

### **38: Phra Wai is affected by the love charm**

[III/289]

When Phra Wai left the house, the young Lao, Mai, flashed a broad smile and whispered a question to Soi Fa.

‘Today you seem cheerful. He came last night as planned, didn’t he? Was it as good as before? Myself, I lay worrying and couldn’t sleep.’

Soi Fa smiled and shyly averted her face. ‘His fierceness was gone, you know. I laid into him for a long time, but he didn’t argue back at all. He just tried to placate me and make me feel good.

The monk got rid of the problem. I saw that with my own eyes. He’ll break off with Simala for sure. I’ll row with her in front of Phra Wai and provoke him to cane her to the point of death.’

I-Mai laughed and said, ‘Perfect! Now the lady’s arrogance will disappear. We have the wind in our sails, and that’ll get us anything we desire.’

After the king left the audience, Phra Wai Woranat thought of Soi Fa. Every minute he thought of her and her alone.

Towards Simala, he felt anger and hatred. ‘Will she be jealous?’ He arrived home, went up to the central hall, and found the two wives sitting out there together.

Simala got up with a tray of cloth. Soi Fa pretended to bump into her, stumble, and fall down. ‘Oh, how about that! Look, my dear Wai.

She blocked me with her arm. She spat on my head. She hissed at me with her mouth open dribbling betel spit. She pushed me with her foot for her husband to see.’

Phra Wai was looking the other way and had not seen, but heard the sound of loud voices. He glanced at Soi Fa fallen down beside Simala,

and felt as angry as if fire flamed in his heart. He stood quivering with rage. ‘My, my! This is vicious behavior – pushing her with your foot like a servant. [290]

Did I redeem you for many chang to be a bully? You don’t fear me at all. You hit and spit at will, even more than if I’d got a war slave.’

Simala said, ‘I didn’t do it. Strike a light! My karma is very troubled. She feigned this craftily. She pretended to fall over, then said I kicked her.’

‘Oh! You’re arguing again are you, you trickster. You kick Soi Fa down and then you lie to shift the blame. You big-mouthed, fibbing

villain!

I saw it with my own eyes but you won't admit it. You like twisting words, Miss Sweet-talker.<sup>1</sup> I truly caught you, you unruly tongue. At first, I thought you were good.

On the day you had a quarrel with Soi Fa, you made many, many complaints. You egged me on and pretended to cry until I beat her. But that wasn't enough to satisfy you.

Today you're trying to frame her again. I should rip your flesh. If I don't, you'll get used to it.' He grasped a stick, and chased after her, whacking all over her back. Simala went to hide behind Thong Prasi, who shouted out, 'Don't come here, you loudmouth! He's hitting you because you're not respectful and make such a lot of noise.

You should be tied by your hands and caned to death. He warned you, but you argued back at the top of your voice. And you kicked and bullied young Soi Fa.'

Thong Prasi pushed Simala forward and said, 'Hit her again, Wai.' Chumphon said, 'Please don't, brother.' He came up to shield Simala. Phra Wai attacked again violently,

hitting Simala many times and catching Chumphon with several strokes. Simala ran into her room crying. Thong Prasi danced around.

She picked up Chumphon and shouted loud enough to shake the house, 'Why did you hit my grandson? It's your wives who are having a jealous spat. Why don't you hit them, you idiot?

You're afraid of your wife losing face, you dirty crazy bastard. You're full of shit. You close your ears and close your eyes. You're raving, dumb, useless – drunk on women.' [291]

She tenderly carried her grandson away to bathe him. 'Your back and shoulders look awful, as if scratched by a chicken. That bighead hit you instead of his wife.' She mumbled on through her tears.

She carried Chumphon into her room, and glumly looked at the mess on his back and shoulders. She soothed him, wiped away his tears, and applied casumunar ginger. Then she took him to sleep on the big bed.

At dusk, Phlai Chai Chumphon was lying on the bed with his grandmother, lost in gloomy thoughts.

'Oh Wai, brother of mine, I didn't think it'd be like this. You went astray and sided with Soi Fa even though her accusations were all lies.

You didn't make enquires, and believed the wrong person. I

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<sup>1</sup> *Nang sroi son*, miss braided necklace

suspect you've been affected by some love charm. Your face is dark and dull with freckles. This is scary.

As for dear Simala, you actually love her well, brother Wai. Yet she got beaten with the cane all over her body. Even grandmother was urging you to beat her.

If even your dear wife can get tattooed with the cane, why should my back escape? We're not siblings of the same womb. How much do you really love me?

If I stay, I'll be like a pig for the slaughter. I should go to find my parents without fail. I'll go with Goldchild, and the two of us can stumble our way through the forest to Kanburi.'

With these thoughts, he swallowed his sadness. He hugged, kissed, and stroked Thong Prasi. 'Your flesh is as soft as cotton, grandma. Today I'll sleep here,

and gaze on the supreme merit of your face. Please tell me a story, grandma.' Thong Prasi laughed merrily. 'Lie down, dear grandson. I'll tell you a story.

