong is no more.' Saithong felt she was being burnt up by fire, and collapsed down in grief

as if her heart would break with sadness. She lay motionless, just sobbing. Servants tried to help but she would not recover. Everybody was stunned.

Siprajan saw Saithong come in with her body trembling as if she was possessed by a ghost. She asked, 'What's this fellow done to you?'

Saithong fell down headlong with a bang. 'Did you hit her or what?' Ai-Sa cried out, 'Wanthong had to die, ma'am.'

Siprajan heard 'will die.' In shock she lay back on a flat tray. Then she got up and began feverishly praying to the spirits and the Buddha. 'Lord, let her survive and not die.

When did she get sick? I didn't know. Well, well! That bastard Khun Chang is too embarrassed to tell me until she's almost dead.' She shambled off to the ruean of her son-in-law Chang.

She was surprised to find the stairway was pulled up. She got Ai-Bia to lean a ladder on the window, and climbed up into the central hall. Khun Chang sat bent over crying.

Siprajan saw his face. 'Eh, something's up. So bleary eyed.' Khun Chang said without waiting, 'Wanthong shouldn't have died.

It happened because Phlai Ngam kidnapped her and the king became enraged. I didn't lay charges with the king. **The king knew and had her executed.** That's the truth.'

Siprajan then realized her daughter was dead. She collapsed flat on her back and lay still. Khun Chang tended to her but she did not move. He despatched his servants to fetch doctors.

Both doctors of massage and doctors of medicine arrived en masse and sat huddled all around her. They massaged her, applied smelling salts, and squeezed her jaw, but it was a long time before she recovered her senses. [251]

Old Siprajan was in a pitiful state. Her body shook, and her face was as white as a ghost. Tears splashed down in torrents, while she raved at the loss of her child.

Khun Chang sat tending to her for more than a watch.¹⁷ Then he

been living with Siprajan all along.

¹⁷ Three hours.

had her carried over on a stretcher. When they carefully but awkwardly carried her up the stairs and put her down, she was still wailing back and forth.

‘Oh my Wanthong! You shouldn’t have gone to the city and let them execute you. If you were sick at home with your mother, I could nurse you.

After your father died, I hoped you’d be my companion, staying here in this house until I was old. As it happened, karma got you an outcaste husband who destroyed you.

If I’d known it’d come to this, I’d have had you ordained as a nun with the abbot. However many piles of money, I’d not get carried away. I wouldn’t let any husband have his way with you.

But both Phaen and that shiny baldie became my sons-in-law. I’d never seen anything like it. The villains fought so much like pig and dog that this disaster happened and you lost your life.

When Phlai Ngam was a tiny kid, I thought of him tenderly as a grandson. I didn’t know he’d grow up so bad he could allow his mother to be done away with.

Oh I’m going to be lonely in my old age! My husband and my child have gone. Why should I live to suffer?’ She wept and wailed in floods of tears.

Saithong, who had been like her elder sister, recovered her senses and got up. She thought of Wanthong forlornly and tears splashed down in torrents.

She took leave of Siprajan and went to board a boat, missing her terribly. She arrived at the capital and went straight to the house of Khun Phaen.

She went into his room and asked, ‘Where’s Wanthong’s body?’ Khun Phaen said, ‘Buried at Wat Takrai.’¹⁸ He had someone take her there.

Saithong descended from the ruean in tears. She pushed herself along in a daze. At the graveyard, her sobbing worsened and she collapsed down in a sad heap. [252]

The servants who had gone along helped her to recover. After a moment, Saithong breathed a sigh and began to come round.

She called out to Wanthong in grief. ‘Oh dear Wanthong, why are you so still? Why don’t you greet me? Why did you come to lie in

¹⁸ Wat Takrai was probably a crematory wat. It is sited outside the city (off the island), as was the usual practice for crematory wat. It is immediately behind Wat na Phramen, the crematory wat of the royal palace. The surviving remains shows it was a substantial wat. Phraya Boran’s map shows that its former grounds were very extensive, stretching down to Khlong Sa Bua, creating the large courtyard needed for a crematory wat. Further up Khlong Sa Bua is Wat Phraya Maen which appears below in chapters 40-1 with a graveyard, suggesting this whole area may have had some specialization in cremation.

the ground? You made such a little hole and fled away all by yourself.

