

The Big Haunted House

and Other Stories



Asian Copublication Programme - Series Four

Sri Lanka National Commission for UNESCO, 'Isurupaya', Battaramulla.

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BURMA



**The Big
Haunted House**

Sayawun Tin Shwe

Translator: San Lwin

Illustrator: Tint Shoon

The Big Haunted House



AT THE SIDE of the Mandalay-Maymyo road stood a big house reputed to be haunted. It was situated in the grounds of a hospital. It had its own large, fenced compound. It was a fine two-storey building, but nobody dared to spend the night in it.

Once two night watchmen from the hospital went to sleep the night in this big house. In the middle of the night somebody, or something, came and tugged at their mosquito net. The two watchmen woke up and heard the groans of a dying person. Then they heard someone breathing heavily. These strange sounds frightened the men and kept them awake.





After this they saw a pair of red eyes staring at them from a corner of the room. The pair of eyes soon disappeared. Then they clearly heard footsteps climbing the stairs. "Who's there?" they shouted. The noises stopped. Then they heard footsteps on the roof. Later the two watchmen heard a loud thud as if someone had fallen from the roof. Both men raced down the stairs and shone their flashlights on the roof. Nothing! But they dared not go upstairs again.

The news spread far and wide. Nobody dared even to go near the big house, let alone think of sleeping there.

Now Dr Tin Shwe was the kind of man who did not believe in phantoms. He was in fact engaged in doing some practical research on ghosts.

One night Dr Tin Shwe, together with another doctor who had the same interest, went to the house at about 9 p.m. They each



carried a bedding roll. As there was no electric light, Dr Tin Shwe and his friend looked round the big house by candle light. It had large rooms and the zinc sculptures that decorated the ceiling were an eerie sight.

The two doctors eventually blew out the candles and prepared to settle down for the night. It was still early. Nothing strange happened and soon the doctors were ready to fall asleep. After a while both of them were suddenly woken by a feeling of something tugging their mosquito nets. They both got up and switched on their electric torches.

The two doctors smiled with amusement when they saw two or three bats. It was apparent that the bats had mistaken the net for food and come to nibble it. The rays from the flashlights drove the bats away and they disappeared behind the zinc sculptures into the ceiling.

The two doctors then lit the candles and looked round the room





Perer J.S.K

carefully. From a corner a pair of red eyes stared at them steadily. They shone their flashlights on the eyes and ran towards them. When they got near they saw a civet cat spring and scurry away. The doctors gasped. Apparently the civet cat had been waiting in the dark to pounce upon the smaller animals that lived in the big deserted house.

Having solved the mystery of the much talked of pair of red eyes, the two friends exchanged understanding smiles.

Just at that moment they distinctly heard the loud groans of a sick man accompanied by deep sighs. With their flashlights on, the two doctors rushed to where the sounds appeared to come from. When they reached the corner of the room, they found neither a



sick man nor a ghost, but a mother dove and her young cooing. The harmless startled doves flapped their wings noisily and flew away. Once again the two doctors exchanged smiles of amusement.

As they stood there the doctors heard footsteps coming up the stairs. Both of them immediately turned off their flashlights, put out the candles and tip-toed towards the door at the top of the stairs. They pressed their ears to the door and listened carefully. As soon as the measured footsteps reached the door, the two doctors gripped their flashlights tightly and flung open the door.

The flashlights showed no ghost, but a pair of stray dogs. The two doctors laughed heartily.

IRAN



THE FIRST LAW

Fereidoun Doustdar

Translator: Mehdi Ansari
Illustrator: Parviz Kalantari



THE FIRST LAW

BABAK put his ball in a net, put his books under his arm and hurriedly left school for home. After he had walked for an hour or so, the streets got less crowded, the houses were more sparse, there were no more shops and there ~~was~~ no more asphalt on the road. He finally reached his house, which was on a rough unpaved street. He stopped at the pale wooden door, looked around and then knocked.

His uncle's wife opened the door, and he greeted her. Then he climbed the stairs to the second floor and went into his little room. There he started to work; he solved a few arithmetic problems, read a few pages of his geography book, memorised a poem by a famous poet and, last of all, picked up his composition notebook to write his composition for homework. This time the subject was elective and he could write about anything he wanted. He was thinking about the composition when, all of a sudden, his uncle and his wife entered the room. Babak peeped up at them and then said "Hello". His uncle's wife was wearing a long dress that covered her shoes, her hips were red and her hair plaited on top of

her head. His uncle was also dressed smartly with a neat shirt and tie. The smell of the perfume his uncle's wife had on made Babak sneeze. He asked them if they were going out.

"Yes, dear Babak," his uncle's wife answered. "We are going to a wedding party and we are going to leave our little baby, Maryam, with you. Now listen carefully. Maryam went to bed a few minutes ago and she won't wake up for some time. In case she does wake up and starts to cry, give her some milk and make her go to sleep again. Take good care of her and cover her properly."

Babak listened carefully.

Babak's uncle then added, "Babak, don't open the door of the house to anybody. When we come back, we will open the door ourselves. I've left a key on the fireplace in case you need it. Your dinner is on the shelf too. You can eat it and then go to sleep."

Both of them left the room and Babak could hear the sound of their footsteps getting further away. —

After they had left, Babak once again picked up his notebook to write his composition. He put his hand under his chin and began to think. All of a sudden, he heard Maryam crying. He ran to her bedside and tried to calm her. He then decided to take her to the annex-room and put her down on the ground. However the baby did not settle, but continually pointed her little finger at the fireplace uttering "That, that". Babak could not understand what she meant at first, but he finally found out that she meant the pill container which his uncle's wife had left on the fireplace. The pills were special pills for nervous illnesses; his uncle's wife took some every morning. Babak took a few empty bottles from the fireplace and put them in front of the baby. But the baby was not satisfied and insisted on having the full bottle of pills. Babak unwillingly took the bottle, tightened its lid and put it in front of the baby with the other bottles. This seemed to please the baby and she began to giggle and play. Babak then picked up his composition notebook once again to write his composition, but he could not organise his thoughts as the baby made too much noise.

