

A GIRL NAMED BINH AN

Nha Trang, in July of 2002. Tossing back briskly her hair locks that clung over her shoulders, the young girl gazed at me, intensely. One might see a bit of nervousness through her clasped fingers tapping gently on the table. She was tall, slender, elegant with an oval face, large dark eyes, and especially a whitish rosy skin –a particular physical trait of girls living in Bong Son and Tam Quan districts, well known for their groves of coconut trees, that I had frequently encountered during my military operations through their hamlets and villages.

After introducing herself, she went straight into the subject of the meeting, briefly and partially relating her personal life, with a typical accent of Nha Trang region, my hometown. With a gentle smile, she said:

“Previously, a long time ago, I was told the whole story of my life by my auntie, but I didn’t believe it. Then afterwards, it happened that one of my distant relatives, uncle Thang, also told me the exact same story. That made me more inquisitive. He even showed me a picture of you in military fatigues with the insignia, and some men of your unit.” All of a sudden, she asked:

“Today, without an appointment, I came to meet with you, as suggested by uncle Thang, because I would like to ask you to verify the truth of the story he had told me.”

“Oh, is that so! It’s no wonder why...” I muttered to myself, struggling to subdue a sigh, but not ready to give an immediate answer. How could one remember, after more than thirty years, to relate it in full details, as she wished? She repeated her request and waited.

After a long pause, I spoke slowly: “True or untrue is up to you, and it can’t change anything, when everyone, including yourself, knows that in this new society the demarcation between lie and truth is very fragile. On the contrary, at this moment, I wonder whether such a request is still necessary, for in so many long years you have been living a very comfortable and proud life with a belief, or illusion, that everything is totally perfect, totally grandiose, and totally sublime, under this splendid regime...”

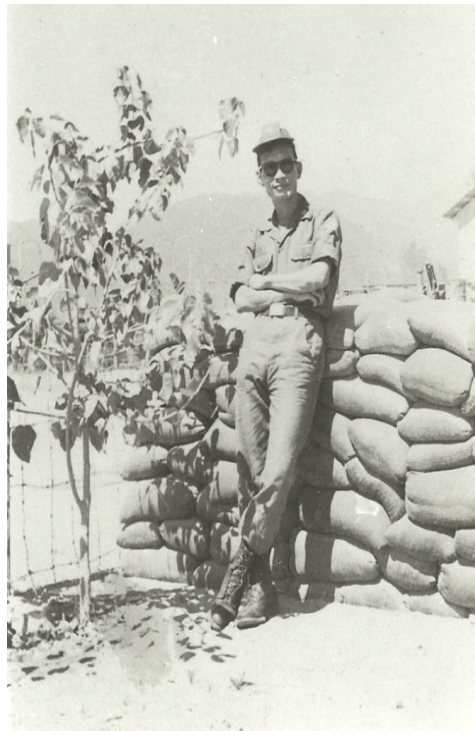
The young girl cut in right away:

“Please, no such ironic tone! Understand me well, uncle! I just want to know, only for once, so that my soul can escape the haunting agony that has been building up since I had the chance to hear about that very important story. Thirty years are my whole life, but only a fraction of time for you, who have endured so many challenges of Destiny, who have inspired in me, right at the first minute of this meeting, a more sympathetic impression, and view, of the ‘enemy’ side that I had been raised to hate. I do expect to hear you, from your own words, if you don’t mind...”

Finally, I said:

“OK then, Miss. Would you like to embark now, with me, on a long retro-voyage in search of the time lost?”

