

**FLEYDO ENGLISH SCHOOL**

Story Material

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# The Night Market

*A vibrant story set in Bangkok about a teenager who spends the summer with her grandmother at a legendary night market and fights to save it.*

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**Level:** B1

**Skill:** Reading

**Duration:** ~45 min

**Age:** Teens (11-16)

**Topic:** Food & Culture

**Pages:** 18

## The Story

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### Chapter I— Arrival

The heat hit Lily Chen like a wall when she stepped out of Suvarnabhumi Airport. It was eleven o'clock at night, and Bangkok was thirty-four degrees with humidity so thick she could taste it. The air smelled of exhaust fumes, jasmine, and something delicious she could not identify — grilled meat, maybe, or fried garlic. Taxis and tuk-tuks jostled for space at the kerb. Vendors sold bottled water and SIM cards from plastic tables. A monk in orange robes walked past with a smartphone. Bangkok was chaos, and Lily was not sure she liked it.

She was sixteen, half-Thai and half-British, raised in Manchester, and she had not been to Thailand since she was nine. Her parents — her Thai mother Rin and her British father David — were spending the summer on a medical aid project in Cambodia, and they had sent Lily to stay with her grandmother, Khun Yai Malee, in Bangkok. "It will be wonderful," her mother had said. "You will reconnect with your Thai side." Lily had her doubts. Her Thai was rusty, her tolerance for heat was nonexistent, and she had just been separated from her friends, her bedroom, and her Wi-Fi for eight weeks.

Khun Yai was waiting in the arrivals hall — a tiny woman of seventy-one with silver hair cut short, a floral blouse, and a smile that could light up a football stadium. She grabbed Lily's face in both hands and said, in Thai, "You are too thin. We will fix that." Then she led Lily to a battered Toyota pickup truck, drove through the midnight traffic with the calm confidence of a Formula One driver, and delivered her to a narrow townhouse in a neighbourhood called Saphan Lek, near the old part of Bangkok.

The house smelled of rice, lemongrass, and the faint sweetness of incense from the spirit house in the courtyard. Khun Yai's cat, a fat orange tom named Somchai — which meant "worthy man" — was sleeping on the kitchen table. A ceiling fan turned slowly overhead. Through the open window, Lily could hear music, voices, and the sizzle of cooking from somewhere nearby. "What is that noise?" she asked. Khun Yai smiled. "That is the night market. That is where we are going tomorrow. That is where everything begins." Lily was too tired to ask what "everything" meant. She fell asleep on a thin mattress under a mosquito net, listening to Bangkok breathe.

### Chapter II— The Market

The Saphan Lek Night Market occupied a maze of narrow lanes between the old shophouses, stretching for almost half a kilometre along a canal that had once been a major trading route. It opened at five in the afternoon and did not close until two in the morning. Over two hundred **stalls** sold everything: grilled satay on bamboo skewers, bowls of boat noodles so rich they were almost black, mango sticky rice wrapped in banana leaves, fried insects arranged in neat rows, freshly squeezed sugarcane juice, handmade silk scarves, carved wooden elephants, and Buddhist amulets in glass cases.

Khun Yai had a **stall** near the centre of the market. She had been selling pad thai — Thailand's most famous noodle dish — from this exact spot for forty-three years. Her pad thai

was legendary. Other vendors spoke about it with reverence. Tourists who had eaten it once returned to Bangkok specifically to eat it again. The secret, Khun Yai said, was not a secret at all: fresh rice noodles, tamarind paste she made herself, palm sugar from the south, dried shrimp from the gulf, and a wok that had been seasoned by four decades of daily use. "The wok remembers every dish," she told Lily. "It holds the flavour of ten thousand meals. You cannot buy that. You can only earn it."

Lily spent her first week learning the rhythm of the market. She woke at noon (the heat made early mornings impossible), helped Khun Yai prepare ingredients in the afternoon — chopping, measuring, tasting — and worked the **stall** from five until midnight. The work was hard: standing for seven hours in the heat, surrounded by smoke and noise, serving hundreds of customers who wanted their food hot, fast, and perfect. But there was something about the market that Lily had not expected. It was alive in a way that no shopping centre or restaurant she had ever visited could match.

