Life In Burma

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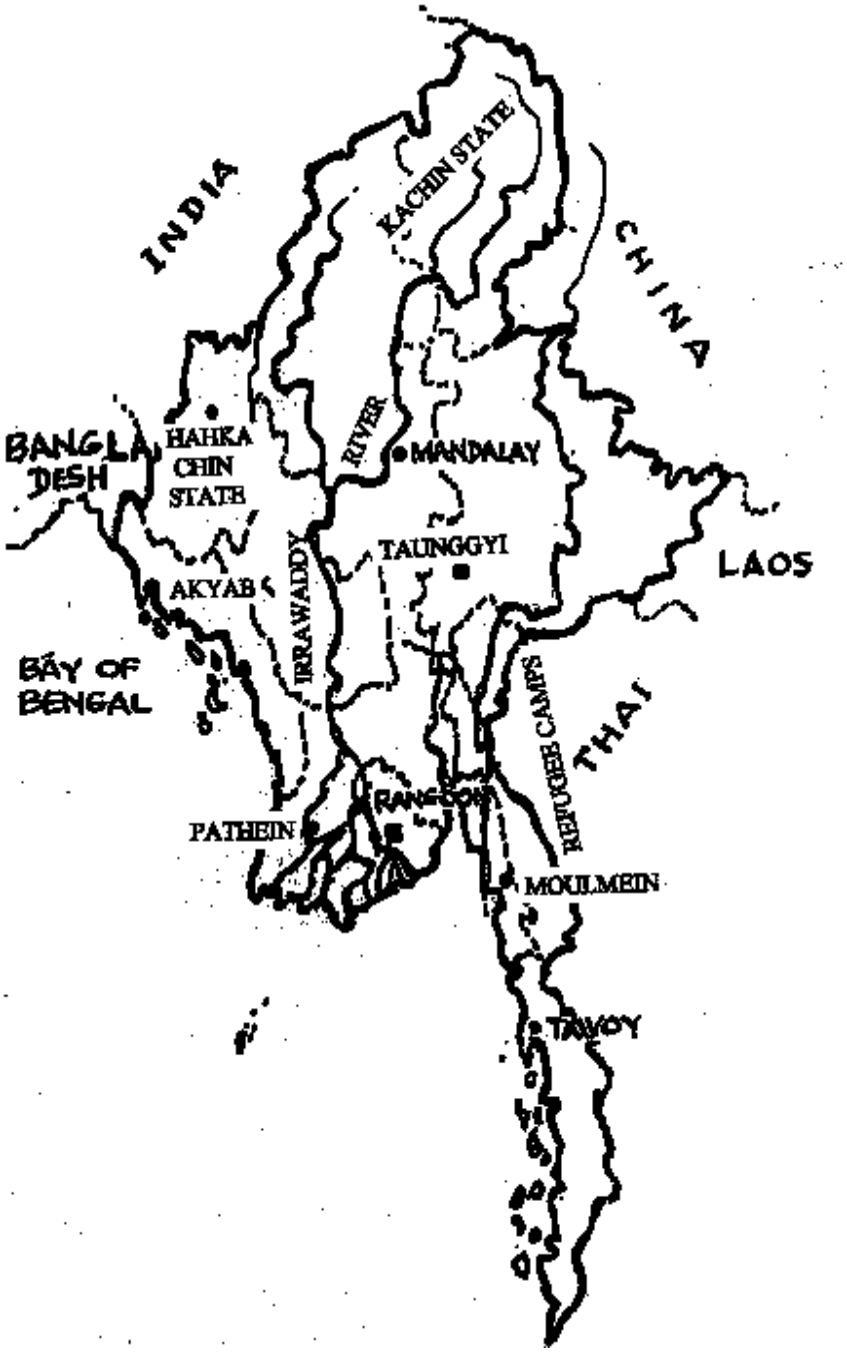
Dedicated to the wonderful people of Burma who have suffered for so many years of exploitation and oppression from their own leaders.

While the United Nations and the nations of the world have made progress in protecting people from aggressive neighbors, much remains to be done to protect people from their own leaders.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Foreword

Around the world are thousands of cultures and ethnic groups. Each culture and ethnic group has its own language, dress, ways of doing things, values, and cultural practices. Each contributes to the beautiful mosaic of the human race. This book is about the wonderful people of Burma--children and adults. With five different major ethnic groups, each with subgroups, and dozens of smaller groups. Only a sampling of their experiences can be shared. While the Burmese share a great deal in common with the rest of the human race, these stories emphasize their uniqueness in culture and ways of thinking.

Burma is a country in Southeast Asia bounded by Bangladesh, India, China, Laos, Thailand, and the Bay of Bengal. It is about the same size as Texas, but is kite shaped with a tail. The population is thought to be 45 to 52 million. There are many ethnic groups, speaking 110 different languages.

Burma was a kingdom for a thousand years until conquered by the British in a series of three wars--1824, 1852, 1885. Burma received independence in 1948 under the leadership of Aung San. Torn by a fifteen sided civil war, Burma tried parliamentary democracy in the 1950s but never established an efficient government under U Nu. The military took over, led by Ne Win in 1962, taking the country down "the Burmese road to Socialism" by nationalizing everything. Their policies took Burma from a prosperous developing country to one of the ten poorest nations in the world.

In 1988 peaceful demonstrations for democracy developed, led by students. The army killed between 3,000 and 10,000 persons but later held elections in which the opposition, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won 80% of the vote. The military refused to turn over control and proceeded to jail, torture and kill all who demonstrated or were elected. Therefore the people of Burma have suffered misrule for almost forty years.

Each group has its own titles like America's "mister", "miss" and "ms". The Burmans use Ma and Maung for young women and men before their name. Maung is also a male Burmese name to make things more confusing and the Burmans like double names like Win Win, Htu Htu, Wah Wah, etc. Daw and U (Pronounced Oo) are used for older women and men. Men will use Ko as a title for men of equal age. The female equivalent is Ma. Karens use Naw for young and old females; Saw for boys and men. Other ethnic groups have their own titles.

Most Burmese do not have first and last names and therefore, no family names. While some are taking last names, particularly those who travel, most families do not have a common name. Wives do not take their husband's name when they marry. Most Burmese names once had meaning and most are several words. Unfortunately there are relatively few names in Burma, so many people have the same name, making for great confusion, especially if using a telephone directory. It is not uncommon for a Burmese to have several names or to change his name. Ethnic persons often have an ethnic name, a Burmese name used on their required national identity card, a nickname and, if Christian, a Biblical name--four names in all! Thus a Karen girl may be Naw Eh Eh, also known as (aka) Ma Aye Aye aka Aki (Bony) aka Martha.

In books about Burma, there is confusion regarding the meaning of the words Burman and Burmese. While there is universal agreement that the large ethnic group that comprises 65% of the country speaks Burmese, it is not universally agreed upon what this group is called. Some call them Burmese while others call them Burman. In this book they shall be called Burman. Therefore Burman refers to an ethnic group and not to all citizens of Burma. The members of other ethnic groups such as Karen, Shan, Chin, Kachin, Mon, Lisu, Lahu, Akha, Wa, Naga are also Burmese (citizens of Burma) but not Burman (an ethnic group).

Everyone is born into a culture and generally adopts those cultural values. Getting to know another

culture often helps us see the differences and that some of the things we were raised to believe as "the" way to do something, can be done quite a different way with equally good results. For example, as an American I had the cultural view that a family was a wife, husband and two children. After experiencing Burma, I came to see that a family can be quite extended as in the chapter called The Family. This awareness of an alternative has resulted in my own "family" often having several non blood related persons for extended periods of time and it has been a very enriching experience.

A very common error often seen in writings about southeast Asia is the term "rice paddy". Paddy refers to the grain grown in the field. When it is harvested and separated from the straw, it is still called paddy. When pounded or milled and the husk removed, it becomes rice. Therefore "rice paddy" is incorrect terminology. Paddy farmers plant paddy fields and harvest paddy. After milling, it becomes rice.

In 1990 the military dictatorship ordered the name changed from Burma to Myanmar. All organizations were forced to change and anyone receiving a letter from abroad addressed to "Burma" was fined 5 kyats. Traditionally, Myanmar referred only to the majority ethnic group but the Burmese military dictators do not feel the need to justify anything or follow any logical, rational, or traditional pattern. The United States does not recognize the name change, so all paperwork for U.S. customs must have "Burma" on it. Probably the country will be called Burma by outsiders and Myanmar by those under the guns of SLORC paralleling other countries with internal and external names such as Germany-Deutschland, Switzerland-Helvetia.

The money of Burma is call Kyat (pronounced chat). While officially valued at about six to a dollar, its real value was about fifteen in 1985, twenty five by 1988, eighty in 1990, a hundred in 1993, falling to 600 in 2001 and 1200 by 2007. While each chapter is fictional, each is written as if it occurred at a particular time and so the value of items in kyats at that time is used. Therefore an item may have different values at different times because of the different values of the kyat.

Burma is one of the least changed countries of the world and so maintains its own unique dress, customs and culture relatively free of "internationalization" that is homogenizing most other countries. In spite of a ruthless, irrational dictatorship, the Burmese people are charming, humorous, and live out their lives in a situation most Americans would find intolerable.

When I started gathering material for this book, I thought about soliciting stories from friends inside of Burma. But I came to see I might be putting them in real danger from a vindictive government so I have used only sources who live permanently outside of Burma.

Most of the experiences shared in this book happened to real people. Names, ethnic membership and places have been changed to protect their identities. Therefore all characters of this book are fictional and any resemblance to real persons living or dead is purely coincidental. Because the Burmese government might take offense at some of the chapters, I must refrain from mentioning any names of those who helped me because they might want to return to Burma some day.

In the West we pride ourselves in not believing in superstitions and coincidences. Yet many unexplained things happen in Burma. Two thirds of the way through writing this book, I discovered a book written in 1930 with an identical format to my book. It's title, Burmese Vignettes, was a title I had considered for this book. Although written sixty years ago, many of its chapters could have been put in this book which shows how little Burma has changed.

1

First Day at the Bazaar

Excited, Thida prepared to shop alone at the bazaar for the first time. For many years she accompanied her mother, Mar Lar, to the bazaar daily to purchase vegetables, fruit, meat, milk, and spices for the family meals.

The hot climate of Burma made food spoil quickly. No one in their neighborhood had a refrigerator, so every homemaker's daily chores included a trip to the bazaar.

Thida learned to carry the big woven bamboo bag with andles full of food for the day. She learned by watching her mother bargain for food in the market. Earlier that day, Thida and Mar Lar had come to the bazaar shopping. They had stopped at the asparagus seller and looked over the carefully arranged bundles of different sizes exhibited on a blanket of banana leaves. "How much is the asparagus?" Thida's mother asked.

"Ten kyats" said the seller pointing to the largest bundles, "Six kyats and four kyats" pointing to the middle size and then smaller bundles.

"I'll give you six!" Daw Mar Lar countered pointing to the ten kyat bundle.

"Oh all right, I'll give it to you because you are my first customer!" the seller answered following the Burmese custom of accepting any reasonable offer to make the first sale. The rest of the sales would be consummated only after a lot of bargaining.

Thida's mother handed her a five kyat and one kyat note. The seller took the notes and holding them by one end, patted the other end on every bundle of asparagus in her display. She thought touching all the items being offered for sale with the first money earned, would bring good luck and quick sales.

Putting her bundle of asparagus in her shopping bag, they moved on to the carrot seller.

"How much are the carrots?" her mother asked the seller, who was sitting on her haunches.

"Five kyats a bundle!"

"Can't you make the price a little better?" Mar Lar's mother bargained.

A long, thoughtful puff on her large cheroot (large cigar), then, "What would you be willing to pay?"

"Three kyats, fifty pyas" Thida's mother hoped for a compromise at four kyats.

"I can't possibly sell them for that little!" the woman hissed. "Four kyats fifty pyas!" Obviously Thida and Mar Lar mother were not her first customers.

"Four kyats?"

The carrot seller cursed and spat a stream of red betel juice into the gutter behind her, "Four kyats, fifty. That's it!"

Thida's mother took Thida's hand and said, "Let's shop around!" and started to walk away.

"Wait, you can have them for four kyats!" The seller picked up what appeared to be the smallest, least desirable bunch of carrots.

"Four kyats, but I want this bundle!" answered Thida's mother picking out what she perceived as the best bundle in the display.

Acting disgusted, the woman took the chosen bundle and wrapped it in a Pet Ywet leaf and quickly tied it into a neat bundle with a thin strand of split bamboo.

The carrots joined the other hard-won purchases in Thida's bag. At the next seller, the bargaining began all over again.

Now Thida, on her own, remembered how her mother's bargaining taught her many tricks of the trade. Thida knew that sometimes sellers of a particular item agreed among themselves not to sell below a certain price. But a seller of the same item off the main aisle of the market might not be in on the price-fixing and so would sell for less. A new seller in the market, from farther out in the country, would be more interested in peddling her produce quickly in order to start the long trip home. Thida knew different factors influenced the final price in bargaining.

Thida's mother had taught her to be aware that many of the whole chickens and ducks had been filled with water from a water pistol. They looked fat and plump but cook to bones.

Sometimes Thida's mother took her purchases to the government shop where they could check the weighed to see if the seller was truly giving them a full viss. Somethimes they discovered that seller had hidden a weighted under the empty pan so the scales said the meat weighted more than it really did.

This particular morning Thida and Mar Lar went bazaaring as usual. However, while preparing the noon meal, Thida's mother discovered no more onions.

"I thought I had a big one left." she sighed. "Well, Ma Thida, you are now old enough to go to the bazaar. Take this ten kyat note! Go buy a viss (3 1/2 pounds) of onions. Don't pay more than five kyats!"

As Thida ran to the market, eager to please her mother, she thought proudly, "I'm really old enough to buy food for my family." She found some of the sellers already leaving. "That's good," she thought. "Maybe someone will sell for less so they can leave too."

She passed by some onions where only the blemished remained and hurried to some onions left over beside a woman with a baby on her back, who asked for eight kyats. Even after bargaining, she would not go below six kyats. Too much, thought Thida. The next also started at eight kyats and wouldn't go below six. "They've fixed the price among themselves," thought Thida.

She wandered around the bazaar, discouraged. She wanted to purchase the onions but knew her mother would not be pleased if she paid six kyats. The words "Don't pay more than five kyats" rang in her head.

She came upon an old wrinkled face woman. Her split bamboo tray had only a few onions.

"How much are those?" Thida asked.

"Six kyats" the woman answered.

"I'll give you three!" countered Thida.

"Three kyats!" the woman exclaimed, her eyebrows high in amazement. "Go tell that in a village!"

Thida's face reddened hearing this saying, which meant that only a simple villager would listen to such an offer.

"Well, then, how about four kyats?" Thida coaxed,
adding, "And then you can go home."

"Oh all right. Just this time." The old woman made a cone out of newspaper, scooped the onions into it, folding in the edges.

Thida handed her the ten kyat note and received her change in dirty one kyat notes.

Taking the onions, Thida ran home, eager to show her success to her mother. She had purchased the onions for four kyats, which her mother would agree was a very good price.

Once home, she told Mar Lar the story as she showed her the onions. Her mother examined them carefully.

"They are good onions and worth five kyats," Mar Lar said. Then Thida gave her the change. Her mother carefully counted the dirty notes. One, two, three, four, five. That was all there were! Only five kyats. Not six. The old woman had short-changed her one kyat!

Thida had learned one more thing about buying at the bazaar!

2

The Water Festival

Min Swe watched the rain come down like arrows striking the ground. How wonderful the coolness felt after so many months of hot, dry weather. "This Thagyan Moe (Rains before the water festival) surely would hasten the blooming of the padauk tree." he thought, then he said aloud, "Next week is the Feast of the New Year! It will be April 13th to 16th on the western calendar."

"It will be four days this year!" happily exclaimed his sister, Thet Aye.

"I wish it was three days," sighed their father, Nyan Aung, "I'm getting too old to be wet for four days. But the Hot Season has certainly been tedious this year."

"Our neighborhood is building a mandat (stand) at the corner of our street and the main street. Tha Kyaw Wai has promised us a heavy duty pump so we can really drown with water those who come by." Thet Aye shouted with glee.

"Htoo Aung is renting a pickup truck and we're going around the city to spray water and get sprayed," Min Swe added excitedly.

"There is a serious side to the Water Festival too," reminded their mother, Naing Win, "I must remember to get the flowers--padauk and Ngu Wa, and five kinds of leaves for the offering to Thagyamin (King of Angels).

"Don't forget to make plenty of sweet drinks and sweet cakes as gifts to our neighbors. I also promised to bring some for our street mandat." Thet Aye added.

"Thami (daughter) Thet Aye, since you committed our contribution, you can help me make the drinks and sweet cakes." her mother said firmly.

"I'll help but I want you to show me how to make the oil-soot mixture." Thet Aye grinned mischievously.

"Don't forget that everyone must refrain from cutting down trees and plants, assaulting people and animals, weeping and wailing, blood letting, eating oil and spices, transacting in goods and money and sending out agents and messengers during this period of the New Year," their father reminded them. "Doing those things would be inauspicious."

The week went by quickly and the air was filled with excitement and anticipation. All over the town, colorful, brightly decorated mandats made with bamboo, coconut palm branches, woven bamboo mats or wood and having board floors, appeared, erected by neighborhoods, schools, factories, government departments, and merchants. Covered with bright paper, flowers, foil, or paint, they blazed color and gaiety. Some would offer dancers for entertainment and refreshments and others had various devices to douse passersby with water ranging from buckets of water to heavy duty pumps and tanks to systems fed by the fire hydrants. Some offered both dancers and water. Min Swe helped build the neighborhood mandat with bamboo and palm branches. The mandat had six 55 gallon drums to store water which they filled with city water whenever water came through the pipes. Pressure would drop to zero on water festival days when everyone tried to draw water.

Min Swe came home and found Thet Aye and Naing Win working making Mote Lone Yay Baw (Round, floating-in-boiling-water snacks). They took sticky rice and wheat flour and rolled it into a ball in the palm of their hands. Using a finger they shaped it into a small cup, stuffed palm sugar in the center and rolled it into a ball. Then they dropped it in boiling water to cook until it floated.

"Wow, they look good," exclaimed Min Swe.

"I made one specially for you," said Thet Aye handing her brother an unusually large one.

Min Swe popped it into his mouth and began chewing vigorously. Suddenly his eyes popped out as the hot pepper hidden inside burned his tongue. "Sugar," he gasped heading for the sugar jar while his

sister laughed at fooling him. Burmese believe sugar is more effective at cooling the mouth from hot peppers than water. Then Thet Aye gave him a good one that was sweet and coconut flavored to make up for having fooled him. The Mote Lone Yay Baw finished, they started making Mote Phet Thut. Rolling a section of banana leaf into a cone, they stuffed the cone with sticky rice. In the center they placed coconut and sugar and then folded the leaf in to make a package. These they steamed until cooked.

Padauk trees were in full bloom and the heavy, sweet scent of the yellow blossoms filled the air. On the front porch, every Buddhist house had a special New Year clay pot filled with these special yellow flowers and Ngu Wa flowers and five kinds of special leaves as an offering to Thagyamin on the Day of Descent--the first day of celebration of the festival which marked the end of one year and the beginning of the next. The leaves were coconut palm fronds, plum leaves, Sein Pan leaves, Thapye leaves and Myayzar grass. The coconut palm fronds were only the end tip cut so there were five blades on each side. The Thapye leaves are sort of the Burmese cultural equivalence to olive leaves as they are presented to returning victorious soldiers. They are also regarded as divine and used as offering at pagodas and nat shrines.

At the exact time of Thagyamin's arrival, Naing Win lifted the pot toward the sky as a gesture of homage to welcome the god to the earth. According to Burmese tradition, Thagyamin originally taught mankind many things and returned at the end of each year with two books. Thagyamin recorded in one, covered with dog skin, the misdeeds done by everyone. In the other book of gold, he recorded the acts of merit performed by the faithful. During the festival, religious Buddhists made a special effort to keep the Eight Precepts or Ten Precepts and to go to the monasteries and pagodas to offer alms-food. Some older adults meditated at the monasteries instead of participating in the water throwing.

Naing Win and Thet Aye then took gifts of sweet cakes and drinks to neighbors and the elders. They were soon soaking wet as children happily threw water on everyone who passed by their houses. Only monks, the elderly, or the sick escaped the drenching. Some sick deliberately went out to get drenched because they thought that brought healing.

As they presented gifts to one elderly man, he dipped a leaf into a bowl of perfumed water and then flicked a few drops of water onto them in the manner of traditional water throwing where it was given as a blessing instead of a drenching.

Returning home, Thet Aye picked up a small jar of oil mixed with soot from the cooking pot and joined a group of neighborhood girls who carried the rest of their equipment--a large pail of water and a piece of rope. They sauntered down the street ignoring the children throwing water on them. However when Zay Yar Kyaw, a young man of their age doused them, they immediately set upon him and "captured" him as was permitted during the water festival. Tying his hands together with the rope, they blackened his face with the black oily mixture. Then, ganging up on him, they ducked his head in the pail of water.

"Pan Pay De! ('I give you flowers! [I give up in peace.])" Zay Yar Kyaw finally sputtered in despair.

"Do the Monkey dance then," Thet Aye and the other girls chorused.

Zay Yar Kyaw did the monkey dance, prancing around and gesturing as a monkey while the girls laughed at his antics. Satisfied with his performance, they untied his hands and set him free and went looking for another hapless male.

When Thet Aye's group came in proximity of another group of girls, a lively water fight ensued between the two groups using cups of water dipped from the pail.

In the afternoon, many of the teenagers climbed aboard Htoo Aung's truck and they went touring the city, throwing water on people walking along the streets and being drenched in turn by those standing by the side of the road. Renting a truck or jeep during the water festival was very expensive as everyone wanted one and rates jumped to 3,000 to 5,000 kyats a day.

Everyone participated in water throwing--young and old, Burmese and non Burmese, Buddhists and

non Buddhists although some older, staid Christians did not, saying it was a Buddhist celebration. Many of their children sneaked away from home and participated anyway. Sometimes Christian churches had youth retreats during the water festival to get their children away from the temptation to participate. Others viewed it as a national free-for-all water fight with no religious implications. These celebrated it with the same enthusiasm as Buddhists in America celebrated Christmas.

A large truck full of young people pulled up beside them and Min Swe, Thet Aye and the others threw water on them. In a split second they heard a motor start up on the large truck and soon a huge stream of water from a hose drenched them from head to toe. With water dripping from all parts of his body, Min Swe taunted them, pretending to look to the sky and announcing he had just felt a drop of water. Of course this brought another dousing from the laughing youths on the truck.

At another light a jeep carrying sixteen young persons pulled up beside them. Min Swe threw water on them and many of the youth of the jeep responded with drinking cups of water. When the small splashes from their cups hit Min Swe, he let out a howl of surprise for the group had a large chunk of ice in their supply tank and their water was cold, cold, cold!

The biggest and best decorated mandats in downtown Rangoon in front of City Hall were sponsored by various government departments who had a large budget allotment just for celebrating the water festival. Their stages had amplifying systems and up to thirty dancers performing traditional Burmese dances. The backdrops announced the sponsoring governmental department. Some had paid professional dancers but many had dancers drawn from the sponsoring department with an occasional friend recruited to fill the ranks. All the dancers at many stands wore beautiful matching clothes paid for by the department. Certain departmental stands were noted for their dancing entertainment and attracted large audiences. Min Swe, Thet Aye and the other youth enjoyed driving around seeing all the different bright and gaily decorated entertainment stands.

The other kind of mandats threw water on them as they passed while they, in turn, threw water back. Some stands had reputations as to the number and power of their water hoses and long lines of trucks queued up in order to go by these stands.

Finally, exhausted and thoroughly wet, the youths returned to their neighborhood. After months of the tedious, hot, dry season, the free-for-all of the water festival provided a great release. Somewhere in the forgotten past, the throwing of water must have been related to the encouragement of the coming rains for the monsoons would start in about three weeks.

At home Min Swe and Thet Aye found Naing Win carefully washing her hair with a shampoo made from the bark of the Tha Yaw tree. The first day of the Water Festival, Day of Descent, fell on Tuesday this year. Since the festival was four days, the last day, the Day of Ascent, fell on Friday. Naing Win had been born on Saturday, therefore the new year promised to be neutral--neither fortunate or unfortunate for her. Her luck would be better if she performed the hair washing ceremony on the Day of Descent. Nyan Aung being Tuesday born, this year the Day of Descent, would be considered to have a year of misfortune ahead. However if he did the hair washing ceremony on both Days of Sojourn (Wednesday and Thursday), then he would overcome the misfortune.

"Min Swe, you are Thursday-born, which this year is "Other Born" and therefore face a neutral year (neither lucky or unlucky) so you must wash your hair today, the Day of Descent, to bring an auspicious new year." their mother said. "Thet Aye, since you are Friday born the new year will be auspicious for you but you can make it even better by hair washing on Friday, the Day of Ascent."

"Ma Thet Aye, did you know that during the period of the Burmese kings, the hair washing ceremony was one of the most important events on the royal calendar? The king's hair washing was publicly done at coronation, the feast of the new year and, in private, at the times the sun entered each of the twelve signs of the Burmese Zodiac." Min Swe said.

"Yes, ceremonial hair washing is a very serious religious ritual." she answered.

Two more days of water throwing followed. Nyan Aung carefully washed his hair both days to

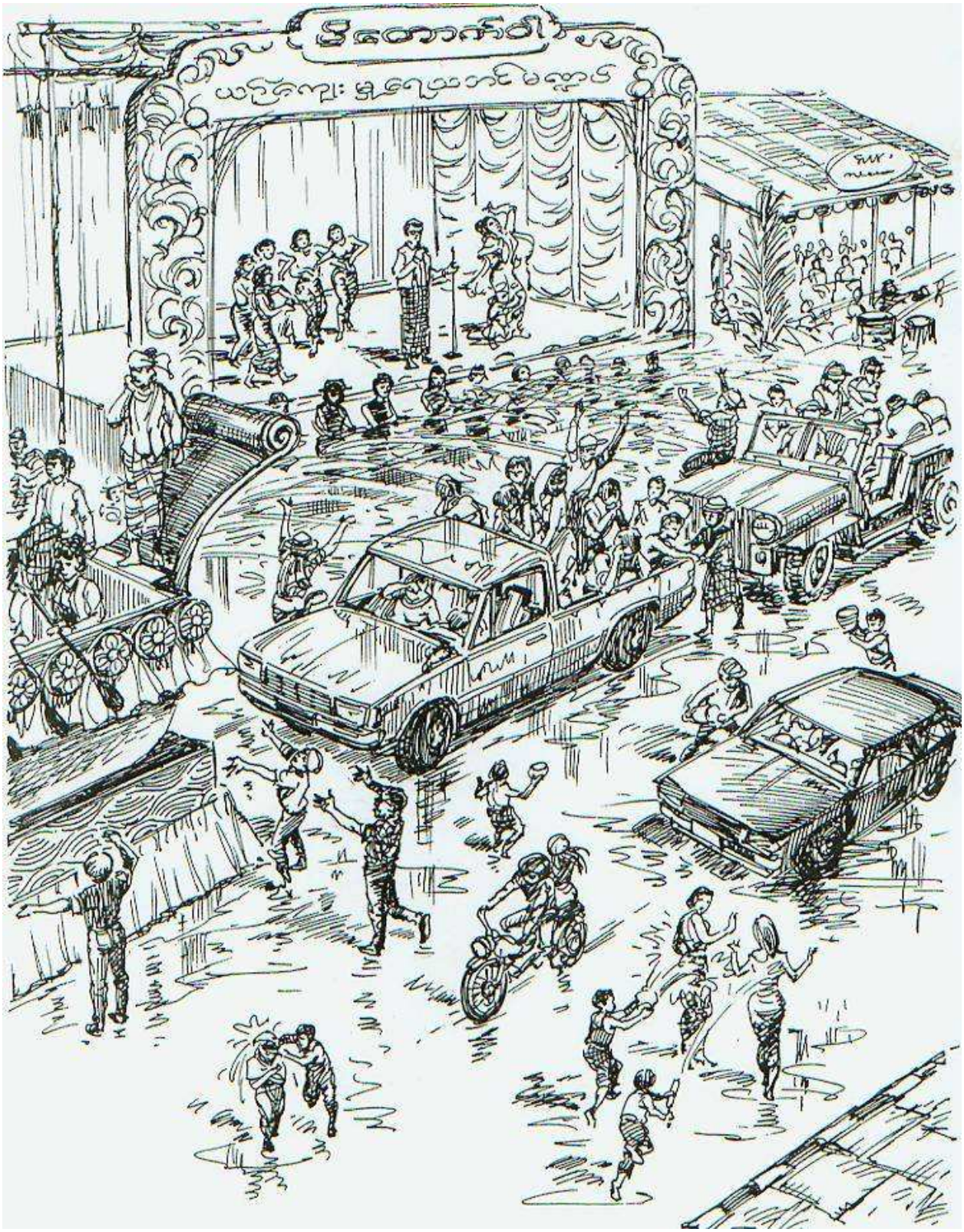
overcome the inauspiciousness of being Tuesday born.

On the fourth day, at the designated time of Thagyamin's departure, Nyan Aung carefully lifted the pot of special flowers and leaves and slowly poured out the water onto the ground while praying for good fortune, good rainfall and good harvest. (Either wife or husband could have performed the ceremony.) The new year is considered to begin exactly at that moment.

Then the family dressed in their finest clothes and went to the pagoda to make offerings. Next they gave alms-food to the monks, and visited the parents of Nyan Aung and gave fruit, flowers and candles. Had Naing Win's parents been living, they would have visited them too. Min Swe and Thet Aye each visited their teachers and gave similar offerings. They also gave these symbolic gifts to the elder persons in their neighborhood.

Then they purchased some live fishes from the fish mongers who would have killed the fish for food and set the fishes free in the nearest lake with the words, "May you have a long and auspicious life." Setting the fishes free gained the family merit.

The Water Festival over, Burma returned to its normal routine. The water throwing induced nature to respond, for three weeks later, the clouds opened up and the heavy monsoon showers began that would drench Rangoon with an average of 100 inches of rain during the Rainy Season.



3

The Union Day Flag

"Listen to this," said Aung Cho, as he read The Guardian newspaper, "'The Flag arrives at Nyaunglebin. Nyaungleben Jan 21, [1986]--Under the programme for relaying the 39th Anniversary Union Day Flag on its cross-country journey to the States and Divisions, the Union Flag [arrived at] the border of Pegu Division by relay teams and by a special car...

"'...at the Mazin archway at the entrance to Pegu, Lt. Col. Myint Tun took out the Union Flag from the silver bowl on the special car and handed it over to Pegu Township People's Council Chairman Lt-Col Than Nyunt. ...[He] then handed over the flag to relay teams and 36 relay teams carried it to the archway at Polan godown...It was accorded a rousing welcome by Ward-Village Party (members) and People's Council functionaries, members of the mass and class organizations, students, Lanzin Youths, Tatmadaw (Army) men, and their families, Red Cross Brigade members, personnel of the Fire Services Department and People's Police Force and the working people numbering more than 70,000 who...accorded it a rousing welcome... with the waving of miniature flags, shouting slogans, and with music and dance troupes. The Union Flag also passed through beautiful decorated archways.

"Big deal, it's the same every year." said Khin Mang Cho sarcastically. "always 'a rousing welcome'."

"I've been chosen to carry the flag when it comes back from Upper Burma," gloated his sister, May Mar Cho, "you're jealous because you weren't chosen this year."

"What?" exclaimed Khin Mang Cho, acting surprised, "Are they using ugliness as the criterion for choosing the relay team members this year?"

"No, it is beauty as usual and I'm beautiful," she said giving her brother a disdainful look and swat.

"If you're carrying the flag, you had best be very careful. I heard there will be death for anyone who drops it." her mother, Win Phyu said worriedly.

"That's only rumor, May May (Mother) We've been practicing. The flag is only about two feet by three feet and so not too heavy." her daughter reassured her.

"Our family is honored that you have been chosen to carry the flag," her father, Aung Cho said.

"I've been chosen to be one of the nationalities," Khin Mang Cho shared.

"One of the primitive, backward hill tribes no doubt," his sister chimed in.

"As a matter of fact, I'm representing Burman. Smarty Pants!" gloated Khin Mang Cho, "I was chosen, no doubt, because I am handsome!"

"Oh, the delusions some people have," said May Mar Cho, rolling her eyes.

"When will the flag arrive here?" asked Win Phyu.

"Well, it has to be carried by 'special' car and relay teams up through central Burma to Mandalay. Then it goes to Pale in Sagaing Division, and Gangaw in the Magwe Division. Then up to Hakha in Chin State, to Kale (Kalemyo) and then by special plane to Myitkyina in Kachin State. Again by special plane to Lashio in Shan State, on by plane to Loikaw in Kayah State, and by plane to Pa-an in Karen State." Aung Cho said.

"It has to go by plane because the government doesn't control much of the territory in those states, at least not at night." piped in Khin Mang Cho.

"Hush, boy, it is dangerous to say such things!" their father cautioned. "From Pa-an it is carried by special launch to Moulmein in the Mon State, on via plane to Mergui in Tenasserim Division. A special plane carries it to Bassein in the Irrawaddy Division, on, via plane, to Sittwe in the Rakhine State, then Minbu. From there it returns by special car and relay teams to Rangoon Command sports ground on Feb 11th. On the 12th it arrives at Kyaikkasan Grounds. On the 21st it will be returned to City Hall where it will reside in the Mayor's Reception room until next year."

"Our school relay team will be one of fifty six teams to carry it from Insein to the road leading to Inya Lake Hotel. I only carry it a few dozen yards. I'm flanked by two lines of seven almost-as-beautiful girls." said May Mar Cho, stealing a glance at Khin Mang Cho to see if she had successfully needled him.

Khin Mang Cho let it pass and said, "We will have handsome and beautiful couples dressed in ethnic costumes representing the major ethnic groups of Burma. Aung Cho, can I wear your silk longyi, jacket and gaung baung (Burmese turban originally wrapped around the head but now wrapped over a light bamboo frame so it can be easily put on and taken off like a hat)?"

"I suppose so, as I want you to look your best but do take good care of it for it cost 70 Kyats {1986 kyats} which is one week's pay {in 1986}." his father replied.

Both Khin Mang Cho and May Mar Cho and the other participants practiced several times until Khin Mang Cho and the other nationality representative knew exactly where to stand while flanking the party chairman and May Mar Cho and her team members smoothly received and passed on the flag as their part of the relay.

When the flag arrived at the Township border after being carried by twenty five relay teams, Insein Township People's Council Secretary Capt Tun Win handed it to Mayangon Township People's Council Chairman Major Kyi Maung. He in turn handed it to the first relay teams. The leader held the flag aloft and flanked by a row of seven runners on each side, ran down the middle of the road lined by cheering people. The flag was passed from one relay team to another. Each team was dressed in traditional hta mein and longyis of matched cloth, so they looked the part of a team. Speed of transfer was not important as this was not a relay race. Smoothness and dignity counted more. The hta mein did not allow fast running anyway. The girls wore shorts in true races.

As they were ordered, May Mar Cho and her team arrived two hours ahead of when the flag was expected to arrive. She anxiously waiting, surrounded by her team mates, in the broiling hot sun. The street was lined with people who had been ordered to come to a particular section of road to cheer the flag.

When May Mar Cho saw the team coming in the distance, she shouted, "Places!" and her team lined up in their formation. As the team came up, the flag carrier ran down the middle of the road. May Mar Cho ran beside her and took a good grip on the silver covered flagstaff as they ran side by side. When the first carrier was sure May Mar Cho had a good grip, she let go and dropped back and May Mar Cho's team continued on amid a crowd shouting a rousing welcome and waving miniature flags that had just been passed out. Hearing so many people shouting produced an emotional experience. But she remembered to scan the road for unevenness or anything that might trip her and spoil her relay. Sweat poured from her body. Fear of falling and possible execution mingled with the headiness of the roar of the crowd. How she wished her father could see her and be proud, but his department had been assigned to cheer along a section of the road farther on.

The flag fluttered in the breeze created by her running. Its red field streamed out to show the blue in the upper corner. That showed a white head of paddy (rice) on a cog wheel. This represented farmers and workers or agriculture and manufacturing. The wheel was surrounded by fourteen stars representing the seven states and seven divisions of Burma.

Rounding a slight curve, she saw ahead the next team waiting with the leader in the center under one of the specially erected arches. Made of plywood and framing, brightly decorated with flags and slogans, the arch was one of many erected along the flag's routes. That leader waited until she came alongside her, ran with her and smoothly took the flag from her grasp. May Mar Cho slowed up and was suddenly surrounded by her team's laughing with relief that all went well and smoothly as planned. The street filled with people who were free now that they had fulfilled their obligation to the Party to cheer the flag.

The street, lined with thousands of workers, gave the uninformed observer the impression the flag

produced a mass popular outpouring of public spirit.

At Kyaikkasan Grounds, Khin Mang Cho waited anxiously with the other students dressed in the various ethnic costumes. Suddenly the flag could be seen over the heads of the crowd coming down the street. It paused as it was handed to Tamwe Township People's Council Executive Committee member, U Tun Han, who then handed it over to Rangoon Division People's Council Secretary Lt-Col Tun Aung. He, in turn, conveyed the flag to the Secretary of the 39th Anniversary Union Day Flag Relay Committee, U Tun Nyein, at the head of a path strewn with white sand. He carried it 20 yards along this path to the mass rally stage and handed over the flag to Nai Kyi Aung of Mon State flanked by representatives of eight ethnic groups that make up the majority of Burma. Khin Mang Cho stood with a beautiful girl at his side dressed as a Burman woman. She wore an exquisite silk hta mein with a bright traditional Burman pattern, an aingyi (blouse) with silver buttons and a thin lace shawl around her neck and down her front. A beautiful white flower nested in her shining black hair. Out of the corner of his eye he could see the Kachin couple. The man carried a dah (knife) covered with silver. While it is illegal to carry a knife except if it is needed in work, an exception was made in these ceremonies. The costume, developed in the cool Kachin homeland, was very hot to wear in lower Burma.

Next to the Kachin couple stood the Kayah and Karen representatives. A Chin couple completed the four nationalities pairs on that side. On Khin Mang Cho's side of the party person stood the representatives of the Mon people. An ancient people who had a kingdom before the Burmese came to power, the Mon are proud people with their own language, dress and customs although other tribes (ethnic groups) considered them basically the same as Burmese. Next came Khin Mang Cho and the Burman girl. To their left stood a Rakhine dressed lady and man and a Shan couple completed the lineup. All looked beautiful in their elaborate ethnic costumes which were worn only on very special days.

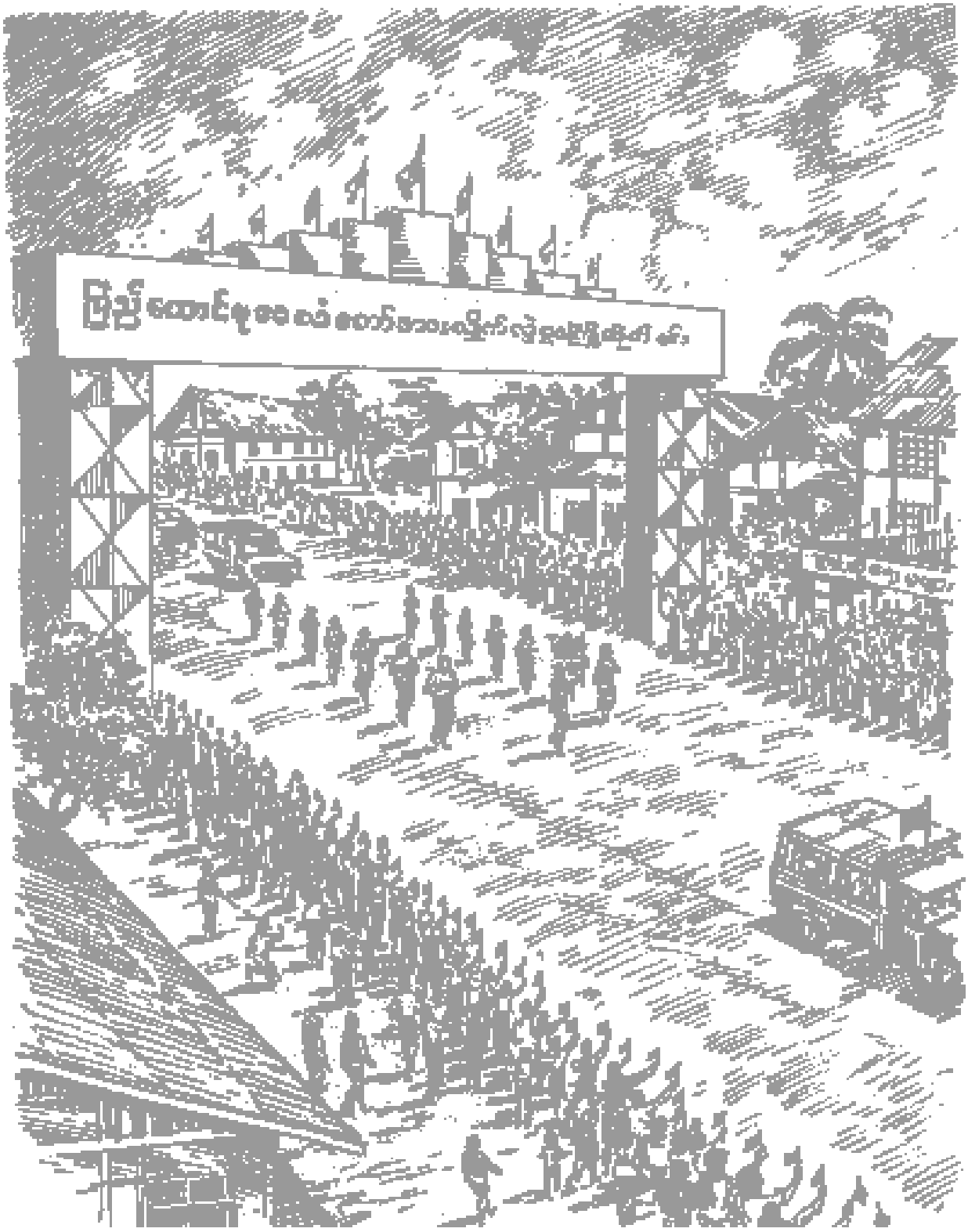
The party member took the flag and inserted the pole into the beautifully hammered silver bowl that stood on the elaborately carved and gilded teak dais. Then he bowed in homage to the flag and all the representatives of the ethnic groups did likewise.

The Party chairman spoke on the importance of Union Day and urged all to take on the spirit of the Union. Every loyal Burmese should work for the tranquillity and prosperity of the nation, all indigenous people should strive to fully achieve targets for the Fifth Four Year Economic Plan, and all should work to expose and crush all destructive elements--those minions of colonialism. "What was 'a minion of colonialism'?" wondered Khin Maung Cho. But he knew better than to voice the question. To the relief of all, the speech was short. Again everyone on the platform bowed to the flag and others on ground level came forward to pay homage. The crowd began to break up and look at the exhibits.

Each of the seven states and seven divisions had an exhibit featuring cultural items from that district, products produced there and other things of interest or at least the Party thought should be of interest to the people.

Other stages featured traditional Burmese dances, Burmese Saingwaing (band featuring drums), Padetha dances, and various movies and music. Lighted by multicolored lights, the sports ground took on the atmosphere of a carnival being enjoyed by thousands. Only late at night did Khin Mang Cho and May Mar Cho return home after attempting to see everything.

Postscript: The carrying of the Union flag around Burma last occurred in 1988. The summer of 1988 brought ProDemocracy Demonstrations and the slaughter of between 3,000 and 10,000 students. A faked military coup in September removed the mask of a government with popular support and revealed only a military junta interested in ruling for its own benefit. The sham of national unity under a popular government could no longer be maintained so the annual around-the-country tour of the flag was discontinued. The SLORC government realized the potential danger of 100,000 discontented persons gathered in one place.



4

Tasty Tagyis

Say Paw, Ler Wah and Moo Ra hunkered around in a circle. "What shall we do today?" asked Moo Ra, the youngest girl. Breakfast over, their chores done, these Karen children had a time of rare freedom to do what ever they wanted.

"We could go to the bazaar!" Ler Wah, the middle brother, suggested.

"But we have no money," Say Paw, the oldest sister, reminded her, "it is not pleasant to see so many nice things, without money to buy any of them."

"Shall we go play with Ma Wah Wah Lin and Maung Tin Ko Naing?" ventured Moo Ra referring to children of a neighboring Burman family.

"No," said Say Paw firmly, "they made fun of me last time and called me a payit-eating Karen."

"What is payit?" asked Moo Ra.

"That is what the Burmans call tagyis," answered Say Paw giving the Karen word.

"What's wrong with eating tagyis?" puzzled Moo Ra. "They are quite tasty!"

"Some Burmans don't eat tagyis and think anyone who does is lower than them," chimed in Ler Wah.

"Hey, let's go catch tagyis! We can get a nice batch and have mother fry them for us for lunch!" said Say Paw. "Last night's rain will make it easier to find their burrows."

The children agreed on this great idea. Since the beginning of the rainy season, tagyis were appearing if you knew where to look for them.

"Moo Rah, you get a jar with a lid and I'll get father's old knife. Ler Wah, you fill the pail on the back porch!" commanded Say Paw, who being the oldest, always organized the group.

The equipment gathered, off they went to the woods. On the bare ground they looked for the small mud mounds that marked the entrances to the burrows of the tagyis, a bug about the size of a child's thumb. When they found one, they scraped away the little pile of earth revealing a hole in the ground. Using the knife, Say Paw dug a hole around the burrow, digging out the dirt, following the burrow into the ground. Sometimes the burrow was not deep and they soon dug up the tagyi and Ler Wah quickly caught it before it could fly or hop away.

Sometimes the burrow went deep, making it hard to keep digging, as the hole got smaller the deeper it went. Then Ler Wah poured water into the burrow and waited until the water forced the tagyi to come up. As soon as Ler Wah saw the antenna of the tagyi breaking the surface of the water, he reached into the water and grabbed it and put it in the bottle Moo Ra held. Moo Ra deftly removed the lid and had the bottle ready every time Ler Wah caught a tagyi. They had to be quick or the tagyis in the bottle would jump out or fly away.

Tagyis could bite but their bites only hurt a little. However, they moved quickly, trying to get away. Some burrows didn't seem to have any tagyis.

After digging all the burrows they found in that part of the woods, they moved on to another. In one place they found only holes marking where burrows had been. Someone had beaten them to the tagyis! Looking through the trees and bushes, they saw two children bent over digging in the ground.

"There are the other tagyi diggers" exclaimed Ler Wah.

Looking closer Say Paw let out an exclamation, "Why it's Ma Wah Wah Lin and Maung Tin Ko Naing who made fun of us for eating tagyis!!!"

"Why would they make fun of us Karens for eating tagyis and then go and dig them themselves?" wondered Moo Ra.

"Maybe they are trying to get them so we won't have them." speculated Ler Wah.

"I don't think so" said Say Paw thoughtfully, "I think they are digging them for themselves and don't want us to know it. Maybe they thought if they could make us ashamed of being Karens and eating tagyis, we would stop eating them and there would be more for them!"

"I think you are right! Those Burmans are sneaky!" said Ler Wah indignantly.

But none of the children wanted to go and confront the Burmans. Karen culture abhors confrontation. So they smiled inwardly at the Burman tricks.

Say Paw, Ler Wah and Moo Ra went off to another part of the woods. They continued digging until they had half a jar of crawling, squirming tagyis. Then they headed home.

Their mother put a little oil in a frying pan. While it heated, the children removed the tagyis one by one, tore off their wings (which didn't feel good in the mouth), and squeezed their stomachs to clean them. Their mother then put the tagyis into the frying pan where the hot oil quickly killed them. She salted and stir fried them. They had collected enough so that each received thirteen tagyis to eat. How crunchy and delicious they tasted with a rich flavor and a slight taste and smell of earth!

As they ate, their mother said, "When I was a small child, only Karens ate tagyis and my sisters and I could gather many in just one morning. We would have twenty or thirty each to eat. Now many Burmans are eating them and even selling them. Tagyis are much scarcer and harder to find."

"Why are the tagyis they sell in the stands beside the road so yellow?" asked Moo Ra.

"They flavor them with turmeric and that makes them yellow," their mother answered.

"Maybe tonight we can use a spray of bamboo and swat some tagyis when they fly around the light and catch them when they're knocked to the ground!" said Say Paw.

"There will be many of them flying around the street light and some will hit the light and fall to the ground. We can gather them." said Ler Wah.

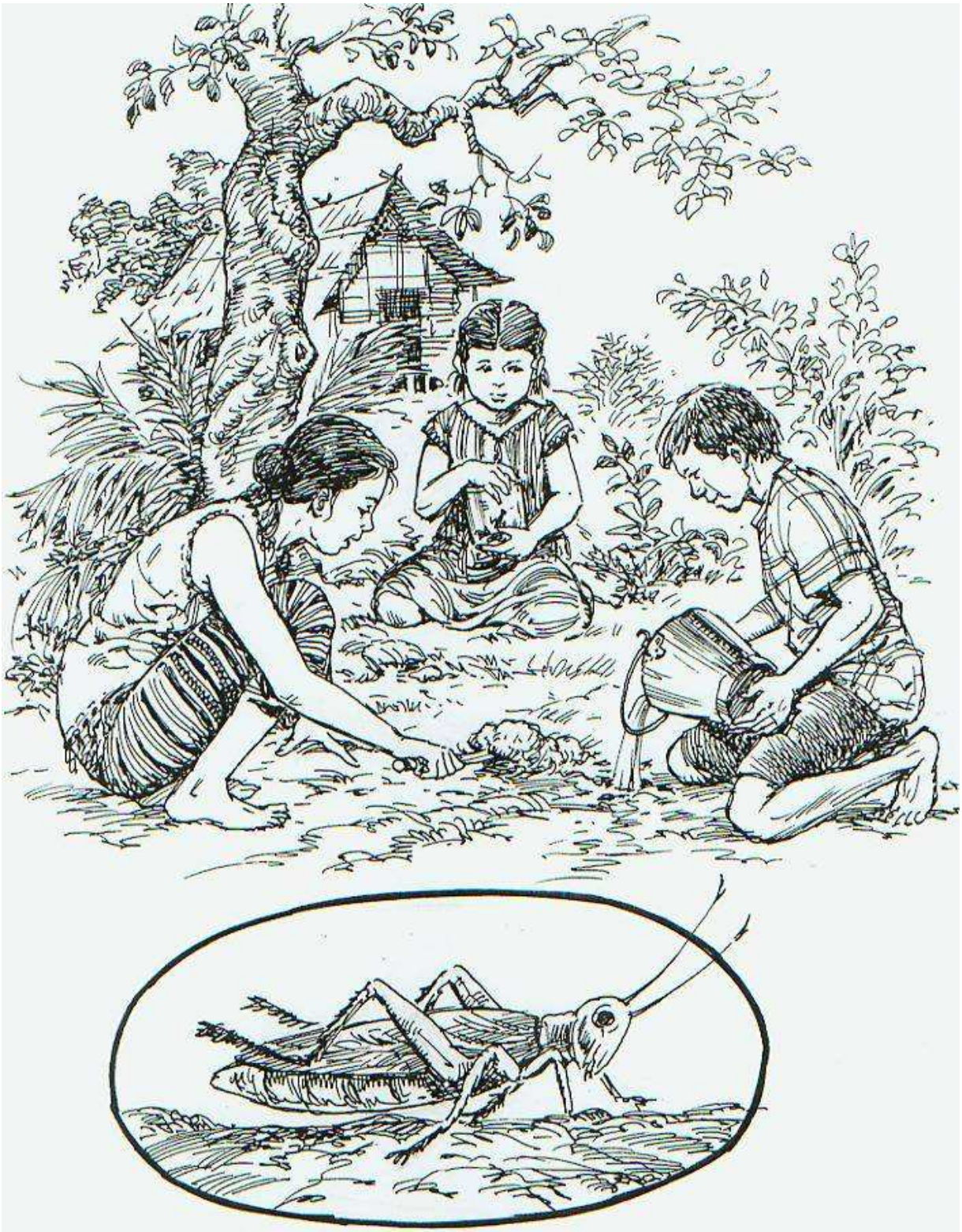
"No" said their mother, "you may not gather tagyis at the street light. You might forget to watch out for trucks."

A little later Wah Wah Lin and Tin Ko Naing came over to play.

As the children went off to play, their mother marveled at their wonderful capacity to forget the scrapes of yesterday.

"We had rice and pork for lunch!" said Wah Wah Lin, the older Burman girl.

Say Paw saw a fragment of a tagyi on the Burman girl's blouse and picked it off. It felt oily. Say Paw looked at Ler Wah and Moo Ra and they all smiled. Following the Karen way, they said nothing so as not to embarrass the Burmans by showing they had been caught in a lie.



5

Water Cress

Aye Aye waded in the water, scooping up water cress with her hands. When she gathered a large bundle, she tied them with a strip of thin split bamboo and set it in her basket. She had already worked two hours and made ten bundles but the basket was only half full. Her back ached and the sun beat down on her as she bent over gathering more water greens. These plants grew floating on the surface of the water and were delicious when fried. When boiled with jaggery (palm sugar) cress made a good treatment for food poisoning. The Burmese usually cook mushrooms with water cress because if the mushrooms were poisonous, the water cress would turn black warning them not to eat it. Her grandfather had sent word that enough had grown and it could be harvested for a profit. Aye Aye walked from her home to her grandfather's. Now she collected the water cress.

Her grandfather stood on the shore with a long bamboo pole sometimes using it to help sweep the water cress toward her. For a split second Aye Aye saw a movement in the water cress just in front of her before it stopped. Her eyes searched for what had caught her attention. A long black snake swam among the plants. "Lin Mway!" she shouted and moved towards the shore as fast as she could through the mud and water. Lin Mway (black snakes) were not poisonous but Aye Aye disliked snakes in general because so many were poisonous. Her grandfather heard and instantly sized up the situation. WHAP! The bamboo pole came down on the snake. The blow stunned it. Her grandfather fished it out with the pole. Once he had it on the bank, he killed it. "Lin Mways are good to eat! I will boil it until the flesh can be shaken out. Then I will season it with salt, pepper, onions, garlic and fry it for supper." her grandfather said. The boiling water will make fine soup. I'll save the unsheathed skin and dry it. It is good for sucking up the pus in boils when moistened and applied to abscesses.

"He is welcome to it!" thought Aye Aye. "It may be edible but I want no part of it!"

After Aye Aye's heart returned to normal, she continued to gather the water cress. The next two hours seemed to take twice as long as the first two. Finally the basket was filled with twenty bundles. Taking an old piece of cloth she carried for that purpose, Aye Aye make a coil and placed it on top of her head. Then she hoisted the basket to her shoulder and then on her head and balanced it. The coil cushioned the basket and provided a broader resting place which made it easier to balance.

As she walked down the road toward home, she called out "Ka zun ywet" which is Burmese for water cress. Aye Aye looked hopefully to a woman working in her yard. "How much?" the woman asked.

"Two kyats" Aye Aye said.

"Is it fresh?" the woman squinted her eyes.

"Yes, very fresh! I just gathered it" Aye Aye lowered the basket. The water cress showed fresh and green.

"I'll give you one kyat!" The bargaining began.

"Sorry, I can't sell that cheap" Aye Aye voiced her decision and started to continue down the road. Aye Aye hated to bargain unlike most Burmese women who love to bargain. She didn't enjoy haggling over the price of everything. She knew that she sometimes paid too much when she was buying. Two kyats was a fair price at the bazaar and her water cress was much fresher.

"Wait, it is fresh. I'll pay the two kyats." and the woman pulled the money from her shoulder bag. Aye Aye held out two bundles for her choice. Aye Aye did not want her to paw through the whole basket as the water cress could be damaged by much handling. Then it would be harder to sell. The woman looked past the two bundles into the basket out of her reach because of the split bamboo fence that surrounded her property.

"All the bundles are the same size and these are the freshest because they were gathered last." Aye Aye put on her most winsome smile. The woman took the bundle from her right hand. In Burma it is impolite to offer someone anything with your left hand.

Aye Aye stuffed the two notes into her bag before continuing down the road. Again she called out "Fresh Water Cress" By the time she reached home, she had sold all but one of the twenty bundles she had gathered and this last one she deliberately saved for her family to eat.

Proudly she gave the 38 kyats to her mother. Her mother gave back four as her share. The rest went into the family purse. Each member was expected to contribute most of what he earned to support the family. Only by pooling their resources did they have enough.

Aye Aye took the four kyats and took out her bank from the back corner of the cabinet where she kept it hidden. It was ceramic and shaped like a cat. Aye Aye stuffed the four kyat notes through the slot in the top. She remembered the time she bought it at the bazaar. It had been hard to tell her father which bank to buy. There were so many shapes and colors. She had finally narrowed it down to a dog, a cat or an elephant although she sensed her father preferred a pig shaped bank. But Aye Aye didn't particularly like pigs and couldn't understand why any one would want a bank shaped like a pig. She liked cats and wished her family could afford one so she chose the bank of that shape. Aye Aye cuddled her hard cat bank wishing for a real soft furry one.

The money could only be taken out by breaking the cat. Therefore Aye Aye had carefully recorded in her school note book each amount put in her cat. Her record showed a total of 78 kyats. How she wished it were one hundred so she could buy a hta mein!

For over twelve years she had worn a child's short skirt or a dress, but now that she was growing up, she was eligible to wear a hta mein.

For in Burma all women wear a hta mein, a cylinder of cloth worn from their waist down and folded over itself in front and tucked in. It takes skill to fold it over properly and tuck it in neatly so that it looks nice and stays up. Girls reach this milestone at puberty, making the hta mein a symbol of maturing.

Many of Aye Aye's friends were already covered by a hta mein. She longed for one but a good hta mein cost a hundred kyats and she wanted a good one.

For a whole year Aye Aye had saved almost all of her part of her earnings. She now had seventy eight kyats. If the water cress grew back, and Aye Aye would be able to gather it six more times before school started, she would have enough for a hta mein in which to return to school. It was a worthy goal.

6

Demonetization

Eh Eh looked at her beloved cat bank one last time. She hit it hard against the floor and it broke into many pieces. Her year's savings lay among the pieces. Most were one kyat notes, some so dirty she had to identify them by size. There, in the midst, lay a thirty five kyat note.

Tears came to her eyes as she separated it from the others. She received it on her birthday from her grandparents. How happy it made her. Such a generous gift! That thirty five kyat note made up one third of her goal of one hundred kyats for a new hta mein. She held the crumpled note in her hand now worthless, all because of a government announcement this morning at 11:00!

On that Saturday in September, the government announced suddenly that all twenty, thirty five and seventy five notes were worthless. The radio announcer had used big words like "demonetized" but it meant the same thing. The notes no longer had legal tender status. Word spread quickly and no one would accept them.

A few months earlier, the government had announced that all twenty five, fifty, and one hundred kyat notes would be discontinued and citizens could redeem some of them for new notes of twenty, thirty five or seventy five kyats.

Everyone had rushed to the banks on the following Monday and long lines of people clutching handsful of obsolete notes wanting to redeem them for notes that could be spent.

As the days went by the government kept changing the rules on how many notes a person could redeem. This demonetization had happened once before back in 1966 but now no one expected it to happen again.

Eh Eh looked at the thirty five kyat note in her hand and cried anew. Thirty five kyats! It would take her eight to ten days of hard work to earn that much! Her grandparents worked hard and saved diligently to have money to give their grandchildren. Now, their gift was worthless.

Eh Eh could not bear to think about the many kyats her grandparents had lost. When the announcement came to turn in their old twenty five, fifty and hundred kyat notes, they had almost five thousand kyats which represented most of their life's savings. Fortunately they had turned in the kyats at the beginning of the thirty day exchange period. The bank exchanged 500 kyats of the old notes and the rest was put into an account in their name. Later they had to explain to the bank official why they had so many kyats on hand. The bank official did not want to accept their story that it represented their life's saving. Only when they had given him a thousand kyats "tea money" did they receive permission to exchange it to the new twenty, thirty five, and seventy five kyat notes.

And now the new notes had been declared worthless and could not be exchanged for the new fifteen, forty five, and ninety kyat notes that would to be issued.

Eh Eh cried and shook with anger. It was so unfair! The government said it was a move against the black marketeers and the rebel groups. Even though only a child, she knew most of the black marketeers were really merchants trying to make a living supplying goods the socialist government was unable to supply. As for the argument it hurt the rebel groups, even Eh Eh had heard those groups kept most of their money in Thai baht so demonetization didn't really hurt them much. Another rumor said that Ne Win's personal astrologer had said the monetary denominations should be divided by Ne Win's personal lucky number 9. Therefore Ne Win demonetized all the large notes and replaced them with forty five and ninety kyat notes.

Only this morning Eh Eh awakened feeling happy only four kyats away from reaching her goal of one hundred kyats for a new hta mein but now she was thirty nine kyats away! Her tears flowed and she was not alone, for everyone in Burma was crying either inwardly or outwardly.

7

Thanakha

Wai Wai wet the small cake of hard thanakha paste. Holding it in her fingers, she slowly rubbed it in the middle of her Kyauk Pyin (stone grinding plate) with a little water in a circular motion to grind it into paste. The piece became smaller and smaller and finally disappeared into paste. She judged there to be enough thanakha paste for her morning's makeup. Taking the paste, Wai Wai used her fingers to rub it on her cheeks and forehead. How good and cooling it felt! Its pleasant aroma contributed to her feeling of well being. Everyone knew thanakha conditions the skin and protects it from the sun. Women use it liberally on themselves and children. Some men even use it too. Many believe it makes the skin fairer.

Phyu Phyu Kyaw, her daughter, came running in, and seeing her applying thanakha, pleaded, "Amay (Mother), put some on my cheeks too."

"We'll use it to treat your rash," said her mother adding a little salt to the paste. She wiped up the last of the thin paste and rubbed it on Phyu Phyu Kyaw's cheeks. "Grind some more and put some on my arms too," her seven year old added.

"It's all used up. That was the last of the last cake. We will have to buy some more when we go bazaaring." her mother said.

A little later, Wai Wai and Phyu Phyu Kyaw went on their daily trip to the bazaar to buy the food for the day's meals. After making those purchases with the usual bargaining, they stopped by the thanakha seller. Spread before her were stacks of limb sections of the thanakha tree (Chinese Box Tree) of various sizes, qualities and types. Also on display were cakes and domes of dried thanakha powder with the labels of various makes each proclaiming theirs to be the best. Wai Wai gave her attention to the natural sticks because she felt the ready made cakes were often diluted with other powders.

The sticks varied in length from a few inches to a couple of feet long and varied from about an inch in diameter on up to several inches.

When Wai Wai asked the price, the seller pointed to one stack and said, "That is first quality Shinmataung Thanakha and is 100 kyats a stick; that is second quality at 80 and this pile is third quality at 60. Over here is Shwebo Thanakha first, second, and third quality at 60, 40, 25 kyats."

"It seems much higher than last time," Wai Wai commented.

"Thanakha grows very slowly and most of the wild trees have been cut, so it is getting much harder to find," the bazaar seller revealed. "These were cut in the summer and so, are dry and better. Some is being grown on plantations but that takes ten to fifteen years and is expensive too."

Wai Wai picked up a stick of third quality Shwebo, so-named because it came from the Shwebo district in Upper Burma. As she smelled it, Phyu Phyu Kyaw tugged at her arm saying, "Can't we buy Shinmataung this time, because most of my friends are using that."

"Shinmataung is expensive. Will your friends know the difference?" Wai Wai asked.

"Of course they will know what I am wearing! Shwebo is more yellow and has a different smell," her daughter answered knowledgeably.

Her mother sighed. "How soon children learn what is more desirable." Wai Wai picked up a stick of third quality Shinmataung and smelled it. "Where is this from?" she asked.

"From Shimmadaung Hill in Myaing township of Pakokku Division," the seller answered, "Finest quality. Grows in the high, dry areas. Note it is hard mature wood."

Wai Wai saw that the third quality was small in diameter and, therefore, less desirable new growth. The best thanakha came from old, slow growing trees of larger diameter. Picking through the second quality sections, she found one of the smaller diameter that looked as if it came from a slower growing

tree. "How about this one? It's about the same size as the third quality. How about third quality price?"

"But, it is harder. I'll let you have it for only 75 kyats," the bazaar seller said.

Wai Wai carefully considered the stick. While the stick of third quality Shinmataung cost fifteen kyats more than first quality Shwebo, it was considerably smaller and would not last as long. Therefore using Shinmataung would be much more expensive. All the Shinmataung stick could be ground on the home grinding plate while the harder heart of the Shwebo would have to be taken to the thanakha grinder to be reduced to powder.

Wai Wai reluctantly put back the stick of Shinmataung thanakha and said to her daughter, "Thami (Daughter), I'm sorry, we just cannot afford Shinmataung now. You will have to wait until you marry a rich man."

Wai Wai picked out the largest stick from the pile of second quality Shwebo and remembering the seller had quoted forty kyats, said, "Thirty kyats?"

"Thirty eight kyats."

"Thirty five kyats!" Wai Wai countered.

"Thirty seven kyats. No less."

"That quality can be bought at Mingala Market for 35 kyats," Phyu Phyu Kyaw chimed in.

"Oh, all right this time," the Thanaka seller responded.

Wai Wai looked at Phyu Phyu Kyaw saying, "How is it that you can learn the grades and prices of thanakha in all the markets but can't memorize the kings of Burma and their accomplishments?"

"Thanakha is more important. I want to be on the same level as my friends at school," Phyu Phyu Kyaw responded honestly.

The deal struck, Wai Wai and Phyu Phyu Kyaw departed carrying their foods and the thanaka stick. Phyu Phyu Kyaw wore a frown because she knew she would be wearing Shwebo while some of her friends would be lording it over her by wearing Shinmataung Thanakha. Noting her frown, Wai Wai said, "Be happy we can afford Shwebo thanakha and you don't have to wear Shan thanakha or Thee Gauk (less expensive substitutes).

In the weeks ahead, after carefully cleaning the section, Wai Wai would slowly grind off the bark and sap wood on her stone grinding plate until all that softer part had been used up. The heart of the limb was too hard for home grinding so Wai Wai would take it to a thanakha grinder who, for a few kyats, would grind it to a thick paste. Wai Wai would make the paste into cakes and show them to the sun until they hardened. These could be ground with water to paste again on her plate as needed.

Even though ready-made thanakha cream or powder is now available in the markets, Wai Wai prefers to grind her own. Thanakha is used with folk medicine. When mixed with the husk of the Bengal quince fruit, it is an antipyretic. For itching from some skin diseases it is mixed with folk medicine like thway say (blood purifier) and used externally.

8

Paper Bags

Excitement filled Pan Phyu (White Flower). She had been enjoying vacation since school let out in March. Now it was June and she had received the results of her three tests and learned she had passed. Now she could go on to the fourth standard. Her mother, Nwe Win, had told her how proud she was of her for passing. Then she said they would now have a special project to earn money. Pan Phyu wondered what it would be. Anxious to earn money to help her family, she eagerly asked her mother about the project. Nwe Win smiled and said, "Let's see how long it takes you to guess!"

After a quick breakfast of leftover rice, Pan Phyu and Nwe Win set off to the bazaar to buy the day's food. Because they had no refrigeration, food had to be purchased each day. At the tomato seller they bought one viss (about 3.5 pounds) of greenish red, hard tomatoes which the seller put in a paper bag made from an old ledger paper. At the salt seller, the woman made a cone out of an old magazine page and filled it with salt. They bought some potatoes after the usual bargaining and the woman quickly wrapped them in banana leaves and tied it with string-like split bamboo.

Walking past the elephant-chickens (turkeys) they came to the fish. Here they bought a fresh fish and the man selling it took thin split bamboo and tied one end around the front of the fish and the other end near the tail so it could be easily carried like a small purse. Nwe Win said it was clever of the seller to do that because it was a fine fish and as they carried it home, shoppers coming to the bazaar might see it and ask where they purchased it.

Nwe Win wanted a little milk so they stopped at the milk sellers. She dipped her hand in the milk and watched how the milk ran off her fingers back into the container. By experience Nwe Win could tell how much water had been added to the milk to make it go farther. After testing the milk of several sellers, she found one with only a little water added and they bargained on price. An agreement reached, he filled her container. Everyone dipping their not too clean hands into the milk horrified western tourists who watched.

After more bargaining and purchasing, they stopped at a stall selling white powder in plastic bags. The woman asked two kyats a bag. Since the price was right, Pan Phyu's mother did not counter, paying the two kyats.

"What is that powder?" asked Pan Phyu.

"Glue!" Nwe Win answered.

Usually they bought only food at the bazaar, but today they bought glue. Pan Phyu wondered if the glue was going to be used in the mysterious money-raising project. This kind of glue was only good for paper. It didn't work well on wood or bamboo. As they walked out of the bazaar, Pan Phyu saw a merchant handing a small sack covered with writing to a customer. It looked like a school report page that had been made into a paper sack.

Suddenly some facts came together in Pan Phyu's mind! With school over and the knowledge she had passed the tests, she no longer needed all the notes she had laboriously copied in class. "We're going to make paper bags and sell them to the merchants!" Pan Phyu exclaimed to Nwe Win. Pan Phyu knew instantly from her mother's pleased look that she had guessed right.

At home Pan Phyu gathered up all the notes and notebooks she had used during the year. Taking a paper bag Nwe Win received earlier at the bazaar, she showed her daughter how the paper was folded so the seam came in the middle of the side. Then she showed how the bottom was folded to make it strong.

Nwe Win mixed a little of the powder with water and boiled it for about half an hour which made a small pot of glue. She folded the paper, put the glue along the seam and pressed the paper together.

Deftly, she folded the bottom and then glued it too.

Pan Phyu tried to do the same. But hers didn't look as even and neat as Nwe Win's. Nwe Win encouraged her, showing her how to line up the fold with the writing to make the sides parallel. At first Pan Phyu put on too much glue and it oozed out, but being an observant child, she quickly learned just how much to pick up on the stick and how thin to spread it.

When her mother left her to do other household chores, Pan Phyu knew she was making satisfactory sacks.

At first Pan Phyu found it fun making sacks, trying to make each one better than the last, but as the hours went by, it became boring. But Pan Phyu kept on working because being bored was no excuse to quit in Burma.

To keep them from sticking to each other, the sacks had to be spread out without touching each other while they dried. Soon the floor was covered with sacks. Pan Phyu thought they would have looked better if they did not have writing all over them, but paper being expensive, she always wrote on both sides. Sometimes she glanced at the notes, recalling the lesson. Burmese students are expected to learn by taking many notes or copying what the teacher has written on the board.

Pan Phyu worked all day and when supper time came, she had made over a hundred sacks. They dried quickly in the hot air and she gathered and sorted them so that each pile had the same size.

The next morning Pan Phyu and Nwe Win went to the bazaar, taking their sacks. Several merchants turned them down, saying they already had sacks. One asked the price.

"Eight kyats for a hundred" Nwe Win answered.

"I'll give you five!" the merchant answered.

"No, I can't sell that cheaply. I can sell at seven."

"No, five!"

Pan Phyu's mother walked on. Finally they found a merchant who would pay six and they settled for that. Pan Phyu felt proud. She had helped earn money to aid her family. Since she was now eight years old, she was expected to do whatever she could to help her family.

9

Primary School

Excited because it was the first day of Primary School, Naw Eh Ku carefully dressed in her white blouse and green skirt. All school children, both boys and girls, were required to wear white and green throughout the country.

Breakfast consisted of coffee and fried rice. The Burmese eat rice for every meal. Leftover rice from the previous evening meal, when fried, became a delicious breakfast. Naw Eh Ku had drunk coffee since she was four years old.

Soon her mother would walk with her to the school. Naw Eh Ku had mixed feelings about starting school. She was Sgaw Karen, an ethnic minority of Burma, and she knew most of the children in the school would be Burman. As some Burmans looked down on the Karens, she didn't know how she would be accepted. Some Karens returned the attitude and felt the Burmans were arrogant, rude, and had low morals. Naw Eh Ku had not played much with Burmans because her neighborhood was mostly Karen but the few Burman children she had met seemed the same as Karen children. But on the other hand, Primary School represented a step toward growing up. That would make Naw Eh Ku more worthy of respect with those in her circle of playmates who had not yet started school. At school she would need to remember to use her Burmese name, Ma Aye Aye.

Many Karens thought it best to use a Burmese name, hoping it would help avoid discrimination problems later. But at home she was Naw Eh Ku which meant "cool love". In a hot country like Burma, coolness was pleasant, and so cool love was a desirable kind of love. When western foreigners asked her the meaning of her name, she soon learned to say "warm love" because to people who dwelt where there are winters, warm is better than cold. But to her Burmese friends she was "cool love".

School started at 7:00 so Naw Eh Ku and her mother arrived well before seven. The class room was crowded and the children sat six to a four foot desk. Until the seventh standard, boys and girls were allowed to sit together. There were sixty-three children and one teacher in the room. Subjects studied included Mathematics, Burmese and the Environment. Instruction was in Burmese and Ma Aye Aye quickly learned not to use Karen language in school. She had heard Burmese all her life, but at home, with her playmates or at church, she spoke and heard Karen.

At 9:00 there was short break to eat and she had rice and curry like most of her classmates. Some did not eat and she knew they must be poor and could not afford to eat three times a day.

Some of the children were brought every day to school by their nanny, grandmother, or mother. Usually ten to twelve of these adults waited outside the school. These nannies gossiped, sewed and watched the goings on the classroom. At break time their children would come outside and eat with them. The rest stayed inside and ate at their desks. Food was carried in containers stacked on top of each other and held together by a long handle through loops on their sides.

At first Ma Aye Aye did not do well in school, being shy about using the Burmese language. In Kindergarten the teacher had divided the class into the white sheep and black sheep. Ma Aye Aye felt the sting of being a black sheep, meaning her level of achievement and behavior fell in the bottom half of the class. The black sheep sat on one side and the white on the other. Ma Aye Aye was very happy when she learned this was not done in Primary first standard. As her knowledge of Burmese improved and the taunts of being a "dumb Karen" motivated her, her scores improved and she stood above the middle of her class.

At 12 o'clock Ma Aye Aye's school dismissed and she went home. Another set of primary students came to the building with a new set of teachers. Since her teacher had sixty-three to teach, Ma Aye Aye did not learn much and so she took private tutoring in the afternoon. Many of the tutors worked for the

government as morning teachers and in the afternoon as private tutors even though it was against government rules for teachers to tutor. But their pay being so low, they could not survive on a teacher's wage and so they tutored and the government turned a blind eye.

Having no library in the school, Ma Aye Aye only saw the books she was required to buy for her classes. The play yard around the school had no play equipment of any kind. In fact the yard was messy and smelly because there was no toilet for the school of 200 children. The children went to the toilet where they could.

