



ARRIVAL OF DAWN

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A book of two awards
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A novel of family conflict and politics

chapter

1

Old maid!

Old maid?

Confirmed spinster!

Confirmed spinster?

Such words cut deep into my heart, but it was surprising how some people could utter them coolly in front of no-longer-young and unmarried women like me, without caring for our feelings. What unkind words then, would they use speaking about us old maids behind our backs?

It was something to think about, but not desirable to know!

Was it advisable for me to get married when I was forty five years old? How could I have done so before this, having now reached this grand age? If I got married at this age, would some people laugh mockingly at me? Would someone regard it as a joke and make fun about it even before my face? Would

someone pity me? And, if my marriage failed, would some people think it served me right for not humbly keeping myself, body and soul, in check at my age?

What should be my decision? So far, I had always been a very agreeable person, doing things for others rather than for myself. Mother and all my younger siblings had always been the 'Big Shots' to me, till I found myself in this situation.

I had wanted to run away and become a nun, or to scream and chase everyone out of my sight and to cut off all ties between me and everybody.

I had lamented the happenings in my life that had brought me to this dead end!

My father's name was Erp and his surname was Ekamphorn. My mother's name was Malee. Our home consisted of two, three-storey shop houses, opened inside into one, in Phra-khanong District in Bangkok. My father, to whom my grandfather left some property, had a moderate business sense in him. He opened a pawnshop on the ground floor of our house and worked his way up till he finally owned twenty shop houses nearby. My mother came from a financially less comfortable family. She was a beautiful woman who had what was popularly described as 'Burmese complexion, Indian eyes'. She was an unyielding woman, always final in her decisions. Father had great respect for her opinions.

There were four of us in the family. I was unfortunate enough to be the first-born, who my parents

hoped, would put my younger siblings on my shoulders and carry them through life, on their behalf till the day I died. Our names are Oraphan, Thanya, Wikanda and Malin. Each one is two years older than the next younger one.

Father died when I was eighteen. After his death, absolute power fell into Mother's hand. She ruled over us with unquestionable orders and with a large thumb that she pushed onto my heart more often and more heavily than she did to the others. Sometimes she not only pushed her thumb onto my heart, but also screwed it in.

To begin with, I had no hope of academic learning because Mother wanted me to help her in the pawnshop. But I protested and tried to find a job in the Civil Service. Finally, I succeeded in being hired by the Foreign Trade Section of the Ministry of Commerce, in a modest position befitting one who had completed only secondary education, and had no university degree.

Niwet Dharmachinda was a colleague of mine. Financially he was poor. At work, his position was only slightly higher than mine. Soon we began to like each other. After being friends sufficiently long and discovering that he was a reasonably good man, not given to drinking, smoking or womanising, I brought him home to meet my family.

That day, as soon as Niwet had left, Mother bombarded me with questions regarding his background. Then, with her hands on her hips, she made an ugly

face at me and demanded loudly, "What made you think of considering such a man?"

I didn't know what to say in answer.

"Your salary and his, put together, isn't enough even to feed one mouth!"

"I'm not thinking of marrying him yet. I only brought him home to meet you."

"But he's full of hope. How can you let him love you and hope to marry you when he's as poor and crispy as a cracker? Your bringing him home will make him believe there's a possibility of his marrying you!" Her eyes looked as large as goose eggs.

"If I like him more and more, we may get married."

"I don't agree with this! Why should you marry him and have a worse life than what you have now?"

She then began a long talk, full of her own reasons which I had to listen to. Sometimes I was angry with myself for acting as if brave enough to go against her wish, but never succeeding even once. Her poise, her beautiful and powerful looks somehow intimidated me, making me yield to her wishes almost every time, except in small matters in which she was clever enough to let me do as I desired once in a while.

Mother was strict in every way with me, but with my brother and sisters, especially with Thanya, her only son, she was easy and accommodating. It could be said that Thanya was spoiled rotten by her doing. She did everything for him with love and fondness.

