

# **THE FAVORITE OF THE HAREM.**

Anna Leonowens

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THE morning on which his Majesty set out on his annual visit to Pitchaburee was one of those which occur in the climate of Siam at almost any season of the year, but are seen in their perfection only in October. The earth, air, and sky seemed to bask in a glory of sunlight and beauty, everything that had life gave signs of perfect and tranquil enjoyment. Not a sound broke the stillness, and there seemed nothing to do but to sit and watch the long shadows sleeping on the distant hills, and on, the warm golden fields of waving corn.

Reluctantly quitting my window, I turned my steps toward the palace, leaving all this beauty behind me in a kind of despair; not that my temple school-room was not in itself a delicious retreat, but that it always impressed me with a feeling I could never analyze; when there, it seemed as if I were removed to some awful distance from the world I had known, and were yet more remotely excluded from any participation in its real life.

Taking out my book, I sat down to wait the coming of such of my pupils as might not have accompanied the king on his visit.

In the course of an hour, only one presented herself; she was a young woman called Choy, a fair and very handsome girl, of about twenty summers, or perhaps not so many, with regular features, a very rare thing in a Siamese woman but the great beauty of her face was in her large lustrous eyes, which were very eloquent, even in their seeming indifference. Her hair, which was so long that when unbound it covered her whole person, even to her feet, was tied in a large knot behind and ornamented with the jessamine and Indian myrtle. She had a careless, and I might almost say even a wicked expression in her face, which was slightly marked with the small-pox.

Choy was the youngest sister of the head wife (or concubine) Thièng, and had been my pupil for about six months. This morning she brought me a flower; it was a common wild flower, that grew up everywhere in great profusion, making a lovely carpet, blossoming as it did in every nook and crevice of the stone pavements within the palace. It was just like her, to snatch up the first thing that attracted her, and then to give it away the very next moment. But I received it with pleasure, and made a place for her at my side. She seemed to be out of humor, and jerking herself impatiently into the seat, said abruptly, "Why don't you despise me, as all the rest of them do?" Then, without waiting for an answer, she went on to say: "I can't be what you wish me to be, I'm not coming to school any more! Here's my book! I don't want it, I hate English!"

"Why, Choy, what is the matter?" I inquired.

"I am tired of trying to do so much; I am not going to learn English any more," she replied.

"Don't say so, Choy," I said kindly; "you can't do everything at once; you must learn by degrees, and little by little you know. No one grows good or clever, at once."

"But I won't learn any more, even to grow good and clever. There's no use, no one will ever care for me or love me again. I wish they had let me die that time," she continued. "Bah, I could kill that stupid old consul who saved my life. It were better to be quartered and cast to the crows and vultures, than to live here. Every one orders me about as if I were a slave, and treats me like a dog. I wish I could drown myself and die."

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"But, Choy, you are here now, and you must try to bear it more bravely than you do," I said, not fully understanding the passionate nature of the woman.

"Madam," she said suddenly laying her hand upon my arm, what would you do if you were in my place and like me?"

"Like you, Choy? I don't quite understand you; you must explain yourself before I can answer you."

"Listen then," she said passionately, "and I will tell you.

"When I was hardly ten years old, O, it seems such a long, long time ago! my mother presented me, her favorite child, as a dancing-girl to his Majesty. I was immediately handed over to that vicious old woman, Khoon-Som-Sak, who was at that time the chief teacher of the dramatic art in the palace. She is very clever, and knows all the ancient epic poems by heart, especially the Rāmāyānā, which his Majesty delighted to see dramatized.

"Under her tuition we were subjected to the most rigorous training, mentally and physically; we were compelled to leap and jump, to twist and contort our bodies, and bend our arms, fingers, and ankles in every direction, till we became so supple, that we were almost like young canes of rattan, and could assume any posture the old hag pleased. Then we had to learn long passages from all sorts of poets by heart with perfect correctness, for if we ever forgot even a single word, or did not put it in its right place, we were severely beaten. What with recitations, singing, dancing, playing, and beating time, with our feet, we had a hard life of it; and it was no play for our instructress either, for there were seventy of us girls to be initiated into all the mysteries of the Siamese drama.

"At length, with some half a dozen of my companions, I was pronounced perfect in the art, and was permitted to enter my name among the envied few who played and danced and acted before the king.

