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THE VIET CONG

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

By

DAVID C. TRAN

May 2016

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ABSTRACT

After the loss of his father, Eddie Nguyen – an English teacher – travels to Vietnam to fulfill his father’s dying wish, which is to have his remains returned to his village of origin, but the problem is that Eddie can’t seem to locate it. In an attempt to generate funds and solicit more information about the whereabouts of the mysterious village, Eddie tries to find work as an English teacher in Saigon, but he quickly discovers no school will hire him based off his Vietnamese heritage. Frustrated, Eddie goes to a local bar and befriends a bartender named Nykky, who then passes his information to a “friend” named Tony who might be able to help him. Instead of a face-to-face meeting, Tony – a gangster – tests Eddie’s English skills by sending him on an errand with his hired muscle, Big Baby, to collect an outstanding debt from an American expat. After the frightening ordeal, Eddie meets Tony in his club. Tony, impressed with the results, offers him a job – the details he withholds until Eddie agrees to his terms – and the payment being the location of mysterious village and the sum of three million dollars.

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No, he said, snapping on his sunglasses. People are afraid of me, but that thing back there. That was different. That was respect. I saw it in his eyes. I want that. Can you teach me that?

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Why do you want to learn English? I asked.

See how that man back there talked to you? Big Baby said. He took off his sunglasses, and for the first time I could see all of his face, including all of the old bruises, his swollen right eye, and the stitches above it. He talked to you like a man -- like an equal, he said. He hung on your every word. He listened to you. He was obedient.

What are you talking about? Everyone must listen to you. Look how big you are?

No, he said, snapping on his sunglasses. People are afraid of me, but that thing back there. That was different. That was respect. I saw it in his eyes. I want that. Can you teach me that?

I don't know, but I'll do my best.

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VITA

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EDUCATION

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TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor, 2015
University of Mississippi
Course: Beginning Fiction Workshop

Teaching Assistant, 2013 – 2015
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Courses: Survey of British Literature to the 18th Century, Survey of American Literature to the Civil War, Survey of American Literature since the Civil War

HONORS and FELLOWSHIPS

English Teaching Fellowship, 2016 – present
Elvis Meets Einstein Prose Winner, 2016
Elvis Meets Einstein Poetry Winner, 2016
Bondurant Award Prose Winner, 2016
The Jeff Stayton “Bubba” Fiction Winner, 2016
Elvis Meets Einstein Prose Winner, 2015
The Jeff Stayton “Bubba” Creative Nonfiction Winner, 2015
Elvis Meets Einstein Prose Winner, 2014
Bondurant Award Prose Winner, 2014