

13 Thai Short Stories – 2013

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Mr Phitsadarn’s love

ARJIN PANJAPHAN

... And Phitsadarn has found a way all of his own...

He thought he had to practise as a painter and draw nudes. Ha! He snapped his fingers and groaned in his heart contentedly. He could see the undertaking through and through. He had to convert his room into a painter’s room, find strange pictures to decorate the walls, buy a table fitted together in a strange way and set it up, find a

vase with strange flowers and place it on the table – oh, no, not *on* the table, that wasn't strange; it had to be *under* the table to look like ultramodern art –, buy an easel for the canvas, buy painting accessories, buy colours, cut out overalls as foreign painters wore, let his hair grow longer and grow a moustache and a beard. Phitsadarn hastened to the mirror and looked at himself in his painter's attire. All right, that would do.

At this point he announced that he was looking for female models to pose for nudes ... Hey, that's bawdy! Oh, not yet, dear reader, not yet. Keep cool!

He had very little money to carry out his trade as a painter because he had already spent quite a lot on refurbishing the room and purchasing his material. Worse than that, one day he found himself in front of a shop selling chests, suitcases and safes of various sizes and caught sight of a huge wooden chest he fell for because it was an antique with a semi-circular lid. He liked its big size because he was short, he liked its antique craftsmanship because he was trying to pass himself off as *vieux jeu* and he liked its rounded lid because he had always liked stories about cutting corners.

So he made up his mind to squeeze his purse and buy that chest. The shop owner agreed wholeheartedly with him: 'You have a keen eye choosing an article such as this one, if you don't mind my saying so, sir. An article like this is multipurpose. It can even be used as a coffin when the time comes.'

Now that chest was properly installed in Phitsadarn's atelier and Phitsadarn was left penniless, so he changed his mind about hiring a female model for nude painting, but he had to let his house. So, what about him? Well, he would go somewhere else. Eh? Where to? Oh, yes, that's it! He'd go and stay in the chest. Why not?

He pierced a hole in the chest that would allow him to breathe while inside and at the same time would allow him to look outside. When the tenant went out he would know and he would come out and do whatever he had to do and when he was done he would steal back inside and hide again. So doing, he would have the income derived from the rental of the house.

But ... ah, yes, he had to make it conditional to the tenant to live in the house alone, so that no one would see him out of the chest when the tenant went out. That made sense.

And he had to move the chest to some messy room no one was interested in. The most suitable must be the bathroom. Talking about the bathroom ... yep, there must be another condition: that the tenant be a woman.

There you are: bawdy again!

Nah. That was just an idle thought as anyone can toy with. Not at all: Mr Phitsadarn hadn't lost his spirit to that extent. That condition wasn't in the tenancy agreement at all ... Well now, don't tell me you are disappointed ... See how it is?

Don't fret, dear reader: luck intervened. As it happened, someone came to rent the house, and that someone was a woman, a young woman actually, and pretty, and single as well. With such attributes, agreement swiftly followed.

The pigeons and the old man

VIENG VACHIRA BUASON

1

(Picture of the top half of a man in his early thirties wearing a yellow polo shirt, with the dark blue glass façade of a building as background. His face is bright, but his eyes are hard, as if smouldering with rage. It looks as if he's alone, talking to the camera.)

Don't. Don't say anything, uncle. It's staring us in the face. Look at the roof and back window: totally smashed in. I've just called my garage to have them come over right away to appraise the damage. We'll soon know how much, but I think it can't be less than fifty thousand, because back windowpanes alone cost over twenty thousand. And then the roof's got to be knocked back into shape and repainted, and there's that deep gash on the boot lid as well, not

to mention that while the car's being repaired I'll have to fork out taxi fare every day.

And look at this! The sticker 'We Love Their Majesties' I went to the trouble of hiring people to produce and I stuck on the windshield above the boot lid, don't you think its current state is appalling? It's been so ripped that the two of them are disfigured and the only word left to read is 'jest'. If I hadn't seen it was an unavoidable accident, excuse me, but I assure you you'd be dead from the first step you took out of the lift.

