Ode to Luang’s Rice Paddy

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I.
After dark, if someone has died
    or married, nasally cantillations
    of monks will drift from gold-spired
    Wat Pabong across spikelets
of young rice in the paddy, admix
    with frog chatter and duck jabber
    enthused by rainspew, tempered
    by tempest of Songkran

nights that are humid, but not
    deliriously so—yet—fresh enough
for bodies to drowse off, to release
    the pickling heat, which will creep
back feverishly up the spine at dawn,
    malarial wind, somersaulting yellow
    confetti of ratchapruek, ruffling
    nectarine drupes of palms,
rattling teak frames thinned by
    seething termites in the ever-selfless
    rice field where three seasons pass
    each day from Luang’s terrace.

II.
At dawn, if Hmong villagers in hills
    distant have been scorching slopes
to prepare the earth for corn, potatoes, taro
    or opium, there will be smoke

hazing the paddy, stinging eyes
    nose, lips and lungs but, when
it lifts, you will see a spindly papaya tree
    with green gourd-like fruits
obscured behind a satellite dish
    as a grey-haired duck-keeper with
bare chest pours gruel for his bunch, sets
    them quacking at once,

before 8 am when *Phleng Chat Thai*
    blasts from the village intercom,
motorbikes sputter to life then buzz away
    but Luang will stay, pacing

paddy edges, collecting ferny *cha-om*
    sprigs to chew fresh or cook in curry,
his crop, taller and more golden, rising
    with wire-tailed swallow song.

III.
By noon, if no rain has fallen, then,
    fish will not belly flop from shallow
pools and ducks, too, will be subdued,
    for once, while summer

furnaces the field and exudes through
    rough-hewn floorboards of a wooden
house where Luang lies in a hammock
    awaiting cooler hours

muttering, from time to time, *mai pen lai*,
    not a problem, nevermind, *sabai
*sabai*, just take your time, his hens
    with downy broods

foraging the yard, mid-road dogs
    comatose outside, then long-legged wading birds will glide
in from Phuket islands

to savour northern delicacies, geckos
    skinks and plump winged-things
in Luang’s paddy, giving of itself
    each season, ever-selflessly.