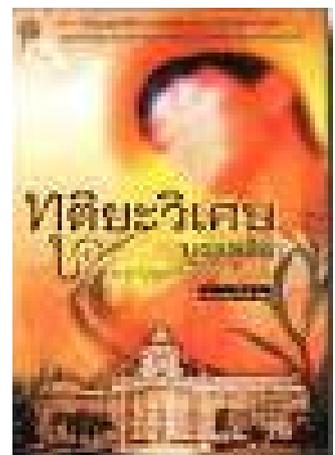


thutiyawiseit

BUNLUEA

WAITING FOR PERMISSION TO PUBLISH



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TRANSLATED FROM THE THAI BY MARCEL BARANG

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Cha-orn Sinlapacharn Warutamapharp or, as of three hours ago, *Tharnphooying* (Lady) Cha-orn Withoontheipphasart took the necklace out of the crimson velvet box with her right hand and spread it across her left palm, considered the ornament for a while before raising it to her bosom, then brought it close to her white, smooth neck. A relative or a friend in her boudoir hastily came to take the ends of the necklace and fasten them together, and then the *tharnphooying* looked at her image in the mirror.

The necklace was made of three chains. The top chain, which was shorter than the other two, was studded with rubies roughly the size of yellow chickpeas. The ruby in the middle was the biggest and the others were of diminishing size all the way to the ends of the chain. There were also diamonds as big as green chickpeas interspersed throughout the chain. The middle chain was slightly longer than the top chain and composed of sparkling diamonds bigger than the top-chain rubies, in alternation with rubies whose bigger size offered a pleasing contrast of proportions. As for the bottom chain, it was the longest, a string of rubies of diminishing size from the middle to the ends in the same pattern as the two chains above. The middle ruby was as big as the lady's thumbnail. Two diamonds the size of little-finger nails bracketed the big ruby, and the crimson rubies of the three chains were held together by a motif of leaves and slightly curved twigs incrustated with tiny diamonds, turning this pricey ornament into a valuable work of art.

When the necklace was set in place on the top of the bosom at an appropriate distance from the neck, three or four women's voices exclaimed simultaneously 'Beautiful!' in stretched syllables that expressed feelings of admiration mixed with jealousy, jealousy mixed with awe, awe and flattery, flattery and admiration.

Cha-orn or *Tharnphooying* Cha-orn looked at her image in the mirror once again. She saw herself from top to toe. Though rather petite, she had a good figure for her age. She was really lucky in this respect. Her skin wasn't exactly white but it had fine pores. Her face and features rated as beautiful. All her life, even before her husband had been called to high office, she had been praised as a beautiful woman so that the word 'beautiful' was always uttered to please her.

Cha-orn would have liked to think of many things in front of her mirror, but *Tharn* (His Excellency) or *Tharn Rong* (Deputy Premier), that is, her husband, was already waiting downstairs. She gave herself another quick look. Her pink gold-threaded *pha nung* and elbow-length blouse of the same colour, of whose style she was genuinely fond even though it wasn't of the latest fashion, gave a pinkish glow to her skin that matched the colour of the clothes. She picked up the ruby ring and slipped it on the middle finger of her right hand, looked at the solitaire diamond ring she always wore on her left ring finger and at the diamond-studded watch on her left wrist, then shook her hand to set the ring and watch into place. Then someone came to pick up her pink handbag dotted with gold beads and sparkling crystal drops and the gold-threaded shawl of the same colour,

ready to follow her downstairs, but Cha-orn still didn't feel like leaving the mirror. She stole a look at the pink shoes enclosing her small feet. Wearing her *pha nung* so that it reached below the ankle as was the fashion in those days made her look a little taller, but did nothing to show off her shapely legs, and made her appear slightly older than she was. She finally tore herself away from the mirror, walked out of the boudoir and down the stairs, followed by her daughter, her sister and two or three friends, and she wondered how come and for what purpose these women had entered her private dressing room.

She went down to the lowest floor, outside the large parlour at the front of the house which wasn't her property but her husband's official residence. Seeing her coming down, he stood up from the chair on which he had been sitting inside the room. He opened his mouth to praise her with an emphatic 'Beautiful!' which others in the room echoed, like musicians answering with strings and reeds the lead of the xylophone. She returned his smile. Today his smile gave her confidence. She was confident that tonight he sincerely approved of her appearance.

She walked into the parlour and saw her brother standing in front of a chair. As soon as he saw her approaching, he raised his hands and bowed, saying 'I've come to say how happy I am that you've been given the sash as...' His voice caught a little. Only she noticed as he marked a pause before adding, '...as a *tharnphooying*.'

'Thank you very much, Cheur,' *Tharnphooying* Cha-orn answered, while thinking that for Cheur, her only, her darling little brother, she wanted today to be an important

day, a day for him to be proud. She stared into his eyes and smiled at him so that he could see that she was delighted with the honour bestowed on her today.

He looked her in the eye with a composed face. Then her younger sister, Cha-eim, exclaimed, 'Isn't she especially beautiful today? Do compliment her, so she feels pleased. She never feels as pleased as when you compliment her.'

Cha-orn stared at her brother meaningfully, as if to plead with him. 'Isn't it better when *Tharn* compliments her rather than when I do?' he told his little sister. 'But then she's truly beautiful today, beautiful in everything.' This said, his eyes went to rest on the ruby necklace on his sister's bosom.

'Beautiful indeed. Beautiful in a way younger women can't match.' The speaker was her brother-in-law, Cha-eim's husband. He was deputy director general of a ministry. He was in all his finery, ready to go to the party the *tharnphoo-ying* and her husband would attend. Cha-orn knew he was talking to please her, but she couldn't help being pleased. Yet her brother-in-law must have realized that his wife was waiting for a compliment, for he turned to stare at the lady's brother rather unhappily, while his mouth uttered, 'Mine isn't that far behind, I daresay.'

Cha-orn turned to smile at her sister. 'Why don't you tell the truth, Mr Serm?' she told her brother-in-law. 'Cha-eim is our beautiful younger sister, as everybody knows.'

Right then, she felt a strong hand grab hold of her arm neither roughly nor shyly. It didn't hurt her but she couldn't shake it off. It was her husband's hand. She turned to look at him, pleased to see him still smiling.

'Well, enough compliments. Let's go,' he told her. He

guided her arm forward for her to follow him. She did so and went to the car most willingly.

One of the dozen people who stood in the courtyard in front of the building ran to open the back door of the limousine. Her husband went into the car without waiting for her. Someone else ran to open the door on the other side. *Tharnphooying* Cha-orn thus walked round her husband's huge official car and went to sit next to him. The doors were closed on both sides and then the car left the grand, sprawling residence that befitted the rank and power of a statesman and his spouse.

She saw her husband looking out through the window on the side where he sat. Cha-orn stretched out her small hand to touch his arm gently. He turned to look at her, smiled and said, 'You're really beautiful today.' Having said this, he stretched his arm and stroked her necklace.

'Me or the necklace?' Cha-orn asked her husband. Her voice was low and almost quivered with emotion.

'You are already beautiful. The necklace makes you even more so,' he answered. He stroked her talcum-powdered arm, then turned to look out of the window again, presenting his back to her more than his profile.

ML Bunluea Theipphayasuwan (1911-1982), younger half-sister of novelist Dorkmai Sot (*Noblesse Oblige*), was a teacher and educator all her life. An outstanding literary critic and translator from the English, she turned to fiction writing in her late forties. *Thutiyawiseit* (1968) is held to be her best novel, along with her last, *Suratnaree* (1971).