He felt very lonely in the house and wished his uncle would be

kinder to him and his uncle's wife not so nervous and bad-tempered. In the holidays, or in the afternoons when he was at home from school, he would stand at the window of his room and watch the children playing in the street. He wished he were allowed to get together with his playmates and play football with them. In his daydreams he had made friends with all the boys in the neighbourhood. He was lost in one of these daydreams when he suddenly noticed Maryam lying on the ground, holding an empty bottle of nerve-pills in her hand. He was terrified. He looked everywhere for the pills, but he could not find any of them. The baby was lying motionless; her face was pale. He looked under the pillows, under the mattress, all around the room, but there was no sign of the pills. He thought that perhaps the baby had eaten all the pills, so he sat down and began to cry. All at once he had an idea that he should do something about it. Maybe, he should ask somebody to come and help him. He ran down the stairs and hurriedly went to a colleague of his uncle, Mr Sabouri's house.

He reached the house and knocked. After a minute the door opened and an old lady peeped out. Babak introduced himself and said his uncle was a colleague of Mr Sabouri. But the old lady said she did not know his uncle and closed the door crossly. Babak disappointedly left the house and ran to the house of a close friend of his uncle's wife, Mohtaram Khanom. He wondered if she would be there or not. When he knocked she opened the door and said kindly, "Dear Babak! Why are you panting? What has happened to you?"

Babak answered, "My uncle and his wife have gone out to a wedding party and little Maryam has opened a bottle of pills and swallowed them all. I think we ought to take her to the dispensary quickly."

Mohtaram Khanom pretended to be worried and went inside the house, closing the door behind her. After a few minutes, she returned and brought some rock candy with her. She gave it to Babak and told him to dissolve it in water and give it to the baby. Then she slammed the door.

Babak was disappointed and sad, as no one would help him and he began to cry. He ran back to his uncle's house and entered the room where little Maryam was lying. He called the baby's name a few times to see if she moved. The baby only made one slow movement and then lay motionless again.

Babak ran down the stairs once again. He wished it were not so dark and the shoemaker's and barber's were still open. But every single shop was closed and he could not go anywhere for help. He, finally, reached a house and knocked. The door was opened by the plump shoemaker. Babak told him the story and he seemed



worried. He called his apprentice Abbas and told him to go with Babak, see what had happened and help if possible. He then tried to convince Babak that he might be imagining the whole thing and he should not be so worried. Abbas, unwillingly, followed Babak. On the way he was so sullen that Babak, who used to be his friend and playmate, thought Abbas was cross with him and he burst into tears. He cried so much that Abbas felt sorry for him. So they both ran to see the baby.

Once in the house, Abbas sat down next to the baby and softly tickled her cheek a few times. The baby made a slow movement and breathed deeply, but her eyes were closed. All of a sudden, Abbas jumped up and told Babak that he thought it would be a good idea if they told the other boys the whole story and got them to help as well. So they both ran down the stairs and went out into the dark street. They ran through a few winding roads and finally reached a mutual friend's house. Hassan, who was one of their playmates, was asleep as it was already night. Abbas managed to wake him up by throwing a small stone at his window. At last, Hassan and his younger brother joined them and the four of them went to Ahmad's house. When Ahmad heard the story, he thought they would need a bicycle to take the baby to the dispensary at that time of the night, so he tried and got his cousin's bicycle. They all rushed to Babak's house to pick up the baby. On their way, they saw Mr Sabouri, who was going home whistling. Babak thought it would be better to tell him the story and get his help, as he was an experienced middle-aged man. So he told him what had happened. Mr Sabouri replied that he did not think it was very serious and, saying good-bye, he continued his way home.

When they got home, Babak got on the bicycle with the baby in his arms. The baby's eyes were closed and she was breathing calmly. Abbas and Hassan held the bicycle, so that Babak and the baby would not fall off and the rest of them pushed the bicycle. The road was dark and no creature could be seen anywhere. The boys were scared of the dark, so they turned on the bicycle lights and went along cautiously. They finally reached the paved road



and, after some time, they found the dispensary, which was lit up inside.

In the dispensary they found a man wearing a dirty white apron dozing behind a table. On seeing the boys and the baby, he jumped up and asked what had happened. The boys told him that the baby had eaten a bottle full of nerve-pills and her life was in danger. The man casually said that they should pay five *tomans* to get a ticket to be allowed to see the doctor. Babak did not have much money on him, so he asked his friends if they had any, but they did not have much either. So they played a trick on the man and was able to take the baby directly to the doctor's room. They told the doctor the whole story. The doctor asked them about the type of pills and they explained that they were nerve-pills. The doctor then told Babak to put the baby on the couch and roll up her shirt. Babak did as the doctor said. All of a sudden, Babak gasped, grabbed the baby in his arms and ran out of the clinic. His friends

followed him to the street, wondering why he had left the doctor's clinic so hurriedly. After a few minutes Babak stopped and told them what had happened. When the doctor had asked him to roll up the baby's shirt, Babak had found the bottle of pills under her shirt. He had stealthily picked up the bottle, so that the doctor would not see it and make fun of him, and run out of the clinic. He continued to explain that the baby had not eaten the pills after all, as the contents of the bottle were untouched.

