

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Chath pierSath: Three Poems

Chath pierSath · Monday, April 7th, 2025

### Mother, I'm Coming Home

Sixteen years is too long.  
Mother, I'm coming home  
To collect your bones.

The war that killed your husband is through.  
The killing fields are done.  
I still wake to the sounds of guns.

Sixteen years is too long.  
I am home, mother, to collect your bones.

Your voice telling me to run:  
*Run, run, run 'til you're free,*  
*Run as far as you can.*  
*When the war's over,*  
*We shall meet again.*

I look for you in the things I had known—  
Bamboo bush and the mango trees you had grown.  
There's nothing but despair in your bones.

*Run from the firing squads of heartless men.*  
*Go where you'll be safe.*  
*You'll grow up to have better days.*  
*Return when you can.*  
*We will soon meet again.*

I am home, Mother, to collect your bones.

\*

### Arrival and Departure

Board clothed, deplane naked

To questions and blank stares.

Born here or there. An American nationality.

A Khmer face pruned to spits of oppression.

Dark skinned Vitamin D rich picking apples at an American orchard.

Armed names and badges. Clean, light blue uniforms.

Hanging epaulettes, shoulder to chest pockets.

You fear their silent indifference asking money for coffee

And cigarettes.

I am not your brother, but here's five dollars.

Take it, but in the evaluation,

I talk behind their backs, snitching.

I don't feel comfortable giving to a policeman who stamps my passport

Each arrival and departure.

Tell them not to beg.

There's dignity in being a public servant.

Or are they just sitting, pretending to work for the low

Monthly salary? A lazy position of power.

To be well dressed only to be full of dirt inside.

There are just too many of them at the airport.

Why do we need so many passport controllers?

The dictator in power had destiny & fate on his side.

His embezzlement of power, fangs and class. A golden tooth

To bite the silver lining of propaganda.

Do as I say or say as I do.

Fear mongering silences the public.

The aftermath of a peasant uprising,

Corruption repeating history, each tyrant wears a different mask.

Now, the return of the Cultural Revolution,

Priced and valued by the fat Chinese Buddha of free enterprise,

Chinese Maoist style, dollars and RMB over riels.

Meta, Karuna bought and sold

At global market rate, slow burning the field,

Slash and burn agriculture,

Plastic strewn roadsides,

National billboards, beers and beers,

Drink to win sparks like diamonds

A moto or a chance to a million.

Driving a Lexus in smothering red dust

To the eco-designated tourism area

To find trees befallen left and right

For cashew growing.

The mega trucks, loads of dirt to and from,

Filling lakes and tributaries

To build villas and skyrises.

Haves/have nots breathing  
 Against giant elephants and oligarchs,  
 A woman working at a hotel, saying, her life  
 Has worsened since the Khmer Rouge times.  
 His Excellency's dog lives better than

an average man.

His excellency's private army  
 bitterness around the clock  
 Ticking  
 Repeating in cycles, like the monsoon,

From wet to dry, itself,  
 Violence to violence  
 Leaves you speechless  
 And cold in the tropics.  
 It's a killing spree. Lawlessness you can't describe.  
 It's jailing and possible torture, traitors of the nation,  
 Of a regime change to be,  
 To arrive to, to depart from,  
 A refugee will always be a refugee  
 Of the motherland.

\*

## My Oldest Sister

Has my mother's face.  
 A widow with four grown children.  
 Only the eldest amount to anything in her favor.  
 She gives her money to make merits at the local temple.

Her eldest son, a drunk like his father.  
 His wife beats him up. The last she heard, the wife had broken one of his arms.  
 The bitch got him all skinny and bone, huffing, a laborer in Thailand  
 For Bahts to keep her happy.

My sister is full of mysteries.  
 Her face, moon swallowing the sun.  
 Aggrieved, she's still thinking her drunken husband is alive.  
 Always praying and chanting, her incense smothering upstairs, spirits and ghosts.

The funerary smot starts at four AM to late one AM,  
 Mournful, reminding the entire village of death's eminence,  
 Sooner or later, like her husband, shot dead by a gang  
 Of men who hated him, the village's drunk who cursed everyone when he wasn't himself.

My sister gathers her ancestral spirits every night,  
 Chanting Pali, invoking the dead to keep her safe and healthy,

But no matter what, she gets sick, she has ovarian cancer,  
Her vagina got all dried up, and her thighs exploded with cancerous infection.

She sang one of her favorite Ros Sereysothea songs  
So I could weep in dollars  
For her treatment, the traditional medicine,  
All healed up now, a miraculous cure, four hundred dollars after.

My sister lives time slow and sad,  
Meaningless, guava and milk fruit,  
In her backyard the banana grove and bamboo bush I gave her grow wild.  
An open pond she pumps to her cement urn to water the fruit trees.

Everything she has  
My American dollars sweat and tears  
An American farm, Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln,  
Wired down to a Cambodian bank account,

As if I have a Swiss account like the rich and powerful.  
Hotwired home, one dollar to four thousand riels,  
My sister now lives better than I can under the poverty line,  
An artist who farms in order to survive.

\*

*(Featured image from [Pexels](#))*

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