It was in spring of 1969, just one year after the Tet Offensive. From Pleiku, Army II Corps conducted several operations of what they called “pacification and development” (*binh dinh va phat trien*) program, especially for Binh Dinh province, which was assigned to the 22nd Infantry Division. The Viet Cong, in response, stepped up their harassment activities and infiltration maneuvers into the villages in the North of Binh Dinh. I was ordered to direct half of the 202nd Political War Company, and to tail closely the convoy, composed of the Division’s commanding staff, from Ba Gi headquarters, in Qui Nhon, to the 40th Regiment’s De Duc base camp, stationed in Bong Son, about 115 km away. The long-term mission of my company included the so-called “civic actions” in the villages surrounding Hoai An, Hoai Nhon, and Tam Quan districts, which were infested with Viet Cong local guerrillas. There, as usual, we performed routine health and physical exam for inhabitants, gave medicines or shots to the sick, and carried out counterpropaganda against Viet Cong poisonous indoctrination. This time, in addition, we had to help the regiment troops evacuate civilians, suspected of having ties with those nocturnal enemy fighters, to safe locations, for a process of identity checking and security clearance, and mostly, to provide fundamental necessities during their temporary resettlement.



Bồng Sơn, 1969. Author at the 40th Infantry Regiment camp

The sun was at its zenith. The rather long convoy was moving slowly along the national route, obviously waiting for scouts from the forward reconnaissance team to wipe out guerrilla snipers' holes. Quite exhausted, I stretched out my legs and leaned back against the seat of my military jeep. In the car, besides Binh, the driver, there were Corporal Hai, the radio operator, nicknamed Hai Grenade (he always carried six grenades which dangled on his body), and Sergeant Thang, the company medic. All three of them were silent, apparently tense, and not chatting noisily as they usually did. As I half-closed my eyes, the image of Tho Tho re-appeared, flickering. Frustrated, and sometimes angry, at her indifference to my burning heart's murmurs and her seeming rejection of my secret but undoubted love, I refrained from going, the night before my departure from Qui Nhon, to see her and say good-bye. Now, in my enormous chagrin and tiredness, sinking into a deluge of regrets, I imagined an idyllic, if not fairylike, love story, more or less romantic, more or less platonic, with her crying on my shoulder, as would do a child, at the time of separation. When choosing not to meet her, I was well aware that from now on I would lose her, forever, even though not a word of love and farewell was uttered. Unless Destiny would decide otherwise...

Suddenly the sound of an explosion boomed across the sky, like a clap of thunder, followed by a salvo of resonant detonations that would rip the surface of the earth. The magic of my sweet dream was broken, and left me alone to face the sad and ugly quotidian reality. I quickly snatched the helmet and the M16 rifle. Dusty smokes billowing skyward formed a long white stretch, at a far distance, in the direction, I guessed, of Tam Quan hill pagoda.

"Sounds like bombs from a B52. I'm pretty sure there must be a fighting somewhere", Hai Grenade said, and turned on the PRC 25, waiting for orders. I called the Division's G3, and learned that the Vietnamese and American troops were destroying the big guns and concentration points of the Viet Cong. Wave after wave of airplanes, making loops in clouds, dropped bombs by turns, and columns of fire and smoke blowing upward like clusters of giant fireworks. Gunshots popped around, continuously. Panicky villagers poured out in great numbers along the national route. Slovenly children ran and cried at the same time.

My jeep moved on inch by inch at a time, at a rather great distance from the convoy. A woman from inside a village suddenly plunged toward our direction, and yelled out:

"There's a person in labor with a child! Help her, please, and take her to the hospital."

I did not even have time to answer when Thang promptly yelled back:

"The district hospital was destroyed last year by the Viet Cong mortar shells. We are on a military operation, so we do not have a car or an ambulance. You women can certainly help deliver. By the way, where is that person?"

Following the direction her finger was pointing to, I saw a young woman, with a large pregnant belly, sitting flat on the grass, apparently in great pain. Thang stuck out his head to have a better look. A voice was heard from a crowd around the woman:

"Well, uncle Thang! You are also here! Uncle, please rescue little Huong."

Thang told me:

“It’s a cousin on my wife’s side. sir, allow me to walk over to take a look.”

