



Weaving Wound

Prasertsak Padmarid



AYUJ





Southeast Asian Writers Award (S.E.A. Write)
Announcement of the Judging Committee of the Southeast Asian Writers
Award (S.E.A. Write) for the year 2024

The Judging Committee of the Southeast Asian Writers Award 2024 agreed that the novel entitled *Ki Bad (Weaving Wound) or How Many Scars?* written by Prasertsak Padmarid is the winner of the S.E.A Write Award for the year 2024.

The novel *Ki Bad or How Many Scars?* by Prasertsak Padmarid recounts the story of “Mae Ying,” the three-generations of Mae Jam whose way of life is tied to weaving the Sin Tin Jok. The novel is presented through a storyline of struggling and passing on the legacy of weaving wisdom in the context of a changing era. The loom is portrayed as a space for women, a space filled with multifarious meanings, reflecting gender negotiation, battles against traditional prejudices, as well as concealing both good and bad.

With regard to the art of writing, *Ki Bad or How Many Scars?* combines traditional literary traditions with new creations. The novel employs the art of weaving and fabric patterns embedded in local color to convey meanings and unfolds the story in a subtle manner. This mixed





technique leads the reader into a poignant and empathetic mood toward the fate of humanity. Though faced with painful experiences or agonizing memories, life must move on and weave stories, which are culture of storytelling of humanity

The Judging Committee, hence, agreed that the novel entitled *Ki Bad or How Many Scars?* by Prasertsak Padmarid is most appropriate to be honored with the prestigious S.E.A Write Award for the year 2024.

Announced on October 28th, 2024.

Associate Professor Dr. Thanya Sangkhaphanthanon
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Associate Professor Dr. Dhanete Vespada
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Prasertsak Padmarid

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From the Publisher

Amid the turbulent waves of global Janges, “old stories retold” continue to circulate across various media platforms. Some are presented through academic works, research, and articles—both in print and online. Others take the form of information shared through modern digital media, including YouTube, TikTok, Reels, Facebook, Instagram, and more. These narratives, scattered throughout the vast ocean of information, can also be transformed into artistic expressions as a means of communication with society. This approach offers a path to understanding Thai identity, which is shaped by the diversity of people and local cultures. Moreover, it brings “life” to these “old stories”, allowing audiences to connect deeply with the essence of traditions passed down through generations.

Prasertsak Padmarid, a new-generation writer, has grown up navigating the fast-moving currents of information and the evolving landscape of modern social theories—such as gender diversity and equality. At the same time, he has a keen interest in local culture



and marginalized histories. Drawing from a wealth of knowledge, he weaves these elements into “new narratives” that integrate traditional culture, local history, mainstream history, war, belief systems, and human identity. His novel, *Weaving Wound*, is a vibrant tale of a weaver family from Mae Chaem, whose lives are filled with flesh-and-blood experiences —marked by pain, resilience, love, heartbreak, encounters, and separation —so deeply moving that readers will undoubtedly feel their hearts tremble. The novel unfolds over 16 chapters, each named after patterns of Sinh Teen Chok (a traditional woven skirt) from Mae Chaem. These intricate patterns, passed down through generations, have been officially registered as a geographical indication of Mae Chaem District, Chiang Mai Province.

A question arises: How will Thai literature endure in the ever-Jangling landscape of reading habits? This shift is happening worldwide, and literary creators face new challenges. Combang Publishing House also finds itself at a turning point. However, we believe that great literature is defined by its ability to resonate with the heart, and compelling storytelling keeps readers engaged. These two elements, combined with writing style, language, narrative techniques, and creative expression, form works that are not only captivating but also adaptable to other art forms. *Weaving Wound* is the novel that Combang Publishing House has chosen as a step forward in this transformation, with a firm commitment to delivering meaningful literary works to the reading community. We Sincerely hope it will be warmly received.

May your reading bring nourishment to your heart and soul.

Combang Publishing House





From the Author

Sinh Teen Chok (a traditional woven skirt) is a valuable handicraft, shaped by wisdom and time—through both hardship and prosperity. It is woven from soft, white cotton that springs from the fertile land, nourished by rains drifting over the mountains and carefully tended by its growers. The intricate process of transforming cotton into thread, the natural dyes sourced from the surrounding environment, and the ancient weaving patterns passed down from mother to daughter across generations—all come together in these textiles. The fabric's motifs may depict elephants, horses, or even the simple life of a person seated at a loom, each thread woven with a purpose, a feeling, and a unique human story embedded in every pattern and piece.

The idea for Weaving Wound was born during a lunch break while watching a documentary about the way of life in Mae Chaem. In one scene, the interviewer asked an elderly woman at her loom how much the fabric she was weaving could be sold for—“kee baht?” (how many baht?). In that moment, the homophonic paradox struck me: the phrase



could imply not only a monetary value but also the number of wounds (Ki Bad) suffered. It reflected both the economic worth of the textile and the unseen toll behind its creation, as the old woman continued weaving before the camera.

What intrigued me further was the shifting social perception and valuation of Sinh Teen Chok from Mae Chaem. Once considered a personal treasure, woven for wear and kept as a precious heirloom for descendants, these fabrics have now become luxury items, increasing in value much like high-end designer handbags.

Initially, I planned to develop this idea into a short story. However, as I delved into my research, the lives of the weavers gradually emerged—each with their own stories waiting to be told. Through every thread spun into Sinh Teen Chok, through the wounds endured, whether silently borne or deeply scarring, and through the loves both hidden and revealed, it became clear that *Weaving Wound* could not be confined to just a few short pages.

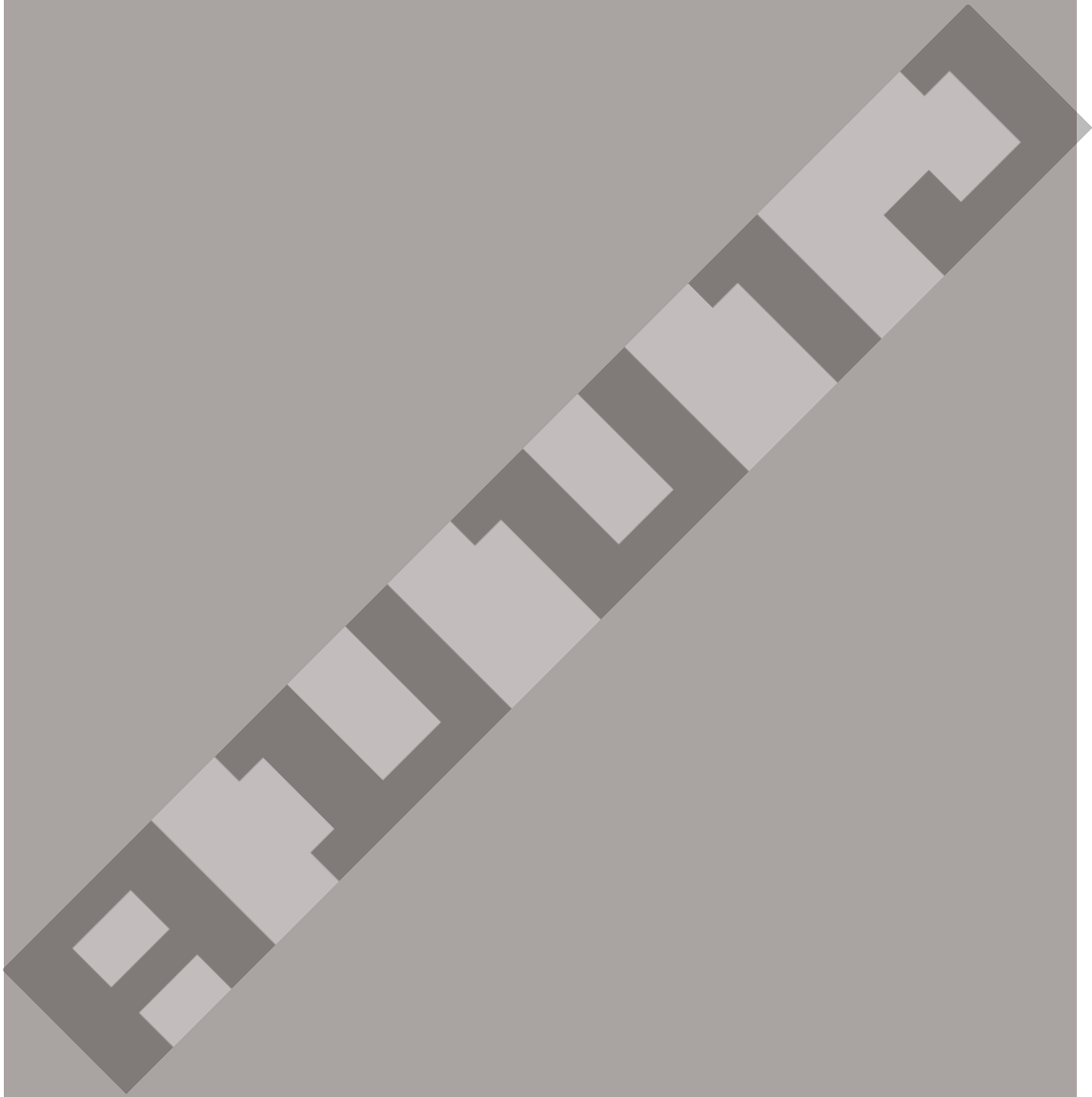
One of the most compelling aspects of writing this novel was exploring the role of women in the past, whose lives were so deeply entwined with weaving that their identities were inseparable from the craft. A woman's worth was sometimes judged by whether she could weave and by the type of Sinh she wore—an evaluation that often overlooked her other qualities. The characters in this novel reflect the realities of women navigating oppression from social norms, cultural expectations, war, religion, men, and even other women.



Since the novel is set in Mae Chaem, one of my greatest challenges was the language. I sought a balance between using the local dialect for authenticity and ensuring accessibility for readers unfamiliar with the culture. The main narrative is written in standard Thai, with some key nouns left in the regional dialect, while also incorporating distinct Northern Thai expressions to preserve the rhythm and flavor of the language. In dialogue, I strived to keep the characters' speech as natural as possible, though some words were adjusted to standard Thai to prevent excessive difficulty for readers. I also included footnotes to explain culturally specific terms, hoping this would enhance readers' understanding of the story.

