

39: Khun Phaen makes a reflection in a mirror

[III/309]

Khun Phaen, before whose powers the world trembled, governed Kanburi smoothly and loved his two wives intimately.

Laothong and Kaeo Kiriya stayed close by his side, attended to his needs, and made love morning and night without fail. Yet he remained irritated and gloomy

because of the trouble created by Soi Fa. ‘She conspired with that elder to lead my son astray. If I sit here doing nothing, it’s likely that Meun Wai will be destroyed and reborn as a crow.’

He summoned Laothong and commanded her to stay and look after the house. He got dressed, called Kaeo Kiriya, and mounted a fine tusker

with an ornate howdah and an elegant canopy. Surrounded by a mass of servants, they left the house and plunged into the forest. They crossed plains, streams, and ridges.

In three-and-a-half days, they reached Ayutthaya, at the time Phra Phichit and Busaba arrived also. Khun Phaen saw them. ‘That’s my patron!’ He got down from the elephant and went to pay respects.

He asked, ‘What business brought both you and Busaba down here?’

Phra Phichit and Busaba said, ‘Simala has fever. She’s so sick she might pass away. She sent Ai-Thit up to tell us, so we came.’

Khun Phaen said, ‘It’s not fever. Please come up to the house to know the good and the bad about Simala.’ He led the way.

Phra Phichit, Busaba, and their servants crowded into the big sitting hall. Phra Wai saw his father arrive and was annoyed. He went out to wai his parents.

Simala was in a miserable state. When she heard that her parents had both come, she came out of her room, [310]

and prostrated at their feet. Sobbing sadly, she told them the whole truth. ‘It’s beyond me. I can’t stand it any more.

Look at the marks of the stick on my poor back. It’s covered with them. They said I’m in love with little Phlai Chumphon. Phra Wai believed what people told him.

If they’d told him a crystal appeared in my stomach, he’d have cut it open. With matters like this, I’m likely to die.’ She sadly sobbed.

Phra Phichit and Busaba felt so sorry for her they could not swallow their tears. With eyes glistening, Phra Phichit said, ‘How

come it's like this, dear child.

Because I love Khun Phaen, I agreed to give you away in marriage. From the beginning I made him promise. Because my daughter did not know much –

she was just an upcountry villager without the proper speech and manners – if she made any mistakes, she was not to be beaten.

Given this promise, why has she been flogged and abused like a war-slave captured from a defeated army? It was a waste to have loved you so much, Phra Wai.

I looked after your parents carefully so that their feelings were not hurt. I love my daughter like my own heart. Not even a midge was allowed to bother her.

Even when she was beaten, it was never heavy. When she had grown up enough to have a husband, I entrusted her to you. But you've acted badly and shamed her in front of others.⁷

Phra Wai (Phlai Ngam) felt angry in every pore of his body. 'Casting all these aspersions is very sudden. I don't know what to say.

According to the ancient and accepted saying, one shouldn't have two wives. For them to have a go at one another is normal. It's not because I don't treat them equally.

I made Simala my major wife. All the servants know not to offend her. Even Soi Fa has to listen to her.¹ Every year, I make her take an oath. [311]

Silver, gold, whatever possessions I have – all have been entrusted to her, the whole house. But when I saw something I didn't like, I complained. She argued back in a loud voice.

She pretended to scold her servant, but really she was getting at me. I couldn't ignore that so I beat her, but only to make her scared enough to listen to me, not to persecute her as she claims.

The Lord of Life has raised me to this position. Having a wife who is no good shames me. My noble colleagues will gossip. It's not that I don't love her.

Did you never quarrel with mother Busaba, beat and scold her? These are old practices. Not everyone can become a stream-runner.²

It's commonly said that we mortal humans still tend to get lost in illusion. It's beyond my wisdom to rid myself of anger.

Sir, think of the tongue and the teeth. How many times do they

¹ The line is ambiguous. It could mean Soi Fa had to listen to *him* (Red: 689).

² *Soda*, meaning *sodaban*, someone who has entered the stream or the first stage on the path to enlightenment. It's used here with the same looseness as saying, not everyone can be a saint.

get in one another's way? To have me not beat her is beyond me.
 You want to grind me up and scatter me to the winds.³

Hearing his son's words, Phra Kanburi could not stay still. 'Don't talk like this. You realize I came to find out what's happening.

I rushed here because I love you. I've had revealed to me where the thorn is stuck. I can see your face is freckled as if painted with indigo. Having two wives was forbidden in the past.

It's like the tale of Lord Yotsawimon.⁴ He had two queens, left and right, called Janthewi and Jantha, both from the same mother.