It was a waste to have loved you from way back. We shared one heart and one husband. We faced the good and the bad in harmony and happiness. We've loved and looked after one another since we were little.

Now Wanthong, my love, you've run away and abandoned me to sorrow. Don't expect me to live long. I'll die and follow you so we can go together.

For years from now on I won't see you. For months, I'll mourn in misery. Every day, I'll grieve for you. When can I meet you again?

She thrashed around as if she was about to die on top of Wanthong's body. Racked by sobs, she slumped down and lay limp, beating her chest and wailing.

She tried to pull herself together. Nightfall was coming and she needed to return quickly. Grieving with loss, she walked back to the house of Meun Wai.

She gave orders to the servants who had accompanied her to return to Suphan immediately. She would stay to help Phra Wai with the ceremony.

At dawn, a bright sun lit up the whole world. Phra Wai's thoughts turned to the cremation of his mother.

'Let's make it massive. I must go to talk to King Phanwasa.' He got dressed and went to attend on the king.

The almighty king, slumbered in the golden palace, attended by many exceptionally beautiful and charming palace ladies.

Every face was fair and attractive. Every group paid him their respects. Ladies-in-waiting performed their duties inside. Some sang and played music. [253]

The orchestra of ranad, gong, plucked and bowed instruments sung his praises in melodious tones. At the time to expound on affairs of state, the king went out to preside in the golden audience hall.

Those attending on regular government service quailed in fear of making mistakes. They presented their addresses, taking care not to provoke the king's irritation on government affairs.

The king noticed Phra Wai. 'Eh! How was it with your mother yesterday? You asked and gained my favor, but didn't return. What did your father say?'

Jameun Wai Woranat listened to the king with tears flowing. He raised his fingers in wai, and addressed the king. 'I wasn't in time to

help my mother.

When I arrived, they'd severed her neck down onto the ground. She was dead.' He sobbed back and forth in front of the king's throne.

The king felt as if thunder had struck and shaken the palace. His mind was in utter consternation, and he was too stunned to say anything.

It was a little time before he recovered his voice. 'I feel great pity for Jameun Wai. You secured your mother's reprieve, but she didn't escape punishment. That alone was her fate.

Don't be troubled. I'll grant money and equipment to arrange an appropriate cremation. Let it last many days and nights merrily. Don't be shy about whatever you need.

Come and take from the treasury. I'll order the officials to provide everything for you. Make it as splendid as you want. If you need anything, don't hide.

Let there be mask plays, dramas, Mon dances, boxing, wrestling, and shadow plays after nightfall. Let the gongs and drums play loudly. I'll provide the casket for the body – everything,

including the bier,¹⁹ all the necessary decorations, all kinds of petty entertainments, and everything for a firework display. Get everything done in time. Don't be deferential.'

Phra Wai was incomparably happy to hear the king's favor. He prostrated to the royal foot and said, 'The royal kindness is great and inestimable. [254]

Your humble servant is happy without compare. The word will spread through every land and river that the king bestowed such favor on the head of his servant, Phra Wai.

Among those condemned to death, nobody dares to petition. I was resigned to death, but have been favored by royal grace.

Though I was unable to fulfill my wish and my mother passed away, let this servant of the royal foot repay the goodness of his mother. I request leave to enter the monkhood for seven days.'

The king was pleased. 'I thank Wai. Your filial devotion recognizing her goodness is bountiful.

The king ordered the staff of the royal wardrobe,²⁰ 'Provide triple

¹⁹ ฐานไม้, *ran ma*, a frame with six posts on which the coffin is placed for cremation (Mat:741).

²⁰ กลังศุกรัด, *khlang supharat*.

robes of mine. I will gain merit and send it to help her.' Phra Wai prostrated and took leave.

Everyone joined in arranging everything needed for the cremation, all of good quality. They had things carried to the wat. The relatives all gathered around.