Every **vendor** had a story. Khun Lung Prasert, the satay seller, had been grilling meat over charcoal since he was twelve — forty years of smoke had turned his forearms the colour of teak. Khun Mae Noi made the best som tam — green papaya salad — in the district, pounding it in a clay mortar with a rhythm that sounded like a drum solo. Khun Pee Dao, a young woman Lily's mother's age, sold handmade jewellery from recycled silver and told Lily that the market had paid for her daughter's education. These were not just businesses. They were **livelihoods**. Lives. Generations of knowledge passed down through families, one recipe, one technique, one customer at a time.

### Chapter III— The Notice

The notice appeared on a Monday morning, pinned to the entrance gate of the market. It was printed on official government paper and stamped with the seal of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. Lily could not read all of it — her Thai was not good enough for legal language — but Khun Yai translated it with a face that aged ten years in ten minutes. The Saphan Lek Night Market site had been sold to Pinnacle Development Corporation. The company had received planning permission to **demolition** the existing structures and build a mixed-use luxury development: apartments, offices, and an air-conditioned shopping mall. The **vendors** had sixty days to vacate. No compensation. No relocation assistance. Just sixty days.

"Forty-three years," Khun Yai said quietly, standing in front of her stall. "I have been here for forty-three years. My mother was here before me. This market is older than most of the buildings in this neighbourhood." She looked at the notice again, then folded it carefully and put it in her apron pocket. "They think paper is stronger than people. They are wrong."

The market erupted. Within hours, every **vendor** knew. Some were angry. Some were frightened. Some cried. Khun Lung Prasert stood in front of his satay grill and said nothing for an entire afternoon, which was more alarming than any outburst. Khun Mae Noi, normally the calmest person in the market, threw a papaya at the notice and hit it dead centre. "I have four children," she said, "and this stall is how I feed them. Where am I supposed to go?"

That evening, the vendors gathered in the open space at the centre of the market. Over a hundred people, from teenagers to grandparents, sat on plastic stools and upturned crates. The mood was a mixture of fury and despair. Khun Yai, by unspoken agreement, stood at the front. "We have two options," she said. "We accept, and we lose everything. Or we fight, and we might lose anyway — but at least we will have tried." Lily watched from the edge of the crowd. She did not fully understand the legal situation or the political forces at work. But she understood something simpler and more important: these people were about to lose their home. And nobody outside the market seemed to care. She decided, in that moment, to change that.

## Chapter IV— The Stories

Lily started with what she knew best: storytelling. She had her phone, a borrowed microphone, and an Instagram account with three hundred followers. Over the next two weeks, she filmed short videos of every vendor in the market. She asked them three questions: How long have you been here? What does this market mean to you? What will happen if it closes? The answers were extraordinary. Khun Lung Prasert told her that his father had taught him to grill satay at this exact spot in 1984, and that the charcoal recipe — a specific blend of tamarind wood and coconut shell — had been in his family for three generations. "The **cuisine** of the street is the real Thai food," he said. "Not what they serve in hotels. This. The smoke, the heat, the noise. This is where flavour lives."

Khun Mae Somchai, who sold kanom krok — coconut pancakes cooked in a cast-iron mould — told Lily that she had put all four of her children through school with the income from her **stall**. "My youngest is studying medicine at Chulalongkorn University," she said, her voice cracking. "Everything she has come from this pancake pan. If I lose this stall, I lose more than a business. I lose my purpose."

A nine-year-old boy named Nong Win, who helped his grandmother sell fruit, looked at the camera and said, simply: "This is where my friends are. If the market closes, where will we go?" That video, when Lily uploaded it, was watched forty thousand times in twenty-four hours. Lily edited the footage into a short **documentary** called "Sixty Days" — the countdown to **eviction**. She posted it on every platform she could think of: YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, Facebook. She wrote captions in Thai and English. She tagged food bloggers, travel writers, journalists, and anyone with a platform and a conscience.