During the first week, the teacher appointed a monitor who was usually the oldest child in the class. When the teacher had to leave the room, the monitor wrote the names on the board of those who talked instead of studied. These students were then punished upon the return of the teacher. The monitor swept the floor and often helped the teacher carry her large basket containing her books, paper, pencils, lunch chalk and erasers to class as nothing could be left in the classroom during the afternoon session or overnight. He had to fill the red clay water pot from the school well as there was no running water.

Sometimes the children brought fruit for the teacher which she appreciated because they truly helped her to eat.

Ma Aye Aye often found school very boring and she made paper dolls and dresses and played with them when the teacher was not watching. The student sitting beside her was a Burman, named Ma Thu Zar, who made beautiful dolls. One day, Ma Thu Zar, was playing with a new doll behind her book and Ma Aye Aye whispered, "May I play with it?"

Ma Thu Zar passed her the doll and Ma Aye Aye became so fascinated with it, she failed to see the teacher approaching. The teacher snatched the doll from her and demanded, "Where did you get this?"

Ma Aye Aye could not betray her seat mate and said, "It is mine."

The teacher told her to "Na Yawet Swe Htine Hta (Hold one's ears, sit down and stand up.)" She had to do this ten times in front of the class with everyone laughing at her. She returned to her seat thoroughly chastened. At lunch time Ma Thu Zar handed Ma Aye Aye a banana and said, "Thank you for not betraying me." Thus began their friendship and Ma Aye Aye learned there were nice children among the Burmans. In fact some of her best friends were Burman.

Teachers strongly believe the truth of the saying, "Spare the rod and spoil the child." Corporal punishment is liberally given. When several had not done their homework, they were forced, as a group, to hold their ears and sit down and stand up. If two children got into a fight, the teacher punished them by making them hug each other in front of the class or hold each other's ears while doing squat downs and stand ups. Other forms of punishments included pinching the skin hard on their stomachs or penciling a mustache on their upper lip for the class to ridicule. For graver infractions, such as talking back to the teacher or to other students, students were forced to stand in front of the class, and receive a painful paddling with a bamboo stick on their bottom or hands. That did make them more careful and obedient!

If two children had a conflict and one wanted to resume their friendship, he would approach the other with his forefinger extended parallel to the ground and the index finger touching the end of the forefinger making an elliptical circle. If the other child wanted to accept his offer of friendship, he would squeeze the fingers together. If he did not want to accept the reconciliation offer, he would put his finger through the elliptical hole and pull the fingers apart.

For recreation, the children made up their own games. One game, called Sein Pyay Dan, literally Run Diamond Done, involved a chaser who tried to catch any of the other players. If a player tired and realized he was about to be caught, he would squat down and couldn't be tagged "it". If the chaser tapped him on the head, the player had to stay squatted until another player touched him on the head. If the chaser caught a person, he became the chaser. If the chaser forces all players to squat, then the first player to squat became "it" or the chaser.

Another game Aye Aye liked used a string of rubber bands looped together. One on each end held it at knee height while the player jumped it in various ways, took it down to the ground with her feet, jumped and crossed her feet and performed other antics requiring skill, balance and nimbleness. The string was raised until the performer was unable to jump it.

During the summer, when public school dismissed, Ma Aye Aye went to a school organized by the Karen Baptist Church where she answered to Naw Eh Ku and learned to read and write Karen. It was not called a Karen school because private schools in this socialistic country were illegal.

10

The Pig Broker

Sein Myaing quickly washed her hands and took her place at the low table with the rest of the family. Her mother placed a huge bowl of steaming rice in the middle of the table and Sein Myaing served first her father and then mother as a sign of respect. Then she served herself and her brother and sister. Her mother brought the bowl of curry and Sein Myaing, her oldest child served her father and then her mother, putting the spicy, stew-like sauce on the rice. Sein Myaing used the fingers of her right hand to mix the rice and curry together. She added a little ngapi, a strong flavored fish sauce, and mixed some more. It felt so good in her fingers. Then she made a ball of this rice mixture and popped it into her mouth. The rest of the family also ate with their right hands, including her parents, as this was the custom in Burma. Even when they ate out in a restaurant, which they rarely did, they ate with their fingers, as they liked to say, "I know where my hand has been and how clean it is, but I don't know about the utensils at the restaurant." Sein Myaing experienced her food three ways--touch, smell and taste.

A bowl of watery soup in the center within reach of all had a spoon for each person. All took spoonfuls to help wash down the rice.

"Ma Sein Myaing," her father said, "a boy came by and said his mother, Daw Bway Say, had a pig for sale."

"Good," shouted Sein Myaing's brother, "now we can have pork!"

"Yes, it's been a long time since we had pork," her mother said, "I'm afraid to buy it in the market. You never know how old that pork is and there are so many flies crawling on it. Or how much water has been added to it to increase the weight!"

"I'll go out and see her tomorrow. I think my customers will be ready to buy again." said Sein Myaing. "I hope U Dan Doe is free to go with me." Dan Doe was a cook at a nearby religious school and did butchering on the side and always went along to help size up the pig to see how much meat it was likely to yield.

The next morning Sein Myaing went to the school. After Dan Doe had finished his work of feeding the students, they began the hour walk out of the town to a nearby village of Plaw La Hay where Bway Say lived. The bright green paddy fields gave the village its name which meant "Green Fields". Paddy is rice before it is harvested and cleaned. Just a little mist remained in the low places and Sein Myaing thought it was appropriate they were going to see Bway Say whose name meant "silver mist". When they reached Bway Say's split bamboo and thatch house, Sein Myaing shouted, "Daw Bway Say, are you home?"

"Here I am,"said Bway Say coming around the corner of her house with three children following. "have you had rice today?" This is the Burmese equivalent of good morning because, in Burmese thinking, no morning could be good if you have not had rice to eat to start the day.

"Yes, thank you," said Sein Myaing.

"And what kind of curry did you have with it?" asked Bway Say, as it is the custom to ask this sort of personal question.

Sein Myaing then asked about the health of her children, husband, and other related things as she did not consider it polite to just start in on negotiating for the pig without the personal conversation first. After the proper amount of time, the conversation got around to the pig. Bway Say led them to a pen under the house, for the house was built up four or five feet above the ground and the pigs were kept under the house where they could be protected from thieves. The pen had a bamboo floor which kept them relatively clean.

"Are you going to sell Mee Net (Blackie) or Phyu Phway (Whitey)?" the oldest child asked anxiously.

"We must sell Mee Net because he is now big and eats a lot!" answered Bway Say and turning to Sein Myaing and Dan Doe she added "you see the children are attached to them so we must sell to you and you..." Sein Myaing knew Bway Say thought it best to have the pig slaughtered away from the children.

Dan Doe felt the pig's back to see meatiness and said, "I think he should yield about thirty five, maybe forty viss of..." Dan Doe was about to say "meat" but caught himself remembering the children who considered Mee Net and Phyu Phway to be pets. A viss is about 3 1/2 pounds.

In this kind of transaction, the pig is sold on the basis of how much meat it yields and not its gross weight on the hoof.

"How much are you asking?" asked Sein Myaing beginning the negotiations.

"I'm thinking thirty five kyats per viss." said Bway Say.

"Market price is now thirty kyats," Sein Myaing countered.

"But this is such a fine pig!" exclaimed Bway Say.

The negotiations went on until a price of thirty two kyats was reached and agreed upon. We'll pick up the pig on Sanay Nay" said Sein Myaing. Sanay Nay is Saturn's day, as the Burmese days are named after the planets. Sanay Nay would be Saturday in English.

Upon returning home Sein Myaing began to make the rounds visiting her regular customers. She sold the meat at thirty seven kyats a viss if they paid her at the time of delivery and forty two kyats a viss if they paid at the end of the month when they, like most Burmese, got paid. Some requested certain parts, but knew they would not always get the parts they asked for. The most desired parts were the thigh, tongue, liver, heart, and intestines. She carefully recorded their commitments in her notebook and who would pay when.

Since there was no refrigeration, all the meat must be sold and distributed immediately after slaughtering. By Friday she had sold thirty seven viss with the purchasers of the last two understanding the pig might not yield enough for them. Her customers preferred to buy from Sein Myaing because they could be sure the meat was fresh and came from a healthy pig. While in theory meat sold in the market has been government inspected, in practice some of the meat came from sick pigs or pigs that had died. Sein Myaing also gave a full viss with no added water. If one was not careful in the bazaar, one could pay for a viss but end up with less than a viss.

On Saturday with two strong friends, Sein Myaing and Dan Doe walked to Plaw La Hay and picked up Mee Net, as Bway Say's children kept calling him. First they tied his front feet together and then the back feet. Mee Net sensed something unpleasant was going to happened and did everything possible to make the task hard. Then they put a strong bamboo pole, between the legs and squealing Mee Net hung from the pole, protesting loudly about being carried between Sein Myaing's two friends. Bway Say would be paid after the pig was slaughtered and the meat weighed, so there had to be a high level of trust between Sein Myaing and Bway Say. If Bway Say had sold to the bazaar butchers it would have been on the basis of gross weight and she would have been paid immediately but less than Sein Myaing paid.

Mee Net was heavy and Sein Myaing's friends swore he grew heavier with each passing minute. At last they arrived to Sein Myaing's yard where the slaughtering was done. The ground was swept clean and clean boards were laid down on which to work. A quick thrust of a spear dispatched the pig and then the blood was drained and saved. The blood would be dried in the sun until it became hard and dry. Then it would be sold to persons who would boil the blood, slice it, and dip it into pepper sauce and eat it. It was very delicious this way.

Meanwhile a large container of water was heated to boiling. Throwing the boiling water on the pig and using a large knife, Dan Doe scraped off the hair. When smooth and hairless, the pig was gutted and all parts saved. While the intestines were washed out, Dan Doe cut up the pig using a saw and big sharp dah (knife). The bigger bones were cut out and the meat was then weighed using a large scale

from Dan Doe's school. It totaled thirty eight viss which proved Dan Doe's good judgement of yield. The head, fat, intestines and bones were not weighed, as these were part of Sein Myaing's compensation. Dan Doe received one viss for his work of butchering the pig.

Some of her customers came to watch the slaughtering and to ask for certain parts. Sein Myaing then divided up the pig in one viss piles, trying to give each some of what parts they wanted and while still making all piles desirable. Most of her customers were regulars who bought time after time from her so she wanted to keep them happy. The big scale having been returned to the school, Sein Myaing used the family scale which could weigh up to two viss. Most Burmese homes had a scale which consisted of two pans suspended from a bar and with a one viss weight on one pan, meat was added to the other pan until it balanced. She then took a sharpened piece of split bamboo and skewered the pieces and the tied the ends to make a ring for easier handling and keeping the meat from coming off.

Then she put the rings in a basket and carried the meat to each customer's house. Most lived in her neighborhood but some lived a distance away, so distributing required real work. The majority had their money ready when they received their meat but there were always several who didn't and who promised to pay at the end of the month. Sein Myaing knew some of these debts would take persistence to collect. Some checked the weight of their meat and found it to be a full viss.

She even sold a viss to Daw Ju who had not paid for the last meat she had "purchased" but she was very poor and lived in a small hovel. Sein Myaing considered that sale to be really a gift. Burma has no welfare system so everyone in each neighborhood is expected to help those in need.

With most of the money collected, Sein Myaing figured thirty two times thirty eight viss equalled one thousand, two hundred, sixteen kyats which she delivered to Bway Say.

Sein Myaing's mother cooked the head and fat and that night they had delicious pork curry. The bones were boiled for soup.

Some of the bones and fat were sold off so Sein Myaing figured she would make about 500 kyats if she was able to collect all the debts. And her family had safe, fresh pork.

11

The Tattooed

"Grandfather, tell us about your tattoos." said Aye Min, looking at his grandfather's great tattoos that covered his thighs from his knee to hip. One leg showed a great, ferocious tiger and the other an elephant.

Aye Lon had come in wearing his longyi pulled up and tucked in about his waist which gave him much freedom of motion. It also show his extensive tattoos.

"I had them done long ago. When I was only a couple of years older than you are now," Aye Lon responded and a faraway look came into his eyes. "Back then all young men had at least their thighs done. In my day a woman would not marry a man without tattoos. Men thought that tattoos were a sign of manliness."

"I have seen other men with other designs," said Aye Min. "How did you choose a Tiger and Elephant?"

"The tattooer had a book of tattoo designs and I went through it and picked out the Tiger which symbolizes bravery and power. Later I chose the elephant which stands for strength.

"Why did you have it done?"

"Tattoos are a symbol of courage. Some think they scare the enemy. I think they help protect from evil spirits. Certainly they helped protect me during some fierce battles during World War II. I was never wounded and I'm sure the tattoos are the reason." grandfather said.

"Was it painful?" asked Aye Min.

"Yes, very! I lay in bed for two days in pain!' his grandfather grimaced. "Had to avoid sour food and drink. Submerged myself in water four times a day to facilitate healing. After seven days the tattoo wounds began to itch. It took steel will power to refrain from scratching."

A friend of mine went into a house where a child had been born recently just after he was tattooed. He almost died from itching. He didn't know he should not go into such a house during recovery. Fortunately someone told him to cleanse himself with incense and talcum."

"How is tattooing done?" asked his grandson.

"First they make the ink by collecting soot on a disc over a lamp of sesamun oil. They mix this soot with the gall or bile of a python and a little water. This is put into bamboo and tightly sealed. These are buried in swampy ground and left for fifteen days. Then the ink will be perfect for using.

"Then the tattooer uses a sharp instrument with a slot to hold the ink. The point penetrates the skin and puts ink under the skin. That is painful and each thigh took about five hours. Or course I did not do both thighs at the same time. No one can endure that much pain.

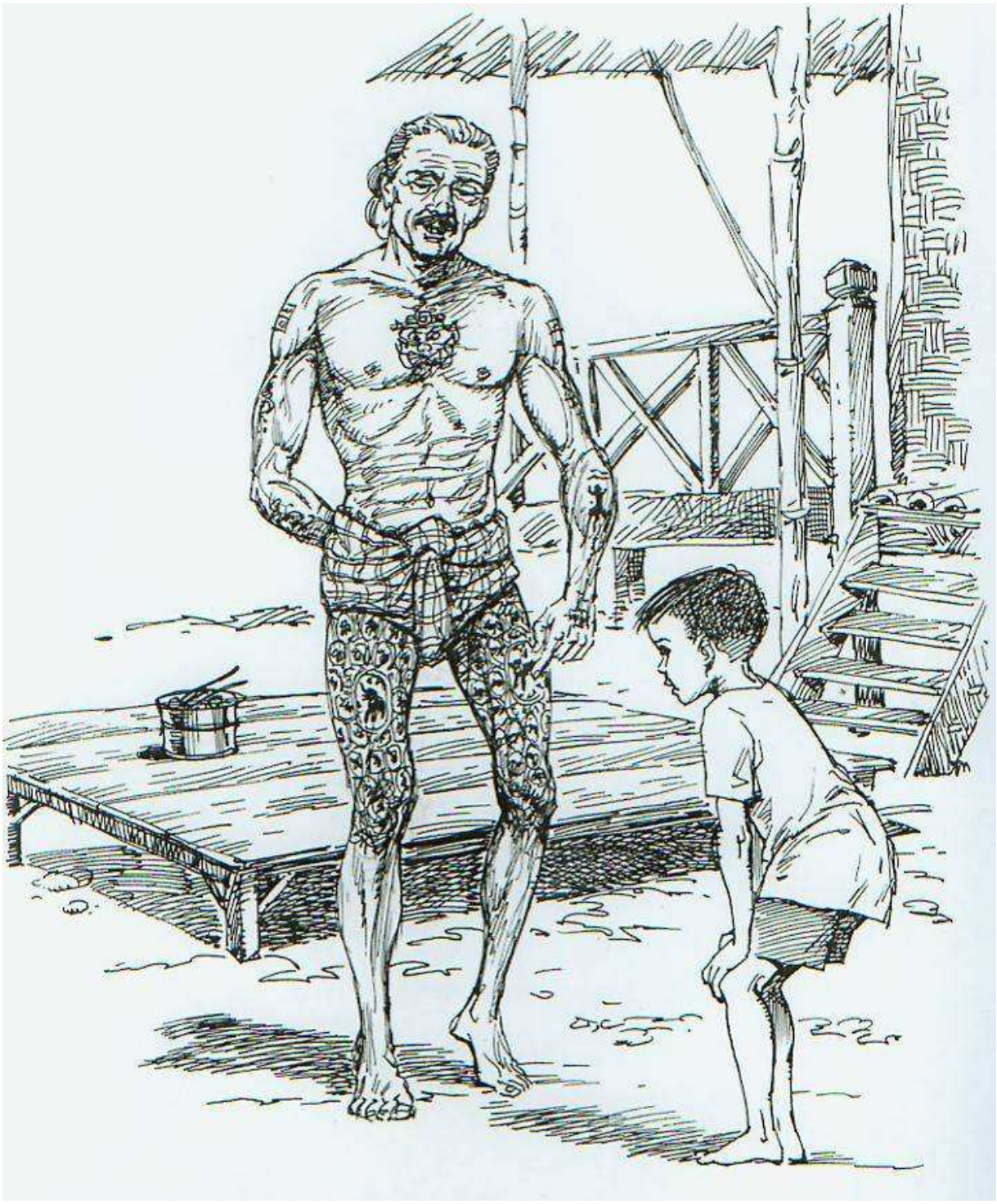
"I had a Shan do it. They were the best back then. He offered a coconut and two bunches of bananas to the nats. That certainly made it go as well as it could. He got the offering after it was over. Now most experts are Karen. It only cost 5 Kyats back then but then we had to work harder for that five kyats than your father does for a hundred kyats today.

"Now the young men only do their arms. The new generation is soft." Aye Lon said.

"Do all people do it?" asked Aye Min.

"Yes, tattooing is not confined to us Burmans. Other men from other tribes do it too. Karens do it for religious reasons.

"I'm going to have tattoos just like you, grandfather!" said Aye Min determinedly.



12

Mismatched Toes

Htway Htway ran into her house and found Auntie Lay. Htway Htway ran to her, sobbing, and held out a note. Lay took the note and slowly read it. Lay sadly invited the crying girl to sit on the teak double seat with her. As Htway Htway sobbed, Lay comforted her.

Htway Htway had sensed something was different yesterday when she and Maung Tin Tun had walked home from school. He seemed distant, as if he had something on his mind but was unable to say it.

After school today, Htway Htway had waited for Maung Tin Tun just outside the school gate as she always did. When he came, he did not seem happy to see her. Then he silently handed her the note and walked away. Htway Htway immediately sensed what the note might say and anxiously read it. It was a Pyatt Sai (broken letter). Americans would call it a "Dear John Letter." Some things are the same the world over. It hurts to read such a letter. "Ma Htway Htway, In this life, that's it. (It's over) The one who used to be yours." As a good Buddhist, Htway Htway believed all went through a series of lives, one right after another one. She understood Tin Tun was telling her that maybe in another life they would marry and find happiness but in this life, their relationship was over.

Again Lay tried to comfort her. Lay was only a few years older than Htway Htway and had come to the family many years ago. She had helped raise Htway Htway. Lay was what is called an Auntie. Even though she is not related to the family, she is considered part of the family and not just a servant girl. Lay loved Htway Htway in a sort of mother-older sister way. She knew how long the relationship with Maung Tin Tun had gone on and therefore how painful Htway Htway's rejection was.

Lay knew Tin Tun had passed notes to Htway Htway for months, telling her he loved her. Htway Htway had reluctantly followed Burmese custom by not responding, although she flashed him messages of encouragement with a quick smile or glance. Finally, after three months of reluctance, Htway Htway felt free to tell Tin Tun she loved him. They became boy and girl friends. They had spent many hours walking home together sharing and laughing. Many evenings Tin Tun had come to the house and visited with her under the watchful eyes of her parents and Lay.

"I was so sure he was my Pu Zar Shin (life partner)," moaned Htway Htway.

"Why were you so sure?" asked Lay.

"Two months ago, on the night of the full moon, I put half a glass of water on the head of my bed with a stick across it. That is supposed to provide a bridge so my life partner can come to me in a dream across the bridge and he did! It was Maung Tin Tun. The bridge fell down. If I had not been able to rescue him, he would not be my life partner. But I did rescue him."

Lay nodded and Htway Htway went on, "Last month again on the night of the full moon, I ate one boiled egg with salt and drank no water. I dreamed he came to me with a glass of water. I didn't see any ghosts and some say you should see ghosts before he came. A couple of weeks ago, I placed jasmine flowers in a glass at the head of my bed. I was supposed to wake up in the middle of the night and look in a mirror to see my life partner. I had a hard time going to sleep and then I slept until morning. I tried again the next night and only saw sleepy me in the mirror. Maybe you only get one chance. I even tried putting a pad of paper with a pencil beside my bed but no name was on it in the morning. I thought some of the signs pointed to him being my life partner. Now it's over!" sobbed Htway Htway.

"Yes," responded Lay, "but I knew it would not last."

"How did you know that?" asked Htway Htway.

"The first time Maung Tin Tun came to the house, I noticed his big toe was the longest, while your

second toe is the longest."

"What differences does that make?" asked Htway Htway in wonderment.

"Don't you know anything child?" asked Lay scornfully. "The big toe represents man and the second toe is woman. A man whose big toe is longest will dominate his wife. A woman whose second toe is longest dominates her husband and should marry a man who has his second toe sticking out farther than his big toe. A woman, whose big toe is the longest, will be submissive to her husband. If both toes are the same length, the person will be neither dominating or submissive and can have a partnership type marriage with someone who also has toes the same length. An even toed person can also get along with a dominant person. Since both you and Maung Tin Tun have dominant toes, it means you would be in continual struggle for dominance! It is better that you separate like a cow's hoof (Burmese saying for breaking up)."

"Are you serious or joking?

"I guess I'm joking, but you never know what truth might be in these folk sayings. If you believe you and Maung Tin Tun were not destined to marry, then it will be easier for you to accept.

"I guess we were destined to go our separate ways" said Htway Htway, feeling better. Then she joked, "why couldn't his second toe have been longer! Everything else seemed just right, he was a little taller and a little browner." In Burma many feel the less brown a woman is, the better. But a husband who is less brown than his wife, makes her look darker brown by contrast.

Then Htway Htway became thoughtful, "Daw Lay, you know last week when I was over at Maung Tin Tun's house, his mother asked me the date of my birth, the time and the day. I think she was gathering information to ask her astrologer if Maung Tin Tun and I would have an auspicious marriage."

"If she asked you those things then I'm sure she was. It appears that the report from the astrologer was not good. That may well be why Maung Tin Tun broke off the relationship." Lay said.

"If the astrologer said our marriage was not auspicious, it is better to find out now when it was a 1,500 relationship, instead of later when we tried to advance to a 2,028 relationship. Certainly, if it were inauspicious, it would never have developed to a 2,028 relationship," Htway Htway said, "I want a 2,028 marriage."

"A 528 relationship is fine between child and parent or brothers and sisters. I felt you had advanced to a 1,500 when you got serious," said Lay, "But it appears a 2,028 (1,500 plus 528) marriage was not in the offing. 'One goes, two comes, three waits, four stands.'"

Htway Htway smiled at that saying, which meant there were other fish (husbands) in the sea waiting to be caught.

13

Buffalo Bell

In the village of Ne' Mu Lu (Sweet Smelling village), Wah Shi stood behind a tree and watched Hti Mu come to the well. How gracefully she walked, he thought, with her straight and shiny black hair. Ah, she was a picture of everything a young woman should be. Her skin was fair, not too brown and without blemishes. Her...well they looked full and firm. How he longed to touch her but he could only imagine how soft and warm she must feel.

Hti Mu carried several pieces of folded clothes and a split bamboo box. She's coming to take her bath no doubt, thought Wah Shi. Social custom required him to look the other way but her flowing, confident walk fascinated him. He had grown up with her but recently he had noticed for the first time that she had become a woman and an attractive one at that!

Wah Shi picked up a stick of bamboo and with a knife, proceeded to split it to get long thin strands that could be used to repair the split bamboo fence around his house. It would be very embarrassing to be caught watching Hti Mu taking a bath so he had best pretend to be working on the fence.

Hti Mu had not seen Wah Shi as the tree obscured her view and if she had, she would have thought nothing about it. Women take baths at the village well every day. Hti Mu lowered the bucket by rope into the well, waited for the bucket to fill twenty feet below and then hauled up the water. Setting the bucket beside the well, she loosened her hta mein (skirt), a loose cylinder of cloth, from her waist and raised it so the top was just under her armpits and tucked it in. The bottom was now just above her knees. Then she pulled out her aingyi (blouse) from under the hta mein and unbuttoned it and took it off. Next she raised the front of the hta mein to hold it in her mouth exposing the back of her bollie (a Burmese combined camisole and brassiere) which she deftly unbuttoned, took off and laid with her aingyi. With a graceful motion she dropped her panties and then again tucked the hta mein around her under her arms. Wah Shi enjoyed her fluid motions. Taking a small bowl from her box, she filled it from the bucket and poured it over her head wetting her hair. The run off wet the hta mein and it clung to the shape of her body. Taking a half coconut filled with Tha Yaw, Hti Mu soaped her hair. She had made the Tha Yaw by soaking the stems of the Tha Yaw plant in water and then added seed pods to make a very effective shampoo. Working the jelly like liquid into her long and plentiful hair, she soon had a cleansing lather. Using another bowl of water, she rinsed her hair and wet those parts of her hta mein missed by the first run off.

Wah Shi worked on the fence tying loose bamboo pickets but watching Hti Mu out of the corner of his eyes. How gentle and lovely were her movements.

Wah Shi rubbed soap on her wet hta mein, washing it and the skin under it and then soaped her arms, face and legs. Loosening the hta mein, she used it as a wash cloth on her face and arms. Holding it in her teeth again, she put her hands inside it and washed the rest of her body. Satisfied that all was cleansed, Wah Shi again tucked the hta mein under her arms and taking another bowl of water, rinsed her face and arms and then poured the rest of the water over her shoulders letting it run down and rinse the hta mein. How pleasant and cool the water felt on her skin.

She paused for a moment enjoying the refreshing feeling of being clean and looked around. She could see someone working on a fence beyond a tree. Taking a step, she brought Wah Shi into full view but he was too absorbed in his work to notice her. Each and every muscle was visible on his bare chest. "Ah, how handsome and muscular he is. He certainly has become a man!" she thought, remembering how skinny he was growing up. "If only Saw Wah Shi would notice me, but he's only interested in repairing his fence." Then she spotted Wah Shi's older brother, Lah Shi, coming around the corner of the house and she stepped back to bring the tree between them.

The brief interlude had allowed the excess water to run off her hta mein and picking up the clean hta mein, she stepped into it pulling it up to encircle her body and the wet hta mein. She loosened the wet hta mein, dropping it to her feet. Putting on a clean bollie and panties was the reverse of taking them off. Taking a clean, dry aingyi, she buttoned it on and then reaching up under it, loosened her hta mein and lowered it to her waist.

Although Wah Shi had been watching all this time, he had seen nothing a modest girl would have been embarrassed to let him see. Her wet skin slightly dampened her new clothes but the air soon dried them. Hti Mu then wet, soaped and rinsed the clothes she had taken off earlier to complete her laundry. Gathering her things she walked toward her home with Wah Shi still watching every fluid move.

Wah Shi jumped when he felt a hand on his shoulder. "She's Mite De Kwa!" (Literally "foolish" but means attractive, stylish in this context) said his older brother.

"I.. I.. I" stammered Wah Shi "wasn't watching her!" and instantly knew how unbelievable that was.

"Come now, brother, you're no longer a child! Don't you think I watched Naw Paw Htoo before I married her?" and Lah Shi gave him a knowing nudge.

"I like Hti Mu. Do you think I have a chance with her?" Wah Shi asked, glad of his brother's understanding.

"Certainly you have a chance. Does a hunter catch a monkey if he never sets a snare? Even if he fails, the knowledge he gains from trying helps him catch the next one," Lah Shi encouraged.

Wah Shi then began courting Hti Mu in earnest. The village boys often hung around the well looking over the girls as they came to draw water. The boys would play their flutes to entertain the girls. Eyes were used for communication. Wah Shi told Hti Mu with his eyes that he liked her. She smiled and shyly glanced away from him as custom demanded but the sweet smile she shot to him told him she was reciprocating. Finally the relationship developed to the point Wah Shi asked if he could call on her at home and she invited him for tea. Wah Shi and two friends visited Hti Mu in her home where she served them all tea and they talked and joked while her parents tried to figure out which boy was really interested in their daughter. The evening finally came when Wah Shi felt secure enough to call alone.

After courting Hti Mu a long time, Wah Shi felt he had some influence on Hti Mu's liver, for that is the seat of love, and not the heart, as westerners mistakenly believe. As the relationship developed, he used the affectionate name Theh-Lay which meant "Little Liver". Finally he felt the time had come for his parents to ask Hti Mu's parents for her to be his bride.

His parents agreed to "Nar Pauk" which literally means "Make a hole in the ear" but is colloquial for asking the girl's parents for their daughter in marriage to their son. This his parents did and the girl's parents consented. A bride price of two cows and three pigs was agreed upon and so a marriage was arranged to be after next harvest when there was less work and more money.

A house was built for the engaged couple and a wedding date set. On their wedding day, their friends decided to play a joke on them and took a buffalo bell from a neighbor's buffalo and tied it under the flexible, bouncy split bamboo flooring of the couple's house where they were to sleep. In the evening, after the wedding ceremony, the couple retired to the house. Their friends listened and sure enough the bell started ringing.

Wah Shi and Hti Mu heard it too and Wah Shi said, "Our neighbor's buffalo has strayed under our house!" Then they continued to consummate the marriage.

It rang so much that it woke the man next door who thought his buffalo was straying off. The man tried to awaken his son to go after the water buffalo before it strayed too far. The boy refused so the old man got up and went out looking for his water buffalo. He followed the sound and found the bell under Wah Shi and Hti Mu's house and discovered why it was ringing. Having been a newlywed years ago, he crept back to his house and listened to the continual ringing of the bell, chuckling to himself.

The bell rang again in the early morning.

14

The Church Builders

The Mang family excitedly walked home from church. The congregation had officially voted to build a new church. Ngun Hlei Thang enthusiastically said, "It will be the nicest church in the Chin Hills, maybe all of Burma!" His younger sister, Tial Ciang, echoed his feelings and added, "and all of us youth get to help build it!" Then she added, "Ka Pa (Father), you don't seem very enthusiastic about it?"

"Well, you have to remember I helped build our current church back in 1955 and we had to extend it three times trying to make it big enough to hold everybody. Each time the church got bigger, the congregation soon outgrew it. In 1970 we decided we needed a larger site so we could build a much larger church. It has taken eight years to get permission to use the site we need," their father, Duh Mang, answered. "And we only have 1300 baptized members so it will be a lot of work for each of us."

"Your father has worked hard getting the building site." her mother, Hlawn Kip Thluai, said. "If you look around and see how hilly our town of Falam is, then you can understand how few places are big enough, level enough and have the right soil to support a large church. You can't perch a heavy brick church on the side of a hill like you can a house."

"Yes," their father added, "we started negotiation for the building site in 1970 and here it is 1978 and permission has just been given. Here in the Chin Hills all land belongs to the government who will lease it for up to five years at a time to those who want land but the church will never own the land just as we don't own the land our house stands on."

"They said at the meeting the new site will be the old British Officers Club right in the center of town on the highest point. That surely is the grandest location!" said Ngun Hlei Thang.

"But the Officers Club is still on that land." said Tial Ciang, "and it is too small to be converted into a church."

"Yes, we will have to dismantle it and give all the bricks, wood, and material to the town council as part of the deal," their father added.

"All of the youth are supposed to be there tomorrow to start tearing it down and cleaning the brick." said the daughter.

Bright and early after a quick breakfast of fried rice, Ngun Hlei Thang and Tial Ciang walked up to the center of town and found the Officers Club swarming with over five hundred volunteers. Too many, in fact, because they got in each other's way. The church had appointed the church president and secretary as overseers of the demolition and they quickly organized the youth and adults who weren't employed into teams.

The volunteers dismantled the Officers Club in three hours. Then teams of women cleaned the brick. Children as young as nine and ten carried the brick to them for cleaning. Then the volunteers leveled the whole site by hand. Fortunately experts found good clay for making bricks within 400 yards of the site and the volunteers began to dig the clay and beat it into a powder. Children as young as eight helped clean the powder of sticks, roots, stones and grass. Older volunteers dug a large depression and put the clay dust in the depression along with water. Ngun Hlei Thang rolled up his pants like the other youth. Like most Chin men, he preferred Chin pants to Burman longyis. Tial Ciang and the other girls gathered up their Hni (skirts) and then the fun of stomping the mixture into a smooth mud began. A deacon experienced in brick making kept adding water until the mud reached the right consistency.

Occasionally a youth lost balance and provided entertainment for all when he fell in the sticky mud. Of course he responded to their teasing by throwing of gobs of mud at his tormentors and work temporarily stopped for a mud fight. However work soon resumed.

The church hired six professional brick makers who verified when the texture was right. The youth

scooped up the mud into loaf size portions and placed them near the brick makers' tables. A brick maker would wet his brick mold and sprinkle it with sand. He also sanded the loaf of plastic mud. He threw the mud into the mold and pounded it tight into the corners. With a stick he scraped off the extra mud. Then carefully tapping the mold at various angles, he got the mud to separate from the mold and then turned it over and dropped it out on a sanded board.

When wet bricks filled the board, a strong youth carried it to the drying field where others laid the wet bricks out to dry on their edge. At the proper time interval, the ten year old members of the church had the chore of turning the bricks over so the other edge would dry as fast as the first and it wouldn't crack.

Six skilled professional brick makers could, with the church members doing all the unskilled work, make about five thousand bricks a day. When thoroughly dried, they stacked the bricks until 50,000 accumulated. That took a little over a week. At first the brick makers were paid 20 kyats a day but, to speed up their work, they were later paid 2 pyas a brick so they earned about 25 to 30 kyats a day.

Then the church hired another expert to fire the brick. He carefully stacked the bricks as the volunteers handed them to him to make a kiln. The kiln had channels filled with wood which had to be brought from Sur Bung Tlang 10 miles away or Taal 15 miles from Falam. Then the whole outside was covered with clay to keep the heat in. Next the expert carefully fired the bricks. If the temperature rose too fast, the bricks would explode or crack. The fires burned for three days and nights. Since the brick firer had to work day and night, he was paid double during this time.

One night Ngun Hlei Thang helped tend the fires, the hottest work he had ever done. Sweat poured off his body as he pushed more wood into the channels in the kiln to keep the fires burning. After three days the kiln was sealed and the fires allowed to burn out and the whole thing cooled down. It took two days before the bricks cooled enough to be handled. The brick firer tapped two finished bricks together and listened to their ring. A dull thud would mean the bricks were under fired and would have to be used on inside walls. A clear ring meant the bricks fired all the way through and could be used on the outside walls where they could withstand the weather. Everyone cheered when he announced it had been a good firing.

Eventually six firings produced over 300,000 bricks.

Then the women of the church took responsibility for carrying the bricks up to the building site. The strongest loaded fifteen bricks into a basket which they carried on their backs with straps around their heads up to the top of the hill. Each brick measured 9" by 4". Fifteen bricks weighed about 42 pounds. Because there were not enough baskets some carried bricks in their hands. None carried bricks stacked on a coiled rag on their head as is done in Mandalay. Those less strong, like Tial Ciang, carried fewer brick but no one chided them as all were working for the glory of God.

While some made the bricks, others prepared the site. The men of the church dug a ditch three feet deep and three feet wide for the foundation around the perimeter of the church. The sixty feet by one hundred and twenty feet long church plan required a perimeter of three hundred and sixty feet which required a lot of digging. In addition the plans called for great columns every ten feet with bases five by five feet. Since the ground never freezes in Falam, three feet was deep enough.

The construction engineer ordered the foundation to be filled with very hard rock from the river bed of the Manipur River which was twelve miles away and 4,700 feet lower. Unloading the trucks by hand, the members carefully packed the rock into the foundation with sand.

They strengthened the foundation by capping it with reinforcing rods and poured concrete. Cement was expensive because of Falam's great distance from the government cement mill. Every bag of cement arrived underweight because each bag had been opened somewhere along the way and cement stolen to be sold on the black market. The sand for the concrete also came from the Manipur River. In hired trucks, the church people rode to the river and gathered the sand and loaded the trucks. Sometimes Ngun Hlei Thang drew this work. He enjoyed the ride down to the river but then came the

hard work of gathering and loading the sand. The trucks really strained coming up the long grade to Falam. Ngun Hlei Thang lost track of how many trips he made but when the church was complete, the overseer said it took over one hundred loads!

With the completion of the foundation, the whole church including the Mang family attended the laying of the corner stone by a former pastor who had served the church from 1964 to 1974. The cornerstone was marble ordered from Rangoon and put into a hollow of the wall. It read "TO THE GLORY OF GOD, FOUNDATION STONE OF THIS CHURCH WAS LAID BY REV. S. HRE KIO Ph.D. ON JAN 14, 1979. Unlike cornerstones in the west, it was not hollow so it did not contain anything. After speeches, prayers and the choir singing special songs, the leaders mortared the cornerstone in place. Tial Ciang had a fine voice and participated in the choir.

To make the cement go as far as possible, members mixed it with lime, brick powder and sand to make the mortar to lay the bricks. The lime came from six miles away and was made by digging a large hole in the earth, filling it with limestones and firing it from underneath for three days and nights. When the stones cooled, they were taken out, sprinkled with water and wonderfully turned to snow white lime.

They built the main walls eighteen inches thick. Ngun Hlei Thang learned a lot about building techniques as he worked on his church. The brick layers constructed the great supporting pillars by laying the bricks to make a cylinder and then filling it with concrete and reinforcing rods. The limestone for the concrete came from Lungpi (Big Rock) village six miles away and had to be broken up with hammers to make chips. Adults made the concrete by mixing sand, rock chips and cement by hand. The church hired experienced women to carry the wet concrete in baskets on their heads up the bamboo scaffolding to pour it into the columns and to make the lintels over the window. Since the work was considered risky, the women received good pay--seven kyats a day (28 cents). Anything over five kyats was considered above average pay in the Chin Hills, one of the poorest sections of Burma.

The church hired seven or eight masons for each day and they, being high skilled labor, made thirty kyats a day ($1.20). Gradually the walls extended upwards until they reached 21 feet. Eleven sets of pillars would hold eleven sets of wooden roof struts that would support the roof.

The days of work became weeks and the weeks months. The months went past and became years and still the work went on. Finally after almost four years, the masonry part of the construction was finished. Next work began on the wooden parts--the wooden window frames and roof struts. The teak came from the Kale Valley 78 miles away. The road was so bad with ups and downs that one trip took a whole day. The rafters and struts came from twenty miles away and were much cheaper.

Ngun Hlei Thang came home tired from another day of working on the church. He noticed his father seemed tired and quiet as the family ate supper together. "Is something wrong, Father?" Ngun Hlei Thang asked.

"Yes, we have just paid all the bills for the wood--teak and pyingadoe we will use for the window frames and pine for roof struts but we are out of money." his father said tiredly. "Everything cost more than we estimated. We have no money for the roof."

In Burma all banks are government owned and do not loan money to individuals or institutions like churches. Money from the private money lenders is very expensive because interest is from 36% to 100% per year! The practice of a church issuing bonds as they do in the U.S. is unknown in Burma and probably illegal. Therefore when the building fund and pledges are exhausted before construction is completed, it is a real crisis.

"Can't members give more?" asked Tial Ciang.

"Many of our members are in the same situation we are in." her father answered. "We're giving almost 12% of our income now and it is very difficult to give more. Some are giving as much as 30 per cent! Some have very little money and are raising extra pigs and chickens to sell for the building fund."

"Let's pray about it," their mother said and the family prayed about the problem. In fact the whole

church prayed that somehow, somewhere, money would be found to buy the sheet metal roofing to complete the church. It had been over fifteen years since the last American Baptist missionary to the Chin Hills had left but the church leaders wrote these retired missionaries hoping they might find friends in America to help. Vague answers came back from America. "We'll try to help in some way--you keep working on the problem."

While waiting for a solution, the work of installing the window frames and roof struts continued. The struts were a marvel of engineering, being made of great planks bolted together into two large triangles and a steel tie rod kept them from spreading. An architect had drawn plans for the struts but the carpenters were from the Figure-It-Out-As-You-Go-Along School who usually worked from plans in their minds. Therefore the architect found it a real challenge to get the carpenters to understand what he wanted. Since there are no cranes in the Chin Hills it was very tricky business getting the struts up on the tops of the columns. But Chin construction workers are extremely adept at doing the impossible and, with enough iron ropes (cables), pulleys and men, they accomplished the task. Then they nailed the boards to support the metal roofing in place. Where would the roof or the money for the roof come from?

Ngun Hlei Thang and Tial Ciang looked up from their studies when their father excitedly came home from yet another meeting at the old church. "We just received word from America that the Women's Group of the Pacific South West, the Baptist Women of Indiana, the Peachtree Baptist Church of Atlanta, Georgia, several churches in Denver, Colorado and the Yorkminister Park Baptist Church of Toronto, Canada, had made the new roof for our church their yearly project and they have raised enough money to buy the sheet metal roofing for us!" he exclaimed.

Besides having the money for sheet metal roofing, it was also necessary to get recommendations from local governmental authorities which allowed them to purchase 805 sheets. Later, permission to purchase another 500 sheets was obtained from the state government.

Ngun Hlei Thang was one of the church members chosen to go to Rangoon and escort the truck load of sheet metal roofing to Falam. One of the older escorts talked of going down to "Burma" to get the roofing. Under the British, the Chin Hills was a separately administered territory not part of Burma. Since 1948 it had been part of Burma, but to old timers, Burma started on the plains once you left the Chin Hills.

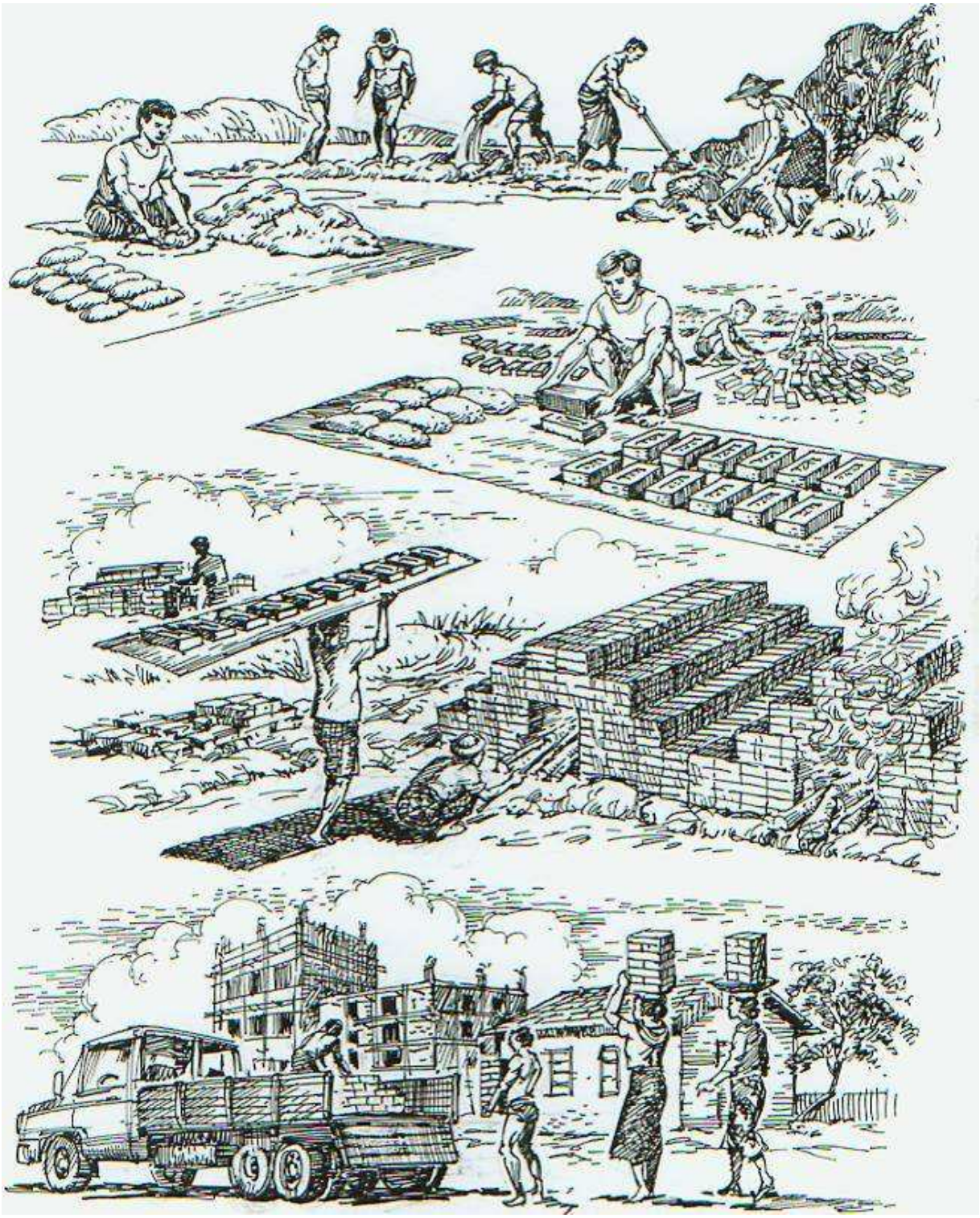
The sheet metal roofing was in very one and every body wanted it, especially in the Chin Hills where good thatching was not available. Therefore a truck load would need to be guarded at all times on the long trip of 800 miles from Rangoon to Falam. Ngun Hlei Thang found the trip very exciting as he had not been out of the Chin Hills before. But he found the plains so much hotter than the Chin Hills with their elevation of 5,000 feet. Also he knew only a little Burmese required in school. Chins rarely heard Burmese in Falam. Everyone spoke Laizo dialect--one of the forty five Chin dialects. In various towns they went through, people offered to buy the roofing not knowing it belonged to those guarding it so it was easy to see how a few sheets could "disappear" here and there if it were not guarded or if the guards were dishonest. At night several slept on top of the roofing. The roofing came by truck from Rangoon to Mandalay and on to Monywa where it was loaded on a river steamer which took it to Kalewa. At Kalewa the roofing again was loaded on a truck and taken to Falam.

A spontaneous celebration ignited when the truck arrived at Falam and soon the workers were nailing the sheets on the roof. With the nailing of the last sheet in place, the leaders set Dedication Day for December 25, 1983.

The whole Mang family joined with many other church families and worked preparing for the great dedication service and a huge feast afterwards. Tial Ciang and the choir practiced and practiced as they wanted to be perfect for the grand occasion. Ngun Hlei Thang and his father arose early on the Dedication Day and helped with the killing and butchering of many pigs and several mythons (Chin cows) as custom required free food to all who came to the celebration.

Over 4,000 crowded into the church and around the windows for the dedication service. Seven thousand came to the celebration feast at the sports stadium. Ngun Hlei Thang thought his sister sang very well and even laid aside sibling rivalry long enough to tell her. All who had helped in the four years of building which was almost every member received praise and recognition! Special thanks were given that no one had been accidentally killed in the construction and the pastor, who fell 21 feet and was unconscious for four minutes, had recovered. Later Ngun Hlei Thang and Tial Ciang received special praise from their father and mother. Their father also told them happily but tiredly, "I have built my last church. This one will hold 2,000 people. If we outgrow it, then you children will have to plan and build the next one."

The final cost was figured at fifteen lakhs of kyats--one and a half million kyats! (A lakh is 100,000 kyats) About a quarter of that had come from America. The church is the largest building in the Chin Hills and the pride of the Falam Baptist congregation. Ngun Hlei Thang and Tial Ciang felt justifiable pride in the part they had in building it.



15

The Outing

Saw Wah Htoo and Naw Thwe Htoo excitedly ran to their house. "Mama, the whole neighborhood is going to No Te Po! Can we go too?"

Their mother, Naw Eh Say, looked up as Wah Htoo and Thwe Htoo tumbled into the kitchen where she was preparing supper. "Where is No Te Po? And just who are going and why?"

"It's a village about a hundred miles from here. Saw Htoo Say and Naw Say Ra are from that village and several others in our neighborhood. They were planning to return to visit during the Christmas season and the village invited all their friends which means the whole neighborhood! It will be for two nights. Can we go? Can we?" they pleaded.

Eh Say said thoughtfully, "I won't say no until I talk with your father and see who all are going and what the plans are."

When Saw Htoo Htoo arrived home after a tiring day clerking at a government office, he was greeted by his enthusiastic children begging to go on the outing. Eh Say and Htoo Htoo investigated and found, to their surprise, the children's story basically true.

A committee collected money and, after much discussion, purchased gifts and prizes.

When the appointed day came, after Christmas, one hundred and thirty of the neighborhood residents climbed aboard the large truck that belonged to Saw Eh Mu, a trader, who used it to haul goods to and from up country. The canvas top had been removed and everyone crammed into the truck. There were women with babies, many children and youth, and an assortment of adults including senior citizens. Some, who had commitments and couldn't go, saw them off a little wistfully. Some also had to stay behind to guard the neighborhood against robbers and burglars.

The truck was so packed no one could sit down or even move but no one complained. The young men hung on the back with their feet on the steel framework, which allowed everyone to get in the truck. Wah Htoo felt pride that he was considered old enough to ride this dangerous way. Thwe Htoo rode in the bed as no self respecting boy would ever let a mere girl hang on the back of a truck. The truck started off amidst cheering and singing. Jokes about being packed like fish in a box brought laughs. Others told jokes and stories along the way, some at the expense of well known persons in the neighborhood. Wah Tote Lay (Little Fats), being fat by Burma standards, particularly suffered persecution. Her size would have passed unnoticed in any American mall, but in Burma such teasing is socially acceptable. Everybody knew everybody because that is the way neighborhoods are in Rangoon.

The rough road and the four hours it took to travel the hundred miles made the ride an ordeal but high spirits of adventure prevailed. The village lay four miles from the road and if they had been visiting in the wet season, they would have had to walk on the paddy dikes. But December, being the dry season, the paddy fields were just dry stubble. The villagers had leveled the dikes on the ox cart path so the truck, which had lower clearance than ox carts, could drive all the way to the village. The dikes would have to be rebuilt before the rains came.

At the entrance to the village, a decorated gate of bamboo, flowers and leaves had been erected to honor the visiting city folks. Most of the 300 villagers lined up and greeted them as they wearily dismounted from the truck and presented them with cups of tea to clear the dust from their throats.

The village contained about fifty houses, some of which were wooden, reflecting the prosperity of some of the families. Most were bamboo and thatch.

The villagers had killed a pig and prepared a wonderful lunch of pork curry for the city visitors. Chicken soup washed it down and vegetables completed the meal. Wah Htoo and Thwe Htoo really enjoyed pork, which they rarely got at home.

During the afternoon they practiced plays, pageants, and action songs. Wah Htoo and Thwe Htoo, with a mixture of neighborhood and village youth, discussed what play to perform, who was to do what part and what would be the lines. Other groups worked on other plays and skits.

Supper was more delicious food with Ngapi Chet, a paste of rotten fish, that most Burmese think has the greatest flavor. Wah Htoo liked it but Thwe Htoo thought it tasted "not delicious".

After supper some of the children wanted to play "Hide and Seek". To determine who would be the hunter, they first played Soldier, Captain, Tiger (similar to the American game of Rock, Scissors, Paper). The children paired off facing each other. Raising their hands together, they brought them down on "one", then on "two". On three, when they came down, each assumed one of three positions--Soldier with hands as if holding a rifle, captain with his hands on his waist in an authoritative position, or Tiger with their hands like claws. Soldier shot Tiger, Tiger mauled Captain and Captain was over Soldier. Losers were then paired until there was only one loser left and he covered his eyes while the others hid. After several games, they tired of the running and sat around in groups and talked.

The evening started with groups of city youth with village youth divided up in manageable size groups in different homes playing what Americans would call parlor games.

To play Buh Sho Dine the players divided up into teams of three and each team had a number. The first member shouted "Buh", the third shouted "Sho" and the middle "Dine" and another's team number. That group then quickly responded trying to say the words in the proper order. Teams that erred dropped out until there was a winning team.

Next they played Find the Leader. Wah Htoo was chosen to leave the circle and the remaining youth chose a leader. Wah Htoo returned and stood in the middle. Then the leader rubbed his own head and all the group immediately imitated him. When he switched to picking his nose, every one again followed his lead. Wah Htoo tried to guess who the leader was. When the leader started clapping, Wah Htoo heard who was first and guessed him. The leader then went out and the game started all over again.

The city folk introduced a game the villagers had not played called Pu Zar Shin (Life Partner). The girls numbered themselves in secret; then the boys counted off so the girls all knew each boy's number. A boy then kneels in front of any girl he chooses and asks, "Are you my Pu Zar Shin?" (Are you my life partner? [Do you have the same number I do?]) The girls all laugh at him and he has three tries to find the girl with his number. Of course there is much cheating with some girls looking at the boy with their number and winking. Thwe Htoo gave Wah Htoo a false signal much to his annoyance. It provided a socially acceptable way to interact with the opposite sex.

The houses were lit with candles or smoky kerosene can lamps which gave some light but made threading the needle very difficult. Each girl held a needle and a boy ran up to her and tried to thread the needle in her hand that was shaking with her laughter in the dim light.

Even the youth eventually tired of games and the rest of the evening was spent with groups of city folks going around to visit various houses and getting to know the villagers. Each house had Burmese tea and Tin Yet (balls of palm sugar) or Kyan Da Gar (pieces made from sugar cane). They enjoyed talking, sipping tea and sucking on the sugar. The villagers had many questions about life in the city. While many of the older people from the city had originally come from a village, the young visitors knew only city life and were curious about life in a village.

After Wah Htoo's and Thwe Htoo's group had visited in a home for a while, the children of that home began pleading with their grandfather to tell them a story. These children told the city visitors their grandfather's father had been a professional story teller going around to villages and telling stories to make a living. But when troupes appeared with cinema shows or bioscopes as they were called, the professional story teller lost his livelihood. However his young son had learned some of the stories and still remembered them as an old man. Sometimes he could be persuaded to tell one. The city people had not even heard of professional story tellers and were very curious to hear one. Their eagerness lit the eyes of the old man and he began. His voice became alive and captivating as the story unfolded. He

used different voices for different characters and painted an intense word picture of the scene so everyone could see it in their mind's eye. The story built to a climax as everyone listened intently. All joined in the laughter at the surprise ending and the old son of a story teller beamed, watching their response.

"Here is a piece of living history," Wah Htoo whispered to his sister.

A large group of adults and youth went around singing at each house and presenting tea cups as a gift from the city folks.

When any visitor became tired, he retired to one of the larger homes and slept on the floor. Burmese clothing allows a person to curl up in his longyi to ward off mosquitoes and the hard floor wasn't much harder than sleeping on mats. The youth sang and chatted until late into the night.

After breakfast, the villagers hitched up several ox carts and gave the city children a ride around the village. The wooden hubs made a creaking sound on the wooden axle. Villagers thought that noise kept away evil spirits. The village children found it quite amusing that anyone would find an ox cart ride interesting. After lunch Wah Htoo and Thwe Htoo continued to practice with others, a play they would perform that night. They wanted it to be perfect.

In mid afternoon, they had game time. They played Zagaw (Rice Tray) where each participant balanced a rice tray on his or her head and raced from the starting line around a rock and back to the starting line. Hands were not allowed to touch the tray so many did not complete the race. One villager was particularly adept and clowned around pretending to lose the tray but always managing to balance it at the last moment.

Frog Jumping involved every one sitting on his haunches and jumping from one line to another as fast as possible. Both young and old participated with the older heavier women receiving all kinds of uncomplimentary remarks about their grace. Wah Htoo got off to a good start but tripped on a root and went sprawling.

The next race was spoon in mouth race. Each held a spoon in his mouth and balanced a ping pong ball on the end. At the start signal, all race to the other line trying not to drop the ball. Thwe Htoo finished without dropping the ping pong ball, coming in third.

Both Wah Htoo and Thwe Htoo were part of a team in the Are Loo Cauk (Picking Potatoes) race. There were two lines of circles drawn in the smooth dirt. Teams lined up behind an empty circle. At start, one team member raced to the opposite circle which was filled with potatoes, grabbed one and raced back depositing it in his home circle. Another team member raced for another potato and so on until all the potatoes were back in the home circle. Wah Htoo and Thwe Htoo's team did well until Wah Tote Lay (Little Fats) was outrun by the other teams.

For Kyo Swe (Rope Pull) a very thick stout rope was brought out and put across a pig wallow with firm ground on each side. Villagers grabbed onto one end and city folk on the other. All ages participated, including rather buxom matronly women. The city folks actually outnumbered the villagers in this contest but the villagers' muscles were steeled from years of hard work. Slowly the villagers pulled the city folk ever nearer the muddy pig wallow. Wah Htoo was among the first city folk to reach the edge. He and others tried to let go of the rope. But their release sped the movement and not all were able to get out of the way of those behind them and so got pushed into the mud. Longyis also got stepped on and their owners dragged out of them so there were many shouts of "You're taking a picture!" meaning you are exposing yourself. Many on both sides ended up muddy and in their underwear. Both sides laughed so hard they rolled in the dust holding their sides. The muddied participants retired to the village well to wash themselves and their clothes.

The villagers then erected a large smooth bamboo pole which had a twenty-five kyat note fastened to the top. The pole had been liberally greased and all who tried to climb it slid down. But gradually the grease was wiped away and each contestant was able to climb higher and higher. Finally one of the villagers climbed high enough to grab the note amid cheers from all. The pole was lifted from its hole, a

T shirt fastened on top, regreased and reset, and the fun started all over again.

Wah Htoo and a friend entered the sack race where two persons stood in a big burlap rice sack and then, by jumping together, moved towards the finish line. By counting together and jumping on "two", they could coordinate their jumping and move together and so won the race.

Many had dropped out so the last game was Aket Ake' Kyaw (Going Through Difficulties). Three teams were formed with twenty on a team. Then the teams raced over an obstacle course which included climbing a tree and descending by a rope, racing around the pond with several going too close and tripping in the mud, walking along a big smooth bamboo placed across the now infamous pig wallow and a race through the woods and crawling under some downed dead trees. Poor Wah Tote Lay tripped going around the pond and came down hard on the soft ground making a large dent. Many gathered at the bamboo across the pig wallow expecting Wah Tote Lay to further entertain them but she disappointed them when she made it safely across that obstacle. Most ended up appropriately muddy or dirty requiring a trip to the well.

The last game of the afternoon involved sticking a 50 pya coin on the soot covered bottom of a pan which was then hung by cord from a tree limb at head level. Without using their hands, two or three boys tried to bite off the coin from the swinging pan which banged into their heads and covered their faces and head with soot everytime they touched it while the audience urged on their favorite contestant.

The villagers had outdone themselves with a supper of three kinds of curry--fish, chicken and pork. Three being the mark of a Patama Dan (first class) meal. While served in humble surroundings, it certainly was fit for a king.

The porch of one of the large wooden houses made a natural stage and the villagers and city folk sat on the ground before it. Kerosene lights, candles and torches provide adequate light as the village had no electricity.

Awards of soap, handkerchiefs, candles, and various plastic items such as combs, brushes, and boxes were presented to the winners of the afternoon games along with recalling highlights. The Master of Ceremonies even presented a prize to Wah Tote Lay for making the biggest dent in the ground when she fell in the last race. The prize consisted of two towels sewn end to end which he assured the audience was then long enough to go around Wah Tote Lay!

Immediately after supper Wah Htoo and Thwe Htoo's group started preparing for giving their play. They drew mustaches with charcoal on the actors who needed that. Their play was about four couples and how they treated each other. One husband played the part of a dominating person, often drunk, who beats his wife, who is afraid of him. In another couple, the wife is bossy to her husband who is called Maya Ka (He is afraid of his wife), Wah Htoo and Thwe Htoo portrayed the third couple as Kway Ne Kyaun (they fight like dog and cat). The last couple loved each other and got along well. Naturally the couples with the bad relationships hammed it up and exaggerated the traits and characteristics. The dominating husband beat his wife around the stage. The hen-pecked husband cowered in the corner while his wife berated him. Wah Htoo and Thwe Htoo had had much practice fighting as brother and sister, put on a great show of hair pulling and fighting as the dog and cat couple. As each couple did their antics, someone in the audience called out the names of a village or city couple whereby showing them how people perceived their relationship. The lovey dovey couple were kind and gentle with each other showing how couples should be in an ideal way.

When their play finished, Wah Htoo, Thwe Htoo and the other participants joined the audience to watch.

The next play cast one man, many girls and his mother. The man was the only male left so all the girls were trying to get him as their husband and flirting outrageously. His mother didn't want to lose her only son and tried to discourage the girls. The man, of course, immensely enjoyed the situation. Finally the mother gave her son a magic potion so that whenever a girl touched him, she instantly became a statue. Soon the stage was filled with the girls all frozen into hugging or kissing positions.

The mother came on stage to kill the unwanted girls with a club but accidentally brushed one frozen girl and became a statue herself. Moral: The method you use to destroy others will come back to destroy you.

After the stage cleared a guitarist played and four girls appeared amid gales of laughter. City boys dressed only in overstuffed brassieres and palm leaves over their shorts imitated the walk, glances and flirting moves of girls. Then they danced like disco dancers they had seen on TV. The audience went wild and soon the dancers dissolved into laughter themselves.

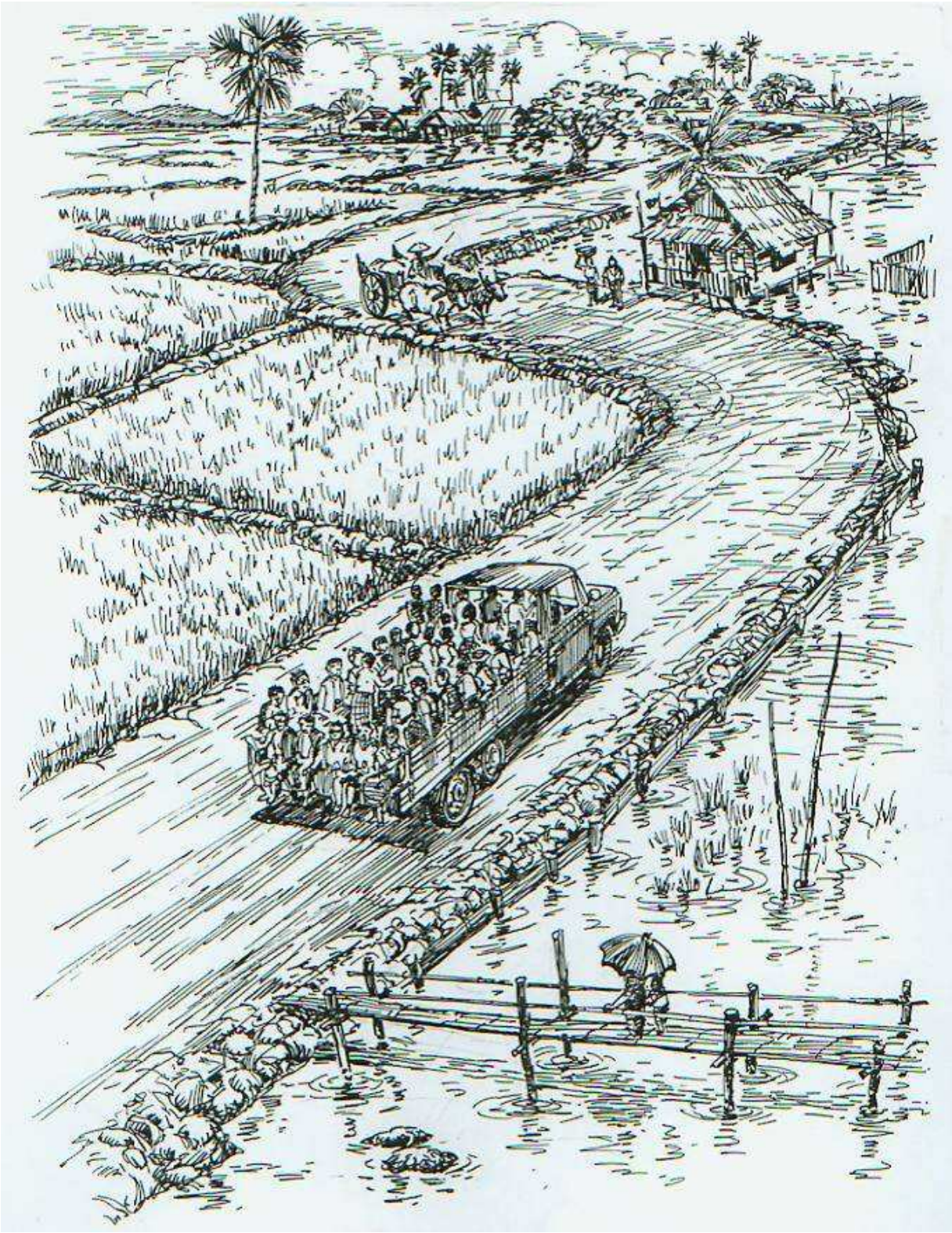
The action songs were tame in comparison, but all ages joined in. After a few more songs, the program ended. The late hours of the previous night and all the activities of the day caused many to turn in although a few youth chatted and flirted into the late hours.

The next morning, subdued city folk prepared to leave. Saw Eh Mu needed to load his truck in the afternoon for his next trip up country. So after a breakfast of fried rice, city folk and villagers exchanged sad farewells. Some youth, having found interesting persons of the opposite sex, found it particularly hard to say goodbye, knowing the hundred miles of separation made further contact impossible. The villagers generously gave their city folk friends fresh vegetables, fruit and several live chickens.

One of the city folk started negotiating to buy a pig, but when all the others realized he expected to take the pig back on the crowded truck with them, the threats of murder and mayhem killed his plans to buy it.

Laden with the appreciated gifts and several villagers going to visit relatives in the city, the truck was even more crowded on its return. Poor Wah Tote Lay (Little Fats) endured more jokes of how she took up the space of two persons, or maybe if they had bought the pig and left Wah Tote Lay, there would be more room! She endured it in good humor.

While some youth sang and joked, most dozed or quietly remembered the excitement of the big outing.



16

The Family

Thein Cho turned the corner to walk down the truck width lane to his house. The lane was built up several feet above the surrounding land which kept it from flooding in the rainy season. Houses, built with legs (on stilts) to keep them above the water, lined the lane. Thousands of similar lanes made up the largest portion of Rangoon.

On the corner stood a small military compound with a building, garages, and soldiers coming and going. As Thein Cho walked past it, he came to the back corner where a water tank stood on thin steel legs about thirty feet above the ground. The tank consisted of rectangles of sheet metal bolted together to make a square box that held the water the compound used. A pump raised water to the tank. Now the water had filled the tank so the overflowing water fell to the ground and ran off in a ditch. No one ever turned off the pump, so, much water was wasted.

Thein Cho looked at the cascading water sparkling in the sunlight and felt irritated. His house bordered the military compound, so was only a short distance from the main street, but little water flowed in the municipal water pipes to his house and the houses beyond. In fact most houses kept a faucet on over a large pottery jar, trying to catch any water that might come through the pipes. Late at night when demand fell and pressure increased, some water did come through, but never enough to completely supply his family's needs. Therefore family members had to carry water from the public spigot on the main street to supply their needs. Seeing this water continually wasted annoyed Thein Cho because a high fence prevented anyone from entering the compound and catching the falling water.

Continuing down the lane, he glanced at the houses across the street from his own. They were wood with split bamboo walls and Dani leaf roofs and were built with their floors about three feet off the ground. In front of each house were two long poles leaning against the gate. One had a hook and the other a flat piece of tin as required by township regulations. In theory they could be used to beat out fires on the roof or pull the burning roofing off, but only in the first seconds of a fire because the whole house would burn to ashes in minutes. He knew the occupants kept their valuables, photographs, and other appreciated items in large boxes that could be quickly dragged to safety in time of fire. He was glad his house was wood and metal and wished these highly flammable houses were farther away.

As Thein Cho neared his house, he passed a man crying out in a sing song voice, "Palin Wete." (Buying old bottles). Thein Cho knew from past experience the man paid one kyat for clear bottles and 50 pyas for brown. Other buyers would come by buying old pans, and paper. Farther up the street a seller called out, "Khout Mont" offering a kind of Chinese cookie filled with bean paste and coconut.

He entered the gate to his compound and saw seven children playing in the yard. Instantly five of them ran to him and greeted him. The other two gave him a friendly greeting while his five gathered around him and grabbed on to his hands.

"Did you bring us anything, Phay phay (Father)?" Kyaw Lin, his twelve year old son and first born, asked.

"What's in your bag?" asked Thazin, his eleven year old daughter, trying to peek into his shoulder bag.

Zabe' and Hnin Si, his daughters, eight and seven, danced around in front of Thein Cho. Zaw Win, his five year old son, stood shyly off to one side.

"Well, let's see if there is anything in my bag that would interest you," their father said as he hunkered down, swinging the bag from under his shoulder and holding it in front of him. Thazin quickly opened it and drew out a newspaper wrapped package tied with split bamboo. Kyaw Lin made a grab for it but their father cautioned, "Be careful, for if you spill it, no one will get any." He took the

package and held it in his hands letting Thazin untwist the split bamboo. Thein Cho loved to see the look of anticipation on all their brown faces with shining brown eyes.

Moe Wah and Moe Thwe, Thein Cho's brother's children, moved closer, for they knew they would be included if the package contained a treat.

The newspaper unfolded, revealing Tha Nyat Lone, a hard, sweet, finger joint size candy made from palm sap the children dearly loved. Thein Cho gave one piece to each child and each kissed their father in the traditional Burmese way of touching their nose to his cheek and then stepped back, making room for Moe Wah and Moe Thwe to receive their pieces. "That's enough for now. Any more and your mother would complain I've ruined your appetite for supper," Thein Cho said, although he could not ever remember his children not eating their share of supper because of any snack.

He rewrapped the newspaper and walked to the foot of the step leading to the verandah of his house while the children resumed their play. Constructed of teak wood, the house had a tin roof. The teak had been painted with earth oil (crude oil) as a preservative, making the house black in appearance. Taking off his hpanats (sandals), he placed them beside the hpanats already on the landing, noting which members of the household were home. Then he climbed the eleven steps to the porch. Most houses in Burma have an odd number of steps, as odd numbers are thought to thwart evil spirits from coming up the stairs.

Seated on the porch, Daw Myint Myint, his mother-in-law, sewed on one of the children's clothing. Thein Cho opened the newspaper and offered her a piece. She had lost most of her teeth but could suck on the sweet candy. "Tha Nyat Lone always brings memories of childhood," Myint Myint said. She did not thank him, as no expression of thanks was usually given among family or close friends. "How much did you have to pay for it?"

"Fifteen kyats," her son-in-law answered, knowing full well what her response would be.

"Fifteen kyats!" she exclaimed, "why when I was a child, you could get almost more than you could carry for one silver rupee. My father would buy four annas (sixteen annas to a rupee) and that satisfied us."

Thein Cho smiled. Silver rupees had disappeared from circulation fifty years before but to Daw Myint Myint it was but yesterday. Prices had inflated, as the kyat, the Burmese name for rupee, steadily declined in value.

Thin Thin looked up from sweeping a room that opened onto the verandah. She had removed a short, loose board from the floor and swept the dirt into the hole, where it fell to the ground under the house. As she replaced the board, Thein Cho offered her a piece of Tha Nyat Lone. She shyly took a piece with her right hand, touching her right forearm with her left hand as a sign of respect. Thin Thin was an "Auntie" not related by blood. Her parents had been killed in a tragic truck accident and her aunt had raised her until her aunt married a widower with six children. With money tight, her aunt had sought a position for Thin Thin in the city as a family helper. Since Thein Cho's wife, Nu Sein, was from the same village, they had taken Thin Thin in when she was twelve. Now sixteen, she was basically treated as a member of the family, although she did more chores than the younger children. As Thin Thin returned to her work, she had to pass in front of Thein Cho so she dipped down and bowed her head as the Burmese way of showing respect by body language to someone older than herself.

Entering the guest parlor (living room), he enjoyed the cool feel of the smooth, polished, teak floors on the soles of his feet. Colorful calendars graced the walls as decorations. A teak cabinet with a glass front filled with mementos and curios sat against the wall. Several chairs with sloping backs occupied the perimeter of the room. A low table was in the center with several photo albums. Stern pictures of Thein Cho's parents and his wife's parents hung on the walls. There was no Saga Pyaw Kye Nan "talking wire" (telephone) as very few residential houses have one.

In a recess in the wall sat a statue of the Buddha. Thein Cho was pleased to note an offering of fresh flowers and several pieces of fruit. On a shelf slightly lower stood a coconut with its stem attached and

a ribbon wrapped around it. This was an offering to the spirit of the house.

Sniffing the air, Thein Cho caught the scent of supper cooking in back of the house. Going through the house, he passed the cat safe which, to Americans, looked like an old fashioned pie safe. A teak frame, covered with screen, provided a place to store food away from flies and cats. Each of its legs sat in a small ceramic bowl filled with used motor oil that prevented ants from gaining access to the cabinet.

Exiting the back door, he found his wife, Nu Sein, and Hla Kyi cooking behind the house in the detached cooking shelter. This cooking shelter kept the heat of the cooking fires out of the house and protected the house somewhat from fires. He could hear his brother, Tin Lin, splitting wood behind the shelter. Thein Cho greeted his wife but did not hug or kiss her, as such intimate things are only done in complete privacy in Burma. Hla Kyi returned his greeting in a perfunctory way. Hla Kyi was Thein Cho's brother's wife, but somehow the relationship between Thein Cho and Hla Kyi, his sister-in-law, was "A Kyaw Ma Tet Bu"--they didn't get along. Their relationship was green (cold) at best, and dog and cat (hostile) at worst. With Tin Lin out of work, and Burma having no unemployment compensation, the only alternative for Tin Lin and Hla Kyi was to move in with Thein Cho. Therefore, Thein Cho and Hla Kyi both tried to make the best of a bad situation.

"What's for supper?" asked Thein Cho.

"Pig ears and tails!" answered his wife,

"Great!" answered her husband, "You cook them so deliciously."

"Oops," said his wife, as she accidentally dropped a spoon. "I guess we are going to have a visitor!" she said as she picked it up.

Tin Lin heard them talking and came with an armload of wood for cooking, ducking under the clothes hanging on the line to dry. He chose to duck under a man's longyi, because to pass under a woman's hta mein, underpants, brassiere or bodice would lower his hpone (masculine strength). His wife always slept on his left side as is the custom, so as not to lower his hpone. Tin Lin said, "My cousin sent word that they might be hiring at the glass factory at Bassein. I think I will go over and see."

"But you don't know anything about glass making," Hla Kyi said.

"It's a government factory. Probably half the work force doesn't know anything about glass making and were hired because of a relative to whom they were related." Tin Lin answered. "But I'll need money for the steamer."