No way will I allow anyone to insult Their Majesties, ever.

Yes, I know. I know like everyone here that you're utterly loyal to His Majesty. I saw you dressed in black going on your own to Sanam Luang every day in early September. How could I not? The condo housekeeper who makes some extra money by taking dogs for a walk in the little park nearby every morning told me you pressed everyone to go to Sanam Luang on September 13 and stay there overnight to take part in the funereal ceremony to send Phra Phee Nang to heaven the next day, but the fact that my car was destroyed has nothing to do with your love of His Majesty.

Talking about this, I can't help feeling that the majority of people in this country don't get it. It really puzzles me. I've been puzzled since I saw 'We Love the King' stickers come up everywhere some two to three years ago. If I'm not mistaken, it seems it wasn't long after preparations for the celebration of His Majesty's eightieth birthday began, and right up to now, please notice, whether on private mirrors, on public phone booths, on the windows of shops of all kinds, even above the urinals at roadside petrol stations, we find that sticker just about everywhere. A friend of mine swears he even saw one on the glass pane of a massage parlour. Therefore one must conclude that people of all walks of life are loyal to His Majesty, yet at the same time I don't see anyone taking this matter seriously, especially the academics, whose various discourses are always raising rhetorical issues, including those who like to claim they are civil servants at His Majesty's service...

Chain reaction

KORN SIRIWATTHANO

‘Why are there two fishes,’ my wife asks, sounding surprised.

‘There’s only one,’ I tell her. I’ve just isolated a single albino giant gourami in a compartment I built specially. This albino giant gourami used to share the pond with the other three without making waves, but with the onset of the rains the weather changed and the fish fell ill because it couldn’t adjust to the changing weather conditions. Because of its physical weakness, white fungus spread over its tail fin and the pectoral fins it uses to steer. This irritated its three companions which resented its company and bit and chased it away in resounding flaps and slaps, with the water splashing to the ground above. It kept being chased and bitten day and night until its body got stripped raw and covered in bruises from head to tail, its white scales cluttering the bottom of the pond. I could see that if I let it be eaten alive like this it’d die for sure. Being eaten up by fungus must be painful enough, and with its companions biting it, it wouldn’t stay alive for long. So I caught it and put it into a glass tank to treat its disease. I gave it oxygen and rubbed strong yellow cream and sea salt on it.

It took only two weeks for it to return to normal. The white fungus over its fins and the wounds from its companions’ biting disappeared. It looked perky. When I was sure it was healthy and strong, I caught it and put it back in the pond with its three companions, thinking that everything would return to normal. But within fifteen minutes of my leaving it there, it was assaulted by the other fishes as before. Its being bitten and beaten this time wasn’t out of irritation. I believe it was being repelled as a stranger more than anything else. Therefore I used whatever material I could muster to make a partition for it to stay alone for a while. Tomorrow I’ll buy thick red bricks for the partition to make it look good so it’ll become a single pond with two rooms, one with one occupant and the bigger one with three.

‘There are two,’ my wife insists...

The traitor

YODA HASEMSENG

The loud pronouncements of the leaders broadcast through amplifiers roused the demonstrators to the point of frenzy. The mood that seethed with anger got fiercer step by step. Police in and out of uniform whose forces surrounded them felt tense as the friction turned more violent.

‘We are fighting with our lives,’ Thawee hollered. He was a young student in his last year of study, totally willing to give exam day a miss to make it his job to lead the demonstration. ‘If they don’t listen to us we won’t listen to them.’

Villagers young and old, male and female, clapped and shouted approval. The clamorous chaos lasted and lasted before the demonstrators were all willing to shout along his concluding sentence.

‘Kill them! Kill them!’

The event looked confused and spread gradually. It was then that I realised that nobody could control anything any longer.

‘Kill them!’

‘Kill them!’

