

37: Soi Fa makes a love charm

[III/265]

Jameun Wai was incomparably happy and fulfilled – as bright and cheerful as the moon. His taste for love did not diminish one day or night.

But Soi Fa tended to be moody. If she got less attention, she would sob. If her husband came to sleep with her, she swallowed every spoonful. But if he missed a night, she became gloomy.

A young man with two wives tends to lose vigor, and wives tend to compete over him. So rivalry arises between them, particularly if one makes matters worse by provocation.

Simala was generally wreathed in smiles because her husband loved her. As a result, Soi Fa got very worked up. But she hid it out of fear and respect for Thong Prasi who would not spare anyone, son or wife.

Simala controlled her feelings like a tiger hiding its claws. But if provoked, she would flare up. If another person crossed her, she would make a big thing like a flaming fire. If the other stayed quiet, she would pounce.

In the afternoon on the day when the trouble arose, Phramoen Wai along with Phlai Chai Chumphon were relaxing in the sitting hall, comforted by a cool wind.

Chumphon crawled up holding a chess board. ‘Will you play chess with me? If I lose, I’ll let you pull my eyebrows. You say what you’ll do if you lose.’

Phra Wai said, ‘If I lose to you, I’ll have them make sweets for you. Little *khanom bueang*¹ pancakes are delicious.’ He promptly gave the order.

Soi Fa and Simala said, ‘Yes, sir!’ They got busy lighting the fire, and putting on skillets.² They cracked eggs, and added some good sweet sugar, flour, and chopped shrimps.

Simala spread the batter very thin, and scooped the pancakes onto a plate for serving. Soi Fa was frustrated by her lack of skill. She added too much flour and spread the batter too thick.

Phlai Chumphon said, ‘Auntie Soi Fa makes pancakes as thick as *baengji* waffles!’³ Phra Wai retorted, ‘Thick ones are good.’ Thong

¹ Small pancakes, filled with a sweet or savory filling, then folded. A specialty of the central area, hence Soi Fa’s lack of skill in making them.

² Actually the *kata* is earthenware. Not sure of the right English.

³ A deep-fried pancake made of glutinous rice, coconut, salt, and sugar [Iam].

Prasi said, 'I never heard such a thing. [266]

The Lao make pancakes different from the Thai. Theirs are something like boiled frogs. Folded they look like frog's legs.' Phlai Chumphon shook with laughter.

Simala shot a sidelong glance. Even the servants could not stop themselves smiling. I-Mai⁴ called out, 'How shameful! I forgot. I thought we were making *khanom krok*.'⁵

Chumphon shouted, 'You keep correcting yourself. Before long it'll turn into *ho mok*!'⁶ Soi Fa shook with anger. She knocked over the flour, banged down the skillet, and flounced into her ruean.

Thong Prasi shouted, 'You pestilential Lao! What a racket, you mangy dirty bitch! Throwing flour around to mess up the whole ruean. Breaking a skillet into pieces. You evil Lao!'

Soi Fa heard her mother-in-law's scolding. She was angry almost to weeping. Simala put out the stoves and went inside. Chumphon went into his grandmother's ruean.

At nightfall, a refreshing breeze made Phra Wai feel frisky and ardent. A bright moon floated through the clouds. He was excited by thoughts of Simala.

A fresh fragrance wafted from the pots of *phuthachat*⁷ flowers. His heart was overcome with sensual feelings. He walked into Simala's room,

and sat close to her. He hugged her gently and tried to excite her passion. He extinguished the bright light of the lamp, and asked her to lie down.

Simala said, 'I'm shy. Lots of people are still awake.' Phra Wai soothed her, 'Don't worry. My love is as hot as a raging fire.'

Simala said, 'Tst! So hot-headed. The sun hasn't set yet. Kids are still awake all over the city. It's easy making pancakes with your mouth.'⁸

Soi Fa caught the mention of pancakes, and understood that Simala was gossiping about her. She ached with anger throughout her lungs and stomach. She flared up like gunpowder touched by fire.

⁴ Soi Fa's servant, who here takes it on herself to try to protect her mistress.

⁵ Another sweet made with a batter of flour and coconut milk, poured into the dimples on a special skillet.

⁶ Usually fish or seafood mixed with coconut milk and spices, wrapped in banana leaf, and steamed. It's used here because of the rhyme.

⁷ พุทธรักษา, *phutthachat*, *jusminum auriculatum*.

⁸ Meaning, it's easy to sweet-talk. The reference to pancakes doesn't work in English but is necessary to the story.

She called out, ‘Miss Pancake Maker is good at raising issues to show off to her husband. Miss Pancake Maker is good at spreading things around, I fear. It’s all over but she stirs it up again. [267]

My, my! I don’t try to improve the taste so the result’s all messy, not scrumptious at all. One pancake comes out as big as an arm. Husband doesn’t get thrilled and ask for more.’

Simala said, ‘Oh my god! I get beaten up for nothing, oh dear me. The old itch remains as itchy as ever. Pandan bushes look beautiful but by nature they have thorns.

On the canal bank, the bush becomes a stump. The boats going up and down have to scrape past it. Pity! Did I say something? It’s not right to get worked up and jump on my neck.

Hornets are known to be as fierce as fire. I don’t want to get into a hornets’ nest. This clever talk is all very well. It’s like a stump that gets in the way of boats –

like the flotsam and jetsam that floats around in a marshy pool. It gets into everything, like a dose of salts.⁹ I’m sick of people talking so much that the saliva flows with betel.’

[Soi Fa] ‘Yes, I’m a thorny pandan. Whoever paddles a boat carelessly will get scratched. Those who don’t keep an eye out deserve to have their ears almost shattered to pieces.

True I’m the salts found in every dose. I can cure a swollen stomach,¹⁰ reduce a heavy fever. You’d be stopped up and close to death without it.

My formula may not be as food as the farangs’ beeswax. But it makes astringent water that’s very good for anything infected. Mix it with a lump of nut-gall¹¹ and a little cutch,¹² and it’ll close an open wound up tight.

Even if there’s a painful cyst inside, it’ll suck up the itchy oily pus¹³ right down to the liver, and close it up as tight as the surface of the earth.’

⁹ *Diglua*, mirabilite, Glauber’s Salt, hydrated sodium sulfate. Salt which appears through salination of paddy fields, or the fine, white, intensely flavored crystals found at the lower levels of salt-fields. Used in many herbal medicines as an antidote to constipation, sore throat, mouth ulcers, skin ulcers, wounds.

¹⁰ Literally, a rice-barn gut.

