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(Mu vi te go, nga shut ngat ax mo dit)

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1987

At Twilight, Longing for My *Amo*

Looking left, a black hand
To the right, a black hand
A dark curtain shrouding me when
At twilight I long for my *amo*

In the front yard, there may be a potato patch
Where potatoes probably bloom.
Those potato flowers may bear seed pods.
As those potato flowers are busy blooming
Amo's sweat surges like a spring,
The drops of *Amo's* sweat
Ringing on potato leaves.

There may be a buckwheat patch in the backyard,
Buckwheat leaves as wide as grain sifters,
Seeds the size of fists.
How many buckwheat leaves
Were nurtured from sprouts by *Amo*?
How many buckwheat kernels
Were so carefully raised by *Amo*?

Oh, my *amo*, her back stacked with firewood,
Staggering from the woods across from home;
I can't say if her steps are steady or not,
As her feet may slip down the slope,
And her hands may grasp only thin air.

Oh, my *amo*, she cut a basket of grass
Walking straight from the grasses behind the house.
I wonder if she can see her way clearly?
Will she step upon a toad or poison snake?

Too hard to forget, too hard to forget!
Amo, busy borrowing money from the neighbor's—
Will the neighbor's dogs bite her?
Will the neighbor's chickens peck her?
Don't fear, don't fear!
Not one of their dogs unkind,
Not one of their chickens unfriendly.

Don't worry, don't worry!
Amo may be in the sitting room, putting away food for hard times;
Or maybe busy cooking there around the fireplace.
Or sitting and eating in the sitting room
Or busy knitting or weaving under the eaves
Or busy making whatever is needed at home
Or busy leaving
A heritage for her descendants.

Don't fear, don't fear!
My *amo* seems busy grinding grain by the millstones,
Calling chickens by the door
Feeding pigs at the pigsty
Standing on the hilltop before the house
Gazing into the distance, awaiting her
Youngest son's return home.

Oh, *Amo*!
Carrying a bucket of water thick as ink,
Carrying two buckets deep as the sea.
Tides surge behind the son.

The tidewaters are *Amo's* milk,
The tidewaters are *Amo's* sweat,
The tidewaters are *Amo's* blood.

Tides surge behind the son.
The son's body, milk;
His wisdom, sweat;
His life, blood.

Oh, *Amo*, you went to carry water,
Though the spring can never run dry,
Night comes.
What can I do? What can I do?

At twilight I long for my *amo*.
Looking down, I sense the warmth
As warm as before I raised my head;
I wish to push aside those ashes that lie
Angled in the fireplace.

1987