

The Legend and the Dragon of Nongchum

The Mystery Behind a Cursed Village . A Novella Inspired by Tangsa Folktales

By

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Abstract : The Legend and the Dragon of Nongchum, by Chinseng Kimsing, is a mythical novella rooted in Tangsa folktales, blending suspense, mystery, and supernatural elements. It tells the story of Homjam, a compassionate widow, and her grandson Sangwa, who suffer neglect and cruelty from the villagers of Nongchum. Despite their struggles, their unwavering faith and kind hearts set them apart. When a mysterious old man—later revealed as a powerful dragon—visits the village, he tests the morality of its people. The villagers' greed and cruelty ultimately bring divine judgment, transforming their village into a lake. Through magical realism and moral storytelling, the novella highlights the power of virtue, the consequences of wrongdoing, and the timeless value of kindness.

Keywords:

Nongchum, Tangsa folklore, morality, supernatural, dragon, divine justice, kindness, magical realism, village life, folklore fiction,

Chapter 1: The Edge of Silence

Long before the land held a lake of still and haunting waters, there existed a village named Nongchum, resting peacefully between rolling hills and a winding river that shimmered like a ribbon of light beneath the sun. The villagers believed themselves blessed, for the forests yielded game, the river offered fish, and the land bore crops in abundance.

Yet beneath this appearance of prosperity lay a truth far darker.

At the farthest edge of the village, where laughter rarely reached and footsteps seldom wandered, stood a fragile hut woven from bamboo and time. Within it lived Homjam, a widow whose life had been carved by loss, and Sangwa, her young grandson, whose eyes still held the fragile light of hope.

Homjam was not known for riches, but for something far greater—her unwavering kindness. Though her body had grown frail, her spirit remained steadfast, anchored deeply in faith. She believed in the Almighty not as a distant force, but as a living presence in the wind, the trees, and the silent earth beneath her feet.

Sangwa, raised under her gentle guidance, had learned to see the world through compassion rather than bitterness. Though hunger often gnawed at his body, it never hardened his heart.

But the villagers saw only their poverty.

On one fateful evening, the village erupted in celebration. Hunters returned with wild animals from the forest, their voices loud with pride. Fires were lit, meat was roasted, and laughter echoed into the night. The entire village gathered to feast—sharing, drinking, and rejoicing.

Yet, as always, Homjam and Sangwa were forgotten.

No one called them.

No one remembered them.

No one cared.

Sangwa watched silently from the doorway, his small hands clenched.

“Grandmother,” he whispered, “are we not part of this village?”

Homjam looked toward the distant firelight, her face calm yet heavy with quiet sorrow.

“We are, child,” she said softly, “but not all who live together share the same heart.”

That night, while the village celebrated, Homjam and Sangwa knelt in silence, offering prayers instead of feasts—unaware that their faith had already been heard.

Chapter 2: A Visitor at Dusk

The following evening, as shadows stretched across the earth and the last light of day faded into a deepening twilight, an unusual figure approached their hut.

He was tall—unnaturally so. His long white hair flowed like strands of moonlight, and his beard moved gently with the evening breeze. In his hand, he carried a staff, ancient in appearance, marked with carvings that seemed to shift when looked at too closely.

There was something about him—something that did not belong to the ordinary world.

“May I rest here for the night?” he asked, his voice calm yet carrying a strange depth. “I ask only for a place to sleep and a little food.”

Homjam did not hesitate.

“You are welcome,” she said gently. “Though we have little, we will share what we can.”

Sangwa watched as his grandmother offered their last portion of food. There was no hesitation in her gesture, no fear, no regret—only kindness.

The old man observed them carefully, his eyes reflecting something deeper than gratitude.

“Many who have much refuse to give,” he said quietly. “Yet you, who have nothing, offer everything.”

Homjam simply smiled. “Kindness is not measured by wealth.”

That night, as the stranger rested, the air grew still, as if the world itself was watching.

Chapter 3: The River's Secret

At dawn, before the first rays of sunlight had fully touched the earth, a strange stillness settled over the village of Nongchum. The air felt heavy, as though it carried a message waiting to be heard. Even the birds, which usually filled the morning with their cheerful songs, remained unusually quiet.

Then, from the heart of the river, something stirred.