It is my sincere hope that, should you visit Mae Chaem one day, you will bring back a Sinh Teen Chok—to wear to the market or a festival, letting its hem shimmer in the light. May you truly feel its beauty and its immeasurable worth, both in the fabric itself and in the person who wears it.

Prasertsak Padmarid





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Prasertsak Padmarid





PREVIEW





Waist of the Sinh





PHOTO





1

Chiang Saen Luang

Every woman in Mae Chaem must have at least one Sinh Teen Chok.

But Madame Mon Huan Kaew had many, carefully collected over time—some she had woven herself, others inherited from generations past. Each piece was meticulously wrapped and stored, untouched by anyone. But the most precious of them all was the last remaining Chiang Saen silk sinh from within the royal court, entrusted to her by her mother, who had emphasized time and again to guard it well. “There is no sinh in all of Lanna as beautiful as this,” her mother had said.

Madame Mon lifted the precious fabric to examine it closely. Her aging, dim eyes traced the delicate cotton and silk threads, interwoven into patterns of birds, nagas, horses, and elephants, galloping across different sections of the cloth. The golden silk shimmered against the deep black background. Such a fabric was not easily woven—only a weaver with a steady hand could guide the fragile silk threads, carefully lifting and interlacing them one by one. But Madame Mon’s hands could no longer do such work.



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Her wrinkled hands trembled as she lifted the hem of the sinh, scrutinizing its intricate details once more. A true Chiang Saen sinh bore golden “claws” at the hem, contrasting against the striking red background. When worn, the hem would catch the light, sparkling with every movement. Anyone who saw it could not resist stopping to admire. Madame Mon had once worn a Chiang Saen sinh, though not this one. That first sinh, which she had woven with her own hands, was not as ancient, but it was the first she had ever crafted. Wearing it to the market or festivals, she had become the talk of the town. Young men from all directions pursued her relentlessly. But in the end, the man who took both Madame Mon and that sinh away was the very one who tore them apart—her fabric, her life—until nothing was left intact.

That was a long time ago. Madame Mon had abandoned that sinh somewhere among the pile of damaged fabrics. As a weaver, she knew that if a pattern was flawed from the very first row, every subsequent row would shift out of place. To correct it, one had to unravel the entire piece. Some women might choose to ignore the mistake and continue weaving, but in the end, the fabric would be worthless—reduced to nothing more than a rag, fit only for men to wipe their muddy boots after stepping in filth from outside.

Madame Mon Huan Kaew is a Chiang Saen sinh. No matter how many times she had been torn apart, she had always risen again, weaving a new one from the ruins. The golden hem of her sinh still caught the sunlight the day she gathered her sinh cloths and her two daughters, fleeing from her drunken husband and the prison of Chom Tong. The old



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saying went: A wife who does not honor her husband, no matter how much gold she possesses, will lose it all. But Madame Mon had neither gold nor riches—only the Chiang Saen sinh that had been passed down to her. She had to trade away almost all of her finest fabrics just to acquire a small plot of land at the foot of the mountain, where she built a home and started over. The hardship did not last long. When the cotton she had planted bore fruit, she used the last remaining Chiang Saen sinh as a template, stretched her threads between the house pillars, and set up a loom. She wove new Sinh Teen Chok—some to sell, some to trade, some to give to her eldest daughter, and some to wear herself. And with every sinh that filled her chest, life for Madame Mon and her children gradually improved.

A new sinh fabric may be vibrant, but no sinh fabric could ever be as captivating as the last Chiang Saen sinh in Mae Mon's hands. Mae Mon had intended to weave a Chiang Saen sinh every year, but as her life journey stretched into its late seventies, the countless obstacles of a widow abandoned by her husband—struggling alone to raise two daughters to adulthood—had prevented even a single Chiang Saen silk sinh from emerging from her home loom.

They say at sixty years of age, one wheezes like a struck drum; at seventy, freckles and spots appear all over the body. In just a few more years, Madame Mon would inevitably yearn for the release of death. It crept closer with each passing moment. A human life, alas, is shorter than the hem of a sinh. With trembling hands and failing eyesight, Madame Mon knew she could no longer weave the intricate patterns of the Chiang



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Saen silk sinh in her grasp. She counted the designs she would need to weave—each of them she had once woven separately, back when her hands were steady and her vision keen. This model sinh held as many as sixteen patterns in a single piece. Just the grand Chiang Saen design, her specialty, would take her a whole year to weave in her current state. It was time for Madame Mon to finally pass this sinh on for the younger generation to study. It was a pity her eldest daughter, whom she had hoped would inherit her entire knowledge of sinh weaving, had passed away before her. And her youngest daughter?

“Ee Nak” Madame called her out.

No response—only the sound of movement from beneath the house, then footsteps ascending the stairs. Soon, the graceful figure of a woman dressed in a cotton blouse and neatly wrapped in a **Lua sinh** appeared at the doorway of Madame Mon’s room.

As soon as their eyes met, Madame hastily grabbed a nearby sinh fabric and covered the Chiang Saen sinh completely. The younger woman’s facial muscles twitched slightly as she caught the old woman’s gesture and intent, but she quickly masked her emotions behind a composed and respectful expression.

“What is it, Mae?” Mae Ui Nak asked.

“Go call **Ba Hong**. Tell him to come speak with me,” Madame Mon Huan Kaew ordered.

“He’s gone to town. He won’t be back until evening. Do you need him for something?” Nak asked.

“That’s none of your concern,” Madame snapped, pulling another



sinh over the Chiang Saen sinh.

“Are you going to teach him the Chiang Saen patterns?” Mae Ui Nak asked, her voice tinged with hurt.

“I will teach whomever I choose. When he returns from town, have him bathe and come see me at once,” Madame Mon commanded firmly.

“But mother! He’s a man! Why are you teaching him? There’s Jan Tip, your own granddaughter, a woman! And me, your own daughter, a woman! Why won’t you teach me? Why won’t you let me see your beautiful Chiang Saen sinh?” Mae Ui Nak trembled with pent-up frustration, struggling to hold back the sorrow welling in her eyes.

A heavy silence descended into the space between mother and daughter. Their gazes dredged up the past, wielding it as a weapon, striking mercilessly at one another—each intent on making the other feel the same searing pain that burned within them. Their battle played out through unspoken resentment.

It was Mae Ui Nak who let filial piety overcome her wounded pride first. She averted her eyes from Madame Mon’s unrelenting, accusatory stare and accepted the judgment passed upon her, just as she had done for so many years.

“If he returns from town, send him to see me,” Madame Mon Huan Kaew reinforced her command.

“Yes,” was all Mae Ui Nak replied, swallowing the emotions that had just surged within her before lowering her head and descending the stairs.

She returned to her loom, picking up where she had left off.



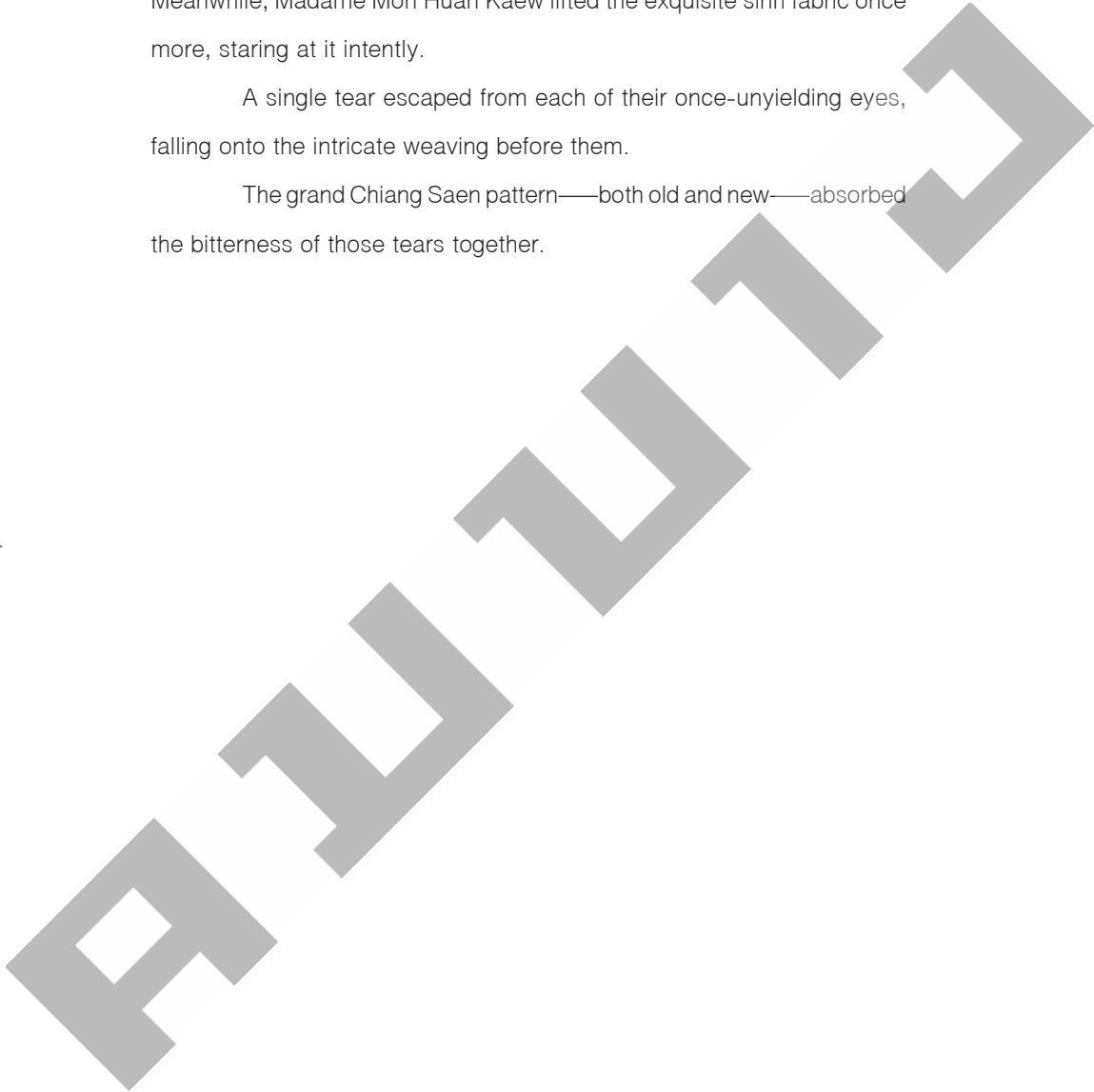


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Meanwhile, Madame Mon Huan Kaew lifted the exquisite sinh fabric once more, staring at it intently.