¹¹ *Benkani*, a growth which appears on the leaves of an oak (*quercus infectoria*) as a result of eggs laid by the gall-wasp (*cynips tinctoria*). Used for ink and medicines.

¹² *Si siat*, black cutch, catechu, a dark extract from acacia catechu, rich in tannin.

¹³ นอง ไทน์, *nong nai*, literally pus-thorn, near homophone and maybe alternative spelling of นอง ใน meaning gonorrhoea, but more likely a pun (since correct spelling of gonorrhoea appears a few lines down).

Phramoen Wai liked this answer and was bent over with laughter. 'Eh, you got so het up over sweets that it finishes up with nut-gall!

The farang formula is disgusting. They grind it up to put on boils. If you had a wound infected with pus, would you try it, Soi Fa?'

Soi Fa cried out in reply, 'I don't know what you're saying. I don't have any wound, and I don't have to study formulas. [268]

If you get the clap,¹⁴ use Simala's medicine. It'll cure it. Her medicine's been good for a long time. As for me, I'm afraid of Thai formulas.'

Grandmother Thong Prasi heard the racket and could not stay still. She opened the window, looked out, and called, 'What's this about medicine formulas, young Soi Fa?

Oh, you're Lao, so Lao! Why are you so hurt? So talkee-talkee you seem to know about everything. I've never known what medicine is for what.

People sitting around are hollow-eyed from having to listen to you – even louder than the castanets of Jao To. How come the husband can sit and listen quietly without concern?

What's up Jameun Wai? Why don't you go to catch shrimps at the Maeklong and hawk shrimp paste? Aren't you ashamed about the neighbors? Still want two wives, you department of pus?'

Soi Fa's face fell. 'Grandmother is taking sides. One person scolds and the next person joins in. The wind blows but has nowhere to go.

Why does the water not flow down to the lowland, but instead flows so much uphill.¹⁵ Oh dear!' Thong Prasi said, 'Hmph! Making insinuations. This Lao mouth is too much!

You're making such a racket, you rude Lao, it fills the whole house, you busted beam. I'm fed up with you, you seven hundred dogs, you're past loving. Just a tricky, noisy Lao hillbilly.'

Hearing her grandmother's scolding, Soi Fa bent her head and fell onto her pillow.¹⁶ Thong Prasi trumpeted, 'Such a frail flower!' Tired from the shouting, she fell asleep and snored.

The sun's chariot loomed up, and dawn brightened all the

¹⁴ Gonorrhoea. The Thai is 'inner pus/infection.'

¹⁵ The high ground is the major wife (Simala), and the low ground the minor one (Soi Fa).

¹⁶ Note that the participants in this argument are not face to face, but are in separate rucan, shouting at one another.

continents of the world. Cocks crowed, and birds called.

Tailorbirds and weaverbirds chattered. Crows swooped, calling out noisily. Simala opened her eyes and washed her face. She arranged things for her husband

She placed the bowl ready for him to wash his face, powder and make-up articles, mirror, and comb. She brought a change of clothes carefully arranged on a tray. Then she hurried out to call the servants. [269]

‘The sun’s up already. Wake up, kids. Why are you still asleep?’ The servants got up and quickly washed their faces. They went into the kitchen, lit the fires, and prepared all the food.

I-Moei got up and called out, copying her mistress. ‘Hey! Don’t sleep late, or you’ll get thumped,’ Simala said, ‘You dumb girl! I’ve never seen a servant who apes her mistress.’

Phra Wai woke up and came from the bed. He took the bowl and washed his face to get the sleep out of his eyes. He combed his hair, powdered himself, got dressed, then walked out in front of the ruan.

A tray was ready, and he sat down to eat. Servant girls crouched and crawled all around. Simala gave the instructions. Soi Fa looked bitter and said nothing.

At the time for the morning entry into the palace, Phra Wai ordered clothes brought. He changed his lower cloth, left the house, and went to the inner palace.

Servants walked behind him, overflowing the road. Other people coming and going got out of the way out of respect for Phramoen Wai’s status. He enter the Chakhaphat throne hall.

When the golden light lit up the jeweled spire and illuminated the whole earth, the king,¹⁷ upholder of Ayutthaya, the crown of monarchs,

walked out to the golden audience hall, like a god-king in his heavenly palace, accompanied by heavenly maidens. The curtain was drawn to reveal the king

who sat on the jeweled throne under a lofty and majestic white umbrella. Conch, horn, gong, and fiddle played together melodiously.

All the nobles prostrated, wai-ed, and waited crouching to respond to the king’s orders. The king roared like a lion. ‘What’s in Chinaman Thong’s petition?’

¹⁷ Here given the unusually elaborate title, Jakkarakrit Visanuwong, wheel of Krishna from the lineage of Vishnu. Jakkarakrit is an old Indic royal title, which also appears in Thai literature as the grandfather of Unarut. (Red:534)

Phraya Rak responded to the king, ‘My liege. The matter of Chinaman Thong. In the past he asked a mother for her daughter’s hand. The mother consented, and he had already taken her to his ruean.

Chinese Thong went to her five times, but Amdaeng¹⁸ Sang did not consent, and acted aggressively. He wrestled with her and she abused him unnecessarily shamefully in front of the neighbors. [270]

Hence he lays charges in the petition to be judged right or wrong. If he is not honest, he offers his life. May the mighty king have mercy.’

The king, ruler of the world, smiled and laughed. ‘This evil Jek can’t talk with her. The wife just scolds him, and he lays charges. I want none of this.

Maybe in China, he can lay charges. Kick him out of the court.’ Then the king made enquiries on every **department**,¹⁹ and was well pleased with government business.

On completion, he walked from the splendid jeweled audience hall up into the inner residence in a joyful mood.

The officials of the various departments came out. Some went to sit in the court on government duty. Those who were free returned home.

Phra Wai Woranat was happy to have finished his work. He left the inner palace and went straight home.

Soi Fa woke when the sun was shining brightly. She felt angry as if about six fires were burning in her breast,

with flames raging like a fierce tiger possessed by a spirit stalking its prey.²⁰ She waited around, spying through a gap to see Phra Wai leave his ruean.

Then she stamped down onto the terrace and shouted loudly to call the servants. ‘Why are you hiding your heads in your rooms so I have to call you? Why isn’t I-Moei here? Where’s she skulking?’

Just cuddling from early evening until late, wallowing shamelessly in lust. Floating your face and flaunting your figure like a dancing

¹⁸ Title for a commoner woman.