How about the tale of Chaiyachet? How does it go? I don't know. Maybe I've forgotten. I remember only the bit where he goes into the forest. His wife left behind gives birth to a baby which turns into a cat.

Oh, that's wrong. It's not that. I'm lost, dear grandson. I haven't seen this story played for a long time. Was it a cat or a log? I don't know.'<sup>2</sup> [292]

Phlai Chumphon laughed and praised her, 'Beautifully told, grandma!' Thong Prasi hugged, kissed, and stroked him, then fell asleep snoring on the bed.

Little Phlai lay listening carefully. When he saw his grandmother was fast asleep, he slowly slid away and got up. He looked around by the bright light of a crystal lamp.

He felt very sad about leaving. Tears glistened on both his cheeks. He took off the bracelets and sema chain which grandmother had dressed him in.

He bent the two anklets open, and took out the hairpin which fastened his topknot. He examined these things, feeling even gloomier. 'If I keep them on, it'll be risky.'

He piled them up at the foot of grandmother's bed, then bowed his face and cried. 'Oh, karma forces me to leave. I was hurt beyond endurance.

I had hoped to depend on grandma's merit, but Wai hit me violently. I must leave and find my way through the forest to

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<sup>2</sup> It was a log. See note on the drama Chaiyachet in chapter 23.

Kanburi to tell my father.

Oh my beloved grandma! When you wake up and find me gone, you'll shout out loud and brim over with tears.' He embraced her feet, sobbing.

At cock crow, he swallowed his sobs. He feared she would wake and prevent him leaving. He got down from the bed and went into the inner room. He put on a shirt and red trousers.

He fixed his topknot, and tied a headscarf tightly round his head. He put on a belt, strung an amulet, and carried a small kris to look tough. He tiptoed stealthily out to the terrace,

and went into the ruean of Simala. He found her fast asleep, and felt sorry for her. Waking her up to say goodbye would take too long. He parted the curtain, and sat next to her on the bed.

He prostrated to her feet, sobbing softly with a heavy heart. 'Oh, I have karma and must go away. Stay well. I take my leave.

I feel sorry for you. Soon you'll be lonely. He beat and abused you with no respect. You'll waste away with misery. I'll disappear from your sight from today. [293]

I think you'll weep and wail after me because you're used to seeing my face. We both still carry the marks of his beating. Thinking about it makes me so pent-up with anger.

Even if I stayed, I couldn't help you. I'll hurry to tell father to come down here.' Then he forced himself to swallow his tears, and came out to the brightly lit central hall.

He saw some buttermilk sweets<sup>3</sup> on a little tray. 'Perhaps Simala prepared these for me. I'll eat them along the way through the forest.' He put them in a waist-sack and left the ruean.

The spirit called Goldchild walked along beside as companion. The sky was bright with moonlight. After descending from the ruean, they walked quickly

to the road which crossed the plain. At dawn, the bright light of the sun caught the film of dew on the ground. They walked along at a robust pace.

Goldchild led him into the forest under the shade of fine tall *jung* and *yang* trees. Little Phlai began to feel better. They made for the house in Kanburi.

While<sup>4</sup> Thong Prasi was fast asleep at night, a cock flapped its wings and crowed loudly.

She dreamed that a big tiger came roaring after her, pounced on

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<sup>3</sup> *Khanom nom nei*.

<sup>4</sup> Section actually begins: 'Let's leave Phlai Chumphon, and talk about grandmother Thong Prasi...'

her back, clutching and biting. She flailed around on the bed, crying out loud in her sleep, and then woke up.

On opening her eyes, she realized it was a dream, but still trembled uncontrollably with fear. She looked to left and right and was worried at not finding little Phlai.

She got up and shouted out, 'Phlai Chumphon, where have you got to, you naughty boy?' She looked round and saw the bracelets, hairpin, anklets and sema chain,

all in a pile at the end of her bed. She was shocked almost to death. 'Perhaps he's run away to his parents without taking leave. My dear grandson, why is this?'

She searched around without finding him. 'Perhaps he woke up and is lying hidden somewhere.' She got up from the bed and called out to the servants frantically. [294]

'Hey, I-Mi, I-Mao, old I-To, and Ai-Pho! Your mother, you like to sleep late. I'll cane your backs into stripes, you creeps and bastards, lying around with your arses in the air.'

The servants heard and woke in alarm. They groped around for their clothes, and got up quickly. They drew the bolts and sleepily poked their faces out to look.

Thong Prasi wagged her finger at them, shouting, 'Your mother's clan! You're still standing around. Phlai Chumphon has run off somewhere. Go and find him quickly.'

The servants rushed all over the house. Some shouted out for him. Some ran to make enquiries at the wat, and returned to tell their mistress they had not found him.

Thong Prasi sobbed, beat her breast, and fainted down on her back from sadness. Servants rushed up and frantically helped to revive her.