A single tear escaped from each of their once-unyielding eyes, falling onto the intricate weaving before them.

The grand Chiang Saen pattern—both old and new—absorbed the bitterness of those tears together.





2

Lakhon Noi (The Small Pattern)

“Beat the beater harder!”

Madame Mon Huan Kaew still vividly remembered her mother’s words. She recalled herself as a young girl, just beginning to learn the art of weaving. Her first baby tooth had barely fallen out when Madame Sri Moi, her mother, called her to sit at the loom and start working the beater.

“Train your hands while they’re still soft. When you grow older and your hands harden, you’ll be able to strike with more strength,” Madame Sri Moi had insisted.

Huan Kaew obeyed, pulling the beater with all the force her tiny hands could muster. But the threads remained loose, and every time, Madame Sri Moi had to go over her work to tighten them. The results were far from beautiful compared to the sections her mother had woven. Yet, Madame Sri Moi never let Huan Kaew leave the loom.

A weaver’s daughter had a childhood unlike the other village children. Instead of spending her youthful days running wild—jumping into rivers, playing games, and climbing trees—Huan Kaew was dressed



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in an elegant, handwoven sinh teen chok and kept at home under her mother's watchful eyes.

"Do you realize how precious the sinh you wear is? Don't go playing around and getting it dirty," Madame Sri Moi warned.

It might have sounded like a gentle reminder, but Huan Kaew knew it was an order. Her mother had bound her to the house, not with chains, but with the exquisite sinh woven from months of meticulous work. She had seen her mother, head bowed over the loom, weaving tirelessly for weeks just to create a single piece for her to wear.

Huan Kaew feared sin. She had once heard a monk preaching at the temple after offering food, warning that ungrateful children who caused their parents sorrow would fall into the boiling pits of hell. She had no idea what hell's cauldrons looked like, but she was certain they didn't have beautiful sinh teen chok like the ones she had at home. So, she obeyed her mother. No matter how much she longed to play with the other children, she restrained herself, remaining within the confines of her precious sinh and her mother's stern gaze.

Each of Huan Kaew's days unfolded like the one before. At the first crow of the rooster, she would tighten her sinh, light the fire, and steam the rice. As soon as the morning sun cast enough light, she would descend from the house to open the coops, letting the ducks and chickens roam freely in the fields. She would hitch up her sinh just above her knees to wade through the coop, searching for warm, pale eggs left behind. On days that she gathered many eggs, she would boil them in a steaming pot. If there were few, she would pick fresh greens from the garden to pair



with fermented soybean chili paste. She meticulously prepared two meal sets—one carefully arranged in a basket for Madame Sri Moi to take to the temple, and the other placed in bowls for her father, who would eat before heading off to work.

Her father was a trader. During the rainy season, when the roads were poor, he would work in the rice fields or plant cotton in the morning before returning home for lunch. After a short rest, he would take the harvested cotton to trade for necessities. Back then, cotton was not easy to grow—it was a prized commodity. Fortunately, the family's land yielded fine cotton, allowing her father to barter for valuable goods like chili, cane sugar, tea, crab paste, coconuts, salt, sugar, kerosene, and even mackerel.

But when the dry season arrived, the roads became easier to travel, yet nothing would grow. The rice stored in the granary began to dwindle. Father would then load up cotton, treating it like cattle, and take it up to the northern highlands to trade for rice from the Yang people. Father once told Huan Kaew that the Yang people were incredibly hard-working—they had wealth, elephants, and an abundance of rice, enough to last them all year. However, what they did not have as much as us was cotton. The highlands couldn't grow cotton as well as the lowlands. But no matter what, everyone needed cotton fabric to wear, which was why they always traded their goods for our woven cloth. Huan Kaew especially loved Yang rice. The grains were large, and when steamed in a clay pot, they became fragrant and delicious. Once, Father brought back two Yang-style *sinh*—one for Huan Kaew and one for her mother.



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Huan Kaew was fascinated by the unfamiliar patterns of the Yang textiles. However, Madame Sri Moi complained that the colors were too red and not as elegant as teen chok designs. She refused to let Huan Kaew wear it.

Every morning, after Madame Sri Moi returned from the temple, she would order Huan Kaew to brush her teeth, Jange into a sinh teen chok, and head to the cotton field to collect freshly bloomed cotton. She would lay it out to dry and bring in the batch from the previous day to fluff and separate the fibers. Using a salun bow tool, she would create soft cotton fluffs, spinning them into threads.

Then, she would light a fire and prepare boiling water, waiting for Madame Sri Moi to dye the cotton. The colors depended on what Father had managed to trade that day—salaak bark for a rich red, mahna wood for a soft brown, mah nom ngua for a creamy hue, mah lin mai for a light green, hak bark for a pale pink, and mah kai wood for yellow. If a monk's saffron yellow was desired, turmeric would be ground into powder and mixed with tamarind and ma ta fruit. Whenever she wanted a more faded or muted tone, she would mix in khee per (a type of natural clay).

Huan Kaew learned the dyeing process through observation, gradually understanding how the balance of each ingredient affected the final shade. The vividly colored cotton threads would be lifted up to catch the morning sunlight, accompanied by Madame Sri Moi's proud smile. Once the dyed cotton had dried, Huan Kaew would gather it neatly into bundles to keep the threads organized. When it was time to weave, the cotton would be transferred to the loom. Huan Kaew watched as her mother stepped on the foot pedal and skillfully passed the shuttle back



and forth. The rhythmic tap-tap of the beater echoed as she wove the less intricate sections, like the main body and waistband of the sinh.

Although there was already a large loom under the house, Madame Sri Moi set up a separate loom specifically for Huan Kaew to practice on. She taught her how to strike the beater with just the right amount of force—steady and firm. Once she mastered that, Madame Sri Moi allowed her to start weaving simpler items, such as cloth bags, before progressing to pillow covers. Madame Sri Moi taught Huan Kaew to hold the porcupine quill tool firmly and begin weaving simple **chok (brocade)** patterns, starting with khiao ma (dog's tooth) and ngu tiao tang (crossed snake), which were uncomplicated designs requiring only two colors and a few repetitions to complete. Huan Kaew remembered weaving pillow covers for months before Madame Sri Moi finally...

“Ee Laa, come sit at my loom. I will teach you how to weave chok patterns,” Madame Sri Moi said in a calm voice one afternoon. Huan Kaew hesitated, standing up from her own loom with a mixture of excitement and fear. She knew the loom wouldn't bark or bite like a mother dog protecting her litter, but Madame Sri Moi's loom had always been an intimidating place. There was a strange energy about it—something sacred and powerful—that made her feel unworthy of getting too close. “Come sit beside me,” Madame Sri Moi called gently, shifting over to make space.

Carefully, Huan Kaew gathered the hem of her **sinh teen chok** and stepped into the loom, moving with caution. She lowered her gaze to the intricate pattern her mother had been weaving—a seamless flow of



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interwoven threads, coming together as one. It was hard to believe that these colorful cotton threads—some bright, some faded, some sharp, some muted—could be woven into such a complex and breathtaking design. It was like seeing the grand temples, pagodas, and sacred halls of the divine realm materialize before her eyes.

“Today, I will teach you to weave the Lakhon Noi pattern,” Madame Sri Moi announced, her tone making it clear this was an important moment.

“Lakhon Noi?... Mother, is that the pattern you’re weaving right now?” Huan Kaew asked in shock.

“Yes, what you see here is the Lakhon Noi pattern,” Madame Sri Moi confirmed in the same steady voice.

“But, Mother... This pattern uses so many different colors, and it’s so intricate! I’ve only ever woven Khiao Ma and Ngu Tiao Tang—those only use two colors. Isn’t this too difficult for me?”

“Of course, it is difficult,” Madame Sri Moi replied plainly. “That is exactly why I will teach you. If you can weave the Lakhon Noi pattern, you will be able to weave anything after this.”

Madame Sri Moi had never been harsh with her words, but her unwavering determination sent a shiver down Huan Kaew’s spine.

“Hold the porcupine quill firmly and watch the pattern I am weaving. Follow it, one thread at a time, one color at a time. There is no need to rush,” Mae Sri Moi instructed, handing Huan Kaew her well-worn quill. The young girl’s small, delicate hands trembled as she accepted the tool—something that had passed through countless seasons,



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countless fabrics, and countless weavings in her mother's experienced hands.

"Strike the beater harder. Don't be afraid of hurting the thread," Madame Sri Moi ordered. Huan Kaew swung the beater with all her strength, but the threads still didn't settle as tightly as her mother's. "It's alright, just weave slowly. Weave it correctly, weave it well, weave it beautifully—just as the elders taught us. Do you understand? A woman must take care of the household without neglecting anything. You must know how to weave cloth and sinh skirts. When your husband goes to the fields and his clothes tear, you should be able to weave him a new set. If your husband and children wear only old, tattered clothes, the villagers will gossip about us. Our home will be restless, lacking harmony." Madame Sri Moi taught, and Huan Kaew nodded.

"Fine garments bring dignity to the household. A man with a good wife, a child with a good mother—they should have proper clothes to wear to the temple, to the market, to the festivals. They won't be looked down upon... Huan Kaew, our lives as women are simple. We cannot earn merit by ordaining as monks like men do. But we can use our skills to weave fine robes for the monks and offer them during the Kathina ceremony. That way, we can hold onto the edges of the men's robes and the ceremonial banners to ascend to heaven with everyone else."

Huan Kaew began to understand her mother's teachings on a deeper level. From that moment, the sound of her beater striking the loom became stronger, her weaving tighter and more precise.

