

Everything Zen

by zach ezer

Kaung tried to get me laid once. It's still one of the nicest things anyone has ever done for me. He was fucking a girl with a lot of piercings, and he told me she had an equally scary friend who liked black guys. It didn't happen, but that wasn't his fault. I almost didn't believe him, because he was such a compulsive liar, but she showed up, stick-poke tattoo and all.

Kaung, yes like King Kong, as he always introduced himself, was 6' and 220 lbs. of muscle. He was an obvious beneficiary of the more caloric American diet, as he dwarfed his Myanmar-born father by nearly five inches and two weight classes. He had always reminded me of an animal. He was unusually hairy for an Asian man and had a glint in his eyes that always struck me as reptilian.

He was impulsive. He was also aggressive. I could never figure out which caused the other. I remember suggesting that he move his brawls to the old reservoir so he wouldn't get suspended again. I remember lying to the cops about who beat Sheldon bloody.

He was always fiercely independent, for better or worse. His father captained an oil tanker, so he spent the majority of his time at home with only a mother whose limited command of English put her at a disadvantage against her wild offspring. I felt an affinity with him, because as an eldest child, I knew what it was like to figure the world out for myself.

The only one who could ever control Kaung was his grandmother. The alternate years she came in from Burma- the name didn't change for those too old to believe in the difference- were the only times I had seen him listen to anyone. He knew she wouldn't put up with his shit. She was a botanist for the military junta, and she maintained a stilled tension about her. I still don't know her name. She was always Kaung's grandma to anyone else, grandma to her.

The whole family loved me. They thought it was good Kaung had a friend who got good grades and read philosophy for fun, instead of chasing girls and pummeling the neighbors. Kaung was jealous of me then, I could feel it. A small part of me liked those moments. *Now you know how I feel*, I thought.

Kaung is my oldest friend. We talk about once a year. He lives with the woman he's likely to marry. She made him care about politics. He's calmer now, less manic than the kid I took speed with so that we could play Bush and Nirvana covers for twelve hours straight. Now I tell him stories about having strange sex with strange people, and he seems to miss those stick-poke women for a second. But it doesn't last; he's content. He always was one step ahead of me.