I would not have you think that the tasks imposed upon me were always irksome or that I have always felt so depressed and unworthy as I do now. The study of the Poets, and above all of the Rāmāyānā, opened to a new world as it were; and it was great gain to have even this, with the half-smothered yearning for life in the outer world that it inspired. It helped me to live in a world of my own creation, a world of love, music, and song. Rama was my hero, and I imagined myself the fair and beautiful Sita, his wife. I particularly delighted to act that part of the poem describing Rama's expedition to Lanka\* to rescue Sita from the tyrant Rāwānā, and their delicious meeting in the garden, where Rama greets her with those beautiful lines,

\* The Sanskrit name of Ceylon.

'O, what joy! abundant treasures I have won again to-day, O, what joy! Of Sita Yanee\* Now the hard-won prize is mine. O, what joy! again thou livest, within this breast. So mighty, armed with love, and with the wealth of heaven beyond\*\* Soon shall Sita, Indara's fairest daughter, Stand by my side, as stands her matchless mother, Aspārā, in heaven refulgent by the great Indara.'

\* Blessed.

\*\* Highest heaven.

"My face is slightly pock-marked I know; but when painted and dressed in the court jewels, I looked remarkably well as Sita, with my hair floating away over my shoulders and down to my feet, bound only by an exquisite crown of gold, such as Sita is supposed to have worn. On the very first occasion of my performing before the king I had to take part in this drama. As soon as we had got through the first scene, the king inquired my name and age. This set my heart beating in great wild throbs all through the rest of the play. But after this weeks passed by, and I

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heard nothing more from his Majesty. He had forgotten me.

"I grew tired of reciting, and keeping time, and singing my sweetest songs for no one's amusement, but that of the old hag who made me work like a slave for the benefit of the rest of her pupils.

"I began to wish there would be some great fête outside of the palace, where all the court, nobles and princes and the king, would assemble, and where I could act Sita and sing like Narawèke,\* and dance like Thawadee.\*\*

\* Narawèke, a famous singer.

\*\* Thawadee, the goddess of motion.

"Then father and mother might see me too, and O, how pleased they would be! I thought. You do not know how dull it is to be acting before women, and with women only, dressed in robes of kings and princesses. If it were only a real king, or a prince, or even a noble, it would not be quite so bad; but all that mockery of love, bah! it is too stupid. I was sick of my life. I wished mother had kept me at home, instead of Chand. I could then have done just what I had a mind to, and have been just as gay and idle as she was.

"Well! the day came at last. I was all but sixteen when that great and eventful day arrived. The fête was in honor of the king's grandson's hair-cutting.

"Though I had performed several times at the court, his Majesty had taken no further notice of me, and I was sorely discontented with myself, piqued at the indifference of the king, and enraged against the old ladies, who seized every opportunity to snub me, and take down my pride, declaring that a pock-marked face was not a fit offering for the king.

"The longed-for day arrived at length. How elated I was! I had to represent the character of the wondrously beautiful Queen Thèwâdee in one of those ancient dramas, of Maha Nagkhon Watt, whose beauty is said to have entranced even the wild beasts of the forest, so that they forgot, to seize upon their prey as her shadow passed near them. My dress was of magnificent silk and gold, covered with precious gems; my crown was an antique and lovely coronet, one that had graced, the brows of the Queens of Cambodia. It was richly studded with rubies and diamonds. The first day of my rehearsal in this costume, all my companions declared that I looked enchantingly beautiful, that my fortune was made, that, if I would only look and act thus, I could not fail to captivate the king. The bare idea of being elevated above my hateful old teacher, and above some of the proud women who domineered over me, half intoxicated me. In this mood I began to realize my future as already at hand, and growing, impatient with my doubts and fears, I sought at nightfall a craft old female astrologer named Khoon Hate Nah. She took me into a dark and dismal cell under ground, and putting her ear to my side, numbered the pulsation of my heart for a whole hour; she then bound my eyes, and bade me select one of the dark books that lay around me. This done, she expounded to me my whole future, out of her mysterious book of fate, in which all my romantic visions of greatness were as clearly predicted as if the old fiend himself had revealed to her my secret and innermost thoughts. I was troubled only at one part of the old woman's revelations which said that, though I was destined to rise to the greatest honors in the realm, a certain malignant star which would greatly influence my destiny would be in ascendancy during the month of Duenjee,\* and that if I neglected to pass the whole of that period in deep fasting, prayer, and meditation, I should sink at once from the highest pinnacle of my grandeur into the lowest and most terrible abyss.