As time passed, Huan Kaew's strikes on the loom became even





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firmer than her mother's. She mastered the intricate Lakhon Noi pattern without needing to reference a guide. That year, the dry season was harsher and longer than ever. The bitter wind from the mountain tops howled down to Mae Chaem, stunting the growth of rice and cotton more than in previous years. As the granary began to empty, Father prepared his caravan of mules and oxen, loading them with goods to trade with other towns and villages.

This time, he instructed Huan Kaew to pack three times the usual amount of dried meat and rice. He said that the Yang people in the northern highlands were suffering just as much from the drought. He might even have to carry the goods as far west as Na Mang or Mae Sariang to find buyers. But he promised that on his way back, he would buy red oil-dyed cotton from the Kulwa merJants in Na Mang so that Madame Sri Moi and Huan Kaew could weave new sinh teen chok skirts in time for the Poi Luang festival.

Madame Sri Moi pleaded with him repeatedly not to trade in the west. The roads were more treacherous, winding through dense forests and steep ravines. The Kulwa traders and the Burmese Ramanya spoke unfamiliar tongues—there was no trust or kinship like with the Ngaew and Yang people.

But necessity left Father and many other men of Mae Chaem with no choice. They formed caravans of oxen and mules and set out westward. Months passed. Other trading caravans returned, one after another. Madame Sri Moi and Huan Kaew waited anxiously. But their father's caravan never appeared on the winding road that stretched



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over the mountain ridges. Their hopes dwindled with each passing day. The loom sat idle, waiting for the promised red oil-dyed cotton from Kulwa to be stretched and woven into new fabric. Days of prayer came and went. The crescent Muin waxed full, then waned and disappeared. New full Muins rose and faded again. Yet, Father's caravan never returned. And then, when the first raindrops of the eighth lunar month fell, Madame Sri Moi finally mounted the loom with plain local cotton and turned to Huan Kaew.

"Your father is never coming home."

Life became difficult for Huan Kaew and her mother without her father. The loom sat abandoned, as neither of them had time to weave. When the planting season came, both mother and daughter had to work in the rice fields, planting cotton and tending to all the responsibilities that once belonged to her father. Madame Sri Moi took on the burdens of a man, while Huan Kaew had to step up and shoulder the household chores that her mother once managed alone.

The beautifully woven sinh teen chok skirts were carefully stored away in chests. The two of them wore simple Lua skirts instead—practical and easy to move in, without worry of them getting dirty or damaged.

"If a Lua skirt tears, we can just throw it away and weave a new one. It only takes you a day to weave a new skirt now," Madame Sri Moi said.

"But, Mae...we don't have any cotton left to weave, not even for a small satchel," Huan Kaew, now a young woman, objected. It was true—her weaving skills had improved enough that she could now weave the Lakhon Noi pattern to her mother's standards. But after that, she had not practiced any new designs. There wasn't enough cotton left to weave



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anything, not even a simple Lua skirt.

“Why must hardship be so relentless?” Madame Sri Moi murmured in despair.

“Even the rice in the granary is almost gone... Mae,” Huan Kaew added.

Mother and daughter looked at each other, their world shrinking tighter around them. Every possible solution had been exhausted. Their options closed in from all sides, leaving nothing but darkness. That night, like so many others before it, they lay in bed staring at the ceiling, hands resting on their foreheads, stomachs growling with hunger.

While waiting for months until the rice was ready to harvest, the two of them climbed the hills to dig for kloi tubers. They peeled and sliced them, then soaked them in the river for days to wash out the toxic sap. After drying them in the sun, they mixed the tubers with rice to stretch their food supply, making the rice last longer and giving them something to fill their stomachs. On days when heavy rains prevented them from climbing the hills, they ventured into the forest to gather bamboo shoots to boil and eat with rice. Although the forests around Mae Chaem were dense with bamboo, there was not the only household going hungry. Every family was waiting for the rice harvest and foraging for bamboo shoots to survive. Each day, Huan Kaew and her mother had to venture deeper and deeper into the forest to find food.

One evening, Huan Kaew returned home first, but her mother was nowhere to be seen. A cold dread settled in her stomach. Fear gripped her heart—was this going to be like her father’s disappearance? She called



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out frantically, her voice shaking with panic. When there was no response, desperation took over. Tears welled in her eyes as she ran around the village, calling for her mother like a madwoman. She asked everyone she passed if they had seen Madame Sri Moi, repeating the question over and over. As her cries spread, the villagers became alarmed. Torches were lit, their flames flickering against the encroaching darkness that draped over Mae Chaem. The women called out Madame Sri Moi's name throughout the village, while the men split up to search the forests.

Just as Huan Kaew was about to give in to the belief that her mother had gone to join her father, a shout rang out. They had found Madame Sri Moi, collapsed in the deep forest. Several men carried her back to the house. The villagers reassured Huan Kaew—her mother was still breathing. But it was Madame Sri Moi herself who brought the bad news. The moment Huan Kaew touched her mother's forehead, she recoiled. Heat radiated from her mother's body, her fevered breath burning against Huan Kaew's trembling hands.

Madame Sri Moi had fallen ill with jungle fever.

"Huan Kaew..." Madame Sri Moi stirred and called weakly.

"Mae, do you want some water? Or should I wipe you down?" Huan Kaew, who had not left her mother's side, was ready to tend to her every need.

"My child, it seems I won't be able to stay with you for much longer."

"Don't say that, Mae! You'll recover soon. Once we finish





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harvesting the rice, we'll gather cotton to dye and weave sinh skirts again. You promised to teach me a new pattern, didn't you?" Huan Kaew's voice wavered as she clung to every possibility of keeping her mother with her.

"Forgive me, my child. I could only teach you the Lakhon Noi pattern."

"It doesn't matter, Mae! You'll teach me more when you get better. Just rest, please. Tomorrow you'll wake up stronger." Huan Kaew coaxed her mother to lie down, but Madame Sri Moi struggled to sit up instead.

"I have something important to tell you. Let me say it while I still have the strength."

Huan Kaew wanted to protest, but the gravity in her mother's voice silenced her.

"Go get the chest from the cupboard," Madame Sri Moi instructed. Seeing how exhausted her mother was becoming, Huan Kaew hurried to do as she was told. The chest was large and heavy, and she had to push and drag it across the floor until it rested before her mother.

Madame Sri Moi reached under her pillow and pulled out a small key. With trembling hands, she unlocked the chest, lifting the lid to reveal its precious contents—exquisite sinh teen chok skirts, intricately woven and packed tightly within. Huan Kaew stared in astonishment. She had never seen these skirts before.

"Huan Kaew, my child...I have no wealth or riches to leave you, only these sinh teen chok skirts, passed down to me from Mae Oui and Mae Mon, your ancestors. They trace back to the old days of Chiang Saen. I do not know much about their origins, for neither your grandmother nor



great-grandmother ever spoke of them.”

Huan Kaew carefully helped her mother take out each sinh from the chest, laying them out one by one. Their elegance radiated from the intricate patterns, needing no explanation from Madame Sri Moi. Anyone who laid eyes upon them, even for the first time, could instantly recognize their immense cultural and artistic value—priceless beyond measure.

“Only the patterns woven into these skirts can guide and teach you after I am gone. Listen to me carefully, Huan Kaew, and remember my words. Study each and every design, and practice chok weaving on your own. Weave with precision, with care, with beauty—honor the skill of those who came before us.”

“But, Mae... These patterns are so intricate, so difficult. How can I possibly weave them without you to teach me?” Huan Kaew’s voice trembled with doubt.

“Do you remember what I told you? If you can weave the Lak-hon Noi pattern, you can weave anything. You have already mastered that—now let these old sinh teach you in my place.”

Just then, Madame Sri Moi coughed violently.

“...”

“Guard these skirts well, better than your own life. Especially this one.”

With frail, trembling hands, Madame Sri Moi reached deep into the bottom of the chest, pulling out a single, extraordinary sinh. As soon as mother and daughter laid eyes upon it, golden threads shimmered, casting a radiant glow that seemed to breathe life into the dim, despair-filled room.

“This is the last of the Chiang Saen silk sinh, woven in the ancient





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ways, sixteen patterns in one.”

Huan Kaew stared in awe, speechless. Never in her life had she seen such exquisite craftsmanship—surely, it was the work of divine hands.

“Let this be my final wish. You may lose any other *sinh*, but never this one. Promise me, Huan Kaew.” Madame Sri Moi placed her fevered hand over her daughter’s.

“I promise, Mae.”

Hearing those words, Madame Sri Moi smiled, looking at her daughter with deep pride. She ran her burning hand over Huan Kaew’s head, then lay back down. Her breaths grew weaker, her trembling body slowly stilling, her feverish skin cooling. Yet, even as life slipped away, one hand remained tightly clenched around the exquisite Chiang Saen *sinh*.

Madame Sri Moi never woke up again after that.

“Mae Mon, do you really want me to weave the same pattern that you once did?” Ba Hong asked again, just to be sure.

“It’s called *Lakhon Noi*. Come here, sit beside me at the loom. Don’t waste time hesitating.” Madame Huan Kaew scolded her great-grandson, shifting over to make space for him.

Ba Hong hesitated, looking uncertain. The loom of Madame Mon Huan Kaew had always been off-limits. Anyone who dared to touch or even approach it would find themselves chased away with a *kaan slaat*—a thin bamboo cane wielded by the formidable Madame herself.

“Hurry up before I have to tell you again!” she barked. The boy



quickly scrambled to obey, taking his place at the loom.

“But I don’t know how to weave, Mae Mon. Grandma strictly forbade me from weaving.” He still did not believe his great-grandmother.

“I know you secretly weave at night in place of your older sister. That girl has no love for weaving, but you do. Now tell me, what patterns do you already know?” Madame Huan Kaew knew everything that happened in this household. She had cornered him completely.

Ba Hong let out a nervous chuckle. “Mae Mon, you’re scary! I only know the patterns that Grandma told Jan Tip to weave—just Khiew Ma and Ngu Tiew Tang.”

“Ha! Those are nothing but beginner’s patterns. I will teach you real chok weaving. We’ll start with this—Lakhon Noi.”