¹⁹ รุาน, *rua ngan*, boundary of duty/work. Gussed, and needs checking.

²⁰ Belief that a tiger which has eaten a human will be possessed by that person’s spirit, with the result that he appears to other people in human form, and that he wants to eat more human flesh (Red:689).

swan. You should be chopped to pieces like a fish!

What's the problem about getting up in this house? Last night, a tray and bowl were left out. They were knocked over and broken to pieces by some black cats biting one another.

They made a mess walking on the roof, knocking down the thatch, and making the bolts slip and shake. You sleep so well you didn't chase them away. Ai-Sijan let loose the horses and donkeys, [271]

who chased around bashing into the pillars and almost shaking the house down. The water jars were shaking and rattling, but you were just billing and cooing.

You saw nothing and you heard nothing because the two of you were sitting, fondling and moaning all the time, so happy you could stand and leap at the same time. You oily-eyed lot are insatiable.'

I-Mai heard the insinuations in her mistress' scolding. She played up to her mistress by keeping up the thread and wagging her tongue about everything. 'I woke late because I was happily lost in dreams.

I dreamt that Rahu, who looked as big as an arm, grabbed the moon and swallowed it.²¹ I opened my eyes and didn't know what was happening. Something was burning as bright as a row of paperbark²² torches.

Then mistress called me and startled me. I was moaning out of pity for the lovely moon. I didn't know whether Rahu would shit or spit it out, or keep it swallowed until the next night.'

I-Moei listened to I-Mai. She felt so hurt and ashamed for her mistress that her breast seemed to have been poked with fire. 'All this spitefulness is evil.'

So she called out, 'Hey, I-Mai! Where's this Rahu as big as an arm? The mistress scolds and now the servant joins in! I've never heard of people dreaming in the middle of the day.'

Simala called, 'Hey, Moei! I didn't ask you, so don't bite back with these loud-mouthed insinuations to play up to your mistress. **You quiver like the post for a fishnet.**²³

Why are you shouting so much. Is it your business to get in the middle? You're like a bramble blocking the road, you third-rater. I wasn't asking you so don't create an issue by getting involved.'

²¹ The traditional explanation of an eclipse is that the god Rahu is swallowing the sun or moon.

²² เสม็ด, melaleuca cajuputa/leucadendra, cajuput, paperbark, milk-wood, swamp tea.

²³ โพงพาง, *phongphang*, a bag net.

Soi Fa heard and felt hurt and needled as if stuck with a thorn. She rushed out of her room roaring. ‘Yes, I’m a thorn in the fence, you pet poppet.

Stop complaining for everyone to see. You quiver like a dancer, a real expert. Nobody can say anything without you badmouthing back. The pillar in a wihan isn’t as sturdy as your pillar.

I’m a toad that’s fallen in a pond. Go on and stab me, I won’t prevent you. It’s time for some peace and quiet. Please powder your face, float your fair face, and rule the palace. [272]

Truly it’s you who is the post for a fishnet. Even though you dodge around, you seem to get hit very often. You’re so good at pleading and inviting pity. You babble like a bulbul and never dry up like a mud snail.²⁴

Simala sit listening quietly. ‘See. Karma catches up with one so easily. This badmouthing isn’t right. You’ve got so used to it, you keep doing it.

What a pity. I didn’t badmouth you even a little bit, so why do you abuse me? It’s not right. It’s true as you say, I’ve been quivering since yesterday. An itch won’t go away unless you cure it.

Get the pillar of an ubosot, pillar of a wat, and ram it in! Why not choose to play as one likes? If he comes, he’ll grab me, and take me into the room to cure the itch for a couple of nights.

The issue arose because of the sweets yesterday evening, and flared up until late at night. The horse and the donkey created chaos, reduced everything to firewood. A little bit of water got turned into crashing waves.

Oh, whose heart wouldn’t feel hurt? You’re so good at picking and scolding. The more I stay quiet, the more you badmouth. Have you finished having a go at me?

Why don’t you be the mistress of the house? Anyone in need will have to come crawling to you. Don’t stamp everything to pieces, even the shadows. I’m not the one who’s a minor wife because a city fell.²⁵

Soi Fa felt mad, as if a kris had been stuck in her throat. She was like a smoldering log that blazes up when some kindling is added.

She clapped her hands, shook her head, and laughed uproariously.

²⁴ *Jupjaeng*, salt water edible gastropod, cerithidea obtusa, obtuse horn shell, horn snail, mud snail, blunt creeper. 3-5cm long spiral shell, especially found in mangroves clinging to roots. The image is that this shell gurgles in the water.

²⁵ Meaning the fall of Chiang Mai, which resulted in Soi Fa being taken to Ayutthaya.

She hitched up her lower cloth, scratched her arse, and bounded forward in long strides. Trembling, she wagged her finger in Simala's face, raised her voice, and shouted.

'Hey, I'm the one that quivers, all over. That's why he can't leave my room. I'm not going to drag him away from you. I'll let you keep him for a while.

It's true. I'm a prisoner-of-war in this city. But let's not talk about a story that's spread far and wide. About an army turning up, and – baboom! – that evening there's a scandal in the house.²⁶

When the army came home, it had a prisoner-of-war too. You're so good at covering things up. It's not worth teaching you about preserving one's virginity. When night falls, you move in yourself.' [273]

Simala also felt mad, as if hit a hundred times with a stick. 'You're good at floating your face and merrily making fun. You address me without respect.²⁷

You have a loose mouth, good at sarcasm and gossip. You deserve to have your face slapped. If our husband doesn't want to keep me, I don't care. How much he canes me is up to my merit.'

Soi Fa stamped forward, tightening her breastcloth and tucking up her hair. Chumphon ran up, and tried to pull her away. Soi Fa pushed him. He span round and fell down a gap in the floor.

Phlai Chumphon pulled his leg out of the gap, his face pale. Simala screamed in distress. Thong Prasi ran up trembling and shouting wildly. 'I'm dead!'

Coming close, she asked Simala, 'Did the little fellow break his leg?' Phlai Chumphon wept, covered with blood. Soi Fa stood speechless.

Thong Prasi wagged a finger in her face and shouted, 'You creep! You bully me a lot, and now you hurt my grandson too. Yet you're still floating your face and laughing enough to show the tendons in your neck.

You're like a *tamyae* itchy vine that goes around stinging people. You shout at people until they get exasperated. You carry your head high like a chameleon,²⁸ you cheeky face. You've been dancing around like someone possessed from yesterday until now.

You're like a tusker in must, wildly goring a wall until it collapses,

²⁶ Referring to Phlai Ngam's escapades with Simala in Phichit in chapters 28 and 31.

