



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.