

THE COW FROM PECHABOON

By Jonathan Gray

Lek shuffled into the schoolyard with her head down and stood alone in a corner. A teacher noticed her melancholia, walked up to her and asked her what was wrong. A waiting tear tracked its way down her cheek.

"Our cow is dead."

Nok Watadish had been a teacher at the small school in Pongsobad since it opened and knew most of the pupils and their families intimately.

She was aware of the devastating effect this loss would have on the Lek's family and on the small village where Lek lived, as it was the only productive cow for miles. The milk supply had now been cut off for several families with children. There was always the Seven-Eleven but the people were poor and couldn't afford the cartons in the store.

"I think I can help," Nok said.

"My uncle in Pechaboon has a dairy farm and I know he will be pleased to give you one of his cows, but you must tell your mother to make the cow have babies so you will eventually get a herd."

The cow from Pechaboon arrived on the Wednesday and the villagers were delighted. Lek's mother arranged to hire a bull from another village to help the new cow make babies. Lek arrived at school on the Monday morning and her head was low. Nok noticed and approached her.

"Lek, why are you so unhappy this morning?"

"Our new cow doesn't like the bull and they can't make babies."

Nok visited the farm that evening and spoke to Lek's mother.

"I've seen the bull," Nok said, "he's a fine looking fellow and I don't know why your cow won't mate with him. Maybe

she doesn't like the way he smells; his odor is pretty strong when the wind is in the right direction. Why don't you put some deodorant on him."

Lek's mother thanked her for the advice but a few days later Lek's hanging head told Nok that something was still wrong. Lek told Nok the deodorant didn't work, the cow just moves away when the bull gets close.

Lek's next advice was to put an earring in the bull's ear to make him more macho and paint a moustache under his nose.

"Clean his teeth, give him a mint to chew." Nok's advice was flowing as freely as the Prah Chao river.

When Lek was openly crying in the schoolyard, Nok shook her head. She had no more advice.

"The cow keeps moving away," Lek said. "We don't know what else to do."

"Let's ask Mr Prayonkan, the head teacher." Nok took Lek's hand and lead her to the head's study. They knocked and entered.

"Whenever the bull approaches the cow, she moves away. They've smartened him up, made him smell good but when he approaches from the back she moves forward. If he approaches from the front she backs off, from the side and she just walks away to the other side."

The head teacher thought for a moment. "Did you get this cow from Pechaboon?"

Nok and Lek were dumfounded, since they had never mentioned the cow to the head teacher before.

"Sir, you are truly a wise man," Nok said. "How did you know they got the cow from Pechaboon?"

The head teacher looked a little sad as he answered. "My wife comes from Pechaboon."

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