Even sisters from the same womb can act like this. Jantha conspired with an evil, lying old woman to use all kinds of devices and love charms so that the lord became obsessed.

Janthewi had done nothing wrong, but Jantha sowed so much discord that she was driven away. You know this story in your heart, so why are you being so careless, my son?

The good people of Ayutthaya are not finished. Don't be arrogant. Listen to me. I know for sure you were put under a spell. If you don't believe me, you'll be ruined.' [312]

In their room, Soi Fa and I-Mai listened with heads swelling and hair standing on end. Soi Fa opened the window, poked her head out, and said, 'Who did some magic? Bring that person here.

On this side it's already known that Phra Wai has been affected by love magic which has made his face dark. Every morning and night I've been waiting anxiously for his father to come down and deal with it.

Now he's come, I'm glad. He'll catch whoever did this magic. We'll see what that person is like. Don't delay or it'll be nightfall.'

Phra Kanburi wagged his finger at her, and shouted, 'My, my! Don't provoke me, you commoner face. Hey, I-Moei! Go and bring the mirror that Jameun Wai uses, right now.'

³ Complete guess.

⁴ This is a reference to the outer drama *Sangthong* (The Golden Conch, see note in chapter 12). King Yotsawimon is the father of the hero. He has two wives who are sisters. Janthewi is the major wife and favorite, which makes Jantha jealous. When Janthewi's son is born as a conch shell, Jantha bribes an astrologer to tell the king that this is an inauspicious sign that will bring disaster. The king has Janthewi and her conch-child abandoned in the forest. After the conch is broken, Sangthong returns to the city. Jantha then employs an old woman, Sumetha, to put a love spell on the king who orders the child to be drowned. But Sangthong is saved by a Naga king and yaksa giant. He then undergoes many adventures before marrying Princess Rojana and being restored to his princely status.

I-Moei went into the inner room and picked up the big Batavia⁵ mirror, a genuine foreign one of good quality, clarity, and high price, and brought it out to Khun Phaen.

Khun Phaen turned to take the mirror. Then he lifted up a large slateboard, drew a yantra, rubbed off the powder, and placed it on the mirror.⁶

He put his hands together against his forehead and chanted a mantra. 'I call on the power of extraordinary magic. If someone with unjust intentions made a spell, let it now be revealed.'

Dummies appeared in the mirror. They were breast-to-breast, face-to-face, wrapped tightly together by a *rak* leaf. Khun Phaen laughed out loud and said, 'How's that?'

Phra Phichit, Busaba, the servants, the whole household all saw that the spell was for real. Khun Phaen handed the mirror to Jamoen Wai. 'Look at this and tell me what it is.'

Phramoen Wai averted his face and did not look. 'I understand. Don't go on. If I do some, it's no different from my father. It's not that I'm stupid and can't see through it.

If I weren't good, how would you have been pardoned? Because the king asked me to attack Chiang Mai, you now live in comfort every night and day. Because you love Simala,

no matter how much she does wrong, you'll take her side. I can't do as you want. If someone's truly in the wrong, they must be blamed.' [313]

Khun Phaen wagged his finger and shouted, 'My, my! You like raking up the past.' He jumped up, grabbed a *samae*⁸ stick, and rushed forward. Phra Wai ran off to find Thong Prasi to help.

Thong Prasi leapt around angrily. 'Struth! You lone madman, you creep! Why are you threatening my grandson, you villain? You boast that you're good, that you have knowledge.

You speak arrogantly and make this reflection in the mirror. I think you talk big to show off to dogs. I'm used to seeing what you

⁵ Batavia (now Jakarta) was the principal Dutch settlement in Southeast Asia. In early nineteenth-century Siam, it was known as a source of European-style artefacts.

⁶ Red:563 has an illustration and text of a mirror *yan*.

⁷ To undo the magic, the mirror is used to locate the dummies which can then be dissolved in enchanted water (Red:564).

⁸ สำน, *samae*, name for several trees in the Avicennia family, with aerial roots similar to mangrove, and very straight branches suitable for sticks.

can do. I don't want to believe it.

It's just a trick for people to see. The Terengganu⁹ Khaek do this sort of thing. Throwing up a golden ball that divides into four. Swallowing burning wood.'

Phra Phichit and Busaba were shocked. He shouted to stop Khun Phaen until he was hoarse, and pulled as hard as he could on the tail of his *kraben*.¹⁰ Busaba grabbed the stick away from him.

Khun Phaen stopped, not knowing what to do since he respected Phra Phichit as his elder. Busaba said to Phra Wai, 'I'd like to take my daughter away for a year or so.

