

Cyclical

Perry Sein

Faded Burmese writings
on old black leather thongs
rest against grey-white stucco walls
wet and twisted

White rain turned in hail with a moment's notice
pounds the corrugated grey-speckled roofs
double-fisted. My grandparents' house
endures under fervent rhythm of rain
like tight-leathered wooden drums being beaten
in wild ecstasy with thick brown callused fingers.

Lightning sliced black pent-up skies
thunder followed close by.

Scentless short white candle flicks off
the cool rushing breeze
with dancing yellow light
and dared us to catch the flowing wax
with our fingers or choose
Poe or Arthur Conan Doyle
from our old brown RCA
radio "broadcasting live from BBC"
which was equally painful
for my two sisters and I.

Glass-less wooden window stares down blue skies
and bright sunlight invites the rain in.

A Chinese family lived 6 inches above
the trash-filled alley
I watched as they tried in vain
to hide from rain like ants
scurrying into their holes

cold water danced in deep frying pans
and muddy alley turned into a filthy river.

We owned lumber store
woods gathered from deep deep emerald
jungles of Burma
drifted down Irrawady River

toward Indian Ocean
 My grandfather lived and worked
 with his fearless devoted crew:
 malaria, tigers, pythons and starvation.

One night they made fire to cook
 whatever they caught from the woods
 but when the ground shook they ran
 in all different directions
 only to find that they were sitting
 on a snake.

dinner that night was wet earth
 served on bitter cold fingers
 sprinkled with dreams
 for a better tomorrow.

The next morning they saw
 a brown-spotted calf
 being eaten alive
 by the same hungry python
 taking his sweet time
 with his eyes rolled back
 mother cow watched from a safe helpless distant.

Our lumber store was always cool inside
 sawdust wiggles on the floor
 and the smell of wet teak and jasmine
 danced together in the air.

But one day they came
 in old army trucks, uniforms and rented guns
 stuffed like pigs on their way
 to a slaughter house.

But it was us that they came to slaughter
 ordering us to surrender our very souls:
 lumber, rice, jasmine and even rain
 "in the name of State and Public and such"

for the state we owed nothing
 for the people that turned against each other

I stood there frozen
 in my wet worn-in thongs
 holding up both my arms
 to catch my grandfather's big broken heart

but his tears snaked through his jungle-worn
 cheeks
 and dripped down on my head
 like the rain that drip for days
 after the storm.