\* December.

"I resolved, that I would fast and pray for that entire month every year of my life. How I wish now that I had never consulted the old hag, because my confidence in her predictions made me proud and defiant to the old duennas, who are now my bitterest enemies!

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"Alas! dear father and mother. It were better to have cast your daughter Choy into the Mèinam than to have given her to amuse a king.

"On the day of the fête, I awoke at five o'clock in the morning, and began anointing my person with the perfumes and unguents provided us at the king's expense. I then spent the rest of the forenoon in making my hair glossy and lustrous, which I did by rubbing it with the oil of the doksarathe.\* How I gloried and exulted to see it floating away in long shining masses, waving over my shoulders and covering my feet! The afternoon came, and with it the old hags bearing my dress and the costly jewels I was to appear in. They opened the box and laid them before me. I had never seen anything so beautiful. The boxes absolutely sparkled like the stars of heaven in one blaze of light and beauty.

\* Flower of excellence.

"When I saw these jewels I was seized with a fit of temporary madness. I could not help skipping and dancing in a sort of frenzy about my chamber, saying all sorts of absurd things and foretelling my, future triumphs. My slave-women looked on amazed at the wildness of my spirits; and as for the old women who had the care of robing me for the evening, they were wrathful and silent.

We were all ready at last. A small gilt chariot of a tower-like form, made of ivory, and decorated with garlands and crowns of flowers, drawn by a pair of milk-white ponies, and attended by amazons dressed superbly in green and, conveyed me, as the Queen Thewâdee, to the grand hall where we were to perform. My companions, similarly attended, followed me on foot. His Majesty, the princes, and princesses, surrounded by all the courtiers, were already there. The king and royal family were seated on a raised dais under a tapering golden canopy.

"The moment the king saw me approach, my ponies led gently forward by amazons, he rose and, before the court of lords and nobles and princes assembled, inquired my name of one of the duennas. This recalled me once more to his memory, for he said aloud, 'Ah! we remember, she is the one who dances so beautifully.' O, what a moment of triumph that was for me! I felt as if my heart in its wild, ecstatic throbs, would burst through its gorgeous fetters of silk and gold. I rose up in my Chariot and bowed low before him three times. 'But, how now,' he exclaimed angrily, looking around; 'where are the nobles who are to lead the ponies? Let those amazons fall back to the right and left.' In an instant there emerged from the crowd two most distinguished looking noblemen, dressed in flowing white robes, threaded with gold and sparkling with gems; they took their places beside the ponies on either side of my chariot. One was P'haya\* Râtani, the other was a stranger to me.

\* Duke.

"They did homage to me, as if I were a real queen, and stationed themselves at my ponies' heads.

"At this moment I was saluted with a burst of music and the curtain fell. P'haya Râtani bent his head close to mine and whispered, 'How beautiful thou art!' I turned a frowning look upon him for his presumption and replied, 'Have a care, my lord, a word from me may be too much for thee'; but he immediately assumed so humble and penitent an expression that I forgave him. I was both flattered and piqued, however, at the other nobleman's conduct; for though he looked admiringly at me, he said not a word. I would have given my eyes if it had been he who said I was beautiful; for there was a majesty of youth, strength, and manly beauty about him that made a blinding radiance around my chariot, and excited an oblivious rapture in my heart. I panted, I was athirst, for one word of recognition from him. At length I became so vexed at his silence, that I asked him what he was looking at. He replied more cautiously than his companion, 'Lady, I thought that I beheld an angel of light, but thy voice recalls me to the earth again.'

"I was so enraptured at this speech, that I could hardly contain myself. A flood of delight swept over me, my breast heaved, my eyes glowed, my lips parted, my color came and went through the maize-colored cream that

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covered my face and concealed my only deformity.