The boys' shouting and joyful chanting could be heard going through the streets and curved alleys towards Babak's house. The baby was giggling too and patting Ahmad's face. Meanwhile, Abbas told the others that this was an example of the "first law" in life—which was to work together for a common cause. If people unite and co-operate, they can overcome every possible obstacle and solve their problems.

The boys, still chanting, finally reached Babak's house. They went in and put the baby safely back in bed and then left. Babak put the bottle of pills back on the fireplace where it had been. He then sat down, made himself comfortable and began to write his composition—the title was "The First Law".

INDIA



The Boy with a Catapult

Bhisham Sahni

Translator: Bhisham Sahni

Illustrator: Ravi Paranjape

The Boy with a Catapult

OUR CLASS at school had an odd assortment of boys. There was Harbans Lal who, when asked a difficult question, would take a sip out of his inkpot because he believed it sharpened his wits. If the teacher boxed his ears, he would yell "Help! Murder!" so loudly that teachers and boys from other classes would come running to see what had happened. This caused much embarrassment to the teacher. If the teacher tried to cane him, he would put his arms round him and implore, "Forgive me, Your Majesty! You are like Akbar the Great. You are Emperor Ashoka. You are my father, my grandfather, my great grandfather."

This made the boys giggle and embarrassed the teacher. This same Harbans Lal would catch frogs and tell us, "If you smear your hands with frog fat you will not feel the teacher's cane."

But the oddest fellow in the class was Bodh Raj. We were all afraid of him. If he pinched anyone's arm, the arm would swell up exactly as after a snake-bite. He was utterly without feeling. He would catch a wasp with his bare fingers, pull out its sting, tie a thread round it and fly it like a kite. He would pounce on a



butterfly sitting on a flower and crush it between his fingers, or else stick a pin through it and put it in his notebook.

It was said that if a scorpion stung Bodh Raj, the scorpion would fall dead; Bodh Raj's blood was believed to be so full of venom that even snake-bite would have no effect on him. He always had a catapult in his hand and was an excellent shot. His favourite targets were birds. He would stand under a tree, take aim and the next moment, bird cries would pierce the air and a cloud of feathers float down. Or else he would climb up a tree, take away the eggs and completely destroy the nest.

He was vindictive and took pleasure in hurting others. All the boys were scared of him. Even his mother called him a *rakshasa* — demon. His pockets bulged with strange things: a live parrot, an assortment of eggs, or a prickly hedgehog.

If Bodh Raj quarrelled with anyone, he would charge at them head on like a bull, or viciously kick and bite them. After school, we would all return home, but Bodh Raj would be off on his wanderings.

He always had a fund of strange tales to tell. One day he said, "There is a *goh* living in our house. Do you know what a *goh* is?"

"No. What is a *goh*?"

"It's a kind of reptile, about a foot long. It has many feet and claws."

We shuddered.

"We have a *goh* living under our staircase at home," he continued. "Once it catches hold of anything, it won't loosen its grip, come what may."

We shuddered again.

"Thieves keep *gohs*. They use them to scale high walls. They tie a rope on the *goh's* hind legs and fling it up. As soon as the *goh* touches the wall, it clamps firmly on it, so firmly that even ten men cannot dislodge it. The thieves then pull themselves up the wall with the help of the rope."

"When does the *goh* loosen its hold?"

"After the thieves have climbed over they give it some milk. It then immediately relaxes its hold."

Such were the stories Bodh Raj would relate.

My father was given a promotion in his job and we moved into a large bungalow. It was an old style bungalow on the outskirts of the city. It had brick floors, high walls, a slanting roof and a garden full of trees and shrubs. Though comfortable, it seemed rather empty and big, and as it was far from the city, my friends seldom came to visit me. The only exception was Bodh Raj. He found it good hunting grounds. The trees had many nests, monkeys roamed about, and under the bushes lived a pair of mongooses. Behind the house there was a big room, where my mother stored our extra luggage. This room had become a haunt of pigeons. You could hear their cooing all day. Near the broken glass of the ventilator there was also a myna's nest. The floor of the room was littered



with feathers, bird droppings, broken eggs and bits of straw from the nests.

Once, Bodh Raj brought a hedgehog with him. The sight of the black mouth and sharp bristles gave me quite a turn. My mother did not approve of my friendship with Bodh Raj. But she realised that I was lonely and needed company. My mother called him a devil and often told him not to torment birds.

One day mother said to me, "If your friend is so fond of destroying nests, tell him to clean our store-room. The birds have made it very filthy."

I protested, "You said it's cruel to destroy nests."

"I didn't suggest he should kill the birds. He can remove the nests without harming them."

The next time Bodh Raj came I took him to the godown. It was dark and smelly, and we felt as though we had entered an animal's lair.

I confess I was somewhat apprehensive. What if Bodh Raj acted

true to form and destroyed the nests, pulled out the birds' feathers and broke their eggs? I couldn't understand why my mother, who discouraged our friendship, should have asked me to get Bodh Raj to clear the godown.

Bodh Raj had brought his catapult. He carefully studied the position of the nests under the roof. The two sides of the roof sloped downwards with a long supporting beam across. At the end of the beam, near the ventilator, was a myna's nest. I could see bits of cotton wool and rag hanging out. Some pigeons strutted up and down the beam cooing to one another.

"The myna's little ones are up there," said Bodh Raj, aiming with his catapult.

I noticed two tiny yellow beaks peeping out of the nest.

"Look!" Bodh Raj exclaimed. "This is a Ganga myna. It isn't usually found in these areas. The parents must have got separated from their flock and come here."

"Where are the parents?" I asked.

"Must have gone in search of food. They should be back soon."

Bodh Raj raised his catapult.

I wanted to stop him but before I could open my mouth there was a whizzing sound, and then a loud clang as the pebble hit a corrugated iron-sheet of the roof.

