

# POEMS

BY

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Comes out to meet and honor me ;  
 The glittering ranks spread royally  
 Far as I walk. When hasty greed  
 Tramples it down for food and seed,  
 I, with a certain veiled delight,  
 Hear half the crop is lost by blight.  
 Letter of law these may fulfil,  
 Plant where they like, slay what they will,  
 Count up their gains and make them great ;  
 Nevertheless, the whole estate  
 Always belongs to me and mine.  
 We are the only royal line.  
 And though I have no title-deed  
 My tenants pay me loyal heed  
 When our sweet fields I wander by  
 To see what strangers occupy.

### THE STORY OF BOON.<sup>1</sup>

**H**T haunts my thoughts morn, night, and noon,  
 The story of the woman, Boon, —  
 Haunts me like restless ghost, until  
 I give myself to do its will ;  
 Cries voiceless, yet as voices cry, —  
 "O singer, can this tale pass by  
 Untold by thee? Thy heart is wrung  
 In vain, if dies the song unsung."

<sup>1</sup> This story of Boon is strictly true. It is told by Mrs. Leonowens, the English Governess at the Siamese court. She took it down from Choy's own lips.

I am unworthy : master hands  
 Should strike the chords, and fill the lands  
 From sea to sea with melody  
 All reverent, yet with harmony  
 Majestic, jubilant, to tell  
 How love must love, if love loves well ;  
 How once incarnate love was found  
 On earth, dishonored, martyr-crowned,  
 Crowned by a heathen woman's name, —  
 O blessed Boon, of peerless fame !  
 In Siam's court the Buddhist King  
 Held festival. Fair girls to sing;  
 And dance, and play, were led between  
 Close ranks of Amazons in green  
 And gold. In chariot milk-white  
 Of ivory, and glittering bright  
 With flowers garlanded, rode Choy,  
 The young, the beautiful ; with joy  
 And subtle pride no words could tell,  
 Her virgin bosom rose and fell.  
 No dream the Siam maiden knew  
 More high or blest than that which grew  
 In Choy's poor blinded heart, — to be  
 The favorite of the King, and see  
 The other wives beneath her feet.  
 From babyhood, that this was sweet  
 The child was taught. How should she know  
 They told her false, and worked her woe !

The song, the dance, the play, were done,  
 Choy's fatal triumph had been won.  
 The old king's bleared and lustful eyes

Had marked her for his next new prize.  
 Asking her name, as low she bowed  
 Before the throne, he called aloud, —  
 "Which of my nobles springs to lead  
 Her chariot ponies? Do I need  
 Speak farther?"

On the instant, two  
 Young nobles robed in white sprang through  
 The crowd, and kneeling as to queen,  
 With low-bent head and reverent mien,  
 They walked the chariot beside.  
 The bands burst forth in swelling tide  
 Of music, and the curtain fell.  
 One noble, smitten by the spell  
 Of Choy's great beauty, whispered, "God,  
 How beautiful thou art!"

"My Lord,  
 Have care," the scornful Choy exclaimed:  
 "'T were ill for thee, if thou wert blamed  
 By me."

The other noble silent gazed,  
 With eyes whose glance strange tumult raised  
 Within Choy's breast. He did not speak:  
 All spoken words had fallen weak,  
 After his look. Yet Choy's heart burned  
 To hear his voice. Sudden she turned,  
 And leaning forward said, "How now,  
 What seest thou in air that thou  
 Art dumb?"

With trembling lips he spoke, —  
 "O Lady, till thy sweet voice broke  
 Upon the air, I thought I saw

An angel; now, with no less awe,  
 But greater joy, I see thou art  
 A woman."

Ah, they know not heart  
 Of man or woman, who declare  
 That love needs time to love and dare.  
 His altars wait, — not day nor name,  
 Only the touch of sacred flame.