“Lakhon Noi looks really difficult, Mae Mon.”

“That’s up to you—do you want to learn how to weave a sinh or not?” Her voice sharpened.

“I do! I want to weave beautiful sinh!” Ba Hong’s whole body trembled with excitement.

“Good. Then let’s begin. Hold the porcupine quill firmly and watch the pattern carefully. Lift and drop the threads exactly as they go—one line at a time, one color at a time. Don’t rush.”

Madame Huan Kaew handed him the porcupine quill, an essential tool for chok weaving. His large, rough hands—hardened by years of farm work—trembled as they accepted the delicate, timeworn instrument from her smaller, calloused fingers, hands that had weathered countless



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seasons and woven endless sinh.

“Beat the weft harder—don’t be afraid of hurting it.”

She instructed him. Ba Hong slammed the beater with all his strength. In just one strike, the threads tightened to the same perfect standard as those his great-grandmother had woven before him.

Madame Huan Kaew knew then—this boy had talent. A rare gift, one that neither men nor women in Mae Chaem possessed.

As she watched her great-grandson with pride, she remained unaware that another pair of eyes, hidden in the shadows, was watching too—filled with jealousy.





3

Lakhon Glang (The Middle Pattern)

“Mon, how is the Middle Lakhon pattern different from the small Lakhon pattern?”

Ba Hong asked Madame Mon Huan Kaew. The teaching of the Chok weaving pattern had progressed significantly. In just a few days, this great-grandson had managed to weave the small Lakhon pattern flawlessly—faster than any woman in the village at his age, faster than when Madame Mon Huan Kaew taught her eldest daughter, Bua Ngern, faster than Fong Jan, their unfortunate daughter-in-law, and perhaps even faster than Madame Mon herself when she learned from Madame Sri Moi. “Look closely,” Madame Mon said. “The small Lakhon has two hooks, with a ‘Gwak’ flower inside the frame. The middle Lakhon has three hooks, with a little bird inside.” She held up the newly woven fabric made by her grand-son to compare it with the pattern on the loom, pointing out the prominent little bird in the middle of the design.

“Oh! That’s called a little bird, Mon? In the middle of the frame? Can I Jange its color?” Ba Hong asked.



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“Yes, if you have enough thread. You can weave it in any color you like, as long as you weave it correctly, weave it well...”

“Weave it beautifully!” the mischievous great-grandson finished her sentence.

At that moment, Mae Ui Nak walked toward them. With just a glance from Madame Mon, she instinctively stopped a few steps away from the loom—an unspoken rule that no one should intrude upon Madame Mon’s weaving space, especially when she was working. Though she remained cautious and reserved, she couldn’t hide the discontent in her gaze toward Ba Hong, her grandson.

“What brings you here? Have you finished preparing for the Kathina festival?” Madame Mon asked, referring to the major annual merit-making event in Mae Chaem, which Mae Ui Nak had volunteered to organize that year.

“Not yet,” Nak replied.

“Then why have you come to my loom? What business do you have with me?”

“Not with you, Mae. I have business with Ba Hong.”

“What do you need him for now? It’s already evening. The daily chores should be done by now. Or are you calling him to help with the festival?” Madame spoke on Ba Hong’s behalf before he could even say a word.

“I wouldn’t have interrupted your teaching if it weren’t for the district chief’s son waiting at the front of the house.” Nak’s voice carried a hint of resentment.



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“Oh, my!” Ba Hong immediately dropped the porcupine quill in his hand, hurriedly rising from the loom and dashing toward the front gate.

“Hmph! Little rascal! The moment a young man comes around, you abandon me and your lessons!” Madame Mon scolded as he ran off.

Mae Ui Nak, having delivered her message, turned on her heels and walked away as if staying near Madame Mon’s loom any longer would burn her alive. The madame wasn’t too concerned about her daughter. She struck the beater against the loom a few times in frustration, but then peered out the door, curious about her great-grandson’s business. Her aging eyes weren’t as sharp as before, but she could piece together what was happening.

“Hmph.” Just the name alone tells me he’s not from here,” she muttered, watching Ba Hong laughing and chatting animatedly with a tall, handsome young man with fair skin.

Ever since the government had declared Mae Chaem a subdistrict separate from Jom Tong, the northern part of the Jang Kheng stream had developed rapidly. The authorities had built a new district office in Jang Kheng village, sent a district chief from the southern provinces to govern, and constructed a hospital, a police station, and a school. This led northern villagers to send their children to school, hoping they would become teachers, police officers, or nurses—government workers with stable salaries. In contrast, the southern villagers still viewed government matters as distant concerns and focused on farming, weaving, and daily survival.

Even Ba Hong’s eldest sister, Jan Tip, had gone to school.





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Madame Mon shook her head, remembering when the girl had first asked for permission to study. She had hoped that having a great-granddaughter would mean passing down the traditional weaving skills, but no matter how much she and Mae Ui Nak tried to teach her, Jan Tip always found excuses to escape, leaving her younger brother to weave in her place. At first, Mae Ui Nak had allowed her to attend school, thinking that indulging her request would make it easier to bring her back to weaving later. But the more she studied, the more determined she became—she wanted to be Mae Chaem's first female police officer. Madame Mon felt a pang of regret but was too old to stop her now. She left that struggle to Mae Ui Nak, who continued to argue with Jan Tip about it every day.

Ba Hong, on the other hand, resisted leaving home no matter how much Mae Ui Nak pushed him to work outside. Some days, she even begged him to go to school like his sister, but he would hesitate until she chased him with a cane, forcing him into the cotton fields. Yet, every night, when the household was fast asleep, Madame would see the glow of an oil lamp from Jan Tip's abandoned loom. Ba Hong secretly taught himself the patterns and wove in place of his sister, making rapid progress. Every morning, Madame Mon would inspect the fabric he had worked on all night. The meticulousness and consistency of his patterns revealed that he wove not out of duty, but out of love.

Yet, Madame Mon wasn't sure if his love for weaving surpassed his infatuation with the handsome district chief's son standing before him. She had seen the district chief's family before at temple festivals. At last year's KUi Salak offering at Wat Yang Luang, they were the presiding chair





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donors. None of them spoke the local northern dialect—they spoke only the formal Thai of the central region, confusing both the villagers and the monks. The district chief's uniform wasn't as awkward as his wife's sinh—though made of fine silk, it could never match the beauty of a handwoven Chok-patterned skirt from Mae Chaem. Some even gossiped that southern women didn't know how to weave and simply bought mass-produced fabric from Indian merchants to sew into skirts. To Madame Mon, no matter how wealthy or prestigious a woman was, if she couldn't weave, she wasn't a true woman. She, then, thought of Jan Tip again.

But the real talk of Mae Chaem was the district chief's only son—a strikingly handsome young man with refined features. Even Madame Mon, in her old age, had to admit that he was exceptionally good-looking. Every woman in the village, from young girls to grandmothers, spoke of him daily—especially Ba Hong, who seemed more excited than anyone whenever he came to buy thread from their house. Rumor had it that the district chief's wife, ashamed of her plain sinhs, had started collecting Chok-patterned skirts. Only Mae Ui Nak was willing to sell, driven by greed, unlike the other women who treasured their skirts as heirlooms for religious ceremonies and even burial garments. Sinh is a lifetime connection with all southern women, from birth to death. Northern women who do not possess weaving skills, on the other hand, would wear Lua sinh, Yang sinh, or Lampang sinh, depending on their financial means. Madame Mon grew angrier at her daughter each day for selling off all the precious woven skirts. When she realized Mae Ui Nak prioritized money over tradition, she refused to teach her any more weaving patterns.



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Without this knowledge, Mae Ui Nak could never weave the intricate Lakhon designs—no wonder she was furious when she saw Ba Hong mastering them.

Even so, Mae Ui Nak was still considered an exceptionally skilled weaver, unmatched in Mae Chaem. Wealthy women frequently visited her house, eager to claim a sinh as soon as word spread that she had finished weaving one. Eventually, the demand escalated to the point where they set up a loom under the district chief's house and invited Mae Ui to teach weaving there. Meanwhile, Madame Mon heard that people had begun mixing patterns in a way that made a complete mess—what city folks called applied patterns, with no respect for the traditional Chiang Saen designs of old. She could only sigh and accept it. Mae Ui Nak's skills in teaching and passing down weaving techniques weren't exactly remarkable. If they were, then Jan Tip, whom Mae Ui had raised and trained in weaving since childhood, wouldn't have ended up hating it so much that she ran away to become a female police officer instead.

All of this led the chief's son to frequently buy cotton for his mother. Madame Mon didn't want to fool herself into thinking her great-grandson had no interest in any women in Mae Chaem—especially since he spent most of his time with Ba Hong rather than with any young woman. She wasn't sure if the chief's son had ever thought of Ba Hong that way, but she was sure that Ba Hong had. Even though it was khit—forbidden, impossible—every time he visited, Ba Hong's face would light up. Despite the hardships of being the only man in a household where Mae Ui made him do every task traditionally assigned to men, he found a flicker



of happiness in that fleeting, foolish hope.

“Mon, can I really choose the color of my bird?” Ba Hong asked with a broad grin after the handsome visitor had left.

“Yes, I told you—you can pick any color you like. Just make sure...you weave it correctly, weave it well...”

“Weave it beautifully!” he chimed in once more, picking up a pink thread.

Madame Mon watched him happily weave the little bird into the middle of the Lakhon pattern and thought, Ba Hong’s bird is pink. But hers...hers was always yellow—the color of the monks.

The ground turmeric powder slowly dissolved into the boiling water, seeping into the cotton threads. Huan Kaew set up the dyeing pot by herself, with no one to help her. Now that she had neither her father nor Madame Sri Moi, her lonely and empty life felt like the repetitive patterns of an old sinh cloth, woven over and over again. Madame Sri Moi’s old loom still held strands of red and black cotton, left just as they were. The small motifs that Madame Sri Moi had once taught her remained unfinished, untouched by anyone. Huan Kaew was not yet ready to weave over her mother’s design, nor was she ready to remove the threads to start a new pattern. Most of all, she was not ready to accept the truth that Madame Sri Moi was truly gone.