"When the curtain rose, I, with this new life rushing through my veins, looked triumphantly at the troop of my Companions who did me homage. This new existence made me so joyous, that I must have been beautiful. Thus inspired I acted my part so wondrously well, that a deep murmur of applause ran throughout the hall. His Majesty's eyes were riveted upon me in startled astonishment and evident admiration. I acted my part with a keen sense of its reality, and gave utterance to the burning passion of my heart. As if I were really a queen, I commanded my courtiers to drive away the suitors who wooed me, declaring that anything beneath royalty would stain my queenly dignity and beauty.

"But when the banished prince, my lover, appeared, I rose hastily from my gilded and ivory Chariot, and with my hair floating round my form like a deep lustrous veil, through which the gems of on my robe shone out like glorious stars of a dark night, I laid myself like the lotus—stem uprooted, prostrate at his feet. I pronounced his name in the most tender accents. I improvised verses even more passionate than those contained in the drama:

'Instantly I knew my lord, as the heat betrays the fire, When through the obscuring earth unclouded Shining out thou didst appear Worthy of all joy; my soul is wrung with rapture, And it quivers in thy presence, as the lotus petals before a mighty wind.'

The courtiers raised me up from the floor and led me back to the chariot. The prince who was no other than 'Murakote,' took his, or more properly her, place beside me, and the curtain fell. The play was over. With nothing but the memory of a look, I returned to my now still more dismal rooms. I disrobed myself of all my glittering ornaments with a sigh, bound up my long, shining hair, and sat down to enjoy the only happiness left me, my proud, swelling thoughts. I was just losing myself in soft, delicious reveries, which illuminated as with a celestial weary light the whole world within me, when I observed a couple of old duennas, who came fawning upon me, caressing and praising me while telling me that his Majesty had ordered that I should be in attendance in his supper—chamber that evening.

"I listened in mute pain. The power of the new passion that now filled my heart seemed to deny all authority, and the very thing for which I had so long worked and longed had become valueless and as nothing to me. But I dared not excuse myself, so I silently followed my conductresses, and for the first time in my life ascended to his Majesty's private supper—chamber.

How changed I was! that which had been my sole ambition ever since I was ten years old came down upon me with a gush of woe that I could hardly have believed myself capable feeling.

"I sat down to await the coming of the king; but I could have plucked out the heart that had rushed so madly on, casting its young life away at the feet of a man whose name even I did not know, whose face I had not seen till that day, but the tones of whose voice were still sounding through and through my quivering pulses.

"Well, my forehead, if not my heart, I laid at his Majesty's feet. 'I am your slave, my lord,' said my voice, the sound of which startled my own ears, so hollow and deceptive did it seem.

"Do you know how fascinating, you were this evening?' said the king. 'Older by forty years than my father,' thought I, as, dissembling still, I replied, 'Your slave does not know.' 'But you were, and I am sure you deserve to be a queen,' he added, trying to play the gallant. 'My lord, is too gracious to his slave,' I murmured.

"Why, Thièng!' he said, speaking to my eldest sister; 'why have you hidden this beauty away from me so long? Let her not be called Choy\* any longer, but Chorm.'\*\* I would weary you if I tried to tell you how he praised and flattered me, and how before a week was over I was the proudest woman in the Palace.

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\* Surfeit.

\*\* Delight.

"I became a stranger to my dismal rooms in the street, to my slave-women as well as to my companions. I lived entirely in his Majesty's apartments, and it was asleep or in the council hall, that rushed down to plunge into the lotus-lake or to ramble in the rose garden. But I never stopped to think. I would give my heart a moment to reflect; not a moment to the past, not a moment to the future. I was intoxicated with the present. Every day gifts rare and costly were brought to me from the king; I affected to despise them, but he never relaxed his endeavors to suit my taste, to match my hair and my complexion. The late proud, insolent favorite, who used to order us girls about as if we were dogs, knelt before me, as half from ennui and half from coquetry I feigned illness and inability to rise from my master's couch. I cannot tell you how well I acted my part; I was more daring than any favorite had yet been.

"In the tumult and excess of the passion I felt for a stranger, I was able to make the king believe that he was himself its object; and he was so flattered at my seeming admiration and devotion, that he called me by the tender name, 'Look,' child, and indulged me in all my whims and fancies.