The water began to ripple—not gently, but with a slow, deliberate force, as though something beneath its surface was awakening. Villagers who had come early to fetch water paused, their eyes fixed upon the shifting current.

Suddenly, with a powerful surge, a massive fish rose from the depths.

It was unlike anything they had ever seen. Its body was enormous, its scales shimmering like polished silver, reflecting the pale morning light in dazzling flashes. It moved neither in panic nor in fear, but with a strange calmness—as if it had come willingly, almost knowingly, into their world.

“Look at it!” one villager shouted. “Such a creature must be a blessing!”

“A blessing?” another replied greedily. “No—this is fortune itself!”

Within moments, curiosity gave way to desire. Nets were cast. Spears were raised. The villagers surrounded the fish, not with reverence, but with hunger in their eyes.

The creature struggled briefly, its powerful body thrashing against the water, sending waves crashing against the riverbanks. For a fleeting moment, it seemed as though the fish might escape—its tail striking the surface with a force that echoed like a warning.

But the villagers did not listen.

Driven by greed, they struck again and again until the great fish fell still.

A strange silence followed.

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For a brief second, even the villagers seemed uncertain, as if they had crossed an invisible boundary they could not yet understand. But the moment passed quickly, replaced by laughter and celebration.

“Bring it ashore!” shouted one of the men.

With great effort, they dragged the enormous body onto land. Its silver scales, once radiant, now dulled under the weight of human hands. The villagers gathered eagerly as the fish was cut and divided.

Piece by piece, it was shared among every household.

Every household—except one.

At the far edge of the village, Homjam and Sangwa remained unseen, untouched by the distribution.

Not a single villager spoke their names.

Not a single portion was set aside.

It was as though they did not exist.

Inside their small hut, Sangwa sat quietly, listening to the distant sounds of celebration. The faint smell of cooked meat drifted through the air, making his hunger sharper, more painful.

“Grandmother,” he said softly, “did they forget us again?”

Homjam closed her eyes for a moment, as if steadying her heart. Then she looked at him with a gentle smile.

“Those who forget others,” she said, “have already forgotten themselves.”

Meanwhile, the old stranger walked through the village.

He moved slowly, leaning on his staff, observing everything with a quiet intensity. One by one, he approached the houses.

At the first door, he knocked.

A man opened it, his mouth full of food.

“What do you want?” he asked impatiently.

“I seek only a little food and a place to rest,” the stranger replied calmly.

The man frowned. “We have nothing to spare. Go elsewhere.”

The door shut firmly.

At another house, a woman laughed. “Why should we feed a stranger? Go beg somewhere else.” At yet another, a voice called from inside, “We owe you nothing!”

Door after door closed.

Faces turned away.

Hearts remained unmoved.

The stranger said nothing. He simply continued walking.

At last, he reached the small hut at the edge of the village.

Before he could even knock, the door opened.

“Welcome,” Homjam said warmly. “Please come in.”

Sangwa quickly brought water. Though they had nothing prepared, Homjam began to gather what little remained—a handful of grains, a few dried leaves.

“It is not much,” she said, “but it is given with respect.”

The old man accepted it, his gaze lingering on them.

“You give when you have nothing,” he said quietly. “And they refuse even when they have more than enough.”

Homjam lowered her eyes. “Kindness is not about what we have—it is about what we are willing to give.”

The stranger nodded slowly.

At that moment, the truth stood revealed—not through words, but through actions.

The village had chosen greed.

And in that choice, it had already sealed its fate.

Chapter 4: The Hidden Truth Revealed

That evening, the air carried a strange tension, as though the world itself was holding its breath. Inside the hut, the old stranger stood near the doorway, no longer appearing as a weary traveler, but as something far greater—something ancient and powerful.

Homjam sensed the change immediately.

“Who are you?” she asked softly.

The old man looked at her, and for a moment, his eyes seemed to hold the depth of the sky itself.

“I am one who sees what others ignore,” he replied. “I walk where justice is forgotten.”

Sangwa moved closer to his grandmother, his heart pounding.

The stranger lifted his staff. The carvings upon it began to glow faintly, as though awakened.

“You have shown kindness without expectation,” he said. “You have remained faithful in a place where faith has been abandoned.”

He stepped forward and placed the staff in Homjam’s hands.