Huan Kaew was forced to grow up quickly to survive on her own. She still woke up to the sound of the rooster crowing, lighting the fire to steam rice at dawn. She lifted the hem of her plain skirt and waded into the chicken coop to collect warm eggs. If she gathered many, she saved



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some for the next day instead of taking them to the temple for offerings as before. She feared that her father and Madame Sri Moi would have nothing to eat in the afterlife, but she was also afraid that she, herself, would starve in this world. She worked in the fields, grew cotton, ventured into the forest to gather firewood, picked mushrooms, dug for wild yams, searched for bamboo shoots, foraged for shellfish, and caught fish in the Chaeng Kheung stream. Anything she could clean, cook, and eat, she sought out. Her mother's loom, her own loom, and all the tools of the weaving trade no longer held significance in her life.

The same was true for the exquisite **Chiang Saen silk sinh cloth**. Huan Kaew carefully stored it in a chest, following Madame Sri Moi's last wishes. No one was allowed to touch it, not even herself. She considered it too precious to be of any significance to her life now. How could something so valuable matter to someone as insignificant as she was? She had not even looked at it again since the last time she pried it from Madame Sri Moi's hands. The only pattern imprinted in her mind was the Lakhon Noi pattern Madame Sri Moi had once taught her. She dared not weave any new designs from the Chiang Saen sinh on her own, nor did she dare to weave a brocaded sinh by herself.

She wore a simple Lua skirt every day, like the women of the northern villages who did not know how to weave intricate brocade patterns—women whom no man desired as a wife. Until that day—a day she would never forget—when the cold wind swept down from Doi Inthanon, and she met him.

“Excuse me, which way is Wat Pa Daed, madam?”



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The saffron robes of the monk fluttered fiercely in the biting wind. His frail body stood stiffly against the cold, wrapped tightly in his garment as he ventured outside the temple. One arm carried a bulging shoulder bag, and a covered alms bowl hung from its strap. A large umbrella-tent rested on his shoulder, indicating that he was a wandering monk from another region. Everything about him should have inspired devotion and reverence in Huan Kaew. But it was his smile, radiant face and warm, kind eyes that made her heart race uncontrollably.

"I pay my respects, venerable monk," she quickly pressed her palms together in a wai. "Wat Pa Daed is quite far. You must follow the Maeraek stream uphill. The wind is so strong...please, venerable monk, come take shelter in my home first."

She had not thought before speaking. She only felt concerned that the stranger might be too cold.

"Thank you, but it would not be appropriate for a monk to stay alone with a woman in seclusion. I shall continue my journey as you have directed. I should reach Wat Pa Daed before long."

Embarrassment burned Huan Kaew's face. She knew she should not have invited a monk into her home, yet the words had slipped out before she could stop them.

"Forgive me, venerable monk. I have spoken wrongly. If that is so, please allow me to offer alms to you for merit." She quickly tried to make amends, thinking of the boiled eggs she had collected that morning.

"It is past midday. If you wish to make an offering, wake early tomorrow and place alms in my bowl or join the communal meal at the



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temple. If I reach Wat Pa Daed by nightfall, I may come to collect alms in this area with the other monks tomorrow morning.” His voice was calm and measured, even as she fumbled through her mistake. Huan Kaew felt even more flustered.

“Venerable monk, from where have you wandered?” She hastily jangled the subject.

“I have come from Wat Phra Singh in Chiang Mai.”

“Oh! That is far from Mae Chaem! What brings you here? Your accent is so gentle and sweet—not as harsh as the local speech.” Huan Kaew blurted out her thoughts, unable to hold back.

“Well then, I shall take my leave now, madam,” the monk said, ignoring her comment, and continued on his way.

Huan Kaew watched as he walked along the stream until he disappeared from sight. The heart of a lonely woman, long accustomed to solitude, wavered in the cold wind. She knew it was forbidden, but his face and voice were impossible to erase from her mind.

From that chance meeting in the afternoon to an intentional morning encounter, Huan Kaew woke early to steam rice, release the chickens and ducks, and gather fresh eggs. She carefully peeled the boiled eggs, scooped fragrant rice into a food container, and tidied herself. She exchanged her dull Lua skirt for a brocaded sinh for the first time, combed her hair neatly into a bun, and adorned it with a vibrant red lotus flower. When the first golden rays of sunlight illuminated the delicate patterns of her skirt, she picked up her food offerings and set off to find the monk she had met the day before. At the temple, she spotted him among the



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monks, though he sat at the end of the row, indicating his junior status. Her heart pounded. She carefully approached with her offering, but instead of bowing her head humbly as she should, she stole a glance at the young monk from Chiang Mai.

When the head monk invited him to preach, the young monk chose to recite the story of Madri (from Vessantara Jataka), the mother separated from her children. His gentle Chiang Mai accent rang like a crystal bell, captivating the listeners. But for Huan Kaew, the words of wisdom barely reached her heart. All she heard was the melody of his voice.

The fine-looking young monk seemed to realize that the laypeople's faith was not particularly focused on the content, so he reiterated the merits once more—stating that if one sincerely worshipped this particular sermon section, their future life would be blessed with a complete family, free from the pain of separation. Upon hearing this, Huan Kaew immediately thought of her parents, Father and Madame Sri Moi. A complete family felt like an unattainable dream, so distant that she could only sigh in longing. Her gaze, meant to wander aimlessly, unexpectedly met the monk's eyes for a brief moment. A cold gust of wind swept through, lifting the hem of her sinh in the same direction as the edges of the monk's saffron robe. A petal from a rawong lotus detached and floated away from her hair. Goosebumps spread across Huan Kaew's skin, sending a shiver through her entire body.

"Hell must be devouring me now," she murmured to herself, as a realization dawned upon her—she had begun to feel something for the monk.





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From that day, her once-empty life was filled with purpose. She wove a new pattern into her loom with intense focus, determined to create something worthy. Every day, she dressed in her finest brocaded sinh and went to Wat Pa Daed, eager to hear the young monk speak. The temple became a battlefield where women competed, each wearing the most elaborate sinh, vying for a place closer to the preacher. And Huan Kaew was no exception.

Huan Kaew refused to be outdone by the other women. She hurriedly wove a sinh with an intricate Lakhon Glang pattern, using bright-colored cotton, mirroring the restless emotions stirring in her heart when she thought of the monk's serene and radiant face. Her sinh was undoubtedly as beautiful as any other. Over time, she moved closer and closer to the Dhammasana from where she had once sat in the back rows of the sermon hall. One intricately woven teen chok after another was created in her efforts to elevate her standing within the narrow confines of Mae Chaem society. Though she could only weave two patterns, Huan Kaew was still regarded as a skilled teen chok weaver.

At every religious festival and merit-making event, she made sure to take part, all for the vain hope of getting closer—if only briefly—to speak with the monk. Deep down, she knew that no matter where their connection led, it was bound to be obstructed by taboos and impossibilities.

Eventually, she was appointed as the head organizer for Thet Mahachat (The Great Birth Sermon), one of the most significant events in Mae Chaem. All eyes were on her, expectations heavy in the air. It was inevitable that rumors would arise about the closeness between



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a young laywoman and a monk. Though nothing improper ever occurred between them, village gossip could not be silenced—especially when even Huan Kaew herself could not claim that her heart was entirely pure. No matter how exquisite her woven sinh was, it could not shield her from the slander of other women in the village. She had no desire to tarnish the reputation of the monk, whose path was one of purity. And so, she gradually moved farther from the Dhammasana, withdrawing little by little, until one day, she decided never to set foot in the Pa Daed temple again unless absolutely necessary.

Everything had unfolded and faded away as swiftly as the monk's teachings about impermanence. The tangled threads of her heart's desires had to be unraveled before they completely unraveled her. In the end, she sat at her loom alone, finishing the Lakhon Glang pattern beautifully—just as it was meant to be, though not as she had wished it to be. Patterns had strict forms that had to be followed, passed down through generations. To deviate, to weave chaotically against tradition, would result in a sinh that was flawed—unworthy of being worn by any respectable Lanna woman. Yet, though the pattern could not be Janged, there were no rules against choosing one's own colors. Huan Kaew, too ashamed to ask for help, prepared her own dye, watching as the ground turmeric dissolved into the boiling water, seeping into the cotton threads—imbuing them with the same sacred yellow used for a monk's robe. But as she watched the yellow fabric sway under the sunlight, she recalled another afternoon—when a cold wind from the summit of Doi Inthanon had blown harshly against her home. The color of the monk's robe, golden under the bright light,



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became etched deep within her memory, never to be erased.

And so, Huan Kaew hid that yellow within the little birds she wove into her Lakon Klang patterns.

“Can a swan choose the color of its own feathers?”

Ba Hong asked again as he was about to weave the little bird into the fabric.

“Haven’t you already picked pale pink? Why are you asking again?” Madame Mon scolded.

“I just don’t want to choose the wrong color. I don’t want to mess up the old pattern.” The boy hurriedly explained, fearing her rebuke.

“The old pattern is just a guide—meant to be followed. But if every weaver used the same color, then all the sinh would look the same. How would anyone know which one was truly beautiful?”

“Ah, you’re right! Then I’ll weave the little bird in pale pink!” Even after understanding, the boy still repeated his choice as if seeking permission.

“Fine, hurry up and weave. Before your grandmother calls you away to help again.”

The boy nodded in understanding.

His little bird, woven in pale pink, was the most beautiful the Madame had ever seen. Though the pattern was fixed, the color had been chosen well. And so, the Lakhon Glang fabric he wove was far more beautiful than the one Huan Kaew had woven alone, when no one had understood her.



4

Lakhon Luang (The Grand Pattern)

Madame Mon Huan Kaew sighed as she gazed at the unfinished Lakhon Luang pattern left on the loom. Though it was more intricate than the Lakhon Glang and Lakhon Noi patterns, the difficulty lay only in the increased number of knots. The weaving should have progressed further by now, especially since her great-nephew had already mastered the two simpler patterns. But perhaps it was the festive air affecting everyone in Tha Pha and across Mae Chaem—excitement was building for the Chula Kathin festival at Wat Yang Luang, which was less than a month away.