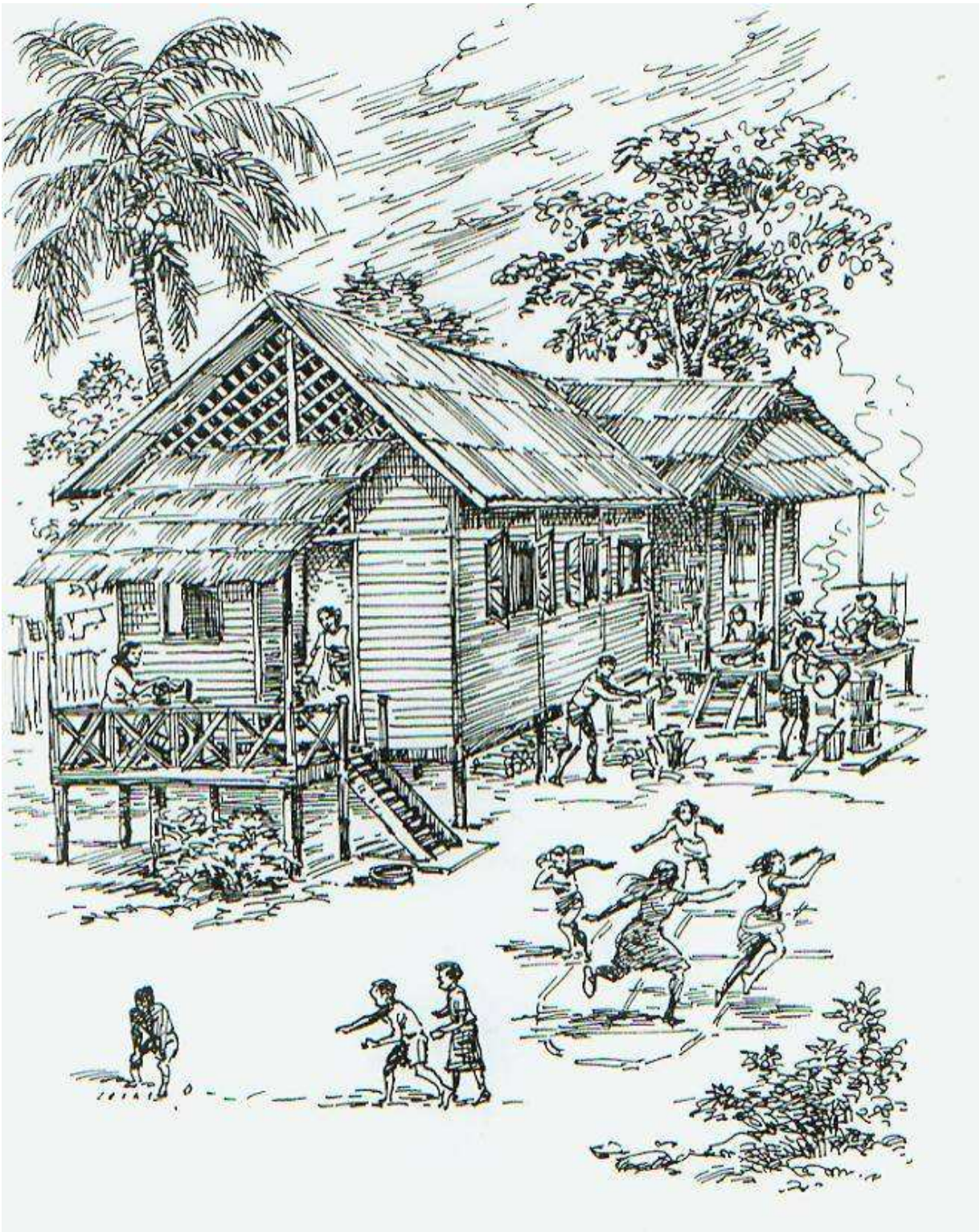
Thein Cho took a deep breath, "I'll advance that," thankful Tin Lin wanted money to go job hunting. Some of his coworkers constantly complained about unemployed relatives wanting money for cheroots, or worse yet, drinking.

"Ah, Ah, Ah," came the raucous cry of the crow from the back of the compound.

"We are sure to have company coming to eat now." Hla Kyi noted.

"Where's Daw Aye Sein?" asked Thein Cho about his wife's sister. She was unmarried and lived with them.

"Daw Aye Sein went to buy some medicine for Ma Hla Win." answered his wife, Nu Sein. Hla Win was Ta Wan Kwe (a cousin) of Thein Cho. Literally Ta Wan Kwe meant "one womb separated (removed)". She also lived with them so she could complete high school as there was no high school near her village. "Ma Hla Win has developed a fever and the doctor prescribed a medicine, but there was none available at the government drug store."



"There never is any medicine at the government store," Thein Cho growled, "It's all sold out the back door. Let's hope Daw Aye Sein can find some in the black market that isn't outdated, diluted, or counterfeit."

The group became quiet as all remembered Aye Maw. Aye Maw was Thein Cho and Nu Sein's son and would have been ten now, but died of sickness when he was four. Thein Cho always said the medicine he had desperately purchased for Aye Maw in the black market was counterfeit. While the counterfeit medicine was probably made of harmless sugar, it did not treat the illness and so, allowed Aye Maw to die.

"Well, I'm glad you are trying to do something to cure Hla Win's illness." Thein Cho broke the silence. Again there was silence as all remembered Kyi Aye, Thein Cho's and Nu Sein's little daughter who became ill and all thought it was only a mild sickness but it suddenly proved fatal. Kyi Aye would have been six now.

"Here comes Ma Aye Sein now," said Tin Lin, "and it looks as if she has her Be (duck) with her. (Burmese nickname for boy friend.) The dropped spoon and the crow were right--we have a visitor."

"I wish Maung Moe Kyaw would court her a little faster." joked Thein Cho, "At twenty five, Ma Aye Sein is rapidly becoming a confirmed spinster."

Aye Sein and Moe Kyaw entered the compound and came around the house. Aye Sein held up a bottle and said, "Ko Moe Kyaw has a friend who works at the government drug store and we got genuine medicine at only double the official price." Black market medicine is usually four times official price.

"The doctor prescribed a 2.5 grams pill every four hours. These are 5 gram pills so we will have to cut them in half." said Nu Sein looking at the bottle.

Using a knife, Aye Sein split a pill on the cutting board. She returned the larger half to the bottle. She drew a glass of water from the clay drinking pot and took the small half with the crumbs and dust from cutting on the board and went to give the medicine to Hla Win.

"The food's ready. It's time to eat," said Nu Sein, setting another place for Moe Kyaw who stood by looking hungry.

After washing their hands, the family gathered around two low tables sitting on little stools about six inches high. Nu Sein placed a large bowl heaped full of fluffy, white rice in the center of each table. Hla Kyi placed a large bowl of soup on each table where it would be shared by those at the table each using the one spoon in it. Thin Thin, the Auntie, sat at the children's table and dished up several cups of rice to each according to their needs while Nu Sein served the adults. Then each server added several tablespoons of pig tails and ears curry heavy with oil. Each person added Ngapi (strong smelling and tasting fish sauce) and ground red pepper, according to their individual taste.

Using the fingers of their right hand, each mixed the curry with the rice, made bite size morsels, and put them in their mouths. Since the curry mixture tended to be dry, the soup provided moisture. The air was filled with the crunching of the cartilage in the pig ears and tails which was considered a special treat.

Conversation included asking the children what they learned in school. The children actually told them some of the things they had learned. The adults also shared the highlights of their day.

After eating, they sat around sipping tea and talking while the children studied. Aye Sein and Moe Kyaw went for a walk.

When it became the children's sleep time, Nu Sein called the children to prepare for sleeping. Each washed their feet which had become dirty during the day just wearing sandals. Washing kept the sheets on their sleeping mats cleaner. Then the children came to their parents and performed shikkho by prostrating themselves before their father and mother touching their foreheads to the floor saying,

"Please forgive me for anything I've done wrong today." Then they rose and each parent kissed each of their children in the traditional Burmese way by touching their nose to their child's left cheek, right cheek, forehead and chin. Kissing on the lips is a western custom many Burmese find repulsive.

After the children were gone, Tin Lin said, "I've been noticing the tank on the military compound almost constantly overflows so they have more water than they need."

"Yes, that waste of water really irritates me," answered Thein Cho.

"Today, as I passed the compound, I happened to see an officer I knew back in school days. We chatted and he introduced me to the commanding officer. Well, to make a long story short, they agreed to let us tap into their water system for fifty kyats a month. But we have to hide the pipes and the connection so any visiting authorities won't notice it." Tin Lin explained.

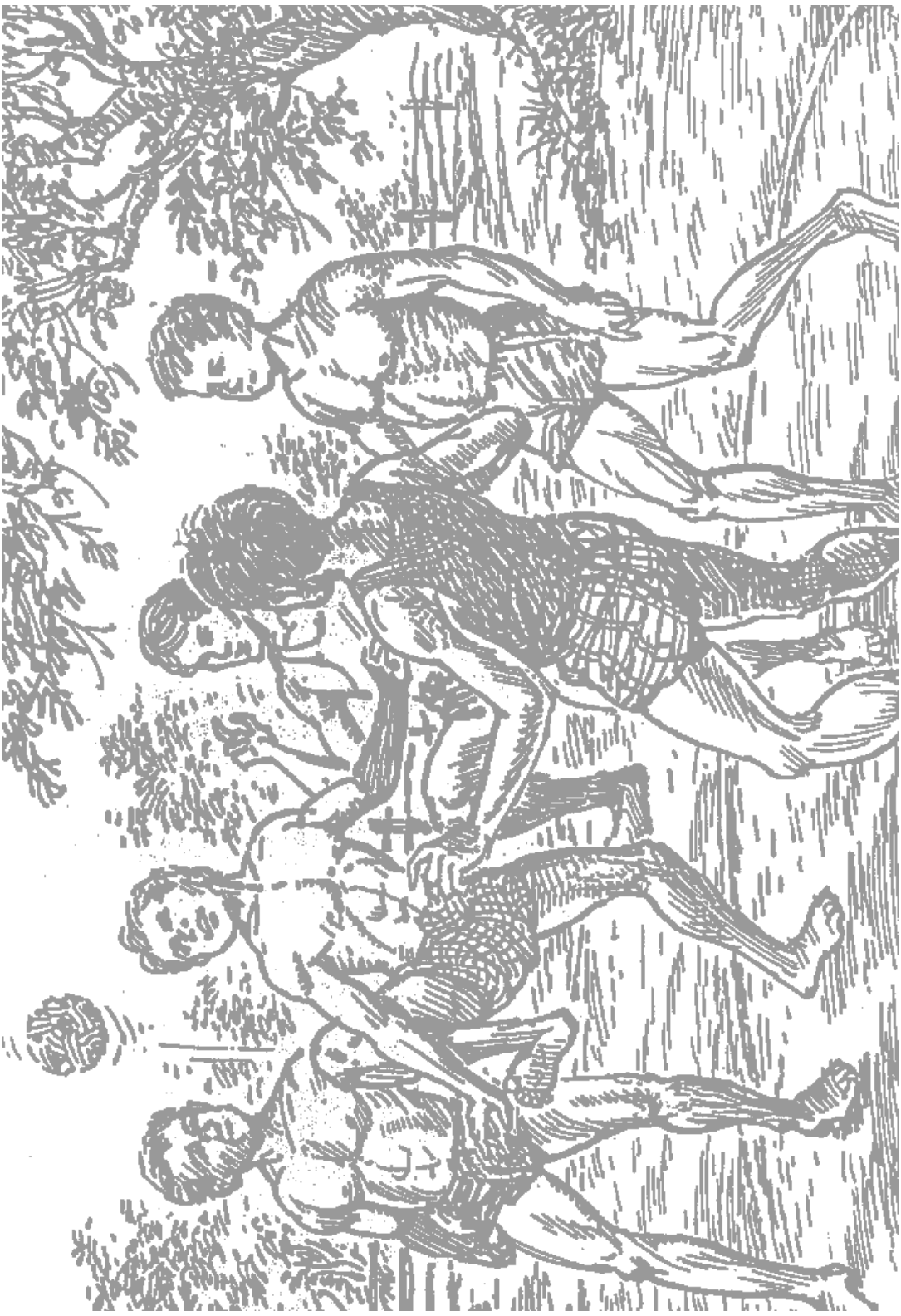
"Hey, that's great!" exclaimed Thein Cho joined by several members of the family whose lot it fell to carry water from the main street. "I hope the piping is not too dear (expensive)." he continued.

"Don't worry," his brother continued. "I can get the pipe at a reasonable price from a friend of mine who buys scrap metal and I've made arrangements to sell water to two of our next door neighbors farther on at twenty five kyats each per month. With luck, what they are paying me to connect them up with us should pay for the materials we have to buy to connect to the compound! I have a friend who knows enough plumbing to put it all together although we'll have to dig the ditches. We'll invite him over for mohinga." (In Burma, help is repaid with a nice meal of mohinga.)

The adults laughed at Tin Lin's cleverness. "My brother sure tries to carry his part of the load," thought Thein Cho proudly.

With wages so low in Burma, (about $180 per year) a family can survive only by sharing several incomes and some cleverness. It also takes a lot of time and work to do things such as laundry, buying food each day, cooking, and maintaining a household. This further necessitates living and sharing together in order to accomplish these tasks. Many family units are at least ten to twelve persons.

Thein Cho was glad he had a good secure job that enabled all these people in his family at these tables to survive in these hard times.



17

The Shin Pyu

Lu Aye sat straight and proud on the back of the horse led by his father, Ko Ba Aung, who smiled with pride. His mother, Ma Hla Khin, stood silently by with her eyes wet with tears showing her emotions of happiness and satisfaction. "How handsome he looks," Ma Hla Khin said inwardly, "And how fast he has grown up."

This day of Lu Aye's shin pyu (induction into Buddhism) had been saved for by Ko Ba Aung and Ma Hla Khin since the day of his birth. It was the most important day of his life. By giving their son a shin pyu, they made him their son and a son of the Buddha. They also believed the shin pyu would help protect him from danger.

His father led the horse around the village so all could see his son decked out like a prince. Lu Aye was dressed in white, elaborate clothes with gold trim rented for this special occasion. He wore a gold crown and gold shoulder epaulets. Bright golden belts decorated his chest. While it was only gold colored foil on cardboard, he felt like a prince. He elatedly thought, "I am coming of age. I am being inducted into Buddhism. This is the most important ceremony of my life."

His father stopped the horse at Tin Tun's house where Tin Tun's father was helping him mount his rented horse. Tin Tun was also dressed as a prince. Circling around the village, they were joined by seven other boys ranging in age from six to twelve, all dressed equally fine, for the villagers had decided to have a joint shin pyu with all eligible boys participating. It made the procession grander and helped cut the costs.

Even Chit Tin, who lived in a hovel on the edge of the village, was grandly dressed. Chit Tin was poor because his family had many children and few paddy fields. But the wealthiest man in the village, U Htay Maung, had provided the money so Chit Tin could participate in the shin pyu. That would bring U Htay Maung much merit because helping a boy go through shin pyu was considered one of the most meritorious acts a Buddhist could do.

Ko Ba Aung led the line of nine boys to the edge of the village. The oxen carts had been assembled and decorated and occupied by family members who were dressed in their best silks. Lu Aye's sisters carried gifts for the monastery balanced on their heads. The gifts were alms bowls, umbrellas, sandals, blankets, robes and other items the monks needed and were allowed to receive.

Lu Aye's older brother carried an umbrella on a long handle over Lu Aye as a symbol of rank.

With the procession assembled, they left the village, led by two of the most beautiful, clever, virgin girls. They had been selected by the village elders for this honored position. One carried flowers and therefore was called the Pan Taw Khine (Carrier of Flowers). The other carried a beautiful lacquered, elaborate container called a Kon Ait and she was called the Kon Taw Khine leading maiden. Each maiden wore a beautiful silk Hta Mein (skirt), as they wanted to look their best for this great honor of leading the Shin Pyu procession. Their blouse, called a Yin Pone, buttoned down the left in the traditional way. The other boys of the village and the villages they passed through complimented the girls on their beauty.

Outside the village the whole procession stopped at a very large banyan tree with an altar at its base. There they paused to Nat Pya (Showing the Premonk to the Nat [Spirit]) and to give an offering to the good nats so they prevent the bad nats from doing mischief during the ceremony. That necessary offering completed, they started for the monastery where the induction was to take place.

Their route was planned to take them through two other villages even though there was a more direct route to the monastery, but they wanted to share this meritorious occasion with their

neighbors. Other Buddhists gained merit seeing a shin pyu procession and these villages had routed their shin pyu through Lu Aye's village in the past thereby sharing merit with them. It truly was a grand, colorful and spectacular sight as they marched through the countryside.

Arriving at the monastery, they dismounted from their horses and went into the audience hall. There sat the monks of the monastery on a low platform. Other monks from neighboring monasteries had been invited to take part in this important occasion.

The boys sat on the floor and faced the monks. Their families sat behind them bearing the gifts for the monks of the monastery. They also carried the eight items needed by their sons when they became monks—three sets of robes, a girdle, a bowl, a razor, a needle and a filter. The filter would be used to filter their drinking water so they would not unknowingly drink an insect thereby taking its life.

They all bowed and showed respect to the monks. Then Lu Aye asked the head monk to accept him as a novice. Three times he asked, as is the tradition. Each of the other boys asked the same thing. The asking three times symbolized their serious intent and the importance of the request.

The abbot of the monastery accepted them and then their hair was shaved off. Their locks were carefully caught in a cloth by their father and mother to be saved. Then each of the boys recited, "Reverend Sir, may you be pleased to give me the robe and out of compassion for me, may you initiate me as a novice so that I may be able to overcome all the suffering in the round of rebirths and attain Nebbana (Heaven)." Three times they asked.

The monks gave them the robes and showed them how to wrap it around themselves and wear it. The boys said the three jewels in Pali, "I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dhamma, I take refuge in the Sangha." The Dhamma is the teaching of Buddha and the Sangha is the order of monks. Pali is the religious language of Buddhism related to Burmese and using the same script.

Then the boys, now considered novice monks, must have new names. The monks give each a new name in Pali, symbolizing their new life as a monk. Lu Aye became Pyin Nya De Pa (Master of Education—i.e. a quick learner). Now they are considered sons of the Buddha.

At this point each novice monk asked one of the monks, "Revered Sir, may you become my instructor?" This he asked three times in Pali.

Which monk he asked had been prearranged and the instructor monk advised him to behave well in order to inspire respect and to fulfill the three-fold Teachings, i.e. Pariyatti, Patipatti and Pativedha.

Then all monks and families joined in a sumptuous feast brought by the families of the novices. The meal is the best that the families could afford. The eating must be completed before 12:00 noon for monks cannot eat after that hour.

After the meal, the families returned to their village while the novices stayed at the monastery to receive instruction.

They were taught the Ten Precepts which are:
Abstaining from taking the life of sentient beings.
Abstaining from taking what is not freely given.
Abstaining from sexual misconduct.
Abstaining from telling lies.
Abstaining from partaking intoxicants.
Abstaining from taking food after midday.
Abstaining from dancing, singing, playing music, and witnessing shows and entertainment.
Abstaining from wearing flowers, using scents and unguents and beautifying with ointments.
Abstaining from using high and large beds.
Abstaining from accepting gold and silver.
Number ten did not preclude monks accepting paper money and number seven did not ban monks

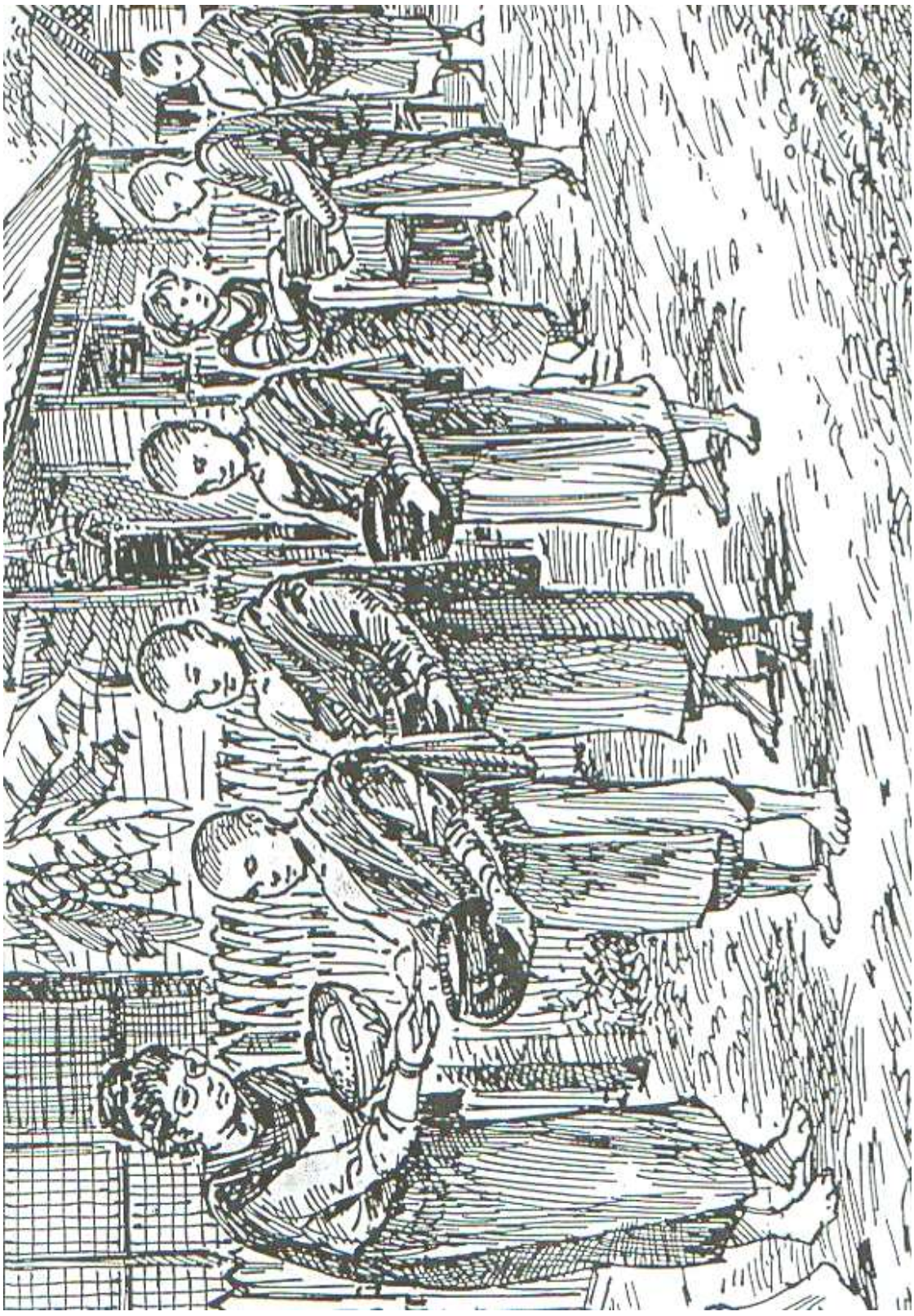
from watching television.

Each morning all the monks went out to collect food. They marched in a line with the tallest in front and the shortest last. Women came out and put rice and curry in the bowls they were carrying. They did not thank the donors because the donors gained merit by feeding them and therefore the donors thanked them for the opportunity to give.

As the days went past, Lu Aye learned the 75 other rules a novice was expected to obey. He also learned that most of the monks of the monastery were full ordained and therefore observed the 227 rules of the higher Bhikkhu order. Since one could only become a Bhikku monk after age twenty, Lu Aye had plenty of time to think about it.

One of the monks had joined the monastery for several months, meditating and learning more of the teachings of the Buddha. He would return to his wife and life in the world after this period of religious retreat.

After ten days, Lu Aye and the other novices had learned the basic tenets of Buddhism and they returned to their village. Lu Aye felt now he had arrived as a man and a full-fledged member of his Buddhist community. It was reassuring to know the monastery was always available to him if he should need a place of quiet, rest, and meditation in later life.



18

Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Standard

In much of Burma, because of overcrowding, schools operate on half days. Assigned to the afternoon session, Thida arrived on opening day long before the gates opened at 12:00 for the second set. She knew when the gates opened all the waiting students would dash madly for their assigned rooms and seek the best seats near the front. Whatever seats they found the first day, they kept all year. Thida, an eager student who wanted to learn, knew the importance of a front seat where she could see and hear well.

Therefore Thida arrived early enough to get right at the center of the two gates. She held her place firmly by holding on to the steel bars of the gate until they opened. Promptly at twelve the gates were opened and the students charged in. It reminded Thida of the start of a marathon race she had seen on government television! Thida had planned her route to her classroom carefully. Being near the front, she endured less pushing and shoving. In less time than it takes to tell about it, she arrived at her room and grabbed a seat in the front row near the teacher's desk. Education provided one of the few ways to a better life in Burma and her parents had instilled in her a desire for education so Thida could have a better job and therefore a better life than they had had. Winning a good seat was part of the process of getting a good education.

The classroom quickly filled and since it was small, it became crowded. Thida's classroom had sixteen student desks. Some classes only had twelve desks but some had twenty. All of Thida's had had at least fifteen. In front sat a teacher's desk and on the wall a blackboard. The desks, designed for four, had six assigned to each. This meant that the students sat shoulder to shoulder tightly against each other. On hot days this sweaty contact was most unpleasant. Each desk had only boys or girls as the sexes sat apart after the 5th standard (grade). Eighty six students crowded into Thida's class and that was not considered unusual. With so many students to a classroom concentration and work was difficult. Being so crowded, Thida rested her back on the front of the desk behind her.

The teacher arrived and recorded the names of the students and the seats occupied. Then she divided the class into four groups called Bayint Naung, Kyansittha, Alaung Paya, Bang Du Latt--the names of famous Burmese kings or generals. Thida was assigned to Kyan Sit Tha group. Each group elected a representative. Thida would have liked to have been elected as a representative but it was not to be. Then all the representatives met and elected one leader from each group for the whole school. The groups competed with each other in sports and other activities. The groups also took turns being responsible for cleaning the room and blackboard after school for a week at a time.

On regular school days, the students arrived at their room and the teacher took attendance. When the bell rang Thida stood at attention with every one in the whole school. When the bell rang again, they recited their pledge of obedience to oneself, to the class teacher, to the school and to the government. In some schools, Thida knew, Buddhists prayers were recited. Christians and Muslims were allowed to stand quietly without reciting but were not allowed to say their own prayers. In Thida's school there were no prayers.

After the pledge, the classes lasted forty to fifty minutes. When class was over, the bell rang and the teacher left for another room and another teacher of a new subject arrived. When each new teacher came into the classroom, Thida and all the other students stood up at attention with their arms crossed in front of them and said, "Mingalaba, Sayama" which doesn't translate but means the same as "Good Morning" or "Good Afternoon, teacher." When the teacher left, again Thida and the others stood and said "Mingalaba" and added "Jezu Tin Bar Day" meaning "Thank you very much." The students stayed in the same room all day. The students went out in the yard to play for a break at three o'clock.

At 5 o'clock the bell rang to end the school day. Every student stood at attention and sang the national anthem. Then, like the world over, there was a mad rush as the students exited their rooms and the school yard except for those assigned to clean their rooms.

Like all the students, Thida wore the prescribed national school dress--green hta mein (skirt) and white aingyi--shirt or blouse with no tails. Developing girls could wear a Burmese brassiere which extended to their waist and held their breasts close to their bodies. Western brassiere, which emphasized their breasts, were not permitted. The girls' hta mein had a black strip of cloth around the waist which had a texture that made it cling to itself and so helped keep the skirt up and tucked in. Western style pants were not permitted for boys so they wore a traditional skirt-like Burmese longyi. While the boys' and girls' longyis were both 2 yards of cloth sewn in a cylinder, the girls held theirs up by carefully lapping and tucking, making the front smooth. The boys knotted theirs in front.

Within a week after school started, everyone had to purchase an official patch with the school's name and sew it on the right side of each shirt or blouse. Thida's school's said S.(tate) H.(igh) S.(chool) #2 Bahan (Township). Poor students could only afford to buy two uniforms while children of well off families had many. But even the poor kept themselves and their uniform clean as personal cleanliness is a national characteristic. In the poor hill country, not all could afford uniforms but in central Burma, all wore the uniform.

In Burma students stand when called on to recite. In hot weather, students loosen their longyis to be cooler. When called on, they tucked in their longyis before standing. Often they fumbled purposely while doing it to give themselves more time to think of the answer! Of course everyone knew why they fumbled and laughed at them.

If a student said Ah, ah, ah... while trying to think of the answer, another student would quip, "Quay ah hlae nin (dumb dog run over by an oxen cart)!" and everyone would snicker.

There was no laboratory in courses like chemistry or biology. Thida read books trying to imagine how a chemical reacts or how the insides of a frog looked.

When required to read in class, each student read aloud along with all the other students in the room. With eighty six in the room, it was quite noisy. Even when Thida studied at home, she spoke aloud when reading as was the custom.

A classmate with more money and things than most, Aung Zebu Shwe, bragged he recorded his reading and when his parents forced him to study at home, played a tape recording of his previous studying so they thought he was studying hard when he was reading forbidden stories.

When Thida needed to go to the toilet, she held her index finger straight up with the end touching the bottom of her nose and she made no sound and the teacher knew she was asking to be excused to use the toilet. The same finger placement with the sound Shhhh in America means to be quiet but that has no meaning in Burma. In Thida's school one finger indicated the need to urinate and two to defecate so the teacher knew how long Thida would probably be gone.

The school did not furnish free textbooks but sold them for around 50 kyats--several days pay for a working Burmese. Books seldom changed so they were handed down within a family. Thida's older brother and sisters used the textbooks she used. After her youngest brother used the books, he would resell them below the school's selling price to students who needed them.

Thida was well behaved in class as she did not want to be beaten in front of the class. Beating was done with a cane stick on the legs or hands and often caused bleeding and left permanent scars. It was very painful. Beatings were given for talking in class, being late or absence, fighting with other students, passing notes, being disrespectful to the teacher, etc. Sometimes punishment was psychological. When two students fought, the teacher would make them hug each other in front of the class, who then laughed at them.

The students who sat in the back of the room often got beaten for passing notes through holes in the walls to students in the classroom behind them.

Thida's parents were anxious for her to do well because they thought education would give Thida more opportunities than they had. Therefore they arranged for Thida to have tutoring each morning in the two subjects hardest for her. Her tutors were teachers who tutored in the morning for private fees and taught in the afternoon for the government. While it was illegal for a paid teacher to tutor, most did so out of necessity as they could not live on a teacher's pay alone. The government turned a blind eye to the practice. Thida found the tutoring really helped her comprehend the material.

Some of the students, mostly girls, still brought flowers for the teacher. The teacher put some of the flowers in her hair and the rest in a vase on her desk.

Towards the end of the year the students observed Teacher Honoring Day. With money collected from each student, a nice practical gift was presented to the teacher. The students asked the teacher's forgiveness for anything they might have done wrong.

Exams came at the end of every year. The final exams for the 8th grade and 10th grade were national exams--the same test on the same date throughout the whole country. While Thida had done well on her mid term exams, she knew only passing the final exams allowed her to go on to the next level. With great anxiety Thida went to school after the examinations to find out her scores when the results were posted at school. Those who passed all subjects made the "A" list ranked from one on down according to their score. Thida eagerly scanned that list hoping to find her name. With tremendous relief she found her name listed thirty seven.

Glancing back up the list, Thida noted that Aung Zebu Shwe was listed fourteenth. That was a surprise for he had not done as well as Thida during the whole year. But he was the son of an army officer. Thida had heard that some of them got to see the test ahead of time and under the table, so were able to prepare better because they knew the questions.

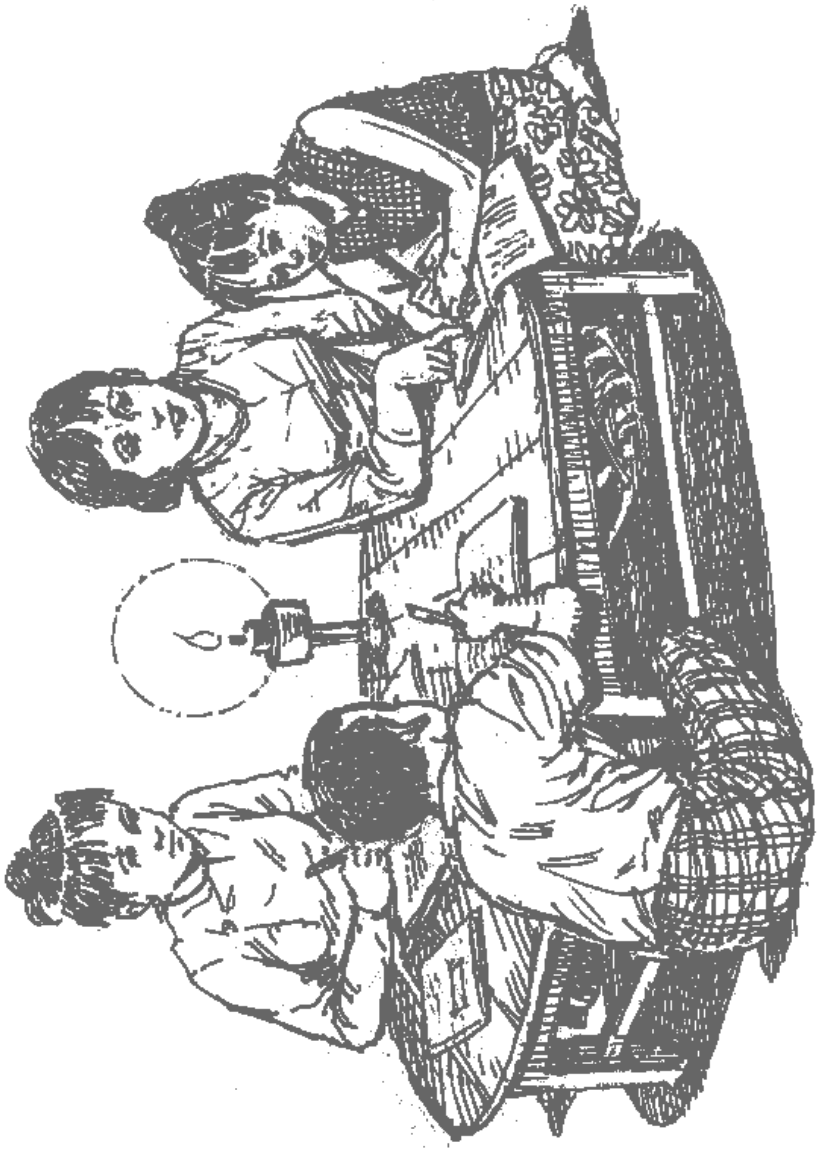
Then Thida carefully checked the list to see her friends' scores. Those who failed one subject but with a failing score of at least 35 made the "B" list. The "C"list listed those who failed two subjects and "D" list denoted three failed subjects. For those who failed more than three or had too low a score in the failed subjects schooling ended.

Sadly she noted one her friends, Ku Ku, was on the list below "D" and so had failed more than three subjects. That meant her friend could not go on and her education stopped. Thida knew Ku Ku was really a bright girl but it was difficult to learn in the crowded classroom and her family, being very poor, could not afford tutoring. She still might have been able to learn on her own but she worked four hours each day earning a little money to help her family survive. Thida looked around for Ku Ku but she did not come to see the posted scores. Thida knew that Ku Ku had realized her education was finished and she did not want to face her friends who would be going on. Life seemed to be so unfair to Ku Ku but perhaps she had done something bad in a previous life and so was being punished in this life. She was a good person in this life, Thida thought, so hopefully Ku Ku's lot would be better in her next life according to Buddhist teachings.

While Thida was glad she passed ninth standard, she dreaded the tenth standard examination because it was very hard and less than ten percent of the students of Burma passed it.

The high schools held no graduation ceremony.

The following year classes were formed with representatives from each list, unlike America, where the highest achievers are put in one class and the lowest in another.



19

The Fish Harvesters

Poe Pay sat in the stern of the rowboat as his father, Than Ge, rowed to the center of the six acre pond. Excited fish turned the water around them and some even jumped into the air. Than Ge said, "See how smart they are! They know from the sound of the oars that it is feeding time."

His father stopped rowing and Poe Pay began dumping baskets of fish food made from rice and bean bran mixed with peanut and sesame cake into the water. The peanut and sesame cake was the by product left over from pressing oil. The water even became more alive as the carp went into a feeding frenzy. Their silver and grey bodies flashed in the light in their excitement. Feeding from the boat gave more fish an even chance to get their share than feeding from the shore.

The pond had been stocked with three kinds of carp--Nga Shwe Wah (golden fish), Nga Gyin Gown Pwa (big head fish), and Nga Gyin Lone (Ordinary Carp).

"Father, it looks as if the pond is full of fish!" exclaimed Poe Pay.

"Yes, there are many fish and they are getting big. Kyaw Swar says we will harvest next week." Than Ge said referring to the owner of the pond.

Poe Pay could hardly wait for the next week to come, for fish harvesting was an exciting time, almost a festival combined with hard work. Three days before the first day of harvest, Poe Pay accompanied his father to the earthen dam that retained the water in the pond. After Than Ge dove into the water to be sure the screen still covered the end of the drainage pipe on the pond side, he turned the valve on the down side of the dam and water began flowing from the pond into the creek. Normally the water in the pond was about ten feet deep. Three days of draining would reduce it to four feet.

Kyaw Swar invited friends from the city to come and join the harvesting. Than Ge, as his part in the procedure, recruited twelve friends from among the nearby villagers who would be paid forty five kyats each per day for their services. They all gathered on the bank of the pond at the nat altar and Kyaw Swar made an offering of banana, rice, coconut, and fruit to the spirit of the pond.

After a wonderful breakfast of fried rice and boiled beans, furnished by Kyaw Swar, everyone got to work. One of his friends from the city killed a very large pig weighing over 80 viss (280 pounds) which would provide food for all the participants. As Buddhists, Kyaw Swar and most of the participants were not comfortable with the idea of taking life themselves but saw nothing wrong with eating a pig that someone else had killed. Hence this friend, known to have no qualms about killing pigs, had been recruited. About twenty percent of Burmese Buddhists will eat pork.

Meanwhile a medium size boat came up the stream and got as close to the pond as it could. While the city folk butchered the hog, the villagers unfurled a long, four foot high net in order to herd the fish into one part of the remaining water in the pond.

The villagers spaced themselves about four feet apart and held the net vertically with the bottom edge against the bottom of the pond. By swinging in a large arc, they swept one end of the pond and herded the fish into an area confined by the net. Gradually they moved the net closer to shore, thus moving the fish into a smaller and smaller area. Soon, the remaining area was so small, it contained more fish than water. The fish, of course, were greatly agitated and tried to escape back into the pond. While some villagers held the net, other villagers used their hands and scooped the fish from the water and put them in baskets on the shore.

Poe Pay enjoyed wading in the water and catching the fish with his bare hands and throwing them into a basket on shore. Most of the fish were about twelve inches long and weighed one to two viss but occasionally a large carp weighing three viss (10 1/2 pounds) was caught.

When a basket was filled with about ten fish, it was carried to the rowboat that had been carried over

the dam and refloated in the stream below. The fish were dumped in the bottom. When full, the rowboat was propelled to the medium size boat which had come up as far as it safely could without being stranded by the falling tide. The fish were then transferred from the rowboat to the medium size boat. That boat had brought blocks of ice and an ice crusher. A block was reduced to crushed ice while the fish from the rowboat were transferred to the bottom of the larger boat. When Than Ge judged a layer was the right thickness, a layer of crushed ice was spread over the fish to keep them fresh. Then more fish were added and then another layer of ice.

Meanwhile, back at the pond, when the confined area had been emptied of fish, a new swing was made with the net and more fish confined and caught. These were dumped in the returned rowboat which shuttled back and forth between the pond and the larger boat.

At lunch time, everyone took a break for a feast of rice and the cooked pig intestines which are considered especially desirable.

When Poe Pay returned to catching fish, he found himself holding a flat, silver fish he did not recognize. "What kind of fish is this?" he asked.

"Nga Pe (Fish Go Away)," a villager answered.

"Don't call it that! Call it Nga Lah (Fish Come) or it will bring bad luck to the harvest," another villager chided him.

By supper time the medium size boat had been filled with 2,000 viss (7,000 pounds) of fish. A feast of rice, pig intestines, stomach, liver and other especially desirable parts was eaten celebrating the completion of the first day of harvesting.

Poe Pay was thrilled when his father allowed him to join the group going to Rangoon to sell the fish. While the city was only three hours by truck, the heavily laden boat chugged along much slower on a winding route and took all night. Poe Pay wanted to stay awake with the adults but sleep overtook him as he nestled beside his father as the workers talked. He awoke in the early morning as the boat arrived at Rangoon about 4 am.

As they neared the wharf boat closest to the Daing (wholesale) market, Kyaw Swar looked around. "I don't see any other fish boats carrying farm fish." he exclaimed happily. Everyone knew that if several boats showed up, the price of fish would drop and each seller would get less. There were other boats bringing wild fish, prawns, eels, fresh water lobsters, and dozens of other varieties of other kinds of fish.

Soon the fish were being loaded into Thit Tar (woven bamboo trunks). When the trunk was full, the Daing workers dragged it up the bridge from the wharf boat to the shore. Kyaw Swar went with the first trunk on its way to the market. He asked Than Ge to make sure a member of his family or a trusted villager accompanied each trunk to the market. One year he had not been so careful and two trunks disappeared between the boat and the market.

At the market, Kyaw Swar sought stall #36 where Hla Sein, a fish broker, conducted his business. The first year, Kyaw Swar had used another broker who, he was sure, cheated him. The next year, Kyaw Swar tried Hla Sein, whose name meant "Pretty Diamond" and felt he was treated correctly and so had used him every year thereafter. Hla Sein received a 1% commission for wholesaling the fish. Many of the cheating agents never seemed to figure out that the honest merchants thrived because they treated their customers right.

The fish were loaded from the trunk into a large tin box on one end of a scale. Daing workers piled two heavy 10 viss (35 lbs) weights on the other side of the scale. While this was being done, Hla Sein shouted the price of 100 kyats a viss to prospective buyers. Several signaled their willingness to buy. Hla Sein chose one who watched, as fish were added to the scale until the scale balanced. Then the fish were transferred to the buyer's baskets. This buyer paid Hla Sein 2,000 kyats, took his fish, and soon would be selling them retail in one of the neighborhood markets of Rangoon. He would hope to average 130 kyats per viss with the bigger fish bringing more and smaller ones less.

Another buyer stepped forward, wanting 30 viss as the fish are wholesaled in increments of 10 viss.

Again the scale container was filled until the scale balanced with three 10 viss weights on the other pan. Kyaw Swar watched the weighing very carefully.

"Twenty Eight viss," one buyer proclaimed. "Throw on another fish."

"No, wait," Kyaw Swar said, "The scales is plainly balanced at 30 viss."

"The fish are muddy," the buyer explained. "I must subtract for the mud."

"Muddy!" exclaimed Kyaw Swar, "why they're the cleanest fish you've seen all month!" But he added the smallest fish he could find from the truck.

The buyer shrugged his shoulders and 30 viss was listed as the weight. Hla Sein made a note of his purchase. He knew his buyers so well that he knew this buyer could not afford to pay at time of delivery but would pay tomorrow when he came for more fish. Delayed payment meant he would have to pay 102 kyats a viss.

Poe Pay found the covered market a fascinating place. This section was for fresh water fish and related aqualife. Another section had saltwater products, while fruit and vegetables could be found in another market.

When all the fish had been removed from the boat and sold, they gathered for breakfast with the crew of the boat at a side walk restaurant. Usually they would have bought fried rice and pork but this boat was Muslim owned and operated and did not carry pork. Therefore Kyaw Swar had to treat everyone to breakfast of rice and eggs.

Breakfast over, Kyaw Swar, Than Ge, Poe Pay and the others returned to the boat. More block ice had been purchased for the next load. Being empty, the boat made much better time returning and by noon they were back near the pond and immediately began loading the second day of harvesting. Lunch was a marvelous meal of pork, potatoes, and rice. When it was loaded, supper was more delicious rice, squash and pork from the pig.

It took three days to harvest the fish from the pond although a few got away. By the third day, Poe Pay was tired of fish but he knew a year from now, he would be excited about another fish harvest.

Kyaw Swar figured about 5,000 viss (17,500 pounds) had been harvested not counting those fish given villagers and friends. Although Kyaw Swar didn't say it, Than Ge figured the owner had grossed 5 lahk (500,000) of kyats. The initial stocking of fingerlings had cost 60,000 kyats. The year of feeding cost at least 3 lahk for the fish food and 1,000 kyats a month for Than Ge to do the work. Kyaw Swar gave Poe Pay a ten kyat note for helping in the harvest.

In his mind Poe Pay figured a hundred ways to spend the money but in the end, it was put with the family money because a member of the family does not have the right to spend his earnings any way he pleases.

Since it was the dry season, no rain fell and gradually the remaining water evaporated until, a few weeks later, only a foot remained. Then the last remaining fish were caught in a muddy melee.

Before the dry season ended, the pond had become a hard baked expanse of cracked, dried mud. Lime was sprinkled over the bottom to cleanse it of any disease that might affect next year's crop.

When the rainy season came, the pond began to refill. Kyaw Swar bought 15,000 4" fingerlings from a fish breeder to stock it.

20

The Pilot

Chit Khin looked in all directions as the motor ship eased away from the wharf boat and swung into the current. He stood turning the wooden spoke steering wheel to adjust the direction of the old, two storied, motor ship named Ayeamya Thida (Cool [in a nice way] Water). The river teemed with hundreds of small boats and several dozen larger motor ships as Rangoon is a busy harbor. The harbor contained huge ocean going, foreign ships and Burma's Five Star Line ships, but these were farther down river. Crossing the Rangoon River to reach the Twante Canal required the utmost attention, as Chit Khin had to plot mentally the probable course of all the other motor ships and ships on various bearings and different speeds.

The small boats, mostly moved by oars, were expected to get out of his way. The bigger ones coming to Rangoon were heavily laden with charcoal, bricks, firewood, paddy. pottery, bamboo products, and a hundred other things to be sold in the city. Two oarsmen paddling a multi-ton boat did not move it very fast, so Chit Khin treated them as fixed points in mentally mapping out his course.

Looking up river, he saw a newer, white motor ship coming. Chit Khin judged it would cross his bow very close. Therefore, he adjusted the steering to make his ship pass behind the white's stern. As he turned the large wheel, the chain was wound from the starboard side, around a drum on the axle of the steering wheel, and let out the port side. The chains went through the gunwales and along the outside of the deck back to the stern where it was attached to levers that controlled the two rudders--one behind each propeller. Chit Khin's muscle provided the power that turned the rudders.

As the white ship crossed his bow, he mused, "Some day I want to pilot a ship like that. It's only thirty years old and has twice the speed of this old black ship."

Looking down river, he saw a very old private freighter laboring to go up stream. Its ancient engines were barely able to push the ship against the current. He thought, "I don't have to worry about that one intersecting my course."

On his starboard was a two tailed boat, loaded with passengers, and propelled by a man standing in back, facing forward, pulling on the oars that crossed in front of him. Chit Khin judged his ship would cross its path with enough to spare but he yanked the horn cord to give a warning blast anyway.

With the white ship out of the way, Chit Khin swung his ship toward the mouth of the Twante Canal. Hundreds of teak logs lined the shore on the south side. Entering the canal, the ship gained speed, since it was no longer bucking the current of the river, although there was some current from the out-going tide. Finished in 1917 at a cost of over ten million kyats, the canal ran for twenty one miles to connect the Rangoon river with the Kyait Htaw River and provide a cross delta route to Bassein (Pathein). This allowed the ships to avoid going to sea which could be dangerous particularly during the rainy season.

Steering the ship in the canal was routine, so Chit Khin sat on a stool and moved the steering wheel with his feet. Unlike the American steamers of yesterday where the pilot's house was on the very highest deck, Burmese ships are steered from a room on the front bottom deck. That location made it easier to see under the frequent fogs.

Chit Khin's thoughts went back to his days of training. He had apprenticed under his father and older brother who taught him all the tricks of the trade--how the read the currents, judge the effect of the wind on the high, broad side of the motor ship, spot sandbars and underwater obstacles and a thousand other things he needed to know to keep from needing to cry for the gods' help. He recalled the proud day when he received his license to pilot motor ships from Rangoon to Bassein.

On the shore were several boats under repair. When the tides were particularly high, the ships were

positioned over great wooden "horses" built along the shore. As the tide fell, the ship came to rest on these supports and were braced to keep them upright. Then rotten boards were removed from the bottom and replaced before the next tide came in. Chit Khin could see large planks positioned over fires with weights on them, bending them to the right shape to fit the bottom.

The shore teemed with activity. Children swam in the muddy water, women washed clothing, men cast nets, teenagers fetched water, families bathed, and the paths along each side of the canal had many people walking in both directions. Along the edge of the canal, smaller boats of all sizes plied their way; some going to Rangoon (Yangon) and others returning. Some were powered by chugging motors while many were rowed or sailed.

From time to time the ship passed villages of bamboo and thatch houses. Many were built over the water but with the falling tide, they stood on the broadening muddy flat. Each village had its wharf where boat taxis landed their passengers, but these villages were too small to merit a stop from Chit Khin's Ayeyawadi class (two storied) motor ship. These villages were serviced by one storied, smaller motor ships. Smoke came out of the roofs of many of the houses, telling of the beginning of supper preparation.

Fishermen fished from small boats. Others tended gill nets which stretched hundreds of feet, their course marked by floats. The motor ship ran over these floats but the nets were suspended far enough below the surface to escape the propellers.

Chit Khin glanced at the flowers on the bow of the ship. The Oo Si (captain) always made sure there were fresh leaves as an offering to the nats (spirits) at the start of the trip. Chit Khin had seen the water suddenly churn violently for no apparent reason, confirming the presence of strong, unseen forces.

A crew member bought Chit Khin a plate of noodles.

"Pork noodles," he said.

Chit Khin looked carefully but saw only vegetables. Pork pieces seemed few and far between. Steering with his feet, he ate with chopsticks without complaint.

The sun settled in the west, turning the sky to brilliant colors of a gorgeous sunset doubled by its reflection in the water. Sunset lasted only a few minutes and then shadows appeared along the shore and Chit Khin switched on the spotlight mounted on the front of the boat. A crew member swung the light back and forth in front of the ship, highlighting night fishermen who could no longer be seen in the falling darkness. Tiny lights appeared as the smaller boats lit kerosene lamps and hoisted them on their masts. While some of these small boats would stop at a village, most continued to go all night, steering by the faint light of the stars.

Leaving the relatively straight Twante Canal, the motor ship continued on natural channels which curved back and forth. The small boats, trying to shorten their travel distance, cut across the curves as did Chit Khin which meant they all were trying to use the same part of the river. While Chit Khin knew he would have real problems if he ran over any of them, he steered as if they were not there, depending on the small boatmen's love of life to motivate them to get out of his way.

Darkness covered the land and the stars shone brightly. The spotlight endlessly probed the shore on one side and then the other. While to most the shores seemed alike, with vegetation, palm trees and villages, to Chit Khin every bend, curve and place was different. There were no charts of the rivers and bayous. He had it all memorized in his head. The Irrawaddy had five main mouths to the sea. The first Chit Khin came to was the Kyait Htaw River. Later the motor ship would cross and sometimes follow the Bogale, the main Irrawaddy, the Pyanalaw, the Thetkethaung, and lastly, the Bassein River. Each branched off the Irrawaddy in the northern part of the delta and fanned out to the sea. Many little bayous and rivers interconnected them.

First stop was Maubin which came up on the port (left) side of the motor ship. An old steamer, long stripped of its engine, functioned as a wharf boat. It was anchored parallel to shore and connected to the shore with a long bridge which allowed the wharf boat to rise and fall with the tide.

When the wharf boat came into sight, Chit Khin shouted to the engine room to reduce speed. As the motor ship neared the wharf boat, Chit Khin called for further reduction, and then for the engines to idle as the ship coasted to the side of the wharf boat.

"We're coming in too fast," thought Chit Khin and he shouted, "Reverse engines!"

It seemed an eternity before the roar of the engines and the shudder of the ship told of the reversing engines. The ship abruptly reduced speed and Chit Khin shouted to idle engines as he steered it in next to the wharf boat. A crew member tossed a rope to the wharf boat and it was made fast to a bollard. The forward movement of the motor ship quickly took up the slack and soon the taunt rope was threatening to break. But it held and the motor ship stopped. Chit Khin spun the steering wheel and shouted to the engine room, "Forward slow." The engine started turning, slowly pushing water against the rudder which Chit Khin had angled so that that action brought the stern of the ship toward the wharf boat and another line was tossed and secured.

As the gap closed between the ship and wharf boat, the young and nimble jumped the space. Chit Khin hated to see them risk their lives to gain a few seconds earlier departure. If they fell between the ship and wharf boat, they would be crushed before he could reverse the movement of his vessel.

When the ship crunched against the old tires and the gap was closed, immediately swarms of people jumped from the motor ship to the wharf boat. Waiting vendors quickly boarded, selling food, snacks and turtle eggs, sugar cane, betel nut, cooked fishes, palm roots, traditional medicine, dried meat, many kinds of fruit, lottery tickets, etc. Passengers also boarded, not waiting for the completion of the disembarking as they hoped to grab the spaces vacated by those leaving. In theory those with steerage tickets were entitled to a two feet by six feet piece of deck but in practice each got what they were able to grab and hold.

First Class passengers climbed the stairs to the front section of the motor ship. All the cabins were still occupied but they had a right to sit and later sleep in the common room which was far less crowded than the steerage in back and below, which was packed with goods, people and belongings.

During this chaos, the freight master made sure the crew unloaded cargo destined for Maubin. At the same time cargo was being put aboard headed for Bassein (Pathein) or Myaungmya.

The horn sounded, indicating three minutes to departure time and the pace of the chaos picked up. Vendors shouted, trying to make last minute sales, arriving passengers scurried across the bridge, across the wharf boat and on to the motor ship. And the last of the new cargo was stowed on deck displacing, protesting steerage passengers.

Another blast of the horn announced departure and the lines were cast off. Vendors vacated the ship and one late young man, who probably spent too much time saying good by to his ahchit (lover), leaped the increasing gap to the motor ship.

Soon the lights of Maubin were left behind and most settled down, trying to sleep.

The quietness and the good channel made Chit Khin's largest problem staying awake. He remembered a close call several years before when he was apprenticing. When the motor ship passed a small boat, a young child had stood up and the bow waves had rocked the boat causing the child to fall overboard. The shouts of his father and from those watching on the motor ship had caused everyone to run to that side nearly capsizing the motor ship. Fortunately that motor ship was equipped with a panic fence down the middle which greatly slowed the movement of those on the other side to the railing and gave the pilot a chance to turn the motor ship into a hard turn so the keeling over of the motor ship against the curve counterbalanced the passengers rush to the side. The child had been rescued but it was a close call for the motor ship.

There were so many dangers. The motor ships were almost three stories high and had very shallow draft, so a sudden broadside wind could capsize them.

Chit Khin's memories drifted back to the time an old fellow came into the steering room and looked around. He had asked, "Pilot, do you know the history of this ship?"

"No, I only know it is very old," Chit Khin replied.

The old man replied, "This ship was one of ninety three sunk at Mandalay in 1942. When the Japanese invaded southern Burma via Thailand, the British, other Europeans, Americans, Indians, Chinese, and other non Burmese fled north, many by steamers, trying to escape the Japanese. At Mandalay many left the ships and took the trains to Myitkyina, hoping to fly out to India. Eventually ninety three vessels, the pride of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, accumulated at Mandalay. A Britisher using a powerful gun, shot holes in the bottom of each and sank them so the Japanese could not use them. Never-the-less they were raised and most of those that survived the allied bombing and strafing are still being used and this is one of them! I helped raise her as a young man. I recognized that patching plate welded on the bow."

Mile after mile of sameness passed as the motor ship chugged along, going about twelve miles per hour. Rounding a curve, they saw a buoy that marked where a private freighter had gone down with a loss of five lives. Chit Khin gave it wide berth.

At the half way point, Chit Khin turned over the piloting job to his relief. The rest of the night the trip was uneventful and they arrived at Myaungmya at 1 AM and later Bassein at 7 AM. Since this was the turn around point, all departed and all cargo was unloaded. The motor ship would lay over at Bassein for one day and then return to Rangoon.

Chit Khin bought several handmade bamboo and cloth umbrellas for a wedding present and a tin of sweet, sticky rice which his children dearly loved. Bassein was famous for both.

Sleeping aboard the Ayeamya Thida, he was ready for the morning departure. The other pilot took the first part of the return as this was the section he knew. Chit Khin took over late at night when they reached his section.

As the motor ship moved through the night, the mist begin to thicken into fog. Gradually it became more and more difficult to see the shore with the spotlight and to see the dim lights on the small boats. Most of the small boats realized the danger and moved close to shore. Large private boats moved out of the channel and dropped anchor and put a crew member on the bell who rang the bell at intervals to warn other ships of their presence. Chit Khin reduced speed to half. The spotlight beam only could reach shore now and then. Much of the time it showed a white wall of fog. As the spotlight played back and forth, there appeared to be a person sitting on the water. "What was that?" asked Chit Khin as the spotlight returned to the spot but now there was nothing there.

"It was a mermaid or a ghost!" a crew member whispered.

"I did not get a clear look," said Chit Khin. The sighting of mermaids meant good luck while a ghost brought bad luck. The sighting only added to Chit Khin's worries.

Visibility dropped to less than the stopping distance of the motor ship which meant if something suddenly emerged out of the fog, there would not be enough distance to stop the ship before it hit. Even the chance for evasive action was limited. Consulting with the captain, he called for the engines to stop and the ship drifted. With the spotlight showing only a white wall all around the ship, the captain decided to anchor and wait out the fog. Radar would have allowed the ship to continue but it was built long before radar was conceived and the ship had never been refitted and upgraded. A crew member was delegated to ring the ship's bell warning other ships of this ship's presence.

Morning brought the sun that began to burn off the fog. Visibility increased and the engine was restarted, the anchor was hauled up by the crew turning a capstan, and the ship began moving. The fog dispersed to patches and Chit Khin increased the speed as visibility lengthened.

The ship ran through patches of fog which got to fewer in number and farther between and Chit Khin increased the speed to normal. Rounding a curve, the motor ship ran into another patch. Expecting to quickly run through it and back into good visibility, Chit Khin did not call for reduction of speed. Suddenly he heard the clanging of a bell on his starboard side and another bell, more distant on the port. This told him those ships were surrounded with fog or they would not be ringing their bells.

"Half speed," Chit Khin shouted to the engine room. The motor ship slowly responded with decreasing speed. Listening carefully, Chit Khin judged the location of the ship with the bell on the starboard side and listened as he passed it. The bell on the port side became louder but Chit Khin was not sure exactly where it was.

"Quarter speed," he shouted.

The bell became louder as they neared it and then began to pass on their port side. Visibility increased to several dozen feet.

Suddenly the shore appeared stretching straight across their bow. They were headed directly for it at a right angles!

"Reverse engines, reverse engines, reverse engines, hard astern," Chit Khin shouted loudly.

The crew in the engine room caught the urgency and quickly stopped the propellers and then threw the gears to reverse them and then gave it all the power they could. The engines roared.

There was no time to turn the ship. Better to hit the shore at right angles than at an lesser angle and risk capsizing the motor ship.

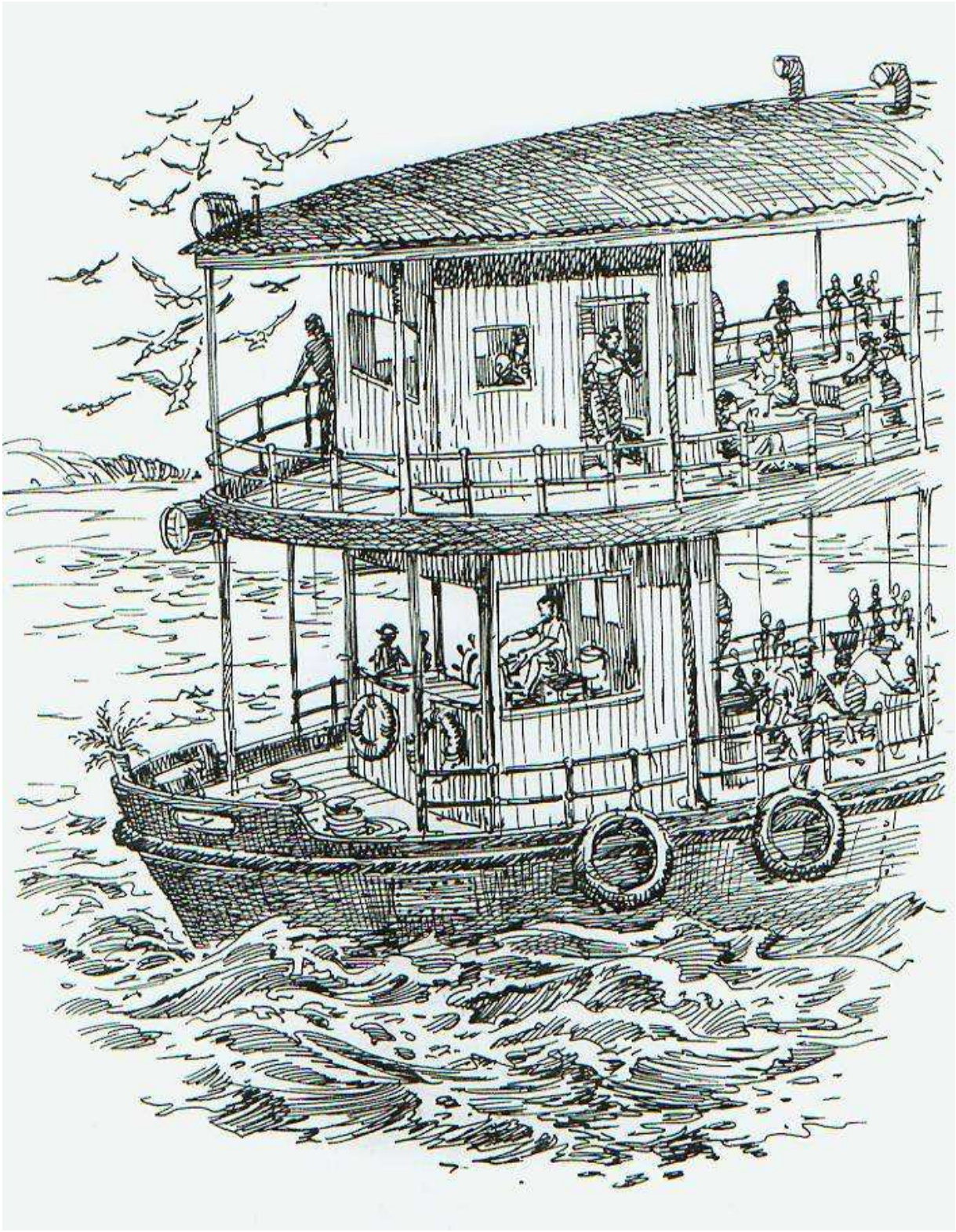
A fisherman was sitting in his small boat and looked up and saw the great motor ship headed straight for him. Showing remarkable coolness, he leaped out of his boat to the shore and ran along the shore pulling his boat, barely getting it out of the way before the motor ship hit the shore.

The shore was sloping and the motor ship ran up on the shore. "Would the bow crumple?" wondered Chit Khin.

The motor ship came to a stop and then slowly slid backward leaving a large gash in the mud and dirt. With great relief, Chit Khin felt the motor ship float free. He became aware of the excited voices all over the motor ship as some were awake and had seen the whole thing and were telling those waking up about the close call.

The anchor was dropped and the captain opened hatches to the crawl space under the deck to be sure no seam had opened and the ship was not filling with water.

Chit Khin, still gripping the steering wheel, lay his head on it while visions of the bank appearing and the motor ship running into it repeated and replayed in his mind as a cold sweat covered his body. "Just about the time you think you understand the river and its ways, it will throw something very unexpected at you," Chit Khin thought. "That was a ghost we saw!"



21

The Scalper

Nay Yi Yi looked at the brightly colored poster advertising the movie. A strong muscular man with blazing submachine gun was killing several men while holding onto a beautiful girl in his left arm. "I wish such a man would come and rescue me from this place." she thought, "Why I would even settle for watching him rescue someone else."

Another poster featured a boy and girl close to each other, obviously about to kiss. Government censors would not allow kissing on posters or in Burmese movies and censored out intimate sex scenes, from western movies starting with kissing. In Burmese movies, when a boy and girl move very close, the picture suddenly switches to a butterfly landing on a flower, a drop of water hitting a puddle, a leaf falling or some similar scene that suggests intimacy. Rape is depicted as a flower being crushed by a sandal.

Although Nay Yi Yi and her younger sister, Khin Ni Ni, had been standing in line for almost three hours to get a ticket, she knew they would never see the movie. Word had spread about this great movie, with even a little sex, although most had been censored out. It still contained all the violence because the government saw nothing harmful with a macho man killing twenty or thirty men, but eliminated kissing as corrupting. Nay Yi Yi and Khin Ni Ni had come almost before light in order to be at the head of the line. In another hour, the ticket booth would open and they should be able to purchase good ten kyat seats. She glanced at the others in line, mostly lower class women reading cheap romance novels. Nay Yi Yi wished she could earn a living in some other way. She returned to studying English in "The Guardian" magazine, leaning against the theater's wall. She mused, "One section of the magazine teaches the meaning of obscure English idioms while other sections contained stories translated into poor English."

When the ticket office was due to open in ten minutes, Nay Yi Yi watched activity on the sidewalk several steps down from the theater where the vendors sold snacks and ice water. A woman with seemingly nothing to sell, approached a young man who engaged her in conversation. She said something; he shook his head and counter offered. They bargained and finally agreed on a price. He passed her some notes and she led him to a girl dressed in worn clothing standing in line. They exchanged places. He had purchased her place in line. While illegal, many of those in line were stand-ins selling their place through hawkers.

"She probably didn't have ten kyats for the ticket anyway and gambled that someone would buy her place before the line moved her up to the window," thought Nay Yi Yi. She had done that when she had no money or thought the ticket might be hard to sell. She had once been forced to sell her place for only three kyats because she was approaching the ticket office.

The window opened and the line moved forward. Nay Yi Yi's turn came and she handed the ticket seller a ten kyat note and received a ten kyat ticket. She handed Khin Ni Ni ten kyats behind her and Khin Ni Ni purchased a ticket besides Nay Yi Yi's.

They joined the others on the lower sidewalk where the murmuring of "Stall Ya Me" (Tickets for you) could be heard. While this was also illegal, several offered their tickets to those just arriving. Nay Yi Yi listened to catch the going rate. "Thirty five kyats" she overheard one scalper quote. She saw another receive three ten kyat notes and hand over the ticket to a prosperous looking middle aged man. "Thirty must be the going rate. It must be a very good movie." thought Nay Yi Yi.

Her attention centered on a scalper bargaining with a young man wearing a silk longyi. "Thirty two" he said, "and I must have two together."

"Who has row C seat 20 or 22," the scalper whispered around naming the seats on each side of the

ticket she was holding. No one came forward. Some of the tickets had been bought by people who actually planned to see the movie.

Nay Yi Yi approached the man, "I have two together at 38 kyat each."

"No way," he answered.

"Seventy kyats for the pair. Its a very good movie. She'll be impressed you were able to get tickets," Nay Yi Yi said with an alluring smile. Even ticket scalping went better with good salesmanship.

The man smiled and handed her seventy kyats and she gave him the tickets. The profit would pay her sister's school fees of thirty kyats.

As Nay Yi Yi and Khin Ni Ni walked away, she heard her name called. She turned, hoping not to see one of her regular customers since she had already sold her tickets. With relief she saw May Tha, the Akyan aphan (literally thinker-deceiver but means buying entrepreneur), who said, "Are you available tomorrow?"

"Yes, what's up? Ma May Tha," Nay Yi Yi asked.

"There will be a good deal at Kone Taik #2 (People's Store #2)," she explained.

"What are you paying?" Nay Yi Yi queried.

"Five kyats."

"Ten kyats," countered Nay Yi Yi, "and you can count on me."

They settled at eight. "How about Ma Khin Ni Ni too?" Nay Yi Yi said.

"Sorry, I don't have enough money for another buyer. I wish I had known she was available earlier. It's in the Cloth Department. Be there at least two hours before opening, third floor. I'll see you in line." May Tha stated.

May Tha left and Nay Yi Yi and Khin Ni Ni started toward home. At the corner, vendors were selling snack foods. Turning to her sister, Nay Yi Yi said, "Khin Ni Ni, the long wait has made me hot and sweaty. Let's have some refreshing Mungletsaung."

Khin Ni Ni quickly agreed. Seeking out a Mungletsaung seller, Nay Yi Yi asked the price. "With htanyet (palm) juice, fifty pyas (half a kyat)," he answered, "With coconut milk, one kyat."

"Two glasses with coconut milk," said Nay Yi Yi. Since they had done so well, she felt they deserved a special treat. The coconut milk was made by scraping out the white meat and pouring boiling water over it and squeezing it to produce a delicious white milk. Although a lot of work, it added a very desirable flavor.

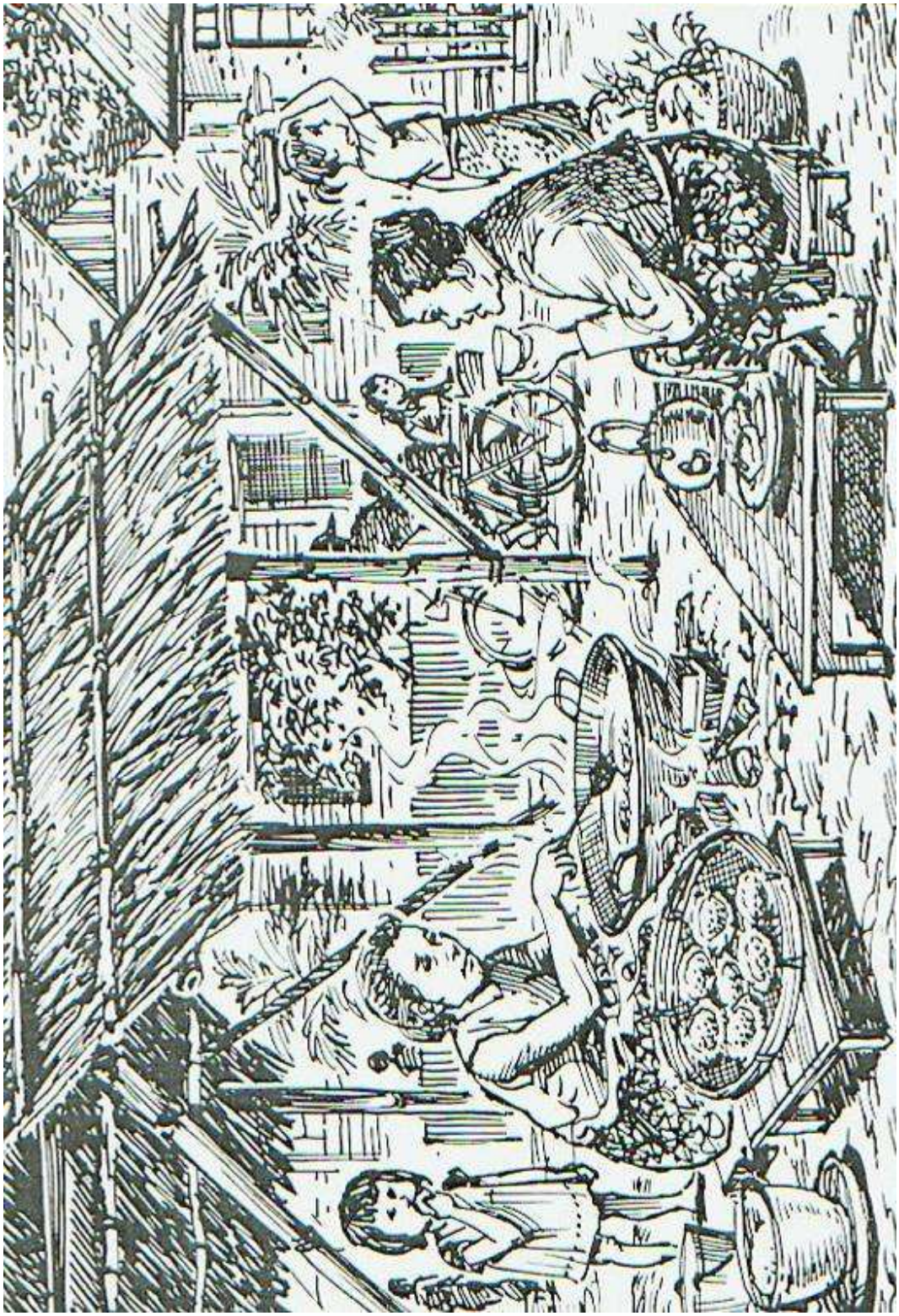
The vender scooped some small greenish noodles made from rice from one kettle. Adding the white coconut milk from another kettle, he stirred the glasses with spoons and handed them to the young women.

As they enjoyed their snack, a group of tourists came out of the Thamada Hotel (President's Hotel) and strolled down the side walk. As they passed Nay Yi Yi and Khin Ni Ni, one of them looked at their snacks and said, "It looks like they are eating little green worms!" Usually Nay Yi Yi liked to listen to foreigners as it gave her a chance to improve her English by understanding different accents. But she was too shy to approach any directly and engage in conversation.

"Stupid tourists," she thought, "they make fun of anything they do not understand."

Then she heard one American tourist say to another, "How many Poles does it take to change a light bulb?"

"Three," the other answered, "one to hold the bulb and two to turn the ladder. That's a very old joke."



"How many Burmese does it take to change a light bulb?" the first said.

The second shrugged his shoulders and the first pointed to the crew changing street lights walking down the street, "Five!"

The crew was pushing a square frame mounted on wheels with a vertical extension ladder in the center that could be raised to reach a street light. One, at each corner, pushed it along the street while the fifth carried the bulbs. When they reached a street light with a burned out bulb, the four braced the corners while the fifth pushed up the extension ladder, climbed it and replaced the bulb. The burned out bulb would be sold on the recycling market for glass.

The group laughed and one said, "they should use a cherry picker truck and do it with one employee."

"I wonder what a cherry picker truck is," thought Nay Yi Yi. "It must be some kind of truck. But trucks are expensive, have upkeep, and burn gasoline. Even if a foreign country gave us this kind of truck, we would have to use precious foreign exchange to buy spare parts and price of a gallon of gasoline would pay a worker for three days. Tourists don't understand the economics of Burma. In the long run, any kind of truck would cost more than the salaries of the four men made redundant (unemployed). What appeared stupid to outsiders was the most economical way to do it in Burma. Besides what would the four men do to support their families?"