Soi Fa and Phra Wai were asleep in the room when they heard people shrieking. They panicked that a fire was burning on the roof. They got up and grabbed their things, hollering out loud.

They tumbled out of the door and saw there was no fire, but people running wildly around the terrace. They asked, 'What are people dashing around madly for?'

Thong Prasi wagged her finger at Phra Wai, and shouted, 'You evil villain, you sleep late. This trouble is a result of your wives' jealousy. It caused Phlai to get beaten and now he's run away.'

Still you dare to poke your face in and ask questions. Your mother's clan! You've got to go after him. If I don't have my grandson, lots of people will have their heads slapped, don't you worry.'

Then she lit into her grandson and daughter-in-law. 'Karma has arisen because of this Lao, this northerner. She ranted and trumpeted on until she was hoarse. A lovely face but the heart of a tiger. Unbelievable!'

Then she fell to lamenting. 'Oh my dear Phlai Chumphon. If you were here now, I'd enjoy being with you. In the daytime, you'd ask me to make figures of cattle.

You'd run around playing morning and evening, making a merry racket. Today it's quiet, my beloved. Why should I go on living to be miserable?' She lay down writhing on the terrace. [295]

Seeing his grandmother cry made Phra Wai concerned. He cast a horoscope following the teacher's manual. 'A Tuesday with a remnant of Saturn entering the time of the moon.

He'll go and return alright, no problem. He'll meet adults and be joyful.' He went inside, wai-ed his grandmother, and said, 'I find no problem for grandson Phlai.

I looked at the horoscope according to the manual. In the details it says he'll go to stay with adults. He misses his mother and father for sure. He probably went to their home in Kanburi.

In fifteen days we'll get news. No need to make a big thing of it. Nobody can do anything about it. He'll come back before long.'

Thong Prasi sat quietly listening to Phra Wai. She saw the truth in what he said and calmed down. 'Well, you've looked at the horoscope by the manual. If things are as you say, I'll stop worrying.

But if you're not sure and fibbing to me, may your mother's clan all fall dead like a rainstorm. My grandson is not yet a grown man. Walking through the forest alone,

he'll be scared by the sounds of wild animals. He can't help feeling lonely. The paddyfields are overgrown with grass and weeds and swarming with all kinds of snakes.'

She went back to her room. The sight of his things made her miss him even more. She found a little cord strung with cowries and prayed. 'All the shrines and the whole lot of spirits,

please protect my grandson. I'll make offerings of duck, chicken, rice liquor, and two pig's heads. I'm not fooling.' She made a garland of cowries and hung it on the head of the bed.

Morning and evening she grieved for her little grandson, sadly hugging a pillow. At sundown, she was still anxiously crying without a break.

Phlai Chai Chumphon walked through the forest. When they came to the Suphan region, Goldchild turned himself into a little

boy,

and walked along with Phlai Chumphon, chatting as his companion. When the sun sank in the afternoon, Phlai felt sad. [296]

‘What a pity. I feel sorry for dear grandmother. She’ll fuss and cry from missing me. By now the house will be in uproar, with everyone arguing angrily.

I sympathize with you, Simala. Now I’ve left, who’ll be your friend? Now the villagers will come to visit. You used to tell me to fix my topknot all the time.

You used to bathe me, put turmeric, and feed me. I love you greatly for this kindness. Though you’re a sister-in-law, you’re not prejudiced. You looked after me like a mother.

Karma, oh karma made me part from you. Now you’ll be sitting with tears flowing. We won’t see one another for days,’ He walked through the forest grieving.

Seeing his sadness, Goldchild encouraged him to enjoy the fine forest trees. ‘There’s a flock of crows settling on a *tumka* with a parasite.<sup>5</sup> Those cawing crows are eying a *kalong*.

That *khang* beside the hill is full of lemur, scratching their chins, covering their chins, and spreading their legs.

In the cucumber tree, monkeys are chasing other monkeys. And there’s a monkey scampering up a pinanga vine.<sup>6</sup>

There were stands of great tall *yung* and *yang* trees, with untidy looking lianas snaking up through their branches. Some were wound round one another, looking truly funny. Some hung down like a swing which looked inviting to play.

Goldchild got Chumphon to sit and swing. A cool wind blew under the shade of the big trees. He ate the buttermilk sweets and felt refreshed. They hurried onwards before sunset.

They saw wild cocks and ran after them, throwing earth and grabbing at them in play. When evening came, dew fell and a bright moon rose.

Scattered stars glittered around the moon, and ornamented the whole sky. Goldchild led him along, telling him to admire the moon.

‘Look. The moon’s got a halo. It looks perfect. There’s nothing like it. In future, when you grow up and are looking for a wife, it

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<sup>5</sup> As usual in these passages, the sound is more important than the meaning. This passage in particular revolves around strings of near homophones. This line runs phonetically: *tumka kafak fung kalong kalong kamong rong kaka*.