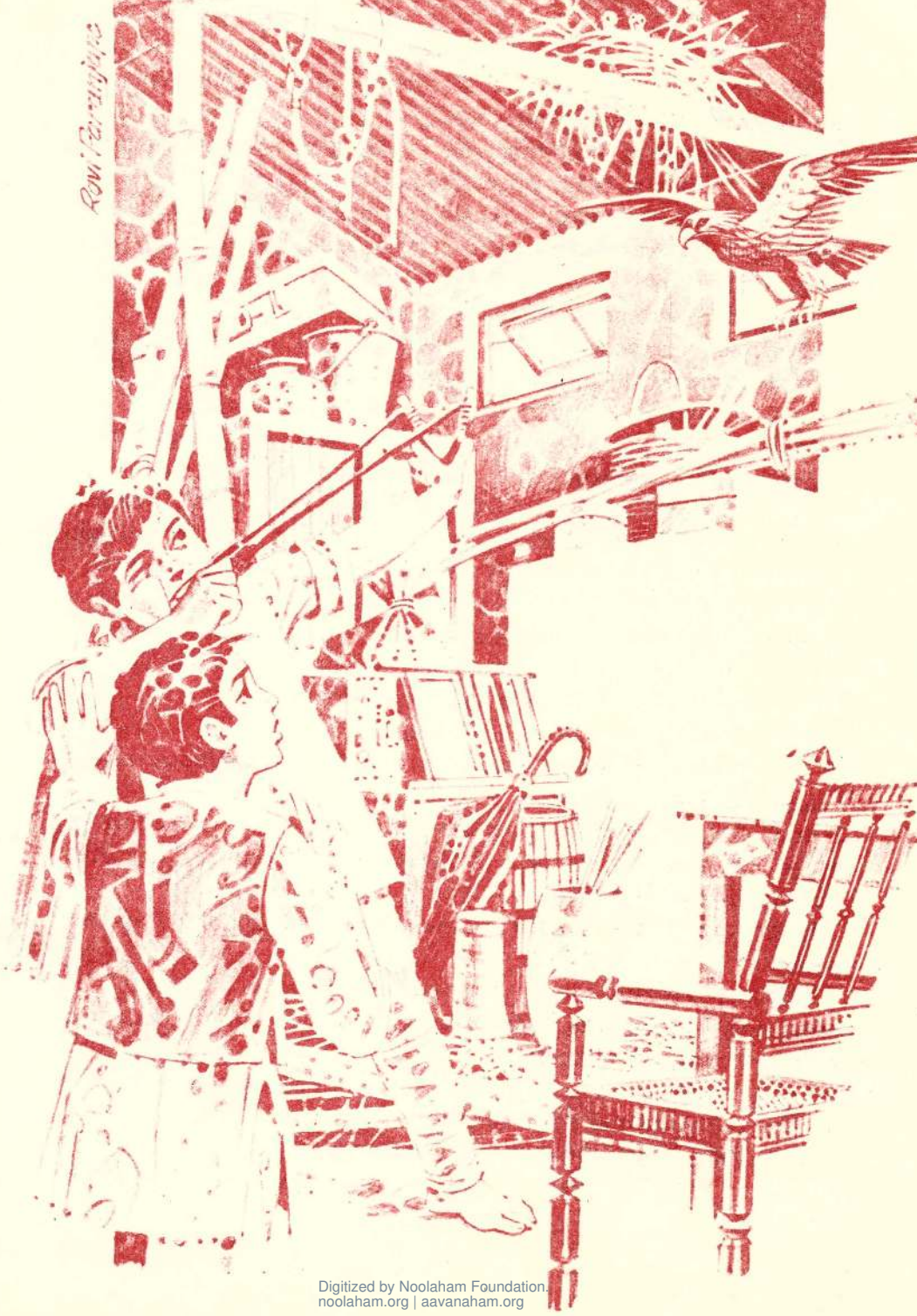
The tiny beaks vanished. The cooing and twittering ceased. It seemed as if all the birds had been frightened into silence.

Bodh Raj let fly another pebble. This time it struck the rafter. Bodh Raj was proud of his aim; he had missed his target twice and was very angry with himself. When the chicks peeped over the rim of the nest, Bodh Raj had a third try. This time the pebble hit the side of the nest, a few straws and bits of cotton wool fell out — but the nest was not dislodged.

Bodh Raj lifted his catapult again. Suddenly a large shadow flitted across the room, blocking the light from the ventilator. Startled, we looked up. Gazing down at us menacingly was a large kite with its wings outstretched.

"This must be the kite's nest," I said.

Ravi Paranjyoti



“No. How can a kite have its nest here? A kite always makes its nest in a tree. This is a myna’s nest.”

The chicks began fluttering their wings and screeching loudly. We held our breath. What would the kite do?

The kite left the ventilator and perched on the rafter. It had folded back its wings. It shook its scraggy neck, and peered, to the right, and the left.

The birds’ frightened cries filled the air.

“The kite has been coming here every day,” said Bodh Raj. Then I realised why broken wings, straw and bits of bird flesh littered the floor. The kite must have ravaged the nests often.

Bodh Raj had not taken his eyes off the kite, which was slowly edging its way towards the nest. The cries rose to a crescendo.

I was a bundle of nerves. What difference did it make whether the kite or Bodh Raj killed the myna’s young? If the kite had not come Bodh Raj would certainly have made short work of the nest.

Bodh Raj raised his catapult and aimed at the kite.

“Don’t hit the kite. It will attack you,” I shouted. But Bodh Raj paid no attention. The pebble missed the kite and hit the ceiling. The kite spread its wings wide and peered down.

“Let’s get out of here,” I said, frightened.

“The kite will eat up the little ones.” This sounded rather strange coming from him.