“Listen carefully,” he continued. “A time will come—soon—when the earth will tremble, and the sky will break open. When that moment arrives, you must leave immediately.”

Sangwa swallowed. “Leave? But... where will we go?”

“Follow the staff,” the stranger said. “It will guide you. But remember this above all—do not look back. No matter what you hear, no matter who calls your name—do not turn.”

“Why?” Sangwa asked, his voice trembling.

The stranger did not answer immediately.

Instead, he stepped back.

And then—it began.

His body started to change.

At first, it was subtle—a shimmer across his skin, like light moving beneath water. Then his form began to grow, stretching beyond human shape. His white hair transformed into flowing strands of silver flame. His staff merged into his being, glowing brighter with each passing moment.

Sangwa gasped.

Homjam fell to her knees.

Before them, the old man was no longer a man.

He was a dragon.

Magnificent. Terrifying. Divine.

His scales glistened like molten metal. His wings unfurled with a sound like thunder, filling the small space with overwhelming power. His eyes burned—not with anger, but with a deep, ancient sorrow.

“You have been tested,” the dragon said, his voice echoing beyond the walls, beyond the village itself. “And you have remained true.”

The ground trembled slightly beneath his presence.

“The village has failed.”

With a sudden surge of wind, he rose into the air, breaking through the silence of the night with a roar that shook the heavens.

Then he was gone.

Only stillness remained.

Homjam pressed her forehead to the ground.

“They have done a terrible wrong,” she whispered. “They have killed what was never meant to be harmed.”

Sangwa clutched the staff tightly.

“Grandmother... what will happen now?”

Homjam closed her eyes.

“Judgment, child,” she said softly. “Judgment has already begun.”

Chapter 5: The Warning Unheard

Fear settled deep within Homjam's heart, but it did not paralyze her.

Instead, it moved her to act.

The next morning, she walked into the village, Sangwa by her side. The staff, though simple in appearance, seemed to carry a quiet energy, as if aware of what was to come.

Villagers were busy preparing for yet another feast, laughing and boasting, unaware of the shadow that loomed over them.

Homjam raised her voice. "Listen to me!" she called out. "You must repent! The Almighty has seen your actions!"

The villagers turned, some curious, others annoyed.

"The creature you killed," she continued, "was no ordinary fish. It was sent as a test—and you have failed." Laughter erupted. The village head stepped forward, his expression filled with arrogance.

"Old woman," he said coldly, "your hunger has made you speak nonsense."

His advisor smirked. "If the gods wished to punish us, they would have done so already."

Homjam shook her head. "It is not too late. Ask for forgiveness. Change your ways."

A villager shouted, "We owe nothing to anyone—not even your so-called Almighty!"

Another pushed Sangwa aside. "Take your warnings and leave!"

Sangwa stumbled, but Homjam held him firmly.

"Please," she said, her voice breaking, "do not ignore this. There is still time."

But no one listened.

Instead, they mocked her. Some laughed. Others turned away.

The village head raised his hand.

"Enough," he said. "Return to your hut. Do not disturb our celebration again."

Defeated but not broken, Homjam turned away.

As she walked back, Sangwa looked up at her.

"Why won't they listen?" he asked.

Homjam's eyes were filled with quiet sorrow.

"Because pride has closed their hearts," she said.

That night, the village celebrated once more—louder than ever before.

Music echoed. Fires blazed. Laughter filled the air.

But above them, unseen, the sky began to gather darkness.

And far beyond the hills, something ancient stirred.

The final night of Nongchum had begun.

Chapter 6: The Ominous Calm

The night after Homjam's warning, Nongchum seemed calm at first glance. The moon hung low and heavy in the sky, casting silvery reflections on the river, but a strange stillness pressed down on the village. Even the fires that once blazed with laughter now flickered nervously, as though the flames themselves feared what was coming.

Homjam and Sangwa sat outside their hut, holding the glowing staff. Its light pulsed softly, almost as if it were alive, responding to their thoughts.

"Grandmother," Sangwa whispered, "do you feel it? The air... it's different tonight."

Homjam nodded. "Yes, child. The storm is not yet visible, but the signs are all around. The earth itself is holding its breath."

From the river, a faint shimmer moved beneath the water's surface. Sangwa tensed. "Is it the fish again?"

