

FON



A true story about a child from Thailand (Asia).

Fon is a little girl who lives in Thailand, a country in Southeast Asia. Her name means “rain” in Thai language. Fon’s house is in a very crowded area. All the houses of the place are built close together, made of wooden planks, scrap metal and other second-hand material. The families from Fon’s neighborhood have left their province with hopes to find a better life in Bangkok. Many of them work now as street vendors. They sell sweet potatoes, peanuts, fruit, caramel corn, flavored drinks... Fon’s grandmother makes and sells beautiful flower garlands with jasmine and red roses.

Fon likes watching her grandmother’s fingers work. First, she threads a string through a big steel needle. Then she skillfully pushes the flowers onto the string in a decorative way. Finally, she ties the ends of the string together, making a lovely wreath of flowers.

One day Fon gathered the courage to ask her grandmother:

- *“Can I make and sell flower garlands, too, so our family has a little bit more money?”*

Grandmother told her that she might prick her finger with the needle! But Fon kept asking until her grandmother agreed to let her try.



Early every morning, hundreds of street vendors rush to the market. Fon's grandmother is among them: she goes to the flower market to buy fresh jasmine, roses, and other flowers.

Then, she spends all day at home stringing the flowers, while Fon is at school.



Fon has returned from school: the Tuk Tuk* driver takes them to the other side of the river where restaurants line the street.



*A Tuk Tuk is a kind of motorized tricycle with seats for passengers, used like a taxi.

A string loops over Fon's neck to support the tray she is holding in front of her with the flower garlands nicely displayed. Fon goes from one table to the next:

- *"Would you like some flowers? Each garland only costs ten bath**!"*

** The bath is the money of Thailand. 10 baths is equal to about 30 cents in US money.



Fon asks her grandmother:

- *"What happens when a family can't sell all their garlands and doesn't have enough money to buy flowers for the next day?"*

- *"Then, we have to borrow money from our neighbors. This is how we support each other here."*

During the rainy season, Fon's grandmother worries. On rainy days it is often past midnight before she and Fon are able to sell their last few flower garlands. After days like that, it is difficult to wake up early enough the next morning to go to school! Missing school makes Fon want to cry away the rain!



When Fon returns to class, her teacher asks her:

- *“Why did you stop coming to school? Where did you go?”*

Fon is sad and nervous, but she explains how she helps her family and the difficulties she faces when it rains. Fon’s teacher does not send her home. She suggests Fon stay after school to catch up on her lessons and arranges another time for her to take the test.

- *“My teacher is so nice!” Fon says to herself.*

After a long week, Sunday is a day off, and Fon sees other kids running by, excited. The Tabori Street Library volunteers have arrived in the neighborhood, and the kids are eager to read, do some art work, and share with others what they know. Fon often attends the Street Library, she loves to read books!

But today, Fon sits by herself in a corner. One of the Street Library volunteers sees her and says:

- *“What’s wrong, Fon? Be happy! Today is a holiday! It’s Loy Kratong!”*

- *“I really like going to school”, Fon tells him. “My teacher is nice, and I’m one of the best in my class. But since I miss a lot of days, I might have to repeat the school year.”*

The volunteer comforts her:

- *“Don’t worry. The rainy season is over now. I’m sure your teacher will be happy that you won’t miss school as often. And you will be happy too!”*

Then he suggests:

- *“Fon, go over to help explain to the younger kids what the LoyKratong festival is!”*



