



The 12th Thai Parliament "Phan Waen Fah" Awards Winners [2013]

The Re-insistence of the New Ta-Eak Village's Divorcee

A Short Story by Luther-Turroore Anabaptists



PAWN

A Poem by Arunrung Satsawee

The Secretariat of The House of Representatives



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Translated by Pimchanok Phungbun Na Ayudhya

As her firm insistence ended, the room fell quiet, leaving only the faint sound of breathing. Outside, complete silence reigned. It was quiet beyond compare. The gentle moonlight beamed in through vented windows, casting a shadow on household objects in the bedroom. Her two children, who used to lie beside her, were sent to the care of her mother two days ago. She sat still with her mind blank, turning her back to him. He lay close by her as he moved his hand gently over her body, her skin, her clothes — stroking and caressing. Although he had already been prepared and tried to restrain himself, he couldn't help letting out a sigh of despair once the answer was heard again after the pain at his pubis faded away. He was asking to test her feelings, to make her hesitant, or to hear the response he hoped to hear. Nevertheless, nothing changed. She stood her ground. The heavy air mingling with the high humidity caused nasal congestion. His lungs struggled so hard to respire that an intense heat burned his chest. Oftentimes, they had to breathe in through their mouths. Rain had been absent for over a week. The moon shone brightly. The gentle wind blew consistently. Yet, to no effect, it never penetrated the room.

“Am I not good enough?”

“No,” she said.

“Then why?”

She turned to him. Her gaze could hardly penetrate the gloom. She reached out to stroke his head, like a mother to a child. Without answering. He stretched himself out, staring at the ceiling without seeing it. He was breathing in and out as loudly as he did just minutes ago when he lay on top of her and thrust into the peak of ejaculation. No answer from her. Her recent insistence remained heavy in the air.

A gentle wind blew that night, three days before the plan to finish off Auey Si, Noi was restless. She was hardly able to stay calm. In contrast, Tom, her husband who was 15 years older, seemed so cold that his chill spread out across her. It was a daunting task — the first time he'd taken a job that he hadn't been hired for. It was, after all, a resolution made by many people he respected. Not only he, but almost the entire village, highly respected them. Everyone must comply with their words. Neither doubts, nor questions arose when these people expressed an opinion. In the bedroom, Noi felt anxious. Her son and daughter had both already fallen asleep. She was eavesdropping on the conversation of the people outside the room, scheming up their final plan. The discussion started 10 days ago, shortly after the funeral rites of the abbot ended. There was no other place as ideal as Tom's house to hold a discussion. By the same token, there was none other than him as suitable to lead the task. His house was set in isolation outside the village, on a small hill amidst the paddy fields, far from the community. He was resolute and reserved. He had great respect for the formidable figures of the village. He believed and had faith in the abbot and Chao Khun Lid, the protective ancestral spirit, with all his heart. Moreover, he was one of the first who took notice of the incidents and

declared: ‘This can’t be wrong. Just like what we’d been talking about. Chao Khun Lid himself even confirmed it.’

The confirmation by Chao Khun Lid was made one night when Tom decided to seek his opinion. He had made a vague assumption since the death of the abbot. There was no rhyme or reason. An even chance of possibility and impossibility went through his head. That night, he collected flowers, had Noi arrange an offering of incense sticks, candles and flowers, and headed to the ancestral shrine located south of the village. The new shrine had been properly rebuilt in concrete since the old one burned down. The man who vandalized it had gone mad. It seemed that the new shrine pleased Chao Khun Lid greatly. It was situated on a small hill under a big tamarind tree and leaned against a towering termite mound. Nonetheless, those termites never once touched the shrine — neither the old one made entirely of wood nor the new one whose crossbeam was made of wood. He went there to consult Chao Khun Lid, taking a shortcut through the village. The dog didn’t utter a bark. It was crouching, crying quietly, and only glanced quickly at him. No one said a word. Some villagers who lived in the area he walked past convened at the abbot’s funeral ceremony while some of them stayed home. Once the dusk fell, no one would ever dare to leave their house alone. No one was brave enough to do so after the abbot became the fifth to die — the abbot who had been regarded as the sternest and most fearless of the village. Neither ghosts nor demons, ogres nor evil forest spirits, even human beings, would never dare challenge him. Nevertheless, the abbot was no exception. His unforeseen death occurred only two days after the fourth to die was cremated. He died on the way to the hospital. The first four

