

**The Long Way**  
By Thu Nguyen – Gaithersburg, Maryland

There are days for shortcuts and then there are the others:  
taking the back of my knife to lemongrass, bruising better  
for the flavor, peeling ginger skin with a spoon,  
frying and tasting, stirring and tasting,  
looking for the gold, still tasting.

The kitchen steams like the fog so thick  
this morning I could barely make anything out  
but if anything makes sense,  
it's that flowers are unavoidable the week of your death;  
die on the 13th of the second month of the year,  
and you guarantee yourself bouquets,  
a beautiful altar for as long as you're remembered.

I take my cues from you: never interested in fame,  
and never in a rush. I set your place while I wait  
for finally the curry almost the color of mangos,  
smells warm and ripe like they do in summer.

But it's not mango season,  
your favorite season, so I make this offering  
knowing how much it lacks; I've cooked  
all morning for you the long way,  
like a prayer, like penance.