²⁷ Literally, you use *ku*, *eng*, forms of I and you which are intimate rather than formal.

²⁸ กิ้งก่า, *kingka*, tree lizard, chameleon. They tend to stand with their neck stretched and head slightly cocked.

though its own tusks are broken and trunk crushed. Terrible! I'll slap you down, you evil woman.'

Grandmother's scolding made Soi Fa's temper worse. Her mouth itched to let rip to the full. Instead she burst into tears and wailed.

'It's true. I'm an elephant in must. You all club together to shout at me so easily. I'm alone with no brothers or sisters. Thump me to your heart's content.

Your grandson ran up, grabbed my hand, and pushed and pulled me with no respect. When he fell down a gap, you blame me. Did I ask him to run up to me?'

Thong Prasi shouted, 'You Lao hillbilly! You make such a racket. I saw you push the child over with my own eyes, but you're talking as if I'm trying to shift the blame onto you. [274]

You – oh yes – you're so good, really, really good. You dance as if you had a band playing, as if you were trembling under possession by a spirit. Who is it – *pho luang*?²⁹ You canal mouth!

When Phra Wai entered the house, he heard the loud sounds of quarrelling and the voice of Soi Fa shouting. He walked up to the central hall.

Soi Fa was deep in argument with his grandmother. She turned around and her mouth fell open in embarrassment. She feared she would be found at fault. Her whole body stiffened, and her fierceness evaporated.

Phra Wai stood glaring. The sight of Soi Fa made him depressed. His anger was rising, and his attempt to choke it back just made it worse, like fire or poison.

He asked his grandmother, 'What's happening here? The racket is shaking the whole ruan. What were you arguing about just now? Who caused this rumpus?'

Grandmother called out, 'I'm totally fed up. Has the spirit possessing her gone yet? She dances around, floating her face, putting on such an act. If you blow the flute, I'll beat the drum.

She dances and prances like old **Bunjan** playing in the mask-play. She has a bash at everyone she meets, like a dugout boat blocking a canal.

First, she had an argument with Simala, and came running and shouting up to the door of her room. Chumphon stopped her, and

²⁹ Nowadays this would mean the village headman. But perhaps at that time it mean an ancestor spirit.

she burst on him so he fell down a gap in the floor and hurt his leg.

This happened because King Chaiyachet³⁰ wanted some sweets, and round-eyed Suwincha began shouting unstopably. She danced around the terrace, hitting and stabbing. I'm just a little finger that got chopped to pieces.

I don't know what they were arguing about before. Ask Simala, grandson. Your women are tedious. Before long, you'll be the same.'

Phra Wai asked immediately, 'What happened, Simala, to reduce the house to such a noisy mess? What was the quarrel about?

Why don't you think? You don't have even a little shame. If I don't complain, you'll get worse. Just tell me who was in the wrong,' [275]

Simala replied, 'The racket started after you left the house. I was still sitting in my ruan. She came out of her room and began shouting wildly.

All kinds of complaints and abuse. Too much, intolerable, nothing like it. Complaining about dogs and cats, all muddled up together. Saying some bowl and betel tray had been knocked over and broken.

Something about driving in the pillar for an ubosot, a wat. Just hammering on about nothing. Then her servant started joining in with her mistress. Some sarcastic insinuation about an eclipse of the moon.

Then about going to war and taking someone prisoner in a bedroom. All very spiteful and abusive. Only when she saw you come did she stop hurling it around. Her mouth is intolerable.'

Soi Fa felt stabbed with thorns. 'Struth! Your wife's good at telling all kinds of stories. True, your love for me is fading. She has the advantage so she can sound off happily.

I'm just a single lonely clove of rotten garlic. Nobody seems to have heard what she shouted at me, but they all pile in from every direction to bury me. When I argued, she tried to slap me.

I was telling I-Mai off in my ruan. It had nothing to do with Simala. I didn't do anything, and got attacked on conjecture. Over a year ago, the astrologer predicted this misfortune.'

[Phra Wai] 'My, my! You're easily hurt. You make a lot of noise. Others were talking and you butted in. I know everything about your kind.

³⁰ See note on Chaiyachet in chapter 23. Thong Prasi is using the names of characters from this drama for effect. There is no scene in the drama about sweets.

Even to my face, you dare to raise your voice. Behind my back, who'll argue with you? You're easily hurt but you like picking on others. Nobody can match your wiliness.

Even when a child tries to stop you, he ends up hurt. You snap at your elders without respect. You're cruel and stupid – a loudmouth who shouts at people with respect for nobody.

Simala has helped you a lot, but you still wag your finger in her face and mock her. Why should I keep you any longer?' He picked up a stick and went for her,

thwacking her so she was marked all over her back and shoulders. Soi Fa ran to escape in panic. 'I apologise to your wife just this once.' [276]

Simala's anger turned to pity. She rushed forward and grabbed the stick. 'Why are you hitting her. It'll leave marks.' Soi Fa ran off to her inner ruan.

She closed and bolted the door, and lay down sobbing and writhing. She ached all over. She wept and wailed as if to die.

[Soi Fa] 'Oh have pity on me. When father brought me to present to the king, I didn't think I'd be beaten and scolded as if to die. This is terribly shameful.

Father and mother are far away. Who can relieve my suffering? I hoped to depend on my husband like throwing myself on a fire, but he tramples me to pieces like chopping fish.

Oh my golden bo, your darling's shelter. How come despite your shelter the sun is blazing? The branches are broken and the leaves wilt. It remains only to kill me, my lord.

At first, I thought it would be eternal. I didn't know you were no better than someone carrying kapok baskets. I think my life will crumble into dust. My merit is used up and I'll pass away.

I feel I'm floating in the middle of an ocean. It's too far to swim to the shore. I clung to a big post, but it broke. I have to hide away like a bedbug.

Oh, my golden scales, why are you tilting to one side? Who can your wife rely on in a time of trouble? All my family are far away in another city.

How can I let them know? I've seen everything to the ends of the yellow sky. Now I'm in difficulty, who'll straighten things out?

There are only bad people who all act the same. If they saw me on the point of drowning, they'd push me down further, so I flailed around until life departed. I think it's too much to expect to survive.

I'm like a jet gemstone fallen from its setting and shattered into dust. Everything looks black. How many years before it'll return to a setting?'

She grieved with a troubled heart. Her anger tended to increase rather than abate. She began to think of taking revenge on Simala. Her tears flooded down as her restless mind prevented any sleep. [277]

Late at night, she had an idea. ‘That teacher of mine is very good. For a long time, he has not come by. Is he still around or has he gone wandering off?’

