



The Fragrant-haired Princess*

(Cambodia)

Once a long time ago, a beautiful daughter was born to a powerful and feared giant king. The princess's beauty captivated everyone from far and near. Her hair exuded a certain fragrance that attracted many suitors to the palace. Before retiring in the evening, the princess had a habit of brushing her hair by her window and many people would crowd around it just to enjoy her scent.

The giant king named her Neang Sork Kro Oub or the Fragrant-haired Princess. He often said to her, "My beautiful Neang Sork Kro Oub, you will be married to a heavenly suitor for your beauty and fragrance are so divine."

One day, as a handsome young man arrived in the city of the giant king, he was caught by the fragrance in the breeze.

"Oh, what a wonderful heavenly fragrance this is. I wish to know where it comes from. I won't be able to live without it," thought the young man. "I will follow the fragrance until I find the source of it," the determined young man proclaimed.

The fragrance led him to the giant king's palace where he met Neang Sork Kro Oub. Fortunately, that day the giant king was away from his palace. Once the man and the princess met, they instantly fell in love with each other.

* *The Fragrant-Haired Princess* is widely known in Cambodia with the the title *Preah Thaong and Neang Neak*.



“Oh, my love, will you marry me and be my wife,” asked the young man.

“I love you, but I fear my father would not allow us to be married. My father wishes me to marry a heavenly suitor, but you are an ordinary man,” replied the princess.

“What shall we do then?” asked the young man.

They thought and thought but could not find a solution to their love.

“We have to escape from your father into the thick forest,” said the young man. The princess agreed and they secretly fled.

When the giant king came back and found out that his daughter had fled the palace with a man, he was so angry. He ordered his giant soldiers to surround the forest and uproot the trees to search for his beloved daughter. Yet, the giant soldiers could not find the lovers.

Then, the giant king thought the man and the princess must have gone underground. “Now dig this entire forest to find my daughter and the thief who stole my daughter,” ordered the giant king.

So, the giant soldiers dug and dug the ground, but in vain. They gave up and returned to their city without a trace of the giant king's daughter.

After they retreated, rain fell and filled the hole in the ground with water. The place became a great lake, which the people called Yeakh Laom Lake since then.



Supplementary information

- In the Khmer language, **yeakh** (rhymes with “back”) means giant and **laom** (rhymes with “comb”) means surround; therefore, the lake's name means “surrounded by giants”.
- The actual **Yeakh Laom Lake** is located in the province of Ratanak Kiri, north-eastern Cambodia. Formed by a volcanic eruption around 700,000 years ago, its shape looks like a perfectly-formed circle in the middle of a dense forest. The lake, along with the big rocks, streams, and jungle surrounding it, is sacred to the indigenous people who live around it.