I ordered Binh to stop the car on the roadside. Thang jumped out. A moment later, he came back and reported:

“Amniotic fluid is leaking, blood is pouring. Can we do something? But if left in this condition, she’s going to die, for sure.”

I asked Thang: “Could you help deliver?”

Hai Grenade answered instead:

“Of course, he could, sir. He has a wife, four children. He’s damned good on that matter, indeed.”

I got out of the car, handed my M16 to Binh and asked him to watch out for any mixing of the Viet Cong with the crowd, then together with Thang, walked up to the woman. Everyone cleared the way for us. At the same time, there was the wailing of a new born baby. Somebody exclaimed:

“Already out. Quite fast! It is a baby girl.”

Blood blotted the used military poncho, which a relative had spread under her body. She bit her lips, groaned, grimaced... Her white skin color now looked pale. Sweat covered her forehead. Thang opened his emergency aid kit, and found a pair of scissors, small and blunt. Thang cut the umbilical cord. It did not work. He asked the crowd, but nobody had a knife. In an extreme urgency, I had to draw out the bayonet from its sheath I used to carry on my hip side, wiped it off with alcohol, and passed it on to Thang. With my help and that of her young sister, in the end, Thang succeeded in cutting off the umbilical cord. However, blood was pouring out profusely, and we used up all the bandages we had taken with us in the car. We then had recourse to her own garments. She was lying immobile, almost dead. Thang gave her an injection that, he claimed, would help stop the bleeding and recover her strength. I asked emptyly:

“Where’s her husband?”

There was silence. Then, after a long moment, someone from the crowd tried to say, hesitantly, that he had been away for work.

Once back to my jeep, I called the chief of the regiment’s PolWar bureau, i.e. G5, a kind major who had directly designated my company to be on this mission, but instead, I ran into the then-acting commander of the regiment, a very cranky lieutenant colonel whom I did not know, let alone liked well. I made a brief report of the incident, and asked if he could send an urgent request for an American MediVac copter. He scolded noisily:

“What the hell are you talking about? To assist the delivery is not your duty as a lieutenant. To evacuate the wounded soldiers is now a priority, don’t you understand?”

Disappointed, I was going to hang up, but he went on talking with the same loud voice:

“Alright, let me call PolWar adviser Moore for his opinion. Wait there!”

I sighed with relief and hope. Captain Moore, a friend who usually had been on missions together with me, in Ban Me Thuot, at the 23rd Infantry Division, some years before, was still

around, wasn't he? A few minutes later, the sound of the radio slightly crackled back to life, and the voice of the acting commander became, this time, milder:

"Moore said ok. He also said he knows you, lieutenant. In fifteen minutes, there will be a copter from the 1st Cav Division. You'd better have your men secure a landing pad..."

"Thank you, sir. Please convey my greetings and thanks to Captain Moore."

The military GMC carrying a group of my PolWar soldiers just arrived from the rear. Just in time, luckily, I told myself. All jumped off the truck, with weapons in hands. The landing pad was a rice plot, dried and abandoned under the radiant summer sun, near the national route. An American helicopter appearing from the northern direction was closing in and circling. Hai Grenade tossed a smoke grenade while Thang pulled out of his shirt pocket a piece of paper, ready to jot down something. He asked the infant's aunt:

"Hoa, what is the name you'll give to the baby, so the American hospital personnel will register it in her birth certificate?"

The aunt answered that it would be up to him. Thang turned to me:

"You give a name, sir..."

I waved away my arm.

"Just give her any name! Whichever name would be fine for me."

Then, all of a sudden, as if from the depth of my sub-conscience, I blurted out a whisper:

"Oh, yes. An. Binh An. Peace."

The helicopter landed. Its still whirling propellers raised wind and dust against the waiting crowd. American soldiers lifted both the mother and the infant into the craft on a stretcher. I requested that Hoa be allowed to accompany them. My eyes searched for Moore, but did not see him, of course. The pilot waved me good-bye...