"But, at length, I grew tired of so much acting, and the intensity of my manner began to flag. I complained of illness, in order to escape to my own rooms, where I flung myself down upon my leather pillow and drove my teeth through and through it, in the after-agony that my falseness brought upon me. I was worn with woe, more than wasted by want of food. My sister observed my paleness and said, half in earnest and half in jest, 'Don't take it so much to heart, child; we have all had our day; it is yours now, but it can't last forever. Remember, there are other dancing-girls growing up and some of them are handsomer than you are.'

"'What do you mean?' I retorted, fiercely; 'do you suppose I am sorrowing because of my grandfather? Bah! Take him if you want him.' 'Hush, child,' she replied and don't forget that you are in a lion's den.'

"'Lion or tiger,' I said laughing bitterly, 'I mean to play with his fangs, even if they tear my heart, until I am rich as you at least.' 'Do you, indeed,' she rejoined. 'Be quick, then, and give him a p'hra ong.\*' With that she left me to my own wild, bitter, maddening, condemning self.

\* Sacred infant.

"Months of triumph, rage, agony, and despair wore away, and my day was not over. I was acknowledged by all to be the wilful favorite 'Chorm.' In the mean time I had one ray of comfort: I found out the name of the man I loved, from a new slave-woman who had just entered into my service. It was P'haya-P'hi-Chitt. That very day I took a needleful of golden thread and worked the name into a scrap of silk which I made into an amulet and wore round my neck. This greatly solaced me for a little while, after which I began to crave something more.

"The new slave-woman who had entered my service, just because I was the favorite, seemed so kind and attentive, and was such a comfort to me, whenever I rushed to my rooms for a respite, that I determined to employ her in obtaining information of the outside world for me. 'Just to beguile me of my wary hours,; I said. She seconded the idea with great alacrity. 'To whose house shall I go first?' she inquired. 'O, anywhere!' I replied carelessly; then as if suddenly remembering myself, I said, 'O Boon, go to P'haya-P'hi-Chitt, and find out how the groom of the Queen Thewâdee lives in a harem.'

"When she returned, which was close upon nightfall, I was impatient to hear all she had to tell me; but after she had told me all, I became more impatient and restless still. Her face lighted up as she expatinest and half in jest, 'Don't take it so much to heart, child; we have all had our day; it is yours now, but it can't last forever. Remember, there are other dancing-girls growing up and some of them are handsomer than you are.'



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"Then I drooped and languished once more, and began to long for some more tangible token of his love for me. I grew bolder and bolder, and the tender-hearted slave-woman sympathized with my passion for him. At last I sent her out with a message to him. It contained but two words, Kit-thung,\* and he returned but two more, Rak-mak.\*\*

\* I remember.

\*\* I love much.

All this while I still visited the king, and was often alone with him; he continued to indulge me, giving me costly rings, betel-boxes, and diamond pins for my hair. Every petition I made to him was granted. Every woman in the palace stood in awe of me, not knowing how I might use my power, and I was proud and wilful. My father was created a duke of the second rank in the kingdom, my brothers were appointed governors over lucrative districts. I had nothing left to wish for but a child. If I had had a child, I might have been saved. A child only could have subdued my growing passion, and given to my life a fairer blossom and a richer fruit than it now bears. At last, I don't know what put it into my head, but I began to solace myself by writing to P'haya-P'hi-Chitt every day, and destroying the letters, as soon as they were written.

"My next step was to send one of these letters to him by Boon. He was very bold, and it makes my heart ache even now to think how brave and fearless he was. He wrote to me at once, and implored me in a depth of anguish and in words as if on fire to disguise myself in Boon's clothes, to quit the palace, and go out to meet him. I burnt the letter as soon as I had learnt it by heart. My heart was set on fire; and I pondered over and over the proposition of my lover, until it became too fascinating for me to resist much longer.

"So I took Boon into greater confidence than ever, put a bag heavy with silver into her hands, and, moreover promised her her freedom if she would assist me to escape. 'Keep the silver till I ask you for it, lady,' she replied, 'but trust me to help you. I will do it with all my heart.'

"Her devotion and attachment surprised me. It could not have been greater, had she been my own sister. Poot-tho!\* could I have seen the end I would have stopped there. I saw nothing but the face that had kindled a blinding fire in my heart.