"No, my child," Homjam replied, her voice calm but urgent. "It is the presence of judgment approaching. All those who have chosen greed over kindness will soon feel the weight of their choices."

Meanwhile, in the village, celebrations continued, oblivious to the warning. Fires burned, drums echoed, and the air smelled of roasted meat and rice beer. The villagers laughed, mocking Homjam's earlier words.

"Old woman, you speak nonsense!" sneered the village head. "There is no curse. There is no dragon. Fear is for children, not us."

But in the distance, deep shadows began to move along the hills. Trees swayed in a windless gust, and the river whispered secrets in a language only the heart could understand.

Sangwa clutched Homjam's hand tightly. "Grandmother... what if they do not listen?"

She looked at him, her eyes reflecting both sorrow and unwavering faith. "Then we must trust in the Almighty. Our hearts are pure, and that will guide us. It is not for us to punish, but to survive and bear witness."

The night stretched long, filled with an uneasy quiet, as though the world itself waited for the storm that would change everything.

Chapter 7: The Whispering Woods

At dawn, Homjam and Sangwa stepped beyond the ridge, leaving behind the remnants of a village already tainted by greed and ignorance. The staff, gifted by the mysterious old man, glowed faintly, casting soft illumination over the hidden paths as if the forest itself were guiding them.

“This,” Homjam said, her voice reverent yet firm, “is the Whispering Woods. A place where the spirits of the land speak, where every rustle of leaves and ripple of water carries meaning. Listen carefully, Sangwa, for eyes alone cannot see the truth. Only a pure heart can perceive it.”

The forest was unlike anything Sangwa had ever witnessed. Massive trees stretched skyward, their branches intertwining like the fingers of titanic beings locked in eternal embrace. Mist rolled along the forest floor, coiling around gnarled roots and mossy stones like spectral snakes. Faint whispers floated on the wind—soft, insistent, and almost musical. The words were not in human language, yet they resonated in their hearts.

“Who’s there?” Sangwa called, his small voice trembling, though steadier than he felt.

A chorus answered, flowing from every direction at once, playful yet grave:

“Why do you wander here? Are you seekers of wisdom... or fugitives of fear?”

Sangwa’s eyes widened. “Grandmother... they’re speaking to us!”

“Yes, child,” Homjam said. Her gaze swept the mist. “The forest watches all who enter. It tests the heart, revealing those who are true.”

A shadow flickered between two ancient oaks. A silver forest cat emerged, its eyes glowing like molten moonlight. It approached the staff, sniffing cautiously, then circled them once before vanishing into the fog, as though it had judged them worthy.

“Why did it not harm us?” Sangwa whispered.

“Because the forest senses goodness,” Homjam explained. “It does not shelter those who live in greed or cruelty, but it guides those whose hearts remain untouched by malice.”

The forest began to test them. Hidden ravines appeared suddenly under their feet. Slick moss threatened to throw Sangwa into the shadows below. A gust of wind, stronger than any natural breeze, tried to push them from the path. Yet each time, the staff’s faint glow pulsed with reassurance, and together, grandmother and grandson pressed onward.

By nightfall, they discovered a small clearing. Mist curled around the edges, forming walls of silver smoke, and a fallen tree served as a natural shelter. Homjam knelt and whispered prayers into the darkness, each syllable a shield of protection. Sangwa mirrored her movements, repeating the words with careful devotion.

Outside, the trees murmured, leaves rustling as if acknowledging the passage of two whose hearts had remained untainted. In that moment, the Whispering Woods accepted them—not as mere travelers, but as guardians of virtue in a world that had long forgotten it.

Chapter 8: The First Signs of Judgment

While Homjam and Sangwa navigated the forest, the village of Nongchum began to feel the stirrings of impending doom. The river, once serene and sparkling under the sun, turned restless. Its waters swelled and churned violently, lapping hungrily at the banks. Fish leapt erratically, splashing and writhing, as though attempting to flee an unseen danger. Trees bent unnaturally in the windless air, and the soft moans of nature—lost creatures and disturbed spirits—filled the village.

Some villagers paused in their labor, uneasy, glancing toward the ridge. “Do you feel it?” one whispered. “Something... terrible is coming.”

“Nonsense,” said the village head, though his voice carried an unfamiliar tremor. Pride and denial clung to him, but even he could not entirely ignore the unease in the air.