Old Siprajan also came to attend Wanthong's cremation. Close to evening, the body was dug up, cleansed,

and placed on the casket provided by the king. Decorations were placed at intervals. The Java flute and victory drum played. Monks were invited to chant.

Phlai Chumphon, wearing a white lower cloth and a conical hat,²¹ scattered puffed rice in front of the procession. The relatives, all gentlefolk wearing white lower cloths, followed behind as mourners.

Her mother, Siprajan, eyes glistening with tears, walked with Thong Prasi. Entering the mortuary ground, the body was raised onto the bier with a lot of noise.

Crematory articles were placed all around. The site was fashioned as a mountain, so artfully painted that those not in the know thought it was rock.

There²² were steep slopes, cliffs, ravines, streams, and a ledge for a rishi's kuti. At the corner of the cliff, Mekhala was playing with her jewel, and Asura throwing his axe to clash on the rock.²³ [255]

On the cliffs, an overhang created a shallow cave in which was placed the image of an *arahan*.²⁴ A tiger and bear were biting at one another, rearing up and baring their teeth as if alive.

A deer was leaping across where a forest huntsman hid unseen among the trees. He wore a mule's head as disguise and loped forwards with his eyes fixed on the deer.

²¹ ลอมพอก, *lomphok*, a conical hat once worn by court nobles (Mat:766, pix from La Loubere).

²² This whole passage describing the meru is very difficult, and a lot of it is hard to understand and visualize. Needs checking.

²³ Folktale of Indian origin about the origin of thunder and lightning. Mekhala/Manimekhala is a celestial being, and Asura/Ramasura is a giant. Mekhala wears a jeweled ring. Asura covets both the ring and Mekhala, and gives chase. Mekhala directs the rays reflected from the ring (lightning) to blind Asura who throws his axe but misses and it clatters against a rock (thunder). The scene is a popular theme of dance. A variation of the story appears in the Ramakian and other literary works. There's a nice summary with illustrations at www.thaifolk.com/doc/mekkala.htm.

²⁴ According to Khun Wichitmatra, the original Vachirayan Library edition had อรหัน *arahan*, a mythical monster with a bird's head on a human body, from the Himaphan forest, but the Khurusapha edition added an extra character making it อรหันต์ *arahant*, a Buddhist saint. Since the scene is based on Mount Meru, the site of Himaphan, the original would seem correct (Red:526).

Next was a forest dweller goggling his eyes and trickily pulling faces like a ghost. Many gaur were standing still, with some eating grass in various poses.

Between the rock cliffs was a clearing, made from paper cut neatly and stuck on a board in a combination of green, black, and red, with a surrounding of much nak and gold.

Parts were made as ponds and islands with indented edges painted in colors of unmatched freshness. Other parts were piled up higgledy piggledy in the unusual shape of a crater with a flame.

Looking down, the abyss seemed very deep and murkily black. Above, birds posed with wings outspread. A fish-owl perched on a lush krathum bush.

The base was very neat and clean – a flat area placed with pots of topiary. Nearby was the ritual balustrade with fine jeweled *jamon*²⁵ and ritual umbrellas.

The support for the casket was made as a golden lotus with gold filigree.²⁶ Above, three sharp peaks rose up to three levels. Fragrant garlands of threaded flowers hung down, along with glittering crystal pendants.

Standing screens were painted with the story of Inao. The posts of the arch had brightly shining mirrors. White curtains glittered with fine gold embroidery. Crystal lamps were lined up with rows of candles.

A neat-looking four-cornered dais had boards at the back and lines drawn to indicate the spaces where the monks sat to chant. Handsome mats were laid on the floor.

In the evening, from nightfall, performers of all languages came to present their overtures, all shouting at the same time in a noisy racket.

Then after sunrise around seven, the play stages competed against one another merrily. There were mask plays, dramas, and Mon dances to enjoy. Castanets²⁷ played the rhythms all together. [256]

Puppets were manipulated in shifting poses. Reciters exchanged words from one side to the other. Clowns brought in a peering hunchback. The stages echoed with the sounds of chatter and laughter.

