

Back in Pittsburgh for My Father's Funeral

In O'Rourke's Bar and Grill, a mile from where I grew up, I'm a *farang*. Jim, Rob, Gerry, John greet me with hard handshakes, booming my name into the loud music.

Sorry, about your dad.

I've known them since grade school, and haven't seen them for years. We trade stories: Bangkok heat from me, marriages, new jobs, and children from them. But what I expect to see throws me: not Singha quart bottles but Iron City ponies on the table,

not sunshine on the wide Bangkok boulevards and palm trees waving in glare, but overcast sky, narrow streets hugging hillsides, my tires drumming cobblestones between old steel rails.

So, how's "Thigh"-land? Jim asks with a wink. It's okay. The American soldiers have left.

I picture Siripan's saffron face at the faculty play. She's the princess in the Ramakien, skin tinted with turmeric and talcum powder. Flashes of her costume ripple through my mind.

How's roofing? I ask John, his hands like sand paper. Last week, he says they faked a drunken fight in the middle of Oakland, a crowd watching, then slipped away before the police arrived.

On TV, the Steeler quarterback throws a long arcing ball caught by the receiver's outstretched fingers. It's Monday night when I play *takraw* with my students, leaping, kicking a wicker ball over a net, no hands. John and Rob have tennis night Thursdays. They play touch football Sundays. They tease me about soccer, kickboxing, and *takraw*.

Those sports are like playing footsie in eighth grade, says Jim. It's from the rice, Gerry chimes in, all-knowing, wise-ass: Football is steak and sex. I smile. Later I walk out in cold November drizzle.

In my father's Monte Carlo, my hands hold
the same wheel he held for years.

Driving the old streets I spot a blue bicycle
like the one I ride everyday in Ubol.
I want to follow it, as the rain thickens
into curtains between us, want to believe
its wavering silhouette will guide me home.