By noon, faint tremors shook the earth. Dust rose from the roads as walls quivered. The laughter that had once filled the village was replaced by murmurs of confusion and fear. Yet still, the villagers ignored Homjam’s warnings. Some mocked her, others whispered to themselves, hoping the signs would pass. But the universe had already begun to signal judgment, and denial could not hold it at bay.

From their vantage point atop the ridge, Homjam and Sangwa watched the storm build. The staff pulsed stronger with each passing moment, as if urging them to prepare for what was coming.

“They will see soon enough,” Homjam said, her voice grave. “And when the earth quakes and the sky roars, remember—never look back. Keep faith and follow the staff.”

Sangwa clutched the staff tightly, his small hands trembling. “Will they listen, Grandmother?”

“No, child,” she said softly. “The wicked rarely heed warnings. But we do not seek to punish—they have chosen their own paths. We only must survive and bear witness.”

Chapter 9: The Dragon’s Roar

As the sun descended, painting the sky in ominous crimson, the first undeniable signs of catastrophe arrived. A sound unlike any thunder echoed across the hills—a roar so immense that the trees shuddered in response. The villagers’ homes rattled violently, and even the bravest animals froze, ears perked and eyes wide with terror.

Lightning split the sky into jagged, fiery cracks, illuminating the terrified faces of the villagers. Water from the swollen river lapped hungrily at huts nearest the bank. Chickens flapped and cawed in panic. Dogs barked relentlessly, and goats bleated as they ran blindly through mud and debris.

From the ridge, Homjam and Sangwa saw it: an enormous shadow descending from the heavens. The dragon—resplendent and terrifying—was vast beyond comprehension. Its silver scales shimmered like molten metal, wings beating the air in powerful gusts that sent leaves flying and small trees uprooting. Its eyes glowed with an ancient, searing intelligence, reflecting the judgment it had come to deliver.

Sangwa clung to his grandmother, his voice trembling. “Grandmother... it’s him. It’s the dragon!”

“Yes,” she whispered, her voice calm but sorrowful. “The one they mocked and ignored. This is the reckoning they refused to believe in. Pray, child. Keep your heart steady. Follow the staff and do not falter.”

The dragon roared again, a sound that shook the very hills. Earthquake tremors split the ground beneath the village. Walls cracked. Roofs collapsed. The river overflowed, sweeping away all that had been built by greed and pride. The villagers screamed, running and clawing for survival, but their choices had sealed their fate. No one could outrun what they had earned through cruelty and indifference.

From the ridge, Homjam and Sangwa watched the destruction with heavy hearts. Their path was clear, the staff lighting the way through the chaos. Though sorrow filled their eyes, they understood that the dragon’s justice was not vengeance—it was balance, the restoration of moral order in a world long defiled by greed and heartlessness.

Chapter 10: The Awakening of the Lake

The ground trembled violently as night fell, shadows leaping across the hillsides like specters of doom. Nongchum, once a serene village, was now a place of terror. The villagers, clutching whatever they could, ran through twisting lanes and collapsing houses. The river swelled unnaturally, as if it had a mind of its own, pulling trees, livestock, and debris into its roiling currents.

Homjam grasped the glowing staff tightly, guiding Sangwa along a narrow ridge above the chaos. “Stay close, child. Remember what the Dragon said—do not look back. Fear will be your greatest enemy.”

Sangwa’s wide eyes reflected both horror and awe. “Grandmother... the village... everything!”

“Yes,” she whispered. “Greed and cruelty have awakened nature’s wrath. But we are spared because our hearts are pure.”

Thunder cracked the heavens in relentless succession, lightning illuminating the now-flooded streets of Nongchum. Even the proud village head, who had mocked Homjam moments before, was swept away by the torrent, screaming prayers he had never spoken in life.

Above the chaos, the dragon soared. Its wings beat the storm into a frenzy, each gust of wind carrying the sound of judgment. The staff pulsed brighter, illuminating the path for Homjam and Sangwa. Every step they took was a step further from devastation and closer to hope.

As they reached a high cliff overlooking the transformed valley, the full horror and beauty of the judgment became visible. The village had vanished beneath a vast, silver expanse of water. The lake reflected the stormy sky above, an eternal mirror of the consequences of human cruelty and the mercy that spared only the innocent.