I must find out what he’s staying in. If I can find Elder Khwat,³¹ he’ll be what I need, no problem.’

She grieved until the third watch. She lay in deep thought with her left hand across her forehead, and her mind restless and anxious, until she finally fell asleep.

The golden light of a brilliant sun brightened the sky. Soi Fa woke feeling ever more angry,

depressed, and vengeful because Phra Wai had believed Simala when she incited him to almost kill her.

‘I’m furious about what she told him, and how she sung her own praises to the hilt. If I stay quiet, this will be repeated until I’m destroyed, left to be blown away on the wind.

I’m like a fishing boat³² with a pirate sail. **However the wind blows, I keep moving, heading through the waves without sinking, even though the sail is wrecked.**³³

I can bear everything and keep on fighting, to find what will be or not be. But I need a good person to serve as pilot, and point out the direction across the sea.

Elder Khwat is clever, super-human. I should take him on as my pilot. I’m het up because she wronged me first. This time I’ll take revenge rather than putting up with it.’

With this thought, she called, ‘Hey, I-Mai! Come here quick. I’m very hurt because things are not right. If you want to run over to my accuser, that’s up to you.

What are you thinking in your heart? Have I lost out or not, I-Mai? Are you going to take sides with Simala? Don’t just listen

³¹ In chapter 32, the king of Chiang Mai left this man in Ayutthaya to help Soi Fa. In Thai, his title ๓๓, *then*, is rooted in a Pali word for a thief. It can be used for a monk in breach of the precepts. It is used earlier in the poem for an old man who stays in the wat and feeds off the offerings. But it is also a homophone in Thai of the word ๓๓, meaning an elder, especially an elder monk. The usage here seems to be a mix of these two meanings. He is an old man and he is addressed by Soi Fa and his own acolyte with words which mean a teacher or monk. But he is clearly not an average monk.

³² ๓๓, *kulai*, a Malay fishing boat.

³³ This whole couplet is obscure and guessed. CHECK

quietly, tell me the truth.’

I-Mai listened with tears trickling down. ‘I’ve been your servant for a long time. Your mother, the queen, raised me in the palace since the time my mother was still a servant. [278]

When you unfortunately had to leave Chiang Mai, I didn’t abandon you but faced up to hardship too. I saw the violence and lack of respect, and my own anger hasn’t gone away for a minute.

If I could, I would’ve helped you yesterday. Even if my back had been caned to death, I wouldn’t have complained. What are you thinking, mistress, about crushing Simala in revenge?’

‘Don’t worry, Mai, I’ve already got an idea how to trample her to dust. My father’s old teacher is very good, just like *jao bu samingphrai*, king of the spirits.

If you want to know who’s good at spirits, it’s him. You want to meet someone, it’s easy.³⁴ You want someone to live, they’ll live comfortably. You want someone to die, they’ll die in front of your eyes.

He’s expert at love charms. Hurry off to find him. Tell him the trouble that’s arisen. If Elder Khwat still has some respect for me, let him not delay.

Tell him to have consideration for King Chiang In, and help me take revenge without fail. I’ll reward him with five tamleung of gold, and the same amount for you.’

I-Mai said, ‘Oh! Don’t say that. I won’t take payment **at all**.³⁵ **Truly the king is important**.³⁶ I’ll take leave immediately.’

She paid respects, got up, and left. She put Thani oil on her head and body. She wore a pretty upper cloth of parrot color,³⁷

a lower cloth of silk woven with a square eye pattern, and a delicate pink bodice. She picked out some excellent fruit to take. She ate her fill and then left.

Elder Khwat, a royal teacher, was formerly at Wat Wiang³⁸ in

³⁴ Probably meaning, if you want to summon up the spirit of a dead person.

³⁵ Guess, *ben yang san*, probably a Lao saying.

³⁶ This is a funny sentence and I wonder if *jao hua*, here and a few lines earlier translated as ‘king’, really means Then Khwat.

³⁷ นกกาฬิิง, assumed to be alternative spelling of กะลาฬิิง, *psittacula finschii*, grey-headed parakeet.

³⁸ There is no wat of this name, but it means the ‘city temple’ and could well refer to Wat Chiang Mai,

Chiang Mai. He was adept in various branches of knowledge, and known throughout the capital for his powers.

When the Thai army invested Chiang Mai, he went to the forest to find magical fluid iron.³⁹ When it came to a battle, the result was not as he hoped because the Thai took the city

and the king of Chiang Mai offered total allegiance. Elder Khwat was disappointed enough to writhe to death. Then when the Lao were swept down to Ayutthaya, the king of Chiang Mai took him along as a companion [279]

because of his belief in the old teacher's knowledge. He retained him to overcome any misfortunes using magical devices so the king would survive any dangers and return home.

When the king of Chiang Mai later returned home but Soi Fa had to stay in the south, the king was very concerned over his child and hence commanded the royal teacher to stay as her companion.

'In case any trouble should arise, you can overcome it. Don't let anyone abuse her. Find a way to behave like an itinerant monk who has come down south.'

Elder Khwat followed these orders. He went to stay in Wat Phraram⁴⁰ for almost one rains retreat.⁴¹ He did not cast off the character of a Lao person from Lanna, and continued to eat rice and drink liquor in the evenings.

He would appear drunk in the ubosot and create trouble until The abbot Phra Phimon⁴² could not tolerate it and said, 'You fake elder, you drunkard, I can't keep you.' He was expelled from the chapter of Wat Phraram,

and so wandered around with Novice Jiw looking for a wat where they could hide and escape their reputation. They eventually arrived at Wat Phraya Maen⁴³

supposedly founded by Mengrai at the foundation of the city in 1296.

³⁹ See note in chapter 16.

⁴⁰ One of the major wat, almost central to the city. According to the Luang Prasoet Chronicle, it was founded in the first reign of Ayutthaya: 'Phra Ram Monastery was first constructed. At that time King Ramathibodi I passed away.' At the start of Trailokanath's reign (1448-), the chronicle states: 'And on the cremation site for King Ramathibodi I, he who had founded the Capital, the King had a holy monastery established, consisting of a great holy reliquary and a holy preaching hall, and he named it the Phra Ram Monastery.' This might mean the wat was expanded, relocated, or something. (RCA: 11, 16)

⁴¹ Monks measure their time in the monkhood by the number of lents or rains retreat periods they have spent. More loosely it just means years.