²⁵ จามร, a long-handled standing piece, modeled on a fly-whisk made of ox-hair (RI:305; Mat:227, pix).

²⁶ Coffins with gold filigree were provided by the king for cremations of high nobility in the First Reign (Red: 527).

²⁷ กรับ, *krap*, two short lengths of wood, knocked together to provide rhythm and punctuation in various performance genre, including the recitation of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* (Mat:46, pix).

At the Chinese opera, actors with faces made up magnificently in red and white entered holding spears and pikes. Some rushed to engage in fights. Some returned backstage. Some stood making grimaces.

Nai Jaeng²⁸ came to play *prop kai*, jiggling his shoulders up and down and singing ‘cha, cha.’ He played with Granny Ma, each trying to outdo the other, and making people laugh uproariously.

There were many different performances all together. The people who walked around to watch ranged from gentlefolk to ordinary people and the penurious, jostling shoulder to shoulder.

Young girls from out-of-town came wearing white upper cloths in peeled lotus design²⁹ and powdered faces. **They kept bumping into people and making others laugh. Their faces looked scared and embarrassed at their carelessness.**

Unruly drunks staggered around, catching sight of people and comically challenging them to fight. They abused anyone who got in their way, until they were tied up in the stocks with red eyes.

Many groups of ladykillers circulated around on the look-out. Some had their hair cut handsomely short *en brosse*. They preened themselves and courted the girls by throwing flowers.

In the afternoon came the throwing of alms. People climbed trees, **removed the cloth and placed it down,**³⁰ then picked up the limes³¹ and hurled them in all directions.

Everyone, Khaek and Thai, man and woman, scrambled to catch them in a crowd, chasing, hitting, and elbowing one another. **Some got pushed out the back.**

The strong ones were ready to pounce. They jumped up to grab the limes, and quickly took off. Others squeezed their hand to make them release their grip. Noisily they pushed and pulled, back and forth.

At dusk, they merrily lit the fireworks. Roman candles whizzed and rockets popped from tall towers.³² Shadow players were called over to set up their screens.

A group of Khaek shadow players came in, and everyone looked at

²⁸ Later Khru Jaeng, the author of several chapters of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*. This was probably written before that, when he was known as a *prop kai* artiste. See Damrong’s preface.

²⁹ บัวปอก, *bua pok*, no idea what this is.

³⁰ Not clear what this means. It seems to mean they stripped, but that’s unlikely. Maybe it means cloth to hold the alms.

³¹ Red:527 says this is *kalapaphruek*, fruits of the tree of plenty, so this is some kind of alms-giving ritual we need to undersatand

³² ช้องระฆัง, *chong ratha*, a tall square tower for fireworks (Mat: 728, pix).

them with eyes a-goggle. Their puppets' appearance was grotesque with curly hair, curved noses, and jutting necks like *pret* spirits.³³ [257]

The relatives took one another to sit with the body, all sobbing because they loved her as if to swallow her. All were in a state of collapse as a result of their unrelenting grief.

Thong Prasi and Siprajan got into an argument beside the body. Thong Prasi said, 'I've never seen anything like it. All because you colluded with that Chang.'

Siprajan said, 'He's a rich man. For better or worse, we've depended on him in many ways.' Thong Prasi replied, 'My dear, that's the wrong way. You depend on Chang and your child is chopped dead.'

Siprajan said, 'What rubbish! It was your child that caused the disaster.' Phra Wai called out to his grandmothers to desist. The pair brimmed over with tears again.

Khun Chang knew it was her cremation and could not stay still. But he feared walking straight in would cause trouble. 'Phra Wai might use violence.

His father Phaen would go along with him, and if I made a mistake, things might come to a head. Now I've lost my beloved Wanthong, why go and get myself hurt unnecessarily.'

He ordered his servants to bring a boat in front of the house. He packed monk's robes, alms offerings, and various items of worship to take along.

On arrival he went to Wat Takrai, moored his boat, and entered from the landing. He went to find the abbot and paid his respects. 'Your honor, please help me just once.

I have come for Wanthong's cremation, and I've brought all the requirements along. But the host has been my enemy for many years. I fear he'll attack me and make a scene.