\* Pitiful Buddha

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"The faithful Boon served me but too well. It was all arranged that I should go out at the Patoo—den,\* the next evening at sunset, with my hair cut off, and disguised as Boon. P'haya—P'hi—Chitt was to be there with at boat ready to convey us to Ayudia, and Boon was to remain behind until the whole thing should have blown over. This last was her own proposition. I tried in vain to urge her to accompany us in our flight. She said it would be safer for us both to have a friend in the palace, who could give us information of whatever took place.

\* Gate of earth

"In the agitation in which I wrote these last instructions to my lover, I made so many blunders that I had to write the letter all over again. Boon implored me to put no name to it, for we still feared some discovery. I gave it sealed with my ring to Boon, who carried it off in great delight; and I laid myself down upon my couch to brood on my overflowing happiness. In the blessedness of the great love that absorbed every feeling of my heart, I loved even the king, whom I had most injured and deceived, with the loving devotion of a child.

"In the midst of my ecstatic dreams I fell asleep, and dreamed a dream, O, so different! As plainly as one sees in broad daylight, I saw myself bound in chains, and P'haya—P'hi—Chitt flung down a dreadful precipice.

"My chamber door was thrown rudely open, I was seized by cold hands, harsh voices bade me rise, and I opened my eyes upon that woman who is called by us Mai Taie.\* There was Boon tied hand and foot lying before my door. It was all over with us. 'If I could only save him,' was my only thought.

\* Mother of death, or female executioner.

"They were putting chains on my hands, and jostling me about; for so benumbed and prostrated was I at the sight of Boon, that I could not rise. I did not dare to ask her a single question for fear of implicating ourselves all the more, when my sister Thièng rushed into my room screaming, flung herself upon my bed, and clasped me around the neck. "'Hush! sister,' I said. 'Make these women wait a little, and tell me how they came to find it out?'

"'O Choy! Choy!' she kept repeating, wringing her hands and moaning piteously.

"'Sister Thièng, do you hear me? I don't care what they do to me. I only want to know how much you know, how much he knows?'

"'A copy of a letter you wrote to some nobleman was picked—up about an hour ago, and taken to the chief judge. She has laid it before the king.'

"'Then if that is all, he does not know the name,' I said with a sigh of deep relief.

"'Ah! but he 'll find it out, sister,' said Thièng. 'Throw yourself upon his mercy and confess all, for he still loves you, Choy. He would hardly believe you had written the letter.'

"'Has Boon said anything?' I next inquired.

"'No, not a word, she is as silent as death,' said my sister. 'But where did you get her? Who is she? She was taken on her return, because you had mentioned your slave Boon in your letter. Now I must leave you and go back to the king,' said my sister. Then, weeping and abusing poor Boon, she went away.

"'Boon and I were chained and dragged to the same cell you visited the other day.

"'As soon as we were left alone, I asked Boon if she had confessed anything. 'No, my lady,' she replied with great energy, 'nothing in this world will make me confess aught against P'haya—P'hi—Chitt.' At the instant it flashed upon me that this woman, whoever she was, also loved him, and I looked at her in a new light. She was young still, and well formed, with small hands and feet, that told of gentle nurture. "'Boon Châ,\*' said I, in great distress, 'Who are you? Pray tell me, it is of no use to conceal anything from me now. Why are you so happy to suffer with me? Any one else would have left me to die alone.'

\* Dear.

"'O my lady!' she began, folding her hands together as well as she could with the chains on them, and drawing herself close to me, 'forgive me, O, forgive me, I am P'haya—P'hi—Chitt's wife.'

"'I was silent in amazement. At length I said, 'Go on and tell me the rest, Boon.'

"'O, forgive me,' she replied, humbly. 'I cried bitterly the night he returned from the grand fête because he told me how beautiful you were, how passionately he loved you, and that he should never be happy again until he obtained you for his wife. He refused to eat, to drink, or to sleep, and I vowed to him by my love that you should

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be his. But I found you were the favorite, and that it would be a more difficult task than I had at first thought; so rather than break my promise to my husband, nay, lady, rather than meet his cold, estranged look, I sold myself to you as your slave. Every ray or gleam of sunshine, every beautiful thought that fell from your lips, I treasured up in my heart and bore them daily to him, that I might but console my noble husband. You know the rest. If I deceived you, it was to serve both you and him, while my heart wept to think that I was no longer beloved. Gifted with unnumbered virtues is my husband, lady; and my heart, like his shadow, still follows him everywhere, and will follow him forever.'