The song, the dance, the play were done.  
 Oh, fatal triumph Choy had won!  
 Oh, hateful life she thought was sweet!  
 She knelt before the old king's feet,  
 A slave, a toy, a purchased thing,  
 Which to his worn-out sense might bring  
 Pleasure again of touch, of sight.  
 Doting, he named her "Chorm," "Delight,"  
 Decked her with jewels, gave her power,  
 And day and night, and hour by hour,  
 With hideous caresses sought  
 Joy in the thing which he had bought.  
 And hour by hour, and night and day,  
 Wasted poor Choy's young life away.  
 One thrilling voice, one glowing face,  
 One thought of such a love's embrace,  
 Haunted her thoughts, and racked her breast,  
 Robbed her of peace, robbed her of rest,  
 Made of her life such living lie,  
 Such torture, she but prayed to die.

Months passed, and she knew not the name  
 Of him she loved. At last there came

The fated day. A woman slave,  
New in the palace, quickly gave,  
Answering Choy's artful questioning,  
The noble's name.

    "Ah, go and bring  
Me news of him," said Choy. "He bore  
Himself so loftily, I more  
Recall him than all else that day.  
Seek out minutely in what way  
He lives; what may his harem hold.  
He seemed to me so silent, cold,  
No doubt some Houri keeps him chained,"  
With scornful laugh, but poorly feigned,  
Cried Choy.

    At dusk of night returned  
The slave, with wondrous tale, which burned  
Itself on Choy's glad heart.

    The Duke,  
Phaya Phi Chitt his name, forsook  
His harem on the day he led  
The Favorite's chariot ponies. Dead  
He seemed to all he once had loved:  
No fear, no joy, his spirit moved.  
His friends believed that he was mad,  
Or else some mortal illness had.  
A feverish joy filled all Choy's thought,  
She knew by what this change was wrought.  
Love's keenest pain, if shared like this,  
No longer seemed a pain, but bliss.  
Again the faithful slave she sent,  
With message of one word, which meant  
But "I remember."

    "I love much,"  
The Duke sent back. Ah, madness such  
As this was never seen. The halls  
Of tyrants' palaces have walls  
Higher than Love's and Hope's last breath,  
Wider than Life, deeper than Death!

Embroidered with a thread of gold  
On silk, and hidden fold on fold,  
As if an amulet she wore,  
Her lover's name the poor Choy bore  
By night, by day, upon her heart.  
The new slave woman, with an art  
As tender as a sister's, sought  
To comfort her. Each day she brought  
New message from the Duke, each night  
Lay at her mistress' feet till light.  
O Buddha! pitiful, divine,  
All-seeing, gav'st thou no sign  
To warn these faithful, loving three,  
Who were as faithful unto thee  
As to each other! Didst thou teach  
The cruel tyrant how to reach  
Their life blood, that thy arm might save  
Them by the surety of the grave?  
Might give to their expiring breath  
The gift of life, in shape of death?  
Ah, Buddha! pitiful, divine,  
Thy gifts of death record no sign  
Of life beyond. Our weak hearts crave  
Some voice of surety for the grave.

The hours grew ripe : the hour was set,  
 The night had come. Choy slumbered yet,  
 While faithful Boon, with footsteps light,  
 Made all things ready for their flight.  
 Sudden a clash of arms, — a gleam  
 Of fire of torches ! From her dream  
 Choy waked, and on her threshold saw,  
 Dread sight which chilled her blood with awe,  
 Standing with panting voice and breath,  
 Mai Taie, Mother of Death,  
 Cruellest of all the Amazons,  
 Slayer of all convicted ones  
 Who braved the tyrant's wrath and hate.  
 Choy called on Boon. Too late ! too late !  
 Boon fettered lay with gag and chain ;  
 Most piteous eyes, faithful in pain,  
 Unto her mistress lifting still.  
 With blows and jeers wreaking their will,  
 The soldier women, fierce and strong,  
 Dragged weeping Choy and Boon along  
 The by-ways of the silent town,  
 And flung them, chained and helpless, down  
 Into a dark and loathsome cell.  
 Soon as their footsteps' echoes fell  
 Faintly afar, Choy whispered low, —  
 " O Boon, dear Boon ! tell me hast thou  
 Confessed ? "

" Dear Lady, no ! " she cried.

" No tortures tyrants ever tried  
 Shall wring from me one word of blame  
 Against Phaya Phi Chitt's dear name."  
 That instant, flashing through Choy's heart

Strange instinct swept.

