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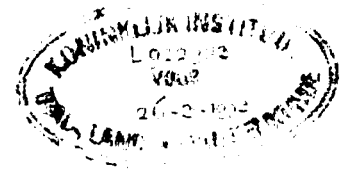


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# Rhinoceros Blood

And Other Stories  
From The North Of Thailand

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## RHINOCEROS BLOOD

This is a story which was told me long ago, a story of the days when the Lao Chiefs of Northern Siam still ruled their little realms with despotic power; the days when a man possessed of a stout heart and endless patience could still track down and kill a rhinoceros in the swamps near Chiang Rai.

Noi Thep of Wieng Wai once actually killed a rhinoceros. True, it was a very small one, and had no horn, but still it was a real rhinoceros, and on the strength of this exploit Noi Thep enjoyed a reputation as a mighty hunter throughout his native State of Wieng Wai and in all the neighbouring Principalities.

One day Chao Lerm, the ruling Chief of Wieng Wai, an aged and rather decrepit man, sent for Noi Thep to come and see him. The interview took place in the Chief's private den. And this is what the Chief said:

"Noi Thep, I look upon you as a faithful and loyal subject, and I want you to help me in a very important matter. As you know, I have had many wives in my time, but now they are all dead except one, and she is old. Both my sons are dead, and I have only daughters left. When I die, my brother and my eldest son-in-law will both claim the right to succeed me, and there may be civil war in the State. I have decided to marry a young wife and see if I can still beget a son to succeed me when I die. But I am old, maybe too old to have a son unless you help me. I am told by my doctors that what I need to strengthen and invigorate me is the blood of a rhinoceros. Now you are a very great hunter, and have actually killed a rhinoceros. Go, I beseech you, without delay to Chiang Rai and seek in the swamps near that city for a rhinoceros. Kill it, and bring back to me six bottles of its blood. If you can do this, I will confer upon you the title of

"Muen" and pay you a hundred Rupees. If I later become the father of a son, I will pay you a further sum of five hundred Rupees and bestow upon you the title of "Saen."

Noi Thep bent his head to the earth, and replied:-

"Father Chief, your word is law. Tomorrow I leave for Chiang Rai. Within one month at most you shall have six bottles of rhinoceros blood."

So Noi Thep set forth on his quest, far from easy in his mind. It was by no means certain that he would be able to track down and kill a rhinoceros, which even in those days was a rare sort of animal. He well knew that, if he failed, instead of receiving a bag of Rupees and a title of nobility, he was likely to be soundly thrashed or put in the lock-up - or both.

When Noi Thep reached Chiang Rai, he went to consult his cousin, Poo Khat, who was also a celebrated hunter. Poo Khat looked grave.

"My dear cousin," said he, "your position is serious. It is most improbable that you will succeed in bagging a rhinoceros. Two of them were shot last month. I do not think there are any more to be found near here now. But I have a plan, which may perhaps solve your problem. I am about to slaughter a buffalo. Why not take back some buffalo blood to your Father Chief? He will never be able to tell the difference. Moreover, by a lucky chance, this particular buffalo has one very peculiar horn, all stunted and gnarled. If we hack it about a bit, you ought to be able to pass it off as a rhinoceros horn. So cheer up! Your fortune is as good as made."

Noi Thep greeted this suggestion with warm enthusiasm. The buffalo was duly slaughtered, a dozen (not six) bottles were filled with its blood, and its stunted horn was skillfully fixed up to look as much as possible like the nasal appendage of a rhinoceros. Then Noi Thep settled down to

enjoy a couple of weeks at Chiang Rai, beating it up with his cousin, and sampling all the gaities of that comparatively great metropolis.