cases were respectively of one from the western, southern, central and eastern parts of the village. The last, from the east, lived in a house adjacent to the temple. Before the abbot was attacked, the first death happened when the villagers started to talk about a black dog whose bullet-sized eyes habitually shone above its target. The big dog was often seen walking stoutly on the streets, examining the yard areas. It was seen on dark dewy nights when the wind breezed over, when the villagers returned from frog hunting, when they got back from passing water, when they came down to check their farm equipment, or when they were patrolling their quarters at night to prevent thieves who targeted the village particularly in the rainy season. That was the usual time when everyone saw the black dog walking dauntlessly through the neighborhood. It must be the case that the black dog was an ogre possessed by some spirit. And everyone knew that the dog was, beyond a shadow of a doubt, possessed by the spirit of Auey Si's father. He passed away many years ago and yet the dog had never harmed anyone for over 10 years. It only made occasional appearances. It had never gone anywhere outside the village. When Auey Si's father died, it was seldom seen. Even on the rare occasions it was sighted, it had never done anyone any harm until these very few months when it was seen every night by the time a series of deaths in the village strangely occurred.

Without question, it was certain that the black dog was owned by none other than you-know-who. One of the villagers, or two saw with their own eyes that the dog walked into Auey Si's house. It disappeared into the residence, which was situated on a large compound located in the middle of the village. The property was ideally owned

by one of the three oldest clans of the village, the home of the village headwoman. Within the expansive area were three big houses. Yet only one of them was lived in. Its open yard was filled with a cluster of concrete urns to keep crematory ashes and there was a warehouse to store coffins. It was her family business, recently started. She lived with her three-year-old daughter, and mother who had been suffering from Parkinson's. She had multiple careers: being the village headwoman, leasing land, owning rubber plantations, running a motorcycle taxi business, selling urns and coffins, and providing one-stop death care services. With these complementary assets proving a perfect combination, things couldn't go wrong. A religion will be glorious, and a rule will be strong when faithful followers and loyal subjects never question. A funeral business, likewise, thrives where there is death. It wasn't a good idea to blindly conclude the case and spur into action, however. Here, one must seek consultation and receive approval from the most revered and respected first.

Tom arrived at the ancestral shrine in expectation. An owl on the tamarind tree hooted. The singing by the funeral guests could be heard faintly from the temple. The stars shone brightly. The night breeze blew as rhythmically as a young girl trying to prevent flatulence before her lover. He carefully placed the offering of incense sticks, candles and flowers, lit the incense sticks and candles, and prostrated himself. He pressed his palms together in worship and prayed: "You holy Chao Khun Lid, we have no one to turn to. You are our only ancestral spirit that we rely on. Please guide us the way, where we doubt Auey Si is true. If it is so, you holy spirit, please make it known to us. Please make your presence known to us tonight. If not, let the night remain

calm,” he prostrated again at the end of his utterance. The owl hooted three times.

He waited until late at night. The incense sticks and the candles burned out. Still, Chao Khun Lid hadn't yet made an appearance. There hadn't been any unusual signs. The noise from the temple still sounded loudly. The owl went quiet. The wind hurled. Tom repeatedly yawned. Finally, he decided to lie down. He didn't know how long he'd been asleep until he was awake again. Later in the night, the heavy dew turned his hair wet. The noise from the temple had already dropped off. The wind blew in its regular course. He opened his eyes and saw Chao Khun Lid emerging luminously inside the shrine, looking straight at him. Tom rubbed his eyes before he was sure. He bowed once again, put his palms together, and raised both hands respectfully above his head. The pint-sized Chao Khun Lid stepped out of the shrine. Tom crawled backwards to give him space. As he came to the outer side of the roof, Chao Khun Lid grew three cubits bigger — not yet bigger than Tom, much smaller, still. Tom prostrated himself submissively, keeping his face down without looking up. He humbly retained his prostration. Chao Khun Lid touched his head in a motherly manner. He didn't say a word. Nevertheless, this was already clear to Tom. Chao Khun Lid kept stroking his head for a while, paused, and turned back into the shrine. It took Tom a long while to eventually raise his head. He bowed down once again before proceeding to the temple.