As the festival approached, the district chief's wife frequented their house more often than ever. Madame Mon couldn't understand what pressing business she had with her daughter. Word had it that she wanted this year's event to be grand, recognized at the provincial level. The preparations had become far more elaborate than when Madame Mon Huan Kaew had once overseen them. Watching her daughter, Nak, rush about making arrangements, she found it both amusing and concerning. Would her daughter have a beautifully woven sinh to wear like the other



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women? She had sold all her woven fabrics to the district chief's wife, leaving herself with nothing but a simple, worn Lua sinh. The thought made Madame Mon shake her head—perhaps it was time for her daughter to feel a little ashamed.

Madame Mon wasn't particularly concerned about the Chula Kathin festival or even about Nak. The real issue was the district chief's son, Jumroen. What business did he have that required him to accompany his mother to Tha Pha every single time? Ba Hong had become so pre-occupied with welcoming the district chief's wife and her son that he had no focus left for learning how to weave intricate patterns, as if he were the host of the festival himself.

Jumroen and Hong had grown noticeably closer. To outsiders, they might appear to be just close friends, but to someone who had lived nearly eighty years, their bond seemed to be more than that. It was a connection woven tighter than the countless knots in the Lakhon Luang pattern. A teen chok fabric, with its beautiful and orderly design, was deceptively complicated to weave—the back of the cloth was a chaotic tangle of knotted threads. The difficulty of the process was hidden from view, known only to the weaver. And it seemed that Ba Hong was weaving a pattern far too difficult for himself—a pattern whose final design was unpredictable. Would it turn out exquisitely refined or grotesquely flawed? "Oh, Madame Huan Kaew! Have you had lunch yet?" The district chief's wife, dressed in a Western-style lace blouse and a teen chok skirt woven by Nak, greeted her in a Southern dialect.

"I already ate. And you, madam? What did you have for lunch?"





Madame Mon responded in pure Northern dialect. The district chief's wife hesitated, her expression awkward—she didn't understand the North tongue.

"Mother was asking what you had for lunch, madam," Nak quickly translated. Madame Mon was slightly surprised—when had her daughter found the time to learn the Southern dialect so fluently?

"Oh, I had green curry chicken with kai look koey (son-in-law eggs)," the district chief's wife replied.

Madame Mon didn't recognize those Southern dishes but assumed they were probably not as delicious as the bamboo shoot curry and stir-fried winged beans from her own region.

"And what brings you here, madam?" Madame Mon got straight to the point, adjusting her language to be more formal when speaking to an official figure.

"I'm here to ask for your help, Mae Mon Huan Kaew," the district chief's wife said, sitting down beside her and taking her hand.

"What could an old woman like me help with? My eyesight isn't good, and my back is even worse," Madame grumbled, reluctant to get involved.

"We need your help weaving fabric at Wat Yang Luang on the night before the festival," the district chief's wife explained. "This year, we're organizing a grand event, with so many houses contributing to set up many looms, but we don't have enough weavers."

"I haven't been to Wat Yang Luang in a long time, madam," Madame Mon replied. She rarely went to the temple unless absolutely necessary.





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“That’s exactly why I’m asking,” the district chief’s wife pleaded. “You’re the most senior weaver in all of Mae Chaem. If you joined the ceremony, it would be a great honor for the event.”

There were several Southern words in her request that Madame Mon didn’t quite understand.

“Let me think about it, madam. I’ll have Nak give you an answer later,” Madame Mon dismissed the conversation, not wanting to struggle through speaking in different dialects for too long. The district chief’s wife looked slightly uneasy.

“By the way, where is your granddaughter, Jan Tip, Mae Ui Nak?” she asked, shifting the subject.

“Jan Tip? Hmph...she’s at school. Should be back in the evening,” Nak replied, slipping into her native dialect for a moment before correcting herself.

“She’s in school?” The district chief’s wife was surprised. “I didn’t know girls in Mae Chaem went to school...Oh! And has Mae Ui told Jan Tip yet that she has to be a dancer and participate in the khao thip stirring ritual on the night of the event?”

“Not yet, madam,” Nak admitted.

“She might not have enough time to prepare!” The district chief’s wife was concerned. “But...your granddaughter isn’t married yet, is she?”

“No, she doesn’t have anyone yet,” Nak confirmed, knowing that only unmarried virgins could participate in the ritual.

“Nak, have you told Jan Tip yet? If not, there’ll be trouble at home soon,” Madame Mon warned.





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Before Nak could react, a young girl in a school uniform stood firmly at the doorway, showing none of the reserved mannerisms expected of Lanna women. Her hair was a mess, and her legs were covered in mud up to her shins.

“**Thammo Sangko!** Where on earth have you been rolling around in filth?” Mae Ui Nak gasped, rushing over to dust off her granddaughter. The district chief’s wife stared at Jan Tip from head to toe, while only Madame Mon found the situation amusing.

“I was playing soccer with my friends at school, Ui,” Jan Tip replied, swatting away her grandmother’s hands as she tried to fix her hair.

“Soccer? What kind of girl goes off playing soccer with a bunch of boys from the whole school? Go! Go take a bath right now!” Mae Ui tried to push Jan Tip away from the district chief’s wife’s view, but the girl resisted.

“Were you just talking about me?” Jan Tip suddenly asked the district chief’s wife in the Southern dialect, catching her off guard.

Madame Mon felt deeply satisfied. This great-granddaughter of hers was bright, but she had always been bold—never caring whether the person she was speaking to was older or held a high rank.

“Oh...um, I was just speaking with your grandmother...”

“Great-grandmother, actually. Yah Noi. Not my real grandmother,” Jan Tip corrected the woman innocently, unaware that Mae Ui Nak beside her had gone stiff.

“Oh, your great-grandmother,” the district chief’s wife recovered. “We were just discussing having you as one of the seven Satabun dancers



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leading the procession and stirring the Khao Thip in the ceremony on the night before the ceremony.”

The moment Jan Tip heard that, she threw the book in her hand against the wall and turned to yell at her grandmother.

“Ui! You know I can’t dance! I don’t even have a beautiful sinh chok like the others! Why did you agree to this?”

“Tsk! Keep your voice down! You’re making a scene in front of our guest!” Mae Ui Nak lowered her voice and tried to drag her granddaughter to the back of the house, but Jan Tip yanked her arm away.

“We can talk right here, Ui! Tell Khun Nai I don’t want to dance, and I don’t want to be any kind of ceremonial maiden!” Jan Tip snapped directly at the district chief’s wife before storming out of the house.

Mae Ui Nak quickly hiked up her skirt and rushed after her granddaughter, calling her back.

Madame Mon and the district chief’s wife exchanged glances. The woman clearly didn’t know how to handle the chaos unfolding before her. But for Madame Mon, this was just another familiar scene—she had witnessed countless clashes between her daughter and her great-granddaughter.

“Well then, I suppose I have no further business here. I’ll take my leave now, Mae Mon,” the district chief’s wife quickly excused herself.

“Alright then, travel safely,” Madame said with a knowing smile, watching her go.

“Jumroen...we’re going home,” the district chief’s wife called to her son, who was still lingering close to Ba Hong.



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Ba Hong's face fell in disappointment at the sudden end to his happiness. Left with nothing else to do, he slowly made his way back to Madame Mon.

"You go help your grandmother calm your sister down," Madame Mon ordered her great-grandson. Hong nodded immediately, understanding the situation—this kind of scene had played out in the house over and over again.

"This year's Julakathina is going to be quite the spectacle," Madame murmured to herself, having already decided she would wear her teen chok skirt to the event, as invited by the district chief's wife.

One morning, as Mae Ui Nak sat weaving Lakhon Luang patterns, waiting for her troublesome great-grandson to return from the fields, she finally spoke up.

"May I borrow a white sinh chok skirt for Jan Tip to wear?"

Madame Mon, startled by the request, snapped back immediately.

"A woman from Mae Chaem shouldn't be borrowing sinh from others! Every woman must weave her own."

"But Jan Tip doesn't know how to weave yet," Nak protested.

"That's because you didn't teach her properly," Madame shot back in frustration. She hadn't meant to blame her daughter—she knew Jan Tip's stubborn nature all too well—but her words still made Mae Ui Nak fall silent for a moment.

Trying to shift the topic, Madame Mon asked, "Which skirt do you want to borrow?"





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Regaining her composure, Mae Ui Nak replied, “The white one with gold-thread Lakhon Luang pattern.”

At those words, Madame slammed her loom shuttle against the frame with a loud crack. Mae Ui Nak flinched.

“There are plenty of other white teen chok skirts! Why must it be that one?” Madame’s voice rose, her eyes sharp with displeasure.

“Because all the others have colored threads mixed in. That one is the only skirt that’s pure white from the waistband to the hem. You know that Satabun dancers must wear all white,” Mae Ui Nak explained hurriedly.

“Yes, I know they have to wear white. But she can wear an ordinary white cotton skirt—why must it be the teen chok with gold thread?”

“I want Jan Tip to look her best. The other Satabun dancers will all be wearing teen chok skirts. Maybe if she sees herself looking beautiful, she’ll finally feel proud and start acting like a proper young woman.”

Madame Mon scoffed, “Then why don’t you weave one for her yourself? Oh, that’s right—you already sold all your white skirts to the district chief’s wife from the South, didn’t you? Always showing off, making promises you can’t keep, and now you come demanding my skirt? You know how much I treasure that piece!”

Mae Ui Nak shot back, “Why are you so possessive over it? It’s not even yours!”

This time, it was Madame Mon who fell silent.

From the look on her daughter’s face, she knew Mae Ui Nak hadn’t meant to say those words to hurt her. But the painful memories



tied to that skirt struck her heart like a whip, burning deep inside.

“You’re right. It’s not mine,” Madame Mon finally spoke, her voice trembling. “It belonged to Bua Ngern, your older sister. I personally taught her to weave that skirt.”

As she spoke, tears streamed down her cheeks. Every time she thought of her eldest daughter, she couldn’t stop herself from crying.

Many years had passed, and for an old woman like Madame Huan Kaew, there was one thing she had accumulated more than skirts in her chest—painful memories.