⁴² According to *Thamniap samonnasak kbrung krung kao*, Phra Phimontham was the title of the abbot of Wat Ramawat, and Phra Thepkawi that of Wat Ramaram. In the Narai reign, a Phra Phimontham, abbot of Wat Rakhang, acted as the king's astrologer. (RCA:286. Red:542).

⁴³ A couple of kilometres further north up Khlong Sa Bua from Wat Takrai. King Phetracha is supposed to have entered the monkhood here; the abbot predicted his future greatness; and Phetracha subsequently restored and embellished the wat. (RCA:321-2, 326, 332, 356-7).

and saw an abandoned kuti by a graveyard. Few monks or novices were around. For want of alternatives, they stayed there. The almsround did not provide them with enough to feed themselves,

but Novice Jiw had a good idea. He went around telling people that his master had knowledge and special powers which the spirits feared. He had cured problems wherever he was.

Men and women, villagers and market people, flocked to consult him. Some asked for amulets, some for medicine, and some for *phrajiat* cloths inscribed with images of the Buddha.

Some had been affected by magic and asked him to counter it by pouring sacral water on their head. In return they offered food which solved their problems of scarcity.

But some days after the midday meal, Elder Khwat still liked to eat rice and drink liquor in the evening. He could not give it up. They had to keep a dog who guarded the stairs and barked to let them know someone had come.

If any evening he had drunk himself drunk, the novice would craftily help his master by saying he was sick and had passed out. Only when he was well, would the novice tell the elder to come out. [280]

Because Novice Jiw knew this fault, he was not afraid that his master would scold him. Because he had fallen in love with knowledge, he stayed with him as a pupil, and they got on well.⁴⁴

That day, Mai turned up in the morning and asked whether the teacher was there. Seeing her, the dogs chased up to surround her, barking fiercely.

Novice Jiw called out, 'Get away, you ghost dogs. Have you come to see me or the teacher?' Mai was timidly trying to get away from the dogs. She called, 'Please help me!'

Novice Jiw shoed the dogs away, grabbed her wrist, and dragged her up the stairs away from them. He used to know her. He raised an eyebrow, narrowed his eyes, and grabbed the tail of her cloth. 'Can I have this? Why not?'

Mai swatted his hand away and said, 'Hey! So a fish that's been scaled⁴⁵ can still wriggle.' Novice Jiw said, 'An anabas⁴⁶ doesn't flinch from anyone. Even when the scales are stripped off the heart is still good.'

⁴⁴ Guess.

⁴⁵ A 'scaled fish' is slang for someone who has entered the monkhood (Red:689).

⁴⁶ *Pla mo*, doctor fish. Known for being very durable, not dying easily (Sup:558).

Mai said, 'Hey, Novice Jiw, **what's this!**⁴⁷ A tiddler⁴⁸ coming to nibble on shit.' She walked into the kuti and found old Elder Khwat sitting cross-legged and reclining.

She sank down, placed the basket, wai-ed him, and said, 'My mistress sent me to see you.' She lifted the basket of fruit as an offering. The novice unloaded the fruit and returned the basket.

Elder Khwat greeted Mai. 'Such a long time. We're like strangers. How come you leave me waiting here every day and night with no enjoyment until I'm old and dilapidated.

You came down from Chiang Mai. Are you well? You look cheerful. Two colors interlaid on your upper cloth. Two lovely full cheeks.

If you were somewhere in Chiang Mai, your ears would be full of ear-rings. Now you've come to the southern city, you're following the Thai. You've let the holes in your ear close up, like a Thai.

What did your mistress send you for? Is she well? Is there any problem, misfortune, or sickness? Does Mai have a husband yet?'

Mai wai-ed teacher Khwat and replied, 'I don't think it's happy to be without relatives. Things are so hard, it's beyond me. Living alone, servant and mistress, is not relaxing. [291]

As for having a husband and child, I'm afraid. I don't go anywhere, not even the market. I can't count cowries like a Thai. I only come out when my mistress sends me.

She and her husband Wai have become very estranged. He believed what Simala told him, and she incited him to scold and beat my mistress like a servant.

Your honor, please help. Bring his soul back without fail. Have him sleep with my mistress and cheer her up. She'll give you five tamleung of gold.'

Elder Khwat laughed. 'Only that! I'll invite Wai's soul to return so he sleeps with your mistress and cuddles her, and this tension will disappear.

On this matter for which she sent you to me, I'll help her over the worry and sorrow. But my own problem is near-fatal. If your mistress is kind, it'll ease matters.

Talking one-on-one and bluntly, if I can cure her sorrow, I'll ask her to let me keep you to be my partner, and steam the rice for my

⁴⁷ *chung ja*, probably a bit of Lao slang. CHECK

⁴⁸ *Pla siw*, a small fish.

midday meal, in place of my pupil.’

Mai said, ‘Hey, teacher Khwat! I’m not willing to talk about having you as a husband. Your eyes are as white as rice water. Vultures come to ask for news every day. Yet you still pressure me.

If you thought about yourself, you wouldn’t want a girl. Do you want to take off the robe and put on a shroud? Ninety years old and toothless. Even female *flies* don’t settle on you.’

Elder Khwat said, ‘I’m old, but I like to admire girls with their fragrant cheeks. I’m an old person, not an overripe fruit. Even if parrots⁴⁹ flock around, I don’t fall.

When can you say a human being has had it? Though I’m old, **I can pull my weight.**⁵⁰ You can’t say I stink of fish yet. I’ve got the strength to work.

I just tend to get tired and short of breath. I have to put down the spade and sit, talk, smoke tobacco, drink some water, have a bite to eat, and so on. When the strength returns, I can keep going until nightfall.

Shift over here, Mai.’ He begged her to come close, grasped his robe, and proffered it to her. ‘Let’s talk straight. **See what this robe is like. With all my heart, truly!**⁵¹

Novice Jiw poked his head round the door and said, ‘Teacher, don’t go talking about having a woman. I told you, it’s not that I’m competing with you. As a rule, I see you lying quietly in the wat.

You’re just making it worse for yourself. It’d be better to leave off talking, and stick to dreaming. The day you went on almsround and tried to flirt with a woman, she just bowed her head and spat.’

Elder Khwat cried, ‘Hey, Ai-Jiw! You’re speaking nonsense, you ugly villain. Wittering on shamelessly. It’s afternoon. Go and find the midday meal, you stupid novice.’

Novice Jiw got up feeling annoyed. ‘I’ll leave you to flirt on your own. Don’t you fear the sin and karma will make a mess?’ Elder Khwat shouted, ‘I’ll beat you, you idiot!