He returned to Wieng Wai exactly one month after he had started on his journey. He at once went to see the old Chief. Kneeling before him, he placed at his feet the twelve bottles of buffalo blood and the stunted horn. Then, with tears in his eyes, he related his adventures:-

"I spent," said Noi Thep, "seventeen days in the Chiang Rai swamps eating nothing but glutinous rice and wild berries, and devoured day and night by leeches and mosquitoes. I was attacked thrice by cobras and chased four times by tigers. But what did I care? I reminded myself that I was there to carry out a duty entrusted to me by my beloved Father Chief, and I laughed at every danger and hardship. And here I am, safe and sound, with twelve bottles of invigorating rhinoceros blood, instead of only six, and also a beautiful rhinoceros horn."

In a voice filled with emotion, the old Chief replied:- "Noi Thep, you are a brave man and a faithful servant. Here is a bag containing two hundred Rupees, double the amount I promised you, and I confer upon you the noble title of Muen. And now I will prepare for my marriage. I have decided to take unto myself Nang Bua Thip, a very beautiful and virtuous girl, and a relative of your aunt by marriage."

"Muen" Thep showed no outward sign of disturbance on hearing this news, but inwardly he was filled with rage and disappointment. Nang Bua Thip was a young lady whom he had often met at the house of his aunt, and whom he greatly admired. It had occurred to him more than once that when he had a title of nobility and a bag of Rupees, she might probably look upon him as a suitable husband.

Bidding a humble and grateful farewell to the old Chief, Muen Thep repaired to the house of his aunt, and to her he

unburdened his soul.

"Just think," said he in disgust. "I have endured frightful hardships and run unspeakable risks in order to procure rhinoceros blood for the Father Chief, and now he intends to take unto himself the very girl I have had my eye on for months past."

"Never mind," replied his aunt; "although Nang Bua Thip cannot be your wife, you will still be able to see her from time to time. She has promised me that when she is married she will often come to see me, as she has always been in the habit of doing. I will let you know when she is here. Then you will be able to drop in and have a chat with her, as you used to do. You may as well come in through the back garden, so as to avoid attracting needless attention."

So the old Chief fed himself up on rhinoceros blood and married a pretty young wife. And his pretty wife often went to visit her old friend. And her old friend's nephew often dropped in for a chat - coming through the back garden.

In less than a year, Nang Bua Thip presented her aged husband with a fine, healthy son and heir.

The old Chief was overjoyed. Public celebrations were held throughout the State of Wieng Wai, gifts presented to every priest in the capital, and hundreds of great rockets let off.

At the height of the festivities, the Chief sent for Muen Thip and said to him:-

"Muen Thip, you have done more for me than any other man in my realm. It is through you, and you alone, that I now have a son and heir to succeed me. I only regret that you had to suffer so much hardship and pain in my service. I now confer upon you the noble title of Saen, and I present you with a bag containing one thousand Rupees instead of the five hundred I promised you."

"Saen" Thip knelt once more at the old Chief's feet, and

weepingly replied:-

"I cannot thank you enough, Father Chief, for the honourable title you have conferred upon me, and the munificent gift of money. But do not, I beg, speak of danger and suffering. Anything I have done to assist you in realising your hope of having a son and heir to succeed you has been a real pleasure and delight to me; and you may rely upon me to continue to serve you to the best of my ability as long as you may live."

And so he did. And when, only a year later, the old Chief died, he remembered Saen Thip in his will, bequeathing to him a house and land, a sum of ten thousand Rupees - and the rhinoceros horn. And Saen Thip married Nang Bua Thip and lived happily ever after.

## GREEN LOTUS

"Please, Nai, will you advance me one month's pay. I am thinking of getting married."

Noi Pam always talked like that. Short and to the point. He was a surly sort of fellow, and nobody liked him. However, he was a pretty good cook.

"Whom do you intend to marry?" I asked.

"Miss Green Lotus, the girl next door," replied Noi Pam.

This rather surprised me. I knew the girl well by sight, and very pleasing she was to the eye; but I had supposed for some time past that there was a sort of understanding between her and my house-boy, Saen, a lively young blade, and a particular favourite of mine. However, it was none of my business.

So I gave Noi Pam the money he asked for, and a week or two later he was duly married to Green Lotus, and went