



The Monsoons

It's another hot and soggy late afternoon in Bangkok, the eternally noisy city. Rivers of kids are flowing out of the schools and into the narrow sois*, scrambling for rides on the back of motorbikes. Six ten-year-old girls in their school uniforms and Winnie-the-Pooh backpacks are trying to cram into the back of one of the many tuk tuks* which go bouncing down the cracked pavement belching exhaust fumes. Others are stepping into mommy's Mercedes. It's a blaze of activity before the city changes gear into the 'nighttime-everybody-goes-to-have-food' time.

I'm sitting on my perch facing east from the fourth floor, overlooking a pale blue swimming pool and the tropical foliage in back of the Sai Nam Peung School. Skyscrapers lace the horizon towards Thong Lo and Ekkamai districts. Sure enough, it looks like another nightly invasion is about to take place. The



most distant clouds are towering higher than they should and resemble the anvils where iron weapons are being forged. The fat and lazy afternoon air is starting to come to attention, alert to the

advancement of the determined invader from the southeast, the Monsoons. Within a few minutes the eastern sky has turned almost black. The bright sunshine from behind my back is lighting up the apartment buildings against the darkened sky with its' last golden blaze. The winds are getting more agitated now, causing tiny waves to wrinkle the pool's surface and making the foliage dance nervously.

From beyond the tall buildings come the sounds of the first war drums, signaling the advance of the barbarous hordes. There is a sudden drop in the temperature raising the level of alertness, it's



no longer sticky and lazy feeling. As darkness moves in the first distant flashes momentarily reflect off the clouds. The first hazy signs of water cascading



down are fading the details of the towers, making them appear more distant. The wind has picked up dramatically causing the windchimes to proclaim that the storm is at the gates. A

tremendous gust of wind sends the plastic lawn furniture skidding across the terrace towards the pool and, as usual, some of the chairs are now headed for the bottom. From down the street there is the nasal raspy sound of motorbikes zooming to finish their last errand before heading for shelter, and most out of place of all, the ice cream wagon toodles by piping out something like the Mexican Hat Dance.

The first heavy raindrops have arrived, bringing a new fresh smell to the air as the smoke of the day is cleansed. The towers have all but disappeared behind an advancing curtain of rain and the first big electrical bombs are detonating down the street, the flashes coming nearer and nearer. The wind and rain is having its' way now, raping and





Taking refuge behind the temple

pillaging and flooding. It's almost completely dark and the invading storm has the city completely in its' power. No one can move about any street or yard. I've turned out all the lights and I'm sitting on

my deck in relative safety watching the spectacle, all my senses are piqued up to maximum sensitivity. How could I even think of doing anything else – the greatest drama on earth is going on! The heaviest bombardment is in progress, the core of the destructive war machine. Some of the flashing and crashing is simultaneous with immediate attacks like shotgun blasts followed by rolling echoes off the city's buildings. Good grief! That blast sounded like huge iron pipes rolling down a cliff face! The most brilliant strikes split the stratosphere and illuminate the skyline. The





neighborhood has lost power now.



It's raining in China

Out on Soi Twenty Two, groups of little ladies with their colorful umbrellas are stranded under the awning of the Seven-Eleven store in its' fluorescent light, hoping an empty taxi will come by. Some are lucky enough to have gotten into one and are viewing the ongoing devastation from within a secure and dry protective bubble. One that isn't going anywhere quickly for a little while! The sound of the rain falling heavily is a steady roar that speeds up and slows down periodically like a freight train. The mighty fortresses like the Queenspark Hotel are resolutely standing with their lights burning, protecting all the travelers who need shelter. Will this be

the kind of storm that is like an army passing through on the march, or the type that moves in to stay like an endless siege?



This one will pass on. Slowly the rain thins out to a fine trickle, then a mist, and the sound of the bombs exploding is coming from progressively more distant neighborhoods. Raindrops falling in the swimming pool are making smaller

and lighter circles as they impact. The lightning flashes are etching the outlines of the office towers to the west now, and not as brilliantly. The trees and foliage along the streets and in the backyards have endured the most direct assault of the invader but appear not to mind at all. They've had long years of training and know just how to survive in battles such as this one.

