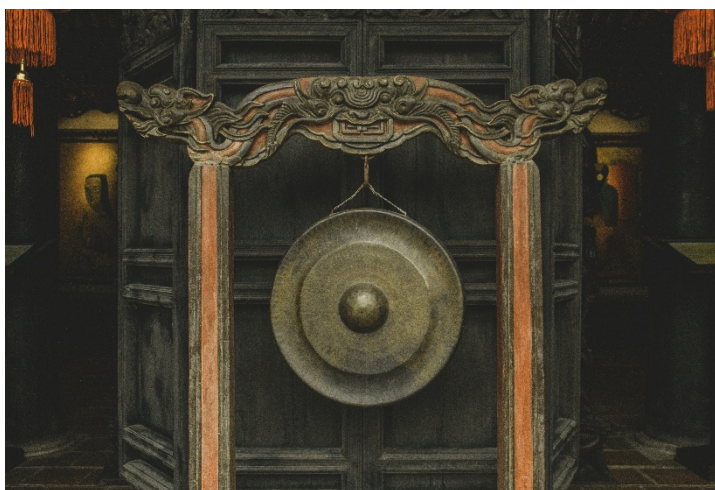


THE LOST GONG

Once upon a time, in a colorful village called Luang Prabang, in Laos, there was a curious and brave girl named Anisa. In her village, surrounded by green mountains and golden temples, every day began with the sound of the gong from the main temple, announcing the sunrise and calling people to gather.

The gong was very special: it had ancient engravings on it that told stories of her grandparents' grandparents. They cared for it with love and respect. But one morning, the gong didn't ring. All they could hear were roosters and the peaceful Mekong River.

Worried, Anisa ran to the temple. There she found her two best friends: Malai, a girl who knew a lot about the village legends, and Tawan, a fun-loving boy who loved climbing trees and finding lost things.



"The gong is missing!" Anisa said, with her eyes wide open. "They say that if the gong doesn't ring for three days, the forest spirit will get sad," Malai added, very seriously.

The three friends decided to look for the gong. They asked the monks, the village elders, and even the vendor selling khao jee, a typical baguette bread that children loved to eat with eggs and spicy sauce.

"Last night I heard a strange noise near the bamboo forest," said the old man Somchai, while taking a sip of jasmine tea. "Maybe something happened there".

Guided by the old man's words, the children walked through the trees, listening to the

creaking of the bamboo and the singing of birds. Finally, they found footprints... and behind a huge tree, and wrapped in vines, there was the gong!

But it wasn't alone. A small, furry figure with pointy ears and curious eyes was staring at it.

"It's a forest phi!" Malai whispered. "They are mischievous spirits, but not evil."

Anisa approached slowly and asked, "Why did you take the gong?"

The spirit responded in a gentle voice:

"I've never heard anything so beautiful. I just wanted to experience it up close."

Anisa smiled. In her culture, sharing and understanding were more important than scolding.

"You can visit us whenever you want. But the gong belongs to everyone."

The phi nodded and helped the children return the gong to the temple. The next day, the village awoke to its deep, bright sound. Everyone celebrated with dances and delicious dishes like laab, a spicy salad of meat and fresh herbs.

From that day on, the gong was rung not only to mark time, but also to remind us that when you listen with your heart, even the oldest sounds can make new friends.