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"Losing You in Chatuchak"

Patricia Murphy

“When we fall, it’s an ordinary sadness.” Robert Bly

Just one 125 Baht 40 minute cab ride
and we’ve left the banks of the Chao Phraya,
gone north to the 35 acres of stalls
we’ve read is the world’s largest market.
The cab drops us at Chatuchak, we’re stuck
in a shopping hall of mirrors. Each turn
brings floating water lanterns, chocolate
crickets, chai tea, and steaming carts of curry.
We start with a map but fail, so we
follow the crisscrosses into corners at first
vaguely familiar—antique toys, stamps,
village shirts and coin wallets, royal silk
placemats and runners. I’m not finding
what I want, and I see a man eye your
pocket. I shoo him. This startles you. You
want to go to section 10, for accessories,
to buy the obligatory pottery or wall hanging
but over shouts of vendors I don’t hear you,
and all we can do is stand in front of the fake
Birkenstocks and scream at each other about
whose fault is it that we came here.
And then you walk away. A fit of temper
you have always been prone to, but never before
in a 35 acre market, with 9000 booths
and 200,000 shoppers. All I can do is blink,
stare up at the dangling dragon kites and wind
chimes, stare out at the pale-faced tourists
hoping the red-headed ex-pat slicing through
the crowd is you coming back, but he has a young
Thai on his arm. What is your goal? Would it
be romantic for me to chase you through
the throngs? Or should we take separate
125 Baht 40 minute cab rides back to Siam
Square, stew in our hotel room until you feel like
making love again? I back away past the
hand-carved wooden candlesticks, the painted
swadee statues. I’m not thinking, even, about what
to do this instant. I’m thinking about me at 11,
at an amusement park where my father had downed
too many beers for two men his size. I dreaded that
weaving, that slurring, but even worse, that anger,
white hot and indiscriminate, and the insults that
resonate in my memory more conveniently
than praise. I was 11, and I left. I ran to the
parking lot, hid behind a Pontiac. Hours passed
before a security guard found me, and my father
was so angry that for once he couldn’t speak.
In the market, I’m passing the dance masks, the
1950’s telephones, Louis Vuitton knockoffs,
the pangolins and gibbons. Now you have your
own potent booze. Descending through the stalls I
wonder why I’ve chosen this, and by this I mean you,
and I wonder why you have chosen this market
to practice the perfect abandonment of fathers?
I push my way to the main footpath, sun blazing,
try to steal a seat out from under a Danish
tourist eating Pla Rad Prig. Then I see you:
rubbing your hands over your red hair,
your face wearing a look like the one when we
stood with your mother and watched her take
her last breath. Then you see me: standing next to
the mangosteen and pomelo. We approach each
other without apology. We’re going to try to
find the right section, section 10. We’re going to buy
the Thai wall hanging or pottery. It will take some
collapsing of defenses. It will take some syncopated fall.