"I was so sorry for Boon, I had not the heart to reproach her. I crept closer to her, and, laying my head on her bosom, we mingled our tears and prayers together. And I marvelled at the greatness of the woman before me.

"Next morning, — for morning comes even to such wretches as my companion and me, — we were dragged to the hall of justice. The king did not preside as we had expected. But cruel judges, male and female, headed by his Lordship P'haya Promé P'hatt and her Ladyship Khoon Thou App. Not knowing what charge to make, they read the copy of my letter over and over again, hoping to guess the name of the gentleman to whom it was sent. Failing to do this, they subjected Boon to a series of cross-questionings, but succeeded only in eliciting the one uniform reply, 'What can a poor slave know, my lords?'

"Her feet were then bastinadoed till the soles were raw and bleeding. She still said, 'My lords, be pitiful. What can a poor slave know?'

"After a little while, Khoon Thou App begged Boon to confess all and save herself from further suffering. Boon remained persistently silent, and the last was applied to her bare back till it was ribbed in long gashes, but she confessed not a word. At last the torture was applied to her thumbs until the cold sweat stood in great drops on her contorted and agonized brow; but no word, no cry for mercy, no sound of confession, escaped her lips. It was terrible to witness the power of endurance that sustained this woman. The judges and executioners, both male and female, exhausted their ingenuity in the vain attempt to make her betray the name of the man to whom she had carried the letter; and, finally, when the lengthening shadows proclaimed the close of day, they departed, leaving me with poor Boon bleeding and almost senseless, to be carried back by the attending amazons to our cell.

"I tried to comfort poor Boon. She hardly needed comfort; her joy that she had not betrayed her husband was even greater than her sufferings.

"Another day dawned upon us. Boon was borne in a litter, and I crept trembling by her side, to the same hall of justice. Boon was subjected once more to the lash, the bastinado, and the thumb-screws, till she fell all but lifeless on the ground. It was all in vain; that woman possessed the heart of a lion; if they had torn her to pieces, she would not by the faintest sound have betrayed the only man she had loved in her sad life.

"The physicians were sent for to restore her to life again. She was not permitted the luxury of death. Then, when this was over, they bound up her wounds with old rags, gave her something to revive her, and laid her on a cool matting. My turn came, and her eyes fixed themselves upon me with an intensity that fairly made me shiver. They seemed to cry aloud to my in-most soul, saying as plainly as lips could speak, 'What is suffering pain, or death compared to truth? Be true to yourself. Be true to your love. If you love another, you love not yourself. Flinch not. Bear bravely all they can inflict.' I shuddered as the judges began to question me, but I shuddered more whenever I met Boon's eyes, so fixed, so steadfast, so earnest, so appealing. I prevaricated. I told the judges lies. 'That letter was written as a joke to frighten my youngest sister. I was only playing. I know no man in the world but my father and brothers and my gracious master the king.'

"My sister was summoned. If I could have spoken with her, she might have helped me in my strait; but the women who were sent to bring her questioned her before she knew what they were about, and she plainly exposed my lies to the judges.'

"A messenger was despatched to the king. The judges feared to proceed to extreme measures with me, who had so lately been the plaything of their sovereign. After half an hour's delay, the instructions were received, and I was ordered to bare my back. A feeling of shame prevented me. I would not obey. I resisted with what strength I had. 'You may lash me with a million thongs,' I said to them, 'but you shall not expose my person.' My silk vest torn off, my scarf was flung aside, my slippers were taken from my feet. My arms were stretched and tied to a post, and thus I was lashed. Every stroke that descended on my back maddened me into an obdurate silence, Boon's eyes searched into my soul. I understood their meaning. My flesh was laid open in fine thin stripes, but I do not remember flinching. My feet were then bastinadoed, and I still preserved, I know not how, my secret. Then

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there was a respite, and they gave me something to drink.

"In fifteen minutes I was once more exhorted to confess. The judges, finding me still unsubdued, ordered the thumbscrews to be administered. Not all the agonies, not all the horrors, I have ever heard of, can compare with the pain of that torture. It was beyond human endurance 'O Boon, forgive me, forgive me,' I cried; 'it is impossible to bear it.' With Boon's eyes burning into my soul, I gasped out the beloved name. Boon threw up her arms, gave a wild shriek of terror, and became insensible.

