

INTRODUCING THE SRPR ILLINOIS POET:  
IRA SUKRUNGRUANG



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Chicago-born writer, Ira Sukrungruang, is the author of the memoirs *Southside Buddhist* and *Talk Thai: The Adventures of Buddhist Boy*, the short story collection *The Melting Season*, and the poetry collection *In Thailand It Is Night*. His collection of essays, *Buddha's Dog and Other Meditations*, was published in March 2018 by University of Tampa Press. He is the coeditor of two anthologies on the topic of obesity: *What Are You Looking At? The First Fat Fiction Anthology* and *Scoot Over, Skinny: The Fat Nonfiction Anthology*. He is the recipient of the 2015 American Book Award, New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in Nonfiction Literature, an Arts and Letters Fellowship, and the Emerging Writer Fellowship. His work has appeared in many literary journals, including *Post Road*, *The Sun*, and *Creative Nonfiction*. He is one of the founding editors of *Sweet: A Literary Confection* ([sweetlit.com](http://sweetlit.com)), and he teaches in the MFA program at University of South Florida. For more information about him, please visit: [www.buddhistboy.com](http://www.buddhistboy.com).

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## Holding Shallow Breaths in the Heart Cage

*after Melissa Carroll*

After the storm that turned limbs to crystals, we found  
frozen the downy nestled  
in a pot of dead daisies, color preserved,  
eyes aimed to the oak in the distance.

Love is like this: a frozen state, a bird  
waiting for thaw.

We found other things, too. The bone  
of deer our dog dragged home  
as an offering. The nose of a vole poking  
from a hole in a stump. The loss of us.

Too long we freeze things  
to keep, to hold, in hope that some day  
the thaw will come.

But this is what moments do—

they wing by, a blur of time and color  
that fades like an old film.

We could not take flight, but stayed  
still through the silent storm.

Hurt is like this: a pointed shard in the ribs,  
memory unshakable.

The melt will come—it always  
does—and underneath the detritus of us,  
a green that browns. But time, we hope,  
will stitch whatever gap and give

again the possibility of bloom.

## And then

the sting, a pinprick burn on the cheek,  
heat spreading down chin neck chest

finally toes which curled hard in rubber shoes.  
And then I cupped it and listened

to it buzz and bump against the walls  
of my palm. And then the opened hand

like the bursting bloom of a lotus, I,  
watching the jagged and drunk flight

of my brief love into the shadowed  
jungle of irises. And then memory of my lips

that night, and hers, but a name lost  
in some sidewalk crack. And then the first and only,

the way firsts dream back to us. And then she ran,  
heat in her absence, and the familiar

scorch lingering throughout the day,  
my life. And then the flood of others—

lips tongues teeth loss  
—each containing its own beautiful hurt.

And then the last—oh princess, come  
rescue me, my lips await, and wake me from my sleep

so deep, a dream of endless fields, a forever  
yawn of green, wishing the next and then and then  
and then...

## Once I Drew a Maze with a Minotaur Waiting at the End

Once I whipped an apple on the ground  
to mimic the end of the world, its splatter  
oxidizing the concrete  
in the shape of a fat Buddha.

Once I broke a bottle, blood blossoming  
in the center of my palm like a harvest moon.  
Trembling at the sight of it. Imagine licking  
shards slicing the tongue.

Once I loved myself, but I find  
love is a sour tasting  
apple—all pucker—hurt  
building at the core, and out scurry worms.

Once a squirrel plummeted  
from a maple, and it shook  
the daze out of its head, leaving  
a lesson of stability.

Once I found the Minotaur and asked  
whether it was best to be caught or lost  
in a world of right angles. He said, mazes  
are like this: one wall after another.