The temple: the singing funeral guests had all gone home. In the sermon hall, the abbot's coffin was embraced by small glitter lights. In the urn for incense sticks was one that was freshly lit. The main

Buddha statue maintained a cold face. It was another depiction of the police officer dummy, the “Still Sergeant”, yet sitting on his haunches. Not far from there, two senior citizens, two young men and the vice abbot were having a conversation. A group of dice gamblers had disappeared without trace. Tom hastily pushed his way into the crowd. He bowed down before the Buddha, before the deceased, and before the vice abbot. He turned to everyone, making his statement: “Chao Khun Lid already confirmed, Uncle.”

“Really? When?” asked the old man who Tom called uncle.

“Just now. I just got back from the shrine,” Tom replied.

“Hmm, no surprise.”

“Then what are we going to do?” a young man questioned.

“I don’t know. Venerable, what do you think?” asked another old man.

“It’s up to Grandpa Huang. I have no comment.”

“We should ask around for opinions. But I think we must get it done. If we don’t, who’s going to be next? Ugh...” Grandpa Huang remarked.

“Get it done? How, Grandpa? Expel her, finish her off or what?” a young man asked.

“Whatever. But we must do something,” Tom said.

“It won’t be that easy. It’s different nowadays,” one of the young men said.

“It doesn’t matter what days we’re in. Don’t you see what’s happened in our village? You don’t have a clue, do you, Pong?” Tom argued.

“There. It’s already obvious what is happening now,” Grandpa

Huang said. The vice abbot stood up, excused himself and returned to his quarters. Pong then spoke out: "I know, but we must prove it first. It could be a coincidence that people just died one after another. The abbot died of a cerebral hemorrhage. The doctor diagnosed it."

"You think the doctor is more reliable than Chao Khun Lid, don't you?" Tom demanded.

"No. It's just a fact," Pong said.

"What Pong said sounds sensible. It may be just a coincidence. We're already in the modern days. It's now totally different from back when we were little, right, Huang?" the old man pointed out.

"Whether it's a coincidence or not. The fact that she owns that black dog and runs a funeral business. It's already clear," Grandpa Huang refused to agree and continued: "No matter what. To me, it's all related and we must get it done. Chao Khun Lid did confirm. Right, Tom?"

"Definitely, Uncle."

"Er, not that I'm skeptical of Chao Khun Lid or that I don't respect him. But we'd better take this with a grain of salt," another old man argued before he went on: "Wasn't it Chao Khun Lid that made Serm a spoilt child and die penniless? Wasn't it Chao Khun Lid that made Nat go insane, huh?"

"That's it. We all know about that," Pong said.

"You shut up, Pong. Shut your dirty mouth. If you don't stop, I'll punch you in the face," a young man lost his temper, ready to slug it out. Still, Pong remained calm and composed.

"Calm down, you boys," Grandpa Huang said. The two cooled off. The threat didn't bother Pong. He kept on: "Are you all out of your

mind? Listen to me. I know I can't stop anyone. But listen. You guys, Grandpa Huang, you think expelling someone from the village is that easy? Or getting rid of someone is child's play or what? It's impossible! We're no longer living in a barbaric world. Think about it. If you were falsely charged and accused unfairly like this, how would you feel? Answer me. You too, Grandpa Huang. Tell me. Don't bother. It's plain to see. Just years back, Tom, Grandpa Huang, and you too," Pong turned to one of the young men. He went on looking at them one by one and continued: "Don't you remember when you were accused of being evil and they stood up to the military crackdown that left so many dead. Don't you remember..." Pong hadn't yet finished when Tom stood up in a rage. Everyone looked at him. He gave Pong a stern gaze, clenching his fists, and shouted: "Whatever! But this must be done!" He left the sermon hall with a flush of anger. Grandpa Huang and a young man abruptly followed him without looking at Pong. Another old man stood up, gave him a pat on his shoulder, and left him alone.