She's in unbearable discomfort because she's pregnant. After the delivery, I'll send her back. If you go on using force and beating her, Simala is likely to die.'

Meun Wai (Phlai Ngam) was as angry as if burnt by fire. 'Casting all these aspersions! Why delay, Simala?

Pack your silver and gold and have it carried down to the landing. Go and stay in Phichit with your father until you've delivered around five children.¹¹

Then come back to live with me as before. Your mother will teach you well. Go, my sweet-faced darling. Carry things down to the *kanya* boat.'

Busaba said, 'Son-in-law, why are you playing games. Your casting aspersions on me. If you don't want her to go, then say so nicely.

We didn't come down here to get into an angry shouting match. This old biddie understands what's going on. You rake up the past to get at me. I know. [314]

You're a big officer in the royal pages, and I'm just a poor person. You stab me with all this sarcasm. Think about the past a bit. Everything except delivering you into this world...

Even if you pay no attention to my kindness, consider this side of things. I've already got a fine head of grey hair because of worry over Simala.

In the city where I live, nobody can bully me like this. Simala, you sent Ai-Thit up to tell us you had a fever, and so we came.

If I'd known you were quarrelling with your husband, I wouldn't have come and let my big toe get bothered. From this day forward, I

⁹ A Malay state on the lower east coast of the peninsula.

¹⁰ *Kraben* is the end of a lower cloth when it is passed between the legs and tucked in the waist.

¹¹ There's a saying that a husband should not let his mother-in-law take his wife away as she'll give him to someone else – hence the sarcastic reference to five children (Sup:573).

won't come. It's our fate to be severed from one another.

If you're sick, don't bother to tell me. I definitely won't come to see your corpse. Even if you live in a brick house buzzing with servants, I'll get along fine as a pauper.

It was a waste to have thought of depending on you. I got you married but I don't see any result. You've turned into an enemy who attacks me. Why worry about you at all?

Even the blood in your body is evil. Scoop it out, I wouldn't care. I'd think the Burmese took it away. I've no more thought for you until my dying day.'

[PW] 'Oh, enough mother! Such a lot of noise, it's frightening. You say I don't respect you as a mother-in-law, so all of this is really meant to get at me.

For better or worse, husbands and wives quarrel, but they don't slash one another to death. When the anger passes, they're good together again. Elders should just help them to reconcile.

But that's not the case here. You want to drag her away from this house. You're encouraging her to be aggressive and sound off like a trumpet. It's very irritating.

Why are you so quiet, Simala? Why don't you raise your voice and argue back? Your mother here is raising questions. Things are not as she wishes, so she's angry.

I'll be afraid of you from now on. If you offend me at all, I won't complain because it might annoy your mother enough to sever relations. [315]

The wife fears the husband and doesn't hold him in contempt, but her mother argues in her stead, on and on. The daughter stays quiet and never makes a fuss, but the mother comes to teach her how to.

She casts aspersions about everything. Who's saintly enough to put up with this? I should respond so you have a taste of your own medicine. But I can't because you're my mother-in-law.

Father, why aren't you saying anything? Everyone is lashing out so easily. She scolds her daughter but really she's casting aspersions on me, even dragging in the Burmese and the Mon!

When we asked for her hand, the parents agreed. How come they didn't choose better from the beginning? Now they're angry, picking at everything, strewing sarcasm around to their heart's content.

I've become a Burmese! In the beginning you didn't know because I cut my hair to look like a Thai, so you made the mistake of giving me your daughter.

Now you know I'm not a Thai, you want to drag her away in front of my eyes. I won't let her go, so you're angry. Don't complain it's because there's only a few of you.

Even if you brought some five thousand men to crush me to dust, I'd fight to the death. So let's find out who's good.'

Khun Phaen stared angrily at Phra Wai. 'Eh, how come you dare to threaten to my face as if you were just mixing vegetables?

You shit on my head as if it were a tree stump. This picking and scolding makes no sense. I've no time for you, you blackguard. Your words are coarse and contemptible.

You think I'm not wealthy, so you answer back with no respect. You're abusive to your mother-in-law. To me, they're like parents.

You know the story from the past because I told you. When I kidnapped Wanthong away from Khun Chang, if I hadn't been able to depend on them, who knows.

I'd probably have faced disaster and a bad death. And you, where would you've found a wife? But now you're all threats and contempt, you ungrateful lackey. [316]

You're only Jameun Wai, but you're this bad. If you get bigger in future, you'll be worse. What will be will be, let's see. I'm also Phra Kanburi.

