

Rice

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On my way to school
there is an old man
down the street who does
tai chi
on his deck
every morning
 even
in the rain.

The sun will always let you
be yourself
he said one day,
It is the rain that
transforms
you...

He stopped me
on one of those
Indian Summer
days when
 sun and
 rain
fight for possession of
your soul...

That is not
 rain
on your cheeks,

he noticed,
but you are strong
 like bamboo
 bending
in the fiercest wind
without
breaking...

When you are sad,
eat a bowl of rice with
 your fingers
and many ancient hands
will uplift you...

You will ride the steamy wisps
that waft about your face,
and wonder
why
there is war in the world
why
children are hungry
when there is rice...

Inhale deeply
silence
 earth
rising from your scarred
brown bowl,
fragrant fingers
cleansing, reaching—
 wrapping
 around
 you

because you
cried when they said
 your eyes were always squinting and
checked *Other* when
they asked if
you were Asian

Eat of the plate before you.
 Tasteless.
 Odorless.
 White.

Only you can savor it,
Only you can flavor it
 with *patis*
 with *boggoong*
 with blood.

Sweet manna from the motherland—
 quintessence
of a sun that shines for all...

Eat slowly,
deliberately,
 peacefully,
and
always
 share your rice.