Moreover, she made us pamper him and serve him as if he were our boss. Thanya lived at home like a prince. Whatever he wanted, deserving it or not, Mother got it for him. My mother made it clear to me, a fellow woman, why some men strongly believed that men were human beings and women were buffaloes! If women are bullied or oppressed by men, or seen by them as being not fully human, blame not the men. It is better to blame the women who made them believe what they believe and are what they are!

Every day, Wikanda, Malin and I kept hearing Mother's endearing "Ya ja...Ya ja¹..." But we said nothing. No one was envious; except once in a while, we would look at Thanya with disgust.

I once thought, 'What a man! Like an invalid! He sits like a statue. He can't do anything or get anything for himself!'

As for Wikanda, although Mother did not pamper her as much as she did Thanya, Mother loved and was proud of her, because Wikanda was beautiful like herself. She also worried over her since Wikanda was a simple, trusting person. When someone told her something, instead of listening with one ear and being careful with the other ear, Wikanda believed the person completely and easily. Mother looked after her and protected her in every way. Whenever Mother had a

¹Ja – a word added to a name by a person calling another person very dear to him or her.

chance, she would mention to me that when she was gone, the duty of looking after my brother and sisters would be mine. In as much as she had never thought or spoken about the possibility of my getting married and having a family of my own, she had never taught my three younger siblings to take care of and to depend on themselves.

Though Malin was not as beautiful as Wikanda, she had some of our father's attractive features. Mother adored Father, so she doted on Malin too. All in all, it was only me, the one most ordinary looking, with an elongated face, long teeth and sickly complexion, far from pretty, that couldn't give her any pride, so she regarded me only as a 'danger-warding gadget' or a piece of blessed religious paper, with some special writing on it, to keep ghosts away from molesting her three other children. It was as if I were not born to have a family life and some happiness of my own!

Father and Mother called us Phan, Ya, Wi and Lek².

After that day, every time I brought Niwet home, Mother's beautiful face turned as stiff as a piece of board. No matter how long he stayed, she wouldn't give him even a single smile. When before leaving, he politely gave her a *wai*³, putting his palms up together

² Means small and is often used as a nickname for the youngest sibling.

³ Putting palms up together with respect, at chin or chest level.

with respect at chin level, in return, she put together only two fingers from each of her hands at the level of her navel!

Finally, Niwet no longer came to our house.

One day after work, he took me out for a snack. There were no other customers besides us in the little coffee shop, so Niwet spoke to me in a personal way.

“Phan, I think you can see that your mother doesn’t like me?”

I sighed and bent my head down to the straw in my glass of young coconut juice.

“And you can also see that I love you.”

What a strange man, confessing his love this way, by talking about something negative first! Did he not hope to marry me? Nevertheless, my heart beat strongly. I was already twenty two and he was the first one in my life, who told me he loved me, whereas Wikanda and Malin, were each having a number of suitors, and Thanya, praised by many as being handsome, had girls running quite shamelessly after him.

“Phan, honestly, how do you feel about me?”

I regretted that Niwet didn’t know how to find a place with a better atmosphere than this. Like me he was truthful and artless. On a second thought, I preferred an artless person to an artful or secretive one. I looked at the face that was not half as handsome as Thanya’s and bent my head down again.

“Phan?”

“Yes?”

"I love you, truly."

"Yes."

"How about you? Have you ever felt love for me?"

"I like you, Niwet."

"More than an ordinary friend?"

"Yes"

"And a little more than that? Enough to marry me?"

"I haven't thought that far."

"I'm willing to continue loving you and wait for you. But your mother worries me. Do you think she'll agree to us getting married?"

I gave no answer.

"I believe that soon, when you realize how much I love you, for I love you as my own heart, you will learn to love me."