Your father-in-law is Phra Phichit. Right or wrong, you should know your place. I'd like to elbow you just once, you arrogant fellow.' Khun Phaen rushed at Phra Wai.

Thong Prasi came between them. She angrily grabbed the pestle for pounding betelnut and brandished it. 'You thick-faced, uppity fellow are making no sense. Son-in-law and mother-in-law are arguing.

What business is it of yours, you oaf. You join in and bark your head off. You arrogantly want to elbow him without shame. You shout challenges at my grandson.

I brought Wai up since he was a kid. You have two eyes but you don't see, you son-of-a-slave. You buried your head inside the jail.

You got out because Wai went to ask the king. You went up to attack Chiang Mai and then were in clover. You went to eat Kanburi without a care. Yet you come back and attack someone with merit.

You may be gentlefolk, but what level? Even now, they still call you "Ai-Khun." Being governor of Kanburi is merit enough, but you forget your debt to Phra Wai for asking the king.

If you don't get out of this house, I'll thump you to pieces.' She tucked up the end of her *kraben*, and bellowed: 'Come on, if you dare. What are you waiting for?'

Phra Wai, hiding behind his grandmother, called out, 'This is not right, father. All this anger and insults will make the neighbors roar

with laughter.

For better or worse, wife and husband quarreled. Mother-in-law joined in and threw her weight about, wanting her way alone, forcing others to follow her words.

Her daughter was hopeless and said nothing, so the son-in-law kept getting scolded, over and over, about all sorts of things. Quite a pounding. Anyone not bruised by this wouldn't be human.

She even scolded her daughter to get at me, and raked up the past to pulverize me. It's intolerable. Even a feeble slave isn't like this. [317]

If she helped me as her son-in-law, I'd not argue and create a fuss. I'd endure with a thick face all year round. Even if she shouted at my mother, I wouldn't feel hurt.

But she didn't help me at all. I'm not the son of somebody's slave. When she raises her voice to trumpet pitch, and scolds me like a servant, don't imagine I'll ignore it.

When warring with enemies to north and south, I've never once fled from the sound of gunfire. I can match the power of others in hundreds of thousands. Only to the Lord of Life will I succumb.'

Khun Phaen roared at his son, 'You have no respect for your parents-in-law. You're too proud of your powers, not afraid of anyone in the realm,

ready to fight to the death with no retreat! Even me you're not afraid of one bit. You say you never beg anyone for food. You show contempt for others even now.

If you become a big nobleman somewhere, you'll trample on the heads of your elders and pulverize them. The more Thong Prasi goes along with you, the worse you get. From today, we're severed, until death.

If I die, don't come to cremate me. If you lose your life, I'm not coming anywhere near your body. All I want is to take your life.

When there's a war, we'll fight. Bring me the Skystorm sword I gave you immediately. If you don't hand it over, I'll attack you right now.'

Phra Wai ran back into the house, crying 'Father, this is not right. You're making such a scene. Even if you bash me about, I don't feel hurt.

It feels like someone else is putting you up to scold and cut relations off like this.' He picked up the sword and raised it over his head in utter panic. He was terrified his father would slash him if he went out.

'Grandmother, please come in here.' Thong Prasi took the sword

and held it awkwardly. Eyes wide open, she shouted,

‘I thought you were good, you *pret* spirit. You give something then change your mind and want it back. You’re broken-toothed, grey-haired, and can’t stand up straight, but you’re still talking like this! [318]

How many *feuang* is it worth? About as much as a city? Struth! Move your head so we can see the sun. You couldn’t slash a fish.

Here, take it. You disgrace, you’re unreal.’ She threw Skystorm to him. ‘Fancy siding with your daughter-in-law who got hit, against your own son Wai, you jailbird.’

Khun Phaen angrily picked up the sword, raised it above his head, and moved away. Kaeo Kiriya followed him, then Simala and Busaba.

Phra Phichit went after Khun Phaen, flowing with tears out of concern for Simala. They arrived at the boat mooring, and held a discussion.

Phra Phichit said, ‘Busaba and I are very concerned about what will happen back here. You’re going to be far away. I don’t know what will happen to Simala.’

When Phra Wai saw her face, he felt hatred. It wasn’t like this before. He believes everything from Soi Fa. She’ll put him up to scolding and beating some more.

We can’t rely on the grandmother who goes along totally with pushing her around. There’s nobody we can depend on. I’ll miss her, being so far away.’

Khun Phaen prostrated to his feet and said, ‘Sir, don’t look on the black side. Listen to me. Nothing will happen to Simala. She’s like my own heart to me.