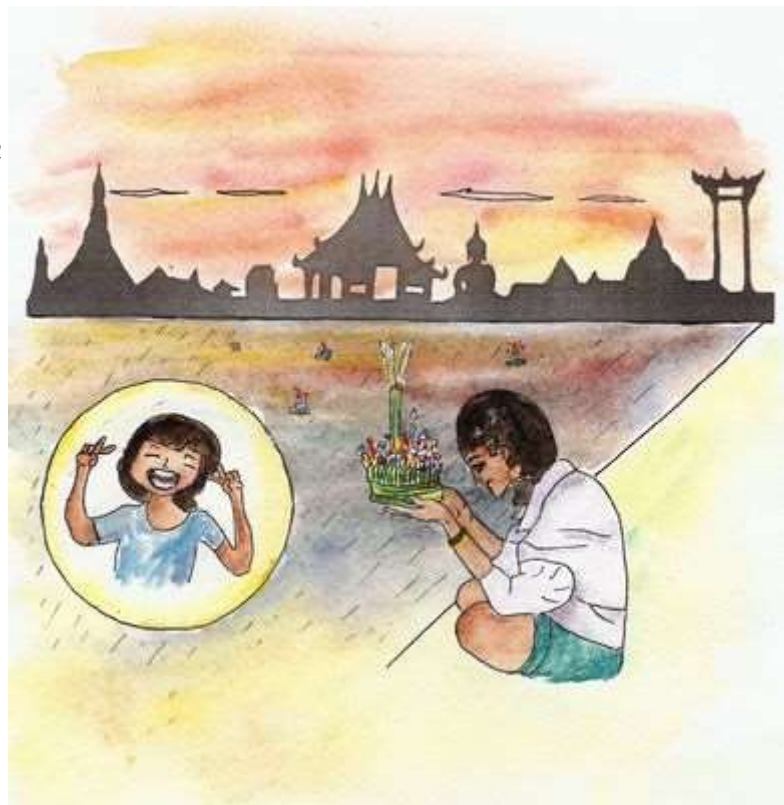
Fon runs back to the group of kids gathered at the Street Library. She begins:

- “The Loy Kratong festival is an ancient tradition in Thailand...”

Another girl continues:

- “Every November all of us kids and parents get together to make a Kratong. We do it to thank the river and the people who keep it clean, so that each of us can drink, wash ourselves, and clean what’s dirty.

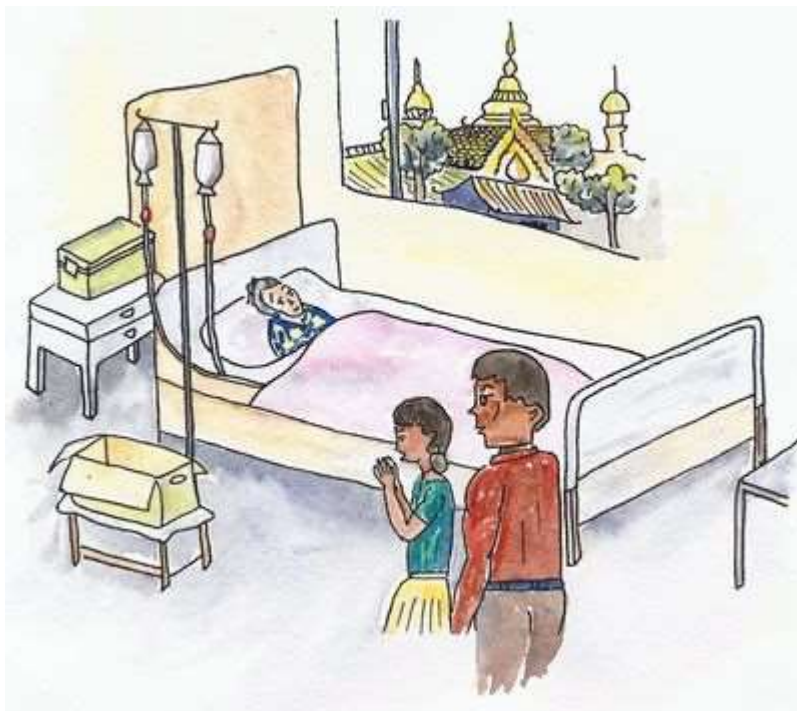
**A Kratong is a floating flower decoration that Thai people put on the river. They believe that by doing so their wishes come true.*



After the excitement of the Loy Kratong festival, life returns to its daily routine. Fon continues to sell garlands with her grand-mother and keeps up with school.

But then one day, Fon’s grandmother gets hit by a car! She has to spend several weeks in hospital. Fon and her grandfather visit her every day.

- “Fon, my little one” says the grandmother, “you know, I won’t be able to make garlands anymore like before.”





Fon takes on more responsibilities in the family and is proud of it.



At the end of the school year, Fon is happy:

- *“The teacher let me go on to the next grade even though I missed a lot of days. But I don’t know if I’ll be able to keep up when I get into the higher grades!*

I am very happy to be able to study and to help my family. I want to go as far as I can in school so that my family won’t have such a hard life anymore.”