The plot by Tom, Grandpa Huang and some of the villagers had been under discussion. The murmur of their malicious plan went on. Although the voices sank to a whisper, it could be heard throughout the village. There was both widespread agreement and disagreement. And this had come to Auey Si's knowledge. She remained composed. Pong joined the group although the objection he had voiced wasn't loud enough. He vanished, shut himself off in the house, and eventually turned indifferent to the looming situation. The whisper, the talk, the scheming had reached agreement. The verdict was to burn. To destroy everything completely, the possessions, the business, the life and the family of Auey Si. Tom was in charge. It wasn't only him, however.

Five more of the villagers were also assigned to the task. Thong was the sixth.

Three nights before the job, the final plan was discussed to prepare for action: one, two, three. Noi got worried when she was listening secretly to the conversation. She looked at the children. Anxious thoughts ran around her head. ‘Again? Is this happening again?’

“Bitch!” a loud shout filled the house. Even the celebratory music played at high volume from a distance turned virtually inaudible. Noi stared blankly at the outdoor lamp, whose light streamed in through the window pane to her eyes. She didn’t even realize that the light was bright. Her answer to him was clear, after being interrogated for 10 minutes. She had been investigated like a criminal. He learned from someone who spoke in confidence at his brother’s house that Noi betrayed him and his brother. Having been scrutinized forcefully about how much she got paid, as her tolerance had reached its limit, she responded: “Two hundred”. Flying into fury, Nat was about to jump on her and strangle her to death. Only two hundred baht? He leaned towards her. That was less than half of what I gave you. Bitch! My brother, your very own uncle, gave you more money. But you voted for them. Then, you should get your ass out of this house. What a bitch! You must tell me why? Why? Noi responded, showing no care. You can’t force your views down somebody’s throat. “It’s a matter of personal preference.” Once she finished, Nat struck a heavy blow to her neck. Noi was knocked out. Nat kept screaming “You bitch!” while walking restlessly around the hall in his concrete one-story house, as if he were competing in the Olympic marathon.

At Serm’s house, ten of them were holding a private discussion,

including Grandpa Huang, his father. Serm, his brother, felt bitterly defeated in the headman election that afternoon. He couldn't believe that his brother lost the election. It was hard to comprehend because even Chao Khun Lid took his side. His brother had been supported openly by him. Everyone in the village knew it well. Before the election, Chao Khun Lid made an appearance before his brother after he asked him if he should run as a candidate. During the election campaign, Chao Khun Lid closely followed his team. Mor Mo, the revered medium of the village, and the abbot were also aware of this. They knew it from Chao Khun Lid himself. The teachers at the local school had all seen Chao Khun Lid and witnessed that he backed up his brother. Everyone saw him leaving the ancestral shrine located further south, cutting across the village, and vanishing into Serm's house. Not only so, according to the pre-election polls made by canvassers, it was predicted agreeably that he was dramatically ahead of his rival. Having worked hard in the campaign, Serm, Nat, their father Grandpa Huang, Serm's wife, their relatives, and the canvassers had made a special effort to win. Their feat of endeavor was as high as their opponent. Their investment in vote-buying wasn't small. The bluff almost disheartened the opposition. Nevertheless, it ultimately turned out that his brother lost the election to an opponent who earned a hundred more votes than him. Among those was one cast by his wife. Someone in the circle secretly told him that before he rushed home to inquire into the case himself.

Before Noi regained consciousness, the cries of her daughter had already woken the house. Nat was snoring loudly in bed on the other side of the room. She used her hand to examine her neck, feel-

ing a slight pain. She then stood up and walked into the room to her daughter. The sun shone, the birds sang. The chickens and ducks were seeking food, waiting for their daily feed. The music playing in celebration of the new village headman was still merrily heard. She held her daughter and consoled her until she turned silent as she tucked her nipple into the baby's mouth. She cuddled her and lulled her to sleep. She put the baby in bed and left the bedroom. With weary eyes, she glared at Nat. This wasn't the hundredth time that she had been physically abused — it could already be the thousandth.