" Tell me who art  
 Thou, Boon," she said : " why dost thou cling  
 To me through all this suffering ?  
 All other women I have known  
 Had left me now to die alone.  
 O Boon, conceal from me no more !  
 Tell me the truth in this dread hour ! "  
 Then, looking newly at her face,  
 She saw it beauty had, and grace ;  
 Saw that the feet were lithe and fine,  
 The hands were small and smooth : each sign  
 Of tender nurture and high blood  
 This loving woman bore, who stood  
 To her as slave. Unearthly sweet  
 Grew Boon's pale face, as to the feet  
 Of Choy, all crippled, chained, she crept,  
 And, as she strove to speak, but wept  
 And sobbed, —

" O Lady dear, forgive  
 That I deceived thee ! I but live  
 For thy dear Duke. I am his wife ! "  
 Dumb wonder sealed Choy's lips. A strife  
 Of fierce mistrust warred in her breast.  
 At last, stern-faced, " Tell me the rest,"  
 She said.

Closer, more humbly still  
 Boon crept, and said, —

" Lady, I will ;  
 And, by the heart of Buddha, thou  
 Canst but forgive when thou dost know  
 The whole.

"The day my husband came  
 Home from the fête, he spoke thy name  
 And told thy beauty unto me,  
 And said that from that moment he,  
 His thought, his heart, his blood, were thine, —  
 Thine utterly, and no more mine  
 Again. What could I do but weep?  
 I saw him pine. No food, no sleep,  
 He took. I thought that he must die.  
 What could I do? O Lady, I  
 So loved him that I longed as he  
 That fate might give him joy and thee.  
 I vowed to him that I would win  
 Thee for his wife. How to begin  
 I knew not, when I found thou wert  
 The King's last favorite. It hurt  
 My pride to be a slave. The gold  
 Lies in the sea for which I sold  
 Myself to thee, rather than break  
 My vow. But easy for his sake,  
 I loved him so, thy service came,  
 Soon as I found that his dear name  
 Was dear to thee as thine to him;  
 That, when I spoke it, it could dim  
 Thine eyes with passion's tears, like those  
 Which he had shed in passion's throes,  
 For want of thee. O Lady, none  
 Of all thy sighs and tears, not one,  
 But I have flown and faithful told,  
 That he might know thou wert not cold.  
 Each word of beauty, nobleness,  
 Which thou didst speak, I bore to bless

His heart with knowledge more complete  
 Of thee. O Lady, the deceit  
 Was only for his precious sake  
 And thine: no other way to take  
 I knew. My husband is so great,  
 So good, I was but humble mate  
 For him. As shadow follows shape,  
 My heart in life cannot escape  
 From following his; nor yet in death  
 Shall it be changed: with dying breath,  
 From Buddha I one joy will wrest,  
 That he find rapture in thy breast."  
 Boon ceased, and in her slender hands,  
 Which scarce could lift her fetter bands,  
 Buried her face. Choy did not speak.  
 Her reverence knew not where to seek  
 For fitting words which she might dare  
 To use to Boon. The midnight air  
 Heard only sobs, as close between  
 Her arms she drew Boon's head to lean  
 Upon her breast. The long night waned,  
 And still in silence sat the chained  
 And helpless women. Strange thoughts filled  
 The heart of Choy. Her love seemed chilled,  
 Poor, and untrue, beside this one  
 Great deed she never could have done.  
 "Ah, me! his wife has loved him best,"  
 In bitterness her heart confessed,  
 Yet jealousy for shame was dead.  
 Her tears fell loving on Boon's head:  
 "Dear Boon," she whispered soft and low,  
 "To Buddha pitiful we go."