A few minutes later, young people and able-bodied men began to push through the surrounding circle to clash with the officials. Children and women as well as old men helped one another pick up stones and earth clots they hurled randomly, so that the police retreated in disarray, too far to set up a defence line.

‘Please stay peaceful or else you’ll be arrested and charged with fomenting disorder,’ an official shouted through a megaphone, to almost no effect. Everything seemed to stop for a brief moment only. As soon as the announcement was over, war exploded.

A flow of villagers poured forth at a run. The police set up a front row of shields and marched in a crowd using their batons, striking and kicking at will. The result of the clash was bodies of villagers falling to the ground one after the other.

Finally the police got close enough to arrest leaders such as Uncle Muean, Uncle Suk and Headman Nam, and the one who was pummelled till his face was swollen and black and blue, with bright red blood flowing out of both his ears, was Thawee.

‘Professor, they’ve caught all of our leaders,’ I turned to shout in shock. ‘Do something, please ... hurry!’

I went to link hands with Professor Sukphong, but he pushed my arm away.

‘Everything is over,’ he said, stressing each word. ‘As I already said, everything is over. You understand, don’t you?’

‘But they’ve carted our staff away!’ I felt confused with his attitude. ‘Won’t you help them first, professor?’

‘Sure I will, but not now. And we should give up our role here and now.’

‘But professor...’ My voice was hoarse.

As the police dragged Thawee forcibly away, he tried to pull back when he turned and came face to face with me. I clearly saw his eyes staring with hate – a defying hate that caught me unawares.

‘Remember ... Remember this, you lot,’ he said with resentment.

Saliva mixed with blood forcefully spit out smeared my entire face. He smiled in contempt before stumbling under the drag of the police, leaving me standing dumbfounded.

‘I’ll tear away your masks, wait for it,’ he shouted finally.

I turned to look at Professor Sukphong but saw that his face was bland as if nothing had happened...

The disused drawer

WAN NA JANTARN

The young woman introduced the key into the keyhole of the top drawer which hadn’t been opened for a very long time because it was stuck and it didn’t contain anything that was needed.

The keyhole was tight with rust, so it was almost impossible to get in. When she managed to push the key into it, it got stuck. Turning it left or right didn't help. When she tried to pull it out, the tall antique wooden chest shook and wobbled and almost collapsed. The young woman pursed her lips and sighed, raised her fist to pound on the drawer, shaking it up and down and sideways, pulling it and pushing it, to get the better of its obstinacy.

It seemed that the strength of the shaking would make the notch of the key enter its groove. As soon as it consented to turn right with a click, the drawer sprang forth from the strength of the pulling. She hastily slipped her hand under it to prevent it from slipping out and then slowly pushed it back half way, with enough of an opening to take things out of it.

The things in the drawer were in the same state as the day her elder brother had come back from abroad, the day she had taken out a few things and finally had had to put them back inside as before. The drawer was still full of old books, bits of paper, friendship notebooks and more recent stamped greetings cards sent from a distant land.

She stood holding the brim of the drawer at length, her eyes roving over those things. Tears came up but she forced them back by blinking and clamping her teeth hard. Her hand went in to idly touch this and grab that and take it out for a look, until she had enough and chose to pick up an old, yellow hard-cover schoolbook. She pushed the drawer back almost entirely, intending to leave it slightly ajar, with the key still in the keyhole. She was afraid that if it was fully closed it couldn't be opened again.

The young woman took the schoolbook and went to sit down on the bed by the window, carefully let her fingers flick the cracked yellowed pages lightly, meaning to handle them as carefully as possible, but then she couldn't prevent a tear from splashing on the paper, causing a star-shaped stain. Finally she closed the schoolbook and, raising it, pressed it to her chest as she sobbed. She had been determined not to cry like a child again after her twentieth birthday. Yet now, five years later, here she was acting like a weak girl once again.

‘Mustn’t cry! I’m a big girl now.’ She panted in a dire effort not to sob...

The locksmith at the crossroads

NOTTHEE SASIWIMON

It’s like every morning when I have to wake up because of mum’s calls. She must have been calling me several times, as the voice I hear is beginning to harden with anger.