Bodh Raj aimed again. The kite left the rafter and spreading its wings, flew in a semi-circle and alighted on the beam. The chicks continued to scream.

Bodh Raj handed me the catapult and some pebbles from his pocket.

“Aim at the kite. Go on hitting it. Don’t let it sit down,” he instructed. Then he ran and pulled up a table standing against the wall to the middle of the room.

I didn’t know how to use the catapult. I tried once, but the kite had left the beam and flown to another one.

Bodh Raj brought the table right under the myna’s nest. Then he picked up a broken chair, and placed it on the table. He climbed

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on the chair, gently lifted the nest from the beam, and slowly stepped down.

“Let’s get out of here,” he said, and ran towards the door. I followed.

We went into the garage. It had only one door and a small window in the back wall. A beam ran across its width.

“The kite cannot get in here,” he said, and climbing onto a box, placed the nest on the beam.

The myna’s young had quietened down. Standing on the box, Both Raj had his first peep into the nest. I thought that he would pick them both up and put them in his pocket, as he usually did. But after looking at them for a long time he said, “Bring some water, the chicks are thirsty. We’ll put it, drop by drop, into their mouths.”

I brought a glass of water. Both the chicks’ beaks were open; they





were panting. Bodh Raj fed them with drops of water. He told me not to touch them, and he did not touch them himself either.

“How will their parents know they are here?” I asked.

“They will look for them.”

We stayed in the garage for a long time. Bodh Raj discussed plans to close the ventilator, so that the kite would not be able to enter the godown again. That evening he talked of nothing else.

When Bodh Raj came the next day, he had neither catapult nor pebbles. He carried a bag of seeds. We fed the myna's young and spent hours watching their antics.

KOREA




The First Commendation

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Translator: Young-Up Min
Illustrator: Young-Duk Kim

The First Commendation



THE DISCIPLINE committee of the 3rd year student council of B Boys' Junior High School made it a principle to have at least one kind of activity going on a week with the support of the training teacher. It was decided that this week was to be Service Week.

Park, head of the discipline committee, gathered the students after class and gave one of his fiery speeches as usual.

“This week is Service Week. This means that you have to do at least one good deed for the public this week. Whether it's a big deed or not, doesn't matter, but you *must* do something. Come to school thirty minutes before class and report to me about what you've been doing. Those of you who have done well will have your names put on this bulletin board and be rewarded later; those of you who have done something which a

student ought not to do will be punished immediately. What I mean is, you will be relentlessly punished. Understand?"

After saying "Yup" in agreement, the students dispersed, each one murmuring to himself.

"Wretch!"

Scabby sniggered first, spitting on the ground.

"Hum!"

Toad also shot a sideways glance at the head of the discipline committee, as if in agreement with Scabby. What on earth did he mean by "a good deed for the public"? They could not imagine what to do.

Anyway, that kind of thing could not possibly interest Toad and Scabby, as the two of them were known to be the worst troublemakers in their group.

Toad was short and stout, as his nickname suggests, with protruding eyes.

As for Scabby, no one knew for sure how he had got that name but he had been called by it since elementary school days. However, he deserved his reputation as the "rogue" of the school as much as Toad did. His critical glances and swaggering manners were proof enough of this.

It was a routine that these two fought whenever they saw each other, but in spite of this, they were good chums.

That day, as usual, they came out of school together and walked along until they reached the road that went up the hill. An old



carter, his face blackened with charcoal, was pulling a cart full of charcoal briquettes up the hill.

Scabby turned his head to see if Toad was there, as he could hear no sound of footsteps beside him. Sure enough, having thrown his schoolbag on the ground, Toad was going down towards the cart, spitting into the palms of his hands, as if he was about to do a serious job. Scabby quickly understood he was going to push the cart and so he also turned round.

The carter was struggling hard, his teeth clenched, but it was impossible to move the cart. As soon as Toad began to push it from behind, the cart started to go up the hill with considerable ease.

Toad didn't like the situation at all. His plan was to have this opportunity of doing a "social service" all to himself, and now he had an intruder and a totally unwelcome one at that. Toad bumped Scabby with his shoulder as the latter approached him behind the cart.

Scabby, who was watching him all the time, returned the bump, which made Toad lose his balance and fall.

"You pig!"

Once on his feet, Toad did not lose any time in giving Scabby a punch on the chin.

"So you hit me, eh?"

Scabby squared his shoulders as usual, and got into a boxing stance, his fists clenched ready to fight.

Meanwhile, the cart, which had been going up, was now rapidly slipping downhill.

"Oh?"

"Well!"

The two troublemakers finally started to fight.

Not knowing what to do, the carter stopped his cart and tried to intervene.

"You boys just stop it and push my cart instead, please?"

At this Toad stopped fighting and at once went behind the cart and pushed. Scabby lost no time in following him. However, once again they started to fight.



“Why can’t one of you come here in front of the cart and pull?”

The old carter was right. Scabby followed his suggestion and went to the front of the cart and grabbed the handle. At last the cart began to go up the hill smoothly.

“What would I have done without the help of you two boys! Thanks a lot.” The carter repeated his thanks several times, wiping his forehead as he rested for a while.

Toad was on top of the world. So was Scabby. Scabby winked at Toad, smiled and added a satisfied “Hm!”

The two boys walked on past the noodlehouse and the fruitstore until they reached the Chinese bun shop. In the showcase there were steaming newly-made buns, enough to make their mouths water.

“Have you got any money?”

“Sure, I have. Want to eat some?” Scabby said, and quickly went into the shop. He came out just as quickly as he went in.

Toad, not wanting to be outdone, also went into the shop and came out very quickly, too. The puzzled Chinese shopkeeper looked at them in amazement.