Without letting on they understood English, they returned the glasses and spoons and continued the long walk home.

The next morning, Nay Yi Yi arrived at the People's Store #2 two hours before opening and found a mob already around the doors. In theory all doors opened at the same time but Nay Yi Yi knew from experience the man unlocking the doors always started with the east doors. She found a large group of mostly women waiting at those doors, as they too had figured every angle.

As Nay Yi Yi waited, she wondered how May Tha know about these great deals. May Tha surely had connections but, judging from the crowd, a lot of others had access to supposedly confidential information too. May Tha arrived a few minutes later resulting in her being several persons farther away from the door. She handed Nay Yi Yi 230 kyats since Nay Yi Yi was likely to be ahead of her in line when they got to the cloth department.

When the doors opened Nay Yi Yi raced for the escalators. She took the left hand one and raced up it as fewer used the left. In theory, one escalator was supposed to go up and one down but to discourage villagers just riding the escalators for fun, both went up, forcing riders to walk back down by the stairs. Most went to the right and since some didn't run up the moving steps, this slowed the flow.

Nay Yi Yi reached the cloth department in a dead heat with about a dozen others. There was a lot of pushing and shoving as a line formed at the cash register-selling point. Store personnel tried to maintain order. Soon the line wound around the room and grew like a Chinese dragon as more joined its end. Nay Yi Yi was eighth in line so she had done well. She wondered what she would be buying for 230 kyats. She looked at the display cases. Most were empty. Some contained merchandise that looked old, dirty and poorly displayed.

Five clerks occupied the sales point. A managerial looking person said something and nodded his head and the clerk at the cash register accepted 230 kyats from the first customer and issued a receipt. The customer handed the receipt to the second clerk. Meanwhile one of the employees took a blanket from under the counter and handed it to the next clerk. This clerk took a hank of yarn from a box and placed it on top of the blanket and handed it on to the third clerk. She added a longyi (sarong type of skirt) to the pile and handed it to the clerk receiving the receipt. This clerk handed the pile to the customer.

The blankets came in different colors and all were of poor quality. The hanks of yarn showed a variety of solid colors while the attractive longyis were all different colors and patterns. The customer had to take whatever the clerk gave him with no choice of color. Since one size fits all in adult longyis,

right size was not a problem. Tourists said the whole process epitomized the Burma way to socialism. Burmese said nothing, knowing, while silence might not be golden, it surely was safer.

When Nay Yi Yi's turn came, she paid, received her merchandise and walked ten steps farther to wait for May Tha. When May Tha's turn came, she paid, received her items and stuffed them in a large bag. Then May Tha came over to Nay Yi Yi and added her items to the bag. May Tha slipped Nay Yi Yi eight kyats. "Don't let the others see how much I've paid you."

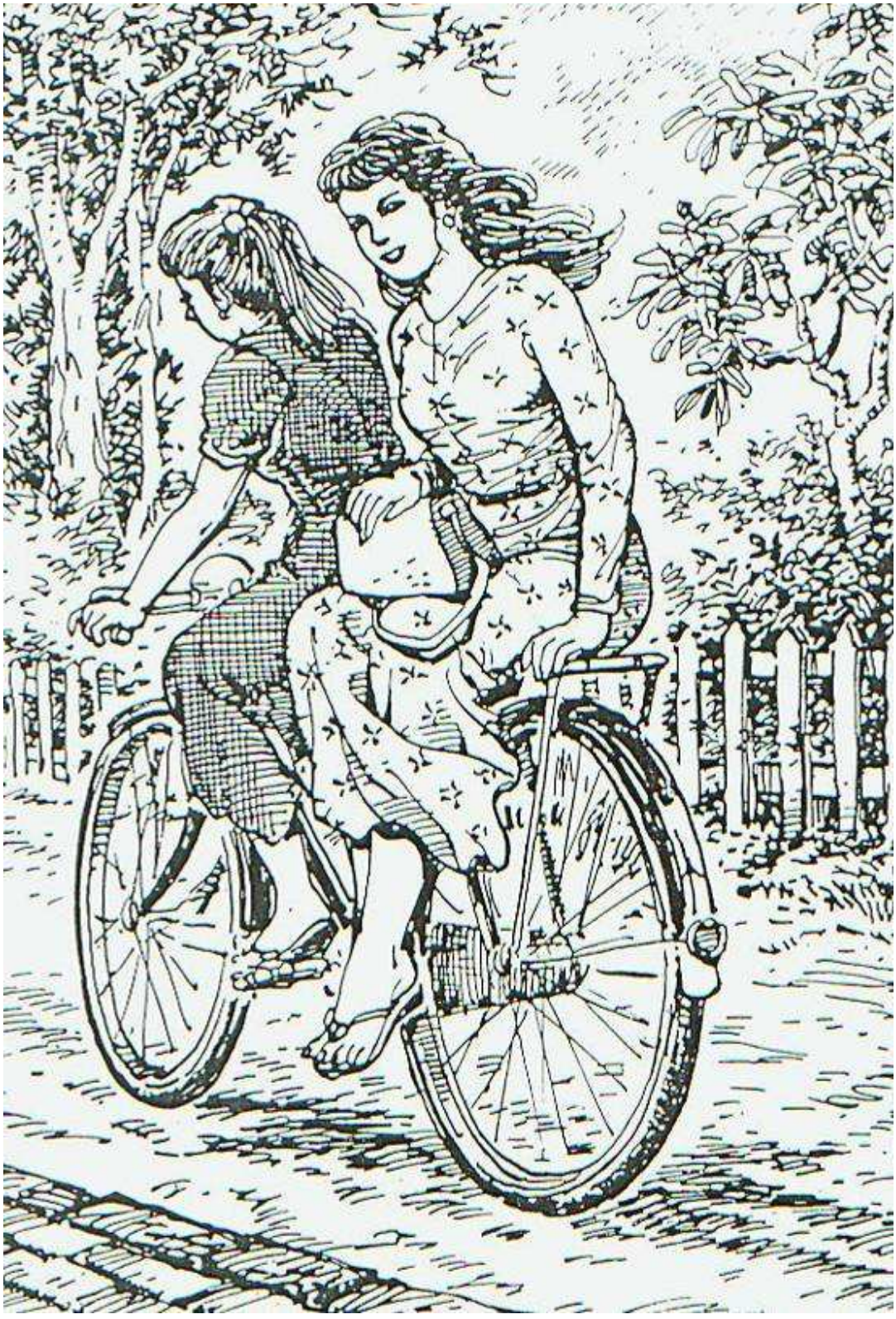
Nay Yi Yi knew the others had been paid less. But Nay Yi Yi knew she was worth it because she had gotten a place near the beginning of the line assuring May Tha was able to purchase some items. One never knew how much had been reserved for the employees and their friends. Sometimes only a few would-be buyers were successful.

May Tha went down the line and chatted with three other girls unobtrusively touching hands by which she gave each the money they needed to make her purchase. She returned to Nay Yi Yi to wait for her other stand-ins to get their turn.

Nay Yi Yi asked May Tha the breakdown on the items.

"As you know, the store must sell at the prices the Store Department, Ministry of Trade orders. The store managers know the prices are out of line--some too high and some too low. If they sell at those prices, only the underpriced items will sell and they will be stuck with all the overpriced merchandise. The longyis must be sold for 60 kyats, while they are worth 100 kyats wholesale. The hank must be sold for 70 kyats which is the market price but no one wants as many as the store has to sell. The blanket is priced at 100 kyats when the same thing is available in the black market for 80 kyats, so no one is going to buy it. By grouping the stuff together they can move out the overpriced items by pairing them with underpriced. I'll sell the longyi for 100 kyats and make forty kyats. I hope to sell the hank for 70 and so break even. I'll have to sell the blanket at 80 and lose 20 kyats but counting what I had to pay you, I should clear 12 kyats. Before you get ideas of going on your own, remember, the secret is knowing what is offered where and for what."

"Crazy system," thought Nay Yi Yi, "but it provides me a living. Maybe some day I can find a job where I can use my education."



22

The Medal

Gam Sheng rested in his chair. The walk from the market had exhausted him. But it was good to have tea with his friends at the tea shop near the market. His ranks of friends were thinner now. So many had died. But they were old and their lives had been full.

Tu Lum, his grandson, came into the room with two friends in tow. "Grandpa, Bawk La and Zau Rip have not heard your exciting stories of your days with the Kachin Rangers," he said.

Without waiting for his grandfather's reply, Tu Lum led Bawk La and Zau Rip over to the teak cabinet and pointed through the glass to a medal lying on the shelf. "There it is! Grand dad's CMA medal. He got it during the great war for killing Japanese!"

As the two friends peered through the glass, Tu Lum asked, "Can I take it out and show them?"

"Yes," said Gam Sheng, getting up with effort. Taking a key from its hiding place on top of the wall beam, he unlocked the door.

Tu Lum reached in and took out the silver medal. At the top were large capital letters "CMA". Beneath them was an eagle, sort of squashed flat, with a shield on its breast and holding some kind of branch in one claw and a bundle of arrows in the other. "That's an American eagle!" explained Tu Lum to his friends.

"What does CMA mean? We haven't studied that English word." asked Bawk La, now in the fourth standard.

"It is not a word. It stands for Citation for Military Assistance." said Tu Lum importantly repeating what his grandfather had told him many times before.

The children placed the medal in Gam Sheng's old, gnarled hand. "It used to have an ornate silk ribbon with three peacocks on each side," said Gam Sheng, "But that wore out many years ago."

"Tell us about your war battles!" begged Tu Lum. Bawk La and Zau Rip coaxed too, although it didn't take much to get Gam Sheng started.

Gam Sheng settled into his chair with the three children listening attentively at his feet. "Many years ago there was a great war. On one side were the British, Americans, Indians, Chinese with us Kachins, and Karens of Burma. On the other side were Germany, Japan and the Burmans. Part of that war was fought right here in Kachin state in northern Burma. Japan invaded China. Then Britain and America supplied the Chinese through Hong Kong and French Indo China. When the Japanese conquered those countries, the supplies came in to Rangoon, and up the long Burma Road to China. When Japan conquered Burma, the road was cut and supplies had to be flown over the Himalayan Mountains. They called it 'flying the Hump'. Over a thousand planes were lost. One night we heard a plane flying low over our heads and knew it was in trouble. Then we heard it crash and explode. We raced to get to the crash site before the Japanese but there were no survivors. On other occasions, we rescued several pilots and spirited them away before the Japanese found them."

"Wow," said Zau Rip appreciatively, "Did you shoot any Japanese?"

"Yes, we ambushed them many times," said Gam Sheng, "but it is not a pleasant experience to line up a young, unsuspecting boy soldier in your sights and squeeze the trigger knowing his life ends at that moment." The old Kachin was quiet, reliving those times he could not deny he had killed another human being.

"But the Japanese killed us whenever they could. It was brutal trying to avoid them. They could be so cruel to villagers if they thought the villagers had information on where we were hiding." shuddered Gam Sheng recalling some of the tortured victims who had died rather than betray their fellow Kachins.

"Were you a big army?" asked Bawk La.

"No, we were always small units spread out. After the war I learned what was called the American OSS Detachment 101 consisted of about 1,000 American and 10,000 of us Kachins, Karens, and a few Shan and Burman. An OSS American, who returned after the war, told us that we had killed over 5,000 enemy and only lost 27 Americans and 378 guerillas. He said it was the highest kill ratio for any infantry type unit in American military history."

"But when you're fighting that kind of war, you don't see the big picture. You fight day to day, trying to survive one more day, elude capture one more day, find food and shelter one more day. Everything is one day at a time."

"Did the Japanese ever ambush you?" asked Bawk La.

"Yes, though I hate to admit it. We got careless and weren't as watchful as we should have been. Walked right into an ambush they had set up for us. Fortunately one of their soldiers was too eager and fired too soon, so we hadn't entered the trap far enough to be inhaled. Still we lost Sin Wa Nau and Da Hpung, good friends. I can see their faces yet.

"We got even though. Set up an ambush of that patrol ourselves. We found a spot on the trail they used that had thick grass on each side. We filled the grass with sharpened, barbed bamboos. When the patrol came along, we opened fire and they dove into the grass, right on to the stakes which impaled them. We then wiped them out. We didn't want them going around saying they had ambushed Kachins and lived to brag about it."

"Tell them about the medal!" coaxed Tu Lum.

"We got our supplies from air drops. The Americans with us would radio back to India what we needed in ammunition, guns, medicine, explosives, food, etc. and where we would be. Planes would come over and drop the supplies by parachutes. Of course the Japanese would see the drops and race to try and catch us and capture the supplies. Once in a while the wind would carry the 'chutes right into their hands. We would get nothing. But usually the drops were far enough away from the Japanese, we got the supplies and then got away." the old soldier reminisced.

"The medal" Tu Lum gently reminded him.

"Oh, yes, as we were unpacking one of the drops, we found a box of silver medals. Apparently Captain William Wilkinson had ordered them but he had been transferred on. His successor passed out the medals among us and we proudly wore them. I guess there were only fifty awarded. That always surprised me there were so few as so many more deserved them."

Gam Sheng lay back in the chair feeling very tired. The walk from the market and the excitement of reliving his war days had drained him. Tu Lum, Bawk La and Zau Rip left him and went to play.

He looked at the medal in his hand and remembered the many friends he had made during those exciting days. So many were dead now. Gam Sheng closed his eyes and rested.

When Tu Lum came to fetch his grandfather for supper, he found his hand still clutching the CMA medal but his spirit had joined his comrades who had passed through death's door.

It is probably better Gam Sheng did not know the full story behind the CMA medals. Years before, a wealthy American women had gone to Paris. There she found a beautiful necklace she wanted but it cost $75,000, a huge amount of money. She wired her husband back in the United States asking if she could buy it. He wired back, "No, price too high." Due to a mistake in transmission, the telegram she received said, "No price too high." Therefore she went ahead and purchased it. When she returned, he was furious and sued the telegraph company claiming their mistake had cost him $75,000. The court upheld him and awarded him judgment. Thereafter "," was always indicated by CMA, an abreviation for comma, so it could not be overlooked.

In the wireless transmission from Burma in 1943, the sender, apparently was trained in traditional telegraphy, used CMA for comma. The OSS operator received the transmission with CMA in the middle of the list of supplies needed. The message was forwarded to Calcutta. The CMA was interpreted to mean Citation for Military Assistance and fifty silver medals were cast and made up with

appropriate ribbons and dropped into Burma where they were given out.

Gam Sheng never knew his hard earned and richly deserved medal was the result of a misreading of a punctuation mark!

23

The Paddy Farmer

U Aye Pe looked at his three sons seated around the eating table and said, "It is time to plant the paddy seed beds. Ye Htut, you can prepare the beds. We will plant on Bodahu (Wednesday). Aung Thu and Htun Wai will help you. Be gentle with the water buffaloes."

Early on Wednesday morning, the family went out to the nat altar built onto a large tree beside one of the paddy fields. U Aye Pe made an offering to the nat (spirit). The offering consisted of a coconut, three hands of special Arakan bananas, betel nuts, cooked chicken, a cup of village-made alcohol, rice, and perfume. He burned an incense stick and asked the nats of the fields to give them a good paddy (rice) crop. While the U Aye Pe family considered themselves to be good Buddhists, they also believed the nats controlled the fields and bounty of the crop. Having made the offering, U Aye Pe tested to see if the nat had come to take the essences of the offering--the spirit. He put three coins in his hand and placed them face up (chinthe side up). Burmese coins have a chinthe (a mythological lion-dragon creature) on one side. He tossed them into the air. Noting that two landed chinthe up, he announced the nat's presence (three chinthes up would also indicate the same).

The family chatted for ten or so minutes. Then U Aye Pe again placed three coins chinthe up on his hand and tossed them into the air. They landed three chinthes up which indicated the nat was still present and consuming the spirit of the offering. A few minutes later, he tried again and when two showed tails up, everybody knew the nat had finished and left. Leaving a small token portion of the chicken and other offerings, they consumed most of the liquor and returned home.

Ye Htut plowed the seed beds using Htoke Gyi (Stocky) and Nga Net (Mr. Black), the family's water buffaloes. Recent rains had softened the soil, making it easier for the plow to loosen and prepare.

On Bodahu they filled the seed beds with water to Ta Htwa (the depth of a hand spread). After more preparation, U Aye Pe sprinkled the paddy (rice still in its husk) evenly over the water. The heavy, full grains sank and would sprout in the rich mud. The lighter grains which floated, Aung Thu skimmed off to feed the chickens. These seeds had been saved from last year's crop.

In seven to eight days, the grain sprouted and tiny paddy plants began to grow. It became Htun Wai's job to keep adding water to the seed beds to keep the water at the proper level. Too much water would drown the seedlings but if the bed dried out, then the plants would die. By planting six to eight weeks before being transplanted in the big fields, the plants could be protected and get a head start and so would be sure to mature while sufficient rains fell. U Aye Pe planted the seed beds usually early in the month of Kasone (May 20th to June 20th) at the beginning of the rainy season.

Soon, the seed beds showed bright yellow green and thickly filled with growing paddy plants. Ye Htut and Htun Wai, using Htoke Gyi and Nga Net, plowed their paddy fields and repaired damage and weakness to the dikes that surrounded each field. Their plowing turned under the dung from Htoke Gyi's and Nga Net's pen that had been spread on the fields to enrich the soil after the last harvest.

Finally, several heavy rains announced the monsoons had begun in earnest and the fields began to fill. Soon the water stood ankle deep and Ye Htut and Htun Wai continued to prepare the soil, using a Tun Chit--a roller with bamboo spikes that broke up clods pulled by the water buffaloes. Then one morning U Aye Pe announced, "It's time to plant." May Lay and Cho Mar let out a groan. While U Aye Pe's sons accepted work as part of life, his daughters, particularly Cho Mar, did not.

"The sun will make me browner, then I'll never get a husband!" Cho Mar pouted.

"No one will notice your brownness with the light shining off your buck teeth, Thwakhaw (Hoe Face)!" teased Htun Wai, using the derogatory nickname Cho Mar had acquired that compared her teeth to a hoe sticking out of her mouth.

Cho Mar picked up a sandal from the outer door step and threw it at her tormentor. "I don't see any girls throwing inviting looks to you, Ayoe Su (Skeleton)," Cho Mar retorted, using his nickname based on his thinness.

"Enough," shouted Daw Hnin Si, their mother, "Ma Cho Mar, you can protect your precious whiteness with an Eh' Yaung (a rowboat shaped basket that extended from the top of the head to below their waist that shielded them from rain or sun as they bent over planting)."

"Ma Cho Mar, do you know that girls in America actual lie in the sun on purpose in order to get browner?" asked Tun Wai.

"You have got to be kidding!" exclaimed Cho Mar in total disbelief.

"No I'm not. I saw it on a video in town. I asked the video operator what they were doing. He said, 'They're sunbathing to get brown.' They didn't have much on either!" said Tun Wai, giving his brother a nudge and a wink.

When the family arrived at the seed bed, the men gathered up their longyis and pulled the back side through between their legs and tucked it in their waist, making shorts. The women rolled up the tops of their longyis so they were only half length to keep them out of the water. Wading into the seed bed, all began pulling up handsful of paddy seedlings. Hitting the roots of each handful against the leg removed the dirt from their roots, making them lighter to carry. Then they tied the plants in a bundle with one of the plants. Straddling these bundles on a bamboo pole made it easier to carry them to the paddy field. They prepared what they thought they could plant in a day. Balancing the poles of plants on their shoulders, they distributed the plant bundles around the paddy fields.

"Watch out for leeches climbing your legs," warned Daw Hnin Si. When they found a blood sucking leech attached to their skin, they used a rag dipped in a mixture of lime and tobacco juice to force it to let go. Some neighbors said soap and tobacco worked better, while Uncle U Aung Than preferred to spit betel juice on them.

Then U Aye Pe said, "This field has good soil, so plant the seedling Ta Mike (the distance from the outside of the little finger to the end of the uplifted thumb)." Poor fields would be planted Ta Htwa (width of a out spread hand). The family had planted these fields at least three generations and U Aye Pe knew the capacity of each field. The family ownership may go back many generations but U Aye Pe could only remember his grandfather, so all before this grandfather were unknown. His grandfather had borrowed money from the chitees (Indian money lenders) at a high rate of interest, not realizing how quickly the debt multiplied. When he was unable to repay, he lost the fields to the chitees. The chetyar did not want to farm the field himself so U Aye Pe's grandfather became a tenant farmer on his former land. Government reformers seized land belonging to absentee landlords and large landowners and so U Aye Pe's father had received the land back, but was required to sell most of the harvest to the government at official prices.

Ye Htut waded into the flooded field. Taking the bundles of seedlings from a pole, he distributed them every few feet. Cho Mar put on the basket to protect herself from sunburn. The others wore a broad rimmed farmer's hat called Khamaut to protect from sun and rain.

"Since we are all wearing a Khamaut except Cho Mar, maybe we should vote for Aung San Suu Kyi!" said May Lay, referring to the fact the National League for Democracy had adopted the farmer's hat as its party symbol.

"Don't even joke about politics," warned U Aye Pe. "Let's get to work."

They waded in and each took a bundle, untying the split bamboo. Selecting two or three plants, they thrust the roots into the mud. Separate, thrust, separate, thrust. Planting the seedings was back breaking, monotonous work. In neighboring fields, children as young as nine planted paddy.

"I'm sure glad you children are old enough to help." Daw Hnin Si said.

"I can't remember being too young to plant paddy," retorted May Lay, "In fact I think I was born planting paddy."

"Actually you were born while I was planting paddy. It was that field over there and I went into labor. U Aye Pe went to get the bullock cart and you were born while I was waiting for him!" their mother reminisced. "I'm sure you didn't plant any paddy the day you were born. Then I took the forty five days of rest to recover."

It took three days to plant the family's ten acres of paddy fields. Even the seed beds had been replanted with the proper spacing. The planting finished, U Aye Pe made a second offering at the nat shrine.

Great happiness reigned until U Aye Pe announced that a neighbor had asked to hire his sons at fifteen kyats a day and ten kyats a day for the girls to plant several of his fields. Cho Mar complained that she planted as many plants as Aung Thu but no one took her complaints seriously as everybody knew the men should be paid more than women.

Fortunately paddy does not need a lot of weeding. Going over the fields once or twice kept the weeds in check. The plants needed to be watched for signs of disease, When the leaves curled or became crumbly, U Aye Pe sprayed that field. Usually there were enough "good" insects to keep the paddy destroying insects in check.

After a very heavy rain, some fields would overflow and the water would cut a channel through the dike, thereby draining the field. If not repaired and allowed to dry out, the paddy would die. Therefore U Aye Pe and his sons patrolled the fields, checked and repaired broken dikes.

Sufficient rains kept the fields filled with water for about two months and the paddy grew well. Then the rains slackened and the fields gradually dried up but the paddy continued to grow. In several of U Aye Pe's best fields, the paddy reached Hnit Taung (two elbow to finger tips--2 x 18 inches) height but most of his fields were average, reaching Ta Taung plus Ta Htwa (elbow to finger tip plus hand with outstretched thumb). In U Aye Pe's worst field the paddy only reached Ta Taung Hsoke (elbow to clenched fist) height.

The paddy began to turn yellow and ripen. Under U Aye Pe's direction, his sons erected Sachaukyoke (Sparrow Frightening Mannequins--Scarecrows). A cracked inverted water pot with black eyes and yellow thanaka skin conditioner on the cheeks made the head and a tattered longyi resembled the body mounted on a cross of bamboo. Straw formed the hair and arms. Unfortunately the sparrows soon learned to ignore them, so the two weeks before harvest required their constant presence in the fields. Temporary elevated shelters of bamboo and thatch provided look out points. Long pieces of split bamboo when snapped together, made a "baung" sound, effectively frightening the birds from the ripening grain.

Ye Htut rigged long strings attached to metal pails filled with loose stones. By yanking the strings, noise could be produced in far fields, frightening away the birds.

When U Aye Pe determined the paddy ready for harvest, the family members carried sickles to the fields. Joining those on guard duty, they began harvesting. Daw Hnin Si said, "Be on a sharp lookout for field rats. I hope we can catch a few, for they make fine curry. But also watch for snakes. One bit our neighbor yesterday."

First they gathered the stalks together and with a cross cut sweep, the stems were cut. The cut plants were laid on the ground and "shown to the sun" for two days to dry them out. Lady Luck smiled on them, for on the first day they caught sixteen fat rats and so, ate well that evening.

After drying, they collected the plants in bundles called Kauthline. Tying them with stalks of paddy, they loaded them on a cart pulled by Htoke Gyi and Nga Net. It took five days to harvest their ten acres. Of course the cut stalks had to be guarded night and day against birds and thieves. U Aye Pe made a third offering at the nat shrine.

The cart took the bundles to the threshing floor--an area of hard, smooth dirt. The U Aye Pe family stacked the bundles beside the floor. When all the paddy had been harvested and stacked, U Aye Pe, helped by all members of the family, carefully burned a wide strip of grass and stubble around the stack

to protect it from any wild fires that might sweep across the dry stubble.

Threshing started by breaking several bundles onto the floor. The water buffaloes, Htoke Gyi and Nga Net, trod the grain out of the ears and stalks. Using a Down (stick with hook) the sons took turns raking the empty straw away to be used later as animal feed. The grain and chaff was swept into a mound near a Hletsin (Winnowing tripod). Ye Htut handed baskets of grain and chaff to Aung Thu who poured it into a large basket suspended by rope from the top of the tripod. Then Aung Thu carefully tipped the basket, allowing the grain and chaff to slowly stream down. As it fell the ten feet to the ground, the wind caught the lighter chaff and blew it several feet away. The heavier grain fell to the floor where Htun Wai spread it thinly over a large area to allow the sun to dry it for four or five days. Then the boys gathered it into baskets and transferred it to the grain storage building.

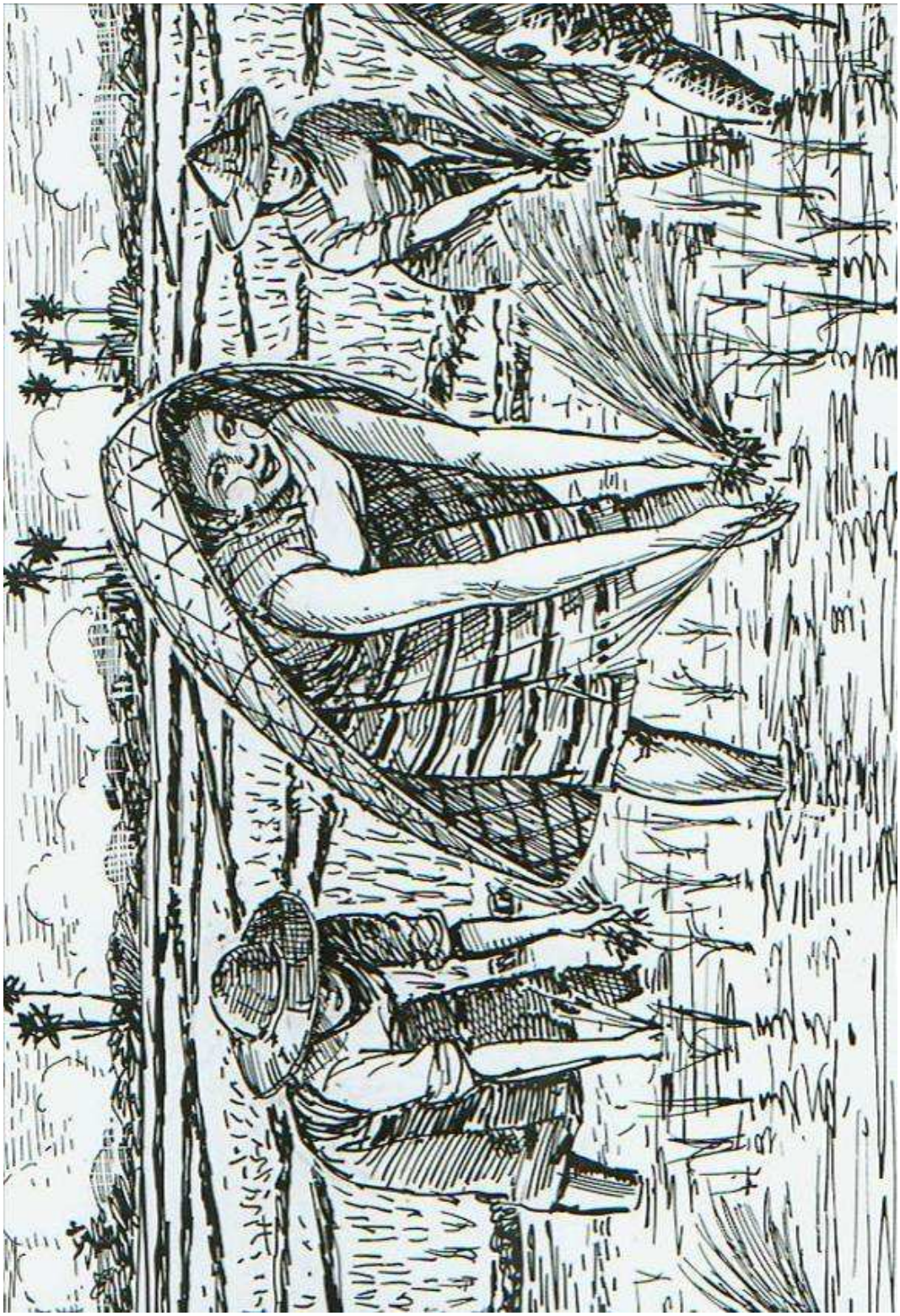
This building housed a very large woven basket in a sturdy frame with a sloping roof. The inside of the basket was coated with dried cow dung to seal up all holes, preventing grain from leaking out. It took two days to thresh all the grain. U Aye Pe figured his total harvest was 420 dhins or baskets of paddy. A dhin was a basket square on the bottom and round at the top used to measure paddy or rice. A dhin, a Burmese name, pronounced tin, was often confused by westerners with the square tin metal containers used to hold cooking oil or kerosene and used as a measurement in other countries.

U Aye Pe owned about 10 acres. The best fields produced about 50 baskets of paddy per acre while the average fields produced 35 to 40 baskets. He was required to sell the government 300 baskets of paddy at 20 kyats per basket--the official government buying price. The independent paddy dealers in town paid 37 kyats per basket. U Aye Pe could sell them any excess he produced over the required 300 baskets. If his fields failed to produce his quota of 300 dhins, then he would have to buy paddy from others to fill his quota or pay a fine for being short. This also prevented him from selling his paddy on the black market at the higher price. He would need to keep at least 67 baskets of paddy (which milled to 45 baskets of rice) to feed his family for a year, leaving him just over fifty to sell on the "free" market. All told, he figured he would gross about 8,000 kyats ($400) for his year's work.

With the help of his sons, U Aye Pe lined his ox cart with woven bamboo mats to make it grain tight and filled it with paddy. Hitching up Htoke Gyi and Nga Net, they rode into town to the government buying point. There the paddy was weighed and put in large bags which held two dhins of paddy. When the paddy came in faster than it could be bagged, it was piled in large mounds in the yard of the mill with a flag on the top to frighten away birds.

U Aye Pe believed the government buyers used a light set of weights to buy his paddy and then used false names to pay themselves for the extra paddy they had cheated him out of but there was no way to prove it. It took nine trips to convey the 300 baskets of paddy. He was then given a Tar Won Kye paper showing he had fulfilled his quota. U Aye Pe refused to pay a bribe to receive his money quickly, and so, spent many hours badgering the officials until he was finally paid 6,000 kyats.

Editor's Note: After 1988 the buying and selling of paddy was reformed so that the farmer only had to sell two basket per acre to the government. The government stopped providing rice to cooperatives and all had to buy their rice on the free market except the military and government servants.



24

The Rafter

Maung Thi La watched his father, U Thu Ya, standing on the front of the great raft peering intently ahead. A little to the right, a large sand bar extended into the muddy Irrawady River. How far did that bar extend into the river and how deep was the water flowing over it?

U Thu Ya shouted to Maung Thi Ha, "Sweep on your side!" And Maung Thi La's brother, Maung Thi Ha, swept the great oar. His straining muscles could be seen on his thin frame. The great raft seemed to make no changes in its direction in spite of Maung Thi Ha's great effort.

"Again," said U Thu Ya and Maung Thi Ha lifted the long sweep oar out of the water, returned it to its original position, set it down into the water and made another great sweep. Although barely noticeable, the front of the raft moved slightly to the left. U Thu Ya signaled that the adjustment seemed to have been enough and sat down on the edge of the raft. The mood of everyone relaxed. If the raft ran aground on a sand bar, the current of the river could tear it apart and all the jars could be lost.

This raft was a very unusual raft because it was made of large pottery water jars, all lashed together with bamboo. Maung Thi La remembered how just a week ago he was helping his father and brothers set the large jars in a row with only a hand's breadth between them. While Maung Thi La held the bamboo poles on each side of the necks, his father and older brothers lashed the bamboos together with pieces of split bamboo his grandfather had carefully made. The jars were about three and a half feet tall and two feet in diameter and were quite heavy. They were made in their village of Ywa Tha Ya (Pleasant Village) because that is where they had always been made as long as anyone could remember. The skill of making such large jars had been passed from father to son for generations. The clay along the river here was just right for making such large jars. And more importantly, there was wood available for firing the jars on the nearby hills.

The clay was dug out of the bank where it had been laid down by the river ages ago and then mixed with water. Since Maung Thi La was a young boy, it was his job to use his feet and help mix the clay with water to the right consistency. When the clay was just right--not too wet and not too stiff, it was allowed to age. Then it was put on a large potter's wheel and turned. Such large jars could not be turned out of one large lump of clay. So more clay was added as the jar developed upwards. When the jar was finished, it was put in the shade and allowed to carefully dry. When enough had been made and dried, the jars were loaded into a large kiln and then fires were built at each of the four doors, one on each side.

It was Maung Thi La's job to carry wood to the fire stoker. The fires were gradually built up and the kiln became hotter and hotter. He was glad he was too young to feed the fires, for the men feeding the fires were covered with sweat running off their limbs. Maung Thi La's little sister kept bringing them water which they drank in large quantities. After many hours they stopped feeding the fires and slowly the fires burned out and over the next two days, the kiln gradually cooled down.

The finished jars were stacked in the yard and when enough had accumulated, it was time to make another raft and take them down river to Mandalay. The river was the best way to transport the jars. If they were carried by ox cart, they had to be very carefully padded to keep them from breaking on the bumpy road and each cart could only carry a few. By making them up in rafts, over 500 could be tied together and floated down to Mandalay.

Using bamboo, the jars were lashed in rows and then taken to the river and turned upside down and put in the water. The air trapped in the inverted jar made it float. Rows of these inverted jars were then lashed together until a large raft was made. More lashing kept the bottoms, which were now the tops, in

place and then a bamboo platform was built in the middle of the raft and a thatch shed built on the platform. The shed provided a place to sleep and shelter from rain. A clay filled box provided a place to build a fire for cooking. Maung Thi La kept the fire going and helped his sister, Ma Thu Zar, cook.

When Maung Thi La was younger, he wondered why they didn't just keep the jars right side up but his father pointed out that the rains would gradually fill them and if a bow wave from a steamer swept over the raft, the jars would fill and the whole raft would sink.

Maung Thi La's father had earned a reputation for being a good raftman capable of getting the raft to Mandalay without breaking it up or getting stuck on a sand bar so U Thu Ya was given the task each time enough jars accumulated. Maung Thi La liked to go along for there were many interesting things to see along the river and all kinds of boats going up and down the river. Old passenger motor ships carrying all kinds of people and cargo vied with wooden boats, each carrying one kind of cargo--bananas, charcoal, firewood, thatch roofing, bricks, paddy (rice still in the hull) and other cargo. While steered by oars, the current carried them down the river. When they had to go up river, the current being too strong to row against, a tug boat pulled six to eight of them at a time.

Great rafts of teak logs also floated down the river. Teak will not float when first cut and so the teak logs were tied to many bamboos to make them float and then made up into great rafts much like Maung Thi La's jar raft. U Thu Ya especially kept a sharp look out for teak rafts as they were very hard to steer and if cross currents brought a teak raft and jar raft together, the heavier teak raft would destroy the jar raft, breaking and sinking the jars.

Each night, as it grew dark, the kerosene light was lit and held aloft on a bamboo pole so the steamers could see it and hopefully not run over them. Before Maung Thi La's birth, one of the rafts had been run over by a steamer at night. His father's brother had been lost and his body never recovered. Many of the jars had been broken and others torn loose and sunk. Maung Thi La had heard the story of that ill-fated run many times as they talked around the dying cooking fire. Therefore some one always stayed awake all night watching for steamers and trying to keep the raft in the current. If the stretch ahead was known to be treacherous, they tied up for the night along the shore. The night watchman always had an old brake drum from a truck and metal bar to beat it with to warn ships away from the raft. It sounded like a bell.

Usually the great spotlight on the front of the steamers picked up the raft and the steamer steered around it. When there was no fog, the steamer could be seen a long way off as the pilot directed the search light up and down the river banks on both sides and over the many boats on the river. Small boats were expected to get out of the steamer's way but rafts were at the mercy of the current and while the sweep oars could change their direction a little, basically they were floating islands which the steamers steered around.

Maung Thi La enjoyed the excitement of getting away from the village and seeing the sights on the river. A change of work was the closest thing to a vacation Maung Thi La's family ever took. His mother always stayed home taking care of the youngest children. This trip had his father, two older brothers, sister and cousin as raft crew. Most of the time there was little to do. When it got too hot, they jumped in the river and cooled off. Maung Thi La's two brothers fished and occasionally caught a nice fish which they ate with their rice. Finally Mingun came into view on the west bank with its huge unfinished ruin of a mighty pagoda. Through the trees by the monastery and Buddhist home for the elderly, Maung Thi La could see part of the large Mingun bell. His father said it was the largest intact bell in the world and had been cast in 1790. It was 12 feet tall and about 15 feet in diameter and said to weigh 90 tonnes. His teacher at school mentioned the great bell and pointed out with pride that it had been made by Burmese and was larger than any of the many bells of western Europe. The Russians have a larger bell but it is broken. Once Maung Thi La had been taken by his father to visit the bell. Since it hung near the ground, Maung Thi La had ducked under the edge and stood inside in the middle and listened to the bell ring from the inside!

Just south of the bell on the bank was a huge base of an unfinished pagoda started by a Burmese king, Bodawpaya, almost two hundred years ago. It was 235 feet on each side. It was not finished when the king died in 1819 and his successor chose to do other projects. An earthquake in 1838 had cracked it and tore large chunks of brick masonry from the top that towered up over 150 feet. The two chinthes (mythological lion-dragon beasts) flanking the walkway from the river to the base had been decapitated by the same earthquake but even their remains towered several stories. Maung Thi La's father had heard it was the largest pile of bricks in the world. How many thousands and thousands of men must have toiled on the pagoda, Maung Thi La thought.

By afternoon, the raft had drifted on down to Mandalay where they steered it into shore. The merchant who usually bought the jars came and after the usual haggling about price, purchased the whole raft and provided men to help disassemble it. Maung Thi La helped cut the bamboo lashings and one by one the jars were freed and carried up to the merchant's godown (warehouse). The name originated from earlier days when merchandise was stored under the office or store. The English manager would tell the natives to "Go down and get some more..." The storage room became know as the Godown.

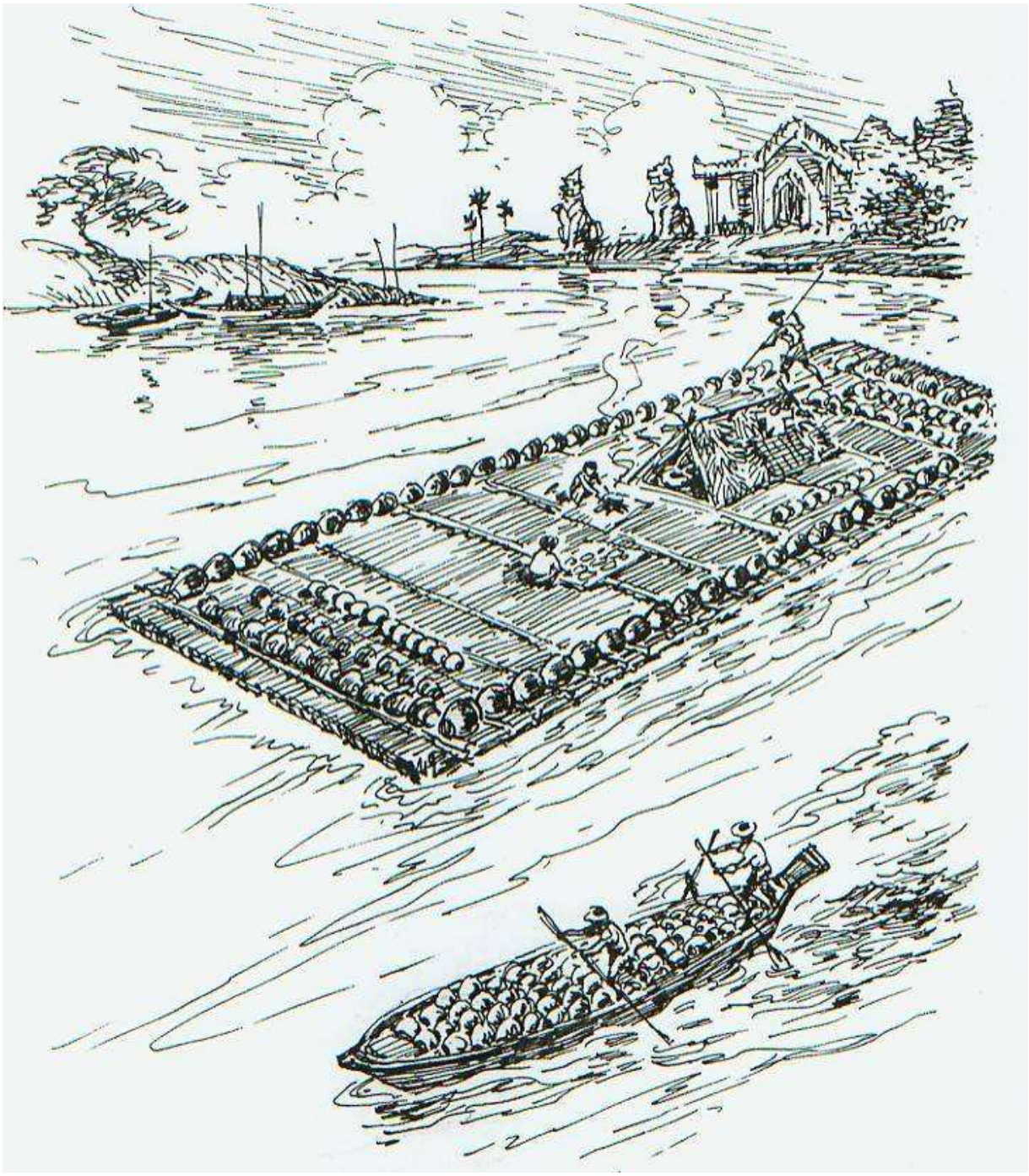
Business completed, they visited the Mahamuni Pagoda rebuilt in 1884. It contains a four meters high cast metal image of Buddha but so much gold leaf has been applied the statue is completely covered. U Thu Ya made a thanksgiving offering for a safe trip down the river. Then they went into the court yard where there were six bronze figures which were brought from the Arakan in 1784. Three were lions, two men, and one a three headed elephant. Originally cast in Cambodia they became spoils of war taken from Ayutthaya in Thailand in 1663 by King Bayinaung to Pegu. Later, King Razagyi of Arakan took them to Myohaung. Maung Thi La's father had had trouble with his stomach and so he rubbed one of the statue's stomach as it was well known that these relics had great curative powers. Various parts showed bright polish by the thousands of fingers rubbing them seeking cures. Maung Thi La was not surprised when his father later announced his stomach problem had been cured.

Then they went to Zegyo Market and marveled at the many, many goods and merchandise smuggled from Thailand, China, and India filling the stalls. It seems that anything that anyone could possibly want could be purchased there. But the prices were extremely high compared to a villager's income so they were content to buy several plastic containers for their mother's kitchen and bright cotton longyis for each of the female members of their family. After much bargaining U Thu Ya was able to buy Maung Thi La a pair of thongs for a little less that they would have cost at the Five Day Bazaar near their village.

They saw some of the other sights of Mandalay including the Kyauktawgyi Pagoda with its huge Buddha carved from a single block of marble. A monk told them it had take 10,000 men 13 days to move it from the canal to the pagoda in 1865. Maung Thi La felt pride in the accomplishments of his ancestors.

Then they walked over to the Kuthodaw Pagoda and looked at some of the 729 marble slabs inscribed with the Buddhist scriptures. An individual temple housed each slab. A caretaker told them if they read eight hours each day, it would take 450 days to read them all. They were written in Pali, the language of Buddha scriptures which uses the same alphabet as Burmese. Many consider it the largest book in the world.

Much more remained to be seen but those temples and shrines would have to wait for another visit. Bidding goodby to Mandalay, they started the long trip back to their village.



25

The Toddy Farmer

Ba Kyaw anxiously watched his father climb up the tall graceful toddy palm tree. The frail bamboo ladder tied to the tree, provided foot holds against the trunk. One section of the ladder did not reach the top of the tree so his father carried another section as he climbed. When he reached the top of the first section, he raised the light weight second section above him and tied the bottom in place with a piece of split bamboo. Putting his arms around the small diameter tree, he proceeded up, stopping twice to tie that section to the tree. Reaching the crown where the branches grew, Ba Kyaw's father drew his heavy knife from the sheath on his back and began chopping away the dead branches hanging down from the crown.

Ba Kyaw strained, looking upwards, watching his father work thirty feet above him. His breath tightened, as he knew the possibility of slipping and falling. He remembered the funeral of U Ba, who made only one slip two years ago. It was fatal. He hoped no evil nats (spirits) lurked in the tree to cause his father to fall. The special offering they made this morning at the family altar gladdened and reassured him.

After his father cleared away the dead branches, he climbed into the crown and sat on the top of the tree. The toddy palm would soon be flowering and if the bud was partly cut through, the tree bled sap rich in sugar. This sap, collected and boiled down, turned to sugar which could be sold for money. Each tree had many buds and several would be tapped. Soon Ba Kyaw heard his father call him, saying, "I'm ready for the pots!" He let down a long rope kept coiled and tucked in his waist. Ba Kyaw strung three pots through their slings. He arranged them in a triangle. When his father pulled the rope, they wouldn't bang against each other and break. "Ready!" he shouted. His father took up the slack in the rope. Carefully he raised the pots, keeping them away from the tree. Banging against the tree could break them too since they were made of clay.

His father tied them to branches so the sap dripped from the wounds in the bud stem into the pots.

All day they went from tree to tree setting pots to collect as much sap as they could. They tapped both male and female trees although the male produced only about two thirds the sap a female tree produced. The trees grew in the space between fields. Some were not their trees but they gave the owners some sugar in exchange for the right to tap the trees.

When his father judged there would be enough sap accumulated in the pots to make collecting worthwhile, they returned. They started with a tree near the road, hoping for travelers coming along the road at the time of the first collection. Sure enough a group of travelers happened along. They offered each a drink of the slightly sweet sap. Toddy farmers believe that the more people who taste the first collection, the more sap would be collected during the season.

With pots suspended from a pole across his shoulders, Ba Kyaw carried the sap home. His father carried three pots hanging from each end of his pole to Ba Kyaw's one. He tried to walk in the funny, rhythmic pattern necessary to keep the sap from sloshing out.

Ba Kyaw played a big part in boiling the sap down. He put the sap in a large metal kettle and kept a fire burning under it, boiling the sap until it gradually became thicker and thicker. His mother oversaw the boiling process and stirred it from time to time. Ba Kyaw wanted to keep adding wood to the fire because it seemed to him that if a little fire made it boil, then a lot of fire would make it boil faster and get the job done more quickly. But his mother chided him, saying that too much fire would burn the syrup, spoiling the taste. Ba Kyaw, with the help of his younger brothers and sisters, kept busy hunting wood to feed the fire, going farther and farther, as the boiling season progressed.

The sap turned to syrup and became thicker. His father carefully noted how quickly it ran off the

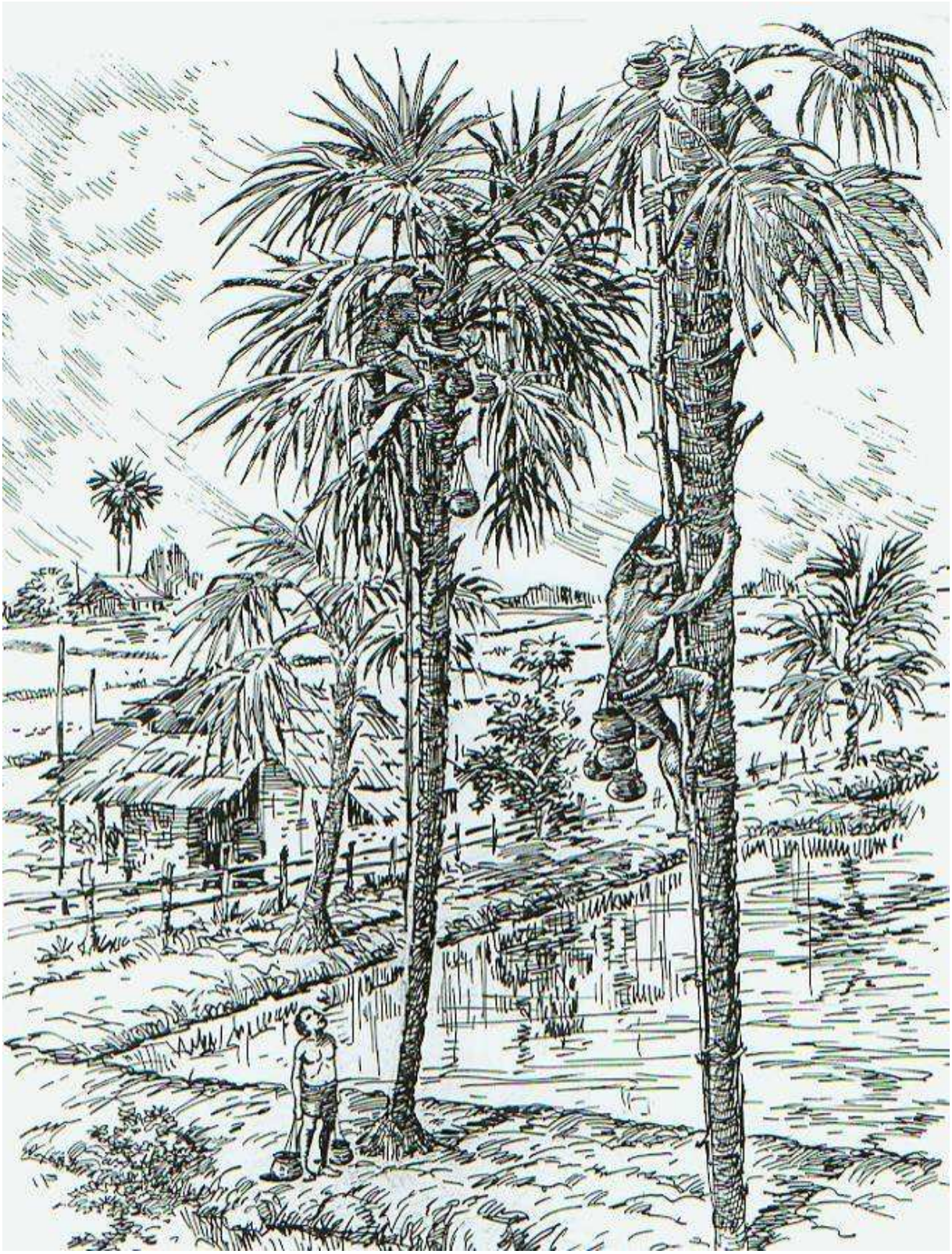
stirring paddle and cautioned Ba Kyaw to be patient and let it thicken a little more. When his father judged it to be just right, he poured the thick syrup into a pan where it hardened as it cooled. It filled the pan about an adult finger thick. Refilling the kettle with sap, they began the long boiling process again.

The cooled sugar, turned up side down on a woven bamboo tray, broke into chunks. His father put a piece on the household altar. Sampling a piece, he handed a taste to his wife, Ba Kyaw, and his younger children. They too helped carry firewood.

"Good!" he judged with satisfaction, "This jaggery (palm sugar) has a nice taste. It makes the white cane sugar from the government factory seem tasteless. It should bring a good price at the bazaar!"

Townspeople bought jaggery and sucked on it while drinking unsweetened tea after evening meals.

The sap of another season made palm toddy or wine. Allowed to ferment, it became alcoholic. Ba Kyaw thought it tasted terrible. It made some people, who drank too much of it, do strange things--sometimes funny and sometimes stupid or mean. He liked the season that produced sweet sugar best.



26

The Train Ride

"Ye Yint Aung," his mother called loudly, "It's time to start now."

Ye Yint Aung needed no more urging and quickly slung two filled bags over his shoulders and gathered up the bundles, each carefully tied to make it easier to carry. His mother, Nwe Nwe, carried a shoulder bag, a mesh basket filled with water bottles and gifts for their hosts in Rangoon. She also carried a jyaint--a series of containers that fit atop each other held in place with a handle that went down through their loops. Each container had a different food which they would eat on the train.

His mother locked the apartment behind them and then went down the stairs from the fourth floor. With no elevator, Ye Yint Aung was glad they didn't live on the fifth floor.

At the edge of the street they stood until a horse cart came by and Nwe Nwe signaled him to stop. After the usual bargaining over the fare with the driver, he slapped the reins and started the skinny horse off briskly for the railroad station two miles away. Taxis were just too expensive compared to horse carts. Her husband, Pay Kaung, worked for the government in a job that didn't provide opportunity for tea money (bribes), so Nwe Nwe had to make every pya (1/100 kyat) count. Since Pe Kaung was now stationed in Rangoon, he invited them to come from Mandalay to Rangoon for the week. Supposedly he had a temporary assignment, but one never knew about the government. Ye Yint Aung hoped Pe Kaung would soon be working back at Mandalay and could live at home, for he missed his father dearly. Anyway, Pe Kaung being in Rangoon provided a reason to visit the capital and for Ye Yint Aung to take his first train ride.

The air was dry and laden with dust. Some said the dust in the dry season was a foot thick on the ground and forty feet thick in the air!

In a quarter of an hour, they reached the railroad station. Nwe Nwe had purchased the necessary tickets a day ahead of time, resenting the "tea money" she had to pay to get the ticket agent to sell them to her.

A great crowd waited in the train station at the steel gates that kept everyone from the loading platform.

The train, consisting of two diesel engines, a baggage car, two Upper Class sleeping Pullman-type cars, two Upper Class cars with big overstuffed seats, and seven Ordinary Class cars with wooden benches, arrived. All the cars were from twenty to forty years old, most being hand-me-downs from European countries who considered them worn out many years ago.

The gates opened and everyone surged forward, having their tickets punched as they entered the platform area. Ye Yint Aung struggled to stay close to Nwe Nwe in the wild, pushing crowd. They found their Ordinary Class car, boarded, and found their seats. The car quickly filled, with every seat being taken. Taking a seat opposite them, a young mother carried a young girl and had two children in tow who looked like identical twins, all helping to carry packages and bags. Nwe Nwe exchanged pleasant greetings while Ye Yint Aung noted with disgust all her children were only girls. Since becoming nine and no longer allowed to sit with girls at school, he pitied their misfortune of being born females. Maybe, if they led a good life, they would be reborn as a male creature and start up the male side of life according to Buddhist teachings.

Nwe Nwe asked, "Are these all your children?"

"These three are my living children. We lost a son to sickness at age four." she replied softly.

"I lost a daughter in her first year," shared Nwe Nwe. Many, if not most, Burmese families, have lost a child. Just because death comes often, his visits are no less painful.

A book vendor came through the car with an armload of paperback books, renting them out for the

duration of the train trip at one kyat. Nwe Nwe looked over the comic type books but did not find any she felt Ye Yint Aung should be reading. He would have to be happy reading some old issues of Shwe Thway, the government 12 page comic and story paper. Ye Yint Aung thought some of the stories were pretty dumb because they always moralized and extolled the greatness of the current government.

At last the steel gates were shut to prevent any late passengers from trying to run and catch the moving train. Starting with a series of jerks, the train slowly moved out of the station. The train was crowded--particularly Ordinary Class which contained those with tickets for seats and those third class riders not entitled to a seat, but no one rode on the roof as they did on the train to Lashio. Going to one of the opened windows, Ye Yint Aung leaned out the window to get a better view but Nwe Nwe quickly pulled him back in and scolded him about the dangers.

Ye Yint Aung excitedly looked out the window, for the view from the train was entirely different from what is seen along the roads going out of Mandalay. Stores, buildings, and houses faced onto the road, but the railroad was in their backyard, which allowed train riders to see the other side of factories and businesses. In town, the route was lined with all kinds of rail related shops, yards, and tracks. Ye Yint Aung could see into a large building where an engine was being serviced. Men, standing in pits between the rails, worked above their heads on the underside of the engine. On a side spur were several mangled box cars, apparently badly damaged in an accident and brought back to the yard, waiting repair. Ye Yint Aung found the freight train being pulled by an old steam engine particularly fascinating. As it waited on a side spur, the fireman heaved logs of firewood into the firebox. His body glistened with running sweat from the heat. Steam came from various valves. In many of the gondolas, people sat on top of the cargo to keep their shipment from being stolen.

The narrow gauge track, with the rails a meter apart (39 inches), caused the cars to move back and forth as the train picked up speed. The springs still functioned but the shock absorbers failed years ago so every rail joint or unevenness sent the cars bouncing and swaying. Soon they left the city behind and the wide, flat, rich plain spread out before them. To the east, the mountains of the great Shan plateau rose up sharply.

Ye Yint Aung knew Maymyo (Pyin Oo Lwin) sat on top of those mountains. His father explained to him the train to Maymyo ascended those great hills by switching back and forth. First it went forward, threw a switch, backed up a section, threw another switch, and went up another section slowly working its way up the side of the mountain. Ye Yint Aung hoped to ride that train to Maymyo someday. His father had also told him about the gharries which looked like small stagecoaches. When Ye Yint Aung got to visit Maymyo, he planned to ride a gharry too.

Straight, deep irrigation ditches watered the fertile fields and kept them flooded with water from the Irrawaddy (Aye Yar Wadi) River even in the dry season. This allowed two crops a year and made the Mandalay district high in crop production. Ye Yint Aung learned in school that the intricate system of canals had been started centuries ago under the Burmese kings.

Being an express train, it passed many stations without stopping, often passing local passenger trains at these stations. Each station had sign boards with the town's name in Burmese. Below that name, was a painted over board that once had the English name but it had been painted out during one of U Ne Win's Burmanization programs when all use of English was discouraged.

Suddenly the train car made a loud clunking noise, startling Ye Yint Aung who looked anxiously to his mother. Nwe Nwe smiled and said, "We're just going over a bridge." Again she reassured him when a train going the other way passed by closely with loud noise and lots of dust. It was so close, if someone leaned out one train, they would hit someone leaning out the other. Ye Yint Aung understood why his mother didn't want him leaning out the window.

Ye Yint Aung felt the train beginning to slow from its top speed of 40 mph and Nwe Nwe told him they were coming to Kyaukse, a major town.

As the train slowed to a crawl, vendors with baskets of all kinds of merchandise waited along the

track. They would run parallel to the train, gradually getting closer, and then hop on the step as it came by. Going through the cars, they loudly proclaimed their goods and urged riders to buy. Their offerings included cooked fish and rice wrapped in paper, rice and raisins in banana leaves tied up with split bamboo, samosa (an Indian fried pastry filled with vegetables), rice cooked in bamboo, various forms of sticky rice, cigarettes (sold individually), and betel for chewing.

One vender offered Pet Toh' (Packed in leaves) which looked good and Ye Yint watched with envy as a fellow passenger purchased a miniature pyramid shaped package wrapped in a banana leaf. As he watched, the passenger unwrapped the white ball of sticky rice which had been made from rice flour. After the first bite, Ye Yint could see the mixture of coconut and sugar water in the center.

When the train stopped at the platform, more vendors shouted offers to passengers on both sides of the cars. Some vendors were children even younger than Ye Yint Aung. One cute little girl carried an earthenware jar of water on her head and offered a cup of water for 25 pyas (1/4 of a Kyat). Her ragged clothes made Ye Yint Aung hope she had a lot of customers. Each vendor offered one product. Offerings included slices of watermelon, several varieties of bananas, various other fruit, and strips of dried meat.

One offering looked like a small umbrella which turned out to be cross section disks of sugar cane arranged on a tree of split bamboo so the purchaser could bite off a disk, chew the sweet juice out and spit out the tasteless dry pulp. Another offered small baby sparrow-like birds, skewered and charcoal broiled to be eaten in total, beaks, eyes and all. Nwe Nwe told Ye Yint Aung she had had a delicious one as a child but money was much tighter now and they would eat what they had brought from home.

In a few minutes the engine's horn sounded a warning and vendors began departing the train, while those on the outside made last minute offers or cut prices for one last sale. After one more beep, the train started with a jerk, while vendors jumped off running to keep from falling. Along some of the tracks ran control wires to the switches which added to the danger of disembarking from the moving train.

Several vendors stayed on with their trays of cigarettes, snacks, candy and other goods, bribing the conductors to let them ride to the next station. The car next to Ye Yint Aung's was Upper Class and its service boy kept its door locked to prevent Ordinary Class passengers from moving into the less crowded Upper Class car. The vendors wanted to sell to the Upper Class passengers, and so they went out the side end door and swung across the space to the step of the Upper Class door and entered that way. A risky maneuver for several more sales.

As the train moved away from the station it passed the backs of bamboo and thatch houses. Ye Yint Aung noticed all the dogs came running from under the houses, up the railroad embankment, and looked up at the train as it sped by them.

"Why do the dogs come up to the tracks when the train comes?" Ye Yint Aung asked his mother.

"You watch carefully and see if you can figure out what attracts them." said Nwe Nwe with a smile, pleased at his curiosity.

Ye Yint Aung suddenly saw a wadded up banana leaf hurled from the window of the car ahead of him. When the wad hit the ground, the nearest dog promptly pounced on it, nuzzled it open, ate the few stray grains of rice and licked the curry juice from the leaves. The dogs knew from experience passengers purchased meals in the station and when some finished, they would throw out the leaf container and any left over food. While many dogs suffered disappointment, others got their best meal of the day.

Ye Yint Aung watched out of the window, trying to take in everything. Every little ditch or puddle had someone seining it for the smallest fish.

Parallel to the railroad ran the Rangoon to Mandalay road, elevated to keep it from flooding in the wet season and lined on both sides with large old Kokko trees. When Ye Yint Aung admired the trees, Nwe Nwe told him the British built the roads to expedite moving troops and the trees had been planted

to shade the marching soldiers from the broiling sun. On some sections of the road, where the authorities were lax or had been bribed, the Kokko trees had lost most of their branches to firewood hunters.

On both ends of all bridges, soldiers rested in the shade of thatched roofs, guarding the bridges against rebel sabotage. Women washed clothes in the rivers the train crossed over although the water appeared to be so muddy, Ye Yint Aung wondered how anything could be cleaned by it.

Central Burma is very dry but heavily irrigated around Mandalay and other towns. Gradually the landscape became arid and cacti appeared and became more plentiful as they left the irrigated parts. As the scene became monotonous, Ye Yint Aung suddenly realized he was very hungry. Nwe Nwe opened the jyaint. One container had rice, another, curry, the third, vegetables, and the fourth, little finger size especially sweet bananas--a special treat Nwe Nwe purchased for the trip. Nwe Nwe mixed rice and curry and added vegetables but refused to give it to Ye Yint Aung until he washed his right hand. Holding his hands out the window, Nwe Nwe poured some water over them and he vigorously washed them, for he would eat with his right fingers. How delicious the rice and curry tasted! His father, Pe Kaung, always proclaimed Nwe Nwe the best cook in the whole world and Ye Yint Aung knew it to be true. Ye Yint Aung washed down the food with water from a plastic bottle which Nwe Nwe had brought from home because she said strange water sometimes makes a person sick.

When the scenery became monotonous, Ye Yint Aung dug out old issues of Shwe Thway and Aurora magazines and began reading. An article about the Akhas, an ethnic group on the Thai-Burma border, caught his attention. It said the Akhas believed in spirits and believed that twins were the children of spirits--therefore very bad luck. They usually killed twins by abandoning them in the jungle while their parents spent a month living in the forest. When the unfortunate mother returned to her village, she gave a sin offering as an act of purification for having borne twins.

Ye Yint Aung found it fun to annoy girls so he summed up the article to his mother while watching the twins out of the corner of his eye. The twins sitting across from him quickly took the bait.

"You're making that up!" one twin said indignantly.

"No I'm not, read it for yourself!" answered Ye Yint Aung, thrusting the paper towards them.

The twins read the article together. While they looked alike, they reacted quite differently to the article. One looked sad and ready to cry while the other showed anger and said, "We're not Akhas. We're Burman and our father said he is very happy to have girl twins!"

Their mother assured the girls of her pride and happiness of having twin daughters.

The sad one said, "How terrible it is to be born a twin to Akha parents. I'm glad we were born Burman!"

Ye Yint Aung glanced at his mother and knew by her look, she wanted to change the subject.

Occasionally a bird flew alongside the train. Even at top speed the train only gradually outdistanced the bird.

Many hours later, near Pegu (Bago), Ye Yint Aung saw a large pagoda built on a man-made hill. How it sparkled in the sunlight from the many pieces of mirror covering it. The gold plated Hti (umbrella) at the top shone brightly. Much merit must have been gained by the builders and donors for such a fine pagoda. He looked, hoping to see the great Shwethalyaung (Reclining Buddha) at Pegu but, alas, it could not be seen from the railroad. His father told him it was 180 feet long and 56 feet high and had been hidden in a hill of dirt until rediscovered in 1881. Constructed in 994 A.D., it was almost a thousand years old.

By now, the constant dust coming in the windows had coated everything. Ye Yint Aung noticed Nwe Nwe's black hair was now brown and his own skin felt dirty and gritty. As the dust accumulated in noses and throats, passengers spat and blew their noses out the windows. Dust in the lungs produced much coughing throughout the car.

As they approached Rangoon, the train slowed considerably going through the outlying stations.

Suddenly several young men riding in Ordinary Class got up and took down large heavy sacks from the overhead racks and went to the windows or doors. At the same time, other young men appeared outside, standing beside the tracks. As Ye Yint Aung watched, the men on the train would drop the sacks out the window to waiting confederates who picked up the sacks and quickly disappeared into the bushes.

"What's going on?" asked Ye Yint Aung.

"Contraband," answered his mother, "They might get caught with their smuggled goods at the station and would have to pay a large bribe, so they drop the goods off to friends as they near the station."

The train began slowing down and everyone rushed to gather up their possessions. Nwe Nwe held Ye Yint Aung back and allowed most to exit, having no reason to hurry. They had covered 385 miles in 14 hours.

Ye Yint Aung shouted with joy when he saw his father, Pe Kaung, waiting for them on the platform.

27

Visit to Rangoon

Pe Kaung, Nwe Nwe and Ye Yint Aung climbed the stairs toward the great Shwedagon Pagoda. They paused at a stall and purchased three Hti Pyu--miniature umbrellas to be given as an offering at the pagoda. The Hti Pyu came in three colors--white, gold and red. The boy chose one of each color while his father paid the shop keeper. He gave one to his father and one to his mother, reserving the gold one for himself. His mother carefully carried her Hti Pyu making sure it did not brush her Hta Main (skirt) as that would make it unworthy as an offering.

From the platform at the base of the great Shwedagon, Pe Kaung pointed to the top of the terraced sides and said, "From the top of the molding to the banana bud shaped top is coated by 13,153 plates of pure gold calculated to weigh some sixty tons! That gold is worth about 750 million dollars. The hti (umbrella) is iron covered with 470 pounds of gold and if you listen carefully, you can hear the gold and silver bells attached to it."

Ye Yint Aung answered, "I can hear them but they are so faint."

"That is because they are so high above us."

As they continued walking around the pagoda platform, Pe Kaung said, "See that great bell? When the British captured lower Burma, they tried to take that bell back to England as part of the spoils of war. But it fell into the river as they were trying to load it on a ship. It was so heavy, the British engineers could not figure out how to raise it although they tried many ways. Finally the British gave up. The Burmese came to the British and asked, 'If we raise it, will you allow us to keep it? After all it is part of our worship center.'

"'How can you succeed when we, the world's most advanced engineers, have failed?' the British answered with a sneer.

"The Burmese refused to tell them how they planned to do it but finally the British consented, firmly believing the Burmese would never succeed.

"The Burmese gathered a large quantity of bamboo. At low tide, divers tied many, many stalks of bamboo to the bell. When the tide rose, the floating bamboo lifted the great bell from the bed of the river. At high tide, the Burmese built a platform under the bell to support it when the tide went down. Then at low tide. a wooden causeway was built and the bell was moved by rollers up the bank of the river and to the Shwe Dagon where you see it now. Our simple Burmese ingenuity outdid the British!" said Pe Kaung with pride.

"We are fortunate that we can worship here, as this is one of the three most sacred places in Burma." his mother, Nwe Nwe, said. "Since I am Sunday born, I will worship on the Galone side. Come with me, Tha (son)."

"I will worship on the Rat for those Thursday born." said his father, Pe Kaung, and they separated after agreeing to rejoin at the Shwedagon Telescope.

The base of the pagoda had eight sides for the eight days of the Burmese week. When the British forced a seven day week on the Burmese, Wednesday was divided into morning and afternoon and considered two days. On the Galone side, Nwe Nwe placed her offering before the Buddha. Then she and Ye Yint Aung knelt and bowed before the image saying a prayer asking for long life, health and wealth. Then Nwe Nwe donated one kyat for use of the water and poured water over a small image of Buddha. She did this the number of times equal to her age. Then she poured water over the image of the Galone, a mythological beast, sort of bird like with the capacity to eat dragons.

Her worship complete, she took her son to the Wednesday side and they worshiped again there, only this time Ye Yint Aung did the pouring.

They joined Pe Kaung at the powerful telescope where a vendor made a living allowing visitors to view the jewels at the top for a few kyats. Pe Kaung held Ye Yint Aung up so he could see the wonderful sight. The man said, "See the weather vane at the top. It has 1,000 diamonds weighing 278 carats and 1,383 other precious stones. Above that is the diamond orb with 4,351 diamonds weighing 1,800 carats and crowned by a single 76 carat diamond. All this wealth has been given over the centuries by pious Buddhists in the belief this gained them merit assuring them a rebirth on a higher level."

Then they heard a bell ring and knew that someone had made a large donation to the pagoda and the ringing of the bell was an invitation for all who heard it to participate in the merit gained in the gift.

From the pagoda platform Pe Kaung pointed out to his wife and son the grave of General Aung San, which was across the street from the Shwedagon pagoda and said, "Ye Yint Aung, Aung San is the founder of modern Burma. He got us our freedom from the English. Unfortunately he was assassinated with seven of his cabinet members just as Burma received her independence. Burma has not had as good leadership since. You will study more about him in school."

Walking down one of the four covered stairways, they passed many stalls selling all kinds of merchandise. Some of the items were related to Buddhism, such as flowers and offerings, images of Buddha, worship centers, World War II shell cases for vases, and peacocks made with kyat notes to be given as a donation. Other stalls featured wood carvings, lacquerware, mother of pearl, and similar items to decorate the home. A third category included metal products such as scissors and knives, plastic containers, thanaka, cooking utensils, toys and household goods. Passing between two huge Chinthes (Mythological Lion-dragon beasts) they left the temple compound and put their sandals back on. Pe Kaung said, "See the remnants of the moat? And the gun slots in that wall? When the British took Rangoon, they fortified Shwedagon hill because it was the highest place."

Walking along the streets, Ye Yint Aung noted, "Pay Pay (Daddy), why aren't there any horse carts or oxen carts in Rangoon?"

"They are not permitted." answered Pe Kaung, proud of his son's keen observations.

Ye Yint Aung found the sidewalk vendors interesting. The sellers of ice water kept up a constant beat with their tin cups. A chunk of ice rested on a cloth cone dripping ice water into a reservoir. For 50 pyas (1/2 kyat) they would dip out a cup full of cool water to slake the thirst of a passerby.

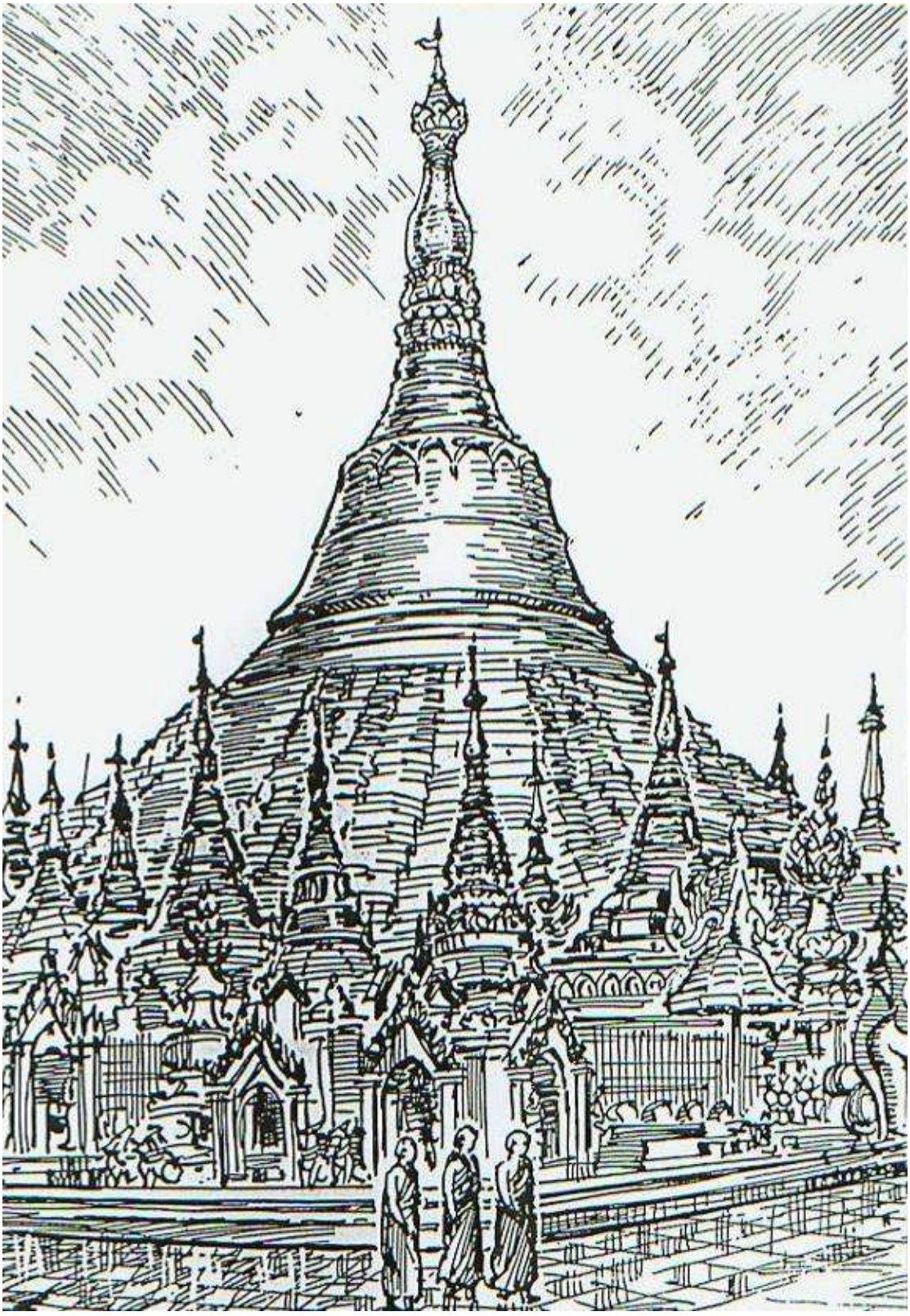
Another vendor sold butane and filled cigarette lighters. An old man had a beat up, old looking, bathroom scale and would allow you to weigh for 1/4 of a kyat. The scale told the person's weight in stones--the old British way of weighing persons. A stone is 16 pounds.