We continued on our moving to Bong Son. After reporting, our PolWar company received the order to split up into three small groups to tag along other fighting units from the 40th Regiment. This time, we teamed up with American civic action groups, alternatively flying with them, on the 1st Cav's copters, into the most distant, isolated and dangerous hamlets. At times, we brought back to makeshift hospitals in Hoai Nhon district or to military medical posts of the regiment some elderly, children, and women, who were injured by mines, booby traps, or grenades that the Viet Cong had set up for us. Being busy with those dangerous tasks, permanently facing death, witnessing daily tragedies of the people caught in the crossfire, I almost forgot the woman who had delivered prematurely. I did not know, and if asked, one would hardly know about the current situation of the mother and her baby. I even forgot Qui Nhon and the short joyful days, and Tho Tho, my unhappy love.

At the end of 1970, I was transferred to the 204th PolWar Company in Nha Trang, close to my home, and three years later to the PolWar Academy in Da Lat. It was for me a fortunate opportunity to escape the sad remembrances of war and love. In 1974, I came back

home for a furlough of one week, and unexpectedly met again there Sergeant Thang –then serving at Khanh Hoa sub-sector’s military unit. Thang related:

“Huong and her infant daughter were given first aid by American rescuers. A few days after, they discharged both of them. Binh An was premature but healthy, developing normally. In 1971, her guerrilla-father sneaked out of a hiding place, and while he set up a grenade trap at the village office, the device exploded accidentally and the blast blew him off, killing him instantly. In the same year, Huong went to the rice paddies, stepped on a mine, and was seriously injured, and died after two days. Binh An was adopted by her aunt, Hoa, who had assisted us in cutting the umbilical cord, do you remember her? Hoa followed her husband to Nha Trang to live, taking along with her Binh An who was then five-year old. Hoa still keeps a leather handbag given by the Americans, but she lost somewhere the baby’s birth certificate... Sir, do you want to meet them?”

I told: “I’m afraid I don’t. I am too busy now. Well, another time, maybe.”

The young lady, Binh An, had been sitting in silence, sometimes wiping her tears with a Kleenex tissue. She listened attentively to the story I narrated in minute details and with moderate and careful words. I went on:

“That ‘another time’ took exactly thirty-one years to materialize. Today, for the first time, I made a huge effort to tell all what had happened, by pursuing my eroded memory that had slipped away all together with evidence. Moreover, I do not intend to persuade you to believe me, and you do not have to be thankful to anybody, because as far as I am concerned, to come to the rescue of anyone is a duty.”

She shook her head:

“No. I don’t think so, at all. On the contrary, in my opinion, it was a mere choice, a personal decision, a clear evaluation of dignity between human beings.”

Then, waiting for her tears to dry out, again, she spoke, in a manner ostensibly half self-explaining, half self-blaming:

“The three individuals told exactly the same story, because there is one only truth for people, I mean, honest people. Nevertheless, in my native village, the angry, extremist young cadres, still nourishing a strange and absurd hatred, stated that American soldiers and your men had rounded up villagers, and they had taken my mother away, just after her parturition, and given her injections that would have gradually killed her. They also said that I had been left hungry for several days, and my father had been captured, tortured, had had his ears cut, his eyes plucked, and then had been taken away to be eventually shot. At that time, still a growing ebullient youth, I had believed without reluctance. Until afterward, when the government policies loosened a little bit, aunt Hoa, uncle Thang, and some of many other witnesses were bold enough to relate the contrary. Now...”

