

Siripan's Father

The night we stay late in the closed library,
she tells me her father doesn't like her
dating a *farang*. She undoes her black hair,
lets it hang to the chair seat, a dark curtain.

At 80, he still sprints each morning, bony legs
pumping under ragged shorts, wind blowing
the silver curls of his whiskers. A GI on the street
once yelled out: *Number 1 mustache*,
and he never shaved it again. His bare feet
swish the dirt road as if he were still escaping
the Red Chinese. At 14, he left his parents
on Hainan Island, walked through starved villages
where the bark had been eaten off trees,
sailed steerage south to Thailand.
In Bangkok, he opened a market stall,
met a dark Thai girl carrying baskets of red spice.

I tell Siripan my grandfather fled Austria,
a famine, and the Great War. He mined
Pennsylvania coal, drifted from camp to camp,
met the woman washing long underwear
in a Johnstown boarding house. Later,
he slogged like a refugee for years,
fixing railroad tracks for American Zinc.

They traveled far to find their wives, she says
into my eyes. Our kiss feels like an ocean,
its waves breaking on opposite shores.