<sup>6</sup> *Bauhinia scandens*, var. *horsfieldii*.

would be really good to find one with a face like the moon.’

‘I want to be a monk.<sup>7</sup> I’m not interested in looking for a woman. If you have a beautiful wife, men try to grab her. I don’t want all that bother.’ [297]

Both of them laughed. The sadness and gloom lifted. To cut a long story short, they reached the house in Kanburi just before dawn.

Goldchild led him along the road, looking at the houses and people on both sides. Goldchild pointed out the residence of the governor of Kanburi, saying ‘That big house with the pot plants and the ornamental fish ponds.

That’s the house of your mother Kaeo Kiriya and father Khun Phaen. Remember it well. Go straight in to see them.’ With that, Goldchild disappeared. Phlai Chumphon walked along the road and went straight up

into the big ruean without stopping. He saw his father and mother sitting in the central hall. He ran to prostrate and said through his tears, ‘It’s a shame you abandoned me.’

Khun Phaen and Kaeo Kiriya were shocked. They went and hugged their son. Khun Phaen asked, ‘Why did you brave the forest?

Your grandmother asked to keep you in Ayutthaya. What troubled you so much that you dared walk through the forest? Don’t cry. Tell your father. I want to hear.’

Phlai Chai Chumphon told the story from start to finish. ‘Grandmother looked after me affectionately and fairly. She loved me like her own heart.

The problem arose because the Lao wife made a love charm which created a lot of nonsense, confusion, and anger. Soi Fa and Simala quarreled. Wai took the side of the minor wife.

He beat Simala badly, making a mess of her back and shoulders. I defended Simala so he turned on me. My back still has the marks of his beating – look here.

This alone made me furious, so I ran away to find my parents. Wai and grandma don’t know what’s going on, so there’s nobody to counter the mantra

which is causing all this big trouble. Goldchild knows what’s behind it. If there’s delay, I think Phra Wai will be lost. It all started because of the Lao, both mistress and servant.’

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<sup>7</sup> The text uses *sankarat*, a term used for local monastic heads in the past, and for the Supreme Patriarch at present. It seems that this chapter uses the word with some poetic licence to mean monk or abbot.

Khun Phaen's anger was rising. 'Struth! Meun Wai is not a man, just a dumb, stupid field turtle. [298]

I gave him all my knowledge, but he's still defeated by a woman – to his shame. On top, he's caned Simala. Her father Phra Phichit will be very hurt.

Before I left, I entrusted her to Wai. It's bad it turned out like this. Why did Soi Fa make this karma? Where was Goldchild? Why didn't he tell me?

Goldchild heard Khun Phaen's question, and whispered in his ear. 'Soi Fa ordered I-Mai to seek out a teacher who's an elder living in Wat Phraya Maen.

His name is Elder Khwat, and his magic is very strong. He molded figures for burying. Terrible. This has created the trouble and discord. Khun Phaen should hurry down there.'

Khun Phaen felt sorry for Simala, and his tears flowed. 'How come young Wai didn't act properly? He was careless to let her make him infatuated. I'll catch the villain and have the king cut off his head at the execution ground.'

He thought deeply, shaking and sighing. The sun rose and shone brightly. Servants prepared curry and brought it on trays.

Khun Phaen invited his wives and son to eat. When they had finished and felt content, he went down to sit in the sala. Local officials come together to discuss matters.

'The buffalo thieves are blaming other people. They weren't telling the truth so we tied them up and caned them for interrogation. People have been sent after those that escaped.' Several matters were discussed in a just manner.

Kaeo Kiriya saw little Phlai was looking sad, and his topknot and hairline had not been oiled. She hugged and caressed him,

bathed him, applied turmeric, gave him food, and took him into her room to tied up his topknot. 'I'm glad you've come. I'm less worried now I can see you.

When grandmother first asked to look after you, I was reluctant to hand you over. But when your father agreed, my hand was forced and I had to be parted from you.' [299]

Phlai Chumphon saw he had an opening and said, 'There are lots of father's relatives in Ayutthaya,

but not even one of mother's. Why? Do they live in some far-off place? Or is there'n't a single person left?'

‘Oh, you’re still very inquisitive. I’ve never told you the background about when I was poor and hard up. I’ll tell you from the beginning.

Your grandfather is Phraya Sukhothai. He had to find fifty chang for a fine.<sup>8</sup> They jailed him at the guardhouse beside the treasury. He’d paid all but fifteen tamleung.

He sold me to Khun Chang. I had to face poverty and hardship for a year-and-a-half. He put me to working hard on frame embroidery. Your father got me by paying the debt to redeem me.

I’ve many relatives but they’re far away in Sukhothai. I think about your grandfather and grandmother all the time.’

Phlai Chai Chumphon was desolated by hearing this story from the beginning. ‘What a pity she fell into great difficulty and had to be parted from her family. That’s very sad.

This evening I’ll run away to find grandmother and grandfather, and get to know them.’ He put on an act of talking sweetly. He sat on her lap and chattered to play up to her.