At one point a crowd of about twenty was gathered around two men. One claimed the other, who wore a blindfold, was a mind reader. To prove it, he asked one of the crowd to take out a banknote. An obliging spectator took out a note from his bag. The man asked his blind folded partner the denomination of the note. "One Kyat!" he promptly answered. Pointing to the first number of the serial number, he asked that number, "Thong!" (3) he responded promptly. A surprised gasp went up from the crowd. He then invited another member of the crowd to pick another number from the serial number. The mind reader promptly identified it. Other equally mystifying tricks followed.

"How does he do it?" Ye Yint Aung asked his father.

"I don't know. Perhaps he really can read minds."

Continuing on they came to a large machine with large wheels on each side of the top. "Let's have some fresh sugarcane juice." Nwe Nwe suggested.



Pe Kaung indicated he wished to purchase three glasses. The vendor took a fresh, peeled stalk of sugarcane and fed it through the rollers the large wheels turned. Crunch went the stalk and juice flowed around and down the rollers into a channel and then to a container. Over and over the vendor fed the stalk through the rollers doubling it up as it became drier and drier. Satisfied he had gotten all the juice, the vendor filled three glasses and the family drank the sweet, tasty, refreshing juice.

Near Revolutionary Park Ye Yint Aung noticed a young man directing a car into a parking place. The driver handed him a banknote and left. Ye Yint Aung looked at his father curiously.

"The man has staked out this section of street for his private parking service. He watches the cars to be sure the windshield wipers, etc. are not stolen. The drivers pay him a kyat for that protection," his father answered.

Passing a government building, they saw many typists sitting at little tables on the sidewalk filling out government forms and selling revenue stamped paper needed for various forms. They would also write letters for those who could not write.

When they came to a vacant section of sidewalk under a large tree, they saw two men each with a pole over his shoulder approaching them. Suspended from each end of the pole of one were large baskets filled with kettles, dishes, and various containers. The other carried small tables and even small stools all fitted together so one person could carry them. They put down their loads and in minutes had set up a sidewalk restaurant offering three kinds of noodles, and many different sauces, condiments and spices. Half a dozen tables with four stools each provided patrons a place to sit and eat. In minutes customers were being served.

Two tourists had been watching the whole procedure. One remarked, "They offer more variety than our hotel!"

At an intersection, Ye Yint Aung saw an older boy offering a cigarette to drivers of cars waiting for the light to change. Again he looked to his father.

"The boys buy a pack of cigarettes for fifteen kyats. They sell individual cigarettes for one kyat each. If there are twenty cigarettes in a pack, what is their profit?" asked Pe Kaung looking at him.

Ye Yint Aung thought a moment and said, "Five kyats."

A little farther they came to a crowd surrounding three women who were singing love songs and flirting with the men around the circle. Everyone was laughing at their antics as they pinched cheeks and made outrageous motions.

"They look like women but their voices sound like men's," noted Ye Yint Aung looking at his father.

"They are gay 'girls'," answered his father. "They are really men who dress up and act as women. They sell lemon drop candy, which should cost one kyat each, for ten kyats but then they sing a song and perform for the crowd."

"Are they homosexuals?" asked Nwe Nwe.

"Some may be. But some are regular men who do it to make a living." answered Pe Kaung.

After watching a while, they moved on and came to a woman sitting with a small sparrow in a cage and three stacks of cards on the ground in front of her.

She looked up at them and said, "For five kyats, the sparrow will tell your fortune!"

Pe Kaung handed her five kyats and she fed some rice to the sparrow and opened the door of the cage. The sparrow came out of the cage and walked to the one of the stacks of cards. Using its beak, it took a card from the middle of the stack. The woman took the card, returned the bird to the cage and handed the card to Pe Kaung who read it aloud. The card read, "Something bad is about to happen to you. To avoid this you have to shout loudly, three times, 'I will win!'"

Pe Kaung returned the card and shouted three times, "I will win!"

He handed another five kyats indicating it was for Nwe Nwe. The bird repeated its act and chose another card. The card read, "If you are ready at the right time, good fortune will smile upon you."

Nwe Nwe, patting Ye Yint Aung on the back said, "Good fortune has already come to me."

Later they went to see the great reclining Buddha. While not as large as the one at Pegu, it still was impressive.

A tourist pointed to a sign that said, "No foot wearing allowed" and laughed but Ye Yint Aung did not understand why they found that funny and his father could not explain either.

The day quickly passed and soon it was time to eat supper.

"Where would you like to eat?" his father asked his wife and son.

"At a Chinese restaurant, of course!" answered his wife. "Why would anyone want to eat out and have Burmese food which they get all the time at home?"

After supper they walked around, viewing the ever changing sights as tired vendors left and new ones set up for the night bazaar. Finally Pe Kaung picked up Ye Yint Aung and soon he was fast asleep as his father carried him back to his father's rented room. Nwe Nwe was glad Ye Yint slept soundly because she and Pe Aung had been apart for a long time and they enjoyed being together again. Let's just close the scene Burmese fashion with a thirsty bird drinking from a quiet pond.

28

Rangoon to Hakha

Happily Lian Kim heard from a fellow Chin just arriving from Mandalay, that a truck was leaving Mandalay for Hakha, Chin Hills, on December 30th. With luck he could get from Rangoon to Mandalay in time to catch it. Getting a ride up to the remote capital of the Chin State often proved difficult. Therefore he went to the train station to buy a ticket. He tried Upper Class, asking for a Sleeper, but found none, or even seats available. He then asked for a ticket on Ordinary (Third) Class which had hard wooden benches for seats; no place to stretch. The cost of 120 kyats made the ticket extremely reasonable because government prices are never based on the actual cost of delivering the service. Fortunately he was able to purchase one. Sometimes they all had been sold and then he would have been forced to buy one on the Black Market at a much higher price.

Lian Kim carried old newspapers when he boarded the 5 pm train and found his seat. Watching the scenery of flat paddy fields stretching as far as the eye could see reminded Lian Kim, by contrast, of the Chins Hills. While called hills, the mountains towered up five thousand feet with deep valleys between. But the Chin Hill were foothills to the Himalaya mountains which reached 14,000 feet, so were hills in comparison. In his mind's eye Lian Kim could see his beautiful homeland and it was such a contrast to the boring flat paddy fields of lower Burma. How he longed for the cool breezes the mountains gave forth instead of the hot dusty air of the delta. Lian Kim was Chin--Haka Chin, a separate ethnic group with its own Lai dialect, customs, dress. The Chins originally lived only in the Chin Hills, a mountainous strip of land between northwest Burma and Assam, India, but now many, like Lian Kim, had migrated to Rangoon and other cities looking for better economic opportunities. The Burmese called them Chin, which some say meant basket carriers. Originally a derogatory term, it gradually lost most of its sting. Lian Kim preferred to be called Lai, his ethnic group's name for themselves. Because of the high ridges and deep valleys, the Chin people were very isolated from Burma and themselves. This resulted in there being forty different Chin languages and dialects in an area 60 miles wide and 200 miles long. Lian Kim spoke Haka Chin (Lai dialect), some Falam Chin (Laizo dialect), and Burmese which he had to learn in school.

He felt good to be returning home and seeing his family and people of his youth. After watching the scenery go by for many hours, he decided at 11 PM to try and get some sleep. He carefully spread the newspapers under his seat on the dirty floor to protect his clothes and then crawled under the seat. Only a few inches above his head separated him from the seat. While not very comfortable or pleasant, it allowed more fitful snoozing than the hard narrow seat.

Unfortunately each time he got to sleep, the ticket checker came through and woke him up demanding to see his ticket and his National Registration Card. Fortunately the express train made the 385 mile trip in only 14 1/2 hours!

Disembarking from the train at Mandalay, Lian Kim hurried to Chin Pyitha Car Gate on 82nd street where he had heard a truck was leaving to go to Hakha. Two bus lines held licenses to carry passengers to Haka--Chin Pyitha and Chin Taungtan. While called bus lines, they were really trucks carrying merchandise which allowed passengers to perch on top of the cargo or hang on the sides. Lian Kim knew if he missed one departure, it might be days before another. He arrived to find that the truck driver planned to leave the next day on December 30th, so he had only a day's wait.

The driver said he hoped to reach Hakha on the first of January if all went well. The route went through Monywa (90 miles), then on to Gangaw (another 112 miles) and to Hakha (still another 86 miles) for a total of 288 miles. Lian Kim hoped to be with his family on the first Sunday of the New Year, so the plans sounded great.

The next day they loaded the six ton truck with over six tons of cargo consisting of hardware, cloth bolts, and Chinese blankets, filling it to the brim. Some of the merchandise would end up in Aizawl, India. While no official border crossing existed between India and Burma, the border was "porous" since Chins lived on both sides. Unknowledgeable colonial mappers drew the border right through the middle of the Chin people placing half in Burma and half in India. Forty four passengers had been sold tickets at 400 kyats each and most perched on the cargo, adding another two and a half tons of human flesh to the already overloaded truck. Some were forced to hang on the side of the truck--a very tiring ordeal. Lian Kim paid another 100 kyats in order to sit in the front cab along with five others plus the driver and repairman in a space two feet by six feet--a total of eight.

Looking over his fellow passengers, Lian Kim could tell most of the women were Haka Chins, with a couple of Falam Chins, Lumbang Chins and even one from Matupi. The men wore Burmese or western clothes so it was harder to identify their Chin groups although several wore over their shoulder a Chin blanket whose pattern told their group. While almost all were Chin, the conversation among the passengers of different groups of Chins had to be in Burmese which all understood as many could not understand the dialects of other Chins. Lian Kim learned some were coming from Muse in Eastern Shan State, where they had gone to buy Chinese goods, particularly textiles.

Heading southwest out of Mandalay, they went past the ruins of the old royal city of Amarapura. It had been founded in 1783 by King Bodawpaya. In 1823 Bodawpaya moved back to Ava. But in 1841 Amarapura again became the capital until 1857 when King Mindon founded Mandalay as the capital. A number of temples and pagodas remained but the city walls had been dismantled to use for road and railway fill.

They came to the sixteen span Ava bridge crossing the mighty Irrawaddy (Ayeyarwady) River. Over a kilometer long, it was the only bridge across the Irrawaddy in the fifteen hundred miles from head of navigation to the Indian Ocean. The gate blocked the highway, showing that a train was due to cross the bridge, for it carried both track and a road on the same level. Lian Kim and others climbed off the truck and stretched their legs. They looked down on the well preserved remains of the Thabyedan Fort beside the roadway. The British had taken it with little effort during the Third Anglo-Burman War in 1885.

When the train had passed, the gate lifted, and the truck proceeded across. The bridge gave them an excellent view of Sagaing Hill with its hundreds of temples, monasteries, schools, pagodas. They reminded Lian Kim of the strength of Buddhism in central Burma. Leaving the bridge they went through Sagaing, which also had been the capital of Burma during the Shan period from 1315 to 1364. The road climbed up past the Kaunghmudaw Pagoda--an enormous dome 151 feet high. Lian Kim smiled as he looked at it, for legend said it represented the perfect breast of a well-endowed Burmese queen. Others said its shape came from being modelled after the Mahaceti Pagoda in Ceylon. "It certainly looked like a breast," he thought.

They traveled through flat land covered with paddy fields. Every hillock was crowned with pagodas, monasteries, and temples, reflecting the strength of the Buddhist faith in this area.

The first leg of the trip went smoothly and they stopped to eat in late afternoon just before reaching Monywa. The roadside restaurant offered curry at two prices. One serving cost 45 kyats and "eat as much as you can" cost 65 kyats. Lian Kim chose the 45 kyat level and was glad he did for the taste was typical cheap curry--filling but not particularly enjoyable.

At Monywa they found the barge to carry them across the Chindwin River had arrived on time--a most unusual occurrence. It could carry six trucks and three smaller vehicles and a hundred passengers. Powered by an eighteen horse power Kobuta engine, the barge was kept from drifting downstream by a cable.

They completed crossing the river in a half an hour and proceeded. The land received much less rainfall and the poverty of the villages reflected the lower yields of the fields. Some supplemented their

income gathering firewood and making charcoal. Darkness found them at milestone 57 west of Monywa. But then the engine stopped. The driver and helper found the seat of the fan belt pulley dislocated and with the liberal use of wires and two hours, fixed the problem.

With a sigh of relief from the tired passengers, the truck started up and moved on until it came to a stop at milestone 59/6 (Fifty nine and six furlongs miles beyond Monywa [8 furlongs to a mile]). Again the driver and helper examined the truck while forty four anxious passengers looked on. They uncovered a very serious problem. The nuts on the U bolts that held the back wheel assembly in place had come off and the back wheels had moved forward, making it extremely dangerous to drive.

The road was surrounded by deep brush. It appeared the nearest village, a temporary four house affair built for gathering firewood, was two miles back. No one seemed optimistic that the village could offer any help. Only two vehicles had passed them coming from Haka so it was unlikely help would appear from another truck. By now it was 9:30 and quite dark. Only two two-cell electric torches could be found among the whole group, so the driver and helper decided nothing could be done until the coming of morning. Fortunately the afternoon meal had been large, so hunger was only a slight problem.

Lian Kim and the other passengers built four bonfires near the truck to warm themselves. Lian Kim and the other Christians in the group decided since it was December 31st, it would be good to hold a midnight service to welcome in the New Year. So at 12 midnight, they sang several hymns using only the first verses which they knew by heart since no one had a songbook. One of the Christians was a minister and he preached a short sermon on the title "If life throws a dagger at you--will you catch it by the handle or by the blade?" He then offered communion using a loaf of bread one of them happened to be carrying. For the wine, they used Lippo, a soft drink--the only thing available. Lian Kim enjoyed the service and felt fellowship with the other Christians among the passengers.

They returned to their respective bonfires and tried to sleep. The ground was hard and very uneven due to water buffalo tracks made when the soil was soft.

With the coming of light, the driver and helper-repairman began to work on the problem in earnest. By 11 AM they had finished the job, put all the parts back together (with none left over) and with grateful comments from the passengers, the truck moved on. The next village proved to be 25 miles which they reached about 2 PM. Famished by that time, Lian Kim ate double, as did most of the other passengers. This food stand wisely did not offer "all you can eat"!

Along the way they saw three log yards where teak logs were brought for transport to Monywa. One yard had over 1,000 logs. Most were from one foot to three feet in diameter and twenty feet long. Six ton trucks carried the logs to the Chindwin River where they would be transported down the river and exported.

The road climbed two mountains. The first one, Pung-tawng, reached 3576 feet. The second one called Pung-ngia towered 3451 feet. At the top of each stood a shrine where Burmans lit candles as an offering to the spirits of the mountains. No one urinated on these mountains for fear of offending the spirits. The Christian Chins didn't believe in these spirits anymore but followed the taboos to avoid offending those who did.

Then they continued on to Gangaw arriving about 7:30 PM. When they reached the military gate (check point) and stopped, the soldiers said the truck would be requisitioned for carrying rock for the railway lines from Pakokku and Gangaw and on to Kalemyo.

The prospect of losing their transportation greatly disturbed and agitated all the passengers and Lian Kim. No other means of getting to Hakha seemed available, which meant they would have to sit around waiting for the military to finish using the truck. Certainly they would be forced to unload the six tons of cargo as the soldiers never work if there are others who can be forced to do the job. Worse yet, they might be impressed to load and unload the stone. However, after dinner, someone talked with the captain and he gave permission to the driver to proceed on to Hakha the next day. Lian Kim didn't

know if a bribe had been paid or if someone was related to the captain.

On the next day the overloaded truck started for Hakha. The road had been bitumenized fifty years ago but now contained more potholes than surface. Some places were graveled and much was dirt. The original plans called for the truck to cross the Myittha River at Saingdoe where a one vehicle ferry made by lashing two sampans together charged 200 kyats for the crossing. But upon coming to a ford before that village, the driver decided to try and cross there and avoid the toll. The passengers disembarked and walked across on a small temporary foot bridge.

The truck had no trouble crossing the two hundred foot wide ford but it pushed a wave of water ahead of it and that washed the steep bank, making it slippery as butter. Three times the truck tried to climb the bank but slid back each time, deepening the ruts. The passengers filled the ruts with rocks, pebbles, and stones and then pushed with all their might until they got the truck nearly to the top. Unfortunately at that crucial point the worn out clutch plate failed, the truck stalled, and the air filled with the foul smell of the burning clutch plate.

The driver decided to allow the clutch plate and engine to cool, so everyone rested on the bank while they waited. A minister and a group of young persons came along from a nearby village and had baptism in the river. Lian Kim and the other Christians joined in the celebration and the other passengers watched. The Chin State is now over three quarters Christian in the north with many converts being made from animism (spirit worship) each year in the south where half are still non-Christian

When the engine and plate had cooled, the driver restarted the motor and climbed the bank without difficulty. Things went smoothly for fifteen miles because the road was level or downhill. But when they went over a bridge and started up a small hill, the truck stopped moving forward. Further examination, made by taking the clutch apart and laying the parts neatly in the road, showed the clutch plate worn out and beyond repair. The helper headed for Gangaw on a bicycle carried on the truck for that purpose for a new plate. If one could not be found there, he would have to continue on to Monywa or Mandalay. Lian Kim and the other passengers proceeded on foot to the next village which proved to be five miles further. The driver had to stay with the truck to guard its cargo. Already 2:30 and very hot, the passengers walked, feeling uncomfortable since no one had eaten since yesterday.

Two hours later they arrived at the village. It proved to be a Chin Christian village, Hring Dildel (Green Fields), which gave them free rice and papayas. That evening, while sitting on the porch of his host's house, Lian Kim heard the sound of a bell. His hosts said that announced a service in their church, and invited all to attend. "How could a church in such a small village afford a bell," he wondered. The bell turned out to be the brake drum of a large truck suspended between two posts that sounded like a sweet toned bell when struck.

The young people of the village surprised Lian Kim and everyone with their beautiful singing. The table in the front of the church had beautiful tapered brass vases which Lian Kim recognized as 105 MM artillery shells left over from World War II and now used as church vases filled with beautiful flowers. It seemed to fulfill the prophesy of "beating their swords into plow shares." Had the truck not broken down, the village preacher said, they would not have had fellowship with the Christians travelling on the truck.

Everyone figured they would be stranded there four days--the minimum time they calculated the repairman could find a plate and return. The villagers, as part of Chin hospitality, provided sleeping places in various homes. Chins are not comfortable with the idea of using a church for sleeping although Burman soldiers frequently did without village permission.

The next day Lian Kim and some of the others went fishing but only caught a few fish which they gave their hosts.

Lian Kim chafed at the enforced wait but at least he was now in the Chin Hills among his own people. How pleasant the cool mountain air felt.

The following morning, to everyone's surprise, the truck came up to the village. The repairman had gone to Gangaw but had been unable to find transportation to Monywa. In searching around Gangaw, he located a used plate that could be made to fit the truck's clutch. Returning to the truck, they had worked all night and got the truck running again with only two days' delay.

After a quick breakfast, the truck and its load of travel weary passengers started out for Hakha. The route took them through deep valleys and over high mountains some five thousand feet tall. Fortunately they met only one truck coming from Haka as the narrow road made passing difficult. The trucks met at a place where they could pass. To everyone's surprise and relief, they arrived without further incident at supper time. Lian Kim was extremely grateful for the trip's completion. This trip would certainly make all the other trips of his life seem easier! It had taken 6 days instead of 3 days. Now his village was only two hour's walk away.

Gathering up his bundles that contained clothing and many presents for family and friends, Lian Kim began the walk home. An hour out of Haka, he turned off the truck road and followed a path along the hillside. While his village had a jeepable road to it, that road wound around the mountainside and came into the village from the other side so a person on foot took the trail which, while narrow and steep, was a lot shorter.

As he walked to his home, he felt good to be back in his homeland. Rounding a curve in the path, his village came into view. Houses built on legs (stilts) with vertical wooden planked walls and hay or tin roofs nestled in a hollow of the mountain. Lian Kim was pleased to see no grass grew around the houses as grass sometimes hid poisonous snakes and grandmothers made it a point to pull it up whenever it appeared. A yard with grass told everyone the owner was too lazy to keep it bare. His arriving to his village was announced by every dog barking in unison. In the falling dusk, people came out of their homes to see what had upset the dogs and shouted salutations and welcomes to Lian Kim as he made his way home. As he neared his house, he noticed with pride, two more skulls of barking deer had been added to the collection of skulls mounted on the front of his house which showed the hunting skill of his father.

He received a warm and heartfelt greeting from the members of his family. As they sat around sipping tea, Lian Kim noticed his youngest brother had disappeared. "Where did Luai Thian go?" he asked.

"You shall see!" his father said with a smile.

A few moments later a neighbor's daughter, Zing Cuai, arrived saying, "May we borrow some sugar?

"Of course," said his wife bringing out the container of sugar.

As Zing Cuai filled her cup, she suddenly acted as if she had just noticed Lian Kim. "Oh, I see the prodigal son has returned!" She tried to act nonchalant but her breathlessness and Luai Thian following her revealed the true nature of her visit.

"The ordeal of the trip was well worth it," thought Lian Kim as he looked into her eyes. "She is even more beautiful than I remembered her."

29

The Chin Bride

Lian Kim quickly settled into village life. He worked during the day, visited or entertained in the evening, and went to church service on Wednesday evening, and Sunday morning, afternoon and evening. Word had spread that he had had an unusually hard trip home and he must have told about the ordeal at least a dozen times. His tale often elicited tales of similar experiences from others so Lian Kim realized his wasn't unique.

During one breakfast, his father said, "The Ngun Er family is clearing a new field, Ka fapa (my Son). Perhaps you would like to help them as they helped us when you were away. The field they drew by lot this year has a lot of brush and trees to be cleared."

Lian Kim jumped at the opportunity and armed with his clearing tools which included a Namtawng (large knife) and an axe, he proceeded to the Ngun Er house. There he found the whole family, including Zing Cuai, preparing to leave for their field. Joining them, he walked along a narrow trail on the steep hillside. Somehow he ended up walking beside Zing Cuai when the trail was wide enough. But suddenly he found himself tongue tied! How many times he had talked so freely in so many houses but, in the presence of this quiet, solid girl, words would not arrange themselves for conversation. At college in Rangoon, he had had no problem speaking among fellow students from all over Burma, some of whom, he knew, felt superior to Lian Kim's Chin background. Of course Zing Cuai's parents and brothers being there and watching every move didn't make it easy. Her sisters whispered and giggled among themselves and Lian Kim imagined they were talking about him, which really increased the pressure.

"How gracefully Zing Cuai walks," thought Lian Kim. "She hardly seems related to the scrawny kid I played with so many years." They reached the field without a word passing between them and set to work hacking down brush and cutting trees. Trees, too large to easily cut down, were trimmed of their lower branches to let the sunlight reach the ground. It was hot, heavy work and Lian Kim was glad when lunch time came. Zing Cuai and her sisters prepared the food brought with them and they sat around eating the rice and curry. Still Lian Kim could find no way to start a conversation with Zing Cuai.

Afternoon brought more hard labor and the clearing of another small portion of the field. When the brush had dried out for several months, it would be burned by a controlled fire. The ashes would enrich the soil and the field would be planted with hill paddy (rice seeds) for one year or corn for two years. Then the field would have been allowed to return to wild growth to rebuild the soil for ten years, but population growth had forced the using of the fields more often, and so, depleted the soil.

In late afternoon Zing Cuai's father called a halt to the work and they headed home. Again Lian Kim managed to walk close to Zing Cuai and again words jumbled in his mind and stuck on his tongue. That night, as he turned and tossed in his sleep, he thought of hundreds of ways to start a conversation with Zing Cuai. Unfortunately he could not recall a single one the next morning as they walked together.

At lunch the rice and curry were particularly tasty and he spontaneously said, "This is delicious! What meat is it?"

Zing Cuai answered she had made it and the meat was dog, which many Chins like. The Burmans would say it was bald (no horns) goat. One of her sisters, with a sly look at Lian Kim, said, "She's a good cook and can make all kinds of good dishes." This produced laughter from the sisters. Lian Kim endured the family's laughter. Deep down he knew they knew what he wanted and had tacitly consented to his courting her by allowing them to work together.

"Was it the black dog I saw at your house?" asked Lian Kim.

"No, the brown one. We've saving the black one in case someone gets malaria when the rains come. Eating a black dog and drinking its blood cures malaria you know," said Zing Cuai, stating a common Chin belief.

As the weeks went by, conversation came easier and they spent many happy hours working and talking. Working beside Zing Cuai gave Lian Kim an edge over the other men of the village who also were interested in her. In the evening, Lian Kim would go to Zing Cuai's house and find other men also visiting. With Zing Cuai having two eligible sisters, he was not sure who was courting who. All the sisters treated all callers with words of greeting and, as Chin etiquette demanded, gave no clue as to whether they favored one suitor over another. Lian Kim figured at least three others were interested in Zing Cuai. Sometimes fifteen or twenty men came visiting the Ngun Er home. The men would share jokes, folktales, experiences, and make up songs as they sat around the fire. The songs they sang in old traditional language different from the every day spoken language. Burning the fire long hours required lots of wood and Zing Cuai had plenty of men volunteer to help her gather wood for the fire and fir knots for light. Of course they met at the many church activities, too. Usually they were expected to leave by 10 PM although on some nights, several men were invited to sleep over--separately from the girls of course.

One evening, as a group of men were courting the sisters, Zing Cuai lit cigarettes and handed them to the men. To each man she handed the butt end first and gave him plenty of room to take the cigarette without touching her hand. But when she handed the lighted cigarette to Lian Kim, she held the cigarette close to the butt forcing him to put his fingers through hers and when he pulled the cigarette from her hand, his fingers touched hers. He then knew she favored him over the other courters. His Thinlung (liver-heart) was filled with happiness and joy as he walked home that night.

By November the field had all its vegetation cut down and had been left to dry. At the end of March all was dried out and ready for burning. First a path was carefully burned around the edge of the field to keep the fire from spreading beyond the field. Whole villages had been destroyed by out of control fires, so every effort was made to confine the fire to the field. Then fires were started on the inner side of the burned paths so they all burned towards the center. All cooperated and men were stationed to be sure the fire completely burned itself out.

From the top of the hill nearest the village, burning fields could be seen in all directions and smoke covered the land. Some fields did not burn clean and had to be burned again.

After burning and cleaning, the fields were ready for planting with dry rice seeds, so called, because it grew on the dry hillside and not in standing water like wet rice. Using a small hoe called a Tuhmui, five to seven seeds were planted in each hole. It took a month of hard work to plant all the fields of the village. When their own fields were planted, they helped plant the fields of widows and those who needed additional help. When the rains come at the end of April, the paddy would start growing. With the planting finished, Lian Kim was ready to talk with his uncle, (father's brother), Sui Cung, about Zing Cuai.

One evening Lian Kim visited his uncle and said, "I'm interested in having Zing Cuai as my wife," he stated as calmly as possible and waited for his reaction.

"She has grown up to be a fine young woman with good qualities. I think she would make a fine wife for you and good mother to your children." Sui Cung said. "I will talk with your parents and her parents."

Several nights later Sui Cung visited Lian Kim's parents, Cung Ling and Mang Thlia. After the usual polite conversation, Sui Cung explained Lian Kim was interested in Zing Cuai and did they approve of his acting as go between to arrange the marriage? Following Chin tradition, Cung Ling and Mang Thlia feigned surprise although there are few secrets in a Chin village.

In olden days, if one's parents disapproved of a young man's choice, he would be expected to stop courting but times had changed and parents were now more told than asked but still through an uncle or

father's sister's husband (uncle-in-law).

Cung Ling and Mang Thlia approved of Zing Cuai, so Sui Cung then approached the parents of Zing Cuai, Ngun Er and Sung Meng.

Sui Cung told them of Lian Kim's interest in having Zing Cuai as his wife and they, too, acted surprised. If they truly were unaware of the courtship that had been going on, they would have been the only adults in the village who did not know!

Ngun Er listened politely and, as expected, said they would get back to the go-between with an answer.

Sui Cung knew Ngun Er and his wife, Sung Meng, would have to ask all their relatives what they thought about the marriage of Zing Cuai to Lian Kim. If the relatives approved, then they would ask Zing Cuai. Needless to say, this discussing of the prospects of this marriage took time which seemed an eternity to Lian Kim. Finally, with the approval of all relatives, the question was asked Zing Cuai. She did not say "no" and word was sent back to the Cung Ling family via Sui Cung of their willingness to go to the second step.

Then Sui Cung again visited Ngun Er and Sung Meng to discuss bride price. In the old days a typical bride price might have been 500 kyats, one mithun (a variety of cattle found only in the Chin Hills), silver bowls, copper pots, blankets, strands of beads, and cooking pots. In those times some families had difficulty raising enough to obtain wives for their sons. In recent times, the old items formerly given are figured in kyats in preinflation rates so bride prices had become much more reasonable and in many cases not demanded at all. The gifts would go to Zing Cuai's parents, brothers, uncle on his father's side, aunts on both sides, and clan who, by custom, had a right to bride price gifts. This helps to solidify family connections. Then the wedding day was set three months ahead. The bride price would be delivered on the day of the wedding ceremony. Lian Kim did pay the customary earnest money through Sui Cung which would be forfeited if he backed out of the wedding, or returned if Zing Cuai changed her mind.

To Lian Kim, the three months of waiting seemed like forever. The paddy needed to be weeded around the beginning of June, beginning of July and in September. How slowly these months went by while waiting for the wedding date.

On the evening before the wedding, all of Lian Kim and Zing Cuai's friends sang songs to tease the bridal pair. One talked about a beautiful maiden who would soon become a mother and what a loss this was to all the young men of the village. A girl sang about all the young women whose hearts were now broken that Lian Kim had made his choice leaving them with no hope. Composing songs as one sings is a highly admired Chin skill and since it was done in traditional language, not every day language, it required extensive knowledge of that language and its figures of speech.

Zing Cuai sat on the edge of her parents-in-law's bed with her best friend and tried to be serious. The young people tried to get her to laugh and dance and she tried to maintain her seriousness.

The older adults eventually went home but the young people stayed on, making up songs, joking and talking with much of it at the expense of Lian Kim and Zing Cuai. Of course some of the young people used this time for quiet courting while celebrating Lian Kim and Zing Cuai's coming marriage, thereby laying the groundwork for their own marriage in the future. Late in the night, Zing Cuai returned to her home.

The next morning, breakfast completed, practically the whole village went to church for the wedding ceremony. Zing Cuai dressed in her finest Chin costume which consisted of a brownish red longyi with an elaborate pattern and a blouse with vertical stripes. Around her waist she wore a silver belt with many more strands suspended from it. When she moved, the metal shimmered in the light. Tucked under her arms was a shawl with fringes that went around her neck which was graced with necklaces of beads and old silver coins. Each wrist had several bangle bracelets.

When Lian Kim saw her in her finest clothes, he thought she was the most beautiful maiden in the

Chin Hills. Great happiness filled his heart as he thought about her becoming his wife.

Lian Kim wore black pants and a white shirt and tie and the traditional Chin blanket draped over his left shoulder, across his back, under his right arm and then over his left shoulder.

The minister preached on the meaning of marriage. The minister then joined their hands and Lian Kim and Zing Cuai exchanged vows. The minister pronounced them husband and wife. They did not kiss at the end of the ceremony, as such signs of affection are never done in public. In fact some Chins don't kiss at all. They pet, pat, touch and hug as a sign of affection in strict privacy but do not kiss, as kissing is a new, western influence and not all Chins have adopted it and certainly not in public!

After the service, Lian Kim and Zing Cuai returned to the Cung Ling family home. There they hosted a great feast in celebration of their wedding. Food included meat of a mithun and several pigs provided by her parents, uncle, aunt and brother. These were matched one for one by Lian Kim's family except the mithun. All of the village attended plus friends from other villages, as marriage is an important celebration in Chin culture. The total number fed was in the hundreds.

Later in the evening, Lian Kim and Zing Cuai sat together. Friends called and visited for several hours. Later in the evening, Zing Cuai went to her home where she spent the night as is the custom. The next day Zing Cuai was escorted by peers and some elders to Lian Kim's house. There was more singing and dancing while the newlyweds waited patiently well into the night. Finally their friends went home and left them alone so they "went to sleep together."

30

The Leg Rower

Tha Oo scooped up more mud from the bottom of Inle Lake and deposited it in front of him in his long boat. The boat settled lower in the water. Taking some stiff mud, Tha Oo built a wall along the gunwales of the boat to keep the water from flowing into the boat. Several more scoops lowered the boat to the point only the mud walls were keeping the water from swamping his boat. "Better not try to carry any more." he thought, "If the boat swamps, the whole load will be lost."

Picking up the oar, Tha Oo stepped on the stern of the boat and stood on the small, flat platform there. Balancing on one foot, he wrapped his other leg around the oar and using his strong leg muscles, he moved the oar in a figure eight motion propelling the boat forward. To foreign tourists, such balancing on one foot, with much of his body over the water, seemed extremely precarious, but to Tha Oo, who had done it all his life, it seemed perfectly natural. In a standing position, a person could see the bottom of the lake six to ten feet below. It was also easier to see the best route through floating water plants.

As Tha Oo propelled his way back to his village, he thought about the coming Phaung Daw Oo Festival and the boat races. Each village put forth their best rowers in competition. They raced in long narrow boats that had an elevated support running down the middle for the rowers to hold on to as they concentrated on getting the most power into their sweep and staying coordinated with each other while balanced on one foot.

His mind returned to the present as he passed several fishermen using cone shaped fish traps held in that shape by a thin frame. The fishermen watched the bottom for fish. When they spotted one worth catching, they would lower their trap over it, trapping it as the open mouth of the cone net rested on the bottom of the lake. If the fish tried to get under the lip of the cone or hide in the bottom growth, the fisherman used a long bamboo to probe the vegetation and force the fish to swim up in the cone. When the fish reached the upper end of the cone, the fisherman closed a net door, trapping the fish. Then he pulled up the cone, took out the fish and continued fishing, hoping for a large catfish, carp or eel.

Continuing on, he turned his boat down a narrow channel to the floating gardens. Soon he pulled his boat alongside where his wife, Mya Win, was working from her boat, tying floating water plants together with bamboo to make an ever lengthening trough.

"Mae Win, you are making good progress!" said Tha Oo using the Intha term "Mae" (mother). Tha Oo shoveled the mud from his boat onto this thick bed of weed to make a floating garden. It was a lot of work but the final result was a fertile garden that could grow cauliflower, tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage, peas, beans, eggplant, and flowers all year around. Across the lake there was a natural floating garden with about 40 inches of natural humus. The state government cut up this tangled mass into 328 feet by 6 1/2 foot sections which it sold to farmers for 600 kyats. The farmers then towed their purchase to their village and anchored it with bamboo to the bottom of the lake. Bamboo framework kept vegetables above the damp soil which would rot them. They usually would not support the weight of a farmer, so were farmed from boats that went up and down the narrow channels between the floating fields.

Since the lake sits in the bottom of a great crack in the earth's surface, with steep walls of mountains on each side, darkness comes quickly when the sun begins to set.

Therefore, with the sun going down, Tha Oo and Mya Win returned to their home, each in their own boat. From many houses they passed the sound of the clicking of the flying shuttle could be heard on the home looms, weaving the cloth for the famous Shan bags that originated in this area. As they passed an open window, a friend hailed him, using the Intha term of adult men "Eh", saying, "Eh Oo,

don't forget the practice of our team for the leg rowers race!"

"Don't worry, I wouldn't miss it for the world!" Tha Oo answered. Rowing on, they passed a tower with a large drum suspended in the top, which could be used to call people to fight a fire.

They came to their home which was built on posts over the lake. Each house had its own landing and a place to moor the boats under the house. Travel within the village was done by boat. Tha Oo and Mya Win were Inthas, which means, Sons and Daughters of Inle Lake, a separate ethnic group numbering about 130,000 related to the Burmans and Rakhine and not the Shans all around them. They lived in about 200 villages on and around the lake.

On the five day market, which came every fifth day, Mya Win donned her khamout (a flattened cone shaped hat) and took her boat to the floating market where many boats congregated. Some brought produce, handicrafts, weavings and bags to sell. Others purchased necessities and luxuries from merchants who displayed their goods through the length of their boats. Of course there was the usual bargaining and banter; shopping would be no fun if everything had a fixed price.

Tourist Burma brought foreigners in motor powered boats to see this colorful, authentic market. Some merchants catered to them, quoting high prices, expecting to be bargained down. Some tourists accepted these prices, much to the surprise and delight of the sellers. Others tourists just shook their heads at the first price quoted. Then the merchants used their limited English to say, "You can bargain!" and brought out a chart with numbers in both western Arabic and Burmese so the tourist could point to what he wanted to pay. The merchant would counter, pointing to another number. Back and forth it went until a bargain was struck. Since kyats exchanged at official rate made most items seem too expensive, cigarettes, T shirts, sun glasses, etc, were also used as a medium of exchange.

Mya Win was shy and avoided the tourists, preferring to do her shopping and return home. Of course she exchanged gossip with her friends who were in their boats, as no trip to the floating market would be considered complete without exchanging tidbits of information.

While Mya Win was shopping, Tha Oo joined with the other men who had been chosen to represent the village in the leg rowing contest. They practiced in the village's boat built especially for this race, learning to work with each other sending the boat skimming through the water. Two lines of rowers, on each side of the center support, propelled the narrow boat with surprising speed.

When the Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda festival came for two weeks during the September full moon, the area was filled with Buddhists from all over Burma for this combination religious pilgrimage and good times fair. Thousands slept in the monasteries and pagodas as well as with friends and relatives. Tha Oo and his team raced in numerous contests around the lake, winning some and losing others. The excitement of the crowds thrilled him and his team. His teams wore matched Shan costumes with tan pants and jackets with knot buttons. While the Inthas are not related to the Shans, having originated in south Burma, they have adopted much from the Shan people around them.

Returning home one day, Tha Oo was hailed by an elder of the pagoda, "Eh Oo, one of the rowers is sick and we need another to row the royal barge on its trip around the lake. Will you help?"

"Certainly," answered Tha Oo, for to do so was an honor and gained merit.

The next day found Tha Oo dressed in white with a white turban as one of the rowers on the large ornate barge with the five images of the Buddha from the Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda on its annual visit to ten lake settlements. The barge, constructed to look like a royal barge from the days of the Burmese kingdom with a huge gilded karaweik bird on its prow, carried the images on stands under white umbrellas and an ornate multilevel roof. The images, originally brought back by King Alaungsithu from Malaya in the twelfth century, had been hidden in a cave. Rediscovered, they were enshrined at the pagoda at Tha Lay near Ywama where devoted believers applied gold leaf for decades as a sign of veneration. So much gold leaf has been applied that they now resembled five rough gold balls since all details have been covered over.

The slowly moving barge was a grand sight with elaborate carvings, and brightly painted intertwines in

gold, silver, red, and orange. Although Tha Oo had seen it many times over the years, it never failed to impress him with its grandeur. As they paddled along, Tha Oo looked to the west and saw dark clouds gathering high on the mountainside that formed the western side of the valley. "We are in for a quick summer storm and a wetting," he thought, and realized there was little they could do except to keep slowly moving along. Often violent storms swept down from the steep mountainsides but usually were quickly over. With a little luck, it would miss them completely. A little later he noticed the storm had now reached the level valley floor and it looked as if it was heading for them. "I hope the wind isn't too strong," Tha Oo thought, "This barge looks awfully top- heavy and presents a lot of surface to the wind. Maybe we should head towards the storm to make it more stable."

Suddenly a great gust of wind struck the boat and Tha Oo felt the boat keeling over. Instinctively the oarsmen ran to the windward side to try and balance the thrust of the wind but the lee side dipped toward the water as the wind struck the superstructure. "We're going over!" exclaimed Tha Oo and sure enough, the barge continued to tip, taking on water on the lee side and capsizing and sinking into the water, leaving the oarsmen and pagoda officials swimming in the pouring rain. Fortunately all Inle lake dwellers are good swimmers. Some, it is said, learn to swim before they learn to walk.

The barge righted itself when it settled on the bottom and since the lake was only ten feet deep, the ornate top stuck out of the water. Escort boats picked them up amid loud discussion as to what should be done next.

Eventually the pagoda elders organized and added enough buoyancy to the barge to bring it to the surface. "The images are gone!" some one shouted in consternation. While the stands were still in place, the gold images were missing from all five stands. Quickly they searched the bottom of the boat, hoping the images had fallen into the boat but they were not found. While others continued to tie bamboo to the barge to make it float higher, Tha Oo joined others in diving in the water searching for the images. The raising of the barge had stirred up a lot of sediment and bottom plants, so very little could be seen. Therefore the divers felt around with their hands. As Tha Oo swept the bottom, he felt something hard and knew by the feel it was one of the images, but it was too heavy to bring up. Breaking surface directly above it, he shouted to one of the numerous boats now surrounding the barge and they came over with rope. With the help of other divers, they tied the rope around it and raised it to the surface and deposited it in a large boat. Meanwhile enough buoyancy had been added to the barge to get its gunwales above the surface and then it was quickly bailed out.

The finding of one image indicated where the others should be and so divers worked the area thoroughly. Soon another was found and raised and then another. The fourth image soon was discovered but the fifth eluded their searching hands. Although they worked late into the night with fresh divers taking the place of tired divers, the fifth image could not be found.

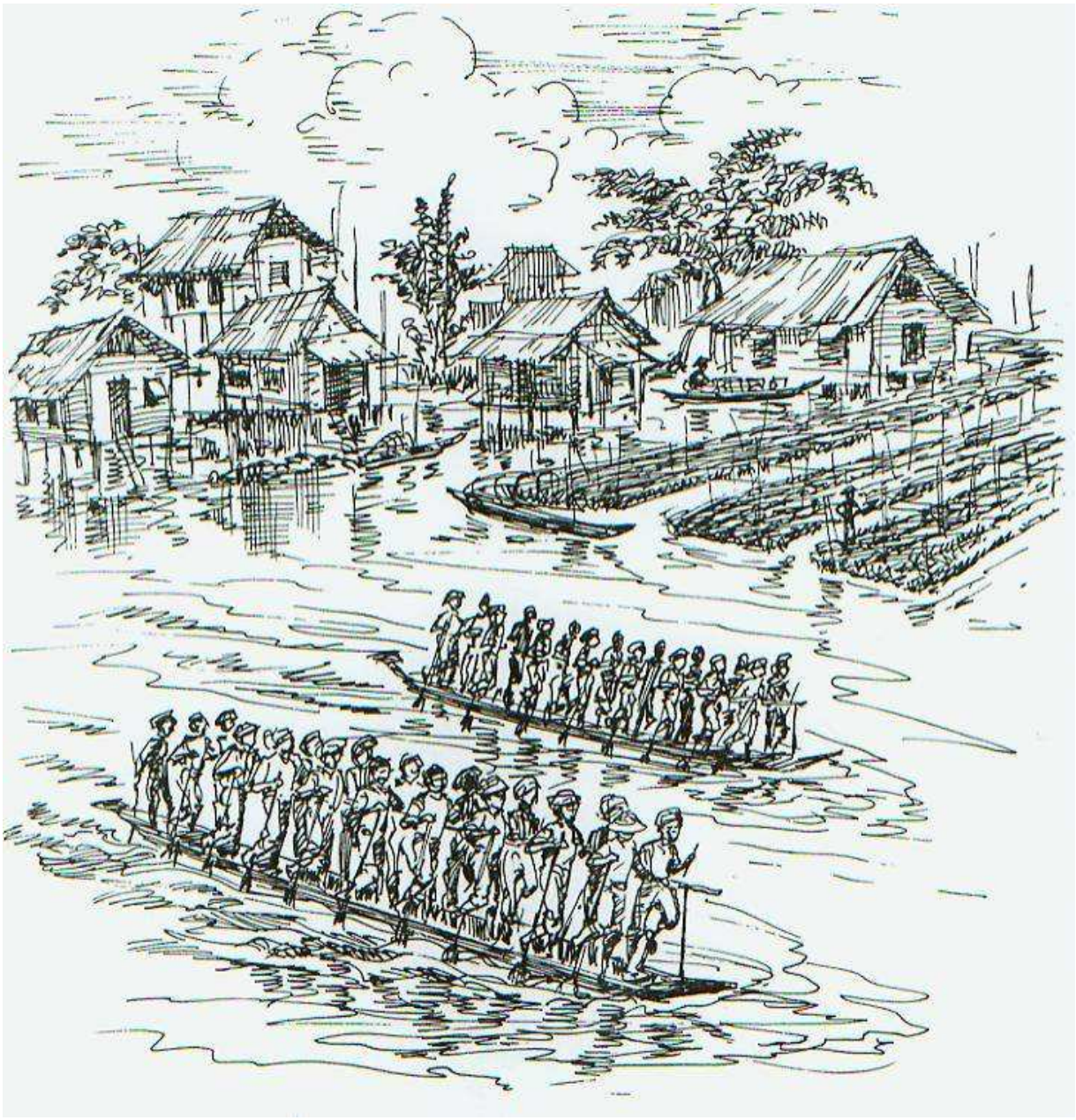
Finally it was decided to take the four images back to the Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda and continue the search for the fifth one the next day. Therefore they took the four images to Tha Lay and carefully placed them on their pedestals in the middle of the pagoda where they usually resided all year.

Tha Oo looked at the fifth, now empty, pedestal and wondered if they would ever find the fifth one. Thoroughly tired, they left the pagoda with the trustees locking the steel gates behind them. He returned home determined to renew the search in the morning.

The news of the capsizing had quickly spread through the village so Mya Win had already heard but she was anxious for the details when Tha Oo arrived home. She reheated his supper while he related the adventures of the day.

Early the next morning, another piece of news quickly spread from house to house. "The fifth image is miraculously back in its place at the pagoda." Tha Oo and Mya Win hastened to the pagoda and sure enough, with great surprise and joy, they found the fifth image enthroned beside the other four. Amazement filled the people as they arrived to view the fifth image. All agreed that one of the nats (spirits) must have rescued the image during the night and spirited it to its place!

Editor's Note: The site of the capsizing is marked to this day with a karaweik (bird) on a post. From that year on only the four recovered Buddhas make the tour while the fifth image stays in the pagoda permanently occupying the place where it mysteriously reappeared.



31

Two Gallons of Gas

U Thein Zan watched the car in front of him pull ahead one car length. Putting his Morris Minor in neutral gear, he got out and pushed the car until it caught up. Only four vehicles separated him from the gasoline pump. The second car up was a reconditioned Japanese car. To keep old cars from competing with new cars in Japan, Japanese dealers reconditioned trade-ins and then sold these rebuilt vehicles throughout southeast Asia to developing countries. U Thein Zan thought, "It surely looks nice compared to my twenty seven-year-old car."

All the cars bore black plates with white numbers indicating the vehicles were private cars entitled to one gallon of gasoline per day. Today was designated for private cars at this station. Looking at the rusting license plate in front of him reminded U Thein Zan of when he had purchased his Morris Minor in 1959. The car, being newly imported, came with red numbers on white, indicating a temporary plate. Registering the car to his name, U Thein Zan had paid for a license number and then made his own license plate because the private shops, that made plates, charged too much. The government specified size and dimensions of letter and numbers. That number would be the same year after year and stay with the car when sold.

U Thein Zan didn't mind waiting in line for gas although he tried to come at the time of the shortest line. As he was a retired person, he could avoid the rush times when the lines got very long. Waiting for gasoline had become a time of remembering.

U Thein Zan watched the passing traffic. A man in his forties drove by with a young women in her twenties seated beside him. "Was she his daughter or "did an old ox like young, tender grass" (an old man like a young woman)?" wondered U Thein Zan.

A vehicle drove by with the chassis of a World War II truck carrying a Burma built bed. U Thein Zan knew the owner, U Tun Yin. Sometimes U Tun Yin would take off the truck body and put on a Burma built bus body with hard seats and wooden windows that were always down except during rain. Today he had the truck body on the frame. This truck had lasted over forty years. U Thein Zan remembered during the early days of World War II, a thousand of those trucks arrived each month from America to carry supplies over the famous Burma Road to China. Long convoys loaded with supplies set out from Rangoon to Kunming. The trip was hundred of miles and usually took several weeks. U Thein Zan had heard stories about the flat delta land drivers inexperienced with the steep, hairpin turns of the mountains produced frightening accident rates.

Another vehicle paid and received its ration of gasoline and moved out. Everybody moved up a car length.

A passing truck caught his attention. This vehicle was a miniature Mazda pickup, nicknamed Lei Bane (Four Wheels), that could barely hold four passengers in back and one crammed in the front seat. U Thein Zan judged it to be ten to twelve years old. He smiled, remembering hearing a tourist describe that size as an overgrown kiddie car. Its white numbers on red license plate began with a letter which told everyone it had been licensed many years ago. That color combination indicated it was licensed to carry passengers.

The car in front of U Thein Zan appeared to be an American Chevrolet or, at least, mostly a 1954 Chevy. Much of the body had been replaced or repaired making certain identification difficult. U Thein Zan wondered what percentage of the engine was original. No doubt it contained many Burma made parts made from melted down kyat coins, worth more as replacement parts than coins.

A new Mercedes passed by with black numbers on a white plate, indicating a diplomat's car. The 300% duty and 15% sales tax made new cars very scarce. These charges pushed a $10,000 car to

$34,500. Burma, with an average annual income of $180, had few people who could afford a car. Pick up trucks had only a 30% duty which accounted for the predominance of that type of vehicle.

For a moment there was a break in the traffic. Looking across the road, U Thein Zan saw a typical compound surrounded by a fence made with stuccoed brick posts and metal planks called PSP (Perforated Steel Planking) with large holes in them. He recognized the metal planks as airport runway paving left over from World War II. It is dangerous to land planes on soft sand, dirt or mud so runways were covered with these steel mesh gratings that locked together to give a hard surface to newly leveled sand or dirt. Enterprising Burmese had salvaged the planks for fencing which could be seen throughout Rangoon.

Next to that compound was a Buddhist compound surrounded by a whitewashed stuccoed brick wall. Between the posts, the wall was divided into panels and each panel had Burmese writing on it that gave the names of donors who had contributed to the building of the most recent pagoda. Over the wall could be seen the spires of several pagodas. Several were blackened with age and mildew and beginning to fall apart. No one would repair them as the merit for repairing would go to the original builder and so, Buddhists with money build new pagodas and did not repair old ones.

In the space between the sidewalk and the street, garbage was dumped to be picked up by a truck once a week. Several people with sticks poked through the refuse sorting out paper, rags, plastic, all metals, foil, glass, bottles, light bulbs, cans, wood, and anything else that could be recycled. Thin, pathetic looking dogs nosed the remains for any scraps of food. When they finished there remained only leaves, bones, pieces of bamboo, old flowers and the remains of a few other things no one had figured a way to recycle.

The car at the pump finished and everyone moved up a length. U Thein Zan looked at his watch. Still an hour to lunch time meant there should be no problem getting his gas before the attendants stopped to eat. He remembered, one time, the car in front of him had been filled, the workers stopped for lunch leaving everyone in the long line to wait until they finished eating. The rebuilt Japanese car received its allotment and everybody moved forward.

When the Chevy moved out, U Thein Zan started the car this time instead of pushing it and drove up to the pump. This fulfilled the government requirement that all cars receiving gasoline had to be running--at least when they pulled up to the pump. U Thein Zan smiled as he remembered U Aung Kyaw who had a small light weight English car. U Aung Kyaw had sold off the engine but he and his sons still pushed the car to the gas station every other day to get his ration of gasoline. Many persons purchased gasoline for cars that couldn't run until the government issued a regulation requiring the car be driven up to the pump.

U Thein Zan had pushed it while waiting in line to save gasoline. He handed the attendant his ration book, which could only be used at this station, and seven kyats for two gallons of gasoline. The attendant noted U Thein Zan had purchased two gallons two days before. He stamped today's date and wrote two gallons. U Thein Zan's private car allotment permitted him seven gallons a week. He could purchase one gallon each day. In a rare show of good judgement, the government allowed private car owners to purchase two gallons every other day but did not allow purchase of three gallons every third day. Hence U Thein Zan's every other day trip to the filling station.

The two gallons received, U Thein Zan drove carefully home to his daughter's house by the most direct route using as little gasoline as possible. By his calculations, he should have about seven gallons in the tank--six day's rations plus one gallon. Today U Soe Naing would come and purchase his gasoline.

His daughter, Hla Hla Win, had a delightful lunch waiting for him which contributed to U Thein Zan choosing to honor Hla Hla Win with the care of himself and his wife, Daw Htwe Sein.

"Could we use the car for an outing this weekend?" Daw Htwe Sein asked.

"I'm selling off the gasoline this afternoon except for one gallon. Where would you like to go?" her husband asked.

"Anywhere except the Rangoon Zoo," she answered, "The animals looked so thin last time we were there, particularly the lions."

"I read they caught the zoo keepers selling the meat meant for the lions in the bazaar." U Thein Zan mused. "So maybe they are fat now."

"No one or no animal is going to get fat on the generosity of this government!" exclaimed Hla Hla Win.

"Hush child, it's dangerous to criticize the government even in our own home," cautioned Daw Htwe Sein.

"Let's go to Mingaladon Park." Hla Hla Win suggested.

A shout from the front of the house interrupted their outing plans and alerted U Thein Zan to the arrival of U Soe Naing, the gas purchaser. U Thein Zan opened the front gate and led U Soe Naing to the car parked under the house. "I can sell six gallons today."

"Sixty five kyats a gallon today," U Soe Naing said. U Thein Zan nodded his approval. He liked dealing with U Soe Naing who never tried to pay him less than the going rate.

U Soe Naing took one of the five gallon cans he carried and placed it beside the car. Taking a long plastic tube from his shoulder bag, he fished it into the car's gas tank. A few good sucks of air out of the tube brought gasoline in sight and he siphoned it into the can. The can filled, U Soe Naing pinched the tube and transferred it to a one gallon can U Thein Zan handed him. When this can was filled, U Soe Naing withdrew the tube allowing the excess to drain back into the car. U Soe Naing then transferred the gasoline from the one gallon can into the other five gallon can.

"Six times sixty five is three hundred ninety." said U Soe Naing taking a wad of notes from his bag. He handed U Thein Zan three bundles, each consisting of nine ten kyat notes wrapped with another ten kyat note to make a hundred kyats, then counted out ninety kyats more.

U Thein Zan received the notes with his right hand as custom demanded, even though he was left handed. U Soe Naing carried the cans to his truck and continued down the street to make his next purchase.

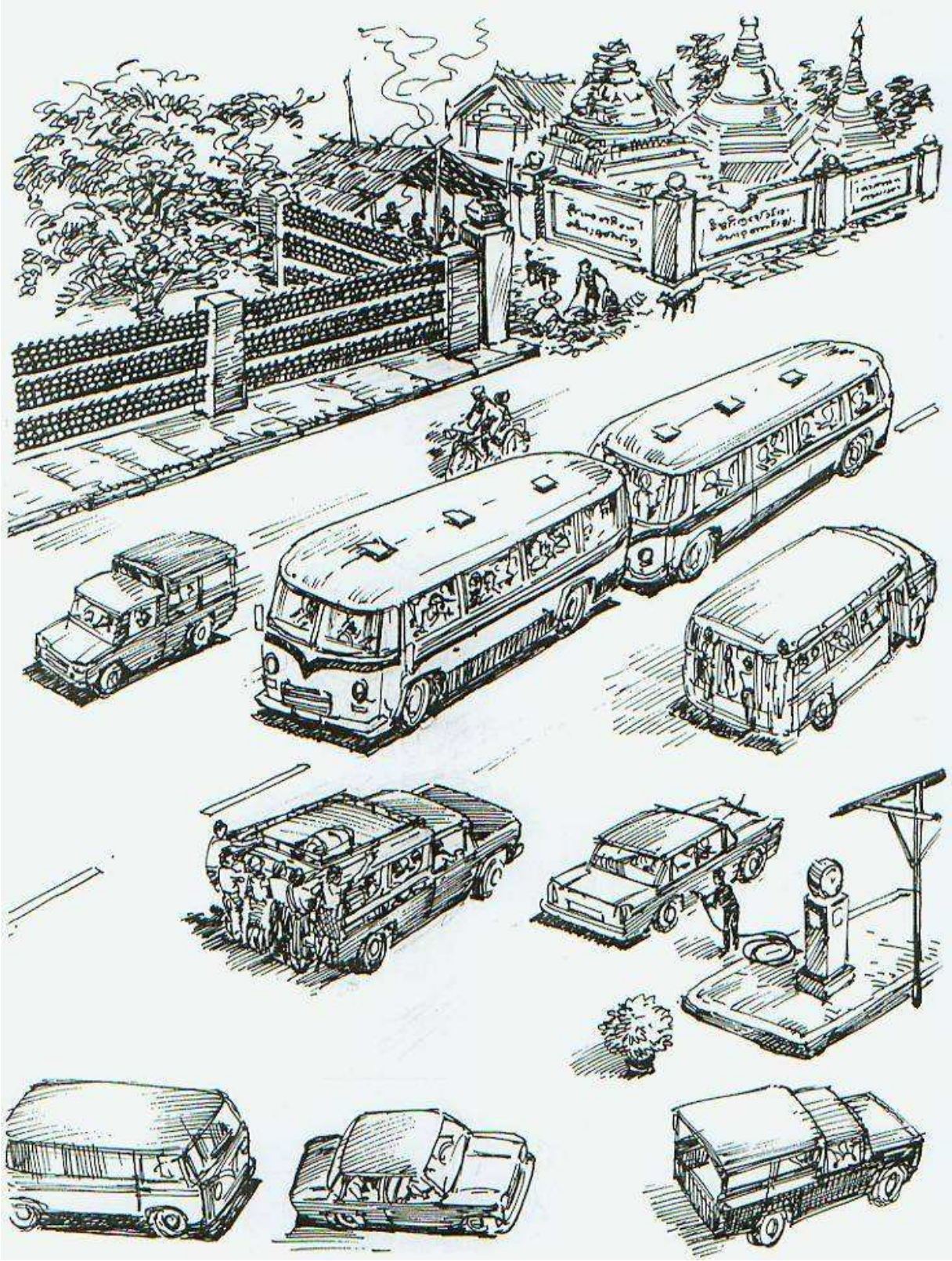
The six gallons purchased at the official rate of 3 1/2 kyats each had cost him 21 kyats and he had sold for a profit of three hundred sixty nine kyats. That provided over fifteen hundred a month--more than four times the amount his son-in-law made clerking. That money paid school fees and provided tutoring for all his grandchildren. Education, hopefully, might provide a better life.

U Thein Zan knew U Soe Naing would sell the gasoline in his black market business for seventy kyats a gallon to taxis and truck owners who needed more than their government allotment but U Soe Naing was entitled to his five kyat profit.

Some small gasoline dealers would stand beside the road with their thumbs down. Westerners thought this was the Burmese version of hitch-hiking but, in reality, it indicated they had gasoline for sale. These illegal gasoline dealers improperly stored gasoline. In 1981 a fire started in one of these shops and then raced through Mandalay destroying 6100 buildings and leaving 35,000 homeless. U Thein Zan sat down in the shade of a Nyaung Bin (shade tree) and memories of the past came and went. He recalled getting his inheritance and debating whether to spend it on a car or buy government savings certificates. Finally the thrill of owning a car won out over saving the money. He never dreamed that when he bought his Morris Minor twenty seven years ago, it would provide him with retirement income. In a socialistic country run by appointed party bureaucrats, prices of items and services could be wildly unrealistic. The socialists scorned capitalism and everything connected with it. They viewed profit as a dirty word and considered procedures developed by capitalistic countries such as cost analysis with deep suspicion. Therefore officials priced gasoline according to what they thought it ought to be, not on the basis of what it cost to produce and deliver. U Thein Zan heard that western observers figured the Burmese government sold its gasoline for about a tenth of its actual cost. This did not bother the Petroleum Industry's appointed military colonel head one bit.

Those in the gasoline distribution system did not want to see the government charge a realistic price because they bought at official price and sold it out the back door at black market rate giving everyone in the department a tidy second income. Some said less than half the gasoline produced actually reached the retail pump.

With his retirement pension of only 100 kyats a month, U Thein Zan hoped that the government would never eliminate the disparity between cost and sale price because this windfall saved him from a bleak retirement. Two gallons of gasoline had a profound impact on U Thein Zan's lifestyle.



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The Retirement Gift

Kyaw Thant approached the secretary of the Colonel. She recognized Kyaw Thant and said, "He's expecting you, go on in."

After giving his uniform a quick once over, Kyaw Thant entered the colonel's office, stood in front of his desk and gave a crisp salute. The colonel returned the salute and said, "Sit down, there is something important we must discuss. Next month you will be retiring after thirty two years of service. You are now a major. Your retirement pension will be 720 kyats a month. You deserve better than that for so many years of dedicated service. Is there anything in particular you would like?"

Kyaw Thant knew that the pension would barely provide food. Retirement would be bleak but he also knew the army took care of its own. Since the military junta ruled the country, he could ask for anything within reason the government could provide. The government was the biggest employer in the country and so virtually any job in any department or cooperative could be his. Also he could ask for political positions such as a village head or to be on a town council. The government controlled much of the economy by licenses and permits and these could be difficult to obtain so they could be lucrative for a retiring officer.

"I would like a permit to buy cattle skins." Kyaw Thant said.

"That is a reasonable request and you deserve it," the colonel answered, "Check with my secretary in two weeks." The colonel stood and saluted and extended his hand, "Have a good retirement!"

"I will now, thanks to that permit," Kyaw Thant answered.

The permit allowed Kyaw Thant to buy cattle skins from the butchers at 31 kyats per hide and they were required to sell them to him. He, in turn, was required to sell the cow hides to the government for thirty one kyats each. Obviously he couldn't make any money doing that. However the going rate in the black market was 60 to 70 kyats to local users and 150 kyats to smugglers who took them to Thailand by sea where they could be sold for 500 kyats. So obviously Kyaw Thant did not want to sell very many of his skins to the government. But to sell them on the black market was dangerous because if he was caught, he would lose his permit, and possibly end up in jail. So he made arrangements for another person, Toe Gyi, to use his permit and buy the cattle skins. The permit allowed them to buy from seven butchers. While Buddhists do not believe in killing, so will not kill animals, they will eat the meat after it has been killed by someone else.

The butchers did not want to sell to Toe Gyi for the fixed rate of 31 kyats but were forced to by government regulation. If caught selling on the black market, the butcher could lose his Butchering Permit or, at least, have to pay a heavy bribe. Slaughtering was done around 2 AM to 3 AM so the meat buyers could start purchasing at 6 AM. Toe Gyi would come to the butchers' stalls at 6 AM to buy the skins. If he was late, the butchers would sell the hides off to other people at the black market rate of 60 to 70 kyats. Sometimes Toe Gyi paid more than the regulation price of 31 kyats to give the butchers a bonus and keep them happy.

The cattle were purchased at a once a week bazaar at Myaung Daga on Friday about 31 miles from Rangoon. The prices paid for each cow was arrived at by bargaining. Veterinarians issued a certificate on each cow but could be bribed a little for slightly sick cows.

Toe Gyi sold the government one skin at 31 kyats each day to fulfill the government requirement and keep the permit active. He made no money on this skin. He bought about 70 skins a day and sold the other 69 on the black market.

Toe Gyi managed the skin buying business. He paid Kyaw Thant 3,000 kyats a month to use the permit.

Toe Gyi had 3 to 4 workers. They treated the skins with salt before they sold them. On a good average day, Toe Gyi grossed 2000 kyats a day profit but, if caught, he was the fall guy for the operation. Kyaw Thant would claim he knew nothing about the cheating of the government by not selling all the skins to the proper authorities. That way, if something went wrong, Kyaw Thant would be allowed to keep the permit.

The whole arrangement would give Kyaw Thant a comfortable retirement. With his 720 kyats per month retirement money plus the 3,000 per month from subcontracting the skin business, Kyaw Thant would be able to live quite well. In retirement he would still have access to the top notch medical facilities reserved for the military and goods available only at the military store for the army.

Without the colonel passing the word to the proper military man in charge of issuing permits, Kyaw Thant knew the permit would never have been issued.

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The Trekker

The bitter, cold winds swept across the flat prairies of Saskatchewan and buffeted the snug, comfortable house in the suburbs of Regina. Inside, sitting beside his wife, Catherine, Dave Neilson took another sip of hot tea, relishing the taste after the wonderful Burmese meal prepared by Khin Thein. Taking a piece of peanut candy, Dave asked Zau Tin about his life back in Burma.

"Tell Mr. Neilson about your trek out," Khin Thein urged her husband.

"Yes, I would very much like to hear about it, if it is not too painful." Dave urged. He knew that some could not talk about the terrible ordeal even after fifty years.

"I was very fortunate to be among the first to make the trek. Those coming later had a much harder time," Zau Tin said. "I was a medical student in Rangoon when the war with Japan broke out. After the second bombing of Rangoon in 1941, which occurred on Christmas morning, I decided to join the British Royal Army Medical Corp (RAMC). Within weeks the government and army headquarters were evacuated to Maymyo, a hill station east of Mandalay. We were quartered in various buildings scattered throughout the town. Being relatively more fluent in English than the local staff, I was appointed as a clerk to carry urgent, verbal messages between the various army offices," he said, using the British pronunciation of "clark" for clerk.

Zau Tin took a sip of tea and continued, "We hadn't been there long when we heard Mandalay had been bombed by the Japanese and a great fire broke out that destroyed a large section of the city.

"Brigadier General Thompson, our C.O. (Commanding Officer) of the British army wanted to go down to Mandalay to see the damage and asked my superintendent to supply someone to go with him. I was assigned and was picked up by the General and off we went down the mountain to Mandalay. I liked to whistle at that time so I asked the General if he minded if I whistled. He said he didn't mind, so I started whistling various tunes. He suddenly got interested in me and asked me a lot of questions. He wanted to know what I had been in civilian life, how I came to be enlisted in the medical unit, etc. I told him I had been a second year medical student in Rangoon, and with the coming of war, I signed on.

"He became very agitated and said, `You've got to go back to medical school and finish your training!'

"I answered, `I can't do that sir. I've signed on and I'm sure they will not let me out.'

"He answered, `I'll assign you to the non-essential staff and you can evacuate with them and their families to India. I'll give you a letter to my friend, Brigadier Rankin, in India and he will see that you get into a medical school.' Thanking him, we continued down to Mandalay and saw the terrible destruction. I had never seen such large scale destruction and it shocked me. By the end of the war, Mandalay would be 85% destroyed but no one knew that then. We looked around. Large numbers of refugees, mainly poor Indians, streamed in from lower Burma because they feared the Japanese and the Burmans no longer being controlled by the British. They wanted to stay in British controlled territory. Everybody believed that the British could halt the Japanese advance and hold upper Burma.

"I took Brigadier General Thompson back to Maymyo. Within two weeks the army HQ (Headquarters) was evacuated to Shwebo by train and during the ensuing chaos, I missed the C.O. and the letter he promised. That deeply disappointed me because he had aroused my desire to continue my education.

The Japanese kept smashing through every defensive line the British threw up. It almost became a rout. The thirty two thousand strong British Indian army with British officers retreated toward India along the Arakan coast trying to maintain discipline and slow the Japanese advance. I heard later that only eleven thousand made it to India.

"Barely two weeks later orders were issued for all non-essential staff to be evacuated to India. The plan was for us to board a train and travel north to Kin U, walk westward for 8 miles to Ye U, board a train there going south to Monywa, cross the Chindwin River, and walk for about 40 miles to Mamu near the Indian border. They made it sound easy.

The essentials planned to retreat to Myitkyina with its airfield. Round-the-clock flights flew important people from there.

As we non-essentials were getting ready to board the train, to my relief and delight, I spotted Brigadier General Thompson who had just driven up in his jeep. Rushing up to him, I reminded him of the letter he promised to get me out of the army and into medical school. He fished through his pockets and came up with an envelope addressed to him. He split the ends and opened it into a piece of paper and then wrote my discharge orders and a letter to his friend in India asking him to see that I got medical training. Then we boarded and I never saw him again, but that precious letter would change my life.

"Among those on the train with me was the family of Mrs. Johns, the mother of a friend who had to remain behind as an essential staff. I promised to take care of them as best I could. It was now the end of April 1942.

"We reached Kin U, slept in the train that night, and walked eight miles to Ye U the next morning. Ye U lay in a neighboring valley on a branch of the railroad that ran parallel to the one we had come up from Mandalay on." Zau Tin paused for a sip of tea.

"Why didn't you take the train back to Mandalay and then over to Monywa. That way no one would have had to walk to Ye U?" asked Dave.

"They didn't explain anything to us. But looking back I think they planned to use our train to take the essentials to Myitkyina. Also with so many trains headed north to Myitkyina, there may not have been any trains to go south. Being mostly single track, southbound trains would slow the progress of northbound trains because they could pass only at double track passing points. Time was running out.

"Well, at Ye U we found the oldest, most rickety railroad carriages (passenger cars) and decrepit engine I have ever seen. The officers ordered us to rest and in the evening we boarded the train and headed south to Monywa. The old engine took all night to go that relatively short distance. In the morning we arrived at Alon which was only one station away from Monywa. Our officers told us to get out and rest and we would go on to Monywa in the evening. They would scout ahead to find a way to cross the river.

"We believed them so we all got out and found places to cook our meals. A large grove of trees near the station provided a nice place for the Johns family and me to rest. I lay down on my back at one end of the grove and took a nap. Suddenly, I woke up hearing an airplane and looked up to see a Japanese dive bomber coming straight down toward me. He dropped a bomb and I felt sure it was coming straight to me. I thought my time was up! But the bomb went over my head and struck the other end of the grove, killing several helpless people. We all scattered and got farther away from the railroad station.

"About 4 o'clock our officers came back and ordered us to form a bucket brigade to fill the train engine with water, which we did. They didn't tell us they had abandoned us that morning and walked toward Monywa. When they got near Monywa, they heard gunfire and knew the Japanese had reached that city and they couldn't cross the Chindwin River there. So they came back.

"We waited until dark, fired up the train engine and we spent the night going back to Ye U. Then they ordered us to walk back to Kin U where there would be a train waiting to take us to Myitkyina. Planes would fly us out to India. When we had walked about a half hour toward Kin U, we met an officer coming toward us who asked who ordered us to come back to Kin U. We told him and he said `No, those were wrong orders. Go back to Ye U.' We started back to Ye U. We met other officers coming from Ye U who ordered us to turn around and march back to Kin U.

"I was pretty fed up with the mess and told my friends, `You can do what you want but I am going to that Buddhist monastery over there and wait until things are sorted out.' An Anglo-Indian doctor named Barnes joined me and the Johns family and we went into the monastery. The monks fed us and we waited watching people go one way and then the other. Tanks going one way, people the other, then coming back." Zau Tin illustrated with his hands pointing at each other and passing each other. "It was funny," he chuckled, remembering the chaos.

"Finally I decided to go to Kin U hoping to catch a train to Myitkyina as the Japs now blocked the way through Monywa. We got to Kin U just in time to hear the officer-in-charge tell us to take what food we could carry and walk to Kambalu, two stations up toward Myitkyina, and a train would be waiting that would take us to Myitkyina. I felt very fortunate to get the last two cans of condensed milk.

"Just then I saw an old friend limping around with a cast on his foot. `Jonathan,' I asked `What are you doing like this?' He replied he had come by truck this far but they had thrown him off at Kin U. He asked me what to do. I said, `We will have to walk up two stations. The first station is six miles. There is no other way. I will help you.' I put his arm around my neck helping him and we started walking up the track. He was quite heavy and burdensome so after about a mile, I let him walk alone. I walked in front of him clearing the pebbles off the sleepers (ties) with my foot to make it easier for him. We finally covered the six miles and reached the next station at about 5 am when it was just getting light.

"We discovered all the others had gone on, including Dr. Barnes and the Johns family. We were exhausted so we lay down in a railway man's shed along side the railroad and soon fell asleep. About 10 o'clock, we awoke to very bright daylight. We were worried and very scared. I looked around and saw a road about 400 yards away with trucks going on it. I said, `Jonathan, we'll never make it to the next station walking with that cast on your foot. Let's walk across those paddy fields to the road and try and catch a lift with those trucks going by.' It took us about a half hour to get across the paddy fields. I left him at the foot of the road bank and climbed up to the road. The trucks, full of Chinese soldiers, would not stop for me.

"Finally a jeep came along carrying a British officer. I was so glad. I stepped out into the road and waved my arms. To my horror, I saw him draw his revolver and aim it at me. I dove for the side of the road and rolled down the bank. Then I commiserated with Jonathan, trying to figure out what we should do.

"Suddenly we were aware the line of passing trucks had stopped and backed up to our location. There were hundreds of them. We climbed up the bank and tried to climb into one of the trucks. The Chinese soldiers kept pushing us out, we kept climbing back in." he laughed. "Eventually they let us stay in the truck. In only a half an hour, we reached the next station."

"We found the railroad station deserted. I called out and a student appeared who recognized me from my Rangoon University days. I told him we were faint from hunger. He took us to a hut and gave us some food. Around four o'clock, an officer called us to board the second most rickety train I have ever seen. People suddenly appeared like ants crawling out from everywhere. Reuniting with Dr. Barnes and the Johns family, we crowded onto the train which headed up the tracks towards Myitkyina. It went only a few miles and stopped. Then we waited. It went a few more miles and stopped. We waited. All night it started and stopped. We didn't cover very many miles. It took two days and three nights of this stop and go travel to reach Indaw.