He was not a poor speaker. My heart warmed. When I looked up at him, I saw that he had not tried to use sweet words. His eyes were honest and entreating.

I sighed once again. What made problems crop up, almost like a necessary accompaniment as soon as someone had come to love me? Wikanda and Malin sometimes dated boys that looked like street bums, but Mother never went into a bad mood over this. She always welcomed my siblings' suitors cheerfully. When they came to our house, she gave them warmth and was kind to them.

What was the great flaw in Niwet?

Was his poverty a drawback? Was this such a

great failing that Mother couldn't overlook?

Six months went by during which Niwet was as steady as ever with me. I felt more and more sympathy for him. By now he had been courting me for three full years without looking at another woman.

One day, when I was alone with Mother, I decided to speak to her.

"Mother, Niwet and I are in love."

She was about to sit down but shot up as if suddenly realizing that the chair was 'The Electric Chair'! Her eyes bulged and succeeded in making her beautiful face unsightly.

"What?" She bawled.

"Niwet and I love each other."

"Huh! Why fall in love with him? Both of you are low-rank government officials. Your combined pays aren't enough to feed your stomachs!"

"With both of us working, we'll be able to live."

"No way! You'll have to eat rice with salt."

"Because we love each other, if it comes to that, we're willing."

"In the beginning, you may be able to swallow it," Mother sneered. "You just find that it tastes salty. After a number of days, love will fly out through the window and the salty taste will turn bitter. Then you'll hate each other's face, and hate the smell of each other's face. Nowadays, no one without money can be happy: You don't find generosity anywhere. Everything must be bought with money!"

chapter

2

“But if we’re thrifty, we’ll be able to find some happiness,” I argued and almost went on to say, “Within our reach, because we’re not ‘big faced’ like Thanya!”

Thanya was spending a lot of money these days. Whatever he saw other people have, he wanted it too. Whoever he saw spending money lavishly and travelling luxuriously, he wanted to do as they did. When he asked Mother for money for such purposes, she never failed to hand it to him and then to complain about it to me, as if preventing me from asking for special expenses as he did. In fact, ever since I started working, I had never asked Mother for any special sum of money. Moreover, I had been regularly buying snacks and fruit for her and those three. Whatever was needed in the house, if Mother asked me to get it, I bought it and gave it to her without asking for reimbursement, till I could hardly afford to even buy myself two new dresses a year.

But instead of seeing my good deeds, Mother looked at the way I kept wearing old clothes and seemed as if she wanted to say, 'This daughter of mine has looks that will get her nowhere. Moreover, she doesn't even know how to dress!'

Once again, she began to reason with me in a big way. Whenever she spoke gently to me, I softened at once. I slowly agreed with her words as she kept explaining that as the eldest of the brood, if I wanted to get married, I should find someone good and rich enough for me to have as a strong pillar, a haven for myself, my brother and sisters. She lamented the death of my father and her own one-foot-in-the-grave stage of life, saying that when the time came for her to die, if I had become a millionairess, she could place her younger children in my care and die with her eyes peacefully closed.

She left nothing unspoken. She used to rule over me imperiously; but now that I had a job and she realized that if I decided to leave her nest, I would not starve, being clever, she used the art of persuasion instead of force.

Niwet waited for me for over two more years, till I turned twenty-five and he thirty. On seeing there was no hope, he tipped his hat in farewell. He left the Foreign Trade Section of the Ministry of Commerce, and found work somewhere else. I never saw him again.

The love I had for Niwet was not that of a teen-

ager but of a full-grown woman of twenty-five who felt even older than her age. It was true that I felt thirty-five and dressed forty-five. Befitting my age, I bottled up my pain and hid it in my heart so well that Mother and my brother and sisters did not know that this heart had a deep wound in it, now scabbed. Peel the scab off any time, and blood was ready to gush out.