He pleaded with her. ‘My mouth’s sour. Please chew a bit of betelnut for me. I’ll recite some sepha for you beautifully!’ They both laughed and played around together.

When the sun went down behind the trees and the moon rose to brighten the sky, he lay on the bed alongside his mother, pretending to shut his eyes and stay still without winking.

At midnight when a cock crowed, everyone was fast asleep without a sound. He summoned Goldchild in a whisper, and tucked the little kris in his waist.

He prostrated at his mother’s feet with tears falling. ‘I’ll leave you while you’re sound asleep. I want to tell you but I fear you might obstruct me so I’m running off without taking leave. [300]

Oh mother and mistress of mine. When you wake up, you’ll miss me sadly. But I’m not going just anywhere, I’m going to see my grandparents.’ He suppressed his feelings, and walked away from the bed.

He called to his partner, Goldchild, ‘Let’s go.’ He opened the door, stepped out to the verandah, and went down to the central hall with Goldchild at his side. They slipped out through the fence,

and walked along the way across the plain in the dim light of early dawn. He chatted and fooled around with Goldchild, with no fear of the wild animals.

When the sun rose at dawn and the sound of bird calls echoed

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<sup>8</sup> This story was first told in chapter 17.

around the forest, Kaeo Kiriya felt lonesome and apprehensive.

She slept thinking of her beloved child, and hugging a soft, warm pillow to her breast. When she woke, she looked around feeling lonesome, and was worried when she did not see the face of little Phlai.

His clothes and kris had also disappeared. ‘Eh, this is wrong. Where’s Phlai gone?’ She got up, walked out, and asked the servants but nobody knew.

She return to the room feeling distraught. She woke her husband and told him. ‘Last night Phlai Chai Chumphon slept on the bed, but he’s disappeared.’

Khun Phaen felt apprehensive. ‘Eh, this is wrong. Where’s he gone?’ With doubt in his heart, he looked at the horoscope as usual. ‘Last night, time of moon, day Tuesday.

In the manual it says **celestial luck**. That means happiness and fun, not sorrow. He’ll go to meet elders in the family. Before long we’ll see one another again.’

With this analysis, he said to his wife. ‘I’ve looked at the horoscope. Don’t be sad. I’ve sent Goldchild along with him so no threat will bother him.

There’s an ancient saying that it’s the destiny of this lineage to be soldiers. I think he’ll grow up to serve the king. Don’t be burdened by worry about him.

I predict that before long, he’ll bring you a daughter-in-law.’ He laughed and teased her to allay the sadness over their son. [301]

Phlai Chai Chumphon walked through the forest with Goldchild, greatly missing his home and mother. His heart was heavy and tears bathed his face.

The forest along the way was dense. The branches swung and swayed. He felt lonely, but cheered himself by admiring the trees.

*Chalut*<sup>9</sup> vine intertwined with branches of *ulok*.<sup>10</sup> *Seuk*,<sup>11</sup> *sak*,<sup>12</sup> *sok*,<sup>13</sup> *son*,<sup>14</sup> *khae* flowers, sappanwood fibre, tall *yung*, banyan, *masang*,<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Alyxia reinwardtii* var. *lucida*, a vine used for medicine and fragrance.

<sup>10</sup> *Hymenodictyon excelsum/orixense*, nothing in Tree book

<sup>11</sup> Another name for จามจุรี, *jamjuri*, *albizia lebbek* or *samanea saman*.

<sup>12</sup> *Erythrophloeum teysmannii/succirubrum*.

<sup>13</sup> *Saraca indica*.

<sup>14</sup> Pine.

<sup>15</sup> *Madhuca pierrei*.

and *yang* swayed to and fro.

Parakeets flew on high through the wilds. Some went around in flocks, squawking. Others cried in reply. Parrots fed their young on a *chongkho*, and flew off chirping noisily.

Seeing the mother bird made him think of his grandmother. 'I used to chatter to please you.' Flocks of mynahs perched in a row on a *kaelae*.<sup>16</sup> 'Just like grandmother beside me, caressing.'

He saw a green pigeon<sup>17</sup> perched alone looking lonesome. 'Uh oh, a bird like me. What a pity. I have to walk alone and lonely. Everything that was happy has become sad.'

Goldchild hugged and comforted Wai. 'Don't be sad. You'll waste away. Over there, so many nutmeg are weighing down the branches.' He urged him to pull down a branch, pick, and smell them.

To cut a long story short, the spirit led them along quickly, meeting no dangers or obstructions along the way. In the evenings, they halted and slept overnight.

In three days they arrived at Sukhothai. In every house they heard the guttural northern accent. Goldchild spotted the governor's residence with a timber roof. He told Phlai Chumphon,

'See the house with seven cages of parrots hanging and a strong-looking screen across the gateway. That's the house of your grandparents. Go and see them without delay.'

With that, Goldchild disappeared from view and became a shadow following behind. Phlai went up to the terrace with Goldchild behind his back, invisible to the people sitting there.