I’ve always found it hard to wake up. If I sleep soundly, no amount of noise will wake me up. Mum and my little sister once came in to tell me to wake up, shower and go to school. They shouted, shook me, slapped me in the face and I didn’t comply for as long as half an hour. By then mum was thinking of running out to get our neighbour help drive me to hospital, but I forced my eyelids open and stroked my cheeks repeatedly. My sister would tease me with this story in front of her friends for years, saying that even if there was an earthquake, the house was on fire or the world deluged, if I still didn’t want to wake up I wouldn’t. She and her friends who came to the house found it funny to spray granulated salt in my mouth while I slept and still didn’t wake up. That had them in stitches. Later they modified the game with sugar, pepper or whatever else more outlandish I had no way of knowing if mum didn’t catch them and warn them of punishment for further wrongdoing.

‘Today you’ve got special tuition, haven’t you?’ How long has mum been standing at the front of the bedroom I have no idea, probably intending to shake me awake like every morning when I’m hard to arouse.

‘Oh?’ I’m still thick-headed, I can’t think, I still don’t want to get up, I feel a nagging pain around my right shoulder and temple.

‘Have you been having a nightmare again? Look at you: you’re sweaty all over.’ Mum sits down beside me, strokes my forehead and

hairline bathed in sweat. Mum likes to act as if I was still a baby. Sometimes it's annoying, but sometimes ... like now.

A nightmare? No idea. Can't remember. I never remember dreams. I remember only that sometimes I wake up with a parched mouth, my eyelids hot and swollen, shivering as if I had a fever, aching all over. So, maybe it means I've woken from a nightmare.

Mum sits with her back to the window. The morning sun outside sends out a soft brightness. The picture of mum framed against the light is beautiful. She's mysterious like a fairy or a sprite or an enchantress, but mum is only mum, the same old mum who's fussy and boring, the same old mum who sometimes is warm and huggable. Such is my mum. Today mum is the latter. I want to hug her tightly for no reason I can think of, but I'm too old to show love like a child like that. Sometimes I'm covertly jealous of my little sister who's still young enough to run up to mum to give her a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Their faces seem incredibly happy then. Just that, just this much I crave but am too bashful to risk any longer...

'Duang Jampa' and the Naga King

PRAKASIT KHONWAI

That evening, after letting his pupils go home, your friend the teacher chose to tell the legend of the Naga King. This tale of a gigantic snake from time immemorial was spread out before you. The Naga King is a fabulous creature able to change shape. He resides in the netherworld. It is said that there is a royal palace there as amazingly beautiful as heaven. After piling up endless details at length, finally the teacher veered towards the matter of good fortune.

'At the bridge, it appeared between the second and third pillars. Those who played those numbers won the underground lottery all over town,' the teacher said, praising its merit. This had made the news about the second Thai-Lao Bridge at the end of last month.

‘Come along, so that you get the lucky number and win like the others,’ your teacher friend insisted, urging you to keep him company. When you nodded, he drove you fast at once to the Wan Chai temple.

It wasn’t at all proper for you to come and stand there. You didn’t believe that what had happened was a miracle. You thought it was an ordinary event that could be explained. You wanted to laugh but it wasn’t funny to the point of forcing yourself to a laugh. You exhaled quietly, looked up and gazed at the watercourse that flowed from as far away as Tibet. The whole length of the banks was festooned with trees tall and small, their branches and leaves sparse, crisp and yellow as if they suffered from jaundice. Peacock flowers, stem unstuck, swirled down to the ground. Fiery red was scattered over the tree trunks and the banks, whispering to the land that the hot season had arrived.

In the old pavilion with a rust-corroded roof, a monk sat next to a small table. On the table, a yellow bucket and a donation box were given pride of place. Microphone in hand, he was announcing that donations were welcomed from the faithful who had come to take a look at the Naga King of the Mekong river in their thousands. Some had come in groups in hired vehicles; others had driven their own cars; those riding motorcycles had parked any which way in the courtyard in front of the statue of the walking Buddha...