Next morning when the judges dread  
 Cross-questioned Boon, she simply said,  
 "My Lords, what can a poor slave know?"  
 Weary at last, the fearful blow  
 Of lashes on her naked feet  
 They ordered. Blood ran down the sweet  
 Soft flesh: still came the answer low,  
 "My Lords, what can a poor slave know?  
 Be pitiful!" The swift blows fell  
 Again: no cry, no sound, to tell  
 That it was pain, Boon gave; no sign  
 Of faltering. They poured down wine  
 To stay her strength, and then again, —  
 Oh, surely fiends they were, not men! —  
 Again, from slender neck to waist,  
 The cutting blows in angry haste  
 With tenfold violence they laid.  
 Each blow a line of red blood made;  
 Yet, when they paused, the answer came  
 Steadfast, heroic, in the same  
 Pathetic words, more feeble, slow,  
 "My Lords, what can a poor slave know?"  
 Then in the torture of the screw,  
 Whose pain has led strong men to do  
 Dishonor to their souls and God,  
 They bound this woman's hands. Sweat stood  
 In bloody drops along her brow,  
 Yet from her lips not even now  
 Was heard one syllable.

In rage,  
 The baffled tyrants to assuage  
 Her sufferings tried every art

Which could be tried by kindest heart,  
 And snatched her back from death again,  
 Again to tortures fresh; in vain!  
 Night came, and from her lips no word  
 Had fallen. All night they faintly stirred,  
 As if in sleep she dreamed and spoke.  
 Choy watching, weeping by her, took  
 Her hand, and said, —

"Oh, tell thy Choy,  
 Art thou in mortal pain?"

"My joy  
 Is greater than my pain," she said,  
 "That this poor flesh hath not betrayed  
 My love. Thanking great Buddha now,  
 I pray unceasing, till we go  
 Again to torture." Then no more  
 Boon spoke. To Choy, but little lower  
 Than angel she appeared. Ah! true  
 It was the wife loved best! Love knew  
 His own. His angels comforted  
 Her soul with joy through hours which bred  
 But anguish in Choy's breast.

Too soon  
 Came cruel day, and brought to Boon  
 Again the lash, the screw; again  
 Unto the door of death in vain  
 They tortured her: no word escaped  
 Her bloodless lips. Her face seemed shaped  
 Of iron, so calm, so resolute;  
 A superhuman light her mute  
 And upward gaze transfigured, till  
 In awe the torturers stood still.

Then, binding up her wounds, they laid  
 Her on a couch to rest. New shade  
 Of anguish now her face revealed,  
 Waiting Choy's words. All unconcealed,  
 No doubt, the weaker love lay bare  
 Before her instinct. It could dare  
 For self: now that for self remained  
 No hope, no future to be gained,  
 Could it for him be true, be great?  
 Ah, this true torture was, — to wait  
 Another woman's courage! Eyes  
 Of fire Boon fixed on Choy. To rise  
 She helpless strove, in impulse vain,  
 As if by touch she could sustain  
 Choy's strength. Her gaze was like a cry.  
 "Oh, what is death, is suffering, by  
 The side of truth? If thou dost love  
 Another, thought of self can move  
 Thee not. If thou dost love, to bear  
 The worst is nothing. Dost thou dare  
 Betray, thou art a coward, liar!"  
 Entreated, warned Boon's eyes of fire.  
 They held Choy's eyes as by a spell.  
 Feeble the judges' stern tones fell,  
 Idle the threats of torture seemed,  
 Beside the scorching look which gleamed  
 Upon that woman's face.

Thus stayed  
 And stung, Choy bore the blows which laid  
 Her quivering flesh in furrows. Feet  
 And neck and shoulders, all the sweet  
 Fair skin was torn: her blood ran down

As Boon's had run, — not of her own  
 Resolve, but born of Boon's the strength  
 Which silent sealed her lips. At length  
 The one sure pain which torturers know  
 They tried. No rack, no fire, no blow,  
 Is dreadful as the screw. At first  
 Sharp turn it gave, a loud cry burst  
 From Choy, —

"O Boon, forgive, forgive!  
 I cannot bear this pain, and live!"  
 And, shrieking out her lover's name,  
 She cowered before Boon's eyes of flame.  
 One cry of uttermost despair  
 From Boon rang out upon the air,  
 Her fettered arms above her head  
 She lifted, and fell back as dead.  
 Ah! true it was, the wife loved best!  
 How true, that cry of Choy's confessed.  
 To love which she had so betrayed,  
 No prayer she for forgiveness made:  
 On him whom she had thought her life  
 She called not, but upon his wife.