He saw his grandparents sitting in the broad hall, and walked tentatively in. His spirit companion warned him, 'Crawl in and wai your grandparents.' [302]

The governor of Sukhothai thought a party from some court case had come unexpectedly. He put on his glasses to see for sure, and looked at the face of Phlai Chumphon.

Seeing no gift, he acted annoyed. He grasped a stick, turned, and thwacked Phlai twice. 'Tst! Who's this naughty child with a topknot? Why did you come up to my house?'

His wife ran over and pulled the stick away. 'Ask to make sure where he comes from. He doesn't look like the child of folks from around Sukhothai. What's his name and family, please enquire.'

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<sup>16</sup> *Maclura cochinchinensis*.

<sup>17</sup> ฝักร้า, *plao*, a word used for various pigeons of the *treron* family, most of which are predominantly green.

The governor asked loudly and menacingly, 'What's the name of your parents, child? Where's your home? I want to know. If you don't say, I'll have you put in chains.'

Phlai cowered in fear, 'Forgive me, sir. I'll not lie. My mother's name is Kaeo Kiriya. She was sold by my grandparents to Khun Chang.

Khun Phaen paid to release her from bondage. I was born as their son and lived in a house at Wat Takrai. My mother gave me the name of Phlai Chumphon.

Father is now the governor of Kanburi. I asked and was told that my grandfather is a phraya in the north. So I came through the forest alone.

I didn't know where you lived. I saw a huge house so I came to look. Sir, if you're not my grandparents, don't be angry. I beg your pardon.'

Phraya Sukhothai and Phenjan hugged him and said, 'Oh my dear, this is your grandparents' house, don't worry. Pity, your grandfather is truly awful.

I beat you before asking properly. No small matter. Your back still looks marked.' He embraced his grandson and carried him into the ruan.

He called the servants, male and female. 'I-Ming, I-Mi, Ai-Muean, where have you got to, you lazy lot.' Lots of people came.

'Our grandson has come so we'll have a soul ceremony.' He ordered the servants to make a *baisi*. The local officials of the place all turned up to hear the news. [303]

The sun sank. At dusk, the time for lighting torches, the old governor of Sukhothai, along with all his kinsfolk,

made a soul ceremony for Phlai Chai Chumphon. Everyone cheered loudly. Granny Suk, Granny Sai, and Granny Chiang sat in a row calling the soul.

'Soul, oh soul of Phlai Chai Chumphon. Staying in the tall *yung* trees, you'll feel lonely. Soul, don't go off to stay in the hills,

where there are only the spirits of the forests, weeds, and undergrowth, and where the parrot, swan, and goose soar. Soul, come to stay in the house and be joyful. Come and enjoy silver and gold,

and a long life of ten thousand years. Dear child, stay with your grandparents happily. Become a monk with robes and a crystal bowl, carrying a gold-tipped walking stick to go around giving sermons.'

All the relatives brought cash and patterned cloth to give to Phlai. ‘May you be cool and happy every night and day. Your grandparents love you like anything.’

They kept asking questions about the past. ‘Dear Phlai, can you read and write?’ Phlai said, ‘My paternal grandmother taught me up to a point, but I’ve neglected it so it’s rough and ready.’

Phenjan said to her husband, ‘Go and entrust him to the wat so he can learn to read and write anew.’ Then she asked Phlai, ‘Dear child, can you live in the wat?’

Phlai said, ‘If so, I’ll study hard. It’s true, I’ve been thinking I’d like to enter the monkhood to gain merit. I’ll come to give you a sermon every day.’

His grandparents said, ‘Please become a monk to help your relatives go to heaven. Grandfather will have Ai-Phuk, son of Ai-Jan, go to stay in the wat with you.’

Orders were given to find incense, candles, flattened young rice, flowers, betel, and pan as offerings. Phlai was bathed, powdered, and dressed in a patterned lower cloth and a purple silk upper cloth with a hibiscus<sup>18</sup> pattern.

Phenjan wore a lower cloth in silk check, and an upper cloth of embroidered Tenasserim<sup>19</sup> silk, befitting her standing. The governor wore a silk lower cloth presented by the king, and a wool upper cloth that suited him. [304]

They took little Phlai to walk along. Everybody held bat’s wings umbrellas<sup>20</sup> for shade. Servants carried a pestle on a golden tray. They trooped out to Wat Kraphung Thong.<sup>21</sup>

At the kuti of the abbot, they asked a novice who said the abbot was in his room. The grandparents stepped inside with their grandson carrying the golden tray, and prostrated to wai.

The abbot was convinced it was one of his pupils, so called out, ‘Is

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<sup>18</sup> *Phuttan*, cottonrose hibiscus

<sup>19</sup> *Tanao*, Tanaosri, port on upper western coast of peninsula where many goods from India and other western regions were landed for portage onwards to Ayutthaya.

<sup>20</sup> *Bik khangkhao*, name for a style of umbrella.