Thanya, twenty three, graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from the Faculty of Humanities, Ramkhamhaeng University. He became a lecturer in a private college. His salary was never enough for him to spend, so he regularly asked Mother for extra pocket money. When he was small, though he overspent, it was at a child's level and the extra sums were small, so Mother had been able to afford them. But now that he was a grown man, and moving in a larger circle of life, things he continually wanted were more costly and greater in number. Mother began to worry but did not dare complain in his presence; so she complained more and more in mine.

One day, after Thanya had been working for about a year, I heard him arguing with Mother in the lounge, on the second floor of our house. "Why do you want me to ask for Salini's hand for you in marriage?" Mother spoke loudly and even more so on seeing me enter the room, as if she felt relieved now that reinforcement had arrived. "Salini's poorer than us, and has little education. She completed only second-

ary school and can't help you to make a living."

"But how many times have I told you that I love her? How you like bossing people! I'm not like Oraphan you know!"

"Correct! You're not like Oraphan!" This was the first time Mother showed that she was really upset with her beloved son. "Unlike her in that you are more stupid. At least when I gave her advice, she got wiser. If, by getting married, you'll be a shortie carrying a hunchback, why marry?" When Mother was enraged, her language was quite something to hear.

"Mother, it's better to speak calmly." Warily I put my handbag down.

"How can I speak calmly? Thidarat is crazy about him. I told him to court her but he won't. He wants permission to marry Salini instead. Thidarat's father owns I don't know how many petrol stations. He's a hundred times, a thousand times richer than Salini's father!"

"Salini's father may be only a clerk in a district office, but his job is an honest one." Thanya argued.

"Yes. And he'll live and die as an honest beggar too!" Mother stressed her words.

"Do you want to know the truth about this?" Thanya asked, his eyes challenging.

"What truth?"

"The truth is that I'm not stupid. I have tried to catch rich girls. In fact, Thidarat's already in love with me."

Mother's pain intensified as she thought of Thanya's stupidity.

"Why then? Why don't you ask me to ask for Thidarat's hand instead?"

"You speak only for your gain! You think only of what you can get! Don't other people know how to figure things out too, just like we do?"

"Thanya! Speak nicely to Mother!" I thought I should admonish him, Thanya paid no attention. He went on speaking in a disrespectful and aggressive tone which, if used by us girls, Mother would have never accepted; she would get us to apologize to her at once. Far too often, she made me believe that arrogant men, who regarded women as their inferiors, did so with the encouragement from the women themselves, beginning with the women who were their own mothers.

"Do you think we're so rich? So honourable? Just as we know how to choose from among other people, they too know how to choose from among us! Every time Thidarat took me home with her, her mother slighted me! But when a rich man's son came to see her, her mother gave him a completely different welcome, right in my face for me to see!"

"But we own a pawnshop," Mother's voice became hoarse.

"My goodness! Only a pawnshop consisting of two shop houses, with our whole family living on the second and third floors! Do you know, whatever you did to Niwet, Thidarat's mother did to me. You can

say that your bad karma back-fired.”

My heart suddenly felt a dull ache.

“But we own twenty shop houses,” Mother pretended she had not heard Niwet’s name.

“Yes, this is called a tiny bit of property! Other people are far, far richer than us. You’re still so satisfied, thinking of yourself as in the time when you and Father were young. Other people have gone a long way ahead. We’re no longer considered rich. You’ve forgotten yourself. I saw it but didn’t know what to say. As for Niwet, you really shouldn’t have looked down on him. People with great riches and honour don’t look at us anyway. Just be careful or Oraphan will have to be an old maid all her life. Frankly speaking, Niwet was good enough.”

The thick scab long settled on my wounded heart had been peeled off, causing my heart to spurt out blood. I almost heard it wail.

Thanya spoke the right words but he spoke them too late to do me any good. As long as Mother kept pleasing him and he did not need to cite my case in order to marry Salini who was as poor as Niwet. Though he knew Mother did wrong to me and Niwet, he said nothing. People centred things on their own interest. No one was as stupid as I who would rush out to help others without thinking of my own desire or happiness!