Rust in other people’s houses

PANKHAM DAMNAI

It’s as if he’s still hanging around. That feeling has never disappeared. But it’s like so many things which in the course of time we learn to live with. I fled from my room in the subsidised flat to go and stay in a friend’s house long enough to be able to close my eyes and sleep. With time the panic slowly subsided, I went back to a normal life in my own place, even though I felt some things weren’t the same any longer.

I gave up my attempts to get in touch with her, even when I learned she was recovering at a nearby hospital. I still had many things I wanted to tell her, but she probably didn't want to meet anyone for the duration, especially me, who would rekindle memories she would rather forget. The familiar number calling my cell phone was that of the other woman. Assuredly she no longer had anything to ask me concerning him. She was just back from the Loi Kroh temple. A monk she respected had suggested she went there to make merit. She told me that if it wasn't for that she wouldn't have set foot in Chiang Mai again. She talked a mile a minute, leaving almost no time for questions. Before she hung up, she made an appointment with me at a restaurant by the Ping river, a place where we would talk at ease. She told me he had taken her there often.

When we met she did nothing but cry. At times we each were silent. She had just finished dealing with what she had to do concerning him. Wrangling with the authorities for the most part fell to his relatives. A life partner who wasn't legally married like her had hardly any say in legal matters. It was the psychological wounds that would endure. It was obvious that she still wasn't free from nervousness. Her despondent eyes were loaded with grief. When she looked at me, I didn't dare look her in the face, I let my eyes drift to the rain falling outside...

A feature story whose end is not yet known

JAKKAPAN KANGWAN

Lek got out of the taxi in front of the building of the magazine office towards the end of the street. He raised his arm to look at his wristwatch. The needles said it was almost eight in the morning. A man sat idly next to the table of the security guard by the main door. He was in his late thirties, lean and swarthy, with sharp features and a goatee, hair gooey with gel combed up from both sides to form a crest on the top of his head, Ultraman-style.

He twitched, looking at Lek in a provoking way, then greeted him in a hoarse voice.

‘Say, Lek, where are we off to today? Who’s your photographer?’

‘Oh, wow, Suchart! So you’re on time today?’ Lek answered and laughed, then mentioned the nearby province where he was going. ‘Is Jae in yet?’

‘Jae, you say?’ Suchart sniggered annoyingly. ‘He’s spent the night here. He didn’t go home. Playing computer games, I reckon.’

Lek walked into the building, went up the stairs to the second floor. The editor’s office was empty and dim. None of the neon tubes on the ceiling were lit yet. He switched on the light and walked over to his desk.

After a while the inner door to the art room opened. A not-so-young young man, dishevelled and sleepy-looking, appeared in jeans and no shirt and made a bee-line to the shelf with the hot water flask and jar of instant coffee.

Lek got up from his desk and went over to him. ‘Did you sleep here?’

‘Yeah,’ Jae answered listlessly. His swollen eyes were almost closed as he made himself a coffee. ‘I stayed behind to repair the graphics comp. It conked out.’

‘You play too much, that’s why,’ Lek teased and then laughed. He glanced at the wall clock. ‘Then when do we start? It’s eight o’clock already. I made the appointment for nine thirty. We won’t make it on time.’

‘We can’t go,’ Jae answered, raising his hand to rub his eyes. ‘The picture folio’s gone. Exclusive shots and texts, more than twenty files. Can’t retrieve them yet, we have to stay and repair the comp.’

‘What!’ Lek exclaimed. ‘Then what can we do?’

‘Have Jo take the pictures instead.’ Jae looked up. ‘But his house is a long way away. It’ll take time for him to get here.’

‘How long?’

‘He said eight thirty.’

Lek was silent for a moment then asked, ‘Did you give him the script to read?’

‘Not yet. I just called him up late last night,’ Jae said and then, holding the cup of coffee, went back to the art room...