Please help speak to him and settle the matter which is causing the trouble. May I invite you to be **head of alms**. Think of me as your son, your honor.'

The abbot listened to Khun Chang's plea and sighed. 'A cremation ceremony is for merit-making. Why fight and create trouble?

Fine! Leave the matter to me. As the other party was my pupil, I can talk to him.' He got up, went down the stairs, and sought out Phra Wai at the hall for the ceremony. [258]

³³ The description resembles the wayang puppets of the Malay world.

He said to Phra Wai, 'I'm upset. May I ask something of you? You have been in conflict³⁴ with the bald fellow for a long time.

Today you're making merit. It would be better to put an end to this karma as a good deed to make merit for your mother. Just now, he came to make merit.

He's still scared to come in. He fears the host will make trouble. He asked for compassion, and said he would remember your goodness until death.'

Jameun Wai Woranat paid respects and replied as hoped. 'I wish to make merit and I don't want trouble. Let this old matter be delivered up today.

As for what gave rise to my mother's misfortune, now she's dead and gone, let it stop right here. Don't let the karma continue into the future.

Abbot, please tell Khun Chang that if he wishes to make merit, he may. I'll not make any obstruction. It's up to his love and devotion.'

The abbot of Wat Takrai was pleased at this answer, and laughed. He said, 'May you be blessed with happiness and joy!'³⁵ and returned up to his kuti.

He told Khun Chang, 'I went down below just now and explained what you told me. He agreed to end the matter

in order to extinguish the karma for the one who's died. On your side, reconcile and be happy. Don't leave any legacy of this trouble. Let the karma end from now on.'

Feeling incomparably happy, Khun Chang paid his respects to the abbot and said, 'I've made up my mind to be careful. I'll not make you lose faith in me.'

He went down to find Phra Wai who welcomed him in an attitude of peace. Both sides patched up their differences. Khun Chang made merit by presenting robes to the monks.

After ceremonies for three days and presenting all the monks robes, the decorations were taken down. Phra Wai rushed to the graveyard. [259]

He sat in a meditation pose, and composed his mind. When he was focused, he chanted a formula, and blew it onto sesame oil,

³⁴ Guess. อารักคาน

³⁵ สาธุสุขโขโมทนา, *sathu sukho mothana*.

which boiled. He applied it to his body,

clothes, and head. Then he got up and left. He climbed up onto the pyre, and had the body lifted and laid on top of him.

The relatives who had come to attend the cremation brought decoratively carved pieces of sandalwood, incense, candles, and flowers to light the fire. Khun Phaen and other relatives wept in lamentation.

The fire blazed up. The flute, drum, and whole ensemble played. Firecrackers were lit by fuse. Women ran off in confusion.

Some said that Phra Wai was lying in the fire to be burnt and die with his mother for nothing. Others said to them, 'Don't worry. In a moment the fire will die down.'

The coffin and firewood were consumed. Amazingly, Phra Wai came back out. The crowd of people watching in a circle were impressed that he was invulnerable even to fire.

When it was over, Phra Wai changed clothes and put on a new upper cloth. He asked the monks from Wat Takrai to shave his head.

He went into the ubosot, and a monk initiated him into the monkhood. His relatives and servants loudly cried 'Sathu.' Khun Chang wanted to make his devotion. He rushed in to find Phra Wai and said, 'I'll enter the monkhood. Please initiate me as a novice.' Phra Wai said, 'I can't. I've just entered myself, and I don't know the chants.'

Khun Chang left Phra Wai and went to pay respects to Luangta Nu. 'Please show me consideration, your honor. Please initiate me as a novice.'

Luangta Nu looked at Khun Chang. 'You still have a little bit of hair, devotee. And if we tonsure you, you still have no triple robe. Go and have your head shaved and bring a triple robe.'

Khun Chang got the robes and had his head shaved. Holding the robes with his hands in wai, he went in, opened his mouth, rolled his eyes and cried 'uka.' Then he trembled with nerves and mumbled. [260]

He got everything mixed up, and could not remember. 'Please tell it to me, Luangta Nu. I've never "uka" before. Please help.' He raised the triple robe to hide his face, and followed the recitation.