“Do you really have some money? Well, I’ve got some, too!”

Hearing this, Scabby made the first move. He went into the shop and sat down, as naturally as possible. Toad followed him and sat down, too.

“Which buns? These buns?” the Chinese asked, pointing to the buns stuffed with red bean paste. Scabby nodded in agreement.

After the buns came, neither dared to make a move and take the first bite, as it was mutually understood that the first one to eat would be the one to pay. In actual fact, neither had any money; they were both pretending.

At last they could not wait any longer and started eating. The buns were quickly finished. Three hours later the two boys were still sitting there, thinking of a clever way of paying for them.

At last Scabby had a practical idea. “You wait here. I’ll go home and come back with some money.” Scabby said and, after putting his hat on the table as a token, went out.

“Do you think you can fool me?” Toad shouted, and started to leave, too.

The Chinese shopkeeper followed him and grabbed at his waist. Meanwhile Scabby was running for his life.

Toad’s anger at this betrayal became greater when he saw the training teacher approaching. He felt he had no time to lose! Toad knocked away the shopkeeper’s hand from round his waist and bolted.

“Catch him! Catch that scoundrel!” The Chinese followed him, yelling at the top of his voice.

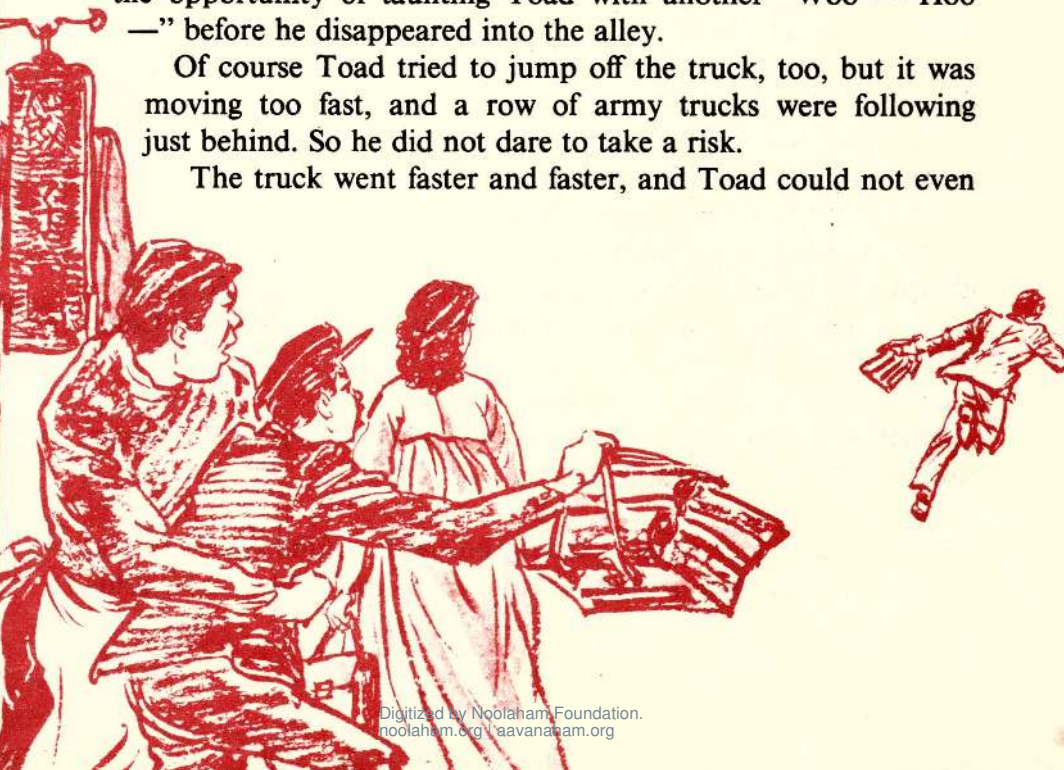
Toad and Scabby ran until they reached a road along which streetcars run. Toad ran after Scabby and tried to catch up with him. But Scabby jumped on a passing truck. He waved his hand triumphantly at Toad as the truck moved away quickly and shouted, “Woo — ”

Toad was furious. He jumped on another truck and followed him, just as in a thriller-movie.

Scabby got off as the car came near his house. He did not miss the opportunity of taunting Toad with another “Woo — Hoo — ” before he disappeared into the alley.

Of course Toad tried to jump off the truck, too, but it was moving too fast, and a row of army trucks were following just behind. So he did not dare to take a risk.

The truck went faster and faster, and Toad could not even



open his eyes. After going many kilometres in this fashion, the truck turned into a millhouse.

Toad finally arrived home after walking many kilometres in pitch-darkness. He practised boxing postures with his fists clenched tight in preparation for getting even in a fight with Scabby the minute he saw him.

The next morning he slept late, and arrived at school ten minutes after the time set by the head of the discipline committee. Boys were gathered around the bulletin board.

There was a note on the board praising Scabby for a good social service. Toad immediately asked the head of the discipline committee about it and got a surprising answer. He said that Scabby had reported that he had pushed a cart up the hill the day before. What a shameless, selfish fellow!

“If that’s the case, it isn’t fair.”

“What do you mean?”

“Actually I was the one who pushed the cart first.”

“Then we will commend both of you.”

With this the head of the discipline committee wrote Toad’s name next to Scabby’s.

The boys jostled into the classroom. The head of the discipline committee stepped onto the platform.

“Er — Yesterday’s record was not good. There were only two cases reported. But Scabby and —”

The boys roared with laughter.

“ — those two pushed a cart for an old carter who couldn’t pull his cart uphill. It’s not a big deed, but it is a good deed just the same. The two boys will tell you all about it. Scabby! Toad! Come over here!”