Swift sped the feet of them who sought  
 The lover. Ere the noon, they brought  
 Him also. Boon, with anguished eyes,  
 Beheld him there. She could not rise,  
 But, creeping on her hands and feet,  
 She cried, in tones unearthly sweet, —  
 "O Lords! O Judges! look at me,  
 And listen. It was I, not he.



I am his wife. I laid the plot.  
 Except for me, the thought had not  
 Been his. 'T was only I deceived  
 The Lady Choy. He but believed  
 What I desired. The guilt is mine,  
 All mine. Tell them it was not thine,  
 My husband, — I can bear the whole.”  
 And, as she turned to him, the soul  
 Of love ineffable set smile  
 Upon her face. Her piteous guile,  
 Transparent, thrilled each heart and ear  
 That heard her pleading voice. A tear  
 Fell from the sternest Amazon,  
 Fierce Khoon Thow App, as in a tone  
 No mortal from her lips had heard  
 Before, she said, “ O Boon, what stirred  
 Thy heart to this? Thy motive tell ! ”  
 The question all unanswered fell.  
 Boon lay again as if in death,  
 With closed eyes and gasping breath.

All night, low on the dark cell's floor,  
 Lay Boon and Choy ; for Boon no more  
 Remained in life. When Choy crept near,  
 And humbly spoke, she answered, “ Dear,  
 Farewell ! ” — no other word. Choy strove, —  
 Poor Choy ! her feebler, lesser love  
 Avenging on herself its sin, —  
 Strove from the greater love to win  
 Some healing stay. Too sweet to pain,  
 Too loyal and too true to feign,  
 Boon made but one reply, which fell  
 Fainter and fainter, “ Dear, farewell ! ”

That night, at midnight, sat the King  
 And Lords in council. For the thing  
 Phaya Phi Chitt and Choy had planned,  
 Scarcely in all that cruel land  
 Was known a punishment which seemed  
 Sufficient. Fierce his red wrath gleamed,  
 As cried the King, —

“ At dawn shall fly

The vultures with their hungry cry.  
 Rare feast for them ready by noon  
 Shall be : three traitors' bodies hewn  
 In pieces, and with offal cast  
 Abroad, that to the very last  
 Low grade of life they may return,  
 And grovel with the beasts to learn,  
 Through countless ages, in what way  
 Kings punish when their slaves betray.  
 Long generations shall forget  
 Their base-born names, ere souls are set  
 Again within their foul, false flesh,  
 To murder love and trust afresh ! ”<sup>1</sup>

Ah ! true it was, the wife loved best !  
 Love knew his own, gave her his rest ;  
 And, to the other woman, doom  
 Of life-long woe and life-long gloom.  
 O cruel friends who prayed the King,  
 Who dreamed Choy to this world could cling !  
 Reprieved from death, to life condemned,  
 Sad prisoner forever hemmed

<sup>1</sup> The Siamese believe that, whenever a dead body is not burned, its soul is condemned to begin life again in the lowest animal form.

Within the hated palace-wall ;  
By all despised, and shunned by all,  
Lonely and broken-hearted, she  
Weeps day and night in misery.  
And day and night one picture haunts  
Her weary brain, her sorrow taunts, —  
Picture of Buddha's fairest fields,  
Where every hour new transport yields,  
And where the lover whom she slew,  
Loyal at last, and glad and true,  
In full Elysium's perfect rest,  
Walks with the one who loved him best !  
It haunts me morn, and night, and noon :  
This story of the woman, Boon, —  
Haunts me like restless ghost, that says, —  
" Oh, where is love in these sad days !  
Rise up, and in my might and name  
Plead for the altar and the flame."  
I am unworthy : master hands  
Should strike the chords, and fill the lands  
From sea to sea with melody  
Of such transcendent harmony  
That it all jubilant might tell  
How love must love, if love loves well.  
Yet, telling all, and flooding lands  
With melody, the master hands  
Could strike no deeper chord than I,  
When from a woman's heart I cry, —  
" O martyred Boon, of peerless fame,  
Incarnate in thy life, Love came ! "