Don’t spin it out, Mai. Ask Soi Fa to come here. Tomorrow the stars are good. Please sneak away so as not cause trouble.’

⁴⁹ นกคอก, *nok hok*, a general term for parrot or parakeet.

⁵⁰ speculative. *phayo oo uai dai*, lift up, cooperate.

⁵¹ Don’t really understand this at all.

Mai took leave. 'I'll come early tomorrow.' She left the wat and walked back. She saw her mistress sitting looking out of a window.

Soi Fa nodded and smiled. I-Mai entered her room tiptoeing carefully. Beaming, she whispered the news. 'I went to find the teacher.

He thinks he can cure the problem for sure. Don't lose heart. He's willing to help. Tomorrow you're to go and speak with him. He'll make it a success.'

Soi Fa was delighted. She lay thinking about achieving her wish. At dawn she got up promptly.

She washed away the dirt, and scrubbed her face smooth and bright. The traces of the beating on her arm made her vengeful. She stroked her back and shoulders, feeling bruised and hurt.

'These wounds hurt, but not as much as my heart does. Unless I have revenge on her, the hurt won't disappear, even though the marks of the cane do. As long as I'm alive, I'll seek revenge. I'm not losing to her.'

She changed clothes and went back into the bedroom, still tending to feel unsettled. She combed her hair, powdered her face, polished her teeth, and put on a two-level sabai. [283]

She passed the betel box to I-Mai and went out. She handed good things appropriate for presents to a trusted slave girl.

When Phra Wai went to audience, she left without anybody noticing anything suspicious. She reached Wat Phraya Maen and happily went up to the kuti.

She sat down, prostrated to the teacher, and presented her many offerings. The servants went to wait in the sala, leaving only Soi Fa and I-Mai in the kuti.

Soi Fa implored the teacher. 'My suffering is more than I can swallow. My husband beat me and shamed me in front of Simala.

She engineered this discord by making up all kinds of accusations, and Wai believed what she said. Now we're estranged all the time. If our eyes meet, he looks away coldly in anger.

Also, Grandmother Thong Prasi stirs up trouble and scolds me relentlessly. Please get me out of this difficulty, teacher. Make Phra Wai come back to sleep with me.'

She took out her purse. 'I'm counting out your fee first. If Wai comes back, don't worry. I'll carry everything over here.'

Elder Khwat sat listening quietly to Soi Fa, and then replied. 'Why suffer? If I do this for you, Phra Wai will become good again within less than a day.'

Saying no more than that, he lit incense and candles, and did the

rite on the spot. He picked up a bronze bowl, and filled it with water. At an auspicious time, he enchanted it,

by holding his breath, and then blowing. The water seethed. Froth and foam bubbled up and overflowed. He passed the bowl to Soi Fa. ‘The time is auspicious. Make your wish immediately.’

Soi Fa happily raised the bowl above her head. ‘May this magic succeed in bringing a grave evil to its end.

Please turn the heart of Phra Wai so he blindly comes to my room, so he no longer yearns for Simala but hates her, so the mantra makes him infatuated with me.’ [284]

After the wish, she washed her hair, and began to brighten up. The gloom disappeared from her face. She talked happily with the teacher.

Then the royal teacher merrily looked at the horoscope. He took beeswax recently used to cover the mouth of a corpse,⁵² and mixed it with ash from a cremation.

He put in letters enchanted, pounded, dyed, and inscribed.⁵³ He blew a formula and then molded two figures, placed side by side. On one he wrote a yantra with the name Simala.

On the other figure he put the name Phra Wai. He put the two with backs together, facing away from each other, inserted thorns all over the bodies, then tied them tightly together.

He wrapped them in a fishtail palm⁵⁴ leaf inscribed with another yantra, and sent Novice Jiw to bury them in the main graveyard. Then he molded figures of Soi Fa and Phra Wai, and placed them on *rak* leaves inscribed with yantra.

He sat chanting a formula and blew it. When it hit the two figures, he turned them to face one another, hugging with limbs intertwined, and fastened them tightly with sacred thread.

‘Bury these figures under the place where you sleep. Within a day, he’ll rush to you.’ He enchanted powder and jan oil mixed with *wan* herbal medicine and spirit oil,⁵⁵

⁵² According to old custom, a corpse’s face would be covered, with a gold plating in the case of a noble, or hardened beeswax then applied with gold foil. This mask would be taken off before cremation, and the beeswax used by spirit doctors as a powerful ingredient (Red:550).

⁵³ This must mean adding something inscribed with a *yan* into the mix, but not obvious what is actually going on. CHECK.

⁵⁴ *Taorang*, *caryota mitis*, a palm with sap that causes itchiness to the skin and blindness if it enters the eyes (Mat:384).

⁵⁵ Oil extracted from a corpse, by various methods. Khun Wichitmatra gives this version. The spirit doctor takes two to three acolytes to the graveyard, puts in stakes around the grave of a newly dead corpse to make a

and handed it to Soi Fa. ‘Go. It’s afternoon. If this is at all effective, tomorrow send Mai to bring a midday meal.’

Soi Fa responded, “No need to be impatient. I ask only that this will fulfill my hopes.’ She took leave of the elder and novice, left the precincts of the wat, and returned home.

At the house, she did everything the elder had ordered. That evening, she lay down on the bed feeling anxious and apprehensive.

Asleep in his room, Jameun Wai had a turbulent dream that Soi Fa came and asked him to go and sleep in her room.

He mumbled blearily in his sleep. He woke and saw Simala at his side. His heart flashed hot as if hit by fire. He turned away feeling repulsion and could not look at her. [285]

The room flickered in the lamplight. Through his drowsiness he saw shadows, and stretched forward to look. A breeze wafted pollen. His heart leapt and he felt a wave of passion.

A bright moon shone. The sky sparkled with a profusion of bright stars. He went over to grab Simala, but when he got close he knew it was the wrong person.

‘I thought it was you. I didn’t realize it was just the shadow of a plant.’ He felt afraid. His skin swelled and his hair stood on end. ‘Am I being possessed by a bad spirit?’ In a trance, he went to Soi Fa’s ruean,

and hid close to the wall, listening quietly. Nothing stirred. Lamps burned brightly. He pushed the door but it stuck half-way. He tapped and waited, looking around.

Soi Fa did not make a sound. She realized the magic’s power was working exactly as the elder had ordered.

‘If he comes, don’t be afraid. See how the royal teacher’s power has affected Wai. Will he explode in rage like before, or be submissive?’ She said, ‘Who’s sneaking around there? Are you spirit or person?’