The amused students laughed and applauded.

Scabby shrugged his shoulders and went forward. Toad also jostled onto the platform.

“Er — Friends!”

Scabby started to speak, holding one arm behind his back and the other raised high in the air. At this, Toad pushed him aside

with a bang on the shoulder and started doing the same heroic stuff, but with one fist held up so that he looked different.

“Friends! Friends! The thing is that —”

But this time it was Scabby’s turn to push Toad aside.

“My friends! The fact is that I —”

Of course Toad would not leave him there and soon they were fighting again.

After tearing the two boys apart, the head of the discipline committee made a speech.

“Scabby and Toad —”

Another roar of laughter from the students.

“— these two are habitually fighting. They fought just now in front of you. But that fight was a well-intentioned one, because it was the result of each trying to do better than the other. Pushing a cart is good. Clearing the rubbish on the sidewalks is just as good. And I hope all of you can do one good thing a day, following the example of these two.”

The students applauded heartily this time. Toad and Scabby stood with their heads bowed, half ashamed, half moved, trying to hide their feelings.

But when at last they tried to look up, they found that the boys were all looking behind at something else.

The owner of the bun shop, the Chinese, was coming forward, shouting and holding up Scabby’s hat.

“What’s that?”

“What’s up?”

“It belongs to one of our students.”

The students rushed towards the Chinese in curiosity.

“This hat student, where is he? He ate my buns. He ran away. No pay!”

Toad and Scabby turned pale and started to tremble, unable to utter a single word.

The Chinese looked into the classroom and spoke loudly.

“Hm, there they are. Those two, ate buns, no pay, run away!”
And he immediately rushed into the classroom.

“What do you think this place is? A classroom! Please go out!”

The head of the discipline committee forced him out of the classroom and came towards Toad and Scabby.

“Did you really do that?”

The boys could not answer. In shame, they bowed so low their heads almost touched the floor.

“So it is true, isn’t it!”

“Ye — es,” Scabby murmured, his head still bent.

“And you, too?”

“Ye — es.” Toad gave the same timid reply.

“Boys!”

The head of the discipline committee stepped onto the platform quickly.

“Boys! I certainly will punish these two troublesome students who have damaged our school’s good reputation. If any of you should do this kind of thing, you will also be punished severely. Understand?”

“Yup!”

The students applauded again, but this time it was not accompanied by laughter. The notice of commendation on the bulletin board was replaced by a notice stating that a one-week punishment had been given to Toad and Scabby. The Chinese



exchanged the hat for money with the training teacher and returned to this shop.

Toad and Scabby knelt on the road just beside the school front gate. Many people passed by.

“Well! What happened to you?” Some of the teachers asked as they passed by. Neither replied, but only bent their heads lower in shame.

“Ding-dong-dang, ding-dong-dang.” The bell rang to announce the beginning of school. All the students gathered in the playground to attend the morning session, except Toad and Scabby, who were still kneeling by the front gate. Seeing no one around, Scabby raised his head just a little to give Toad a grin and stuck out his tongue at him for a second. What he really wanted to do was to give him a good punch. Toad also gave him a flash of his tongue, whilst he clenched his fists tight, ready for yet another fight.

THAILAND



GETTING RID OF THE CAT

Nuchnoi Mahanond

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Illustrator: Pratate Sooksatit



GETTING RID OF THE CAT

“HEY, JUK, LISTEN! Good news! Said so, didn’t I?”

Juk, spooning up weed for feeding the ducks, looked up and stared at Peung, a friend of about her own age, ten, who was rushing towards her, skilfully climbing along the trunk of a betel tree, which was laid across the garden ditch.

“What good news do you mean? And what noises you’re making. As if the city’s on fire. Good job I’m not fishing now.”

“Aunt Paen wants us to get rid of Daen, her cat. We’ll get two *bahts* each for that! Want to take it or not?”

Juk’s eyes widened with delight.

“Two *bahts*? That much?”

“Ah ha. At first she asked me to do it alone, but I said no. Said I had to take you for company, ’cause I’d be afraid to go all by myself. Had to beg her a long while before she’d agree. So there. Two *bahts*! Isn’t that a lot of money? My right eye has been twitching for the past two days and two nights, you know. Thought



R. Sankarath

I'd have some luck, somehow. And aren't I right!" bragged Peung, glowing with joy.

Juk was now quite excited herself.

"Just a minute, then. Let me spoon up this duckweed for a moment more. Wait for me a little while, will you? Or better still, give me a hand so I'll make it quickly."

Hurriedly, Juk and Peung helped each other gather the duckweed. Then, having just about half the quantity they would normally have, they lost patience and gave up. They carried the bucket back home and fed the ducks, quite half-heartedly. As soon as they finished, they rushed on to Aunt Paen's house. There, Daen, the cat with black and white spots on her nose, who was to be got rid of, lived.

"Off you go, then. And make sure she can't come back again, or I'll take my money back!" Aunt Paen gave her ultimatum. "She bears as many kittens as anything. Just impossible to keep her. But wherever I took her she managed to come back every time. This time you two girls take her as far away as you possibly can. Doesn't matter where. Just make sure she won't run back to me again and that'll be all right."

Peung talked it over with Juk and decided that the nipa palm forest would be the best spot. Deep in the forest there was a thick grove of many other kinds of trees. If they took the cat walking and turning and walking very deep into the forest, surely Daen would not be able to find her way out of the maze, and that would be the end of her.

Before the journey began, Daen was securely blindfolded. Peung and Juk took turns in carrying her, happily singing and looking at birds and trees along the way. Each of the two girls had twenty sweets, bought with the two *bahts* they had received, bulging snugly in their *panung's* corners tied into bags round their waists.