To begin with, I let Mother brainwash me and convince me that I should not marry a poor man because I had to be the main pillar for my younger

siblings to lean on, all through my life even after she died. If Thanya was right, what young man of rich and noble birth would want to marry the daughter of the owner of a tiny pawnshop like me?

"But we're richer than many people," Mother would not give in. "If you're smart, since Thidarat loves you, make her stand firm about marrying you. Her parents will just have to follow her wish."

"Who knows? They may be just as determined as you."

"Then elope! After that, they'll just have to forgive you."

"You really want me to do that?"

"If necessary," she wavered.

"No, I don't agree with you here. Her father may forgive us or fix me with a bullet instead."

Mother gave a start, her eyes suddenly full of pain.

"Then you mustn't do it! For sure you must not!"

A weary smile appeared at a corner of Thanya's mouth. "Now, what do you say about Salini, Mother?"

"I'd like you to find someone else. Of the many girls who like you, there're two more, much richer than Salini. At least don't marry too far beneath yourself. This way I can still look with full eyes at my friends."

"What has that got to do with this?"

"It has a lot to do with this."

"If you won't speak for me, I'll find another per-

son I respect to do it. I must marry Salini and must be fast about it!”

“Why the bloody hurry?” Mother blared.

In answer, Thanya bellowed as loudly as she, “Because I’ve made her bloody pregnant, that’s why!”

Mother almost fell on her face.

I rushed forward to support her.

Thanya went downstairs banging his feet.

At the end of the month, Mother had to host Thanya’s and Salini’s wedding. At the reception, there were 30 people including relatives and friends, just right for three tables of Chinese food, which was nothing luxurious, and was ordered from the restaurant of a man called Meng, who rented one of Mother’s shop houses. This reception took place in our 160 square metres backyard, turned by us into a nice garden for family relaxation.

Salini moved in with us. At first, she was nice and humble. Whenever we were without a maid, she helped with the dusting and sweeping. She assisted here and there. But after a number of days, she became lazy and played up to her husband. She had morning sickness early in her pregnancy and this morning sickness knew no end. When Mother saw Salini doing nothing each day, she felt uneasy on her behalf. So she invited her to help in the pawnshop, hoping to pass to her some knowledge so that Salini might be able to handle the business later. But Salini had no

business sense at all. She often miscalculated, causing Mother to lose money. Moreover, she did not care to study the business. What she liked was to dress up prettily and go out to see things. She loved shopping, mostly for cheap clothes and cheap ornaments that from their looks, shouted out her class.

Mother shook her head every time she spoke to me about her daughter-in-law.

Salini gave birth to a baby boy, pale in complexion, chubby and really loveable. Mother doted on him so much that she tried to like his mother more. But when the baby, nicknamed Oh, was six months old, be it through Salini's persuasion or not, no one knew, Thanya mentioned that he would like to move out with his family. One day, in the evening, he called for a meeting among us.

We met in the lounge on the second floor. Salini took the baby upstairs to the bedroom given to her and Thanya on the third floor. Mother was addicted to a television mini series that would start at 9 p.m. When she saw that the time was 8.30 p.m., she looked around the room. On seeing that we were all there, she asked Thanya, "You want us to have a meeting. What is it about?"

"I want to move out with my family and live separately, Mother."

"Is it necessary?"

"Am I to do so only when it's necessary?"

“Living separately, suddenly you will have no maid. Who will help look after the baby? When Oh gets to be sick, it can be really worrying, because he’s Salini’s first baby and she doesn’t have enough experience yet, in taking care of a baby.”

“If he’s sick, we can take him to a doctor.”

“You’ll need a nanny. Otherwise you and Salini can’t go anywhere.”