After you return home, I won’t neglect her. I should find a solution. I won’t let her be lonely. I’ll send two spirits to protect her.

Wai is confused by the love charm. The effect has also reached the grandmother, so she believes that side. In fifteen days, I’ll return here.

Leave this annoying matter to me. If I can’t find a solution then you can complain. I’ll also catch the person making this magic. I’ll put things right and save your face.’

Phra Phichit and Busaba said, ‘I’ve always sympathized with you as you’re an honest fellow. I’ve trusted you for many years. [319]

Stay well, Simala. Listen to your father’s words and don’t cry. It’s not that I don’t love you. If I could, I’d stay with you.’

They consoled her, then boarded the boat, full of grief at the parting. Simala’s eyes brimmed with tears. Phra Phichit and Busaba

left.

After Phra Phichit disappeared from sight, Khun Phaen drew Skystorm, and stood brandishing it. Then he went back into the house.

Phra Wai's servants, men and women, ran off in alarm. Khun Phaen was unusually angry. 'Hey, Wai! Come here and play with me.

I'm no longer your father. That's final. Though I'm old, I'm not afraid. Dead or alive, good or bad, I'll slash you – and your stupid wife too. Watch out.

Where are you hiding up there?' He picked up several lumps of brick and hurled them to clatter against the sleeping room. Phra Wai went into the ruan and kept dead quiet.

Thong Prasi poked her face out with eyes wide. 'Thieves plundering in the middle of the day! Since I was little, I've never seen such a thing. Hey, kids! Go and inform the town officials.'

Khun Phaen was so enraged by her, he picked up a brick and threw it against the wall. Thong Prasi shouted, 'Ow! I'm dead!' She closed the door and ranted noisily.

Seeing the turmoil, Kaeo Kiriya could not stay still. She tried to calm and placate her husband. 'It's nearly dusk. Don't stay around and create more trouble.'

Khun Phaen listened to her and walked off. Simala followed him out of the house. A little way off at the graveyard, she prostrated to Khun Phaen.

'My lord and master, you're leaving me. Whose merit will I depend on when your far away and out of sight? Soi Fa will play all sorts of tricks.

Phra Wai is like a blazing fire, and she keeps on stoking it with more kindling and oil. Before long, this fire will burn to ashes. [320]

If I'm here alone, he'll keep on scolding. How can I stay alive?' She hugged her chest, sobbed, and flailed around at his feet.

Greatly concerned, Khun Phaen consoled his daughter-in-law. 'I'll give you two female spirits to stay and protect you against dangers.

I'll certainly come back with an army to capture Wai, take revenge for this harassment, and truly put Soi Fa to the question.

I'll pay her back for everything she did to you – for revenge, and because she deserves it. I'll rip her flesh and rub in salt. Now it's almost nightfall.

It's not good for you to be walking around alone in a graveyard where there are aggressive and crafty spirits. My darling, please listen

to me. Go back.’

Simala paid respects and took leave, wet with tears. She walked off alone, turning to look back forlornly. Khun Phaen sighed, and mounted his elephant.

He left, riding Phlai Kang, with Kaeo Kiriya and a great crowd of servants following behind. They sang wild-cock songs along the way.

In three-and-a-half days, they reached Kanburi. The elephant halted, and they went up into the house with all the servants. Kaeo Kiriya went into the inner room.

Phra Kanburi stayed in the residence. The anger and turmoil did not leave him. Vengeful feelings towards his son, Phra Wai, made him hot with frustration as if licked by fire.

He was almost mad with rage. Morning or night, sitting or sleeping, he was miserable every day, thinking only of how to make an attack.

Phlai Chumphon, who had made his way to Sukhothai, was greatly loved by his grandparents. He had now been a novice for some time.

He studied Khmer and Thai well, and could translate texts skillfully. He was always in a happy mood. Morning and evening, he took a broom to sweep the wat grounds. [321]

One day as he was sweeping the dirt, a Khmer who had tunneled his way from Pegu carrying a golden book of knowledge with the aim of asking the riddle of the Mon,

surfaced in the middle of the wat grounds.¹² He put the riddle to novice Chumphon who was able to solve it immediately. The Khmer gave him the book.

He studied the knowledge in this book to become expert. He had the power to become invisible, to be invulnerable against all weapons, and to dive into the earth.

He was fifteen years old and full of vigor. Still with the strength of youth, he was known also to have special powers without rival. Sukhothai quailed at his powers.