Walking into the kitchen, cooking rice, feeding the poultry, returning back to cook breakfast, collecting the personal necessities of her children and of her own, taking a shower, waking the kids and glancing briefly at her carelessly snoring husband, Noi left for her own house, her mother's. On the way, she ran into Thong who was coincidentally heading to her place. Thong usually sneaked a glance at her every time he came to hang out, chatting or drinking with Nat. Oftentimes, he glanced down to avoid eye contact. It took several years until he got to be with her tête-à-tête. He was one of Nat's best friends. Thong and Noi were of the same age. They both paused and gazed at each other without smiling or exchanging words. They parted in different ways. Three hours later, Nat had woken up at the same time Thong was already chatting with Noi at her house. The wind hurled so hard that it brought a messenger to deliver news to Nat. Serm, his brother, had fatally poisoned himself with Grammoxone pesticide. Nat got up in sheer confusion before flying off so hastily that he hit his head on the door. He rose to his feet, opened the door, and rushed out, with the man who came to wake him running after him.

Her response was finally heard after a long silence. She stroked his head while saying: “I’ve decided. I’ve made up my mind,” causing him greater resentment. He didn’t know what to do. He sighed, shaking his legs slowly, pointlessly. She smiled. She could even see his breath, but he didn’t notice her cold smile as she pulled her hand back from his head.

“I still love you, but I’ve made up my mind. This could be our last night together. I’m leaving for Pattaya tomorrow. How about you, when are you going back to the camp?” she said.

“In a few days. Can you tell me, Noi, why you have to leave? I can look after you. Wait until I’m discharged. I’ll offer to marry you, I’ll propose properly,” he said.

“Uh, if I was on my own, I may choose to go, or not to go and stay here. But I have my children and my mother to take care of. It’s not just me. I’m already done with this neighborhood and these neighboring villages. I’d better move on and try my luck.”

“You don’t count on me that I can take care of you and your children, do you?”

“No. I believe you can be a good husband and take care of me and my children. But I just want to give myself a chance,” she responded, before lying down beside him.

He turned over to lie on top of her.

Chao Khun Lid circled about. Not far away, Grandpa Huang stood vacantly. The neighbors crowded Serm’s body. Nat pushed his way in. The Subdistrict Administrative Organization’s ambulance with its siren turning arrived on scene. Serm’s body was carried to the am-

balance. Nat cried like a child. And so did Serm's wife and children. Tom, Pong, Serm's wife and a few others jumped in the ambulance. Soon after it'd left the house, Thong and Noi arrived. Noi and Grandpa Huang stared fixedly at each other for a short while before Noi rushed to Serm's children. Nat was still sobbing, absent-mindedly. The villagers kept coming to Serm's house. Even Auey Si left the new headman celebration to join. She went directly to Grandpa Huang. Nat watchfully kept his fuming eyes on her before abruptly rushing towards her. Just as he reached Auey Si, Thong flew to stop him. Nat resisted, trying to fight against Thong, until he wore himself out. He sank to the ground, broke down, and cried. Auey Si cast a glance, showing no emotion. She went to Grandpa Huang and reached out to hold his hands. She looked at him, letting her facial expression do the talking. She turned to Chao Khun Lid. No smile. No utterance. A call of a rooster was heard from a distance. Nat got up. He again walked towards Auey Si and his father. No one could stop him this time. He promptly shook his fist. Amidst the loud cries of the witnesses, he ceaselessly rolled with the punches in empty air. Chao Khun Lid didn't move. He stood stagnant against the heavy blows. Nat kept on smashing and uncontrollably bawling until he tired. He threw himself into the ground hopelessly as if he had surrendered to despair. In a flash, to the astonishment of the crowd, Nat rose to his feet. Noi raced to him. He shook himself off and ran. Noi didn't follow. It was Thong who instead went after him. The rest were left in bewilderment.

Nat arrived at the ancestral shrine entirely made of wood — deteriorated yet tidy. The tamarind leaves fell down in the wind.