I intercepted:

“Now you have understood. In fact, nobody worried much about the above-mentioned truth distortions. Likewise, after 1975, while being transported to re-education camps in

North Vietnam, we officers became the ideal targets for the illiterate peasants who threw stones and worst curses at us, while accusing us of being enemies of the people, and valets of the imperialist Americans. They accused us of raping women, decapitating children, killing people unscrupulously. At last, by gradually interacting with us, they discerned the truth, and changed their attitude completely. All of this was the result of pernicious propagandas, which they had implanted in the mind, the marrow and the bone of many generations. Truly so, in order to survive, the regime has to cling to deceptions as well as terror tactics by creating permanent fears, thus to silence everyone from speaking up the truth. From the beginning to this day. From a dark cave in the jungle of Viet Bac before to the streets of Ha Noi now. From an uneducated farmer to the band of writers and poets, and the gang of self-proclaimed leaders. I speak this up because I believe that an intelligent and beautiful young lady like you, I mean, a young lady still knowing how to think, still being tormented by her past and about the truth of her life, would not definitely be a Communist. Communism is synonymous of evil, wickedness. They have no heart, no brain, and no knowledge of whatsoever other than a bunch of rotten theories that they have to repeat continuously like idiot parrots...”

I paused for a short while to fathom her reactions, and realized that she was still listening calmly. I then resumed:

“I told you this thing, because, obviously, the past that you woke up from a sad sleep is coming back in its entirety, with a devastating war and a multitude of unfortunate people fleeing from it. It included the image of your mother passing out in pain, of your very dark purple body wrapped in my green military towel, and of a shining bayonet drawn out from its sheath, yes, that bayonet which, on the very day of your birth, I did not plunge into any enemy’s heart. With the South Vietnamese soldiers and the American men in the rescue helicopter, those strangers, who for the love of mankind...”

To this point, suddenly, Binh An sprang straight up and sobbed:

“Enough! Please don’t talk anymore. Don’t say anything more. I understand completely. Throughout the entire recent past, they filled my mind with trivial little privileges and excessive and deceitful praises, through a futile piece of paper certifying that I am the daughter of a revolutionary martyr. There were moments when I had suspicions, and posed bitter and hard questions to myself and got no answer. I also knew, like millions of people today, who know but cannot do anything, who know but have to shut their mouth, for the sake of their own safety. I would feel smug and perhaps proud –like you said– to live in this society, if I don’t have a sensitive character and the strong instinctive self-defense of an orphan thrown too soon into this world, and if I were not dreaming of happiness and peace for my soul, and of truth for my mind. Moreover, had I not had the incredible opportunity to meet with you, the main witness, I would not be able to hear the integral voice of conscience. I also know that you are not a person who fabricates stories, because what kind of benefit would you get from me by doing so, now or then? At that time, you did not even care for a word of gratitude, you did not even attempt to come and see aunt Hoa, much less now. I believe you.”

A few days later, Binh An came back with a bouquet of flowers and a basket of oranges, and asked permission to go in the room to greet my ill mother. Also coming were Hoa and former Sergeant Thang. His hair was now gray, and his back, bent down. He was practicing as a private nurse, injecting medicine as per doctor's prescription. He wrapped his arms around me tightly, talking nonstop about old stories:

"Gosh! My boss, my master, you are still alive after so many years so we can see each other again. I'm so happy! You still have the same old manners... Since I happen to know that you returned to Nha Trang to visit your bedridden mom, I urged Binh An to come and see you first and ask you to tell the truth because she doesn't believe me, and always remains skeptical, and tortured by many difficult questions.

Binh An burst into laughter:

"No more questions now. I feel at my ease and make peace with myself, dear uncle!"

Meanwhile, Hoa held my hands, for quite a while, and wept:

"Do you know, since that day I'd been longing so much to meet with you. Thang told me you had moved to another unit. My sister Huong, at her death agony, said she missed you, told me to go and look for you. She asked you to accept Binh An as your own daughter if Destiny would one day bring you and Binh An together..."