Late one night, the novice woke up with his chest trembling and his mind agitated. He tossed and turned, unable to sleep a wink. He lay still thinking

¹² This tale is adapted from one of the stories of the legendary King Ruang of which was collected into the *Phongsawadan Neua* (Northern Chronicles). Ruang sent tax of water to the Khmer king. The king decided to capture Ruang but Ruang escaped and went to stay as a monk in a Sukhothai wat. A Khmer tunneled through to Sukhothai and enquired after Ruang, but the locals told him that Ruang had gone north. He enquired at Sawankhalok, and was sent back to Sukhothai where he accosted Ruang sweeping the wat courtyard. Ruang turned the Khmer to stone. (*Phongsawadan Neua*, 28-9; Red:572)

about his grandmother and his parents, becoming more and more miserable. 'After I faced being beaten by Wai, I fled up here in tears.

That's eight years ago. I've now been parted from my parents for a long time. I don't know how they're ageing. Grandmother must be quite doddering.

It's a long way to visit them, but I'm missing them very much.' He felt completely pent up and unsettled. When the sun caught the mountain tops

and flooded the world with brilliant light, the birds sang loudly. The novice got up from his bed, washed his face,

went down from the kuti, and walked away. He tied up grass in the form of a standing giant, with robust legs and arms, and shaped a mouth and fangs.

He trussed up bamboos as a stave and put it in the giant's two hands. When he had done, he went up the stairs and took some paper from the kuti.

With a black pencil he wrote a letter to his father asking for information. He folded it tightly, walked quickly out to the terrace, [322]

and arranged various offerings. He descended from the kuti, built a shrine, and surrounded it with a sacred thread. He chanted a mantra to activate the demon,

and scattered rice. The giant sprung up as high as a mountain, and leapt around displaying its powers. The novice shouted at the giant to sit down.

He tigh the letter tightly on its neck, and gave orders to take it immediately to his father in Kanburi.

The giant prostrated to take leave, and bounded away, crossing hills and mountains, smashing *yung* and *yang* trees to powder, and trampling tigers and elephants under its feet.

It ran like a whirlwind, treading on mountain peaks, which collapsed with a thunderous roar. The earth shook and the forests swayed.

It crossed streams, rivers, forests, and plains making for the great forest. In the evening when the sun weakened, the giant entered Kanburi.

The townsfolk were shocked stupid, and fled away with their wives and children. Phra Kanburi was also alarmed.

'What's that great banging sound?' He rushed down from his residence, saw the giant, and knew it was a giant created by magic.

He enchanted a thin white cloth, and threw it. The cloth turned into a big monkey, which leapt over and attacked the giant. All the townsfolk watched the fight.

The monkey leapt around, enticing the giant. The giant brandished a club, and struck. The monkey crawled up the club, bit the giant in the neck, and hung on.

The monkey pushed the giant away, raised the giant's club, and snapped it in two. The giant kicked. The monkey caught its foot, and the giant fell. The monkey hung on without letting go.

The giant's power weakened. The monkey magically tied it up with his tail. The giant changed back into grass. The monkey disappeared and became cloth again. [323]

Khun Phaen looked at the sheet of paper. 'Eh, this is strange. He unfolded it and saw the beautiful lettering.¹³ 'From your son in Sukhothai.

I haven't seen you, father and mother, since we parted. I don't know if things are good or bad with you. Is the king still well-disposed, or angry?

Are you still happy in royal service? Has any sickness or threat been mild? Are things between Simala and Phra Wai good or bad? I have no news.

Since I left grandmother, is she healthy or has she met with sickness and suffering? It's a long time since I was parted from her. Has her sorrow over her grandson diminished?

Mother Kaeo Kiriya and mother Laothong, are they both well? I'm particularly concerned about mother Kaeo Kiriya.

As for me, I'm well and flourishing, with no anger and only joy every day. I was able to depend on the merit and kindness of my grandparents. I've entered the monkhood as a novice.

Let me share the merit with my parents, brothers, grandmother, and other kin.' When Khun Phaen finished reading, he went back up to the residence.

Thinking of the contents, Khun Phaen went into a small room in the house and thought sadly about his beloved son. He felt unsettled and tears welled up in his eyes.

'Oh, I have a son, but matters didn't turned out as I'd hoped. I loved Wai like my own eyes, but he turned round and showed contempt for me.

He got extremely arrogant about his rank and status. He feared I would depend on him to do my cremation. I think Chumphon is truly good, and I could entrust my body to him.

Though still small, he has a good heart. I think I can depend on him in future.' He promptly wrote a letter to tie on the neck of the

¹³ *Akson bowon laksana wilai*, probably means a certain kind of orthography. CHECK

giant.