He put on the robes, rolled the upper one on his shoulder, took the precepts, and came out. He stayed in the kuti at Wat Takrai for three nights, then disrobed and went to Suphan.

After Wanthong's cremation was over, Phra Wai joyfully went to stay in the monkhood for seven days. After disrobing he went to

attend on the king.

In the evening, the king, famous in continents large and small, came out to the audience hall of victory. Phra Wai prostrated.

‘My liege. Dust under the royal foot. Let me make an offering for the king’s merit. I’ve entered the monkhood following the ceremonies for my mother.’

The king smiled and laughed. He joined his hands in wai and said, ‘May you be blessed,’ and presented cloth to Phra Wai.

He thought about matters on the frontier. ‘How is your father, Khun Phaen? I had him govern Kanburi. Why is he still here? Go and talk to him, Wai.’

Jameun Wai Woranat returned home and spoke to Khun Phaen. ‘The king has instructed you

to go and live in Kanburi. Suppose something was to happen on that frontier....’ Khun Phaen understood, and so looked for an auspicious day.

He prepared incense, candles, and flowers for paying respects to the king. Then at dusk, he became concerned,

and so went to talk to Thong Prasi. ‘I’ve been worried for some time that the king would have me go to Kanburi.

Wai went to audience this morning, and the king commanded exactly that. I’m terribly concerned about you, getting older. If I go, you’ll be upset. [261]

I’m also worried about Jameun Wai. My heart feels burned with fire. Just my concern for you is boundless. I want to ask you to go with me.’

Thong Prasi listened with tears falling. She thought quietly then said, ‘I’m not against this at all. You’ve no choice because you fear royal authority,

But if I go along with you, I’ll be very concerned about Wai. Being here alone, he’ll be lonely and in low spirits – orphaned in every way.

My heart is split between my concern for my son and my concern for my grandson. I don’t know which way to go. I think I must stay with Wai. If he has nobody, his tears won’t stop trickling down.

Since his mother died, the sadness has not left him. His father leaving too will make things worse. But if I stay here, I’ll miss little Chumphon.’ She sighed wearily from indecision.

‘Oh lord and master of your mother! Have a care for an old person. Don’t make me hurt and bathed in tears. Please let me have Chumphon, can you?’

When I feel heavy-hearted, I'll be able to look at the face of my little grandson and it'll help to dispel the gloom. Kaeo Kiriya, please don't miss him. Have a care for me. I wai you.'

Her mother-in-law's words threw Kaeo Kiriya into confusion. She would miss her dear son, and felt sorry for him being parted from his mother's warm flesh.

But if she refused the request, she feared it would make her mother-in-law angry. So she steeled herself and said, 'As you wish. If you want to take him, then let that be the case.'

With these words, she got up and took leave, with tears flowing and misery deepening. As evening turned to night, she took her child to suckle and put to sleep.

'Oh dear, jewel of mother's eye. I'll be far apart from you and miserable.' She hugged her child, crying and not sleeping until the rising sun brightened the sky.

Khun Phaen woke and came out to wash his face. He ate, changed clothes, called his servants, and went off to the palace. [262]

The mighty king, illustrious, excellent, and sublime, commanded Khun Phaen, 'Proceed to Kanburi

to look after government affairs, take care of the capital's frontier, and inspect the forest outposts. Go well, and have no trouble.'

Khun Phaen took the royal blessing and put it on his head. The king returned inside immediately. Khun Phaen came home and gave orders to the servants to prepare food supplies.

Kaeo Kiriya and Laothong found everything needed. They arranged elephants to carry it all, and carts to accompany them.

At dawn on Sunday, a highly auspicious and bright day, Khun Phaen took Kaeo Kiriya and Laothong to take leave of his mother.

Thong Prasi was pounding betel. She dropped the pestle with a bang, and stared in a daze of grief. She mumbled blessings through her tears. 'May none of you three have sickness.

May your ages stretch to ten thousand years. May you be eternally hale and healthy, and obtain what you desire. May you have a thousand children, one a day. Little Chumphon, come over here.