“You’d baby-sit for us once in a while, won’t you?” Thanya gave her a sweet smile. Whenever he wanted something from Mother, he would at once make use of his charm.

chapter

3

Mother beamed, happy that there would be times when she could take care of her grandson. But, feeling that Thanya should be more considerate to her, I said, "I'm sure she would, but when you want her to do that, bring the baby's nanny along. Mother isn't young anymore. She can help supervise but can't be expected to run around much, or she'll get sick."

"My, my, Sister! If I had a nanny I wouldn't have to leave the baby here in Mother's care! OK. If I have one, I'll bring her along. Don't you worry."

"Where do you intend to live?" Malin asked.

"This is what I want to talk to Mother about."

"Why talk to me? If you wish to move out, you just have to rent a place, that's all. Do you have enough money?" Mother's voice was not so good. "I warned you before, about choosing a reasonably rich wife, to sail through life comfortably together."

"Oh Mother! They've already got a baby!"

Wikanda looked at her, amused. "If you have some place for them to live in, then let them."

"I don't have too much of anything. This is the only house I have!"

"That's why it's necessary for us to have a serious meeting!" Thanya affected a solemn voice and acted important. He made me, Wikanda and Malin sit up on our chairs.

Mother frowned, "What meeting? What need do we have for a meeting?"

"It's like this." Thanya met her eyes. "Father told me that the twenty shop houses are for us, five shop houses for each of us."

"If he told you, I never knew that he did." Mother too, sat up straight. "And even if he didn't tell you, that's what I intend to do. The only thing is, the time hasn't come yet."

"But it has come, Mother."

Mother's eyes suddenly flared. She was part Chinese like Father, and she believed that being asked by someone for your property before you were ill, was like being hastened by that person to an untimely death.

"I'm still alive, Thanya! Can you wait till I die first?"

"Mother, let's talk with reason. As it is, Phan and I are adults. Even Wikanda is twenty two, and Lek, twenty. Give us our inheritance now; it isn't that much too soon."

Mother's face paled. I quickly said, "I'm in no

hurry for it.”

“Me too,” said Wikanda.

“And me too,” said Malin.

Mother looked as if she had been hit hard on the head. Was it not Thanya who was her most favourite? And now what? It was this same Thanya who demanded to have his share of inheritance before she passed away or before she was ready to give it to him! In my heart I agreed with her that what she and Father had earned through hard work, should remain in her hand for her to feel rewarded and secure financially, till the day of her death.

Strange but true, Thanya and Salini were unlike Niwet and I. When Niwet and I thought we might get married, it never occurred to me that I should ask for my inheritance from Mother. I pictured a small lovely house that Niwet and I would rent, using part of our earnings, for we would save some money and go on saving, bit by bit until one day, we could make the down payment on a house of our own.

But... never mind. My castle had collapsed long ago!

And it was unlikely that anyone would come along to build a castle with me again.

“Go rent a place, and wait till I am dead, then the four of you can get your inheritance at the same time. Alright?” Mother’s voice was strained. “I might die within a year or two, Thanya, to fulfil your wish.”

Thanya knew very well that Mother was sensitive

to this matter, and that his request, in her opinion, was like a curse for her to die before her time, but he appeared unperturbed. He made me think of some women who had lamented about their ungrateful children, saying, "They only used my belly as a means to get born. They feel no love for me, no ties between them and me at all."

Mother's face lost its colour. Her eyes were dry looking. Her lips quivered a little. But I believed that even at that moment, of the four of us, she still loved Thanya the most.

Why?

Because Thanya was a man, a male who would carry on the family name! So the male kept the female underfoot because the dumb female supported this themselves.

The female realized this but continued to be stupid, letting the male continue to rise above them.

That night, after Thanya and Mother argued till their faces went black and red, she agreed to pass into his possession a shop house to be his home. Though Thanya was not completely satisfied that he couldn't get all the five shop houses in one lot, he was clever enough to stop there. This could be because he knew that when Mother was driven too far and turned back to fight, she would fight, even though in so doing, she had to bang her head against a wall.