The response astonished her. The video was shared by a popular Thai food blogger with two million followers. An Australian travel journalist wrote a column about it. A Thai-American chef in New York reposted it with the caption: "This market is where I learned to cook. If it disappears, a piece of Thailand disappears with it." Within a week, the story had been covered by three Thai television channels and two international news websites. The hashtag #SaveSaphanLek was trending in Bangkok. Pinnacle Development Corporation released a statement calling the coverage "emotionally manipulative" and insisting that their project would "bring modern **infrastructure** and economic growth to the area." Lily read the statement and felt the same cold determination she had seen in Khun Yai's eyes.

## Chapter V— Bangkok

Through all the campaigning, Bangkok continued being Bangkok — vast, loud, contradictory, and endlessly fascinating. Lily had arrived expecting to be bored. Instead, she was overwhelmed. The city had thirty million visitors a year, but it was not built for tourists. It was built for itself: a sprawling, chaotic, magnificent organism that ate, prayed, shopped, argued, and celebrated twenty-four hours a day.

She took the BTS Skytrain over the rooftops, watching the city spread beneath her in layers: glass towers and golden temple spires, rooftop gardens and rusty tin roofs, elevated highways and narrow canals where long-tail boats pattered between houses on stilts. She visited Wat Pho, the temple of the Reclining Buddha, where a golden figure forty-six metres long lay in serene calm while tourists clicked photographs and monks chanted in a side chapel. She walked through Chinatown at midnight, where the pavements were so packed with food stalls that walking in a straight line was impossible, and the air was a dense fog of steam, smoke, and the scent of roasting duck.

The food was the best part. Khun Yai took her on a tour of the city's eating culture — not restaurants, but the street stalls and market kitchens where ordinary Bangkokians ate every day. They ate boat noodles at a canal-side stall in Thonburi, the broth so rich with spices and herbs that Lily's eyes watered. They ate mango sticky rice at a cart near the Grand Palace, the mango so perfectly ripe it tasted like sunshine. They ate deep-fried chicken from a woman who had been selling it from the same corner for thirty-two years and who scolded Lily for not finishing every grain of rice.

"Thai people do not eat to live," Khun Yai explained as they sat on plastic stools at a roadside noodle shop, surrounded by the roar of traffic and the hiss of woks. "We live to eat. Food is how we celebrate, how we mourn, how we show love. Every dish tells a story. A recipe is a form of memory. When you eat your grandmother's pad thai, you are not just tasting noodles. You are tasting her life — every meal she cooked, every customer she served, every morning she woke up and chose to do it again." Lily looked at the bowl in front of her — a simple bowl of kuay tiew, rice noodle soup — and saw, for the first time, what Khun Yai meant. Food was not just fuel. It was **heritage**.

## Chapter VI— The Hearing

In the seventh week of Lily's summer, the Bangkok Cultural **Heritage** Committee agreed to hold a public hearing on the future of the Saphan Lek Night Market. The hearing was scheduled at the District Office — a grey government building with fluorescent lighting and plastic chairs that seemed designed to drain hope from anyone who sat in them. But the room was packed: vendors, neighbours, journalists, food bloggers, university students, and a legal team that Lily's mother, calling from Cambodia, had helped organise through a human rights network.

Pinnacle Development's lawyers went first: economic projections, architectural renderings, job creation statistics. Their presentation was polished and professional. They argued that the night market was "informal, unregulated, and incompatible with modern urban development." They used the word **gentrification** once, by accident, and quickly

corrected it to "urban renewal." They did not mention the two hundred families whose **livelihoods** would be destroyed.

Then it was the community's turn. Khun Lung Prasert stood up — a man who had never spoken in a government building in his life — and described, in slow, careful Thai, what the market meant. "I am not educated," he said. "I did not finish school. But I know how to feed people. I have fed this neighbourhood for forty years. I know every family within a kilometre of my stall. I know who is sick, who is celebrating, who needs a free meal and is too proud to ask. The market is not just a place where we sell food. It is the place where this community exists." His **testimony** lasted four minutes. Several committee members were visibly moved.

Lily spoke last. She played her documentary on the committee room's screen — the faces, the stories, the sounds of the market. She presented data: the market supported 217 vendor families, employed approximately 600 people, attracted 3,000 visitors per night, and contributed significantly to the local economy. She presented a **petition** with 28,000 signatures — collected online and in person. And she made a simple argument: "You can build a shopping mall anywhere. You cannot build a community. This market took sixty years to grow. If you destroy it, you cannot get it back. Some things are more valuable than property prices."