The poor cat did not know of her fate. She was only a little curious as to where the girls were taking her and why she had to be blindfolded. Anyhow she was not particularly worried. For one thing, she was well familiar with the two girls, and she was quite



tame herself. Besides, both Juk and Peung knew how to keep her calm by just softly scratching her chin. When this happened, Daen raised her chin to be scratched, closed her eyes and soon fell asleep. In fact, she even purred with contentment throughout the journey.

The two girls kept on walking and turning and walking and turning deep into the forest until they estimated that it would be beyond the cat's ability to get out. They then abruptly stopped, took the blindfold off the cat and dropped her into a thicket and hastily ran away.

This forest was actually no mysterious place for the two girls who had often come with their fathers and brothers to chop wood. Only this time they went deeper than usual. The two girls set off on the journey back, talking and eating their sweets. After a while they arrived at what used to be the way out.

"Hey, this is not it, Juk," cried Peung. "There's no way out here."

"We must have been talking too much. I was just thinking that we should have turned left a while ago. All right, then. Let's just go back the way we came."

They went back the same way, their hands still busily unwrapping sweets and popping them in their mouths, quite unconcerned. After walking for a long while they still could not find that particular left turn.

"Hey, this must be that same old Combretum thicket where we dropped that cat . . .," Juk had not yet finished her sentence when Daen mewed in reply.

"Miaow," and again, "miaow."

"Oh heck!" cried both Juk and Peung in unison when they saw that Daen was still sitting by the Combretum thicket. Probably the cat was only calling them out of good nature, as she did not show any sign of wanting to walk up to the girls, or to run after them when they hurriedly ran away in another direction. What a strange cat!

Juk and Peung stumbled onwards away from the cat, still not

worrying too much. There were still a lot of sweets left, and it was still fun. Eventually an hour passed, and the two girls still had not found their way out. Only a few sweets were left and the sun was getting low. They were talking and laughing less.

“I think we must turn right here. There’s no left turn anywhere,” suggested Peung.

They took the right turn.

“Miaow!” the cry came from Daen, who was sitting right at the turn. This time she stretched herself when she saw the girls.

“Oh! So you’ve moved over to this Ceylon Oak thicket, have you, you wretched cat!” shouted Juk, who was losing her patience. Wherever they fled, they never seemed to get away from the cat!

Almost another hour passed. The sun was getting lower and lower, losing much of its glorious colour and light. Juk and Peung were still unable to find their way out. The sweets were all gone by now. Talking had died away. Exhaustion and thirst had taken its place. How was it that all familiar paths became dead ends like this? It was as if something was blindfolding their eyes.

“Is it that we are now paying for what we’ve done to the cat, eh?” remarked Peung, panting heavily out of exhaustion. Too much walking, and eating as many as twenty sweets had caused the girls to be very thirsty. Their throats were parched and sore, as if there was a piece of sandpaper stuck inside. Their legs began to weaken.

The girls looked at each other and each saw signs of tiredness and anxiety in the other’s eyes.

“Oh, come on, Peung, don’t talk nonsense,” said Juk, trying to be brave. “There’s no such thing as retribution. I just don’t believe it. It’s just that we’ve come much deeper than we used to, that’s why we have got lost.”

The girls sat down to stretch their tired legs and relax for a little while. Evening was setting in, so they could not rest for as long as they wished. Still thoroughly exhausted, they forced themselves to get up and continue walking, feeling somewhat apprehensive as to what might happen next. Strange as it might

seem, whichever way they turned they found only paths that led nowhere. The two friends looked at each other in despair. Neither could utter any sound now. They both stumbled through the grass and the woods in silence. Sunlight was about to disappear and the girls' sense of fun had completely died away. Anxiety was turning to fright. Their hearts beat faster just as the sun was setting. They walked on, casting their inattentive eyes at the birds flying back to their nests. Juk began to feel funny in her stomach.

"How I envy those birds!" exclaimed Peung as if to herself. Juk made no reply.

They rambled on a little further, and emerged once again at the Combretum thicket they had first come to. Daen had come back there as well. She was sitting right in the same old corner and, as usual, she mewed to greet them, "Miaow!"

This time Juk lost her patience. Driven by her emotions, she grabbed a stick of wood and struck at the cat angrily, "You wretched cat! It's you that has made me lose my way! All right, then, if you are that clever, why don't you lead me home?"

Daen did not make any noise. She got up and led the way, twitching her whiskers. The two girls followed her, not knowing what better to do.

Daen went on steadily, taking a short cut here and there. She walked proudly, paying no attention to the two girls. And, as if by a miracle, but really due to the cat's intelligence, finally they all managed to get out of the forest.

After that there was no problem for the girls to go their own separate ways to get home. The problem was the cat.

If she was allowed to go her own way, she would definitely return home, to Aunt Paen's house. Then what if Aunt Paen asked for her money back? What money could the girls give her when all the money had been spent? And Aunt Paen had such a sharp tongue she had made herself known throughout the whole district.

In the end, Peung, who was mainly responsible for the whole incident, had to take the poor cat home, and was severely scolded by her mother for the next couple of days.



“You horrid child! You have no sense of right or wrong, have you? You got what you deserved immediately, didn’t you? What wrong had the poor animal done that you took her away to the forest? All right, then, if no one wants to keep her, let her stay here. Feeding one cat won’t be the death of me yet.”



As the house-owner was so generous, Daen stayed on in the house without thinking of going back to her former place, although she could easily walk back there any time with her eyes closed. And the first litter she produced in gratitude to her owner consisted of no less than nine kittens.



Daen is still producing litters of kittens regularly without anyone daring to get involved with her, for both Juk and Peung still remember the lesson they learned in trying to get rid of the cat, and have no wish to repeat it.

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ISBN 955-9043-22-6