Thousands of termites ran rampant both on the mound and on the shrine without eating the wood. Thong was catching his breath from a distance when Nat tore apart and burned down the shrine. Thong wasn't able to move to stop him. He felt his legs were stuck in the ground. Roaring with laughter, Nat took off his shirt and swung it in the air hysterically. Soon after that, others entered the scene and seized him. Nat persisted and managed to run away like a wild buffalo shook off from a yoke to make its escape. Several villagers ran after him. He was seized for a short while. Nat had been insane ever since. Noi hence had to live in her mother's house and never returned to her own. During these five months, the house where she used to live with Nat had been a place for her secret rendezvous by the time the matter was known and the house had finally been pulled down by Grandpa Huang. On the second day of the sixth month, Noi and her daughter moved into Tom's place, located on a small hill outside the village.

At the crack of dawn, the rooster started to crow. The light wind blew harder. The conclusion was made. Others left as Tom returned to his bedroom. He stared in pitch-darkness at Noi, his son and her daughter. As he sighed deeply, Noi said: "Are you really going to do that?" He shuddered slightly before returning back to normal and replied: "I think so. Or else who's going to be next?"

"There's no other choice?"

"No."

He lay down and held Noi in his arms. Stroking her body,

pressing his lips on hers, he tore off her wrap skirt and his shorts. Their breathing sounded so heavy that both the children tossed in their sleep.

Until early in the morning, and later, when Noi finished cooking breakfast, Tom and the children were still in bed. The house on the small hill was surrounded by the police. They were accompanied by Grandpa Huang, Auey Si, Thong and a few other villagers.

He didn't press his lips on hers when he lay on top. But he reached out to squeeze her throat. She looked up with wide, terrified eyes and struggled as the grip on her neck turned fatally tighter.

-The End-

PAWN

A Poem
by
Arunrung Satsawee

Translated by Sunida Supantamart

Somebody compared me to a pawn,
Most lowly on the low political board,
A base peasant in the front line.
Hundreds or thousands of my kind will never see through tricks.
A pawn would sacrifice its life for its superior.
It's plain truth. Don't be confounded.
It is an underling for stirring up riots, a buffer.
Can't save itself from being fooled into going out and meet death.

Such a pity heavy is the toil
Of those loving ones outside the board, my friends.
Politics, the world, philosophy they expound.
The life of the upturned pawns – how comfortable.
How did you manage to get outside the board?
What textbook did you consult, sir?
The carcass piles are getting higher and higher,
Carcasses that in your eyes mean nothing.

On the board the battle towards new things was being waged.
Long was the path, with support from the hearts.
The front and the support sought balance.
The modern pawns drove out the king right on the board.
The experts remain on the outside.
Inside are those still stuck in the pen, deceiving their children,
Deceiving even their minds and spirits,
That they are outside the vile political board.

Everything is interconnected.
Such is nature's law. You can do nothing about it.
A butterfly flaps its wings and the fuel burns.
Those who sneer on the hill, and gaze at the stars,
As if still, in truth you are in motion,
Like an overlapping front, turning black to white.
Stubborn is the devil within; it fabricates stories,
Holding you back from stepping away from yourself.

Not believing in democracy, who would blame you for that?
Yet why prevaricate, wielding rhetoric with your sharp tongues?
Make moves according to a real man's code,
Not acting like bullies after defeat, rocking the boat.
Lost the bishop and the horse and you trembled,
There you upset the board again. What a cliché.
All scattered were the pawns. A multitude was the dead,
And so frequent are elections. The entire village is bored to death.

You are one pawn on the board,
Keep that in mind.
After the dust cleared, the horse, queen, bishop, and rook could be seen.
The pawns' chasing the king opened the way for us to think.
It's a discourse of secrecy. The rulers are asleep.
Static pawns are the product,
All their lives fostering dictatorship,
Misunderstanding that they have gotten out of the board.

You are just like a pawn of the opposite side.
The horse, rook, and bishop can be disposed of. No objection.
Let's uncover the wicked ones.
Why spare the king on the board?
We believe that all lives are equal, so we fight.
Set up the board. March towards a new day
On the path of democracy.
If we fall, we will rise, not overturning the board.
On the path of democracy,
We must not let anybody – overturn the board.



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