Sangwa whispered, awe-struck, “Grandmother... it’s a lake now. Our village... it’s gone.”

Homjam, tears glinting in her eyes, nodded. “Yes, child. The Almighty and the Dragon’s justice have done this. Let it be a lesson, for hearts of gold are never forgotten, and cruelty carries its own weight.”

Chapter 11: The Journey Across the Unknown

The next morning, the storm had passed, leaving an eerie calm. The new lake shimmered under the pale sunlight, its waters holding both the memory of the village and the reflection of the Dragon's shadow.

Homjam and Sangwa had to move forward. The staff pulsed faintly, guiding them toward safety, away from the cursed lake. Each step was cautious, as the forest around the lake seemed alive, whispering warnings and riddles.

“The path ahead is not simple,” Homjam said, scanning the dense trees. “The forest will test us further, Sangwa. Remember—courage and faith will guide us.”

Sangwa nodded, following closely. “I will remember, Grandmother. I will never leave your side.”

As they walked, streams surged and fell unexpectedly, fallen logs blocked their path, and strange shadows moved between the trees. At times, glowing eyes peeked from darkness, testing their resolve. But the staff glowed brighter whenever danger approached, illuminating hidden bridges over streams or safe footing over jagged rocks.

By nightfall, they found a secluded hollow and made a fire. The forest, once threatening, seemed to settle, acknowledging their courage. The glowing staff cast a halo of light over them, a symbol of divine protection.

Homjam whispered a prayer into the night. “Almighty, we are only two, yet we carry faith and truth. Protect us as we walk beyond this cursed land.”

Sangwa repeated her words, a child's voice carrying unyielding hope. “Protect us, Almighty. Let us be guided by goodness.”

Chapter 12: The Forest of Shadows

As days passed, Homjam and Sangwa entered what seemed an endless forest, the trees growing taller, darker, and thicker. The staff now glowed steadily, revealing twisting paths and shadowed hollows.

“This is the Forest of Shadows,” Homjam said quietly, sensing a new challenge. “It is a place where fear and doubt take shape. You must trust your heart, Sangwa. Do not let darkness deceive you.”

They encountered strange creatures—shimmering birds whose calls sounded like human laughter, foxes with eyes of amber fire, and whispering winds that seemed to taunt them. At one point, a deep chasm appeared suddenly. Sangwa stumbled, his small foot slipping on moss-covered stones.

“Hold on!” Homjam cried, grabbing him firmly. “Fear will not guide us—faith will.”

The staff pulsed, revealing a hidden root bridge over the chasm. They crossed carefully, each step a lesson in trust, patience, and courage.

Night after night, Homjam told stories of virtue, compassion, and divine justice. Sangwa listened intently, learning not just the ways of the world, but the ways of the heart. The Forest of Shadows seemed to sense their resolve, and although the shadows whispered menacingly, they never attacked.

Chapter 13: The Dragon's Guidance

After several days, the air grew thick with the scent of storm and magic. The staff pulsed violently, leading them to a clearing where the sky opened above them. There, hovering in the clouds, appeared a faint, silver silhouette.

“The Dragon,” whispered Sangwa, eyes wide with awe.

The Dragon's voice boomed across the clearing, though it was calm, almost gentle. “Homjam, Sangwa, you have walked the path of virtue. Your hearts are pure, and your spirits unyielding. But one final test remains before you may leave this cursed land entirely.”

From the shadows emerged illusions—visions of the old village, alive with smiling faces, tempting Sangwa to look back. Homjam clutched his hand tightly.

“Do not look back, Sangwa. Do not give in to what is gone. Remember the Dragon's words!”

They pressed forward, ignoring the illusions. The Dragon's voice grew stronger. “You have passed the test of faith and virtue. The cursed land is behind you, but the lessons must remain in your hearts forever. Carry this knowledge and teach others what you have seen.”

With a powerful beat of its wings, the Dragon vanished into the clouds. The storm faded. The lake reflected sunlight instead of darkness. Homjam and Sangwa were safe—but forever changed.

Chapter 14: A New Dawn

As the first golden rays of morning touched the horizon, Homjam and Sangwa found themselves at the edge of a wide, open valley. Birds sang once more. Trees swayed gently. The terror of Nongchum was behind them, replaced by a fragile peace.