The roti seller from Sri Lanka

KANOKPHONG SONGSOMPHAN

When the roti seller from Sri Lanka appeared with his pushcart, the rumour about Tamil hawkers abducting children was a clamour. They said those people wanted the children’s heads as ballast for the causeway linking the Singapore island to the continent, according to some strange belief of theirs.

I’m not sure that news was the truth. It didn’t even state clearly whether that causeway was actually being built or not. Nevertheless I still remember the atmosphere of apprehension at the time. Wherever went the Sri Lankan roti seller pushing his cart, mothers would spread out their hands to protect their children and pull them tight to their aprons. They had the same attitude when they met other strangers, and that made me think far back to the time when I was a child. In those days the bridge to the island of Phuket was being built. To stop us from being stubborn, the grownups threatened us with this kind of festering news. Whenever I saw a stranger with a big body and dark skin walking past the house, I ran to the bedroom and hid myself carefully.

Those people caught children, tied them up, put them in gunny sacks and hid them someplace. They waited until they had collected ninety-nine of them and then a lorry came and took them away ... Even now I still don’t know whether this was true or not. While it lasted, the rumour created nervousness. And then it was over. One day we forgot about it, the same as with the roti seller from Sri Lanka...

I forgot about him until one day I heard my wife threatening our little one, ‘Beware or the man from Sri Lanka will come and take you away!’ I couldn’t help bursting into laughter.

That laughter made her stop short. She took her eyes off our little one who was still whimpering in the hammock and glowered at me. She was careful not to let anyone see the nonsense stuffed inside her head. That's the truth about women. I tend to believe that a great number of women have utterly given up any attempt to keep the various nonsensical stories from coming out and she must have understood I was laughing at such a slip, but actually I was admiring her attention to detail. This is another kind of truth about women. They have eyes to notice details with which to embellish their souls. Women remember tiny details all the time, even though sometimes and in some cases time has passed beyond the ability for human beings to remember. I thought of simple truths like these while recollecting the Sri Lankan roti seller, which made me laugh even more. I tried to laugh to make her feel relaxed, as if I was pleased with witnessing the transmission of apprehension to a new generation, that of our little child.

I had forgotten about the roti seller from Sri Lanka ... I had forgotten about him entirely...

He rode away into the sunlight

REWAT PHANPIPAT

The young goatherd

He rode away into the sunlight ... I was still waving my hand to greet him. His horse as white as mist. He wore white trousers and a white shirt. I was leading the goats through the grassy field along the road. The sun was so hot my head was spinning. I didn't dare to look the sun in the eye. The bleats of the goats mixed with the clanging of the bells round their necks resounded above the grassy field. Suddenly I think of school, the small school in the village that was burnt down just last month. I was in Primary 6. I think of the desks, chairs, blackboard and books, my classmates and the teacher. I stood watching the school burn

down through my tears, tears that ran down as if they'd never stop; the same for my schoolmates, the teacher and the villagers. I watched a huge number of black letters flying en masse in the bright blood-red sky, letters that fled away like a flock of birds escaping from a cage. My tears and the tears of the others took on the black glint of specks of soot. The school has closed down indefinitely. My only thought goes to reading and writing. Thanks to reading and writing I wouldn't have to be a goatherd all my life (even though goats are in demand). Therefore in my drab lunch bag beside the packet of rice and the bottle of water there's a sling with clay bullets, a book of international tales, a pencil kit and a bamboo flute. My essays have earned me first prize three years in a row. I write about my parents, write about dreams, write about peace, write amidst flames, gunshots and explosions. And the coloured pictures I draw have earned prizes I don't know how many times. I draw pictures of my family, of our small village, of my herd of goats, draw pictures that have to do with peace. I draw those things amidst people in pain and dying every day. I keep thinking about those various things out here in the strong sunlight, a sunlight which makes my head alternately swell and shrivel, which has made the white-clad man on a white horse vanish in front of my eyes, even though I'd just waved a greeting to him and I shouted to his back, 'Be very careful, Uncle Somchai!' ...