<sup>21</sup> A massive wat on the eastern edge of the old city of Sukhothai. Kraphung is a Khmer word for a pond, and the wat’s design – an island in a square pond – suggests Khmer influence. Unlike most of the old Sukhothai monasteries, the wat is still in use today, and probably was at the time of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*. This maybe explains why this wat was chosen for Phlai’s education. Sukhothai in late Ayutthaya and early Bangkok was a rather small and unimportant place, and this surviving wat with the cachet of age must have been one of its most important religious places. Even today, the wat covers a large area. The island in the pond has an old Sukhothai-era chedi, a wihan which probably dates back to Ayutthaya, and a couple of smaller buildings. To the east of the pond, the wat extends over a large area including a massive sala, extensive kuti, a kindergarten school, and a major market.

that Chiton Khong? Why don't you come on in.'

The governor heard the question and laughed. 'Don't you know me, your honor?' The abbot was surprised. He put on his glasses. 'Oh governor, I thought it was someone else.'

At the back there's your lady wife too. Please come up close and have some betelnut. My legs are stiff and awkward, so I don't go begging on almsround.

Both of you look bright, healthy, and full of energy!' The monk scrutinized the governor. 'Like you could manage another couple of wives...'

The governor of Sukhothai sat and laughed. 'I could, there are plenty around. But my wife won't stop being jealous. It's intolerable.' All three doubled over with laughter.

The governor turned his face and called to Phlai to present the incense and candles, then prostrate and wai. 'I have brought my grandson to place in your care. Please have him study the teachings to be expert.'

'If he's your grandson, whose lad is he and where from?' The governor of Sukhothai prostrated, wai-ed, and then informed him, 'He's the son of Kaeo Kiriya.'

When I had to raise money for a fine, she went to stay in Suphan in great difficulty. Khun Phaen loved her, gave the cash, and took her to live together in a house at Wat Takrai.

That's how this Phlai Chumphon was born. Later he volunteered and went to attack Chiang Mai. Now the adroit Khun Phaen has been favored by the king to eat Kanburi.<sup>22</sup>

The abbot said, 'Oh, young, golden Kaeo Kiriya. Has she got a husband and child already? When you brought her to the kuti, I was wearing a *tumpi*<sup>23</sup> which didn't survive and was thrown away. [305]

When I last went to your house, I saw her still wearing a *jap-ping*.<sup>24</sup> Truly, how time passes! Both boys and girls are growing up faster.

Here, governor, you and I are getting dismayingly old.' He stroked young Phlai back and front. 'The lad has loveable looks.'

Make the effort to study both reading and writing to become a soldier like your father, young lad. I'll have you sleep in the inner room near me so I can keep an eye on you.'

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<sup>22</sup> 'Eat' meaning to be the governor and thus live off its revenues.

<sup>23</sup> A hat. The word is from the same root as *topee*, but a little different in shape (RI:472, pix).

<sup>24</sup> See note in chapter 7.

Phraya Sukhothai and Phenjan spoke entrusting Phlai to his care until it was almost time for prayers and the evening bell tolled. They took leave and returned home.

Simala was incomparably miserable. Within a month of little Phlai leaving, she stayed in her ruean, feeling her breast was as hot as if lying in fire,

because Phra Wai had gone to live with the minor wife, and the grandmother kept scolding her with no respect. She was wasting away, gloomily weeping for Phlai Chai Chumphon.

'You used to be my companion. You'd tell me everything that happened, good or bad. When you saw them beat me, you were upset. Your eyes were wet with tears when you helped grind the casumunar ginger to put on my wounds.

I love you to the bottom of my heart. Now you want to cross the forest to find your father and inform him about all the scolding. I'd have forbidden it, but you were impatient and didn't wait.

You'll be in a pitiful state now, little Phlai, sad and gloomy. You've never traveled through the forest. When the dew falls, you'll be miserable.

Who'll comb your hairline and coil your topknot? The fragrance you once had will disappear. You'll be lonely facing hardship and discomfort. When you reach your father's house, you'll look thin and strange.

Oh Khun Phaen, father of mine. When you know, you should rush down here. But I've been waiting several days and you haven't showed up. Perhaps you've forgotten Simala.

I'm living here alone and lonely, not seeing anyone. They've beaten my back until it's swollen. In the whole household all I meet is hatred. Now, all that's left is to die. [306]

Mother and father are in Phichit. Oh, the more I think, the more I'm desolate.' She sobbed softly, feeling weak and troubled every day without fail.

'I must get someone to tell mother and father to come down here, stand up for me, and learn the truth. If Wai no longer loves me and breaks it off, I'll bow my face, go home, and become a nun.'

She called an old servant from Phichit. 'Ai-Thit! Where are you? Come here.' Ai-Thit answered, 'Yes, mistress,' and came immediately. 'What is mistress Simala calling me for?'

Simala said, 'Come close here,' and whispered to him through her weeping. 'Please help me. Go up to inform my parents to help me however they can.