"There we heard the terrible news that Myitkyina ahead of us had already fallen to the Japanese. So the Japs were ahead of us and they had captured Mandalay behind us. The Major General in charge announced that all able bodied persons could take any available food and head west for India on foot--now about 180 miles as the bird flies but much farther by trail. Those who could not walk or who were too old, should reboard the train and continue on to Myitkyina. He said the Japs would treat them well and take care of their needs and they would be reunited after the war. Jonathan had no choice but to

stay on the train. It was the last I saw him. Most of the old refused to reboard the train and tried to walk to India. I believe most died on the way.

"There were all kinds of food lying around--sugar, tins of milk, dahl (split peas), flour. I said to Mrs. Johns' three daughters and son, `Please take as much food as you can carry. Abandon your suitcases of clothes and personal effects.' They would not do it! I finally persuaded them to take three tins of milk each. I had two camera cases with shoulder straps. I emptied out the camera and other personal items and filled them with flour and dahl. I had so far been carrying two rifles so I threw one away." His hands illustrated his words--stuffing food into the bags, throwing the rifle away, pleading with the women to take food.

Zau Tin continued. "We started walking. Many, at this point, were in high spirits. We reached a township with a bungalow around noon. Hundreds of people milled around. There was no organization; no one seemed in charge. Outside the bungalow I saw a large box of tinned food. I asked, `Who owns these?' No one seemed to know, so I told the people nearby, including some nuns, to help themselves. I tried to get the daughters to carry tins but again, they refused. I pleaded with their mother. It is a long way to India. There may not be food along the way. Please persuade your daughters to take food. Clothes can be replaced in India. Without food, we will not make it.

She scolded her daughters and finally they got rid of some of their possessions and took some cans. Here our party had to split up. Too worn out to climb the mountains, the mother, accompanied by her son, went by ox cart towards Homalin while the three young women, the doctor and I went cross country climbing the hills towards the Chindwin River. That evening we came to a marsh drained by a small stream. Locals said the small stream drained into a larger stream which in turn drained into the Chindwin River. We found a man, who owned a boat, and he agreed to take us to and across the Chindwin River for thirty silver rupees. Early in the morning the young women got into his boat and the boatman, the doctor and I walked in the water pushing it along for about a mile and a half until the stream got deep enough to float the boat with us also in it. We got in and he paddled us down the stream. At about 8 am, we reached the Chindwin which was so wide, it looked like a sea. The rising sun made it a most beautiful morning. Across the river we could see beautiful mountains.

"We were paddling down the middle of the river when suddenly, around 10 am, a Japanese war plane was heard coming towards us. The boatman said not to worry but Dr. Barnes was very fearful because he, too, had been near when the bomb exploded at Alon. He insisted we pull over to the bank and try to hide. The boatman pulled over and the plane passed on.

"Noon came and our hunger gripped us. The boatman said he would find food and disappeared into the brush. Minutes went by. Dr. Barnes and the girls became convinced he had abandoned us. I reassured them saying. `This is his boat, he would not abandon his boat. He will be back." After what seemed to be hours, but was less than an hour, he returned with rice and curry and fed us. The curry was really only a thin soup but in our circumstance, it tasted delicious.

"He then took us across the Chindwin. We thanked and paid him and he went back to his village. Then we joined many others, who were converging on this point from lower Burma, and began our trek to India in earnest. Resting that night we were told only eight miles separated us from the next village where we could camp. The first six miles traversed through beautiful fruit tree groves on an easy path. I thought `This is going to be easy--two or three hours.' But then we came to this steep sided mountain that went straight up from the valley floor," Zau Tin said, indicating with his hand a slope of at least 60 degrees. "There was no path, just hundreds of people clawing their way up this steep slope. It took us over four hours to reach the top. Abandoned suitcases, bags. packages, and goods covered the side of that mountain. Forced to choose between being able to go on by giving up the items they carried, and dying with their possessions, most abandoned everything except food, water, money, jewelry. Some would leave their prized clothes beside the trail draped over a bush as if they hoped someone would see them, like it, and save it. Others would throw what they no longer had strength to carry over a cliff

selfishly figuring if they couldn't keep it, no one else was going to get it either.

"Exhausted after that climb, I sat on top resting. The magnificent view thrilled me. To the East, you could see up and down the Chindwin valley even to where the Chindwin joined the Irrawaddy in the south. To the West, ridge after ridge ran north and south which we would have to cross to get to India. But it looked so beautiful at this moment.

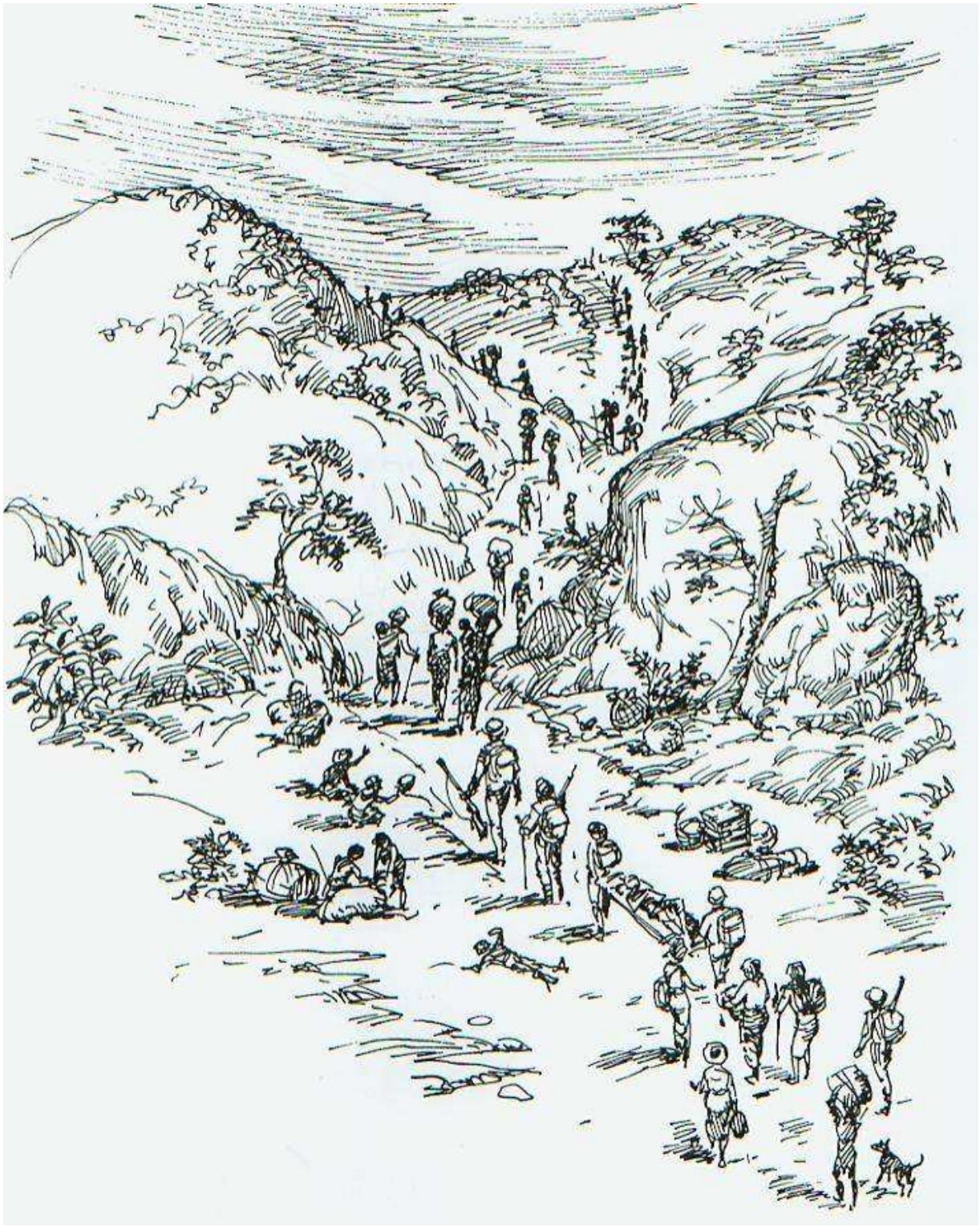
"Lots of abandoned items covered the top. After struggling hours to carry them to the top, the refugees looked west and saw dozens of similar ridges to be crossed and knew they could not make it with the load they carried. The three young women came to their senses and sorted their possessions and reduced them to small cloth bundles.

"After resting about two hours, I asked a local person how far it was to the next village. He said, `Not far, just a call (shout) away.' A call was the distance that a voice could be heard. But you can call from one ridge to another, yet it is ten miles of hard hiking to cover the distance your voice covers in seconds. This time the call turned out to be about three miles. I went along the ridge, my party having gone ahead earlier, and came to a Naga village. The people were semi naked. That is the way the Nagas dress. Our throats ached with thirst. We asked for water. They said, `We'll get you some.' Strapping large, hollow, bamboos on their back, they went down to the valley, filled them up and returned in forty minutes. They covered in twenty minutes what had taken us four hours! They sold us the water and some eggs and other food and we made a meal." Zau Tin laughed recalling how fast those hill people could climb those mountains.

"We stayed overnight there and continued the next day. Day after day we walked averaging eighteen miles. One day about 4 o'clock we reached a valley with a nice stream. I said, `Let's camp here." But the doctor said, `No, they said we must cover so many miles each day and I calculate we have just two more miles to go.' I said, `Be reasonable, look at that ridge ahead. See the long line of people on the trail that zigzags across the side of that mountain. It is more than two miles to the top. There will be no water on the top. Let's camp here.' Dr. Barnes refused to listen to me and he and the women started on. `Wait,' I said to the women, `You have forgotten your bundles.' They shrugged their shoulders, left their bundles and continued on. After a while I felt I had abdicated my responsibility so I continued on to catch up with them.

"As I was walking along, I saw a chicken off in the brush, caught it and hung it from my belt. I caught up with the doctor and the girls near the top of the mountain. They had drunk all their water and now proceeded to drink up mine. By now the trail was beginning to be littered with the dead and the dying. My heart broke to see people begging for water and I had none to give. I came upon a man lying beside the path and I recognized him as the father of my friend from school days. He begged for water. I had none. I finally gave him a tin of melted butter which he drank. He could not go on and so I had to leave him to die."

Zau Tin stopped speaking and the room became quiet. All could feel his anguish about abandoning his friend. Fifty years had not softened the feelings.



Finally Zau Tin continued, "It was terrible climbing that mountain. I saw several other people I knew beside the trail and I could do nothing to help them. Well, it was very dark when we reached the campsite. I just flopped down and fell asleep. At midnight I awoke and took the chicken, defeathered it and built a fire. Some Gurkha soldiers there helped me. I cooked the chicken over the fire until it was black. I tore it open to eat and it was still raw! I gave it to the Gurkhas who ate it anyway.

"In the morning I made coffee and went to get a tin of milk out of my pack and found my last tin missing. Someone had pinched (stolen) it while I slept. Now my memories get jumbled. I remember one evening camping when I used some flour to make some Chappaties (Indian pan cakes). There was only enough for two small ones for each person. An army officer I recognized as one of those who tried to abandon us near Monywa, came by and saw what I was cooking and asked for some. Sadly I had to refuse saying, `No, I am very sorry, I have these three ladies and doctor to feed. I can not give them to you.' I still carried the rifle and I picked it up with my right hand. He said nothing and went on. Later, I realized I would have killed him to keep those miserable pieces of dough. But the trek was like that.

"The rest of the trek is a blur. I can't remember how many more days we walked. I no longer looked at people beside the trail beseeching help, or at the bodies. I didn't want to see someone I'd recognize. I'll never forget the smell of decaying bodies. Bodies all along the trail. Every possible campsite was filled with bodies of people who had lain down to rest and died. We were so hungry. The girls complained constantly until I reminded them they had refused to carry food when I had asked them.

"We finally got to the Indian side of the border and found vendors selling food. We bought and ate, walked, bought and ate. We finally made it to Imphal. We were lucky to be among the first to trek out. It was terrible for those who came later. The rains came early which produced mosquitoes and caused malaria. The trails became almost paved with dead. The stench became overpowering. The villagers believed if a person was not properly buried, his spirit would wander about causing evil. With so many unburied dead, the fearful villagers abandoned their houses and moved away from the trails. This meant no possibilities of food or water for trekkers coming through. Springs became contaminated from people dying and falling into them.

"The brother of the women also eventually made it out after his mother died along the trail." Zau Tin said. "Later, in India, I met a young man who had started the trek with thirty one family members and friends and he was the sole survivor!"

Dave added, "I remember hearing an old missionary tell how seven students from their school volunteered to help them to get to India and six died of malaria on the way. They were too weak even to bury their dead."

"I read an account of one of the last trekkers out, saying he was crossing a shallow stream on stepping stones and suddenly realized each `stone' was a skull. He said there were thousands upon thousands of bodies--babies, children, the old, wounded soldiers, adults of all ages. You could tell what tribe they had belonged to by the rotting clothes on the bodies." Catherine added.

"We were fortunate," Zau Tin said.

"What happened to you in India?" asked Dave.

"Well, I was afraid that orders written on a salvaged envelope from Brigadier General Thompson might be questioned but they understood the situation and it got me into a medical school and by the time I finished my training, the war was over. Of course we had many soldiers in the hospital connected with my medical school and I helped them.

"Did you go back to Burma?" Catherine asked.

"Oh yes, I practiced as a doctor there many years." Zau Tin exclaimed, "I enjoyed the work. It was quite fulfilling until Ne Win took power in 1962. Then they appointed military persons to oversee and control everything. These men knew nothing about medicine or procedures. They just issued ignorant

orders. One said to stop wasting time sterilizing all the equipment and tools. The infection and death rate went through the ceiling. They nationalized everything. Drugs ceased to be available. How can you treat patients without drugs? I didn't want to practice that kind of medicine. I found out Canada issued immigration visas to doctors who would serve in small out-of-the-way towns.

"So I applied, got accepted, and we came to Canada. Winters were very hard to adjust to, but the people are wonderful. I did a lot of work among the native Americans of the First Nation. Since I was non white, I think they found it easier to accept me." Zau Tin added.

"It was also your concern for them." Khin Thein interjected, "You spoke on their behalf, made sure they got the best medicine and treatment. They appreciated someone standing up for them."

As the cold wind whistled outside the house, the room grew silent--each person with his thoughts. Dave thought, "So many of Burma's best had been forced into exile around the world. What a loss for Burma!"

34

The Lawyer

As Yin Yin walked to work, she passed a government building. Already typists were setting up their stands with typewriters on the sidewalk to type for persons who did not have a typewriter. Many displayed revenue stamped paper required for various documents, which they sold to customers for a little more than the cost of the revenue stamp thereby saving them long waits in line.

A little farther Yin Yin arrived at her law office which shared the building with ten other separate, independent lawyers and a pool of typists, as none of these lawyers had secretaries. Companies of multiple lawyers are rare in Burma.

She met with Than Htay, an established lawyer whom she assisted. He said, "I have two cases for you to handle. U Nyi Nyi was accidentally killed and had no will. Since he was Muslim the family has agreed his estate will be divided according to Muslim Customary Law. You need to draw up the necessary paper for them.

"U Tun Thein also died without a will. Since his wife has predeceased him, all of the family members accept the Buddhist Customary Law provision that all the property, house, and assets will go to the eldest son who will take responsibility for his younger brothers and sisters. You will need to draw up the necessary papers, have them sign the agreement, and present it to the court.

"It is hard to make a living when families get along with each other. We need a case like the estate of U Kywe Wa. The family members can agree on nothing. They could not even agree to have a court appointed administrator to run his business while the matter was settled in court. Therefore his business has been locked and sealed for over ten years while they fight. It has been very profitable for us.

"Here is a draft of the partnership agreement for U Ko Ko Gyi and U Nyi Nyi. Please take it to the secretaries and have them make three carbons. Are they still charging eight kyats per page with three carbons? It must be on a twenty five kyat revenue stamped paper." Than Htay added.

"Still eight kyats. Here is 900 kyats for three papers I notarized after you left," said Yin Yin, handing him the notes. "Three hundred kyats for notarization is over a week's pay for most of them. It seems expensive for so little work."

"Perhaps, but it is how we make a living." answered Than Htay. "What was involved in that land transfer for U Maung Maung Aye?"

"It's almost finished. U Maung Maung Aye is getting old and wanted to transfer his land to his children before he died. He bought the land in 1951 when it still had thirty one year's left on its ninety year lease from the government. He renewed the lease in 1982 for another ninety years. I drew up the papers to register the land in the names of his children. I charged them 20,000 kyats which is over a year's pay for most of the children, but any lawyer would have charged at least that. I had to pay 200 kyats "tea money" to see the revenue officer at the Registry Office. He wanted to inspect the land to see if it was only worth ten lakhs (1,000,000 kyats) as the contract said.

"Well, he went out there and inspected it and said it was worth at least a hundred lakhs (10 million kyats). My clients moaned and groaned that they are only poorly paid government employees making less than 20,000 kyats a year. True, the land has gone up but they aren't selling it, only transferring it from father to children so no money is available to pay the revenue tax of 7,000 kyats on their declared value of 10 lakhs. If he declares the value to be 100 lakhs, then they will have to pay 70,000 kyats revenue tax. They gave him 5,000 kyats as he was leaving and he declared the land to be worth 36 lakhs which meant they would only have to pay 25,200 kyats for the transfer. I understand they paid him an additional 5,000 kyats for giving such a low value.

"I'll file the papers with the Land Registry which should complete the transfer. The clerk there will

make the entry if I give him 200 kyats," Yin Yin said and then added, "I bet that revenue officer is making more than one lakh a year!"

The day passed with routine matters. After work, Yin Yin had been invited by an old classmate to dinner.

Yin Yin watched Aye Aye Maw come towards her table at the Panda Restaurant. Aye Aye Maw's bright kimono htamein (skirt) shimmered in the light with its gold threads. Her fancy aingyi with gold buttons was very becoming. Gold accented her wardrobe. Several gold bracelets adorned each wrist. Elaborate gold earrings with pearls graced each ear. A heavy gold necklace held a sizeable ruby pendant of the best pigeon blood red. Three rings adorned one hand and two the other. One had a large coveted apple green jade stone. Aye Aye Maw was obviously successful--very successful! Eyes followed her as she came to Yin Yin's table.

"Thank you for accepting my invitation," Aye Aye Maw said.

"It is good to see you again," answered Yin Yin. "It has been six years since we graduated from law school together."

Aye Aye Maw seated herself and called the waiter with a chee-chee sound made with her lips and instantly an attentive waiter came to their table.

"People dressed like Aye Aye Maw get the best service." thought Yin Yin feeling a twinge of envy. Then she added aloud, "I heard you had become a judge. Are you doing well?"

"Quite well considering the court I had to take. My uncle promises to arrange for a better court soon," Aye Aye Maw answered.

"A judge at that level only receives 2,000 kyats a month. Have you married well?" Yin Yin asked.

"Naive girl," Aye Aye Maw smiled. "No, I haven't found a man worthy of me yet, but I have my eyes on several."

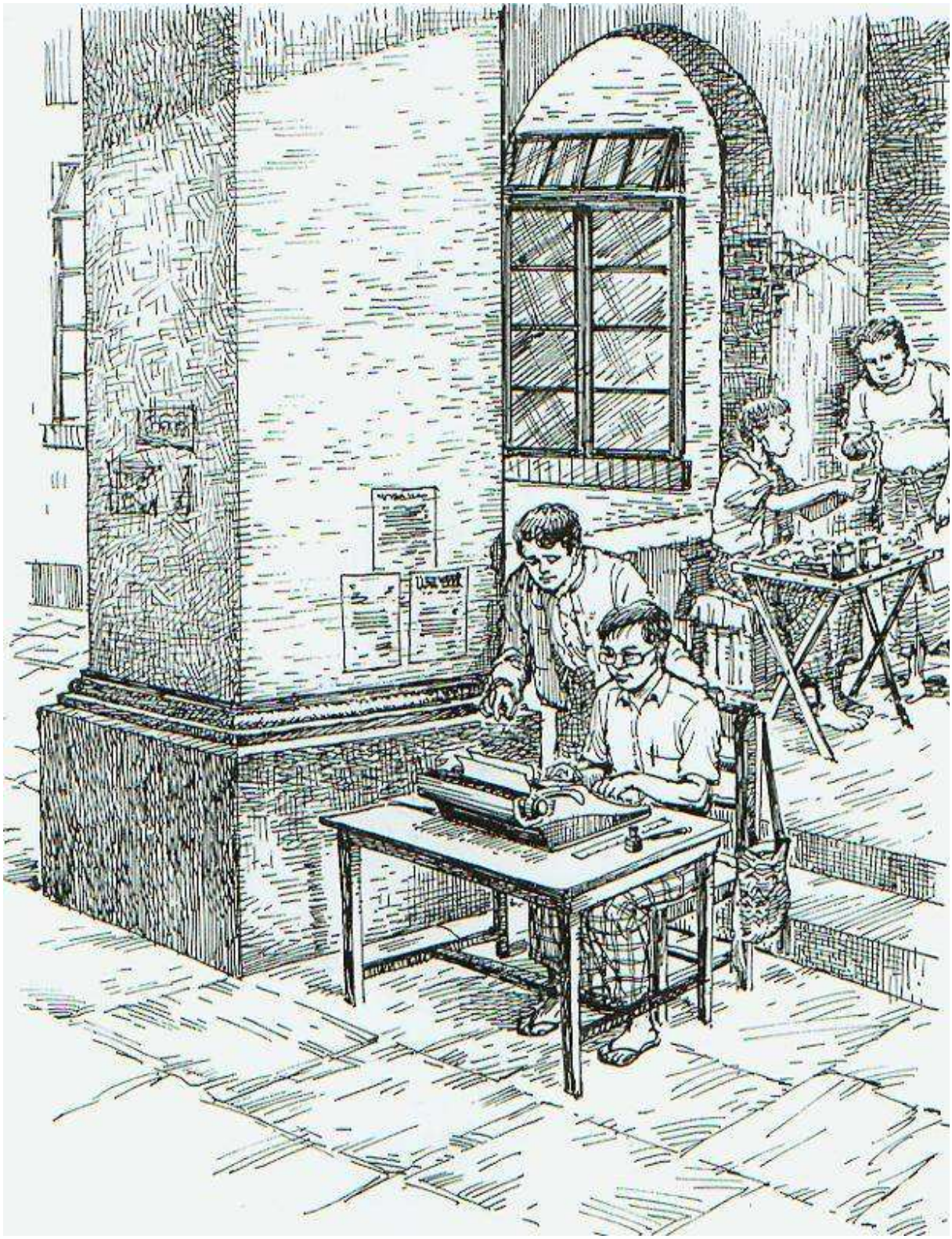
"I tried to pass the exam to become a Judicial Assistant four times but failed each time," Yin Yin shared, and then thought "and I don't have an uncle in the Judicial Department either."

"I make my judgeship pay. Actually it pays fairly well." Aye Aye Maw bragged.

Yin Yin thought, "I bet she's making over a lakh (100,000 kyats) per year. Aye Aye Maw always had had a little self glorification tendency even back in law school but now Yin Yin found her insufferable and was glad the dinner finally came to an end.

The next day Yin Yin went to Insein Township Court to represent her client, Ko Khin Aung. Three judges presided, as Burma does not use the jury system. Many of the judges were retired army officers and two such men were hearing this case. Yin Yin despised them, as they knew nothing about law but she knew better than to let her feelings show. There was a Judicial Assistant who would look over the evidence and the notes of the recording clerk and advise them on Burmese law. The judges would then render final judgment, so she must present her case as clearly as possible. The judges usually decided the cases as the Judicial Assistant suggested unless they had been bribed to vote the other way.

It was a difficult case, because her client, Ko Khin Aung, had been caught with drugs in his possession which did not give her much room to maneuver and to suggest alternatives. The prosecutor for the state presented the case well and clearly. A police officer had searched Ko Khin Aung and found a bag of white powder on him. Tasting the powder he had found it bitter and therefore, heroin. It appeared he had a case with no other choices (an air tight case). Yin Yin glanced at her client and was surprised to see him appear relaxed and unconcerned. Whispering to Ko Khin Aung, she said, "I don't have much to make a defense for you."



"Force them to test the white powder." Ko Khin Aung answered.

As the prosecutor wound up his arguments, he submitted a plastic bag of white powder as evidence.

It was now time for Yin Yin to make her defense.

Ko Khin Aung leaned over and whispered, "Call me to witness and question me about the powder."

Yin Yin called Ko Khin Aung to witness and questioned him about various events the prosecutor had talked about. Ko Khin Aung admitted being searched by the police officer and the officer finding the bag on him. Then Ko Khin Aung added, "There's no law against carrying powdered milk."

"So you are testifying that bag contains powdered milk and you are innocent of possessing drugs?"

"That is correct," Ko Khin Aung affirmed.

Gambling her client was right about it being powdered milk, Yin Yin closed her arguments on Ko Khin Aung being innocent because the evidence was powdered milk.

The prosecutor rose to cross examine. Picking up the bag, he approached Ko Khin Aung and opened it. "You're saying this is powdered milk? Taste it!" and he held it open to Ko Khin Aung.

Ko Khin Aung touched his finger to the powder and then to his tongue, "It tastes like powdered milk to me. You taste it!"

A puzzled look flickered across the prosecutor's face. He dipped his finger in the powder and touched his tongue. All his years of experience of hiding his feelings and emotions failed to mask his reaction to the milk taste in his mouth. He tasted it a second time and then said, "The state withdraws the charges."

A surprised Yin Yin walked out of the court with Ko Khin Aung. Suddenly it hit her what Ko Khin Aung had done. "Did you pay someone to switch the evidence?" she asked looking directly at Ko Khin Aung.

"Lawyers counsel their clients never to say anything to incriminate themselves. That is good advice which I shall follow." Ko Khin Aung said, but the smug look on his face confirmed her suspicions.

"Whoever said Burma has the best justice money can buy was certainly right," thought Yin Yin.

Note: After the ProDemocracy Demonstrations of 1988, an effort was made to reform the judicial system. Judges with no training in law (mostly retired military officers) were retired and replaced with trained judicial assistants. With the judges now knowledgeable about the law, there was no need for Judicial Assistants and so they were made Township or District judges.

35

The Agent

Maung Kyaw walked down the hall to his superior's office to answer his summons. He walked confidently for he was a red card agent of Defense Services Intelligence (DSI). This gave him the power to arrest anyone up to and including the rank of colonel. He was sure another important assignment awaited him.

His superior's secretary greeted him by name and told him Captain Hla Myint had been delayed but was expected back any minute. She told Maung Kyaw the captain had asked him to wait.

He settled in a handy chair and his thoughts went over previous cases. He remembered one over in the Mon State. Two members of the Mon ethnic group had disappeared and a letter had been received by Defense Services Intelligence implying the local military officer had been less than helpful and therefore must be responsible for their disappearance. DSI doesn't usually get too worried about a couple of Mons disappearing but these were government employees in the Transportation Department and they disappeared carrying a large amount of government money. One of their relatives was also influential in the Mon State government. Maung Kyaw had been assigned to Moulmein, capital of that state, to investigate. Nosing around the Transportation Department and befriending various workers, he learned the two men had taken government money and left for Karopi village to buy a truck for the government two months before. They had never returned. The relatives of the men were sure they had been murdered for the money. There was, of course, the possibility they had skipped to Thailand with that amount of money.

Disguising himself as an army inspector by getting the proper uniform from army supplies in Moulmein, Maung Kyaw had set out for Karopi village. Upon arrival, he found the village was garrisoned with one company of men under Captain Ba Hlaing. Posing as an inspector, he inspected the barracks, grounds, office, kitchen, etc, and then asked to see the records of all movements and activities of the company. Checking the date when the two men should have arrived, he found no mention of them.

Since this village was partially Christian and had a small church, he checked with the local pastor, seeking information about the missing men, pretending to be acting on behalf of the missing men's families. Since two months had passed, the pastor couldn't remember much but thought he did remember someone mentioning he hoped to sell his truck.

At Maung Kyaw's request, the pastor had asked among his members and later told Maung Kyaw the two men had arrived in Karopi but did not choose to buy the truck that was available. One had reported they thought the men had gone on to Anin village. Maung Kyaw had persuaded the pastor to visit Anin village on his behalf because the Mon villagers would be reluctant to reveal anything to a Burman. The pastor reported back news that the men never had arrived at Anin. He also brought back with him a relative of one of the missing men eager to help in the search.

Alone, Maung Kyaw again checked the company log and found an entry of seven men going to Anin village and returning on the same day. This was the day after the two men were known to have arrived at Karopi.

With the help of the pastor and the relative, Maung Kyaw began a systematic search of the eight mile road to Anin. They explored every trail that came into the road. In the first six miles they found nothing unusual. But two miles before Anin, Maung Kyaw noticed a faint trail off through dense growth. Careful examination of this trail revealed army boot prints of soldiers still visible in the now hard soil of the dry season. Why had the soldiers gone down this trail? The captain should have known it was not the trail to Anin.

Farther on, machete cut brush indicated the soldiers had cut their way through dense growth. It was the pastor who had spotted the peculiar pile of leaves covered with dead, cut brush. Maung Kyaw's investigation had revealed the bodies of two men in a shallow grave--undoubtedly the missing men.

Careful examination of the area turned up one clear, complete boot print in the now hard soil. Maung Kyaw cut a twig the exact length of the print and another the exact width. That would give him the boot size.

With this evidence Maung Kyaw was sure the captain and the six men had killed for money. But he knew he had to be careful. The 100 men under Captain Ba Hlaing might be more loyal to him than to the government. If he, as a lone DSI agent, tried to arrest Captain Ba Hlaing, he could disappear too. So he had returned to Moulmein and then returned to Karopi with two companies of infantry. With this overwhelming superiority, he had arrested the Captain. When Captain Ba Hlaing was asked who had accompanied him to Anin village on the fatal date, he had responded he had been transferred to this post a month after that date and knew nothing. Under the watchful eyes of the two Moulmein companies, Ba Hlaing's company was assembled and each one's boots were measured against the sticks. Eight were found to match in size. Seven of these men quickly figured out their lives were in peril and so, fingered the one who had gone to Anin to clear themselves.

This man knew the only way to clear himself was to reveal the other five men who had accompanied him, the former captain, and the government buyers on that fateful trip. This he promptly did.

Taking the captain as a material witness and the six men, Maung Kyaw with his escort, had returned to Moulmein and then on to Rangoon. The former Captain had been transferred to Rangoon and so was easily picked up.

Later, at the military trial in Rangoon, it came out that the captain Maung Kyaw arrested, while not committing the murders, had found out about them, covered them up, and therefore was guilty of obstruction of justice. The transferred captain was sentenced to prison. It took some time to ascertain which of the six committed the actual killing because each accused the other but eventually the court sorted it out and two got the rope (were hung).

"Too bad he hadn't chosen to kill a Karen." thought Maung Kyaw. After fighting the Karen ethnic group for forty years, no one in the army or DSI cared what Karen got killed or where. There were so many atrocities and extra judicial killings of the Karens it was impossible to pursue any of them. But the captain had chosen to order the death of a Mon with influential friends and involving government money and that was his downfall.

No thoughts about the fairness of soldiers getting death for obeying orders and a captain only getting prison for issuing the orders crossed Maung Kyaw's mind.

Captain Hla Myint arrived and they entered his office and Maung Kyaw stood before his desk.

"Sit down," said Captain Hla Myint. "I have an important assignment for you." And he handed Maung Kyaw a crumpled xerox copy of a magazine article attached to a report.

Maung Kyaw quickly scanned the article. It was from last month's Far Eastern Economic Review. The subject was Myanmar and it took only the reading of several sentences to realize it was strongly critical of Burma's ruling military junta.

"Lies, all lies!" said Maung Kyaw, giving the official response to such articles. Deep within he knew most of what the article said was true but one does not earn the rank of red card at Defense Services Intelligence by agreeing with critical articles.

Maung Kyaw looked at Captain Hla Myint who wore an inscrutable smile, which could be read as Captain Hla Myint being pleased with Maung Kyaw's response, or he found Maung Kyaw childishly naive. Maung Kyaw knew Captain Hla Myint would not clarify his response as no one is ever honest with a fellow associate at DSI.

"Well," said Captain Hla Myint, "You know that magazine is banned in Burma. That copy was found in the wastebasket of San Pya Hall, Hall No 2, First Floor out at Rangoon University. Your

assignment is to find out who put it there."

Resentment swelled up in Maung Kyaw's breast. Such assignments were usually given to agents of lower rank. He started to ask, "Why is this assigned to me and not to some low ranking person," but quickly checked himself as one does not question superiors at DSI. But his moment of hesitation before saying, "Yes, Sir!" betrayed him.

Captain Hla Myint read his thought instantly. Captain Hla Myint had an uncanny ability to do that sort of thing. He said, "You're probably wondering why we are assigning a red card agent to such a lowly task. Well, this may be Ah Yate Ah Mwet (the tip of the iceberg). It may indicate a secret organization spreading information among the students that we do not know about. Students are always a big potential source of trouble for the government. If someone or some group is systematically spreading these lies among the students, it may get them riled up and cause unrest, disunity and problems."

Captain Hla Myint continued, "Our hidden agents among the students could provide no light as to its source. If such an organization exists, it must have very clever members because we have had no indications of its existence up to now. That makes it a doubly dangerous organization. I want you to do it because I know you will not overlook anything."

Maung Kyaw felt better. It had the potential of being an important assignment. "I'll get right on it." he said. "Can you give me some names of agents we have hidden among the students?"

"Here are two names," said Captain Hla Myint, handing him a paper from his desk.

Back in his office Maung Kyaw studied the report. A cleaning person had found the copy of the article. Since it was in English he was suspicious. He had found a friend who told him the gist of the article. He had passed it on, receiving 200 kyats for his information.

Maung Kyaw then jotted a note to each of the undercover agents to meet him at Pagan Lacquerware Shop in downtown Rangoon at 4 pm. There they would find a man in his late thirties. They were to ask him if he was looking for lacquerware with elephants on it. He gave the notes to a peon (low ranking employee) to deliver it to the student dormitories where the agents lived. Maung Kyaw knew if he went directly to the agents, other students might become suspicious why an older, non family member was visiting. Students were very suspicious. They also hated Defense Services Intelligence and if they concluded he was an DSI agent, the cover for the two student agents would be blown and he could be lynched. "No," thought Maung Kyaw, "I will have to be very careful on this one."

At five minutes 'til four, Maung Kyaw entered the Pagan Shop and proceeded to browse. Several minutes later a student entered and then another. One sidled up to him and asked in a low voice so the shopkeeper could not hear him, "Sir, Are you looking for lacquerware with elephants on it?"

"Yes," answered Maung Kyaw, "Show me."

The other student joined them as they left. Maung Kyaw noticed he was carrying an old paper bag. They walked down the street to a tea shop and took a table away from the other patrons. After ordering tea, one of the students took out a lacquerware plate from the paper bag and handed it to him.

"I don't see any elephants," said Maung Kyaw, with a smile.

"I've never seen elephants on lacquerware. It was the best I could do on the spur of the moment." the student answered.

"Which one of you is Mya Din?"

The first student nodded.

Maung Kyaw then got right to the point. He showed them a copy of the copy of the magazine article and explained where it had been found. "I want you to find out where this copy came from and who had it."

Then Maung Kyaw shook his head, as if they had been negotiating on the lacquerware, handed the plate and copy to Mya Din, paid the bill and left.

Mya Din and the other student, Win Bo, remained, sipping tea and planning strategy and who would

do what, so they wouldn't duplicate each other's efforts.

It was decided Mya Din would make friends with the cleaning man and Win Bo would start befriending a student known to have a class in that room.

A week later they met again. The cleaning man had told Mya Din what classes met in that room. By watching the room for a week, Mya Din had a fairly accurate count of how many students had used that room during the week. Over five hundred!

Meanwhile Win Bo befriended a student coming out of the room and invited him for tea and a snack. As they chatted, Win Bo said, "A friend of mine told me that he saw someone go into your classroom with an article from the Far Eastern Economic Review. I would like to read that article. Do you know who had that article? It is so hard to get honest foreign reports here!"

"No, I have seen no such article," the student answered, "Don't you know such articles could get you in trouble?"

"Hey, there aren't any DSI agents around here, I just want to read it." said Win Bo reassuringly.

But the student still couldn't or wouldn't remember.

Weeks went by with Mya Din and Win Bo befriending various students in all of the classes that met in San Pya Hall, Hall No 2, First Floor. They had difficulty approaching the women students, as girls do not expect to be spoken to without being formally introduced. Sometimes Win Bo could get a befriended student who knew a girl in the class to introduce him, but none of the girls contacted that way knew or would say anything.

Finally, after four weeks of work, Win Bo found a girl who remembered seeing a fellow student with the copy of the article.
She identified the student as Thang Cin Khup, from the Chin ethnic group.

This new information Mya Din and Win Bo reported to Maung Kyaw in their weekly meetings. Maung Kyaw asked them to befriend Thang Cin Khup and see where he got the copy of the banned article.

A few days later Mya Din reported Thang Cin Khup was uncooperative. He wouldn't admit having the article. "I think he is suspicious of me," added Mya Din.

"Better back off," said Maung Kyaw, "I'll go at it another way."

Using an informer in the administration, Maung Kyaw received Thang Cin Khup's address. "Not a hostel, Thang Cin Khup must live with a relative," thought Maung Kyaw. "It looks like it might be easier to use the help of the Special Police II (SPII)."

Through DSI's contact with the SPII, a detective, Than Win, was recruited and briefed. In late afternoon with classes over, Than Win took a car and ordered the driver to the address. The driver picked his way through the rush hour traffic and swarms of pedestrians. He drove carefully because a recent military decree said any driver involved in a fatal accident would get seven years in prison regardless of fault. That made all drivers very careful and slowed traffic.

They arrived at a narrow lane going off the main street which led to more little lanes. The driver asked directions of pedestrians who pointed the way. Most of the pedestrians looked Chin. "Must be a Chin quarter," thought Than Win. They arrived at another intersecting lane blocked by a plank marking a collapsed culvert tile. The driver said, "It is the last house on this lane. I can't go farther."

Than Win walked down the lane to the last house. An old man was puttering with some potted plants. Than Win called out, "Is this the home of Thang Cin Khup?"

The old man looked at Than Win and called out to someone in the house in a language Than Win did not understand. "One of the Chin dialects," Than Win thought. A woman appeared and asked what he wanted in Burmese.

When he told him, she responded indeed this was the home of Thang Cin Khup but he had not returned from university yet.

Than Win turned and walked back to the car. As he prepared to enter the car he noticed a college

age student approaching the lane. "Let me see your national identity card," Than Win demanded.

The student looked frightened and produced his card. Than Win saw the name Thang Cin Khup on the card. "Get in the car, there are some questions I want to ask you."

The student looked around as if contemplating flight, but Than Win's sharp, "Now!" produced obedience.

They drove to the police station and Than Win led Thang Cin Khup to an interrogation room. Thang Cin Khup looked very scared. "He should tell me everything I want to know quickly," thought Than Win.

But to the detective's surprise, Thang Cin Khup denied ever having or seeing the magazine article. Than Win called in another agent who liked to use "physical persuasion". Five hours and several beatings later, Thang Cin Khup still stuck to his story.

Than Win was tired and irritable. "Look, Thang Cin Khup, the article was found in the wastebasket of San Pya Hall, Hall No. 2 First Floor. You have a class there. A fellow student testifies he saw you with the article. Make life easier for all of us. Just tell us where you got the article."

"Hall No. 2? I don't have any classes in Hall No. 2. In fact I don't have any classes in San Pya Hall this semester!" Thang Cin Khup said with conviction.

"Your name is on the class list!" answered Than Win, "Explain that!"

"Must be a mistake. A very bad mistake," said Thang Cin Khup tenderly feeling his bruised jaw. Then a look of insight came in his eyes. "Thang Cin Khup is a very common Chin name."

"You do live at 159 Bahan Lane," stated Than Win.

"I live on Bahan Lane but our house number is 135." answered Thang Cin Khup.

"Aw," thought Than Win, "the wrong Thang Cin Khup. Whoever thought there would be two Thang Cin Khups on the same lane!"

Than Win took out another car and driver and drove Thang Cin Khup back to Bahan Lane. It was the least he could do for grabbing the wrong student. And Than Win always did the least!

He tried the house at the end of the lane and found a second Thang Cin Khup at home there. He hauled him down to the station and started the questioning process all over again, going late into the next morning. This Thang Cin Khup readily admitted having the article. It had come from his brother's wife who worked at UNESCO. UNESCO had a subscription to Far Eastern Economic Review delivered by diplomatic pouch. The wife had thought the family would find the article interesting and copied it on the office copier. His brother had given it to Thang Cin Khup. Thang Cin Khup had brought it to class to show a fellow student, then trashed it when the student had finished reading it.

After several more hours of questioning, Than Win was convinced there was no great conspiracy, no hidden organization, no underground news network. Thang Cin Khup stuck to his story and the pieces all fitted.

Finally Than Win let a very relieved Thang Cin Khup go home with a very stern warning. Than Win wrote up his report which was duly passed on to Maung Kyaw. Maung Kyaw studied Than Win's report and wrote up his own report. He stated he was sure Thang Cin Khup had been sufficiently scared so he would not distribute any more banned publications and the case should be closed.

"Two Thang Cin Khups, on the same lane! Tough luck for the first Thang Cin Khup!" mused Maung Kyaw. "And a lot of work for a copy of a magazine article!"

36

The Rock Singer

Myint Tin entered his house quietly. He could hear the voices of his parents in the back yard talking. Going in his living room he saw the small silver bowl that his mother treasured sitting in the showcase. He hesitated and then scooped up the bowl and put it in his shoulder bag. Turning quickly, he silently stole out of the house and quickly walked down the street.

In a silver shop on a back street of Rangoon he sold the silver bowl. He knew the shop keeper's offer was only half of what it was really worth. But he needed money and that was the only quick way he could think of to get it.

Taking the money he went to another shop that appeared to be selling machine parts. The clerk glanced at Myint Tin. His eyes showed recognition but no friendliness.

"I need fa!" said Myint Tin using the note fa which came after do, re, me. Fa was the fourth note and stood for #4, a slang term for heroin.

"Two hundred kyats," the clerk said.

Myint Tin paid him and received a small packet of white powder. Taking the packet, Myint Tin went into the back room where he found the equipment necessary to dissolve the heroin and inject it into his vein. Soon his troubles were gone and he entered the blissful world of Myut Nay Day (a floating high).

Sometime later Myint Tin found himself walking aimlessly down the street. Soon he found himself on a crowded street jostled by the many people. Suddenly he was confronted by a young man of his own age, Soe Maung.

"Myint Tin, have you eaten rice today?" Soe Maung asked using the common phase that is equivalent to hello.

The question startled Myint Tin because food was not something he thought much about. Number four occupied his mind all the time now. "No," he finally answered realizing it was truly a question and not just a greeting.

"Let's have noodles together!" said Soe Maung and they sought out a sidewalk noodle shop. Soe Maung treated which relieved Myint Tin, for his last pya had gone for his last fix.

They talked small talk to catch each other up on what friends were doing. Then Soe Maung became serious and said, "Myint Tin, you look Nyii ('Attached'--slang for hooked on drugs)."

Myint Tin lowered his eyes. "Yes," he admitted, he was attached to #4. "But I can stop anytime." he added knowing full well that was a lie.

Soe Maung looked at him silently and said nothing. Soe Maung was, or at least used to be, a good friend. Now only #4 was Myint Tin's friend. Or master.

Then Soe Maung brightened up. "I've got an extra ticket to Saw Myo Htoo's rock concert tonight. I planned to take Thuza May but she can't come. Obviously I can't take any other girl or she will get angry with jealousy. Why don't you come with me?"

Myint Tin agreed. At least Soe Maung wasn't condemning him like all his other friends.

Evening found Myint Tin and Soe Maung in the theater where Saw Myo Htoo was playing. Hundreds of other youth and young adults filled the auditorium. Soon the concert started. Saw Myo Htoo was a huge fat man. Some said he had been weighed on the airport scales at Myitkyina and topped 500 pounds. Others said he weighed 555 pounds--a very lucky number in Burmese thinking. In spite of being fat, he was good! He sang very well in the group, played several guitars, and composed many of his own songs. He had sold thousands of tapes.

Some said he and his band, the Iron X, were the best, while others said the Kings were, but everyone agreed these two groups were the two best of Burma. Myint Tin had once aspired to be a popular

musician but #4 had put him on a different road.

The power of Saw Myo Htoo's music banished Myint Tin's problem for the evening. He was entertaining and creative, playing his guitar with his teeth!

After the concert Soe Maung treated Myint Tin to a snack. Myint Tin expressed his admiration for Saw Myo Htoo. "You know Saw Myo Htoo was once a Nyii (addict) like you." Soe Maung said.

"No!" answered Myint Tin in surprise.

"Yes, and he is telling his story at Insein Church tomorrow Sunday. You really ought to go. Why don't you come home with me and we can go together." invited Soe Maung.

Myint Tin knew the silver bowl would be missed by now and wanted to put off seeing the anger of his father and hurt of his mother as long as possible so he accepted Soe Maung's invitation.

They stopped at the ward chairman's office on the way to Soe Maung's home to report that Myint Tin would be staying overnight there as required by law.

The next morning found Myint Tin and Soe Maung attending the Insein Church. Saw Myo Htoo had the whole service and youth crowded the church. The church elders had invited Saw Myo Htoo to tell his story because some of the youth had a problem with #4 and other drugs.

Saw Myo Htoo sang several Christian songs, some of which he had composed. Then he became very serious. In a solemn voice he said, "I was a Hsay Swe (the traditional term for addict)." He told of his stealing to support his habit, the disappointment of his parents, wife and children. He enumerated about the loss of his friends and how #4 had become the most important thing in his life. "No," he said, "Stronger than that. Number four had become the only thing in his life."

He told of the times he tried to stop, to break the habit but every time #4 beckoned him back.

Myint Tin listened. Saw Myo Htoo was describing the same hell he was in.

Then Saw Myo Htoo said, "I could not save myself. But Jesus saved me. He redeemed me. He picked me up. He cleansed me and made me whole."

Saw Myo Htoo went on to describe how he had become part of the Young Crusader's program.

Myint Tin listened. "This man has been through what I am going through." Tears came to his eyes.

After the service Myint Tin went forward. He was stumbling with Yinn Hta (the shakes, wanting another fix). But he felt compelled to talk with Saw Myo Htoo. Saw Myo Htoo looked deeply into his eyes and said, "I was where you are now four years ago. Go to the Young Crusader's house by Rangoon Institute of Technology and they will help you."

An elder of the church overheard the conversation and offered to drive Myint Tin there. Myint Tin accepted for he feared he might change his mind on the trip by bus.

At the house, Myint Tin was accepted in the detoxification program. He had to give up heroin "cold turkey" with no help from any drugs. At night he was locked in a room and savage dogs roamed the halls and yard. He would have gone hunting for drugs but he was trapped. The people running the place could not be conned. They knew every line, every excuse, every lie that addicts used to fool themselves and the people around them.

Days were filled with activities, Bible study, witnessing by those who had found salvation from drugs by the Lord.

And there was music. All kinds of music. Different groups formed and played different kinds of music. The music gave Myint Tin something to focus on during the withdrawal period. The music filled the void and made him feel better about himself. Gradually Myint Tin improved. Some dropped out but more were allowed to join the program.

Months went by. Myint Tin and several others began to think of themselves as reformed addicts. The desire for #4 was still there, but the desire for a better life was stronger. Myint Tin concentrated on his music, improving his playing, writing songs and practicing popular songs of the rock heros. But most of all he liked the songs of Saw Myo Htoo because he and Saw Myo Htoo had been in the same hell. Sometimes Saw Myo Htoo came by and encouraged all of them. Saw Myo Htoo is very successful

now. He was making a lot of money but Saw Myo Htoo never forgot where his rise to success had started and he continued to try and reach youth through the churches and other meetings.

Myint Tin was proud of how far he had come and thought it might be time for him to leave the center but he was afraid. Could he say "No" to #4 on the street?

Then one evening it happened. At the evangelistic service, the preacher talked of the need for each person to make a commitment to Christ. It seemed that he was talking directly to Myint Tin. At the end of the service, he invited Myint Tin to make a commitment. At least Myint Tin felt the invitation was directed at him. Myint Tin resisted but suddenly he felt an urge to get up and go forward. A strong urge. Stronger than any urge he had had for #4. He could not stay in his seat. He got up and walked forward. Tears streamed down his cheeks. He needed the power of Christ to keep his life clean. He knew his Buddhist parents might disown him. They might even publish a notice in the newspaper saying he was no longer their son or declaring he was considered dead because of his conversion to Christianity. But he now saw that Jesus had given him the power to overcome his addiction. Jesus had saved him. He would now have to proclaim this saving to the world come what may!

His conversion solidified his recovery. He and several new friends left the center.

Over the months he had sent several letters to his parents telling them he was trying to get his life in order. In the past he had promised them that so many times in the past that this time he want to show them he had put #4 behind him.

So he lived with his new friends and they got some jobs performing for parties. They played well and more jobs followed. Soon Myint Tin had money in his pocket.

He went to the shop where he had sold the silver bowl. How happy he was when he spotted it among the many tarnished silver items. Although he had to pay four times what he had sold it for, he counted it a bargain. Now he could return home.

No prodigal son ever received a warmer welcome. His parents even accepted his conversion to Christianity. Years before, when his problem was developing, they had taken him to see their monk. The monk had earnestly admonished Myint Tin to give up #4 but Myint Tin was not ready at that time. While his parents would have preferred Myint Tin had been brought back from addiction by their monk, they preferred a son reformed by Christianity than an unreformed son on #4. While not their words, their thoughts were "Let us celebrate for our son who was lost has been found!"

37

The Line Taxi

Pe Kaung took the bus to Sawbwagyigon to catch a line taxi to Mandalay. He had a week's vacation and was anxious to see his wife and son. Arriving at Sawbwagyigon, he went to the ticket booth and purchased a ticket for 103 kyats. The ticket seller showed Pe Kaung a chart of the truck's seat and indicated which ones were still available. Pe Kaung indicated the seat he desired and she wrote his name on that seat and issued him a ticket indicating that seat. Seats in the cab of the pick up truck are considered more desirable, and so cost more, usually double, but these had all been purchased.

The government set the price of the tickets, eliminating the need to bargain. The ticket allowed him to carry two medium size pieces of luggage. Since Pe Kaung was going home for a brief visit, he carried one tin box of gifts and things he thought would please his wife.

Pe Kaung had chosen this line because it left soonest and was the cheapest. While its vehicles were older, he preferred to spend as little as possible. The best line charged over twice as much--230 kyats.

At the announced departure time, passengers started boarding and loading their luggage onto the rack built on the roof of the truck bed. The driver questioned if any were carrying pork as he felt that would bring bad luck. Certain nats (spirits) did not like for people to eat pork and these nats could cause accidents if offended. To his relief, none were. Several late comers bought tickets that allowed them to hang on the back, as all the seats were taken. Finally, all were scrunched inside the cab and the bed with three hanging on the back and two sitting on top of the luggage. The driver and his relief driver counted and came up with 50 passengers. He believed that an even number was inauspicious, so he picked up a rock lying at the curb for that purpose and dropped it in the back, counting it as a passenger, thereby making the number odd.

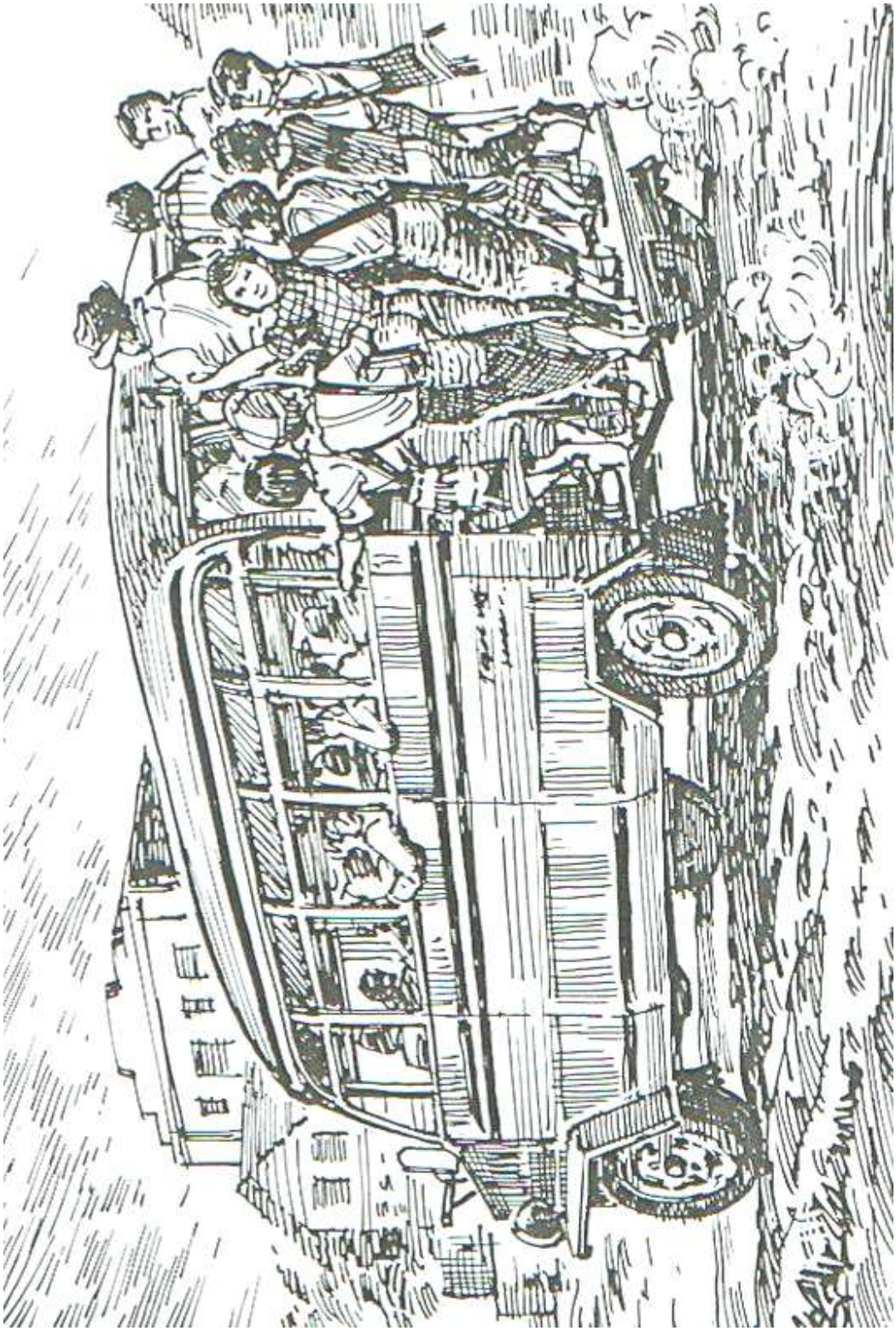
While the Burmese have a low average weight, sheer numbers can make a heavy load. With 50 passengers, oops, 50 plus one, the back of the truck sank low, causing the front to rise. Pe Kaung hoped there would be no break downs as passengers are expected to wait until the truck was repaired and not given refunds to seek an alternate way.

Going around various ways because of one way streets and no left hand turns, the taxi finally reached Pyay Road and headed for Bago (Pegu). Thirty kilometers out of Rangoon, they came to Htaukkyan where a large military cemetery contains the remains of 27,000 allied soldiers killed in Burma during World War II. Each grave is marked by a large bronze plaque worth several days pay on the scrap market. Pe Kaung had heard there were problems in protecting these markers.

A little farther the taxi turned left to face into a spirit shrine. The driver stopped, backed up, went forward three times as a sign of homage to the spirit. Many girls offered bunches of Eugenia leaves for sale. The driver bought two bunches--one for the shrine and one for the front of the truck.

Pe Kaung wondered when the driver expected to get to Mandalay but he knew better than to ask, since most drivers thought such a question would certainly bring bad luck. Some drivers will tell their passengers, "we hope to arrive in the evening" but never a specific time.

Nearing Pegu, the taxi stopped at a military check point and the officer looked over the passengers and asked for identity papers which everyone carried. Since little is smuggled from Rangoon to Mandalay, he only gave a cursory glance at their luggage. Taxis going the other way were gone over much more thoroughly, hoping to catch contraband, so a bribe would be paid in order to let it through. Here only the driver had to slip him some "tea money" and the taxi continued on.



Eighty kilometers from Rangoon, they came to Pegu, an ancient city founded in 573 AD and then called Hanthawady. It was capital of the Mon kingdom of lower Burma. In 1757 King Alaungpaya sacked and destroyed the city. Rebuilt later, it lost its importance when the river shifted its course so that Pegu was no longer a seaport.

Beyond Pegu the driver felt a need to relieve himself and pulled off the road. He announced, "You can reduce your weight, if you want," and went into the bushes. Many availed themselves of the opportunity and did likewise. Pe Kaung smiled as he remembered his father telling him they used to say, "Men would go to shoot rabbits and women to pick daisies" to describe toilet breaks.

At towns noted for enforcing the ban against riding on the roof of the taxi, the truck would pull over and the driver ordered everyone to hang on the back until he got through town. Beyond the town, he would stop and they returned to perching on top.

Unlike in America where road-kill of wild life is common, no dead wild life was seen along the roads of Burma for two reasons. One is that wildlife is rare in Burma--most has been eaten and secondly if a wild animal is killed crossing the highway, it is not left to rot but quickly expropriated for food by the first Burmese to see it.

In front of some pagodas and monasteries, offering collection stands had been set up. Loud speakers solicited donations and announced donors. Girls with large silver colored bowls rattled the coins in the bottom of the bowls and went along the sides of each truck, taxi, and bus collecting from passengers. Some cars didn't want to take the time to stop so dropped a kyat note out the window as they went by. One of the collecting girls would chase the fluttering note.

There were many of the collecting stands along the road so soon most gave nothing, having exhausted their supply of kyat notes.

At various gates the driver had to stop and report. While the truck was stopped, venders offered boiled eggs, watermelon, and fried sparrows.

While the road was paved, frequent passing and going off the edge of the road created a lot of dust and soon everyone was coated and gritty.

Nearing Mandalay, many horse carts clogged the road, slowing the progress of the taxi. When they entered Mandalay swarms of bicycles further slowed them but finally, to the relief of all, they reached the end of the trip.

38

The Road Builder

In the board room of a beautiful skyscraper in Chicago, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in a crisp, businesslike way said, "Well, that's the report on our contracting to do exploration in Burma. Any questions?"

"Isn't Burma ruled by a ruthless dictatorship?" a board member questioned.

"Yes, but they are moving towards democracy. Elections are scheduled for next May so I think they are coming around. If we wait for them to become a full fledged democracy, the opportunity will be gone. Other oil companies will grab it. All in favor of these contracts say 'Aye'." The motion passed.

Many months later, on the other side of the world in Rangoon, Ted Johnson, petroleum geologist, studied the computer screen one last time. Yes, he was convinced that Muddy Stream structure should be approved for the first well. He conveyed his recommendation to Bob Griffith, manager and Walt King, engineer. Later, after management had approved, Walt pointed out the location on a Burmese map to Ba Thin, a Burman forwarded to Unocal. Walt said, "U Ba Thin, we'll need a road from Shwe Gone to this location."

"It will be built as you request," Ba Thin said with a thin smile.

Several weeks later Ted, Bob and Walt visited the site and saw thousands of peasants working with hoes, hacking out a road along the side of a hill. Wiping the dripping sweat from his brow, Walt said, "I want to talk with one of the peasants," and ordered the driver to stop the Land Rover by a group of dusty, glum looking workers. Approaching the peasants, Ba Thin said in Burmese, "This American wants to talk with you, You all have wives, children, or family. If you want to see them again, you will smile, act happy, and glad to see him. Otherwise you will be dead five minutes after we leave!"

Instantly, fixed smiles appeared on their faces. Years of attending mandatory party rallies had honed their skill of providing the expressions demanded.

"It surely is hot as blazes." Walt said in a friendly voice.

"It's as hot as bonfire." Ba Thin translated accurately.

All the peasants nodded strong agreement. "It's difficult to work in such heat," one of them said in Burmese.

"The heat makes work difficult but this road is important." Ba Thin translated.

Walt asked, "How do you like working on this road?" Ba Thin translated.

A mature man, survivor of many years, stepped forward from the group saying in Burmese. "It is good to build this road as it will help to develop Burma." Ba Thin translated.

Then Walt asked "How much are you paid?" The liaison translated.

Sensing the American did not understand a word of Burmese, the man looked at Ba Thin and asked in Burmese "What are we to say? We are not paid. We are forced to work for nothing. They do not even provide us with food, water, shelter, or tools."

Ba Thin said in Burmese "Keep smiling!" and in English, "They are paid ten kyats a day--very good pay for a peasant!" All nodded and smiled, knowing that any other response would shorten their life span.

As Ba Thin, Walt, Bob and Ted walked back to the Land Rover, Bob asked "Why are there soldiers with rifles standing on the outskirts of the construction area?"

"To protect the peasants from rebels and dacoits (bandits)." answered Ba Thin with his ever present smile.

Something struck Bob as not being right. "Why are the soldiers facing the peasants and not facing outward if they are protecting?"

Ba Thin sighed, "The soldiers should be looking out but they are young and inexperienced. They prefer to watch the peasants working instead. I'm sure you noticed some of the workers are young, pretty girls. Soldiers prefer watching them to looking at empty countryside."

The answer did seem to fit but Bob had a nagging feeling all was not right. Oh how he wished he understood Burmese. But the thought that he might not be getting a true picture was soon pushed out of his mind by the worry about the drilling site. Was this the best place to drill a well? So much was riding on it--the success of the company's exploration project and his personal reputation as an petroleum geologist.

Mya Thein watched the Land Rover disappear in a cloud of dust. Although he knew no English, he sensed that the translation had been a lie to tell the American what the Burmese government wanted him to know. Mya Thein had noticed Wah Wah Lwin listening intently to the conversation. He would ask her what was really said. Wah Wah Lwin was a teacher in the village school and knew some English.

When it became too dark to work, the soldiers herded them back to their makeshift thatch lean-toes where they cooked their meager supper using the last of the rice they had brought with them. Mya Thein hoped that someone from their village would bring more food soon. Two of the villagers, Ko San and Kaung Nyan, were sick. The others gave them a little more rice hoping to give them more strength.

That morning, Mya Thein had pleaded to the overseer, Kyaw Aung, to let them return home as they were unfit to work. But Kyaw Aung, a cold hearted government bureaucrat, refused and forced them to work all day in the broiling sun. When the sick worker, Ko San, slowed, the overseer beat him with a bamboo cane. Kyaw Aung seemed to fail to see that beating only weakened him further and made him work more slowly. At the end of day Mya Thein and other villagers had to support Ko San in walking back to their campsite. Both of the sick needed medicine but the government provided none.

After eating, Mya Thein talked with several elders about the plight of Ko San and Kaung Nyan. One volunteered to search in the jungle around the camp for Ngayit Myit (a herb) so they could brew a strong tea to make folk medicine that might help the sick.

Having done all he could for the sick, Mya Thein took Wah Wah Lwin aside and, speaking in a low voice, asked her what really went on in the conversation. Wah Wah Lwin knew enough English to catch the charade going on and quietly explained it to Mya Thein. Then Wah Wah Lwin said, "I didn't know what I should do. If I told the white man he was being lied to, the Burman mistranslating to him would be very angry and make life difficult for me and maybe all of us. I do not think his threat to kill us was idle."

"You did best, Daw Wah Wah Lwin. Punishment was certain, help from the white man very uncertain." reassured Mya Thein. "Americans talk a lot about human rights and helping the oppressed but do very little."

Everyone spent another miserable night sleeping on the bare ground tormented by mosquitoes and other biting insects. All longed to be back in their village sleeping on mats on floors high above the damp ground with mosquito netting protecting them.

The next morning one of the sick, Ko San, had permanently escaped the repression of the Burmese government--he had died during the night. Mya Thein approached the overseer pleading to allow the remaining sick one to return to the village. Kyaw Aung finally agreed, provided two replacement workers were sent, but would allow no one to accompany Kaung Nyan as all were needed on the road construction.

Miserable week after miserable week went by. Aung Sein was bitten by a snake while going for water and died several hours later. Myat Soe accidentally cut himself. The government provided no medicine or medical care. The villagers could not find the proper plants for folk medicine so the infection became worse, causing much suffering to Myat Soe. Finally Mya Thein was able to convince the overseer that Myat Soe should be allowed to return home to be replaced by his sons, ages eight and

eleven.

The soldiers, guarding the villagers to keep them from escaping, were particularly abusive. They beat the villagers for any real or imagined slights.

Slowly the road took shape. In the evening, around the smoky campfire, the villagers commiserated. The only bright thought was that they were better off than those taken as porters. In her teacher's training, Wah Wah Lwin had studied Burmese history, which told of how conscripting of labor had been done for a long time. The Burmese kings had used it. The British colonial power had used it, and now the military dictatorship used it.

One of the older villagers told of how his father had been conscripted by the British to build a railroad. "But at least the British paid silver rupees and provided tools and enough food. My father never mentioned beatings and abuse." All agreed the oppression and abuse by the current Burman government was worse than the treatment received from the British.

On the other side of the world, in a beautifully paneled boardroom in Chicago, the CEO reported, "And now for our report from Burma, or Myanmar, as it is now called. Everything is going well. We have just received word that the road to the prospective drilling site has been completed at very low cost. We will begin drilling soon."

"One of the demonstrators in front of our building said that slave labor is being used to construct things we need in Burma," a board member said, "Can that be true?"

"Our man on the scene says workers are well paid," answered the CEO. "You will have to decide which to believe--those radical troublemakers out front or our man on the scene."

The CEO, board members, or stock holders, could not have imagined the total cost in suffering, death, and hardship the road really cost.

39

The Censored

As Myint Htwe approached his place of employment, Ngwe Kye Publishing (Silver Star Publishing), he saw Tin Kyaw standing at the door and immediately sensed something was wrong. Tin Kyaw's expression showed anger, frustration, and rage. Myint Htwe quickly reviewed mentally the work he had done yesterday and decide he had made no mistakes, certainly none to put Tin Kyaw into such a mood. Tin Kyaw was usually easy to work for although he had that universal employer's characteristic of expecting a day's work for a day's pay. "No," thought Myint Htwe, "it must be something else very serious."

Myint Htwe mounted the steps and asked, "What on earth is wrong?"

Tin Kyaw motioned him to come inside and led the way to his office in the back. They entered the small office which was cluttered with books, manuscripts, letters, bills and host of other things Tin Kyaw never got around to organizing. Tin Kyaw went behind the desk and picked up a book lying on it.

Myint Htwe recognized it as the latest one Ngwe Kye Publishing had printed and it had been submitted to the governmental censors for approval. While Tin Kyaw might not be able to keep a neat desk, he had an uncanny ability to judge what would be acceptable to the government censors at the Press Scrutiny Board (PSB).

"Well, we got our book back from the censor. As you may guess from my state of mind, it was not approved," Tin Kyaw said, fighting to control his emotions.

"Totally rejected?" marveled Myint Htwe thinking of the official 2,000 copies in the back room and the 8,000 unofficial copies at Tin Kyaw's cousin's warehouse. "But they accepted the original manuscript."

"Not totally rejected," Tin Kyaw hasten to explain, "rejected in its current state. Here is a list of unacceptable pages and words." Tin Kyaw pointed to a paper.

Myint Htwe studied the paper. Since he knew the book almost by heart, he could place where in the book the unaccepted parts were. "This is most unusual for you, U Tin Kyaw, it must be quite a shock. Did you, ah, give the proper gifts to the proper people?"

"Of course," growled Tin Kyaw treating the question as absurdly stupid. "They changed the rules on us. Or had a new censor who wanted to impress everyone with his strictness. I don't know what happened! We usually get approval with only a minor face saving change here or there. Anyway, Maung Myint Htwe, you study the report and tell me the best way to comply with it. U Myat Naing Moe is coming over soon."

Myint Htwe did not envy Tin Kyaw's job of telling the author, Myat Naing Moe, the government had censored his work. Authors always took censor's comments as an affront. Tin Kyaw had to walk a tight rope between choosing books the censors would approve and books the public would buy. Any book the censors easily approved was practically unsalable.

Myint Htwe settled down with a copy of the book and noted where the objectional parts were and seeking the best way to eliminate them. He could choose several methods. One was to cut out a whole page but then the prose and story line was broken. The second was to cut out part of the page but that too took out copy from the other side of the page. Or the page could be rewritten and reprinted and pasted on top of the offending page. Or the disallowed word could be cut out with a razor blade but that again messed up the text on the back side. Special silver colored ink could be used to blot out one or two words and the pigment in the ink prevented curious readers from seeing what was blocked out. Or two pages could be glued together thereby covering the offending page.

While Myint Htwe was figuring out how best to deal with each rejection, Myat Naing Moe came in, and soon bitter and disappointed words were coming fast and thick from Tin Kyaw's office. Tin Kyaw was saying, "Hey, U Myat Naing Moe, I'm not PSB (the censors). I just submitted it to them. I really thought it would be accepted. You realize I have to bear the expense of changing every one of those 10,000 books. You still get paid, you still get the public to read your writings. Some of them will get your critical illusions to the government. You are just lucky they didn't understand all you were saying and put you on the black list."

"Well, it's good I took out the part about them enjoying watching the sunset as you suggested. The government censors would have certainly thought it referred to Ne Win (literally Rising Sun)," Myat Naing Moe said.

"If you had written it, it would certainly have referred to the setting of Ne Win's sun." Tin Kyaw answered. "Now don't you do anything to get arrested because arrested writers are not allowed to publish, or have their published works distributed and we have those ten thousand books to sell."

Myat Naing Moe left, having cooled down. Tin Kyaw came to where Myint Htwe was working and asked, "Well, what have you come up with?"

"If we glue page eighty two to eighty three, that covers two offending phases and not too much is lost to make sense. We can cut out page 113 and the remaining text still carries the story. We can silver out the rejected words on pages 14, 27, and 52. I'm afraid we will need to reprint page 37 to leave out what they don't like but the rest of that page is necessary in order for that chapter to make sense." Myint Htwe supplied.

Tin Kyaw took a deep breath and sighed, "Get to work on it and hire up the extra workers we will need to get the job done. Save the cut out pages as we will have to give them to the censors to show they were all cut out. My father told me I was a fool to get into the publishing business and he was right."

40

The Factory Builder

John Doe saw Bill Smith and Dick Jones arrive and stood up so they could see where he was sitting. He motioned for them to join him.

"It is good to see you again, Bill. Thank you for bringing Dick," said John extending his hand. "Dick, Glad you could come and share with me."

"Well, its always good to get a free lunch from John," said Bill, and turning to Dick he added, "Be sure and count your fingers after shaking hands with John. He's sharp."

After John Doe asked the usual questions to Dick Jones about his work, company, and family, John brought up the reason for the lunch invitation. "My company is considering setting up a clothes manufacturing company in Burma and I wanted to get your input on the problems of doing business here."

"First, you had better get use to calling it Myanmar even though the American government doesn't recognize the name change." said Bill. "Secondly since you are an old classmate from Amherst University and not with a competitive company, I will tell you. Myanmar is a whole different ball game than doing business in any other country."

"How so?" asked John.

"Well, there's all the usual corruption that you find in many countries. The people of Myanmar have their own customs which you will have to learn. But the big problem is the government and all its different bureaucracies. All the heads of these different departments are appointed for their political connections. Most are retired army officers and few know anything about their job or department. Most of all they have absolutely no understanding of how business works. For thirty years, the word profit has been a dirty word along with free enterprise, capitalism, etc." Bill related.

"And to top it off, the exchange rate is completely unreal. The official rate is 6 and 1/4 kyats to the dollar while the black market rate is about one hundred kyats to a dollar," added Dick. "If you buy something for a thousand kyats, it will either cost you $10 or $160 depending on how the kyats were purchased. Ten dollars if the kyats were obtained on the free market, as we like to call it. But if the kyats were officially exchanged, then $160."

"So, of course, you buy everything with kyats obtained on the free market," John observed.

"You try to, but when you are doing business with the government, you never know when they are going to throw you a ringer," Bill said. "For example, we needed 200 steel barrels to ship fuel up to one of our exploration sites. Our shipment of new barrels with fuel was overdue and held up somewhere. We found the fuel here in Myanmar but we had to furnish the barrels. We ordered used barrels from a source that had been selling them to the public for 360 kyats each. Well, $3.60 each is higher than new ones but they are here and available immediately, so we ordered them. They came, we used them and then came the bill billed in dollars at official rate--$57 each! For empty used barrels. Can you believe it?" And he threw up his hands in despair. "Over $11,000 for 200 g_ _ d_ _ barrels."

"What did you do?" queried John.

"Well, our Burmese compatriot, Chit Kyi, sat down and talked with them. He pointed out we had been quoted a price in kyats and we would pay that quoted price in kyats, not dollars at the unrealistic official rate. Chit Kyi may have paid them a bribe, 'tea money' they like to call it. I don't know. I don't ask," Bill explained.

"Yeah, we got stuck on a deal like that too," Dick said. We needed fuel for our shuttle ship. The government department that was supposed to be supplying it said they were out, but they could buy the fuel on the black market for 170 kyats a gallon. We said go ahead, so they did and our ship left. Then

our Rangoon office got the bill. They billed us in dollars at the official exchange rate. Each gallon was to cost us $27.20 U.S. We sent our counterpart, Thant Lwin. He's good at negotiating. But they gave him the run-a-round. Said government departments can only receive dollars from foreign companies, not kyats. They told him to go see the financial department and each department kept sending him somewhere else. No one would make a decision. Finally I told Thant Lwin to forget it and to get to work on some of the more important problems. They really screwed us on that one."

"Are these problems common?" asked John with concern.

"Hey, we've telling you about the good days. Way 'til you hear about the bad days." Bill grinned.

"Yeah, let me tell you about a bad day. We had a mother ship and a side ship coming in on the 23rd. One of her side ships was coming in on the 22nd to get things ready for her so she could be quickly prepared and get out to sea and start to work on our oil exploration. Someone representing one of the generals on the SLORC committee of 21 called us up and asked all kinds of questions. We told him the schedule, the first ship arrived on the 22nd, all three would be there on the 23rd and all would leave on the 24th." Dick related.

"A few days later, he calls back and says General someone or other wants to see the three ships on the 22nd and will come by helicopter for an inspection. We remind him that only one ship will be there on the 22nd. If he wants to see all three, he has to come on the 23rd. He calls back and tells us the general has other engagements on the 23rd. He then asks us the get the mother ship to arrive a day early or stay over an extra day so the general can see it on the 24th.

"I tell him those ships are under a contract which kicks in the moment they arrive at our port. To bring the mother ship there early requires extra fuel to increase its speed and kicks in the contract one day earlier.