The man who conversed in the bird language

PRARTANA RATTANA

... The sunlight began to shine like a spotlight, piercing through the screen of clouds with difficulty. Four days and four nights had rain been pouring down. There was no sun. Today, Golden Anvil would sunbathe for once. He unhooked the bulbul's cage from under the eaves and went to place it in the sun on the lawn, before sitting down at the rudimentary wooden table in front of the house. He was in a hurry to read the law manual as the exam was in a few days.

The little singing bird in the sun was jumping about wildly. He snapped his fingers and turned to raise a finger at the young male bird. It kept jumping and singing.

‘Such a sweet voice, my darling son!’

‘Yes, dad. Yes, sir. Yes, master.’

‘Cheeky you! Stay in the sun for two hours, okay? It isn’t often you can enjoy sunlight. Or how about half a day? By then, you’ll be dry to a crisp and a dainty morsel.’ He chortled.

‘Yes, sir,’ I answered my master, my father, in utter merriment while jumping around in the cage.

My master is preparing to send me to a singing contest to win a prize as in American Idol. So today I’m singing for my master, for him to know how much I love him.

After a while, friends of my master walked onto the lawn. As soon as they heard me, they crowded around, full of praise, saying, ‘That bird is a wonder. Look at it. It looks exactly like you.’

‘Like this, if you enter it in a contest, it’ll win for sure. Well-proportioned, very majestic too, this one.’

He burst out laughing, exploding the shackles of queer terror in the heart.

‘It eats lots of cicadas and worms and is in very good humour. And very talkative besides.’

‘This bird? Talkative?’

‘Indeed. But it only talks to me.’

‘Funny, funny, you’re so funny.’ They all laughed uproariously.

Before the boom of the bomb at the morning market, not very far from the house, dispersed the lot of them.

‘Hey, where was that? So loud. Let’s go and find out. Let’s go! Let’s go!’

‘You go. I have to stay with Golden Anvil. Tomorrow it’ll compete. And I have to learn that code by heart as well.’

‘Never mind. We’ll keep you posted.’ Master’s friends ran off, jumped on their motorcycles and stormed away like a jet stream...

*The house by the bypass road:
The blind hen's last light*

RATTANACHAI MANABUTRA

...The bonfire

The racket moved from under the pavilion facing the booze shops to the junction. The electricity of the last pole was working for the first day after being out for a long time. A drunken young man was sitting with his back against the pole. In front of him were a bottle of spirits, a bottle of soda water and a pail of ice cubes. Another two men stood tottering, raising their glasses and clinking them with each other. A car drove by slowly. One of the drunkards took off his shirt and, throwing it over his shoulder, raised his glass. Another of his friends motioned to the car with his hand. The car drove by but wouldn't stop.

Followed by a shout. 'You fucker!'

Then they motioned for a motorcycle to stop. The motorcycle slowed down as if he might stop. One of the men shouted out, 'Where are you off to, my friend?' Another one added, 'Stop and have a drink first.' The motorcycle driver shook his head. Seeing this, one of the men shouted in his back, 'You fucker!'

The wife of the owner of the house by the bypass road had finished cooking. She asked her husband, 'Who are these lushes?'

'I don't know who they are ... Not the regular ones.'

'Drunk or mad? They're as noisy as thunderbolts.'

The owner of the house by the bypass road glanced sideways at the tray of food as if he had no taste, as if he wasn't hungry, thinking of nothing else but what was happening to Muslims. Whenever he was asked why Muslims didn't eat pork, he would answer that it had nothing to do with science, nothing to do with health or filth: it was a simple matter of faith.

The same went for violence. He had answered many times that there was no violence in Muslims as such. In truth, all of mankind shared in it.

Thinking about what was happening in the three provinces...

Two months ago, terrorists had shot dead an official. In the last two days, terrorists had shot dead a villager. Today terrorists had exploded a car bomb. Tomorrow terrorists would go on performing.

These days, terrorists had a lot of work cut out for them...

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