Tell them I'm sick and my spirit's broken. Don't tell them about

the quarrel and beating. Please convince father and mother to come down, but leave the big matter for me to tell them myself.'

Ai-Thit felt sorry for her and cried too. 'Mistress, it was like they grabbed you to bully, hit, and scold without respect. Me and the wife were upset.

I'll slip up there, don't worry. Once I've told the governor and his lady, they'll come for sure.' Then he walked out without speaking to anybody. He picked up a big sidebag and put in food,

betelnut, pan, tobacco, pots, and a hookah. He tied a *chalang* pattern cloth round his belly, and grasped a Lawa lance. He put the big bag on his shoulder, and hurried off.

He stood legs astride, hitched up his lower cloth Khmer-style, and looked for the direction to go. He could recall it from his time as a buffalo thief. He went out to Three Bo Trees plain and entered the forest. At night, he paid respects to teachers, and slept in a tree.

In the morning, he came down and found a stream. He made a pile of firewood, lit a fire, and put on the pot. When the rice pot was done, he grilled mackerel. After eating, he left without delay.

In the heat of the sun, he rested and smoked a hookah. High on ganja, he walked along laughing blurrily. A rustling sound made him hunch over in fear. A footfall on leaves sent him galloping ahead.

Three-and-a-half days of walking brought him to Phichit. Friends greeted him, 'Ai-Thit, where are you going?' He pretended not to hear, and did not look at anyone. He went straight up to the big ruean. [307]

Phra Phichit was sitting talking with Busaba in the sitting hall. Ai-Thit came in with his sidebag looking a mess. He prostrated, and sat with his face bowed and eyes narrowed.

Phra Phichit's face paled when he saw Ai-Thit come up. He scolded, 'You should get about eight hundred strokes of the cane. You look filthy. Fancy coming up here in such a mess.

What's that in the bag? Oh, a hookah? Ai-Thit's been smoking ganja till his eyes are glazed. You like getting stoned stupid at night. Why did you wander up here, you jailbird?

Why aren't you with your mistress? Did you come looking for some fun thieving buffalo? Perhaps they caught you. Your face looks troubled. You deserve to be flung in jail.'

Ai-Thit sat quietly listening to his master's scolding. He scratched his head, rubbed his eyes, then wept. 'I've no intention of stealing anyone's cattle and buffalo. The mistress sent me to prostrate to you, sir.

She's sick. The lady has cramps and a cold shiver. Her stomach is bloated from time to time. She's not well. The spirit doctor was consulted and said she's under a spell.

Lots of royal doctors and people's doctors have come to treat her. The house is packed and chaotic. She won't eat and I think she's reached the end of her merit. Master should hurry down there.'

Phra Phichit and Busaba wept and beat their breasts. She said 'Thit, oh Thit, I'm upset. How did it come to this?'

She summoned the servants frantically. 'Hey, Ai-Ban, Ai-Bao, old Ai-Si. Go and get the *kanya* boat out. We're going down to Ayutthaya.'

The whole house was in uproar. People who were absent were called back. They grabbed paddles and poles and ran over. They went down and brought the *kanya* boat

to moor at the landing in front of the house at the big jetty. They put in a bamboo bed and tied up a backrest of woven bamboo and rattan. The northerners had never paddled a boat or raft. They haggled noisily among themselves over who would steer.

Women brought mats, tables, trays, crockery, silk, raw rice, cooked rice, and stoves and placed them in the stern. [308]

Phra Phichit and Busaba were full of misgivings. They gave orders to the servants and phrai to look after the house, cattle, and buffalo. 'All of you, men and women, help one another to look after things.'

They went down from the big ruan. Ai-Thit walked behind carrying the fire set.<sup>25</sup> At the landing, they boarded the boat. Phra Phichit had a comfortable seat.

Ai-Thit waved a hand to tell them to cast off. The northerner oarsmen said in their guttural accent, 'Never done this before. How d'you paddle?' They blundered around, getting in one another's way.

Some took long strokes, and others were not skilled enough to follow. Those at the bow and those at the stern tried to steer this way and that. They weren't in harmony. The boat rocked and rolled.

Ai-Thit squatted on his heels and cried out, 'These oarsmen are hopeless, sir.' Phra Phichit wielded a cane and thwacked them. 'You puppies, **you're not pointing the boat downstream.**'

The men saw their master holding the cane. They got up onto their haunches, **and made a big stroke.** Ai-Thit raised his head. 'Eh! What's that? Any moment we'll thump into that clump of bamboo!'

The bow broke. The seat collapsed. The boat crumpled. Phra

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<sup>25</sup> *Chut fai*, presumably flint, oil, materials for torches.

Phichit fell bang on his arse. He got up scowling and scolding loudly. Ai-Thit leapt up to steer.

They switched to the middle of the river, and practiced until the afternoon when the whole boat was ready. Then they paddled quickly downstream without stopping, and reached the capital in comfort.