He found rope and tied it tightly across its shoulders. Then he activated the giant which sprung up and trampled lots of trees flat. [324]

It bounded away in paces each one *yojana*¹⁴ long, carried by the wind, crossing rivers, forests, and cart-tracks, so fast it almost flew.

In a trice, the giant arrived in Sukhothai and entered the wat. The novice saw it coming from afar, and happily untied the grass spirit immediately.

He saw the paper strapped across its shoulder, and knew his father had replied to his letter. Very happy to have news from his father, he unfolded the letter and read it straightaway.

The lettering was in the auspicious style.¹⁵ “To the diligent novice Chumphon. The fact you sent a magic giant through the forest to carry an important letter to your father

telling the news that you are well, has made your mother and father very happy. We are also glad that you have entered the monkhood, and offer our respects to receive the merit you have shared.

You asked how things are here, good or bad. Your father is immersed in suffering because of the contemptible Wai who has forgotten his father’s kindness, my darling.

You know the matter of him being affected by a love charm. I wanted to release him from the spell, and went to Ayutthaya to try. Phra Phichit and Busaba came at the same time.

I warned them as elders. I made a reflection in a mirror to show the cause. But Wai got even angrier and more stubborn. He raised his voice and argued loudly with no respect for anyone.

He dragged up the past to get at me. He said I was released from jail because he asked. He abused me for all the people sitting around to hear. From that time, I’ve been very angry.

If that day your grandmother had not got in the way, I would probably have killed Wai. Grandmother has also been badly affected by the charm. Wai thus got the advantage and became violent.

Since returning to Kanburi, I have not been happy. I suffer relentlessly every morning and night. If I don’t take revenge successfully, I’ll probably die. As my son, you can help.

The fact that you made a giant figure to send to me shows you have powers and knowledge. Please think of making soldier

¹⁴ A unit of length used in many texts of the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, including the Three Worlds. Equivalent to 400 *sen* or 1,600 meters.

¹⁵ *Akson bowon laksana mongkhon*

dummies, disguised as new Mon,¹⁶ and sending them down here.
[325]

Have them charge down and invest Doembang¹⁷ which is not far from Suphan. The news will spread to Ayutthaya. King Phanwasa will probably send Wai to do battle.

He'll probably recruit me to go along to help him. You and I can cooperate to attack Wai in a pincer, and slash him to pieces. Then you escape back to the north.

Don't kill anyone else except Wai. If you care for your father, Phlai Chumphon, hurry to make the dummies and march them down.'

When he had finished reading the letter, Chumphon felt very angry. Pity for his father made his tears flow. 'Struth! Wai is no good.

He even shows contempt for his father. His feelings about me would be the same as about a midge. In future I can't be concerned about him. We no longer count as brothers.

I know magic. I'll repay the kindness of my father. It's a pity the plain is wide and the journey long. If I could fly, I'd go down there right now.'

His breast felt bruised black with anger. At dusk, he went into his room but could not sleep soundly for thinking of the suffering of his father.

At dawn, novice Phlai Chumphon felt very worked up. He put on his robe, belted to his body, and rolled the upper cloth on his shoulder. He went into the house

and informed his grandparents. 'I can't be happy with my father and mother so far away. I miss them terribly. May I take leave?'

The governor and his wife agreed. 'Take leave from the abbot and disrobe, as you wish. Please delay a little, and I'll arrange some servants to go with you.'

Chumphon answered, 'I was able to come here alone. I ask only for a good horse to ride, one that's fast with a good rhythm.'

His grandfather said, 'I think there's only Blueblack. He's very

¹⁶ Mon migrated to Siam to escape increasing Burmese domination since at least 1660. Two large influxes came in 1875 and 1814–15, when Mons from Martaban under Saming Sotbao fled from the Burmese, and were sent by King Rama II to settle in Pathumthani, Nonthaburi, and Paklat. The earlier arrivals were known as 'Old Mon' and the later arrivals as 'New Mon,' a distinction clear from language as the later migrants spoke a version more influenced by Burmese (Halliday, 'Mons'; Red:690 from Second Reign chronicle).

¹⁷ Now amphoe Doembang Nangbuat on the Suphan river in the north of Suphanburi province.

swift, a spirit horse. Anyone wants to ride him has to currycomb him and feed him grass a whole year or he'll buck terribly. [326]

He bit the son of I-Baen and almost took his arm off. The lad got yaws and it's never gone away. As you have powers, you should be able to ride him. Let's see.'

Chumphon took leave of his grandfather. He picked some grass, and enchanted it with a formula. He went into Blueblack's stable and proffered the grass while chanting a mantra.

