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Siam: Four Poems

Jai Yen, or Cool Heart

Tell me of your troubles,

But I’ll not tell you mine

Twelve hours over this fryer with no fan to ease me

And the unfaithful villagers

Will eat elsewhere again

My hands are sandpaper

From cutting and grinding

My back and feet throbbing from lifting and standing

I cannot wash away

The rancid grease from my hair

My husband with millions

Borrowed in my name

Wasted on gambling, motorcycles and mistresses

But I should sop it up,

An old rag, and remain stoic

Have jai yen, a cool heart,

As a woman must, so come dusk,

I pedal my rusty bike past the empty temple and yowling

Cats in search of the dusty

Lanes of my youth when water

Buffalo with great curved horns

Hauled carts and ploughs unhurriedly

And father sold rice packed in palm leaves not plastic

As a girl dreamt of worlds beyond

And who would take her there.
Funeral for Tuluang Yut

It is said that Tuluang Yut rescued so many starving dogs that wads of fur clogged his lungs.

Now, after a year of waiting, gold leaf coats his cheeks, and he is ready to greet the afterlife.

Dancers come first with flamboyant pha nung dresses and sbai wraps slung over thin shoulders.

Soldiers in military garb rap mallets on ranat ek xylophones, seeing him off with baritone flourishes.

A dragon boat with elephant tusks and a trunk will escort the monk to chiwit phayhlang mrna.

At his casket, under funerary steeple, dignitaries lay flowers, then cherubs in flowing green gowns, bearing sparkler sticks, swing down to the pyre, triggering fireworks and clouds of blue smoke.

The burning masterpiece rages until all that remains are bamboo poles overarching the crematorial stage.
The audience rises en masse and rushes to exit, leaving Tuluang’s dogs to scavenge the scene for scraps.

**Kad Bantha**

There is a wild market on the highway from Chiang Mai to Lamphun with wriggling coconut palm grubs for sale

*aroi mae krub*

There are fried water bugs sweeter than scallops and shiny as roaches with their legs stuck together with rubber bands

*malaeng da na*

There is a well-dressed woman peddling bitter bark from the forests for old men to boil up and drink as a tonic

*yin dee tee dai roo jak*

There are piles of brown pockmarked mushrooms round as plates with particles of earth still on them

*hnung roi baht ka*

There are *hedtob* truffles spilling like black marbles over rims of tin cups from the tailgates of pickup trucks

*hnung roi ha sip baht ka*

There are bull frogs stuffed with galangal, kefir lime leaves and coconut then roasted on skewers over wood fires

*khao pat kob krub*

There are strange bird carcasses plucked and sealed in clear plastic bags beside tubs of eels there at the wild market

*jee gan mai krao-naa*
Ratchaphruek

I am the golden rain tree
I am stalling here to see you

These are my heady dok koon
I smell them showering the soil

My pungent fruits bring fortune
I won't leave here empty-handed

You felt that I was coming
Through the many-petalled tunnel?

I purge away the putrid
Hope this week you are on duty

The season rages in my belly
You pulp the pangs of Songkran

You are overfull with racemes
I am peduncled with burden

When will cool of rain come?
When the seeds will be split open

I overlean these temple walls
You rain petals on the naga

Near fishmongers in their stalls
I stall with you just a moment

Should I?
You must.

And you?
I must too.