Everyone comes out of their shelters and the city resumes its' unceasing and cool-headed pace. People continue with their lives, unruffled. Lines of cars moving slowly down the sois are making waves in the few inches



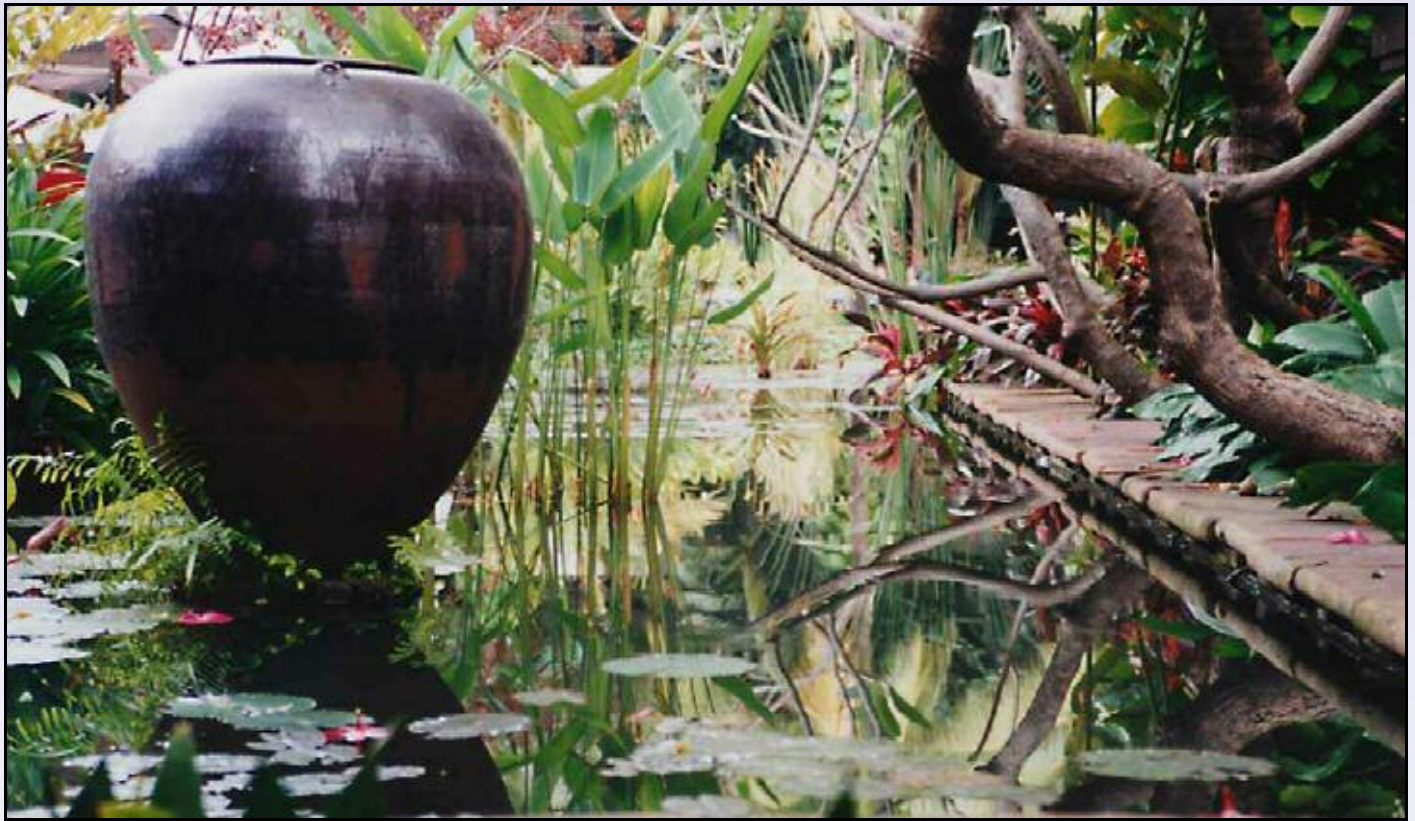


of water that has backed up in the street. This was an intense storm and it will be late at night before the rainwater goes down. How do you ride a motorbike through six inches of water? Practice, practice! What do you do if all the taxis are taken and you simply must get home? Take off your shoes, roll up your jeans, and wade on down the lane.

There's plenty of time to go home, change into dry clothes and relax before heading out into the colorful noisy evening to mix with all the lovely people. In Bangkok, the night is always young.

Soi = smaller lanes and backstreets

Tuk tuk = three wheeled motorcycle carts for maneuvering the narrower sois



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