Sangwa turned to his grandmother. “Grandmother... will the villagers ever know what happened?”

“Perhaps not,” she said softly. “But the lake will always remember. And those who listen will learn. Our lives are not merely for survival—they are for the preservation of truth, kindness, and courage.”

The glowing staff, now calm, was placed carefully beside her. She knew it would guide others if ever virtue needed protection in the future.

Sangwa smiled, understanding for the first time the depth of their journey. “I will remember. And I will teach others, just as you taught me.”

Homjam hugged him tightly, the wind carrying her whispered blessing: “May your heart remain true, my child. The world needs hearts like yours.”

Chapter 15: The Legacy of Nongchum

Dawn broke over the valley, but it was unlike any dawn the villagers of Nongchum had ever known. A heavy silence hung in the air, thick and trembling, as though the earth itself was holding its breath. Where once thatched huts and winding streets had thrived, now stretched only a vast, glimmering expanse of water—the lake that had swallowed the village whole. Silver waves lapped at the edges of what remained of the hills, catching the first rays of sunlight and scattering them into a thousand dancing shards.

Homjam and Sangwa stood on a high ridge, the magical staff between them glowing softly, a heartbeat of light in the new world. They gazed down at the transformed land, a mixture of sorrow, awe, and relief filling their hearts.

Sangwa's voice trembled. "Grandmother... all of it... it's gone. The village... the people... everything..."

Homjam placed a hand gently on his shoulder. Her eyes, aged with both suffering and wisdom, reflected the waters below. "Yes, Sangwa. It is gone—but not without reason. The Dragon's judgment was neither cruel nor unkind; it was justice. The greed, the cruelty, the indifference... all of it had to meet its consequence."

The wind stirred, carrying the soft echo of cries and laughter that had long since vanished, a memory embedded in the very stones now submerged beneath the lake. Homjam closed her eyes and whispered a prayer, hands raised to the sky. "Almighty, may the lessons of this land endure. May the hearts that remain remember, and may the purity of our spirits shine, even in darkness."

Sangwa tightened his grip on her hand. "Grandmother... will anyone ever learn from this?"

Homjam's gaze softened. "Some will, child. Some will see the lake, hear its whispers, and remember. Others... they will not. But what matters is that goodness survives, that virtue remains alive in those who choose it. That is why we were spared."

Behind them, the forest rustled. Shadows moved gracefully between the trees, and a silver fox, its fur shining like starlight, paused to watch them. The staff pulsed once, warmly, as if approving their courage and faith.

Above, the sky shimmered with a faint silver light. For a moment, the outline of massive wings appeared, circling high above before vanishing into the clouds. The Dragon had returned, not in anger this time, but in silent blessing. Its presence was a reminder that justice, like nature, is patient and inevitable.

Homjam knelt beside Sangwa and pressed the staff into the earth. "This staff is not just a tool, my child. It is a guide, a memory, and a promise. It will lead those who are true, just as it led us. Carry it with respect, and teach what you have seen and learned."

Sangwa looked at her, eyes shining with determination. "I will, Grandmother. I promise. I will carry the story of Nongchum... and the lesson of kindness, courage, and faith."

They began their journey beyond the lake, stepping into a world that seemed larger, brighter, and full of possibility. The water below reflected the sun, shimmering like molten silver, but also mirrored the echoes of the past—a reminder that actions, good or bad, leave a mark that time cannot erase.

In the distance, the first signs of other villages appeared, still untouched, still learning, still alive. Homjam and Sangwa knew that they would carry the story forward, that the legend of the Dragon and the lake would endure in whispers, in teachings, and in hearts willing to listen.

And somewhere, high above the valley, the Dragon soared, wings outstretched, eyes glowing with ancient wisdom. Its roar had faded, but its presence remained—a silent guardian over those who dared to walk in truth and virtue.

The lake of Nongchum became a legend, a testament to the consequences of cruelty, the strength of faith, and the enduring power of goodness. And though the village itself was no more, its story lived on, carried by the two who had endured, by the hearts that remained unbroken, and by the land itself, forever shaped by justice and mercy.

Homjam took Sangwa's hand once more, and together, they stepped forward into the light, leaving behind the ruins, yet carrying the eternal legacy of Nongchum in their souls.

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