Aren’t you afraid of my husband, Phra Wai? He’s already thrashed me to pieces beyond what I can bear. Are you the spirit of my grandfather? I’ll make offerings.

sanctified area with sacred thread and yantra cloths at the eight directions. The acolytes dig up the corpse and place it in a sitting position. The spirit doctor sits in meditation pose opposite the corpse, chants a mantra to activate the soul of the corpse, lights a candle and holds it under the corpse’s chin. The oil drips down and is collected in a bowl. This can be dangerous as the spirit doctor may first have to quell a *phisat* in the grave of the corpse. He chants a mantra and the *phisat* comes out as tall as a sugarpalm tree. The spirit doctor must then chant mantras to reduce him to normal human size and quieten him down. If the *phisat* is still too strong, the spirit doctor may die when he applies the candle. The diggers also risk being dragged down into the grave. The process is thus only attempted by very skilled spirit doctors, and the resulting oil is credited with great powers, especially in love magic. (Red:549-50)

Have you come to see me because I was caned? Tomorrow I'll make offerings to feed you. I will, I promise. I'm not telling lies. Don't worry. You can come in my room while I sleep.'

'Oh Soi Fa, my darling. I'm not a spirit come to play tricks. Don't be afraid. Your soul is weak, but don't fret.

You're frightened and confused because on the day you were beaten as punishment, your soul bounded away. I've come to embrace you and get your soul to return to your fair body.

My beauty, please open the door for me. Don't keep the room closed and ignore me. Stop being hurt and sorrowful. Forget about the punishment and lighten up.'

'Is it you? I didn't realize. I didn't think you could come. Aren't you worried about Simala? Did you take leave of her or not? [286]

If she wakes up and can't find you, she'll be hopping mad, my dear. She'll come after her man shouting out loud. Such a pity. **This meeting will come to nothing.**⁵⁶

Please return to her room. Don't get carried away. I'm a bad person not a heavenly maiden – bad in every possible way. Enough! What has happened has happened.

My back is swollen and my whole body smashed. I don't think I can be happy with you. The marks of the stick are all over me. I'm hurt inside and outside beyond what I can bear.

Yet you come to create even more karma. In a moment your wife will come and make a scene. I've been shamed in front of others more than I can stand already. This will create something else for people to rake over in the future.'

'Oh, light of my eye. Don't think I'm like that. I love you as much as my own heart. I haven't stopped loving you for one minute.

I hit you because you were in the wrong. Don't say I did it for nothing because I'm bad. You raised your voice, trumpeted wildly, wagged your finger – and not just for one eyeblink either. I was angry so I beat you.

The cause was your aggressiveness, your wild behavior, and lack of respect for my feelings. I've calmed down now and I'm feeling very merciful. But you still accuse me as if you want to break things off.

Am I wrong to think of the time we were in love? Where will this aggression and anger get us? Please calm down and be less sorrowful. Don't break off the relationship. I'm sincere.'

⁵⁶ Ambiguous. She might be referring to Soi Fa here.

‘Don’t try to soften me up. I’m still angry. This has all affected me very deeply. When I was good, all I got was hatred. The lady put you up to being contemptuous of me.

You keep complaining that I want to break it off. You pick at me without respect. I survived only because of Chumphon. If I hadn’t been able to escape and hide in my room, I’d have breathed my last.

Even then, you grabbed your sword and Simala went on shouting. You scolded and abused me for her to hear. The neighbors must be fed up of listening to all this.

That wasn’t enough. You accused me of quarrelling. You raised your sword to slash my head. You complained and complained to intimidate me because the lady provoked you to do so.

Eh, when you’re kissing and cuddling her, it belittles me. I feel that every morning and night. It breaks my heart. Who could tolerate this? You’ve come here talking a pack of lies and wanting me to forget. [287]

Even if you **file gold for me⁵⁷ to eat**, I wouldn’t be happy. From now on, I don’t want to see you – a man who can’t keep his wife under control, and whose tongue is only good at trickery.

‘Eh? Are these words worth listening to? You like rambling on about matters from the past. Once you’ve raised your voice, you don’t ease off. You started it first, so who are you complaining about?’

I tell you off, but do you restrain yourself? No, you keep stubbornly on with lots of sarcasm and innuendo. The question is: who is trying to break off with who?’

I tell you off, and you just make a bigger, angrier scene. You insist on arguing on and on. I came to see you, but you play games. My love for you is too hot to bear.

I call out to you but my darling won’t open up and receive me, just keeps on complaining until I’m crushed.’ While speaking, he chanted a formula which sprung the locks and bolts.

Soi Fa pushed the door open. ‘Look here, Wai, what’s all this? Forcing you way in will make trouble. In a moment what will be will be.’

‘Tst, my darling! Your eloquence never dries up. My hand is itching for some satisfaction.’ He made as if to grab a stick to beat her.

⁵⁷ File gold to eat?

‘Hit me if you dare. You’re not listening. Why don’t you punch me? Watch out that I don’t scratch and draw your blood.’ She pushed him away, not letting him get near her.

‘Tch! Why are you really so stubborn.’ He took her by the neck, bent her over, and lifted her in his arms onto the bed. He said beseechingly, ‘I won’t hit and hurt you again.

Stop being angry. What are you flailing around for?’ At the same time, he thrust in tune with an inner rhythm. He experienced joy before falling asleep with her.

To north and south, a golden light lit up the sky. The sun shone through the central window. Phra Wai and Soi Fa woke immediately.

They got up from the bed and went together to rinse their mouths. Mai crawled in and set up the betel tray. She caught Soi Fa’s eye and they exchanged a glance. Phra Wai prepared to go to the palace. [288]

He changed clothes, grasped an umbrella, and descended from the ruan. His youthful *thanai* thronged along behind. All the way to the entrance to the golden audience hall, his heart was heavy with thoughts of Soi Fa.

Chaophraya, phra, luang, meun, and khun swarmed into the audience. The king, upholder of the three worlds, was feeling joyful.

He roared like a lion, asking, ‘Phlai Ngam, why are you gloomy? Your face is badly freckled and dark. Why aren’t you happy?

Are your two wives jealously bickering and insulting one another? People with two wives tend to be miserable. You can’t find a single one that’s happy.

Having three or four is better. According to the manual, that’s ecstasy. I say you must watch out. There’ll be trouble in the future.’

Phra Wai bowed his head. Lost in thought, he said nothing. Under the influence of the magic, he felt dull and so did not address his grace.