"I was released from further punishment. Two of the pha-koons\* were despatched for P'haya-P'hi-Chitt. He was betrayed to the king's officers for a heavy reward, and before noon was undergoing the same process of the law. When Boon was once more brought to life, she saw her husband in the hands of the executioners. She started upright, and supporting herself on her rigid arms and hands, cried out to the judges and to Khoon Thou App: 'O my lords! O my lady! listen to me. O believe me! It was all my doing. I am P'haya-P'hi-Chitt's wife. It was I who deceived the Lady Choy. It was I who put it into his head. Did I not? You can bear testimony to my guilt!' An ineffable smile beamed on her pale lips and in her dim eyes as they turned towards her husband.

\* Sherriffs.

"There was profound silence among the judges. P'haya-P'hi-Chitt, I, and even the rabble crowd of slaves listened to her with astonished countenances. There was an incontestable grandeur about the woman. Khoon Thou App, that stern and inflexible woman, had tears in her eyes, and her voice trembled as she asked, 'What was thy motive, O Boon?' There was no reply from Boon. There was no need to torture P'haya-P'hi-Chitt. He was chained and conveyed to the criminals' prison, and we were carried back to our cell.

"The report of our trial, and the confessions elicited, were sent to the king. That very night, at midnight, the sentence of death was pronounced by the Secret Council upon us three; but the most dreadful part of all was the nature of the sentence. Boon and I were to be quartered; P'haya-P'hi-Chitt hewn to pieces; and our bodies not burned, but cast to the dogs and vultures at Watt-Sah-Kate.\*

\* The rite of burning the body after death is held in great veneration by the Buddhists, as they believe that by this process its material parts are restored to the higher elements. Whereas burial, or the abandonment of the body to dogs and vultures, inspires a peculiar horror since, according to their belief, the body must then return to the earth and pass through countless forms of the lower orders of creation, before it can again be fitted for the occupation of a human soul.

"My sister Thièng implored the king in vain to spare my life. My poor mother and father were prostrated with grief. As for Boon, she never uttered a single word, except in answer to my inquiries, if she were suffering much, she said very gently, 'Chan bha lah pi thort,' — Let me say farewell, dear. Her pallor had become extreme, but her cheeks still burned, all the beauty of her spirit trembled on her closed eyelids. She appeared as one almost divine.

"On Sunday morning at four o'clock the faithful and matchless Boon was taken from our cell to undergo the sentence pronounced upon her and her husband. The day appointed for my execution, which was to be private, arrived; and I had no wish to live, now that P'haya-P'hi-Chitt and Boon were gone, but the women who attended me said that no preparations were as yet made for it. I wondered why I was permitted to live so long.

"After two weeks of cruel waiting to join my beloved Boon, I was removed to another cell, where my sister visited me, with the good Princess Somawati, her daughter, at whose earnest request, as I was told, the British Consul\* had pleaded so effectually with the king that my life had been granted to his petition.

\* Choy's life was spared at the intercession of Sir Robert J.H. Schombergk, her Britannic Majesty's Consul at Bangkok.

"Alas! it was Boon who deserved to live, and not I. I am not grateful for a life that is little better than a curse to me. God sees that I speak the truth. Woe still hovers over me. It is the doom of guilt committed in some former lifetime. I am an outcast here, and in this world I have no part, while every day only lengthens out my life of sorrow."

Here the poor girl broke off, laid her head on the table and wept as I never saw a human being weep, great tears of agony and remorse.

As soon as Choy left me, I hurried home and wrote down her narrative word for word, as nearly as I could;

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but I encountered then, as always, the almost insuperable difficulty of finding a fit clothing for the fervid Eastern imagery, in our colder and more precise English.

We became better friends. I maintained a constant oversight of her and persuaded her gradually out of her griefs. She learned in time to take a pleasure in her English studies, and found comfort in the love of Our Father in heaven. Without repining at her lot, hard as it was, or boasting of her knowledge, but with a loving, humble heart she read and blessed the language that brought her nearer to a compassionate Saviour.

Mrs. Leonowens.