Why are you crying to go with your mother? Don't you fear the macaque³⁶ and tukkae in the forest? Stay with grandmother and I'll

³⁶ ลิงแสม, *ling saem*, long-tailed or stump-tailed macaque.

give you a doll, and buy sweets and oranges³⁷ to eat.’

Kaeo Kiriya grieved over her beloved child. She felt heart-broken. She writhed around with floods of tears flowing down. She turned her face to talk to the child, feeling forlorn.

Khun Phaen hugged her gently in consolation. ‘Where will all this weeping and wailing get you? The journey isn’t so long. Whenever you think of him, then come.’

Kaeo Kiriya controlled her emotions. She held her son in her arms and passed him to the grandmother. She was so concerned she was reluctant to walk away. Her tears streamed down.

Khun Phaen gave instructions to Meun Wai and his two daughters-in-law. He brought Skystorm and handed it to Meun Wai. He drew a yantra on the palm of his hand, [263]

put his palm against Phra Wai’s face and forehead, and gave a blessing. Phra Wai inclined his head with joy, wai-ed to accept his father’s blessing, and paid respects to Khun Phaen’s feet.

Soi Fa and Simala wai-ed their husband’s father sadly. Tears welled up and they sobbed some more. Both grieved and wept.

Kaeo entrusted Phlai Chumphon to their care. ‘Both of you please look after him. Teach him what’s right and wrong. Don’t have prejudice or disliking.’

They mounted the elephants. The two wives each rode a female elephant, and Phra Kanburi rode Phlai Jamlong. Servants and phrai followed in a crowd.

The jumble of cases and baskets swayed back and forth. Men raised their loads and staggered along, weaving unsteadily. The troop went straight into the forest, and admired the fine trees along the way.

Clumps of lush dense thicket. Budding leaves. Sprays of flowers blooming aloft. *Samo thale*,³⁸ *pheka*³⁹ and *khanang*.⁴⁰ An egret flew to perch on a *phayom*.

A dove settled on a *khoi* and cooed. Carpenter bees swarmed around the fragrant flowers of a *pradu*. Sandal fruit were so plentiful

³⁷ ส้มซ่า, *som saa*, a variant with a bulge, bit like a pear. No idea of name. Dix don’t help.

³⁸ สมอทะเล, *samo thale*, *sapium indicum*.

³⁹ เพกา, *oroxyllum indicum*, 626 in Tree.

⁴⁰ ขานาง, *homalium tomentosum*, Tree:65.

the branches were bowed down low, and they happily picked them.

Many animals ran around the forest, darting through the undergrowth. Kaur bounded away in all directions. Big tigers paced along in a crouch, looking around,

intent on catching a young kaur. They pounced, one on one. The tiger swiped its paw, sunk its teeth, and hung on while the blood flowed. The kaur called out, and people went towards the spot.

The tiger took fright, abandoned the gaur, and ran away towards the deep forest. The kaur, almost mortally wounded, ran off to hide from danger.

They cut a route through the elephant and lalang grass between the hills. The sun dropped towards evening. Birds flew to their nests.

A female gibbon hanging from a tree let forth plaintive, desolate whooping. Khun Phaen thought sadly of his wife. 'If she hadn't died, she'd have come to this forest. [264]

Oh, Wanthong, this looks like the thick forest where I took you after kidnapping you from Khun Chang. I took my darling to play in the water. Seeing this place makes me more sorrowful.

Oh, my Wanthong. When will my beauty return? What karma made in some previous life drew you to this death?

The abbot saw it all. I remember the determining signs. It didn't differ at all. It was exactly as predicted. Your death truly came about.'

He tried to calm his mind down. They drove the elephants forward, slept in the forest, and arrived after three nights in Kanburi.

They unloaded the supplies and released the elephants. Local officials welcomed them noisily. They assigned phrai to cut timber and build a good ruan. They had it fully furnished and decorated.

They lived happily in Kanburi. Khun Phaen conducted affairs fairly and honestly. The household enjoyed happiness and well-being every night and day.