He stroked the horse's back and said, 'My love, will you be of use to me? I'm facing a lot of hardship, and I want to escape it today.'

Iron-backed Blueblack listened, accepted the proffered grass, and whinnied loudly. Chumphon untied him, and put on a saddle blanket, good saddle, harness,

stirrups, and flanking – all very gently. He jumped onto the horse's back, dug in his heels, and whipped as a signal. The horse turned around and pranced away in a smooth rhythm.¹⁸

He was as swift, agile, strong, and fearless as hoped. With a little touch, he was also obedient. Chumphon rode him to the residence of his grandfather who hollered loudly,

danced with glee, and clapped his hands. 'You're a tigercub or else you couldn't have done this!' He was very pleased. He called his grandson upstairs and presented him with a sword.

'This sword is from the time of my grandfather. He attacked a group of Mon and Burmese, and put them to flight, so he named the sword Victor. It's a valuable heirloom passed down to me.

I'm old and I'm concerned about you. I fear my merit will soon be up and the sword will be lost. Nowadays, I have no son. Take it, Phlai.'

Chumphon took the sword, and prostrated to take leave. He had a servant keep the horse. At sunset he arranged a *baisi* and offerings,

and had servants carry them to the graveyard. He cut bamboos as posts for a shrine. He set out incense and victory candles on a tray, and strung sacred thread round the graveyard.

At the auspicious time of the opening of the *khlon* gate,¹⁹ he chanted a very special formula, scattered rice, and summoned the spirits from every place. [327]

Spirits from the caves, ponds, streams, canals, forests, and woods

¹⁸ Literally, the spear rhythm, referring to the 'dance' of posing with a spear.

¹⁹ A ceremonial gate for soldiers leaving for war. The gate has two Brahma dummies seated above, pillars on each side, and is decorated with fresh leaves to mimic a forest. A monk sprinkles it with sacred water. (Mat:150)

all called out to one another in confusion. In fear of his magic, they hurried over.

All came to take the offerings without fail. Chumphon finished making offerings and then chose only the fiercest spirits and ghouls. 'Tomorrow I'm going to Suphan.

All you come along to join my military column in charge of the soldier dummies.' The spirits all accepted, and Chumphon returned home happy.

At dawn, Phlai went into the big ruan and prostrated to take leave of the governor of Sukhothai. Both grandparents gave their blessings.

He bathed his body clean, put on a lower cloth, shirt, make-up, a belt cinched tight, and powerful amulets.

He clasped hands above his head, then grasped his grandfather's sword, and leapt onto his horse. At an auspicious time, he galloped away from Sukhothai,

surrounded by his swarm of spirits. His troops consisted only of them. His horse was strong, and he rode along as if blown by the wind.

Half-way along the journey, he halted and went to sit in the shade. He made a yantra on his horse's foot, and sprinkled specially enchanted oil.

He cut grass and tied it into a thousand dummies. He scattered enchanted rice, and the dummies came to life as people,

with weapons in their hands. The forest was crowded and noisy. All prostrated to wai Phlai Chumphon. He mounted Blueblack

and gave orders to his army of magical dummies. 'You will march as an army into battle. Cheer loudly like new Mon. There is one strict command:

only round up the people, don't kill them.' With that order, he galloped away. [328]

They crossed streams, roads, rivers, forest, and plain, hollering war cries and stirring up clouds of dust. Villagers woke in alarm and scattered into the forest before the army could catch them.

They carried or dragged their kids away to crawl into the undergrowth. Clothes slipped from their trembling bodies. They stumbled, tripped, and fell over one another. At every place, the villagers were in turmoil.

The army soon reached Doembang, and set up a huge camp in the forest. They halted and quietly kept watch as they were close to Suphan.

The governor of Suphan heard the news and was very afraid. He recruited men to go up to the frontier, and guard the forts and camps securely

with walls, spikes placed in the ground, and trenches suitable for a grand moated camp. Guardposts were placed all round the perimeter. Horsemen were sent to bring information.

Then the governor quickly prepared a report, and sent Khun Phaeng to gallop through the forest to reach Ayutthaya at dawn. He went into the inner court sala,

and handed the report to Nai Chamnan²⁰ of the army. The duty officer took it, broke the cylinder open, and went to inform the minister of Mahatthai of the contents. Then the contents were copied.

The minister of Mahatthai urgently pondered and consulted with his officials who reached an agreement and then went to attend on the king.

²⁰ Chamnan Krabuan, a *nai wen* in Mahatthai, sakdina 200Red:476.