"He says, 'No big deal, you can afford it.' I said, 'It is a big deal. That mother ship costs us $63,000 per day and an extra day is a lot of money and I know my boss isn't going to approve an extra day just to make some general happy.' These Myanmar bureaucrats have no idea what it costs to run a business like ours. To make a long story short, the general came down on the 22nd and saw one ship. We told him the other two were delayed and in spite of our best efforts didn't make it in time. We gave him the cook's tour of the one and he seemed satisfied. That d_ _ _ bureaucrat would have cost us $63,000 if he had had his way," fumed Dick.

"One of the government departments we work with came to us and wanted high quality pictures for a calendar. Our company photographer gave them a lot of nice shots. Never paid us a cent or a kyat. Next thing we know, they asking us to buy two hundred of their calendars at 100 kyats each--twenty thousand kyats. Since the calendar was a pet side project of the head of that government department and we needed his cooperation, we bought the two hundred calendars. Ended up giving them away, or using them for scratch paper. I'll get you one if you have any use for last year's calendar!" grinned Bill.

"Wow, it sounds as if Burma, I mean Myanmar, is fraught with problems," sighed John.

"It is a mine field. To tell you something confidentially, there is a problem that has our company lawyers scared to death. There is an American law that says American companies that benefit from slave or forced labor are legally liable for damages from those injured, killed or forced to work without compensation. Even if we had nothing to do with the actual project. If the Myanmar government uses villagers to build a road to one of our exploration sites, we benefit and therefore may be liable according to our corporate lawyers. Of course lawyers are paid to watch out for potential problems and often see problems where none exist but there is a human rights group gathering information about forced labor projects in Myanmar and they might be able cause some real trouble in the U.S. courts. It's so stupid. You could hire one of those villagers for $200 a year, yet we may be piling up horrendous liability because the Myanmar government is forcing him to work for nothing. Frankly, I think that is one of the reasons Unioil pulled out," said Bill

"Even hiring a work force can be fun," added Dick. "A friend of mine helped set up a factory

probably similar to what you're thinking about. Of course he had to use Burmese to do the hiring. In America we hire on the basis of job skills or at least trainability. Here for the last thirty years, all the government enterprises have been hiring on the basis of who is related to whom. No wonder almost every government enterprise lost money. Family ties run deep; friendship is ruthlessly exploited. My friend soon realized everyone being hired was either related to or was a friend of his personnel director or the office staff. Over here they have large families and usually know their third and fourth cousins so everyone has a lot of relatives. My friend found he soon had a full staff but only a small percentage could do the job."

"There are all kinds of unexpected surprises. What do you think it cost to get a phone line installed?" asked Bill.

"A hundred dollars," answered John giving what he thought was the highest possible price.

"Nope, at least a thousand!" responded Bill, "Phones lines are scarce and it takes at least a thousand dollars in bribes to get one."

"But to say something positive, over here jobs have been so scarce for so long, that most are so happy to get a job, most will give you their best shot. The problem is getting them to understand what you want," Dick added. "We're allowed to pay them in U.S. dollars. With most persons making the equivalent of $200 per year, our pay of $150 to $250 per month seems like a fortune to them. The government forces them to convert 25% of their pay at official rate which means they are, in effect, paying a 96% tax on a quarter of their earnings. If you average it out, they are paying 24% on their total income which is high by Myanmar standards, but tolerable. They can sell the other 75% of their dollar earnings on the free market and live very well."

"I read there are a lot of different tribes in Myanmar," John said, "How do they get along?"

"Surprisingly well considering how different some ethnic groups are from one another. Incidentally they are called ethnic groups, not tribes, now. The government does not allow ethnic slurs or preaching ethnic hatred which is one of the few good things I can say about the government." Bill contributed.

"With all this ethnic diversity, you can celebrate five different New Years here in Rangoon," Dick said.

"And wait 'til you go through a Water Festival. You will feel like a drowned rat but it is an experience--sort of a national water fight," Bill chuckled.

"Well, John, what's your thinking at this point in setting up a factory in Myanmar?" asked Bill.

"I'm still gathering information. Obviously the labor costs and work ethic are very favorable. I'm not sure how to compare the corruption cost with other possible locations. I'm worried about the infrastructure here. Is there enough water, electricity, repair services, spare parts, etc? I'm particularly worried about the government incompetency and corruption. I also sense a pent-up rage against the military leaders which could explode into another slaughter like which took place in Indonesia. Somehow the military junta seems to think that if they get the economy going and build parks, the people will forget they killed their sons and monks. The potential for a violent termination of the military rule is frightening to me. You're both here because you have to be--you have to go where there is unexplored land. But for us there are a dozen places that would welcome our factory with open arms that don't have the possibility of a political explosion. So, at this point, I'm leaning toward recommending we build elsewhere." John summed up.

41

The Grave Robbers

"Mama, please stop crying and speak plainer. I can't understand you!" pleaded Matthew Allen as he talked to his mother calling from Burma.

"I have to bury your father and I don't have any money!" Mary Allen said, with anguish.

"What do you mean?" Matthew asked. "You buried John over a year ago. Mama, you must let go of him and not think about him any more. It's not healthy."

"They say I have to bury John Allen again and I have only thirty days to do it." his mother wailed. "I'll have to sell all the jewelry he gave me to pay for it"

"Who's 'they'?" asked her son.

"The government authorities."

"You aren't making any sense. Is Susan there? Let me talk with her." said Matthew naming his sister.

"Here she is." said Mary, handing the phone to her daughter, but the line went dead because calls from Burma were limited to three minutes and are cut off without warning.

Matthew immediately began calling his mother's number through the U.S. International Operator and after twelve tries, the operator made the connections.

"Susan, what is going on? Why is mother so distraught?" Matthew asked his sister.

"The government is seizing all the cemeteries in Mandalay to use the land for other purposes. Everyone who has relatives buried there must move the graves of their relatives to the new cemetery way out in the country. They have ordered mother to move all our family's bodies--our father, grandfather and his wife, great-grandfather and his two wives, the eleven children who died in infancy, everybody." his sister sobbed out.

"But that is a Roman Catholic cemetery consecrated for burial. It was given by King Mindon Min for the use of Catholics in his service." Matthew answered in a state of disbelief.

"That doesn't matter to the government officials. Any gravestones and bodies not removed within thirty days will be bulldozed out of the way to make way for the new hotel the government wants to erect on the site. Land has become very valuable in Mandalay since you left. Common land is selling for 10 million kyats an acre. The government is seizing all cemeteries and moving them way out in the country to undesirable land."

"Isn't the government paying for the cost of removing gravestones and caskets?" Matthew asked in disbelief.

"Certainly not," his sister cried, "You wouldn't believe how callous and heartless the officials are in this matter."

"How much will it cost?" sighed Matthew.

"The best price we have gotten so far is 100,000 kyats to move all our family graves." Susan wailed. "That's six year's pay for my husband!"

"I'll try to send some money but schooling is expensive in America and if I don't carry at least twelve hours, I could be deported. Try and comfort Mama. She was just beginning to get over dad's death." Matthew said.

Mary Allen sold her jewelry that had been given her by her late husband, John, to see her through retirement for she could not bear the thought of his coffin being bulldozed aside for a new hotel. That money barely covered the digging up and moving of the caskets, skeletons and grave markers.

When it was all over, Susan called her brother and reported it had been accomplished. "I'm glad we did it. There were reports of the skeletons not moved being desecrated and treated just like animal

bones. That would have killed Mama." Then his sister added, "Something very strange happened. The workers did not feel the spirits of the dead had gone with their skeletons, so they arranged for a truck to transport the spirits to the new cemetery. At the Buddhist cemetery they called to the spirits to all climb on the truck for a ride to the new cemetery. When they thought all the spirits had mounted the truck, they tried to start the truck moving but it groaned and stalled like it had too much weight on it. So they told some of the spirits to get off and take the second trip. Only then was the truck able to go to the new cemetery. When the truck returned, it could barely carry the second load of spirits too.

"When the truck came to the Christian cemetery, they called for the spirits of the dead to climb aboard and the truck had no trouble starting up. In fact the driver said it acted as if it had no load. All the Catholics are saying this is true because all the Catholic spirits have gone to heaven or hell but the Buddhist spirits have no place to go and are still waiting there for rebirth."

"That indeed is strange," answered Matthew, "I'm sure the government officials will be punished by God for seizing consecrated land."

42

The Demonstrator

A feeling of elation ran through the crowd. Their numbers had swelled to thousands. Students, workers, professionals, common people, all supported the freedom and democracy movement. The crowd filled the street from side to side. It stretched back as far as Maung Maung could see. "The hated dictatorship in the Philippines has been overthrown by a popular uprising," thought Maung Maung, "Now its Burma's turn. Ne Win must go. Twenty six years of ruthless, incompetent rule must end."

The student leaders in the front of the crowd began to chant, "Tha-Bake, Tha-Bake, Hmauk, Hmauk." To westerners with a little knowledge of Burmese, the words "Upside down monk's bowl" made no sense. But the words had deep meaning for the Burmese. In a deeply religious Buddhist country, the monks went out each morning with their begging bowls, gathering food. Hearing their gong, women and men would come to the street with food to give them. The monks would uncover their bowls and allow the devoted worshippers to give them food. The monks never thank the giver because the monks, by accepting the gifts, were giving the donor an opportunity to gain merit. The monks, of course, are grateful and give a blessing. If a family had deeply offended the monks and Buddhism, the monks would not accept their gifts and symbolized this rejection by turning their bowls upside down. The upside down monk's bowl (Tha-Bake) symbolized rejection and came to mean strike.

When a crowd chanted these words, it meant strike--rejection of the government in the strongest terms. The large throng marched forward chanting "Tha-Bake Tha-Bake, Hmauk, Hmauk." "How can the government stay in power when they see so many want them to resign, want freedom, want democracy, want free enterprise, want an end to socialism?" a nearby student asked.

Maung Maung agreed, "Victory is surely ours!"

As they marched toward downtown Rangoon, a line of people appeared across the street in the distance. As they got closer, Maung Maung saw they were soldiers armed with guns. The crowd continued chanting and marched up to the soldiers. A feeling of tenseness and confrontation came over Maung Maung and the crowd.

Maung Maung heard the military officer say, "You cannot go on! Disperse immediately!"

The student leader responded, "No, we will not disperse. We want democracy!" The mass of students echoed his words.

Several lines of soldiers with rifles blocked the road. The soldiers lowered their guns, aiming at the crowd which had now grown to tens of thousands. "They are our soldiers," thought Maung Maung. "They will not shoot us. They know our cause is just!"

Suddenly the soldiers began firing their weapons directly at the students. Students dropped dead to the pavement. "In the movie, people who are killed scream as they are hit," remembered Maung Maung, "but here they are just silently dropping. Like a surrealistic dream. Some don't even seem to know they have been shot. This cannot be happening."

But the cries of the wounded and blood on the bodies forced the reality of the situation into the minds of the students. The soldiers were shooting unarmed, peaceful demonstrating students! Maung Maung ran for the side of the street. Bodies littered the roadway. As Maung Maung neared the sidewalk, he saw a student in front of him get hit in the chest by a bullet. He fell down. Maung Maung caught him by the arm and dragged him to the more protected sidewalk. Maung Maung knelt beside him to see if anything could be done for the bleeding soul. He cradled him in his arms. The dying student reached up and grabbed Maung Maung by the shirt and looked him in the eyes. Maung Maung had never seen him before. Although a total stranger, Maung Maung felt a strong comradeship with

him.

The student said, "I have finished my duty for democracy. I cannot do anything more than this. Promise me that you will work for human rights for the good of the whole country. Promise me!" He died in Maung Maung's arms.

All around Maung Maung soldiers shot all they could see. He laid the head of his new friend down on the sidewalk and ran blindly to escape the killing bullets.

Somehow Maung Maung made it away from that terrible scene. He arrived home in a daze. Fear, shock, revulsion, anger, disappointment racked his body. Tears flowed. "Hundreds must have died. Our own soldiers killed them!"

In a few days Maung Maung heard on foreign radio stations, estimates of three thousand to ten thousand had been killed. Stories circulated that truck loads of bodies had been taken to Kyandaw Cemetery crematorium. Rumors said some who were cremated were not dead yet. Parents were not allowed to claim the bodies of their children. Some only knew their sons and daughters had not come home and could only guess their fate.

Rumors of the round-up of all participants spread like wild fire. "But thousands upon thousands had participated," thought Maung Maung. "How could they round them all up?" But soon a rumor circulated that the government was emptying the Insein Jail of thousands of criminals to make room for ProDemocracy students.

In the middle of the night, Maung Maung heard a knock on the door of his house. Feeling that such a late caller, during curfew time, could only mean trouble, Maung Maung slipped out the back door. As he descended the darkened back steps, two burly figures seized him and wrestled him to the ground. Maung Maung resisted. Several blows to the head stunned him.

"He thought he was going to give us the slip" one of them growled. Pulling him to his feet, they took him around the house to a waiting ranger truck and pushed him into it so that he sprawled on the floor. Then the soldiers climbed into the truck too. As Maung Maung struggled to sit upright, he became aware the truck was full of persons and he could hear the sobbing of women. "What's happening?" Maung Maung asked.

"No talking!" came the command from the darkness. After three more stops and two additional persons being shoved through the back doors, they continued moving for a while. While the prisoners were crowded, there was no danger of them suffocating like the forty one students who had been crammed into a truck on a hot summer day last March 16th and all suffocated.

The truck stopped; Maung Maung's heart sank. He recognized the notorious compound of the Department of Military Intelligence #6 at Ye Kyi. Other trucks were disgorging other students.

Police roughly shoved them in a door of one of the buildings, down halls and into rooms. Maung Maung found himself in a room with twenty-six other students.

The questioning began immediately. An interrogator pointed to Maung Maung and ordered him to the front of the room. "What is your name?" He demanded.

"Maung Maung."

"Age."

"Twenty-one," Maung Maung answered.

"Father's Name."

"U Tun Naing"

"What is his party position?" the interrogator asked.

"Ward Chairman, Za Wa Na Ward." Maung Maung responded.

"How much property does he own?"

Strange question thought Maung Maung. He must want to know in order to shake down my father. "Only our small house."

The questioner carefully wrote all his responses down.

"Were you at the unlawful demonstrations on Aug 9th?"

"No, I was home," lied Maung Maung.

"You're lying," screamed the official, "It will be a lot easier for you if you tell us the truth. We have video tape of that demonstration and you are near the front ranks! Now let's try it again. Were you at the demonstrations?"

"Yes," Maung Maung said softly. "I was going to visit a friend, saw the demonstration and followed along to see what they were doing."

More questions followed and Maung Maung decided it was best to answer those concerning the demonstrations until his questioner asked the names of the leaders.

"I was following along swept up in the spirit of the crowd. I only followed." Maung Maung lied, unwilling to betray his friends. "I don't know the leaders."

"We shall see if you are telling us the truth." his questioner glared at him. "Follow me." And he led Maung Maung from the room to a small room with a chair, table and pencil and paper. "Sit here! Write what you have told me. Why you were in the demonstrations. Why should we let you go free."

The Military Intelligence person left, locking the door behind him. Maung Maung wrote, repeating what he had said and trying to make a case he was just an innocent bystander caught up in the spirit of the crowd. From time to time the interrogator returned and crossed out parts and made him rewrite other parts. The day passed slowly. As he wrote Maung Maung could hear the screams of a woman in a nearby room. She was being beaten and raped. Her cries cut to his heart.

Finally the interrogator took Maung Maung to another room crammed with students. He was given a half cup of water. Many of the other students were bloodied and bruised. Night came but the room was too crowded for all to lie down. Only half could lie down and try to sleep spoon fashion tight against each other while the other half stood. The night was a nightmare with the sounds of female students being raped and abused by the guards and police.

Morning seemed forever coming. It brought renewed raping of the female prisoners by the next shift of guards coming on. During the day, the door opened and names were called and prisoners taken for questioning. Some returned to the cell, others did not. One badly bruised and bleeding soul cried out upon return, "They know everything!" Each received another half cup of water but no food. Maung Maung felt faint.

The third call at mid morning was for Maung Maung and he followed the guard with fear rising in his chest.

He saw a girl between two guards coming towards him. Her disarrayed clothing and the terror in her eyes told Maung Maung of her ordeal of being gang raped. With a start he recognized her as Ma Yu Yu, a fellow student from his second period class. His mind compared the memory of a happy, vivacious, smiling girl with this abused, battered, frightened prisoner. He had heard rumors of the government using rape as a policy against minority women but the effect and barbarity of that policy had never hit home until he saw Yu Yu. How his heart went out to her but fear prevented Maung Maung from saying anything as they passed.

Maung Maung was taken into a room. An interrogator, seated behind a desk, ordered Maung Maung to stand in front of the desk. Two guards stood, one on each side, of Maung Maung. "You are Maung Maung?" the interrogator asked.

"Yes" Maung Maung answered.

The officer looked over the papers Maung Maung had written over and over again. "Who were the leaders. Name them!"

"I was swept up in the spirit of the crowd. I only followed." Maung Maung lied, still unwilling to betray his friends.

His interrogator looked at one of the guards and nodded his head towards Maung Maung. Instantly the guard struck Maung Maung across the face knocking him to the floor.

"Get up! You're lying again. You were at the meeting of the Student Democratic Committee on the previous Saturday. The leaders of that demonstration led that meeting too. So don't tell me you don't know the leaders."

"I wasn't at that committee meeting." lied Maung Maung realizing if anyone in the demonstrations was in trouble then those on the organizing committee would be in big trouble. He also realized there had been no video at that meeting. Everyone there was a trusted fellow student.

Another nod brought another smashing blow. "You're lying again!" snarled the interrogator. "Bring in Maung Thet Wai."

Maung Maung shuddered when he heard Thet Wai's name. Had they broken him and forced him to betray the students on the organizing committee?

The guard returned in a few minutes with Thet Wai following. Thet Wai went around the desk and stood beside the interrogator. "That was odd." thought Maung Maung. "He should be on the prisoner side of the desk."

The interrogator looked at Thet Wai and said "Maung Maung denies being at the meeting."

"He was there!" Thet Wai affirmed.

"You have betrayed us!" exclaimed Maung Maung in a shocked voice.

"I was never one of you minions of colonialism!" retorted Thet Wai. "I work for Burma Intelligence to keep students like you from destroying our country."

"And were well paid no doubt" muttered Maung Maung.

This time Thet Wai's nod brought another blow across the face.

Just then a guard entered the room and whispered something in the interrogator's ear.

"You're lucky, you have friends in high places!" growled his tormentor. "Take him out of here."

Within minutes Maung Maung found himself thrust out of the gate of #6 in a double daze, partly from the blows and partly from the sudden turn of events of being betrayed and then suddenly freed. He walked quickly toward a main street and a bus stop.

When he arrived home, he found his father, Tun Naing, waiting for him. A look of horror crossed Tun Naing's face when he saw Maung Maung's battered face. "My son, my son!" he cried out.

"I went to everyone I knew, everyone who owed me favors. I could find no one to help me free you." Tun Naing sobbed. Maung Maung knew it was the first time he had ever heard his father cry.

As the days passed, Maung Maung and Tun Naing soon realized Maung Maung's freedom was not secure. Others, who had been released, were being rounded up again. The universities and all the schools had been closed. He could not find many of his friends. Most parents would not tell him anything. He found two sets of parents in mourning, having heard from other students their sons had been killed. Some had been picked up and not released and their parents begged him to help their sons. Maung Maung knew he could do nothing. He did not tell them of the brutal treatment he had seen and experienced.

Maung Maung finally located two friends, Aye Lwin and Phone Nyo. Aye Lwin had been almost home when he saw the truck in front of the house and realized what was going on so he escaped capture. Apparently the police didn't know Phone Nyo was staying with a cousin and therefore couldn't find him. But Phone Nyo's cousin had not reported to the police, as required by law, the staying overnight of Phone Nyo so there was great danger an informer on the block would report an unreported stayover to the police and they would find him.

Maung Maung, Aye Lwin and Phone Nyo discussed their plight among themselves. While the face of the dying student haunted Maung Maung, he realized the uselessness of further peaceful demonstrations. The military junta apparently would slaughter any number to retain power. Other rumors told of student leaders being sentenced to long jail terms by the military courts. Defendants could not have legal counsel or call witnesses. No one knew of any cases of acquittal--the courts found all guilty. At a secret meeting, Maung Maung, Aye Lwin and Phone Nyo decided that sooner or later

they would be caught, so the best choice was to flee to the Thai-Burma border. There, Aye Lwin said, they could take up armed struggle against this ruthless military junta. They could avenge the slaughter of their fellow students.

Maung Maung returned home and sat down with his father. Maung Maung said, "It is not safe for me here, I feel they will return for me."

U Tun Naing nodded. "I know. Don't tell me anything. Don't tell me where you are going or what route. If I don't know, I can be more convincing." And they tearfully embraced.

"I am sorry you lost your job as ward chairman, father," choked Maung Maung.

"Say goodbye to your mother" and Tun Naing called Ma Ma in to sit beside him on the settee. Her tear streaked face told that she knew what was coming. Maung Maung performed shikko, an expression of obedience, honor and respect to his parents. He prostrated himself on the floor and touched his forehead to their feet three times. Then he stood and his mother stood and they embraced. Her tears flowed and so did Maung Maung's.

Maung Maung packed quickly and lightly, for too much luggage would attract attention. He rolled up a change of clothes, extra thongs, a sweater, and toilet items in a blanket and a rain coat. After tying it with rope, with a loop to go over his shoulder, Maung Maung took one last look around his room. "Would he ever see it again?" he thought. "My odds are better on the border than in Insein Jail where rumors say many die each day."

Saying a last painful farewell to his parents, he slipped out to the street. His watch told him it was 8 o'clock. He had to get to Phone Nyo's cousin's before 9 when the curfew began. To be caught on the street after 9 pm guaranteed trouble. As Maung Maung turned the corner out of his street, he saw a police car turn into his street. Was it coming for him? He wasted no time watching to see where it stopped.

When Maung Maung arrived, Aye Lwin and Phone Nyo were waiting for him. "Where's your cousin?" Maung Maung asked Phone Nyo.

"Gone for the night," Phone Nyo answered, "If we get caught, I don't want him implicated."

In a darkened house, they discussed the best route to Thailand. Each road route had many check points and danger at each one that their names would be on the officer's list of wanted students. Phone Nyo had a cousin, Min Din, from a village on the coast near Moulmein who regularly came to Rangoon by small motor ship. A sea route would bypass a large number of check points.

"Phone Nyo, do you think he would take us to his village?" Maung Maung asked.

"I think so. Our family traditionally has always helped each other," Phone Nyo answered. "He is in the smuggling business so is used to skirting government patrol boats."

When the night curfew ended at 6 am, Maung Maung, Aye Lwin and Phone Nyo caught a bus for downtown Rangoon. The Burma-built body on an old World War II truck chassis was packed with half a dozen men hanging on the back. It seemed to Maung Maung that everybody was looking at them, but maybe all fugitives felt that way.

Getting off the bus, they made their way to the docks where coastal ships came up the Rangoon River and unloaded produce and smuggled goods for the Rangoon market. They walked arm in arm as friends do in Burma. Maung Maung found it reassuring to feel his friends close beside him in this stressful time. Such close contact among friends of the same sex has no connotation of homosexuality in Burma.

"Maung Maung and Aye Lwin, you go to that tea shop over there and I'll look for Ko Min Din alone." Phone Nyo said.

Phone Nyo disappeared in the direction of the docks and the two nervous students sat at a small, less prominent, table sipping tea. After what seemed hours, Phone Nyo returned. "Luck is doubly with us. Ko Min Din is there and willing to take us to his village but does not want us around until just before leaving. We are to return at three."

The three students walked down the street. The hours passed very slowly as they browsed looking at various items spread on the sidewalk by hopeful vendors. A light lunch of khaushwe helped pass the time. At three they returned to the docks. After Phone Nyo made sure his cousin was ready for them, they went to his boat. Min Din had made a space among the cargo he was carrying back and they squeezed into it. Immediately more boxes sealed them in.

A great feeling of relief swept over Maung Maung when he felt the engine start and the ship begin to move out into the river. Through a narrow crack he could see the shore line go by. Briefly he saw the beautiful golden Shwe Dagon pagoda shining in the distance. And then Rangoon slipped behind in the smog and smell of charcoal fires cooking supper. He thought of his poor father who had worked so long and hard for his party job and now had lost it because of his son's involvement in the demonstrations. He wondered when he would ever see his father and mother again.

Only when the ship reached the sea and proceeded along the coast did Min Din remove the boxes and allow them out of their cramped hiding place. It felt good to stretch their legs and watch the sun set and the moon come up. Maung Maung loved Burma and had never been anywhere else. "What lies ahead?" he wondered. "Freedom and democracy seemed so close at hand and now seem so far away. I risked everything and lost."

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The Student Soldiers

After landing on the coast, near Moulmein, Maung Maung, Aye Lwin, and Phone Nyo made their way east toward the Thai-Burma border. Great care had to be taken to avoid army patrols and road checkpoints. From time to time, they caught glimpses of other groups of students making their way too, but, being careful, they avoided contact with these other groups because they might be military intelligence officers disguised as students.

Once, on a narrow trail, Aye Lwin was leading. Suddenly he saw someone ahead and immediately whispered, "Backtrack, quickly, someone's coming!"

They turned and fled back the way they had come until they could leave the trail in some thick brush and hide. As they watched, a long line of porters coming from Thailand passed by their hiding place. The porters were carrying great rolls of cloth wrapped in plastic, and other goods in short supply in Burma that were worth smuggling from Thailand. Several even carried television sets.

"Now there's a hard way to make a living," commented Aye Lwin. "I hear they make twenty five kyats (S1.25) for carrying their load five days."

With the smugglers past, they continued on, penetrating deep into the mountains. Hunger drove them to seek to buy food from a village. The red clothing of some of the villagers told the students that this was a Karen village. As was the Karen custom, they provided food to the students and allowed them to sleep on the porch of the headman's house. An attractive, young Karen maiden in a white dress that indicated she was single, brought them a large bowl of rice as the head man directed. Maung Maung liked to interact with attractive girls and learned her name was Thu Lay Paw. He soon learned she only understood a little Burmese language, which put the brakes on further getting to know her.

Early the next morning, Maung Maung, Aye Lwin, and Phone Nyo were startled out of their sleep by being probed with rifle barrels. They found themselves staring into the faces of soldiers pointing rifles at them. Their immediate reaction of fear that the soldiers were from the Burmese army turned to relief when they realized the soldiers were questioning them in Karen. That told them the soldiers were from the Karen National Union army which was fighting the Burmese army.

Aye Lwin explained to one of the Karen patrolmen, who understood Burmese, that they were students who had demonstrated for democracy and now were fleeing for their lives from the Burmese army. Phone Nyo added that now they wanted to fight the Burmese army since it had slaughtered so many students.

The Karen patrol seemed sympathetic and after the villagers had fed everyone, they took the students with them as they left the village heading east toward the territory held by the Karens. After several days marching, and being passed from one patrol to another, Maung Maung, Aye Lwin, and Phone Nyo reached a Karen rebel regional headquarters. Here they were questioned individually, and as a group, about their part in the demonstrations, Maung Maung's arrest and the questions asked by Burmese Military Intelligence and their escape. The Karens seemed to be suspicious of them, or at the very least, very cautious. Other groups of students were brought in by other patrols and also questioned.

The Karens fed them meager meals of rice, thin curry and watery soup. Aye Lwin said, "These are the worst meals I have ever eaten."

The students felt ill treated until Phone Nyo pointed out, "The Karen soldiers are eating the same meals and have the same size portions. Obviously this large influx of us students is overtaxing the food supply of the Karen rebels who are sharing what little they have."

As Maung Maung, Aye Lwin, and Phone Nyo were eating with other students, Maung Maung looked

out the window to see another Karen patrol bringing in still more students they had come across. Suddenly Maung Maung recognized one of the students as Thet Wai, the government informer who had refuted his role as innocent bystander during his questioning by Burmese Military Intelligence. Many thoughts raced through Maung Maung's head. "Had Thet Wai defected to the Karens to fight the Burmese government? No, that did not seem logical. Then it meant Thet Wai had been sent by Burmese Military intelligence to spy on the students and the Karens." As he tried to sort out his thoughts, Maung Maung realized it was important that Thet Wai did not see him. When it became clear the patrol was bringing the new students to the messing place to eat, Maung Maung quickly shoved his remaining food to Aye Lwin and said, "You eat this, I've got to run."

Aye Lwin took his quick exit to mean "run to the toilet" and gladly finished both his and Maung Maung's food.

Maung Maung exited the back of the messing hall just as the patrol and new students began to enter the front. Going to the latrine, Maung Maung squatted and tried to sort his thoughts. Finally he decided the best course of action was to talk with the Karen officer who had questioned him in such detail. Making his way unseen by Thet Wai to the headquarters, he asked for, and quickly received an audience with his interrogator. Maung Maung quickly explained Thet Wai's role as a government spy among the students. The Karen officer listened very carefully and asked many questions. With a start, Maung Maung realized the Karen intelligence officer viewed the situation as being one of two possible ways. One was as Maung Maung told it. The other possibility was that Thet Wai was a legitimate student and Maung Maung was a Burmese Military Spy whose role was to discredit legitimate student leaders.

Finally the Karen Intelligence officer sent for Aye Lwin and Phone Nyo but they could not confirm Maung Maung's experience with Thet Wai. They did confirm their belief in Maung Maung and the fact he had told them of Thet Wai's deceit back in Rangoon. The Karen officer ordered a soldier to take Maung Maung, Aye Lwin, and Phone Nyo to an outpost and for them to stay there until notified to return to the main camp.

After a fitful sleep at the outpost, the students joined a patrol that was going out scavenging for food. The Karens were adept at spearing fish and soon had four. The leader of the Karen patrol told the three Burman students to take the fish back to the outpost and prepare them for cooking.

Maung Maung and Phone Nyo would have become lost on the way back but Aye Lwin's studies in geography enabled him to find the outpost. They prepared the fish and waited for the patrol's return. Hours passed before the Karens returned with some edible plants.

The Karen outpost leader remarked, "I see you are still here."

"Do you think we would take off just to get all the fish?" Maung Maung asked. From the look on the Karen's face, Maung Maung suddenly realized they had been tested to see if they would flee when given a chance. Since they hadn't, the Karens then concluded Maung Maung had been telling the truth about Thet Wai.

As the days went by, the Burman students studied the Karens and tried to learn a few Karen words. All their lives they had heard government propaganda about how vicious, unreasonable, and wrong the Karen rebels were, but now eating and sleeping with them, the Karens seemed to be likable people wanting only to be left alone to determine their own future.

It was on another patrol that the Burman students learned more of the suffering of the Karen people. They came to the still smoking ruins of a burned out village. There, in the center, they found three Karen elders tied to bamboo stakes. Death had finally released two of them from the agony of having boiling water poured on them and then being sprinkled with lime, salt and chili peppers to fry in the sun. The third one was still barely alive. They tried to give him water to drink but the boiling water forced down his throat by the Burmese army two days earlier had caused it to swell shut so there was no way to relieve his agonizing thirst. His eyes told of his suffering.

One of the Karen soldiers pointed to pieces of a freshly broken bloody bottles lying on the ground in front of him. "Burmese army raped his wife and daughters in front of him. Then rammed bottles into them and broke them with their rifle butts. Bastards!"

As they debated what they could do for the suffering man, his eyes closed, his body twitched, and his suffering ended. The students now understood why the Karens had carried on a forty year war with the Burmese army.

In the evenings around the smoking campfire, the Burmans and Karens talked. One evening a Karen said, "You Buddhists and your beliefs are the reason our nation has suffered so long from misrule!"

"Why do you say that?" asked Maung Maung.

"When something bad happens to you or your nation, you say you are suffering for misdeeds in some past life. Therefore suffering must be endured to pay for those past crimes," a Karen answered. "We believe our suffering at the hands of others is because of their evilness. Evil persons or leaders should be resisted and justice should be sought."

Maung Maung could not think of a quick answer.

After a week went by, Maung Maung, Aye Lwin, and Phone Nyo were taken back to the headquarters. Thet Wai was nowhere to be seen.

The trio then joined three dozen other students and, with Karen escort, traveled farther east to another Karen base. One evening, after eating, they sat around the smoky fires they hoped would drive off the mosquitoes. A Karen officer chatted with them and said to Maung Maung, "You're the one who fingered that Burmese Military Intelligence agent, aren't you?"

"Yes, how did you know that?" Maung Maung answered.

"We Karens have been fighting the Burmese government for forty years and we have survived by knowing as much as we can about as much as we can."

"I didn't see Thet Wai around."

"You won't. Karen Intelligence at our headquarters at Manerplaw confirmed he was an MI agent. He wouldn't cooperate and give us any useful information. So we got rid of him."

A chill went down Maung Maung's back as he realized he had caused Thet Wai's death. But it was tempered by the knowledge that Thet Wai would have killed him if given the chance. Hundreds of his friends were now in the Insein jail because of Thet Wai's betrayal.

When they reached the much larger Karen base near the Thai-Burma border, they found hundreds of students who had fled. Phone Nyo decided he had seen enough bloodshed and crossed illegally into Thailand where an American group was giving training in nonviolent protest.

To those who wanted to fight the Burmese army, the Karens issued wooden rifles and began to teach them the basic elements of jungle warfare, military discipline, strategy, and jungle survival skills. Maung Maung felt the wooden rifle was like a toy but soon learned the Karens were deadly serious in their training. As the Karen teacher said, "Every lesson is important. If you forget one thing, make one mistake, there are no second chances."

Karen soldiers around the camp missing hands or feet drove home the horrors of war. The seriously wounded coming through the camp on their way to safety and recovery seared the cruelty and suffering of this very dirty war in Maung Maung's mind.

The Karens soon decided their camps could not absorb the thousands of students arriving at the border. The students were mostly Burman and Mon with a sprinkling of Karen, Shan, and other ethnic groups. All spoke Burmese but few understood Karen. After years of being told by government propagandists the Karens were low, tribal people, some of the students weren't ready to fight under Karen leadership. They wanted all student units. Therefore, after giving these urban students basic military training, the Karens stepped aside and helped the students organize themselves into the All Burma Student Democratic Front (ABSDF). The students then went to locations along the border to

set up their own camps.

Maung Maung and Aye Lwin found themselves with a hundred and fifty other Burmese students setting up a fortified camp on the western edge of secure Karen territory.

The students used what little money they had to buy guns from Thai gun dealers. Mostly they got Russian AK 47s and American M-16s. There were not enough guns for each to have one.

They surrounded the camp with fortifications. These included a fence of interlocked branches, bamboo stakes, ditches, and home made mines. Then they dug deep bunkers and felled large trees to cover the bunkers. The Karen advisors told them when the Burmese army lay siege to the camp, the bunkers were the only way to survive the constant shelling of the Burmese army.

The KNU had captured Burmese army communication personnel who then worked for the KNU decoding Burmese military messages. Word was received of the Burmese army moving forward to attack their camp. Maung Maung, Aye Lwin and the other students did everything they could to prepare the camp and themselves. They trained and trained and trained. Ammunition was too scarce to use for practice and while their rifles could be fired as automatics, they were trained to fire them in the semi automatic mode so each shot required a pull of the trigger.

The students sent out patrols to ascertain the location and movement of the Burmese army. Some of these Burmese student patrols ambushed the Burmese army patrols. One of students' favorite tricks was to lie in ambush along the trail with the students spread out in groups of three each with a line of retreat away from the trail. When all was ready, several students "showed their face to the enemy" (let the Burmese soldiers see them). Then they would retreat rapidly back down the trail with the Burmese patrol hot on their tails. After they ran past the concealed students, the hidden students opened fire on the patrol which, by this time, was spread out along the trail and not supporting each other. If the patrol was small, the students would wipe it out. The first time Maung Maung waited in ambush, he felt extremely tense. Soon the baiting students ran past his position and he prepared the fire on the Burmese soldiers who would soon follow. As the young Burmese soldiers came into view, Maung Maung lined up his sights on one and followed him as he crossed in front of their position. Maung Maung froze until he heard a shot. He suddenly had a flash back of the student dying in his arms. He then had no trouble pulling the trigger and watching the young soldier drop. In a few minutes it was all over. The Burmese patrol was wiped out. Carefully they approached the wounded soldiers calling out for them to surrender. The few remaining alive pleaded for their lives. Maung Maung and his fellow students stripped the dead and wounded of the guns, ammunition, money and anything else of value. They bandaged up one of the lesser wounded and took him back for questioning. The three remaining seriously wounded were left to await death as there was no way to get them back to their camp. Perhaps another Burmese army patrol would find them but most Burmese patrols didn't want to be bothered with wounded--even their own!

After the Burmese army suffered several such ambushes, they increased the size of the patrols so they outnumbered the students by at least two to one. In spite of being outnumbered, the students laid an ambush for one of these large patrols. The students killed as many as they could when they first surprised the Burmese troops. The rest of the Burmese troops fell back and regrouped. The Burmese soldiers opened up on the student positions with rockets and mortars but, by that time, the students had retreated after stripping the dead of their rifles and ammunition. Therefore some of the students carried German made G-3 rifles which were the standard issue of the Burmese army. They had to depend upon captured ammunition as the G-3 used different ammunition from the M-16s and AK-47s. The Burmese army's defeat in these skirmishes provided guns and ammunition.

But war is never one sided and the Burmese army tried to ambush the students. One time they succeeded and the students lost two men and had three wounded. The students were able to retreat and take their wounded with them but one of the wounded died two days later.

Finally the Burmese army arrived at the perimeter of the student camp and began shelling them with

83mm mortars and 120mm mortars. The 120s made a very large noise. The students had to put their fingers in their ears to protect their eardrums or they would bleed from their ears. Maung Maung and Aye Lwin soon learned to count when they heard the mortar fire. The 83s mortars would reach them on the count of fourteen and the 120s at eighteen. Usually the Burmese army started shelling the students at 11 A.M. and continued until 1 P.M.

One day the KNU headquarters told the students via radio that the Burmese army would attack at 1:30 so the students stayed in the bunkers during the shelling and came out just before 1:30 and were ready for them. The students killed several attacking Burmese soldiers and wounded four. One of the wounded was a captain so other soldiers came and carried him back to Burmese lines. They took the rifles of the dead and wounded they could reach. They left the three wounded common soldiers to die.

After the Burmese army had retreated, the students ordered the three wounded Burmese soldiers to surrender. Two called out that they surrendered but the third refused. Maung Maung felt sick as they killed the third one. They retrieved the first two and treated their wounds. Having been told they would be slaughtered by the students, the young Burmese soldiers were surprised and grateful for their humane treatment. These wounded prisoners ended up helping the students around the camp with cooking and washing. When sufficiently recovered, the Burmese prisoners were sent to Manerplaw, the capital of the Karen state, and questioned. They often ended up working as porters for the Karen National Union.

Aye Lwin used his knowledge of geography, topography and surveying gained at the University of Rangoon to figure out where the Burmese would place their mortars and how to aim his 2 1/2 inch mortar to zero in on theirs. The Burmese tried very hard to hit his position. Shells hit so close to him so often, that he became deaf.

The Karens notified the students that the Burmese army was bringing up more troops so as to be able to overrun the students' camp. The Karens suggested a retreat was preferable to being wiped out. Having fought the Burmese army for over forty years, with 6,000 soldiers against 270,000, the Karens had long since learned the value of retreating and surviving to fight another day. After the students discussed their situation, they too concluded retreat was best.

By now the Burmese had surrounded their camp but when the Karens attacked the Burmese from behind and the students from the front, the Burmese panicked and fled, allowing the students to break out of their camp and retreat toward Thailand. The students built the next fortified camp very near the border so it could not be surrounded and the students could retreat to a safe haven in Thailand when the Burmese attacked in force.

But a more devastating enemy attacked this new camp--malaria. Students became ill, with high temperatures and delirium. Medicine was in short supply. Both Maung Maung and Aye Lwin caught it and suffered terribly. Finally camp authorities decided that they and three other serious cases would be sent to Mae Sot where a Karen doctor named Cynthia had a clinic and cared for Karens, students, and others the best she could.

When the time came to leave, Maung Maung felt someone shaking him awake. In his weakened condition, he struggled to sit up. He reached over to awaken Aye Lwin but found his place empty. "Where's Aye Lwin?" he asked the care giver.

"His suffering is over." a voice answered.

The trip to Mae Sot was a nightmare. Maung Maung kept thinking about Aye Lwin who had survived so many mortar attacks only to fall to the bite of a mosquito.

At Dr.Cynthia's clinic, Maung Maung began his slow recovery. Malaria had really weakened him. It was here that he heard some Burmese students had gone to Bangkok and applied to the United Nations for refugee status. Receiving refugee status did not guarantee the Burmese Pro Democracy students any better treatment from the Thais who looked upon them as illegal immigrants and refused to recognize them as political refugees.

Maung Maung had strong mixed feelings. On one hand he wanted to continue the struggle against the military dictatorship of Burma but 4,000 students against the Burmese army that outnumbered them seventy five to one left little realistic hope of success. On the other hand he wanted to live. The doctor told him that to return to the front in his weakened condition almost guaranteed death in his next round with malaria. A sick girl, who had been on the front as a medic, told him she had seen over 137 students die of malaria.

While the Thais allowed the Burmese students, Karens and other refugees to cross into Thailand, they were confined to a fifteen mile wide strip along the border. Checkpoints kept refugees from going farther.

Ye Soe Aung came to the clinic and exhorted the recovering students to continue their struggle for democracy against the Burmese army. Maung Maung felt ashamed but Ye Soe Aung disappeared and his body was found several days later. Ye Soe Aung had last been seen alive in Thai police custody but rumors said he had been executed by Burmese Military Intelligence that operated freely in Thailand, often bribing the Thais to do their dirty work. Ye Soe Aung's death drove home the hopelessness of his situation and Maung Maung went to Bangkok with several other students, one of whom knew how to get around the checkpoints.

At the office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, Maung Maung was interviewed and given an NI number. He also received 2,500 Baht per month support ($100) from the United Nations. Bangkok is an expensive city so it was impossible to live on that amount. Fortunately, Maung Maung found construction employment to supplement his income.

His luck ran out one night when the Thai police raided the apartment where Maung Maung and twelve other students were living. Maung Maung was sent to a very crowded Thai jail. It was so crowded that only half could lie down to sleep at one time while the other half stood. It was the hardest three months he had ever spent.

Finally he was released from prison and taken by bus to the Thai-Burma border. Fear filled Maung Maung's heart. Was he being forced back into Burma and into the arms of the waiting Burmese army? In the recent past, the Thais had sold ProDemocracy Students to the Burmese army for $250 each. Four hundred had been sent back and never seen or heard from again. Maung Maung had heard international pressure had persuaded the Thais to stop the practice but there was no guarantee they would not start doing it again. Maung Maung's and the other Burmese students' fears mounted as they came closer to the border. A Burmese student pleaded with the guards in Thai and then collected all the money he could from the students. Then he presented the money to the Thai guards. The bus stopped in a Thai town and the guards and driver went to eat, leaving the students unguarded. Needless to say, there were no students on the bus when they returned!

Maung Maung and the others made their way back to Bangkok. Maung Maung heard that the United States was accepting some Burmese ProDemocracy students but only those with sponsors. Fortunately his name was given to an American who filed sponsorship papers for Maung Maung and his case came up for review. Maung Maung learned there were over 5,000 students on the United Nations list and the U.S. only accepted about fifty each year. Therefore it would take a hundred years for all to be processed.

Maung Maung felt lucky when he received an interview but then he received the terrible news that he had been rejected. No reason was given, although some said you had to be a very prominent student leader to be accepted. Just being a leader and having his life in danger if deported to Burma was not sufficient reason to be accepted by the staff of the American Embassy.

His sponsor tried to go through his congressman to get Maung Maung accepted but the U.S decision makers in Bangkok were a law unto themselves. No way could be found to change their ruling or even understand the basis of it.

With deep discouragement, Maung Maung left the U.S. Immigration and Refugee office.

44

The Porter

Thu Lay Paw looked around her village as she hulled the rice. It exuded domestic calm and peace. All around she heard the thump, thump, thump of other families pounding rice. She could hear mothers singing to their babies in Sgaw Karen, one of the ethnic languages of Burma. Pigs grunted and an occasional dog barked. It was a pleasant scene in the hills of Burma and Thu Lay Paw felt contented. Fourteen years old and big for her age, boys had begun to notice her. This pleased her. Young Thu Lay Paw smiled to think of the ways her body was being transformed into the shape of a woman. Her traditional white dress with its vertical fine stripes conveyed to everyone that she was a Sgaw Karen and eligible for marriage.

Thu Lay Paw put all her weight on the end of the beam-like seesaw, raising the other end about three feet into the air. She stepped off, causing the pestle end to fall and enter the hole in a wooden stump mortar pounding unhusked rice at the bottom. Each time it hit, a few more husks fell off the paddy, revealing the kernels of rice. After about a half hour she scooped the mixture of rice and hulls into a carefully woven bamboo tray sieve, letting the cleaned rice fall through.

The clean grains fell in another bamboo tray with no holes. Over and over Thu Lay Paw tossed the rice into the air, letting the breeze blow away bits of husk and dust. Between tosses, she inspected the rice, picking out heavier impurities.

Ready to cook, Thu Lay Paw put the rice in a clay pot, filling it with just the right amount of water. Thu Lay Paw set the pot on the three stones over the fire her sister had built and it began to boil.

Suddenly a young boy came running into the village. "The Burmese Army is coming!" he shouted. Dread filled Thu Lay Paw's heart. The village burst into a frenzy of activity. People ran in all directions. Women scooped up their children and babies, and grabbed precious possessions from their houses. The men and boys quickly drove the water buffaloes and pigs up the mountain trail. They called their dogs to follow. Any dog left behind would bark at the soldiers who would quickly shoot them. Other men tried to grab the chickens pecking in the yards but most eluded capture. The village emptied as its inhabitants fled in fear into the jungle and up the mountain. Time ran short!

Their fear was well grounded. The Burmese Army was unpredictable. Once in a great while, it passed harmlessly through villages, but usually the soldiers took whatever they wanted and abused the inhabitants in any way they pleased. The Sgaw Karen villagers had learned the hard way that it was best not to be around when the army came through. Sometimes the soldiers were looking for porters, sometimes rice, sometimes money or loot, and sometimes for all three. Thu Lay Paw did not want to find out what they were after this time. She wanted to escape from them! Lifting the pot from the fire, she set it under the house behind a post. She knew if she left it right beside the fire, the prowling soldiers would realize it was food and destroy it out of meanness.

"Come on!" her mother urged her. "Go on," Thu Lay Paw shouted. "I'll catch up with you." Her mother took her sister and baby brother and hurried towards the path that led away from the direction of the army and into the jungle. Thu Lay Paw quickly climbed the short ladder into her home built above the ground and looked around. A picture of Jesus fastened to the split bamboo wall would take too long to remove. Beside it was a picture of her brother, He Ser--the only picture she had. He Ser had been killed three years ago. When he was sixteen, Karen rebels had come through the village and tried to recruit him as a soldier but he had refused. Later the Burmese army had come through and killed him to prevent him from being recruited in the future by the rebels. She grabbed his picture. Then she saw the family Bible, picked it up and put her brother's picture between the pages. She put both treasures in her Karen bag which she took from the corner post. Jumping down from her house,

she hurried to catch up with her family. She soon came upon an old woman lugging a heavy bag. "Let me help you with that, we must hurry!" she said. When they reached the end of the village she realized most had gone. They joined six others fleeing through the gardens for the safety of the jungle. Thu Lay Paw looked back. No soldiers had yet appeared on the other side of the village.

A gasp from the girl in front of her alerted Thu Lay Paw to soldiers blocking the path ahead. The soldiers had circled the village, cutting off their escape route! In an instant the soldiers wrestled them to the ground and tied their wrists behind their backs. "Let the old woman go." the sergeant in charge commanded. "She's too old to carry anything. These seven will do nicely as porters!"

Thu Lay Paw was filled with fear and dread. They were being taken as porters to serve the Burmese Army! There were no roads along the Thai border where the soldiers of the Burmese government battled the insurgent Karen National Union. The Burmese army captured the powerless villagers and forced them to be porters. They carried all ammunition, food, medical supplies, guns, rockets, and mortar shells to the front line.

The brutal soldiers herded Thu Lay Paw, three other girls, a middle aged mother, Say Tha, who carried a baby, and two boys toward the other end of the village. The Burmese invaders searched each house for valuables, stealing what they wanted. At Thu Lay Paw's home a soldier emerged with the picture of Jesus he had torn from the wall. As he slowly tore it into little pieces and threw them to the wind, the helpless girl thought, "At least he cannot destroy my brother's picture. It will be safe in the Bible in my bag." It had been left unnoticed by the path where Thu Lay Paw had been wrestled to the ground. Though separated from the pictures and Bible, Jesus was in her heart where no soldier could destroy Him.

Taking turns guarding the prisoners, the soldiers gathered quite a pile of stolen items they deemed salable. Taking baskets, they prepared to force the Karens to carry the loot away from the village. Thu Lay Paw was filled with indignation. The items the soldiers snatched up in a few minutes had cost the owners many hard months of work to obtain.

Turning to Say Tha with her baby, the sergeant ordered, "Leave the baby!"

"But I'm nursing it" she pleaded.

"I'm doing you a favor," the sergeant snarled. "He won't survive if you bring him. Leave him or I'll shoot him now!"

The mother looked anxiously to the other prisoners. They pleaded to leave both the nursing mother and baby. The solders unheeding, seemed to enjoy their anguish.

Reluctantly, painfully and in tears, Say Tha laid her baby in the shade on a porch of a house and picked up the back basket full of loot pointed out to her. As others were untied, each hoisted a back basket and followed her under watchful eyes of soldiers. The village grew quiet except for the crying of the abandoned baby.

Thu Lay Paw wondered if she would ever see her village and family again. She knew the villagers, once assured of the soldiers' departure, would return. The village mothers would do their best to care for the baby. She also knew they would find her bag and Bible and know that she had not escaped. The old woman, whom the soldiers had freed, would confirm that.

The captors and captives walked on and on until they came to another village with a market. There the soldiers sold most of their loot and bought food, which they ate with relish. How good it smelled, but the soldiers did not offer their prisoners any. The hungry porters could not buy for themselves as the soldiers had taken all their money after their abduction from the village.

Everyone in the bazaar knew the porter's plight and where they were headed. An old lady, who no longer cared about the consequences, gave each helpless captive a cup of tea. This time the soldiers ignored her.

From the bazaar they walked to the army compound and were joined by other army patrols bringing in more impressed villagers. That evening, the dejected captives were given a thin soup of rice which

they ate, huddled together in misery in a barbed wire pen. What a difference sixteen hours had made. This morning Thu Lay Paw had awakened with her beloved family in a peaceful village. Now she was treated as an animal. Tears flowed and Say Tha, who had been forced to desert her baby, comforted Thu Lay Paw.

The next morning after a meager breakfast, each porter received a pack weighing forty to one hundred twenty pounds. Thu Lay Paw received four 81mm mortar bombs which weighed over 20 kilo or forty four pounds. Some porters carried 84mm rockets.

The overloaded slaves set off in a long line toward the eastern front. Between every few porters a soldier walked. Anyone trying to escape would be killed. Those with 84mm rockets were forced to walk "point" or in front to explode any mines in the path. The 84mm rockets were less likely to explode and kill the following soldiers if the porter carrying them was blown to bits by a mine. Without lunch, evening found all the porters exhausted as they made camp. The porters were allowed to drink and bathe in the small stream by the camp but only downstream from where the soldiers washed, muddied and fouled the water.

After a pitiful supper, groups of soldiers came to the huddled porters and picked out the girls they wanted and dragged them off into the woods. Any male porter protesting this treatment of the women was ruthlessly beaten. Thu Lay Paw tried to hide among the older women porters but her white dress gave her away. Several of the brutal predators grabbed her and dragged her away. When she resisted their pawing, they beat her until she was incapable of further resistance. They stripped her and raped her one by one. Through unbearable pain and devastating degradation, she screamed and begged them to stop. It was to no avail. "Oh Jesus" Thu Lay Paw cried out, "Save me!" All around her were the cries of other women being ravaged. The beasts used her until they satisfied their animal urges and then allowed her to dress and crawl back to the other porters.

Thu Lay Paw wept and wept. Her dreams were shattered. Like all young women, she had wondered what the first time she made love would be like. But this was not love, it was hell. She felt so dirty, violated, used and helplessly degraded. Would any young Karen man ever want her for a wife after this? Middle aged, Say Tha, from her village put her arms around her and tried to console her. Even as Thu Lay Paw was comforted by her companion, she realized the woman was mourning the abandonment of her baby. Both knew Say Tha would be raped on another night.

Daylight brought little food, more miles and that heavy pack of mortar bombs. It also brought terrible thoughts of pregnancy and the remembering of rumors that the Burmese army had a high AIDS infection rate. Surviving each day and the rapes each night left no room for the dreams of tomorrow.

The cold nights with no blankets produced sickness and misery. Their only clothes, which they were wearing when captured, became dirty and torn. Rain bought more misery and rain during the cold nights created extreme suffering.

Each day and night was a repeat of the previous. The lack of food took its toll. One day Thu Lay Paw saw a young man, really a boy, lying beside the trail. He had evidently collapsed and was unable to get up. The soldiers had broken his leg with their rifle butts and left him there to die and to be an example to all the other porters who walked past him. Thu Lay Paw felt the pain in his eyes as he lay there waiting for death.

When they came to villages emptied at the approach of the Burmese army, the soldiers looted it, killed any animals they could find, eating some of the meat but giving none to the porters. Usually the cruel soldiers destroyed what they couldn't take, burning the stored paddy (rice) to leave the villagers destitute after their passing. Any villager caught was impressed to replace dead porters.

Each day brought other heartbreaking sights. Malaria struck without warning. A particularly virulent strain would strike a healthy person dead in a few hours and by now none of the porters were healthy. Each day their number was less. Finally, after twenty days, they reached the front line.

The Burmese army had laid siege to a strongly fortified Karen position. An extensive mine field

surrounded the Karen army camp. The Burmese army had learned the hard way how many soldiers are lost attacking through mine fields. So they adopted a policy of forcing porters to march through them to explode the mines.

Thu Lay Paw and the other porters were lined up on one section of the battlefield and forced to march forward. With each step they risked being blown to pieces. Burmese soldiers stood ready to shoot anyone who tried to flee or refused to march.

Thu Lay Paw's heart beat wildly. She dared not look back as she walked toward the Karen battle line. She tried to take big steps, figuring that would make fewer times she touched the ground and therefore lessen her chances of stepping on a mine.

Step by step she advanced, sweat pouring down her face. Her clothes were wet with sweat. Fear choked her throat. Off to her right she saw the other porters in a line marching. A loud explosion sounded, a girl catapulted into the air. She came down with a thud and lay lifeless.

Thu Lay Paw longed to turn back, hide, anything. If only there were a depression somewhere so she could drop out of sight. But the field had been leveled to be sure that no advancing soldier could find protection. A rifle shot rang in her ears. Then she heard another body dropping to the ground. Someone had tried to turn back! Thu Lay Paw trembled as she took several deliberate steps forward. Suddenly great pain shot up her leg. It seemed to explode through her tired body. Such blinding hot searing pain!!! "Oh Jesus!" she cried out, "I can't stand it!"

Gradually the pain became concentrated in her right foot. Thu Lay Paw realized she was sprawled and twisted on the ground. "What is causing my foot so much pain? It must be badly injured" she thought.

She rolled over and saw with horror her right foot was gone! Her lower leg was ripped and bloody. It looked like a badly butchered piece of meat. Blood was flowing rapidly from many wounds. She realized she would soon bleed to death. She ripped several traditional strands of string from the sides of her dress and tied them tightly around her leg just below the knee. Every move brought more searing hot pain. The bleeding seemed to lessen. Still she tied several more strands through the mangled meat. The bleeding stopped. She lay back exhausted. Shock and unconsciousness delivered her from the pain.

Several hours later she regained consciousness and became aware of her pain-racked body. She heard sounds of movement behind her; one shot followed by more shots. The pattern repeated; a shot, then a volley of shots. Then she felt a rifle being laid across her back. The rifle moved back and forth. She realized she was being used for a gun rest. Burmese soldier! She stayed still and pretended to be dead.

Another shot, then the volley. Suddenly her ears were filled with a loud "Dine" as the rifle fired one shot. The sudden noise so close, startled her. Her body moved involuntarily. Yet the rifle stayed across her. All was quiet. Minutes passed. She heard the soldier moving. Suddenly she felt a hand wrapping a cord around her leg. The string was pulled tight and a knot tied. Then Thu Lay Paw felt an object being inserted under the string. It pressed against her artery. Someone had tied a tourniquet around her leg. A voice whispered,"Taung Paan Bar Day." Thu Lay Paw knew enough Burmese to know this meant "I apologize to you." She knew it was a Burmese soldier.

"Strange" she thought, "Why is this Burmese soldier helping me?" But the pain and broiling sun pushed the question from her mind. She lay, too exhausted to think or move.

Hours later the sun set and the field quickly became dark. The very weak Thu Lay Paw heard a hoarse whisper, "Crawl east" Then she heard the receding sound of a person crawling west.

Mustering her remaining strength, she dragged herself east toward the Karen lines. She progressed inch by painful inch until exhaustion overcame her. She lay panting. Suddenly she felt strong hands gripping her under the arms and dragging her ever closer to the safety of the Karen fortifications. Karen soldiers had risked their lives to come out and rescue her. "Oh Jesus, thank you for sending

them." she prayed.

The remainder of the night was a blur of pain, movement, and shadowy figures as Thu Lay Paw was being carried away on a litter. When consciousness returned, the exhausted girl found herself in a primitive hospital. A female doctor was examining her leg. The doctor's face was solemn as she said, "We will have to take your leg off below the knee. It is the best we can do." Thu Lay Paw cried and pleaded but in the end her resistance was silenced by an anesthetic. The shattered, mangled leg was removed. Fortunately, at this time, the hospital had sodium pentothal which put her to sleep so she felt no pain until she awoke. The doctor felt thankful for the sodium pentothal, remembering all the operations she had had to perform on screaming, suffering soldiers when none was available.

After Thu Lay Paw began her slow recovery, a worker for the Karen National Union interviewed her. Testimony of her abduction, rapes, and slavery was recorded. This information detailing the violation of her civil rights, would be added to the 4,000 other pages of testimony from ethnic minorities in Burma. Despite unspeakable horrors, all the atrocities will be ignored by the rest of the world.

"What will happen to me?" Thu Lay Paw asked the case worker.

"Do you have relatives in any of the sixteen refugee camps in Thailand?" the case worker asked.

"Not that I know about," answered Thu Lay Paw.

"Well, don't worry, we will take care of you".

When the doctor felt Thu Lay Paw was strong enough, she was carried by litter to the Thai border. Skirting the Thai border posts, the litter bearers reached a clinic-hospital in Mae Sot, Thailand. There she made a remarkable physical recovery and was transferred to a refugee camp. There she waited with fifty thousand others for the international community to decide what to do about the "Burma Problem."

45

The Soldier

Maung Aye lay still, waiting for darkness. His buttocks throbbed, but the bleeding had stopped. He recalled various events. His thoughts returned to his village, Tha Min Gone (Deer Hill), in the delta of Burma. Growing up had not been idyllic. Bo Kya, the village bully, three years older than Maung Aye, took special delight in making life miserable. His mother named him Bo Kyar, meaning tiger, but the village children dropped the "r" to call him Bo Kya, which meant Bully, behind his back. Maung Aye hated him. When Bo Kya left the village and joined the Burmese army, Maung Aye's life improved. Those three years without Bo Kya were the best. But then Bo Kya returned on leave with glowing stories of his exploits in the army. Maung Aye's father listened carefully and later asked many questions. Maung Aye had suspected nothing until several days later as he sat on the split bamboo porch after supper chatting with the other family members, his father said, "Maung Aye, its time to think about your future. We do not own enough paddy fields to divide between you and your older brother. Had you succeeded in courting Mee Mee, her family would have given you fields so you could support her."

"Damn!" thought Maung Aye, "in our village everybody knows everything!" He waited for his father to continue.

"You didn't do well at school. You failed the Third Standard, so you couldn't go on." School! What a nightmare! His city-raised teacher, just graduated from the University of Rangoon, spent his first two years against his will, teaching in a village he obviously despised. All the students felt his anger in the frequent beatings and belittling comments they endured each day. Unlike Daw Pan Pyu (Miss White Flower), the previous teacher, who eagerly taught and did everything she could to make school interesting. Maung Aye looked forward to her classes but she left after Maung Aye completed First Standard.

His father continued, "I've decided that you must join the army. Bo Kyar tells us the army pays well and we could use the money."

Maung Aye said nothing. He knew that once his father decided his future, he could not argue with him. His father continued, "You can go with Bo Kyar and he'll show you how to sign up."

Maung Aye's countenance fell. "I hate Bo Kya and do not want to leave the village with him! Can't I wait until after he's gone and then go in alone?"

"I've already talked with Bo Kyar and he'll take you." His father said firmly. "He'll look after you."

Being an obedient son, Maung Aye accompanied Bo Kya when he returned to his base. Bo Kya started training new recruits. He arranged for Maung Aye to be in his platoon. Maung Aye suspected Bo Kya enjoyed making his life miserable. Bo Kya always found fault with him. The first day of shooting on the rifle range, he lined up the sights of the rifle with the target and quickly pulled the trigger, jerking the gun slightly. Instantly, Bo Kya screamed in his ear "Squeeze the trigger, you village idiot, squeeze the trigger, don't jerk it!" Maung Aye's face burned. He reloaded the rifle, lined up the sights with the target and quickly, evenly, squeezed the trigger. The bullet hit the center but no word of praise came from Bo Kya, just "Beginner's luck!"

The first time his platoon heard Maung Aye use Bo Kya behind Bo Kyar's back; they caught the pun and used that nickname too.

The blazing sun beat down on his prone position; sweat saturated his uniform. Maung Aye knew his mental wellbeing required that he think of something other than his predicament. He remembered the day at the border. Maung Aye, Bo Kya and three other soldiers sat in the shade looking across the border to Thailand. A vehicle pulled up to the Thai outpost and stopped.

"Thai police," said Bo Kya. "I wonder who Thailand doesn't want now." Two Thai policemen

emerged from the vehicle and looked toward Burma. Spotting the group of soldiers in the shade, they waved. Bo Kya gave a disinterested wave back. One of the police opened the door and six women awkwardly emerged, with their hands cuffed behind them. Maung Aye judged them to be in their early twenties. One of the police pointed to the Burma outpost but none of the women moved. The other grabbed the woman nearest him and shoved her toward the outpost thirty yards away. A couple of hard kicks got the rest moving and the group crossed the no man's land between the border stations. The women trudged with heads down, obviously not thrilled with the idea of being forced back to Burma. Maung Aye studied them as they approached. Four of them seemed to be hill tribe girls, probably Akha or Lahu. The other two, appeared to be Burman, their faces hard and devoid of innocence. The policeman said something in Thai and they stopped three yards from Bo Kya, who had stood but had not left the shade of the tree to meet them half way. The other policeman took keys from his pocket and unlocked the handcuffs. The girls rubbed their wrists and looked at Bo Kya. The Thai policeman said something in Thai. Bo Kya shook his head. The policeman took out a slip of paper and slowly read in terrible Burmese, "These girls are citizens of Burma and are being returned because they are illegal immigrants to Thailand." Without another word he turned and walked back to Thailand with his companion.

Maung Aye wondered, "Why these girls?" Thousands of illegal immigrants from Burma came to Thailand. Why had only these been returned? Had they failed to bribe the police when caught or to give them sexual favors if they had no money?

Bo Kya looked disgustedly at the girls. "AIDS, huh?" They didn't answer, their eyes downcast. Bo Kya turned to the other soldiers, saying, "I bet you a hundred kyats they tested positive for AIDS. Infected prostitutes Thailand is dumping back on us."

"What will happen to them?" asked a soldier.

"We'll take them back to base. They'll be taken to a clinic and injected with something and sent back to their villages. In less than a week they'll die," Bo Kya sneered. "Burma authorities know how to cure AIDS. If someone is a problem, kill'm."

His thoughts of the past were pushed aside by the present. Maung Aye longed to move his cramped muscles but any movement might betray he was still alive and bring a Karen Army bullet. Another scene flashed through his mind. In northeastern Burma he loaded supply boxes on an army truck to be sent back for refilling. Somehow Bo Kya's platoon got a lot of truck loading jobs.

"Load those boxes first" Bo Kya said "Put them in the middle bottom of the truck."

The first boxes were heavy. The platoon did as he ordered.

"Now, load all the rest." Light boxes, obviously empty, covered the heavies on all sides and top.

"What's in the heavies?" asked Maung Aye.

"Rock samples for the geological department of the University of Rangoon," Bo Kya sneered.

Maung Aye knew Bo Kya lied. He always lied. Bo Kya only told the truth when he couldn't think of a good lie. Only the weak or ignorant told the truth according to Bo Kya. "What could the army be shipping back from northeast Burma?" Maung Aye wondered. Bo Kya gave them two-day passes. The passes always came after loading the trucks. In town at a bar, Bo Kya proceeded to get drunk. Maung Aye drank too, but to feel good.

Bo Kya leered at him saying, "Well, village idiot, did you figure out what is in those boxes?"

"Rocks, like you said, maybe jade."

"You are a village idiot! They're full of opium. It will end up in New York City. Do you think our officers get rich on army pay?"

"I thought the American government paid the Burma government to eradicate opium poppies."

"They did but the dumb Americans didn't monitor the program, so one small department was destroying opium poppies belonging to hill tribes or rebel groups, while the army was moving tons and tons out through the port of Rangoon. The Americans even gave us helicopters and Agent Orange to

spray the poppy fields. Of course, the army is using it on the gardens of rebels and those sympathetic to the rebels. But some loud mouth American female journalist heard about it and word got back to the American Congress, which put an end to that program."

Bo Kya knew a lot about many things. "Sometimes, to know too much in Burma is unhealthy," thought Maung Aye glancing around the bar to see if anyone listened. Burma Intelligence, with its effective Israeli training, listened everywhere.

Again Maung Aye's thoughts were brought to the present. Flies buzzed around his head, most attracted to the body in front of him. Maung Aye remembered raiding the Karen village. Bo Kya's platoon, one of many sent out to get porters, followed Bo Kya toward a village. "We raided this village about three years ago." Bo Kya said. My first raid of a village. I found a sixteen year old boy. That age is rare in a Karen village. My sergeant asked him if the rebels tried to recruit him. The dumb kid said, 'yes'. He should have lied. Sergeant made me kill him. It made me sick. Not any more."

Maung Aye could not recall Bo Kya showing any regrets before for killing an unarmed simple villager.

"They probably have a lookout now. When we get near the village we must double time it or the village will be empty when we arrive." They followed a well worn path along the stream where women came down for water and to wash clothes. They saw no one. "Double time," said Bo Kya, running down the path. "Follow me." He didn't turn at the main path leading up to the village, but went on another path that bypassed it. "This one leads around to the far side of the village. We may be able to cut some of them off."

They caught glimpses of the village as they circled round it and came to another path through the gardens on the other side. A group of Karen villagers came toward them. "Grab them!" shouted Bo Kya. A young girl dressed in traditional maiden white, lugged a heavy bag, accompanied by an old woman. Maung Aye quickly overpowered her and wrestled her to the ground. Taking a loop of rope Bo Kya had issued earlier, he tied her wrists behind her. The other soldiers captured two boys, the old woman, a mother and baby, and three other girls. Bo Kya ordered the old lady released. They took their prisoners back to the empty village. "Now for our fringe benefits," gloated Bo Kya, as he entered a house and took whatever pleased him. At one house he emerged with a picture of Jesus and tore it in tiny pieces. The prisoners watched and said nothing. Taking baskets, the soldiers filled them with loot. Bo Kya turned to the woman and said in Burmese, "Leave the baby." She understood. Holding the baby close to her breast, she said, in poor Burmese, "I'm nursing it." The other prisoners pleaded for her but Bo Kya remained unmoved. Only after Bo Kya threatened to shoot the baby, did she leave the baby on a porch. The prisoners left the village, carrying the baskets of loot, under the guns of the soldiers.

"Those who have the guns make the rules," Bo Kya summed it up.

The battlefield seemed quiet, now. The sun began to descend. Another vivid scene seared Maung Aye's memory. The first night on the trail to the front, Bo Kya led Maung Aye and four of his platoon to the huddled porters, saying in a cold voice, "Let's have some fun," He found a young Karen girl hiding among the older women porters and dragged her out. Maung Aye recognized her as the girl he had captured. "I bet she's a virgin," said Bo Kya and ignoring her pleas, they dragged her into the woods.

They pulled off her clothes, humiliating her. Karen women are rarely naked even when bathing. She resisted, but a few blows from Bo Kya stunned her into submission. She kept pleading in Karen, seemingly unaware they could not understand her. It made no difference what language she used. Bo Kya was on her first, "You know they pay 125,000 baht ($500 U.S.) or even a quarter million baht for a virgin in Bangkok and we get them free!" he said, as he went to work on her. Maung Aye felt sick. The girl reminded him of gentle Mee Mee back in his village. Bo Kya took delight in hurting her. Others followed when he finished. Finally only Maung Aye remained. "Your turn, sloppy fifth!" Bo Kya said.

Maung Aye wanted to run. But he knew life would be hell if he refused. Every member of the platoon would question his ability to be a man. He pulled down his pants and mounted her. He hated the feel of her tense body held down for him. Each thrust produced distraught sobs. He was glad when he climaxed and could get off her. He felt sick as he watched her crawl back to the other porters. This was not the way he envisioned his first lovemaking. Damn Bo Kya.

Then he recalled Bo Kya saying, "Well she certainly earned her five kyats today."

"Five kyat?" asked Maung Aye.

"Yeah, porters are supposedly paid five kyats a day," laughed Bo Kay, "but none of them will ever see the money. Our officers will requisition the money but it will never get to the porters. It won't even get as far as us."

The sun dropped lower. His thoughts reached today. Arriving at the front, the porters had been lined up and forced to march toward the Karen lines. He saw a Karen girl blown into the air. That girl lay still where she had fallen. Then he saw the Karen girl he had raped blown into the air. She had come down writhing in pain. She kept trying to do something to her right foot. The porters not killed made it to the ditch in front of the Karen line. They huddled out of sight of the Burmese waiting for darkness when the Karens would rescue them. That same day Bo Kya told his platoon they must make a probe attack on the Karens. Bo Kya said, "We have to see if the Karens are awake and ready."

"That's stupid," thought Maung Aye. "The Karens are always awake and ready." Officers never ask the lowly foot soldier how the war should be fought. Bo Kya showed himself all bluster and hero. Maung Aye thought, "I bet some officer thinks we loaded too many trucks and it's time to eliminate us." Bo Kya urged his platoon to start crawling forward across the battlefield while other platoons watched with ready rifles for any Karens to expose themselves trying to shoot the probers. At least Bo Kya crawled with them as they started. Crawling might protect them from some of the mines set for standing weight. Maung Aye felt sure the porters only exploded a tenth of the mines. Half way across the field a shot killed the soldier on Maung Aye's right. The Burman soldiers opened up, shooting at every likely source of the shot.

Then a silence followed. Another shot and his buddy on his left stopped moving. Another fusillade of shots from the Burman side. Those Karens did not waste ammunition. Two more shots and two more platoon members stopped moving. Bo Kya shouted, "Come on, you village idiot! Move forward." Maung Aye crawled toward a body in front of him. A shot caused searing pain in his buttock. He crawled down behind the body, which gave him some cover. He felt his buttock and his pants, bloody where a bullet furrowed a skin-deep channel. God, it hurt. Whoever said, "just a flesh wound," never had one.

Bo Kya, just ahead of him, yelled for him to come on. "What's the point?" Maung Aye thought. We've already proven the Karens are awake and ready. That damn guy is after a medal. Maung Aye put his rifle over the body, the body of a Karen girl dressed in a dirty gray, bloody, maiden dress. Her foot gone, her butchered leg made him sick. The girl had tried to tie strings around her leg to stop the bleeding. Maung Aye could see the side of her face. He recognized the girl he had captured and later raped! She still reminded him of Mee Mee. He wondered about her name. Maung Aye slowly moved his rifle back and forth looking for a target on the Karen lines. Bo Kya yelled something. Suddenly, Maung Aye saw Bo Kya in his sights. "I wish he would shut up and call it quits." All the abuse, taunts, belittlings of a lifetime came to mind. He lined up the sights perfectly centered on Bo Kya. "Whoever has the gun makes the rules," came ringing in his ears. "If a person is a problem, kill him." A shot came from the Karen lines. The Burmese line returned a multitude of shots. Maung Aye slowly squeezed the trigger just as Bo Kya had taught him. Instantly he knew Bo Kya would never bother him again.

Maung Aye realized the body jerked when he fired. The girl was not dead. He hugged the ground wondering what to do next. His eyes traveled to the stump of the leg and he saw that the bleeding had

resumed. Probably the involuntary reflex to the sound of his rifle had loosened her tourniquet. Suddenly the awful thought came to him that she was here because he had captured her. "No," he said to himself, "If I hadn't caught her, one of the others would have." But that answer did not fully relieve him of feeling responsible. He brought his boot within reach and unthreaded the strong cord shoelace. Wrapping it around her leg, he tied it tight and inserted a pebble under the cord on top of the artery. The bleeding stopped. Then he whispered "Tuang Bun Bar Day"(I apologize to you). He wished he could say it in Karen and hoped she understood.

When darkness came, Maung Aye whispered in Burmese, "Crawl east" and he crawled west towards his own lines. He was sure he could lie his way out of any problems. He could say the girl, on which he rested his rifle, moved just as he fired—a believable lie. Bo Kya and the Burman army had taught him well.

46

The Missionary Kid

Dave Neilson scanned the faces of the people waiting on the wharf boat as the steamer neared it. Many smiled and waved but who were the people waving at him? Well, he couldn't figure out who came to meet him. They certainly could identify a missionary's kid. Dave, his wife, Catherine, and son, Paul, the only westerners on the steamer, waved back to the group of five standing together, who waved every time he looked at them. "That must be the church delegation," thought Dave. "Only five?" Somehow he thought there might have been more. After all, his father served over thirty years in Burma among these people and he heard they held their missionaries in high esteem. His father died eight years after retirement, twelve years ago, so maybe most had forgotten him. What a mistake to spend so much time and money to come so far!

He remembered the anxious scene at the airport when they entered Burma. Everything went smoothly until one of the officials spotted "Place of Birth: Burma" in Dave's passport. After excited consultation among the officials, they led Dave to a side room. There he learned that anyone born in Burma and left, could not return even for a visit. "Why did you leave?" they queried.

"My parents took me home at five years of age for furlough. I never returned because they put me in the Missionaries' Children's Home so I could go to school."

The Immigration official understood. Obviously, he was not another expatriate trying to sneak a home visit. They discussed the problem among themselves while Dave suffered terrible visions of being refused entry after a trip half way round the world. Finally, Dave filled out a form all in Burmese stating he left Burma against his will. Drenched with sweat, he passed through Customs and into the country.