## Chapter VII— The Decision

The committee deliberated for two weeks. During that time, the #SaveSaphanLek campaign continued to grow. An international food organisation published a letter supporting the market's **preservation**. A group of Thai architects offered pro bono designs showing how the market could be integrated into modern development rather than replaced by it. Three celebrity chefs — one Thai, one Japanese, one Mexican — recorded a video statement arguing that street food markets were "irreplaceable cultural assets" that cities should protect, not destroy.

The decision, when it came, was a **unanimous** compromise. The development would proceed — Bangkok needed housing and commercial space — but on a significantly modified plan. The night market would be granted protected **heritage** status. Pinnacle Development was required to integrate the existing market into the new design, providing improved **infrastructure** — sanitation, drainage, fire safety — while preserving the market's character, layout, and vendor community. Every existing vendor would be guaranteed a **lease** at a controlled rent for a minimum of twenty years. The **demolition** order was cancelled.

The celebration at the market that night was the loudest, longest, and most delicious event Lily had ever experienced. Khun Yai cooked pad thai for three hundred people — free, as a thank-you to everyone who had supported the campaign. Khun Lung Prasert grilled enough satay to feed a small army. Khun Mae Noi's som tam was so spicy that a foreign journalist who tried it had to sit down for twenty minutes. Nong Win, the nine-year-old who had appeared in Lily's video, ran through the market distributing flowers to every vendor.

Music played from speakers mounted on a noodle cart. Neighbours danced between the stalls. The canal reflected the market's lights — red, gold, green — like a liquid painting.

Somchai the cat sat on the counter of Khun Yai's stall and accepted offerings of grilled fish from passing admirers with the dignity of a king. "You did this," Khun Yai said to Lily, squeezing her hand across the counter as another plate of pad thai disappeared into the crowd. "No," Lily said. "The market did this. I just made sure people could hear it." Khun Yai smiled — the same stadium-lighting smile she had given Lily at the airport — and flipped another portion of noodles in the wok that remembered ten thousand meals.

## Chapter VIII— Going Home

On her last night in Bangkok, Lily sat with Khun Yai on the balcony of the townhouse, drinking iced Thai tea and watching the lights of the market through the trees. The air was warm and sweet. Somewhere, a vendor was frying garlic. Somewhere else, a radio was playing a Thai pop song. Somchai the cat was purring on Lily's lap, which she took as the highest compliment a cat could give.

"You came here thinking you would be bored," Khun Yai said. "I was not bored," Lily admitted. "I know. You were lost. There is a difference." Lily thought about this. She had arrived in Bangkok disconnected — from her Thai heritage, from her grandmother, from any sense of purpose beyond schoolwork and social media. She was leaving with recipes in her notebook, spices in her suitcase, new Thai words in her vocabulary, and a **documentary** that had been watched by over two million people. More importantly, she was leaving with an understanding of something her mother had always tried to tell her: that identity was not just about where you were born. It was about what you chose to care about.

Khun Yai handed her a gift: a small clay mortar and pestle, worn smooth by decades of use. "This was my mother's," she said. "She used it to make curry paste for the market stall before I was born. It is the oldest thing I own. Take it home. Use it. And when you use it, remember that every meal you cook carries the memory of every cook who came before you." Lily held the mortar in her hands. It was heavy, warm, and smelled faintly of chilli and galangal. She thought about the chain of hands that had held it — her great-grandmother, her grandmother, and now her. A **legacy** measured not in money but in flavour, in care, in the simple act of feeding people.

"I will come back," she said. "Next summer. And the summer after that." Khun Yai nodded. "Good. I will teach you the pad thai. Not the tourist version. The real one. The recipe that your great-grandmother invented and that nobody outside this family knows." She paused. "But first, you must learn to control the wok. That takes at least three summers." Lily laughed — a real, deep laugh, the first she could remember in a long time. Below them, the night market hummed and glowed and fed the neighbourhood, exactly as it had done for sixty years, exactly as it would continue to do. Some things, Lily was learning, were worth more than progress. Some things were worth fighting for.