To the tenant who had only three months left on the lease of one of her shop houses, Mother said the

contract could not be extended because she needed the place for her own use. When the contract was near its end, Thanya was all sweetness, asking her for money to repair and improve the shop house and also to extend it in the back. When it was ready for use, he moved in with his family. He was out of sight many days though it would take him only a few minutes to walk over to our place to see Mother. On the day he showed his face for the first time, it turned out he wanted to take Salini to a movie. So he brought over the baby and the baby's nanny, for Mother to keep an eye on them.

Wikanda and Mother were delighted with the baby. Wikanda spoke as naturally as could be, "Little babies are so loveable. When I'm married, I want to have many of them."

Mother looked at her tenderly, "How many?"

"At least half a dozen. Good idea, Mother?"

"In that case, you must find a rich husband."

Wikanda's face fell, and she mumbled, "Khomsan, though not rich, is a good man."

Mother nodded slowly, "Not that I mind, but if you choose him, frankly speaking, I'll worry about you. These days when a shortie carries a hunchback, he has doom and only doom in his future. We ourselves aren't that rich, only comfortable enough. If we have to carry a poor man on our shoulders, I mean if you have a husband that you have to feed, would you be able to cope?"

I was sitting not far away and heard her every

word. I couldn't help thinking that when Niwet came to woo me, she never spoke so gently. On knowing that Niwet was poor, she put her hands on her hips and made a terrible face at me, blasting out her order that I was not to think of marrying him.

Wikanda studied Accountancy in a private college. Newly graduated, she was about to start working in a pharmacy while Khomsan worked as a freelance insurance salesman. His earnings were irregular. Most of the time he was short of money and he ate regular meals in our house.

"I don't think I can like any other man. Khomsan and I have been in love more than a year already."

Mother sighed, "In that case, how about waiting till he's a little more established?"

My heart pained. Where Niwet and I were concerned, why did Mother not think and speak this way? I remembered her words very well as she made an unsightly face and blasted forth.

"I don't agree!"

"As poor and crispy as a piece of cracker!"

"Your pays put together aren't enough to feed one mouth."

"Without money, you can't find happiness."

Wikanda smiled sweetly at Mother and spoke breezily, "We've been waiting for each other a long time already, and I have completed my education. We should be able to get married within two to three months from now. But Khomsan is afraid to talk to you about

this. So he asked me to approach you.”

Mother knitted her brow and appeared to be with a heavy heart. I became worried, fearing that Wikanda might have to be disappointed.

“What? He hasn’t sent anyone here to ask for your hand as his wife yet, and you’re speaking of getting married in two to three months?”

“Come on! His mother is only a nanny in a kindergarten school...”

I visualized Khomsan’s mother cleaning little children’s bottoms in a kindergarten school.

“You think she’d have the courage to come and ask you for my hand for her son? I’m thinking of getting engaged and married on the same day. Say yes, Mother. I’m a fully grown woman and I want to have lovely little babies like this one, quickly.”

Mother breathed a heavy sigh. “You are a pretty girl, Wi, and many men seek your love. Some of them are richer than Khomsan. Why don’t you make a more suitable choice?”

Wikanda smiled cheerfully, “Because pretty girls like handsome men. You must admit that Khomsan is very handsome. If I marry him, you just wait for the grandchildren from us. I guarantee that all of them are going to be good looking!”

Mother smiled along with her, as if to encourage Wikanda to continue thinking like a simpleton. Does being worthy or not, depend only on being good-looking or not? If it were so, how about goodness,

diligence, politeness, honesty, generosity and gratefulness? Don't they have any meaning?

"If I had to marry someone else, I won't be happy."

"In that case, you have my sympathy," Mother turned to me as I was sitting, doing up the hem of a soft-texture pyjama top that I was making with enthusiasm for my first nephew.