She still remembered the Julakathina festival from that year. It was the Year of the Rabbit, a winter so bitter it chilled to the bone. It was the year that Bua Ngern, her eldest daughter, was chosen as one of the seven Satabun dancers.

Bua Ngern had grown into a strikingly beautiful young woman, her beauty renowned throughout Tha Pha and Mae Chaem. But her fame wasn’t only for her looks—her skill in weaving teen chok patterns had been meticulously honed under Mae Huan Kaew’s guidance, making her the most talented weaver of her generation. She was the first person Madame Huan Kaew ever allowed to see the sacred Chiang Saen silk skirt hidden in her chest.

“If you can weave all sixteen patterns, I’ll give you this Chiang Saen silk skirt,” Madame Huan Kaew had promised, handing her daughter a porcupine quill—the first tool of a weaver.

With determination and natural talent, Bua Ngern mastered



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the intricate patterns quickly. Her weaving was so precise and fluid that Madame Mon Huan Kaew hardly needed to teach her. She only had to show her the Chiang Saen skirt once or twice, and Bua Ngern could replicate the patterns flawlessly—sometimes even more beautifully than the original.

Among weavers, people like Bua Ngern were called “Om Lai”, meaning they didn’t need to count threads or memorize weaving steps. Instead, they could recreate designs purely from memory and instinct. Most Om Lai weavers produced patterns that were chaotic and unrecognizable, deviating from the traditional designs passed down through generations.

But Bua Ngern was different. While she innovated by using colors no one had dared to combine before, every pattern she wove remained perfectly faithful to the ancient Chiang Saen style. Madame Huan Kaew was in awe of her daughter’s skill, and so was the entire town of Mae Chaem. Even those from the northern villages, who didn’t weave, came to buy Bua Ngern’s skirts. The demand was so high that there were never any left unsold. Some skirts fetched prices as high as a hundred baht—an astronomical sum at the time when a royal government teacher earned only eight baht per month. This meant that high-ranking officials had to save almost an entire year’s salary just to afford a single skirt woven by Bua Ngern.

Her most renowned pattern was the Lakhon Luang design. Though difficult to weave, it wasn’t the hardest pattern. Even with twelve knots per motif, Bua Ngern could execute it effortlessly, as if the patterns projected themselves into her vision. Lakhon Luang skirts were the most valuable,



often selling for far more than any other designs. Bua Ngern's reputation as a master weaver even reached Chiang Mai.

The descendants of the old nobles in the city were so impressed that they sent palace attendants to request to buy Bua Ngern's intricately woven "Lakhon Luang" patterned sinh for a thousand baht per piece. They even tried to persuade her to become a royal weaver in the palace, where she would have the opportunity to touch and weave the finest silks, such as the golden silk sinh of Tulya and the golden silk sinh of Chiang Tung, woven with real silver and gold—luxurious fabrics that commoners like Madame Huan Kaew could only dream of.

Bua Ngern was overjoyed and eager to go to the palace. Although Madame Huan Kaew did not want her daughter to leave home and go far away, she also did not want to hold her back and trap her in a life of poverty in Mae Chaem. Her daughter's fate was far grander than her own, so she told Bua Ngern to accept the offer and go to Chiang Mai as she wished.

"Before you go, I'll give you the Chiang Saen golden silk sinh as promised," Madame Mon told her daughter.

"Keep it for Nak instead, Mother. I have already memorized every pattern of the Chiang Saen sinh, but she hasn't yet learned to weave. She needs it more than I do. Please be patient with her, Mother. Even if she's slow, she's trying her best. If I leave, she'll be here to take care of you," Bua Ngern pleaded.

Madame agreed. Tears, which had never fallen before, now dripped onto the loom as she thought about how her beloved daughter





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was about to leave. Bua Ngern wiped her mother's tears away. The more Madame Mon reminisced about the happy moments when she taught Bua Ngern how to weave, the harder she sobbed.

"Don't cry for me, Mother, or you'll curse my fate. I'm not going far at all. Chiang Mai and Mae Chaem are just a short distance apart. Now, come help me weave this white silk sinh instead. I've earned enough from selling my fabrics to the palace to buy plenty of golden silk, enough to weave an entire Lakhon Luang' sinh."

Bua Ngern tried to console her mother. The one thing that always brought them joy together was weaving. The delicate golden silk threads were gently woven by the slender, youthful fingers of the young woman, while the calloused hands of Madame Mon Huan Kaew, worn from years of hard labor, were not suited to handle such precious silk. But Bua Ngern patiently waited for her mother to weave, allowing the two of them to complete the white silk sin together, hoping that their shared merit from making it would allow them to be reborn as mother and daughter once more—as celestial beings in heaven, as they had once wished.

But perhaps heaven was too far away. Hell, on the other hand, arrived first. Before Bua Ngern could even complete the temple offering while wearing her white silk sinh, disaster struck. That night, while Madame Mon was at her loom weaving monastic robes, other women from the temple ran to inform her that Bua Ngern had disappeared. In a panic, Madame Mon abandoned her unfinished cloth and ran from person to person, begging them to help search for her daughter. The entire festival was thrown into chaos. The elderly monks, young novices, and everyone



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in the temple were shaken. Nak, her younger sister, sobbed inconsolably, calling for her sister. As the hours passed, Madame Mon Huan Kaew's heart grew heavier with fear.

At dawn, when the first rays of sunlight pierced through the grass, someone found Bua Ngern lying unconscious in a banana grove. The image Madame Mon saw of her daughter that morning remained a deep, unshakable wound in her heart. The white silk sinh, still unstained and untouched, hung loosely on a banana stalk. But its wearer lay beneath it, bare and bruised, her body covered in deep, purpling wounds, bite marks, and signs of unspeakable violence. The most violated part of her body was too horrifying to describe—bloodied, torn, and ruined beyond repair. The hair Madame Mon had carefully tied up with a priceless golden orchid hairpin was now disheveled, the delicate flower trampled and crushed beyond recognition. There must have been more than one attacker. A mother's pain crashed down upon her all at once. Madame let out a soul-piercing scream before collapsing next to her daughter.

When she awoke, the first thing she saw was the neatly folded white silk sinh. But the Bua Ngern who once wore it was now broken beyond recognition. She never spoke again—not to her sister Nak, not even to her own mother. She sat in a daze, as if her spirit had left her body.

Madame Mon Huan Kaew sought every kind of healer—shamans, spirit doctors, and monks. But the moment Bua Ngern saw a man, whether young or old, she would shriek like a possessed being, claw





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at her hair, and lash out violently, throwing whatever was within reach. Eventually, Madame Mon and Nak had to tie her down to prevent her from harming herself or others.

The only thing that calmed her was the white silk sinh. She carried it everywhere, stroking its patterns, staring at it, laughing, crying, and muttering to herself. At one point, Nak suggested burning it, but the moment anyone tried to take it from Bua Ngern, she would attack them in a frenzied rage.

Madame Mon Huan Kaew and Nak took turns caring for Bua Ngern, as best they could. At least she could still eat, sleep, and relieve herself on her own. Then, over time, the Madame noticed something else—Bua Ngern's belly was growing.

The village gossiped. Women who once envied Bua Ngern's beauty and weaving skills now mocked her, some even placing bets on who the father of the unborn child might be. Some said it was a traveling merJant from Lampang. Others claimed it was an old drunkard from the end of the village. Some whispered it was a Hmong opium seller. The most wicked rumors even accused the young monks in the temple of being the unborn child's father.

But Madame Mon had her own suspicions—the drum troupe from Chom Tong. They had vanished without a trace after the incident. The abbot and monks all said they had prepared payment for them, but no one came to claim it. Madame Mon was convinced those heartless men were responsible. Even without proof, she had enough of a target to curse. And she would curse them—through every lifetime if she had to.



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On the day Bua Ngern gave birth, she still clutched the white silk sinh. No matter how vile the circumstances of his conception, the newborn boy was pure and innocent, untouched by the sins that had brought him into the world.

Madame Mon Huan Kaew named him simply—Ngern, after his mother. She refused to acknowledge his unknown father, wanting the child to know that he came from Bua Ngern alone. With a grandmother's love, she vowed to raise him, hoping he would become his mother's strength and solace.

But Bua Ngern did not see it that way. The moment the cotton cloth was unwrapped, revealing the infant's tiny body—his unmistakable resemblance to his father—Bua Ngern's mind shattered completely. All the pain of childbirth, all the terror and suffering she had endured, crushed her in a final, fatal instant. She died in fear before she could even hold her child.

Madame Mon never expected that she would have to pry a sinh cloth from the hands of the dead twice. From the golden silk sinh of Chiang Saen that she had once taken off the hand of Madame Sri Moi, her mother—to the white silk sinh that now lay in the grip of her broken daughter. From a mother's final wish—to a daughter's last, terrified scream, both voices had faded into silence. Yet in the heart of the one left behind, they echoed forever.

That white silk Lakhon Luang sinh was carefully folded and kept as a reminder that once, Madame Mon Huan Kaew had sat at the loom weaving alongside the person she loved the most—Bua Ngern, her eldest daughter.



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“Take a different one instead, please. Consider it my request,”
Madame Mon pleaded with her daughter, Nak.

“It’s been so long now, Mae. Have you still not forgotten her?”
Nak asked sympathetically.

“Can you weave a new one for Jan Tip? If you start now, it should
still be in-time. White sinhs don’t take long to weave.”

“I can’t weave it, Mae. You never taught me the Lakhon pattern,
nor did you ever teach me how to weave with silk thread,” Nak’s voice
carried a hint of bitterness. Madame Mon had to admit that she had favored
her first daughter for a long time.

“Fine, then don’t weave the Lakhon pattern. Just weave the simplest
one with the fewest knots. You know which one that is, don’t you?” she
tested Mae Ui.

“If not Lakhon, then the only one left is Hook and Line.”

“Hook and Line only has nine knots.”

“But I’m not good at that pattern.”

“If you’re not good at it, then you don’t have to weave. But tell
me, do you have silk thread?”

“I do, Mae. The money from selling the sinh to the mistress was
enough to buy plenty of silk thread. Are you going to weave it yourself?”

“My hands...my eyes...I can’t weave silk anymore...”

“...I’ll have Ba Hong weave it instead.”