## Key Vocabulary

Term	Definition
<b>Vendor</b>	A person who sells goods, especially in a market or on the street
<b>Cuisine</b>	A style of cooking, especially from a particular country or region
<b>Demolition</b>	The act of pulling down or destroying a building or structure
<b>Eviction</b>	Forcing someone to leave a property or place
<b>Lease</b>	A legal agreement allowing someone to use land or a building for a set time
<b>Petition</b>	A formal written request signed by many people asking for change
<b>Heritage</b>	Cultural traditions, buildings, or practices valued by a community
<b>Documentary</b>	A film or programme that gives facts about real events or people
<b>Entrepreneur</b>	A person who starts and runs their own business
<b>Gentrification</b>	The process of renovating an area so it suits wealthier residents
<b>Stall</b>	A small open-fronted shop or table in a market
<b>Authentic</b>	Genuine, real, and true to its origins; not fake or copied
<b>Livelihood</b>	A means of earning money to support yourself and your family
<b>Inventory</b>	A complete list of items or goods in a particular place
<b>Advocate</b>	A person who publicly supports or argues for a cause
<b>Preservation</b>	The act of keeping something in its original state or protecting it
<b>Testimony</b>	A formal spoken or written statement about personal experience
<b>Infrastructure</b>	The basic systems and services needed for a society to function
<b>Unanimous</b>	Fully agreed upon by everyone involved in a decision
<b>Legacy</b>	Something meaningful left behind for future generations

## Comprehension Quiz

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### 1. Why was Lily sent to Bangkok for the summer?

- A) To attend a cooking school
- B) To stay with her grandmother while her parents worked abroad
- C) To study Thai language at university
- D) To compete in a photography contest

### 2. What was special about Khun Yai's pad thai?

- A) It was the most expensive dish in the market
- B) It used a secret recipe passed down through three generations
- C) It was made with imported Italian ingredients
- D) It was only served once a week

### 3. What threatened the Saphan Lek Night Market?

- A) A flood that destroyed all the stalls
- B) A development company that wanted to demolish it and build a luxury mall
- C) A new law banning street food
- D) A fire that damaged the main building

### 4. How did Lily first learn about the market's history?

- A) From a textbook at school
- B) By listening to her grandmother's stories and the vendors' memories
- C) From a government website
- D) Through a television programme

### 5. What was Lily's main strategy to save the market?

- A) She hired expensive lawyers to fight the developers
- B) She documented the vendors' stories through video, photography, and a petition
- C) She offered to buy the land herself
- D) She organised a protest that blocked traffic

### 6. Why was Khun Lung Prasert's testimony powerful at the hearing?

- A) He was a famous celebrity chef
- B) He had worked at the market for forty years and could describe how it held the community together
- C) He offered the committee a bribe
- D) He was a retired politician

### 7. What does 'gentrification' mean in the context of the story?

- A) Making a neighbourhood cleaner and safer
- B) Renovating an area in ways that push out original residents and replace local culture with expensive alternatives
- C) Building new schools and hospitals
- D) Planting more trees in a city

### 8. What was the committee's final decision?

- A) To demolish the market completely
- B) To grant the market protected heritage status and require the developer to integrate it into the new plans
- C) To move the market to a different city
- D) To close the market permanently

**9. How did the night market change after being protected?**

- A) It was turned into a museum with no food
- B) It received investment for better infrastructure while keeping its character and vendors
- C) All the original vendors were replaced
- D) It was sold to an international company

**10. What is the main message of the story?**

- A) That modern development is always better than old markets
- B) That food, community, and cultural heritage are worth fighting for because they define who we are
- C) That young people should not get involved in local politics
- D) That night markets are unhygienic and outdated

## Answer Key

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#	Ans	Question
1	B	Why was Lily sent to Bangkok for the summer?
2	B	What was special about Khun Yai's pad thai?
3	B	What threatened the Saphan Lek Night Market?
4	B	How did Lily first learn about the market's history?
5	B	What was Lily's main strategy to save the market?
6	B	Why was Khun Lung Prasert's testimony powerful at the hearing?
7	B	What does 'gentrification' mean in the context of the story?
8	B	What was the committee's final decision?
9	B	How did the night market change after being protected?
10	B	What is the main message of the story?

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