"Phan," she called my name loudly. "Wi wants to get married. I guess you don't mind?"

I smiled. There might have been some bitterness at a corner of my mouth but I couldn't help it. "Why should I?"

"I asked because she's younger than you and will be married before you. But nowadays, nobody minds this anymore." She turned back to Wikanda. "Now let's talk about after your wedding. Where would you live? Would you like to have a shop house from your share, like Thanya, or live with me first, until you have a number of children and the place is too crowded? Then you can move out. What do you prefer?"

Wikanda's eyes brightened with gladness. "So you allow me to bring Khomsan in? Oh how wonderful! He's now living in a tiny place with his mother and his brother. I wanted to ask you if he could come and live here with us, but didn't dare. How kind you are! Wow!"

Mother's face blossomed.

"If I let you and him go out to face the world

now, you might have to eat rice with salt!”

Mother completely forgot that in my case with Niwet, she uttered this as a threat. She neither allowed me to marry Niwet nor offered that after I married him, he could come and live here with us. Although I loved my brother and sisters dearly, what Mother did cut me to the quick. She never gave me any warmth. Of her four children, was it only three of them, Thanya, Wikanda and Malin that were entitled to have wedded and family happiness?

After gathering the pyjama top and the sewing kit, I got up.

About the Author

Pensri Kiengsiri

(Narawadee)

Special lecturer in *Communicative English* and *Creative Writing* at the Department of English and Linguistics, Faculty of Humanity, and also at the Language Centre of Ramkham-haeng University, Bangkok

Awarded the **Surindharaja Prize** in 2008, as Outstanding Translator, by the Translators' and Interpreters' Association of Thailand.

Co author of *Thai Social Etiquette* published by the Ministry of Culture, Thailand.

Co translator of the Thai immortal epic *Phra Aphai Mani* published by the Ministry of Education

Co editor of *Thailand – Traits and Treasures* by the National Identity Board, Prime Minister's Office, Thailand

Weekly columnist for *Bangkok World* in a column called *This Precious Life* from 1973 to 1977

Bi – monthly essayist for *Bangkok Post*, 1978 to 1979

Authors of essays on Thai culture in *Sawasdee*, an in-flight magazine of Thai Airways International, 1975 to 1989

Published Works in Thai :

Fifty novels, of which many have been presented as

television mini series and also as motion pictures

Fifteen novelettes

Five collections of short stories

Two books of stories for children, with illustrations

Published Works in English :

Poems from Thailand

Buddhist Ways to Overcome Obstacles (translation)

Thailand – Revealing Perspectives

Love in the Fish Market (novel, published in the German language in 2007 by Baobab Books and distributed world-wide by Nord Sud Verlag A.G., office in Switzerland)

Arrival of Dawn published by Praphansarn Publishing Co., Ltd.



PENSRI KIENGSI

“Arrival of Dawn” vividly describes three generations in a Thai-Chinese family living in Bangkok as they interact with each other over the course of twenty years. Pressured by her mother, the narrator takes on the role of family caretaker, and later in life realizes that her sacrifices, instead of helping, have often brought harm to herself and others. In a distinctly Buddhist way, she gradually reaches serenity and understanding.

Frances Siranovic

Writer/ Editor

Pensi Kiengsiri’s “Arrival of Dawn” gives a glimpse into the domestic lives of contemporary Thai families, who despite their modernism still tend to adhere to customs of old where matters of family and male dominance are concerned. It’s a story of self sacrifice, love and the ultimate happiness derived from a solid familial nucleus and the “knowing of one’s own heart.” I found this story to be highly enlightening thanks to its in-depth portrayal of the dynamics of Thai life, it gave me an understanding I would not have otherwise had access to. It is a compulsory read for anyone seeking closer familiarity with the Thai people’s everyday way of life.

Ines Ehrlich,

Writer, Editor, Translator,