Dave's thoughts came back to the present by the steamer reversing its engines to stop its forward motion and the brown water turning up under the boat. As the boat neared the wharf barge, the young and nimble jumped across a four feet gap. More vendors jumped as the distance narrowed, many carrying all kinds of goods. In the U.S., federal safety experts would have a heart attack to see such blatant disregard for safety. Watching them made Dave feel uneasy.

The old tire cushions scrunched as the steamer crushed them between its steel hull and the steel wharf barge. Passengers poured off the boat, some even climbing over the rails when the back up at the gates seemed too long. Parents handed children to waiting relatives' arms. Baskets, bags and boxes followed. When old people tried to cross the gap, many willing hands of younger persons assisted them.

"They certainly esteem older persons here," thought Dave.

When the exodus from the boat slowed to a mere stampede, Dave noticed the five making their way against the flood of humanity. They had to be the welcoming delegation. None of the others waiting boarded the steamer. A crewmember stopped them but they said something in Burmese, pointing up to the first class deck, and passed on.

Within minutes Dave found them shaking his hand while holding their left hand under their right forearm. The youngest one looked down as she shook hands and bowed her head low-another Burmese way of showing respect to elders. Dave caught the name of the leader, Saw Kler Taw, but lost the other names in the confusion. He hoped his wife remembered them. The welcoming delegation gathered the suitcases of the Neilsons. Going down the stairs to the main deck, they crossed to the wharf barge and proceeded up the anchoring bridge to the entrance. Ushered into a side room, they filled out papers given by Burman security personnel, who examined their passports. Every checkpoint required the same information. Dave obliged but thought, "I bet they know exactly who we are, where we're from, how long we'll stay and who we'll visit." Burmese security is the only super efficient organization in the whole country.

After satisfying security, the group left the dock and went to a waiting pick up truck with a roof and built in seats on the back. Dave noticed a young man in his twenties joining the group. The leader of the welcoming delegation insisted Dave ride in the front cab with himself and the driver.

"Baptist headquarters at Rangoon warned us not to take more than five to meet you so please forgive the small welcoming committee." Saw Kler Taw said sadly.

"Why the limitation?" asked Dave, heartened by this information.

"We planned to have a choir and band but the leaders at Baptist headquarters said it would attract too much attention. If the authorities knew how much your coming meant to us, they might cancel their permission for you to visit our convention. So it is better that it appear your coming is only a small thing. But I want you to know we deeply appreciate your coming. You are the first westerner to visit us in seven years, the second in nineteen. More importantly, you are the son of our beloved Thra (teacher)."

These Karens surely have long memories. Dave began to understand what it meant to be in a minority ethnic group in a minority religion. "Who is the young man who joined us as we left security?" Dave asked.

"A security agent who will be with us while you are here. But do not worry, he is married to a Christian girl and will turn in an honest report. We worried about drawing an agent who tries to create problems for us by misinterpreting something or just outright lying to please his superior," sighed Saw Kler Taw. "Now let's have breakfast and meet some church members who can't go to the conference. After that, you can take some rest. Then we will go on to the conference."

In the upper room of the Baptist Association headquarters they found a beautifully decorated table among other empty tables. "Go ahead and eat," said Saw Kler Taw, "The others have eaten."

"Understandable," thought Dave, "the three hour late steamer kept these people waiting without a word of complaint.

They enjoyed a delicious English style breakfast of eggs, bacon, toast and jam. "All especially purchased just for us," thought Dave. Dave preferred mohinga, a delicious noodle and fish soup, which they probably ate but, not being sure the Neilsons liked Burmese foods, they served what the government hotels served.

"I hope we'll eat Burmese food at the convention." said Dave.

"It can be arranged," answered Saw Kler Taw and Dave knew he had just negated their carefully laid plans. The English, noted for their lack of culinary skill, had been imitated by the Burmese perfectly. Dave couldn't stand the thought of another government hotel type meal.

Dave felt self-conscious eating while Saw Kler Taw introduced twenty people who sat and watched him. He recalled his mother telling of eating in a village with the whole village watching every move she made.

Breakfast finished, Saw Kler Taw said, "Do you want to take rest now?" indicating some western style beds found somewhere and set up in a side room. What work they had gone to trying to accommodate them! Most Burmese slept on mats on the floor.

"No, we slept on the steamer. The mice frightened my wife at first, until the cockroaches chased the mice away. She insists the cockroaches were bigger."

"Yes, you came on the black steamer. It's terrible, old even by Burman standards, probably built in the twenties." Saw Kler Taw commiserated, "Once when I took that steamer, the rats kept biting our toes as we slept. People kicked them up in the air and they came down on us--miserable night."

"We're three hours late already; let's push on," said Catherine.

"Shall we go now?" asked Saw Kler Taw uncertain of the American idiom "push on."

"Yes" and together they boarded the waiting rented pick-up truck, since no one in the Christian community owned a car or even a pick-up truck. For a car, you pay 300% duty, so a $10,000 (U.S. Dollars) car plus $30,000 duty and 15% sales tax costs $46,000. This makes it unaffordable where good

pay comes to $180 per year. Pick-up trucks with only 30% duty abounded in a tremendous variety of sizes and ages. Neither the Baptist Association or any of its ninety-one employees owned a vehicle. They rented trucks for special occasions. Dave knew they considered him someone special.

The pick-up took them to a small dock. A two-tailed boat waited. Each side came back beyond the stern in a wing shaped tail, hence the name. They considered this one "puckha" (first class) because it had a roof, curtains, and a strong outboard motor. Two sat side by side. Eight people, including the security man, accompanied the three Neilsons. The association leaders feared the mass produced food of the convention might not agree with sensitive western stomachs, therefore this team cooked and waited on the Neilsons.

Soon they skimmed along the water heading up one of the many tributaries of the great Irrawady delta. "How far is the place of the convention?" asked Catherine.

"About two hours, maybe a little more as the tide is beginning to turn against us." In the delta, running with the tide or against makes a great deal of difference in travel time. After an hour and a half the boat turned into one of the many bayous that entered the tributary.

"How many will be at this convention?" asked Dave.

"This is only an association level convention so there will only be four thousand," answered Saw Kler Taw.

"`Only four thousand'," thought Dave, remembering back in Indiana a turn out of sixty seemed good for an association meeting. The churches of a geographical area formed an association. The associations spread across the land joined together in the Karen Baptist Convention. There are other conventions for other ethnic groups or regions. These fourteen Conventions then unite under the Burma Baptist Convention.

"Where is it being held?" asked Catherine.

"At Plaw Lah Hay (Green Field), a village of forty houses." answered Saw Kler Taw.

"Wait a minute," thought Dave, "a village of maybe 350 men, women and children hosting a convention of four thousand?" A village without electricity, running water or refrigeration, he must see to believe.

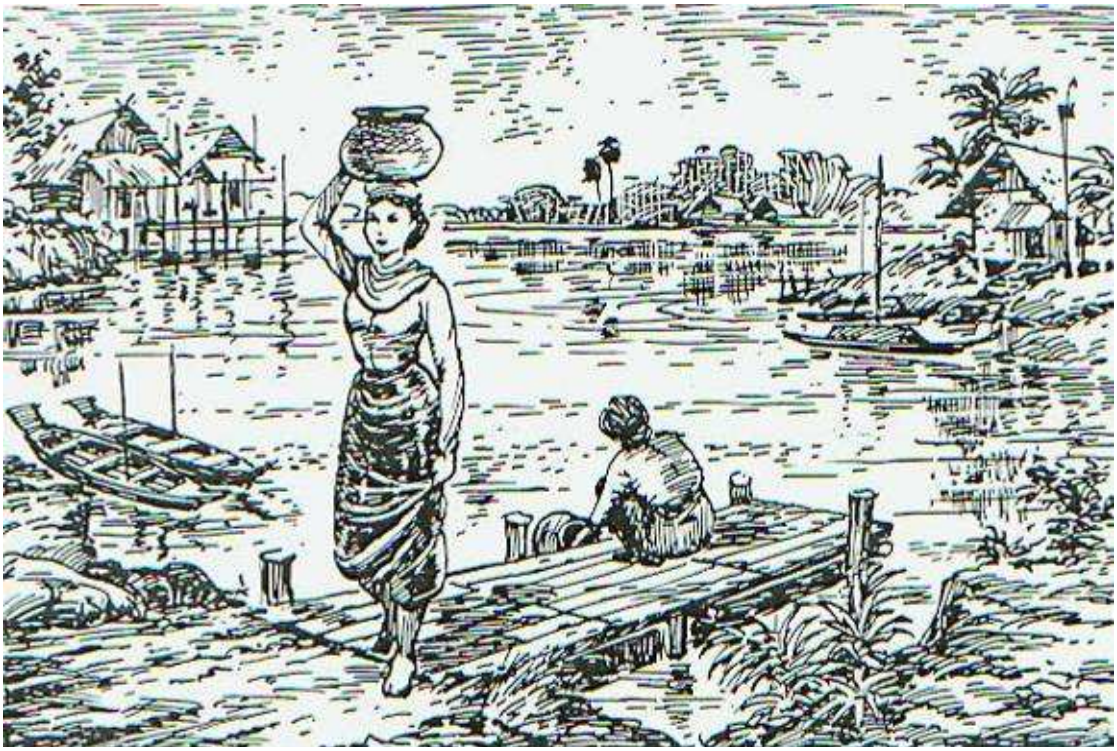
"Of course many churches were assigned last year to help them," supplied Saw Kler Taw. "Some raised extra pigs and chickens, others gathered thatch and bamboo, still others, obtained supplies. The association owns cooking pots, pans, utensils etc. used at every convention," explained Saw Kler Taw.

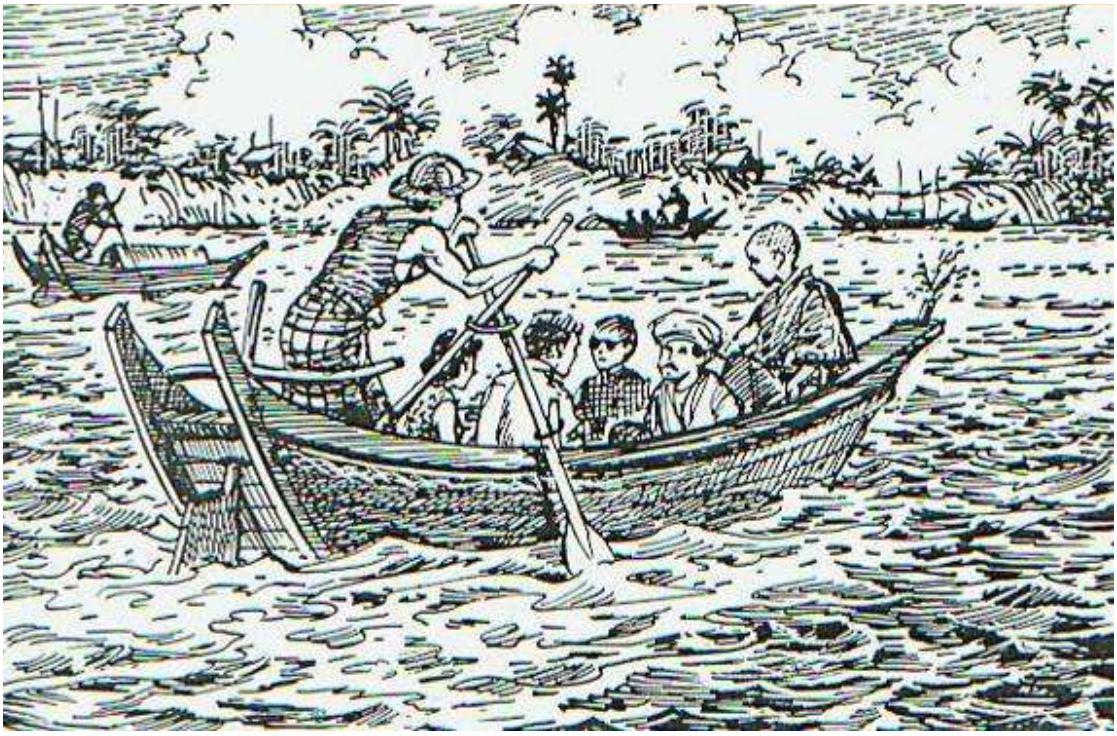
They traveled through a green tunnel formed by the bayou, ten to thirty feet wide, overhung with trees and lined with bushes and shrubs of all kinds.

They passed a village dock and saw a boat taxi landing passengers. A soldier stepped ashore last. Dave thought, "I bet he's on leave and glad to get home." Dave could not have imagined the turmoil in Maung Aye's mind. While glad to be seeing his family, he would also see Bo Kya's parents who would want details on their son's death.

Rounding a bend, the Neilsons and their escorts discovered many boats moored along the shore flying the Christian flag--red cross on a blue corner field on a large white field. They arrived to find about fifty persons lining the banks waiting for them.

The boat eased up to one of several new bamboo docks cleverly built with a slope so it was useable regardless of tide level. Paul climbed nimbly onto the dock but Dave, noting the many faces watching, hoped he would not provide entertainment stepping from the narrow rocking boat to the slippery bamboo dock. The Karens, aware of the Dave's and Catherine's unsureness, provided many helping hands supporting them every inch of the way.





Climbing the bank brought them to the edge of a vast plain of paddy fields now stubble and bone dry as this was the dry season and the paddy (rice) had been harvested months before.

In the midst of these fields they saw over a dozen buildings of bamboo framework, thatch roofs, and woven bamboo walls all erected for this convention. Dave later learned that many youth and men came a week earlier to construct these buildings. The largest, about fifty by one hundred and fifty feet, held large assemblies. A large stage and backdrop occupied one end complete with microphones, speakers and lights powered by a portable generator. Rooms behind the stage provided a place where people waited their turn. The stage had chairs, the wings used bamboo benches. The delegates sat on the floor covered with rice straw. Without walls, every breeze cooled the participants. The thatch roof protected them from the sun as no rain would fall this season.

Followed by a large group of curious children, the Neilsons and escorts walked on to the village located in a grove of trees to the pastor's house where Saw Kler Taw indicated they would be staying. Dave noted new construction in back and discovered an Asian type toilet obviously just purchased and installed for the Neilsons. A large jar provided water for washing. Woven bamboo mats gave privacy on all sides. Dave felt the Burmese certainly went to a lot of work and expense to make everything as nice as possible for him and his family.

After a tasty lunch of Burmese rice and curry, Saw Kler Taw asked if they wanted to take rest. They obviously felt fragile Americans needed more rest than Burmese.

"No, let's see the buildings and how a village of four hundred people hosts a convention of four thousand." said Dave.

Saw Kler Taw, pleased with Dave's interest, led them from the village across the paddy fields.

First, they saw one of the eight sleeping quarters, a long building of bamboo and thatch with woven bamboo walls. A hallway ran down the middle and each side had one long room with rice straw for bedding. Women and children slept on one side, men and older boys on the other. Burmese sleep quite comfortably in their clothes not needing sheets or blankets.

Dozens of children appeared from nowhere and surrounded them.

In the kitchen, teams of people busily cleaned up from the last meal and prepared for the next one. Bamboo racks held many potatoes, green tomatoes, onions, and other green vegetables Dave didn't recognize. Many bags of rice lined the wall. Outside the kitchen, pens held pigs and chickens waiting their turn to satisfy the hungry delegates. With no refrigeration, they killed and ate meat on the same day.

Dozens of men and women peeled, sliced and prepared ingredients for the large woks--large half spheres used for cooking. A long row of woks covered holes in the ground. Another hole had been dug down beside it and then over to bisect the hole under the wok. A fire heated the wok, fed by the side hole. A smaller hole on the opposite side acted as a chimney and provided draft. A team fed the fire and stirred the spicy stew-like curry with long paddles.

Rice cooked in large drums in unbelievable quantities. Americans, who think of a serving of rice as being two tablespoons, are amazed to see the Burmese serving of several cups for each adult. A serving meant filling a square of banana leaf with fluffy, soft rice, with a spoon full of curry in the center. They gathered the four corners of the leaf into the center and held it with a thorn.

When each delegate registered, he received a colored tag. At mealtime a large colored flag indicated which color tag should come to eat. They washed at a long line of large bamboo pipes on legs about four feet off the ground. Large holes in the top allowed for easy filling with water. About every twelve inches, a hole had been drilled in the bottom side and a bamboo spike inserted down to this hole from a corresponding hole in the top. Lifting this spike caused the water to trickle down and the delegates washed their hands, replacing the spike when finished. Youth refilled the bamboo tubes as needed.

Delegates picked up their leaf wrapped food parcels, eating at long tables and benches, again made of split bamboo. Karens eat with their right hand mixing the curry and rice into a ball and popping it

into their mouths. Therefore no utensils are needed. Bananas and other fruits provided the dessert. Karens are "eat and run" people not accustomed to talking and visiting while eating, so a large number can be fed quickly. When one color had been served, they ran up a flag of another color until all had eaten. Banana leaf plates and left over rice was fed to the pigs, demonstrating instant recycling.

As the Neilsons moved around the conference grounds, an increasing number of children followed them with large examining eyes. "They seem to find us quite interesting." Dave remarked to Saw Kler Taw.

"Most are village children who have never seen a white person," answered Saw Kler Taw.

Catherine, not as interested in the mechanics of the convention as Dave, entertained herself by holding up one finger and saying "tit", then two "hnit" and then three "thone". At four she pointed to one of the children. Invariably, the children caught on and shouted "Lay" which Catherine tried to imitate. They found her pronunciation hilarious and corrected her. Some seemed hard put to understand how an adult couldn't even count in Burmese or Karen.

Older children tested their limited English vocabulary asking, "What is your name?" Catherine would answer, "My name is Catherine. What is your name?" Their eyes became big in a reaction similar to what an American Latin student would have had if he ran into a Roman actually speaking Latin. Later, Catherine met elementary teachers who taught English but had never spoken with an English-speaking person!

Many of the children had thanaka, a light yellow paste, spread on their faces. Some children close to Catherine rubbed her arms to see if the white of her skin would rub off like thanaka (Burmese skin conditioner).

Saw Kler Taw showed the Neilsons more bamboo and thatch buildings along one side of the conference grounds. The size of a Burmese house or an American double garage, they housed a first aid station, and a bookstore with all kinds of Christian literature displayed on bamboo racks. "If you could get to the moon using bamboo," thought Dave, "the Karens would be there, too."

The third housed a teashop set up by the students of a nearby Bible School to raise money.

Saw Kler Taw explained the fourth provided quarters for security personnel from various Burman Intelligence groups sent to keep an eye on the Karens and their conference. The Karens provided good food and a sleeping place for them. Some of the police did not like to work Christian conferences because the delegates never got drunk or into fights so they made no arrests and no one had to pay bribes to get free. Others considered it a mini vacation with good food and nothing really to do. Some read novels while others tried to flirt with Karen girls who pretended they didn't understand Burmese and ignored them.

Latrines, screened by woven bamboo walls, had large Karen letters representing men and women, made out of straw bound with string like American straw Christmas wreaths.

Across a small stream, another dozen booths set up by entrepreneurs, sold tea, household goods, toys, thanaka (skin conditioner), and other things they hoped the delegates would buy.

Off to the side, teams of youth from different churches competed in volleyball for the conference championship.

The tour completed, they went to the main conference "hall" filling with people for the afternoon session. They led the Neilsons to chairs on the stage. Saw Kler Taw said to Dave, "You will be asked to speak. It would be best if you do not say anything controversial." Dave pondered this warning. When introduced and asked to speak, he carefully chose his words thanking the leaders for inviting them, reminiscing about his father's appreciation for the Sgaw Karens he had worked with and being thankful to the government authorities for giving permission for the Neilsons to attend. Saw Kler Taw translated and the crowd responded appreciatively.

After Dave sat down, he leaned over and asked Saw Kler Taw, "Did I say anything that might offend the government?'

"No, you did just fine."

"What would they do to me if I said something they found offensive?"

"Nothing to you. I am your guarantor and I would have gone to jail on your behalf," Saw Kler Taw answered.

A cold chill ran down Dave's back. What a lot he didn't know about Burma. One misstatement could land someone in jail.

The meeting continued and the Neilsons moved to the side stage. Dave noticed a large group of attentive young men and women seated in the rice straw on the front all wearing white and blue tops. "Who are these?" he asked Saw Kler Taw.

"They are the sixty one evangelists of our Association." answered Saw Kler Taw, "Even in this part of Burma where Karens have been Christians for over 150 years, there are many non-Christian villages and we are trying to reach them."

Dave also learned thirty other employees of the association worked with youth, women, and other specialties. In America, large, wealthy churches hire specialized talent for youth, and other areas of concern. Small churches have only one minister. If the youth are few, no program exists for them. In Burma the Association of 233 churches hires six youth workers. They program for all the youth in the association. The two or three youth of a small church are included and participate. "These Karens may be poor," Dave thought, "but their organization and strategy is well thought through. They certainly could teach us American churches something."

A choir, with all its members dressed in matching red Karen costumes, sang beautifully. At each session a different choir performed. In an earlier contest, they awarded the best choirs prizes.

The meeting continued in Karen, which none of the Neilsons understood. They tried to look interested. As the minutes turned to hours, his son, Paul, stopped trying and looked bored. Saw Kler Taw said firmly it was time to take rest and the Neilsons agreed.

While walking toward the pastor's house, an old man stopped them and tried to tell them something but his English failed him. He proudly showed Dave a worn, tattered piece of paper--a school form dated 1931 said this man had completed eighth standard and failed, signed by Dave's father! Burmese considered having even attended eighth standard and failed noteworthy. With Saw Kler Taw translating, the man expressed his gratitude to Dave's father for being his teacher. It touched Dave's heart the man had kept that note for over fifty years.

Back at the pastor's house, a bedroom set up with new mattresses and mosquito netting awaited the Neilsons. They needed to rest and sort out the many thoughts swarming through their heads.

The Neilsons enjoyed a delicious mild curry and rice for supper cooked by those who had accompanied them. The security agent ate in one corner. The cooks kept it mild, convinced Americans could not really eat hot spicy food.

That evening Youth Night featured speakers to the youth and youth participating in many ways. Most adults left after the first part. Then the part the youth really enjoyed began. A Christian musical group came from Rangoon with their guitars, keyboards, drums and brass. An attractive female soloist proved her talent. Paul said the music, all popular U.S rock, used Karen or Burmese words. Dave hoped they proved more spiritual than the original words.

After an hour, they retired at Saw Kler Taw's suggestion. They crossed the paddy field, taking care to step over the dikes. As the bright moon showed the way, Saw Kler Taw explained they scheduled the meetings during the full moon as most delegates owned no electric "torch" as he called a flashlight.

Quietness prevailed in the village as no roads ran through it or even to it. Delegates all came by boat or ox cart. The Neilsons retired to the bedroom while Saw Kler Taw and the helpers held evening prayers. Then they and the security man slept in the all purpose family room. Unfortunately a mother pig, kept beneath the house, decided this night to wean her piglets and much squealing and oinking ensued. It sounded as if she was killing them but all survived the night. "They can't be more than two

feet below the floor," groaned Dave. He was right. Before daylight their hosts prepared breakfast. Dave decided to use the specially built bathing house and went out early to take a sponge bath. "A cold bath on a cool morning with cold water," thought Dave, "the things I get myself into!" Bracing himself, he dipped his washcloth into the jar of water. WARM WATER!!! Incredible! Someone got up earlier and heated their bath water. He enjoyed a very pleasant bath and felt glad he used it. How would the Karens have felt if he had not used it? At breakfast, leaders and pastors, who wanted to meet Dave, joined them. Many told stories about his father and expressed appreciation for things he had done for them. One told of how Dave's father helped him get a scholarship so he could study for full time Christian service. He served as a minister for over forty years. Dave learned about many good works his father never mentioned.

Breakfast over, Dave asked the pastor to show him the village church. Obviously pleased, he led the Neilsons among the houses to a corrugated iron covered building surrounded by a bamboo picket fence.

The church sat in a cleanly swept yard. Corrugated iron is considered "puckha" (first class) when all the other houses are thatch and bamboo. It represented the best the village could afford. The pastor said, "This church was first built in 1886. We hoped to paint it but money is scarce." From other conversations Dave knew the average paddy farmer handled less than $50 cash a year. "Most of our members tithe (give a tenth of their income)," the pastor said. Dave felt ashamed thinking of the giving record of the members of his church back home, any one of whom had more income than this entire village combined. Dave knew the pastor would refuse money for the Neilsons using his house for their stay so he slipped him some kyats for the church. He got the kyats by selling the legally allowed cigarettes and whiskey he brought into the country. Dave wondered if the pastor approved of such a profit--better he didn't know.

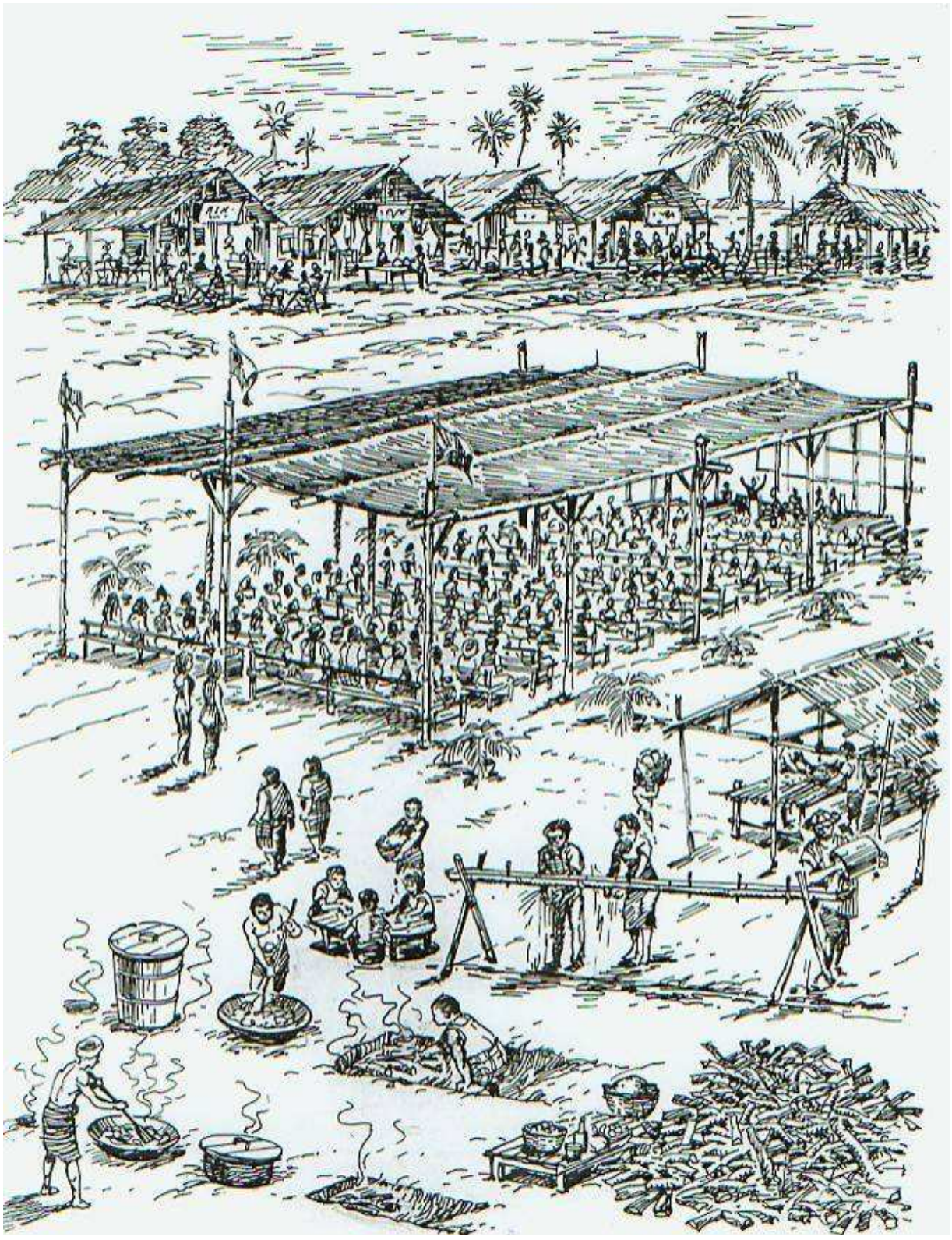
Saw Kler Taw reminded Dave they must be leaving soon to catch the steamer to Rangoon. Catherine found some extra T shirts and gave them to the pastor's wife. Although they attended the conference less than 24 hours, it seemed much longer. Goodbyes came hard and eyes filled with tears. Dave now understood much better why his father so deeply loved these people.

While a boy growing up, he saw his father only six weeks during a fourteen year period. Dave felt a deep resentment because his father chose Burma over being his father. But now that he saw the people with whom his father worked, and how much the Karens appreciated his father, he understood. He realized, with a start, that he now agreed with his father, that working with the Karens was the right choice.

Much later, at the airport, getting ready to leave, an immigration official recognized him and asked, "Did you enjoy my country?"

"Yes, very much," answered Dave, "but remember, it's my country, too."

"Oh yes," the official replied, remembering the "Place of Birth: Burma" in his passport.



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The Guide

Con Pa Li looked at the scheduling board as he prepared to leave work. Tomorrow his name appeared as guide for the Neilson party of three for one day. "They probably speak English," Con Pa Li guessed, as the name didn't sound Italian--the other language he was fluent in.

The next morning he arrived promptly at 9 at the government hotel, the time the touring was posted as starting. Usually tourists were late, giving him time for a second cup of coffee, but he arrived to find the Neilson party waiting for him. Mr. Neilson introduced his wife, Catherine, and son, Paul. That made a favorable impression on Con Pa Li because some groups wouldn't introduce themselves or acted as if no Burmese could possibly remember their names. Con Pa Li then said, "I am Con Pa Li your guide for the day. You can call me Paul." Most foreigners had trouble pronouncing many Burmese names and preferred to use an English sounding nickname.

"We're ready when you are, Con Pa Li" said Mr. Neilson.

"His pronunciation of Con Pa Li was not quite right but at least he tried," thought Con Pa Li. "English speakers are not aware of the importance of tone and whether the end sound rises, drops, stretches out or quickly ends."

Con Pa Li checked the board to see which vehicle his party was scheduled to use. He noted it was a twenty passenger bus, which meant all the smaller vehicles had been assigned to other small parties. "Is my bus ready?" he asked the desk girl at Tourist Burma.

"Your driver is probably having tea. Tourists rarely are ready when they are supposed to be." she said in Burmese.

Sure enough, Con Pa Li found his driver with the other drivers having tea in the back. Telling him to meet them in front, Con Pa Li went to the Neilsons and led them out front. "Did you have a good night's sleep?" asked Con Pa Li, partly because he had been taught as a guide to show interest in his charges' comfort and partly because Burmese culture considered personal questions normal.

"We slept very well," Catherine responded. "The bungalows are so nice."

"Well, that was a refreshing response," thought Con Pa Li. "So many of the tourists focus on the negative and compare Burma's facilities unfavorably with wealthier, neighboring countries."

As the twenty passenger bus left with its four passengers, Dave Neilson asked, "Con Pa Li, what ethnic group are you?"

"Mon," he answered and thought, "This tourist even knows there are different groups in Burma." Then he asked, "Do you know about the Mons?"

"Not much," answered Dave, "I know they are an ancient people with their own language, customs, dress and have their own state. They had a kingdom before the Burman Kingdom with their capital at Pegu. Probably they would have been better off if they had been more generous with the Buddhist scriptures."

"This is not the average tourist," thought Con Pa Li. "He even knows Burmese history and that Anawrahta, King of Upper Burma, asked Manuha, King of the Mons in Lower Burma, for a set of Buddhist scriptures. When Manuha refused, Anawrahta attacked and destroyed the Mon kingdom and carried the scriptures back to Pagan." He said aloud, "You know a lot about Burma."

"More than most," conceded Dave. "Tell us about Pagan."

"Pagan was founded about the beginning of the Christian era but its golden era began in 1057 with the conquest of Thaton and continued until 1287 when it was overrun by the forces of Kublai Khan. During that era over 12,000 temples and pagodas of all sizes and styles were constructed. We will see some of the remaining 5,000. Now a temple has rooms and halls and usually has one or four images of

Buddha in it. A pagoda is a solid structure with no rooms in it. As you can see along the road, these come in all sizes and are over eight hundred years old. We have earthquakes here from time to time which accounts for much of the damage you see to many of the structures."

"If 12,000 were built and 5,000 remain, what happened to the 7,000? I thought no good Buddhist would tear down a pagoda." asked David.

"You are right in that Buddhists think it is inauspicious to tear down a temple or pagoda. But Narathihapati destroyed many for building materials in 1287 to strengthen the city walls against the invasion from China. Others have just crumbled to dust," said their guide.

All around them, as far as they could see in all directions away from the river, stood thousands of pagodas ranging in size from a few feet tall to two hundred feet. They ranged in volume from a garage size to taking up a city block--impressive buildings even today and absolutely stunning at the time they were built. The important ones, built by kings, had been repaired after the last big earthquake in 1975, but thousands of smaller ones ranged in condition from good condition to down to a pile of bricks with every state of preservation in between.

"Did people live in these buildings?" asked the son, Paul.

"No, these are all places of worship or built to gain merit. We Buddhists believe building a pagoda gains the builder merit. Some have little money and so you see small ones built by them. Others had more money and built as they could afford. Kings, of course, had the wealth of the country at their command and built the massive one." Con Pa Li explained. "Ancient Pagan occupied what is now the farm land between these ruins. But the Palace, monasteries, government buildings and houses of all classes were of wood and have completely disappeared."

"Everything looks so dry!" commented Catherine, "I thought all of Burma was tropical."

"Central Burma really is quite dry--almost a desert. It probably was wetter when Pagan held tens of thousands of people. Some say the weather has become drier, others say originally this area was heavily forested and denuded to burn the bricks used in making all these pagodas. This deforestation changed the climate."

"I was surprised to see cacti," added Dave.

"I think we might start with Shwezigon Pagoda and then work our way back toward the hotel. This pagoda is 165 feet square and 165 feet tall." said Con Pa Li as the bus pulled up at the gate to the precinct. "It is Buddhist custom to remove your foot covering and socks when entering a temple or climbing up a pagoda so let us leave our shoes here."

"This pagoda was started by King Anawrahta on Thursday the 10th waxing moon of Tabodwe (February) in the year 421 Burmese Era, or 1059 AD as you date it. It was completed thirty one years later. It houses the sacred frontal bone of Buddha and a replica of Buddha's sacred tooth.

David said nothing although he noted the similarity between the Catholic's esteem for relics and the Buddhist's. As a Baptist he found relics a quaint holdover from medieval times.

The size and power of the architecture with its three layers of brown terraces topped by a tremendous bell shaped gilded top was impressive.

"Wow," said Paul, "now that's something else!"

Con Pa Li led his party to the base of the pagoda which seemed to grow in size as you approached it. Climbing one of the steep stairs in the middle of each side, they stepped out on one of the terraces and their guide said, "Note the enameled plaques set in the walls. They illustrate the 550 Jataka stories connected with Buddha in his various lives."

Climbing two more steep flights of stairs, they came to the base of the brightly gleaming gold round bell shaped top that towered above them. Its top was capped with a Hti (umbrella). At the tip top of the umbrella, Con Pa Li said, was a diamond.

"Look at all the pagodas!" said Paul gazing at the thousands of pagodas and temples stretching off into the distance. "That is really impressive."

Con Pa Li pointed out several nearby large ones, naming them until he sensed his party was suffering from information overload. "Let's go down on the grounds, there are several things you might find interesting."

"Can we see the dedication inscription stone?" asked Catherine which told Con Pa Li she had been reading the guide books.

Taking them to a shed, Con Pa Li showed them several inscribed stones that proclaimed who and when the pagoda had been built or repaired.

"It looks like Burmese, can you read that?" asked Paul.

"Most of it is in Pali, the language of our Buddhist scripture. It is related to Burmese and I can read some words." their guide answered.

Surrounding the Shwezigon pagoda were many temples, smaller pagodas, pilgrim houses, zayats (places of instruction), shops, four thirteen foot images of Buddha, cave like structures, and two causeways. Because the Neilson family showed interest, Con Pa Li pointed out the ancient inscribed bells, a door with elaborate carvings from the golden era, various Buddha statutes from different periods and the Nat (Spirit) shrine with thirty seven nat images on the southeast corner of the platform.

"How do these Nats fit in to Buddhism?" asked Catherine.

"Frankly, speaking," said Con Pa Li, "They don't. They are left over from preBuddhist times and worshiped by simple people because they have always worshiped them. Sophisticated pongyis (monks) and educated Buddhists don't worship or believe in them but it is impossible to change the peasants."

"I have heard that each great Buddhist temple has something supernatural about it. Is that true for this one?" asked David.

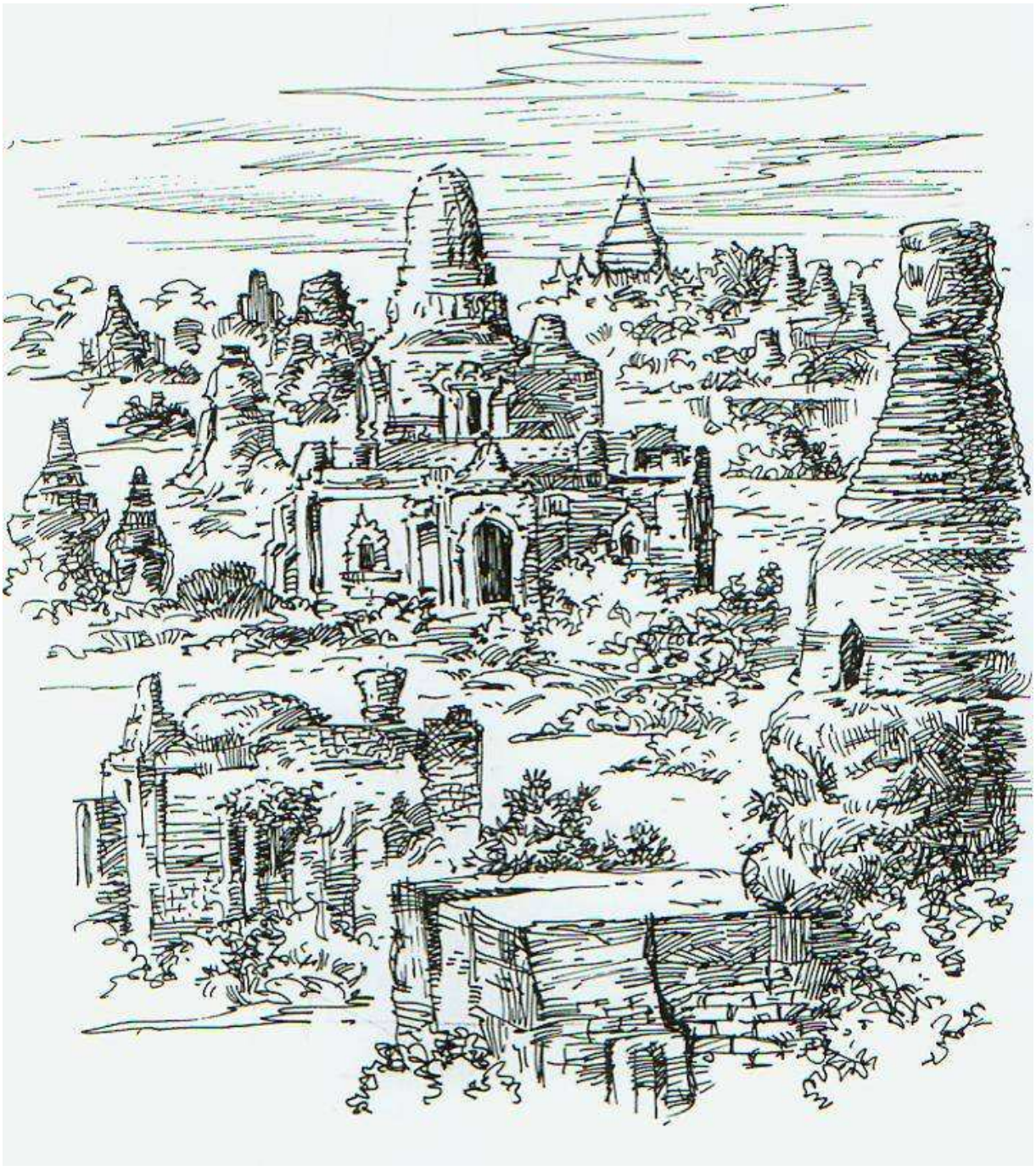
"Yes, there are said to be nine wonders at this pagoda. They are: 1. The Hti has no iron buttresses, 2. the shadows of the precinct walls do not change position, 3. Papers that hold gold foils are dropped from the height of the Pagoda after gilding, but they never land outside the precinct, 4. the precinct can accommodate any number of visitors and pilgrims, 5. There is always an early offering of steamed rice at the Pagoda, 6. the big drum being beaten on one side of the Pagoda cannot be heard on the other side, 7. the Pagoda gives you an illusion of being on a ridge, 8. Regardless of heavy rainfall, no rain water remains in the compound, and 9. there are, in the precinct, Khaye trees and Chayar trees which bloom all the year round." Con Pa Li shared.

"If a rumor started that a three day visit to this pagoda would result in a visa to the U.S., this place would not be able to hold all the visitors it would suddenly receive," thought David.

Boarding the bus, they went to another large temple. As they were leaving, Catherine asked, "Will we have an opportunity to purchase lacquerware here?"

"We can stop at a shop now," said Con Pa Li, who planned to stop anyway because guides received "tea money" from the shop owners for bringing tourists to shop.

At the shop the owner explained how lacquerware was made. "First the bases are woven from fine bamboo and then covered with a mixture of clay and lacquer and allowed to dry. Then after careful sanding, it was covered again and the process repeated until a smooth surface resulted. Then black lacquer made from the sap of the thitsi tree was painted on the object and it was allowed to cure for three or four days. It took many coats to make a beautiful covering. There are twelve stages of production."



Taking his charges to a workshop in back, Con Pa Li showed them a worker with a sharp tool engraving lines, designs, and figures on the containers. Another worker then rubbed a green paste into the scratches. After drying, another worker rubbed it with rice husks removing all the green from the surface but leaving it in the scratches which made green lines. More design was added and then rubbed with red and the process repeated again using yellow paste. It took six months to complete an article with three colors of lines.

"U Con Pa Li, what do the figures represent?" asked Catherine, picking up a piece.

"This is the king seated in the center with his ministers on each side. The designs have not changed for over 800 years." responded Con Pa Li while he thought "I'm not old enough to have my name prefixed with the honorary title U but I appreciate her trying to use Burmese titles."

Then he added, "None of the raw materials used in making lacquerware are found at Pagan. They are all brought from elsewhere but when Pagan was a royal city, lacquerware was made for the king, royalty, and nobles and it has continued to be made here ever since.

In another section of the shop a different process was being used. On the hard, dried black lacquer, a solution of gum was painted in the desired design or figures. Then thin gold leaf was applied which stuck to the gum but was wiped away from the other areas. The gold leaf was burnished and then coated with clear varnish to protect it. When done by a skilled artisan, the final product was stunning.

The shop contained an incredible variety of lacquerware products--containers of all sizes, bowls, cups, boxes, tables, vases, tumblers, plaques, coasters, plates. While most were black with the red, green and yellow designs, some had gold leaf designs. These made beautiful plates, wall plaques, and small containers shaped like owls, birds, turtles, and fish. The goods filled every nook and cranny.

"Can lacquerware take heat?" asked Catherine.

"You can pour boiling water in lacquerware because it can take wet heat but not dry heat like putting it on a fire," answered Con Pa Li.

Catherine examined many pieces before finally settling for four wall panels in black lacquer with gold leaf designs, exclaiming, "These will really look nice in the hall." Then she picked out a large round container with slip overtop. "What is this for?"

"It is for lapet, pickled tea leaves." said Con Pa Li removing the top and revealing a round tray divided into compartments. "Each compartment would contain ground nuts (peanuts), sesame seeds, crispy garlic, dried prawns (shrimp), crisp fried beans, and in the tray underneath pickled tea leaves. A guest then mixes them as it pleases him."

"I think it would make a nice sewing box. Will you bargain for us for them?" asked Catherine giving Con Pa Li a winsome smile.

Con Pa Li asked the shop keeper his best price in Burmese. The shop keeper quoted, saying it was his very best price. Con Pa Li countered, reminding him he had sold a similar container to an Italian lady for less last week. The shop keeper sighed as he remembered that long bargaining session. Con Pa Li added that he liked these tourists and wanted the best price for them. Finally a bargain was struck.

After visiting another temple, they returned to the hotel for lunch. "Do you want to take rest this afternoon?" Con Pa Li asked.

"No, there is so much to see," answered David and a time was set.

After picking them up, he took them to other temples. David was really impressed with how tightly the bricks were fitted together. "They were ground against each other." Con Pa Li explained.

As the day became hotter, Con Pa Li structured the tour so that much of the time was spent in the cool inner rooms of the temples. He smiled when he remembered how he took one tour group that particularly annoyed him with their derogatory remarks, to the south side of a white pagoda in the afternoon sun. Even he found the reflected sun uncomforting. That group had decided to call it quits at 2:00.

Paul loved to climb the steep stairs on the pagodas. Some have narrow inner stairways to the lower levels with local boys offering flashlights for a nominal tip. Catherine did not like the steep stairs and often declined to go up all the way. Dave explained she had broken a leg in an auto accident several years before and still did not feel secure in climbing about.

After a particularly strenuous climb, Con Pa Li suggested they might like a cool drink and took them to a stand. Paul asked the price of a Pepsi and translating it into dollars said, "That's $1.50 even at black rate and $4.50 at white rate."

"That's because it has to be smuggled in from Thailand," said Con Pa Li. "The sparkling lemon is much more reasonable."

When they indicated they wanted sparkling lemon, Con Pa Li examined the bottles, satisfying himself they were government bottled pop. Sometimes stands reused the government bottles and caps but their product was not sterile and would give tourists gastric problems. Of course Dave treated Con Pa Li to a bottle.

As they sipped, Con Pa Li said, "Soon the sun will be going down. Some find watching the sunset from the high platform on a temple a beautiful sight. Would you like to do that?"

"That sounds wonderful!" both David and Catherine exclaimed.

As the sun began to set, they made their way to the top level of a temple giving Catherine plenty of help with Con Pa Li always below her. The upper terrace was only two feet wide with no railing and a twenty foot drop to the next terrace. Catherine inched her way along it with encouragement from both sides until they were on the west side. There they watched the sun go down and the changing colors of the many brown pagodas and temples spread out before them. It reminded David of the Grand Canyon's changing colors in sunset. The Irrawaddy River sparkled like a sheet of silver as the sun went down in the mountains beyond. A slight breeze added to the pleasantness.

"The sun certainly goes down quickly and darkness descends without much twilight." said David.

As they returned to the hotel, Con Pa Li asked, "If you like I can make arrangements for you to see a Burmese puppet show tonight."

"I would love that!" Catherine exclaimed.

"I'll arrange for a horse cart to pick you up at 8:30 to take you to the puppet show and he'll bring you back. It will cost 35 kyats for the three of you. I can not join you but will see you in the morning to take you to the airport."

As the bus pulled into the circular drive at the hotel, David said, "We customarily tip good guides and you have been very helpful. But we only have kyats exchanged at official rate which makes them very expensive. Would you like a thirty kyat tip or a roll of film?"

"I prefer a roll of film," answered Con Pa Li knowing that some tourists would need it and be willing to pay 100 kyats for it. Since he was paid 15 kyats a day, tips were very important.

After choosing and enjoying the Burmese meal, the Neilsons rested and then went out at the designated time to meet the horse cart. As they stood on the hotel's porch, an older Burmese man approached them and asked, "Horse cart and puppet show?"

When he received a positive response, he led them beyond the hotel's gate to his cart and all climbed aboard. "I bet the hotel doesn't allow horse carts in their drive up and this whole deal is probably not government sanctioned." guessed David and he was right.

The horse cart took them through the dark night to a stand whose proprietor led them to a tiny theater behind it with bench seats. Two back packers completed the audience.

The wooden puppets, with hinged arms and legs, were manipulated by strings and performed several plays. The dialogue was all in Burmese but one could get the drift of the plot. At one point, the upper curtain above the stage was raised allowing the audience to see how the puppeteer manipulated the puppets. He had obviously performed many years and the skill with which he made the puppets live and act proved very entertaining. Some puppets were persons and others horses and other animals; all

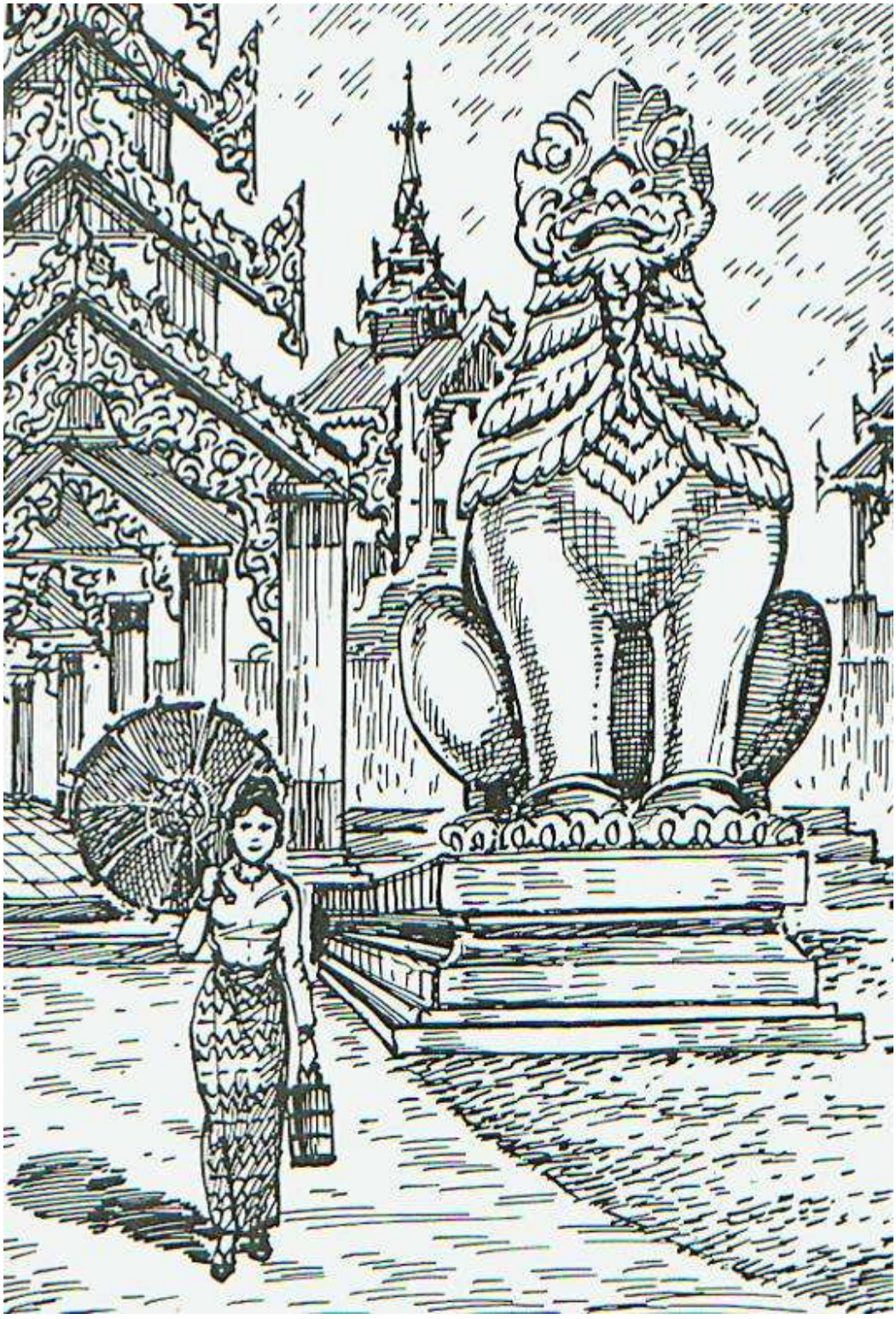
were convincing.

When the show finished, the cart returned them to their hotel. The next day David surprised the waiter by asking for mohinga--a fish chowder the Burmese like for breakfast but none was available, so they settled for an English breakfast of eggs and toast. Looking at the printed bill, David said, "They still call the waiters 'Boy' just like the British did forty years ago. You would think in a People's Socialistic State the derogatory term 'Boy' would have been dropped."

After packing, they boarded the bus with Con Pa Li and went to the airport. David noted each group was taken in a separate vehicle and asked why. "Some groups don't want to intermingle with other groups." answered Con Pa Li. So five vehicles took groups that could have all gotten on the largest bus.

While waiting for the plane, they sat on a bench beside the control tower, a two story building. Burmese could be heard in the control room and the radio. Con Pa Li listened to the conversation and then said, "The plane has been delayed but has now left so will arrive here within the hour."

When the plane arrived, the Neilsons said good-by to Con Pa Li. As Con Pa Li watched them leave, he thought, "It is surely nice to guide appreciative tourists."



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Mandalay

As the plane banked over Mandalay, Paul Neilson exclaimed, "I can see a large fort surrounded by a moat!"

"That's the original royal city," said his father, Dave, "It used to contain the royal palace but that was destroyed in World War II.

The plane soon landed and Dave, his wife, Catherine, and Paul disembarked, went through inspection, and found the Tourist Burma bus waiting for them. After arriving at their hotel and settling in their rooms, they went to the Tourist Burma office and found their guide, Zaw Htoo, who would show them the city.

Soon they were visiting pagodas and temples with their guide pointing out interesting things. As they walked barefooted out of one of the Buddhist holy places, they passed a woman sweeping the walk. "I read in a 1920's book that, at that time, there were still pagoda slaves. Are any of these caretakers descended from them?" Dave asked the guide.

"Yes, some of them probably are. The use of pagoda slaves goes back to the 11th century from the time of King Anawrahta. He captured King Manuha of the Mon Kingdom. The captured king built a pagoda at Pagan which is still in existence. King Anawrahta offered his prisoner, King Manuha, his children, and descendants as an offering to the pagoda--to be its slave caretakers forever."

Zaw Htoo continued, "Some of these caretakers' ancestors were captured during one of the Burma-Siam wars and brought as prisoners to Burma and dedicated as slaves to the pagodas. Of course they were allowed to eat the food offered the Buddha and provided with bare necessities. Their children continued as slaves--caretakers through the occupation of the British and the establishment of the modern Burma state. I've heard they have never been officially freed from being pagoda slaves but nowadays they are free to leave and to marry outside the pagoda precinct.

Zaw Htoo continued, "As slaves, they kept the compound clean and removed dying flowers, burned out candles, and stubs of incense sticks. Gradually the stalls developed along the hallways leading to the Buddha and some of the slaves became stall managers working for themselves, although they have to pay rent for the upkeep of the pagoda. At first, the stalls only sold items for offerings, but now you see household goods, cosmetics, hardware, lacquerware, and many items not related to worshiping. Some stall owners have done quite well.."

After visiting the main pagodas they went to Zegyo Market, a series of long, dark buildings with aisles. On each side of the aisles were booths selling all kinds of merchandise. Some sections seemed to specialize in particular types of merchandise. In front of one booth was some newly arrived merchandise from China. "Look how that is packed," said Dave, "That would fit on a pack horse very easily."

"Much of the merchandise comes from China on pack horses.", Zaw Htoo supplied.

As they walked through the aisle, at a narrow place, Catherine came face to face with a Burmese man. He stepped aside and let her pass. When he was out of earshot, Catherine said, "He had grey greenish eyes, reddish hair and looks darker than most Burmese. Most Burmese seem to have dark brown eyes and black hair."

"You are very observant," said Zaw Htoo, "He is probably Ba-yin-ji, I mean of Portuguese descent. There are two sources of Portuguese blood. One source came from Phillip De Brito, a Portuguese free booter who had carved out a piece of territory at Syriam across from Rangoon in the 1600's. This enclave of Portuguese men had married Burmese wives and maintained its independence from Burmese kings' authorities until King Alaungpaya had conquered Syriam in the 1700's. The king then took the survivors and relocated them to Shwebo in upper Burma where he could keep a close eye on them.

"The other source came from the Portuguese gunners imported by Prince Kanaung Min Tha in the middle of the 1800's to establish a musket factory to arm the Burmese army against any further incursions by the British. Other Portuguese had responsibility for the artillery--its care, aiming and firing. Prince Kanaung Min Than had sent carefully chosen Burmese to study the technology of Europe. He chose only Burmese who were strong and tall to go on this fact finding mission as he did not want the Europeans looking down on the Burmese. He also imported Italian artists who taught the Burmese perspective drawing.

The Prince figured there would be another war with the British and the British would come by boat, so he experimented with bombs that could be exploded underwater and therefore under the British ships. One of the test bombs was so powerful and so destructive that the prince was horrified by the destruction it caused and stopped working on that weapon. Historians speculate whether such a weapon might have changed the outcome of the Third Anglo Burmese War. However Prince Kanaung Min Than fell victim to palace intrigue and he was assassinated. The Portuguese he brought to establish the arms factory stayed on, intermarrying with the Portuguese who had already been here for three centuries, and with the Burmese.

"Do they speak Portuguese?" asked Paul.

"No, I think not." answered Zaw Htoo. "Most live quietly in villages raising pigs and driving trucks. They are simple village folks generally quite docile, who know their place.

Postscript: The royal palace at Mandalay has since been rebuilt in its Burmese splendor as a center piece of national pride and a tourist attraction.

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The Refugee Child

Dee Na woke to the smell of acrid wood smoke. Light began to dawn. Her mother, Paw Paw, built the fire to cook breakfast. All across the village of thatched houses smoke rose through the roofs and spread in layers in the damp air. Some foreign visitors thought the houses appeared to be burning since Sgaw Karen houses don't have chimneys. The smoke from the cooking fires works its way out through the split bamboo walls and teak leaf roofs driving away insects. Dee Na knew that breakfast would be very sparse.

Yesterday her uncle, Eh Kyaw, had unexpectedly stopped by with his friend. The Sgaw Karen custom of hospitality required visitors be properly fed. Dee Na's mother cooked the last of their rice and set it before Eh Kyaw and his friend as they visited. That afternoon they had gone on to Mae Sot and when the evening meal came her mother served the rice that was left from feeding Eh Kyaw to Dee Na, and her brothers Htoo Saw and Eh Moo. Dee Na noticed her mother ate nothing and asked why. "I'm not hungry." her mother lied. Dee Na knew better. Her mother refused food so her children could eat. Fortunately their ration receiving day was only one day away. Then they would receive another week's supply of food. The problem was finding something to eat until then.

After Dee Na washed her face in the cold water, her mother called her to breakfast. Paw Paw handed her a bowl of thin soup with greens in it that gave it a little flavoring. At least it was warm and filled the belly.

After breakfast Dee Na took her younger brother, Htoo Saw, and set out into the surrounding woods to hunt for firewood and edible plants or roots. She wished Thai authorities allowed her mother to have a garden as she did in Burma. They never hungered there. Her mother knew how to grow so many good things. Dee Na hurried as fast as Htoo Saw could walk, not bothering to look for food in the first mile as they walked away from camp. Every thing burnable and edible had long since been scavenged by the 4,000 hungry persons constantly searching. Birds, snakes, monkeys, grubs, crickets, grasshoppers, frogs, minnows, crayfish, field mice, rats and other wild life disappeared to feed the hungry.

At a fork in the path, Dee Na took the way less traveled. Her keen, black eyes scanned right and left. She noticed one of the branches high on a small tree had been bent. Looking up to the great tree above it, she saw a stub of newly broken wood. Guessing a dead branch had broken off and hit the smaller tree, Dee Na made her way through the weeds and found a good size branch lying out of sight from the path. With Htoo Saw's help she dragged it back to the path. Leaving him to guard the branch, she continued her search 2 miles farther. At last she found some edible greens called Kaw Say Dot growing by a small stream. Intermingled with lotus, it had been overlooked by previous searchers. She gathered it all, knowing what was not needed for their family her mother would share with a widow. Thramu Naw Paw had no one to scavenge for her. Her two sons had been killed in the fighting long ago.

Dee Na and Htoo Saw returned by noon. Dragging the branch, they carried an arm load of Kaw Say Dot to their mother. While Paw Paw made a soup from most of the greens, Dee Na carried a portion of the greens to Thramu Naw Paw. She accepted the greens with gratitude and tried to give Dee Na one of her flowers she tenderly nurtured in tin cans along the edge of her porch. Dee Na begged off, saying she could not accept on behalf of her mother. Even in a desolate refugee camp, people attempted to have a little beauty around them.

When Dee Na returned home, the soup was ready and they had prayer. As always Paw Paw prayed that God would be with her husband, Saw Htoo Saw and protect him from Burmese bullets. Dee Na prayed too. She missed her father. The soup tasted sweet. One meal of this soup was acceptable but

Dee Na knew there would be three more meals of it before ration issuing time. Eating did not seem complete without rice. How Dee Na wished the Burmese army would go away and leave them alone. They could go back to their lands and rebuild their village and farm again. Some refugees tried to sneak back to Burma and farm whenever the Burmese army left the area, but that was risky and disappointing. Pastor Joseph, a Karen minister, had been caught and killed by an army patrol while trying to harvest his garden. The patrols destroyed gardens when they found them or hid mines in them.

The rest of the day Dee Na watched her mother weave on a back loom. Dee Na tried to do the same on a smaller version. The back strings were attached to a post and held tight with a strap around the back, while threads were woven through the strings and pounded tight to make cloth. Varying the color of the threads produced a beautiful design. Dee Na's piece was mostly plain allowing her to concentrate on getting the thread evenly spaced and in place with the same pressure so the cloth would be even.

Tedious, back breaking work, it took 12 to 14 hours to make a shoulder bag that the Thai buyer would only pay 90 baht (at 25 baht to a dollar--$3.60). Since the materials cost 25 baht, the gain was only 65 baht or 4 1/2 Baht per hour (18 cents). There were no jobs available and her father only earned rations as a solder in the Karen army. Since they did not have Thai papers, they could not get beyond the military check point twelve miles inside the border. Already over 50,000 Karen refugees in Thailand were living in sixteen camps along the border making jobs and opportunities scarce.

"Why don't you go visit Mai Pai?" her mother asked Dee Na. Mai Pai had been a soldier working for the Karen National Union. When a mortar shell failed to explode, Karen soldiers would dig it up and bring the dud shell to Mai Pai who carefully took it apart, rebuilt and rearmed it so it could be fired back at the Burmese army. Unfortunately one of the shells he was working on exploded unexpectedly and he lost both hands and eyes. His family could not care for him but a spinster Bible school teacher had taken him in along with six orphan boys. There was little that made life enjoyable for Mai Pai but he did like having Dee Na read from the Bible and Dee Na relished being appreciated.

When evening came, the sound of singing came from various huts at various times as each Christian family had their family devotions which included Bible reading and singing.

On their ration receiving day Paw Paw, Dee Na, Htoo Saw and Eh Moo went to the warehouse to receive their weekly ration. As they walked through the alleys between the huts, they passed a Muslim mosque, a Buddhist monastery and a Christian church. At one time only Christians sought converts among the Karens but now all three religions vied for their allegiance. The Muslims with the greatest infusion of oil money were making the greatest number of converts. Dee Na had heard her father say they could trace their family's conversion to Christianity back to Saw Quala who converted their great, great grandfather. Seeing their church reminded Dee Na of that story. Saw Quala had been an assistant to an American missionary in the 1840s. The missionary had to return to the U.S. for medical treatment and left newly converted Saw Quala in charge of the 400 converts the missionary had made over a twenty year period. The missionary hoped Saw Quala could keep the little churches going until he could return. The missionary's treatment took longer than expected and it was over two years before he could return to Burma. With great anxiety the missionary saw Saw Quala coming to the boat to meet him. The missionary shouted, "Are our flocks still intact?" "Oh, yes," answered Saw Quala, "and we have 2,000 waiting for you to baptize!" Saw Quala had made five times more converts in two years than the missionary had in twenty.

Over the years, about thirty percent of the Karens became Christians but now Buddhism and Islam had developed a zeal to make converts while American Christians' missionary activities declined.

At the warehouse each adult received one viss rice (about 3 1/2 pounds), some salt, and some fish paste. Fish paste is made from aged (westerners say decayed) fish and has a very strong smell and flavor. A little goes a long way in flavoring rice. Once in a great while there was a blanket or some other item from a relief agency. A child's ration was half a viss. While a viss was a weight, a container about 8

inches in diameter and five inches deep was used to give out a viss of rice. The refugees gathered around the person giving out the rations as lines are not part of Karen culture. There was no pushing or shoving as all knew they would get their share of whatever was available. Her mother gossiped with other women while Dee Na played with their children.

Htoo Saw and Eh Moo played with other boys their age. On a smooth piece of ground, they drew a circle and each put in five rubber bands. Drawing a line ten feet away, they took turns throwing their hpanats (sandals) trying to knock the rubber bands out of the circle. Each kept what they knocked out. When one ran out of rubber bands, the person with the most gave him some of his so the game could go on.

There were a few old men but all the men of military age were off fighting the Burmese army. Forty two years of fighting resulted in there being over 400 widows in the camp.

When their family's turn came, they showed their I.D. card which was checked off the camp roster. Their rations were put in the containers they had brought. Dee Na helped her mother carry the rations back to their little house. That night they had rice and fish paste. How good it tasted after three meals of only Kaw Say Dot soup. Her mother also included thanks in her prayers for the Christians far overseas who had supplied the rice month after month. Without that ration, Paw Paw said they would have starved to death months ago.

Then Paw Paw became very serious and said, "We will have a new member of our household tomorrow. She is fourteen and her name is Thu Lay Paw. She has no relatives here and so our pastor has asked us to take her in."

"Oh good, she can help me hunt for wood and eatables" exclaimed Dee Na.

"Well, I'm sure she will help as much as she can but she was a porter and lost a leg to a mine. So it will not be easy for her to get around. We will have to be very patient with her as she was raped and badly abused. Her soul may be badly scarred.

Paw Paw did not have to explain rape to Dee Na. Too many of the children of the camp had seen it or experienced it.

The next day Thu Lay Paw arrived in a pick up truck with yet another load of refugees. Three families disembarked carrying their few possessions. Thu Lay Paw, awkwardly trying to use her crutch, got out last. Her dress was clean though gray with many brown stains on it--blood stains. She had no possessions to carry.

The pained look in her eyes told of the suffering and mistreatment she had endured. Dee Na's heart instantly went out to Thu Lay Paw.

As the weeks went by Thu Lay Paw's strength of youth returned but the joyfulness of innocence could not. Paw Paw feared it was gone forever.

Thu Lay Paw's time of the month came and to her great relief, her period started. She was fortunate as many of the women porters came out of the ordeal pregnant.

The pastor called frequently trying to answer Thu Lay Paw's question. "If Jesus loves me, why did he let such a terrible thing happen to me?"

The pastor tried to explain, "God has given humans freedom. They could choose to do good or evil. The soldiers and the Burmese leaders chose to do evil. Innocent persons are hurt by this evil. You were one of the innocent that was hurt."

Thu Lay Paw asked, "Then my being raped and loss of my leg were not punishment for some sin?"

"Certainly not!" the pastor said emphatically, "Jesus did not want that to happen to you but men have chosen to misuse their freedom."

They were big concepts for a fourteen year old but she had big questions.

The pastor's explanations answered her questions. The love and patience of the pastor, Paw Paw and Dee Na helped heal her soul. But new questions appeared.

One day Dee Na came home to find Thu Lay Paw's cheeks wet with tears. "Why are you crying?"

Dee Na asked.

"I have no future," Thu Lay Paw answered, "I wanted a husband and family but so many Karen boys have been killed in the war there are two maidens for every man. What man would want a raped, one legged wife when he can have his pick of virgin wives with whole bodies?"

Dee Na desperately tried to think of an answer but none came to her.

While Thu Lay Paw struggled with this question, it was fortunate she did not know one of the soldiers, who raped her, was infected with AIDS. Now so was she.

Postscript: Since Thu Lay Paw has not died from AIDS yet, she is not counted among the twenty thousand porters killed on the Thai-Burma border. While her name is fictional, unfortunately her experiences were not.

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The Birthday Party

Dave Neilson watched as Htoo Htoo gleefully opened her present. With all the enthusiasm of a three year old, she tore the wrapping off the package. When she had succeeded in getting all the crinkly wrapping paper off the box, she proceeded to play with the paper and ignore the box containing her present, much to the amusement of the two dozen Burmese watching her.

Sitting in an overstuffed chair, Dave's eyes went from one Burmese to another, enjoying the looks of happiness and enjoyment on their faces. He knew that these faces had not always been so happy. He could remember each face as he arrived at the Fort Wayne airport. Then, each one was tired and anxious, but glad to see the throng of Burmese on hand to greet him. He remembered Maung Kyaw, who raised his hands when he saw his Burmese friends, and shouted, "Free, Free at last,!" His years of hiding from the Thai police and Burmese secret agents were now over.

With her mother's encouragement, Htoo Htoo found the box and began opening it. As Dave glanced around the room, his eyes rested on Tin Maung Naing. The relaxed look on his face told nothing of his past experiences. Dave remembered reading a paper Tin Maung Naing had written about his shin pyu back in Burma. Shin pyu, the initiation into Buddhism, was a very important celebration for a boy, and his family had gone all out to make it a memorable event with feasting and a pwe (stage show) the night before. It was to be a very happy evening, but his village suddenly discovered itself in the middle of a cross fire between the rebels and the Burmese army. The joyful celebration became a nightmare as people sought shelter in ditches from the flying bullets in the light of burning houses. The next morning revealed twenty one villagers had been killed, including Tin Maung Naing's favorite uncle and the village teacher. The shin pyu was never completed.

Htoo Htoo was making good progress on opening her present. Dave's attention was diverted to the Major who was encouraging her efforts. The Major had white hair and looked to be somewhere around sixty. During the troubles of 1988, law and order ceased to exist in many areas, so neighborhoods organized to protect themselves from all the thieves who had been released from the Insein Jail to make room for the thousands of political prisoners who were being rounded up.

The retired Major, with his military experience, had organized his neighborhood. They took turns patrolling at night and all responded quickly to any alarm sounded by anyone on their street. When law and order returned, the Major thought his job was over and things would get back to normal. To his horror, he learned the SLORC government viewed his organizing as an antigovernmental activity. Thanks to friends with connections, he learned of his impending arrest. His trial would be by military tribunal. He would not be allowed to call witnesses. He would not be allowed legal counsel. There were no known cases of acquittal by these kangaroo courts. The Major reluctantly decided to flee to Thailand rather than face certain jail. What an upset this had been for him. In Burma he had a pension, a lucrative hide buying business, prestige of being a retired officer, and family. Here, he was an old man, struggling to learn English, seeking a job in a society that did not esteem older workers.

Htoo Htoo had the box open now and drew out the large plastic toy. Dave continued looking around the room. Tiny War War's eyes danced with amusement as she watched. Dave remembered meeting her in Bangkok and the hunted, despairing look in her eyes then. Dave also remembered her telling about the mass demonstration on Sule Pagoda road on the evening of August 8, 1988 (8/8/88). The four eights was supposed to be an auspicious day. But at 11:30 in the evening, the troops opened fire on the crowd of unarmed demonstrators. War War had seen hundreds fall from the killing bullets as she ran for her life. She had told her story with no emotion but her eyes showed the shock, pain and anguish of that experience. She had fled to the border, been a soldier and a medic and then to a camp at

Three Pagodas Pass. When the Burmese army came in force, she had fled to Bangkok, managing to elude the Thai police for nineteen months before she became one of the lucky few admitted to the U.S.

On the couch with three other students sat Shwe Sein who had completed six years as a medical student, demonstrated for democracy and then fled to the border area, working as a medic with the students trying to fight the well armed Burmese army. He never talked much about those experiences. Dave did remember asking Shwe Sein if he had seen any student die of malaria. Shwe Sein had answered he had stopped counting them at 150. He looked happier now, but the trauma at the border prevented him from pursuing any occupation in medicine.

Next to Shwe Sein on the couch sat Win Win Aung Tin. Dave remembered her showing him a prized photograph with her and other National League for Democracy workers standing beside Aung San Suu Kyi. In their young idealism, they had been inspired by Suu Kyi's talk of bringing democracy to Burma and had joined the new political party NLD (National League for Democracy) working to win the election. Suu Kyi had visited them and the picture had been taken with them all eagerly crowding around her. Win Win Aung Tin had explained how idealistic they had been.

They thought if they worked hard and won the election, Burma would be on the road to freedom and democracy. They had worked hard. They won 80% of the seats but the military junta had refused to hand over power and obey the will of the people. One by one elected NLD candidates had been arrested. Even those who worked down on the precinct level were arrested and beaten. Win Win Aung Tin had pointed out each person in the photograph and said, "She fled to Thailand. The Thais caught her and sold her back to the Burmese Military for $250 along with 400 others. None have been seen since." Then she pointed to another pretty girl in the photo and added, "She also fled to Bangkok. Thai police caught her and raped her. Then turned her over to a brothel owner who forced her to be a prostitute. She caught AIDS. In a roundup for show, she was tested, found to be infected and forced back across the border into Burma. I heard she returned to her village and died a week later." Win Win Aung Tin had gone on pointing to other smiling faces, "She died of malaria at Mawker Camp. She was killed fighting at Three Pagodas Pass. I don't know about the other three. We were so young and naive then. We thought the world would support our push for democracy."

Win Win Aung Tin was helping Htoo Htoo play with her toy. Win Win Aung Tin's face plainly showed that she would like be a mother and have a child. "Maybe," thought Dave, "Win Win Aung Tin will find the freedom she longed for in America."

Next to Win Win Aung Tin sat Aung Phone Zan. Aung Phone Zan had been stranded in Bangkok for years and during that time he had married a Thai girl. He was one of the very few granted the right of immigration by the American Embassy and he had come to the U.S. But Thailand had refused to recognize his marriage to a Thai citizen because Aung Phone Zan was an illegal alien. So she was still in Bangkok and he was here and no one could figure out a way to get them together again.

On the end of the couch sat Myo Myint. Dave knew very little about him and Myo Myint never spoke about his experiences in Burma, the border or Thailand. Obviously they had been very painful.

Dave's attention was focused on Soe Soe Aye and Myat Moe who sat in the corner. Dave knew they had recently closed a deal to buy a house. Four years ago they had arrived with only a suitcase each. While some loud voices said America was no longer a land of opportunity and there was discrimination, Soe Soe Aye and Myat Moe didn't know that and had worked hard and saved their money and made a down payment on a house. While the house was old, in what some would call "a declining neighborhood", it was also a neighborhood of those pulling themselves up. They would never have been able to afford a house in Burma so they jumped at the opportunity here. Myat Moe had suffered discrimination but he kept plugging away until he found a job, any job, and then moved to better jobs when opportunities arose. Most were now making good.