Two days before returning to the USA, I was invited by Hoa and Binh An to visit their home and have dinner with their family. They were living in Xom Moi area. Their old house was relatively large, partitioned into two sections; one was for the sewing and alterations shop, the other used as their own residence. Vinh, Hoa's husband, formerly a sergeant leading a local armed force platoon, was now a taxi driver. Imitating Thang, he called me "master" incessantly. During the meal, Binh An didn't eat or talk much, appearing deeply meditative. At one time, she asked me about the regiment's acting commander, about my friend and advisor Captain Moore, about Hai Grenade, and my other soldiers that I had mentioned earlier in my story. I answered:

"Captain Moore, a few months later, stepped on a bamboo trapped mine, and had a foot shattered. Binh, the driver, and his two companions fell in an ambush. Their bodies were thrown into a pond near the railroad tracks between Bong Son and Tam Quan, where I also had been, once before, shot at by a sniper—the bullet piercing, luckily, only my snug jacket. I heard that the commander, after April 1975, died in a re-education camp in North Vietnam. As for Hai Grenade and the other men, I don't know where they had ended up."

Binh An held her face in her hands, bowed her head, exhaled a long sigh:

"What a pity! They were very good people. They were my benefactors, more or less. Why did God make them suffer like that?"

"It's not God, but men", I corrected. "Calamities and tragedies are created by men."

She understood, nodded her head slightly. Then she took me to the garden.

The garden was small, beautiful and well maintained. The wind, blowing intensely from the sea, was pleasant and fresh. Some butterflies were flying about rows of flowers. Birds were singing from above, and crickets chirping around. Mangoes, milk fruits, custard apples, timely ripe, were bending the overloaded tree branches. The lights of the fading sun were dancing in the dark green foliage like a band of *ignes fatui*.

“This is my kingdom, my little world”, Binh An said gently. “When I felt depressed and desperate, I came here to cry alone. Please sit down here with me.”

As I sat down on the old wood bench, full of paint patches, next to Binh An, a feeling of pity was rising in my heart. A look of discreet melancholy did not leave her eyes yet. We both stayed silent, letting our souls sink with the evening dusk. She stared forward, thinking deeply. And, unexpectedly, she turned her head and asked:

“How come you have named me Binh An?”

Her abrupt question caught me off my guard, and made me feel startled and a little confused. I answered, in a compassionate voice:

“It was chosen by Tho Tho. One evening, still in Qui Nhon, talking about Hue, her birthplace, and the Tet horrendous massacre by the Viet Cong, she looked very emotional, and told me that in the future she would call her first child by that name... Perhaps she had dreamed of a day when there would be no more war, and only peace, *binh an*, would come back everywhere. Also, she said that every night she prayed for my safe return from the fields, to my surprise, for she had never expressed her tenderness for me in such an explicit loving way. At the time, I was too stupid, or too haughty, to realize that love is always a visible thing. However, Fate dictated arbitrarily its own tyranny: the day you were born was the day we separated in silence, and it was my fault. When Thang asked me what name I would give you, it suddenly came back to my memory.”

Binh An begged me to tell more, and urging repeatedly out of curiosity:

“What happened to her now, uncle? Did you ever see her again?”

“Yes, in the very town of Bong Son”, I said. “There, she was appointed teacher in a primary school, after graduating from the Qui Nhon Pedagogy School. There, we both have lived a mutual, pure, romantic, if not platonic, passion, as I had imagined once, and spent a wonderful time ever together, until I got the order to go back to the rear post of Ba Gi, and a month later, she had to transfer to a school in Kon Tum. But that should be another story... In 1975, on the way of escaping the war-ravaged Kon Tum province, many people were killed by a Viet Cong mortar attack near Phu Bon, and she was among them. She was just twenty-seven.”

Then silence again. Each of us followed one’s own thought. All around, mosquitoes were buzzing, and insects lamenting. Moments later, she stood up, took my hand, and walked me to the beds of assorted colorful flowers, which exhaled a deep fragrance. Smiling and relaxing, she told me:

“Previously, this garden was full of sweet potato buds and bindweeds, according to the plan of the government. Aunt Hoa intended to raise pigs. I objected fiercely, and she

conceded. I sneakily planted flowers some years later. Aunt kept teasing me, saying she did not expect that, as a daughter of a revolutionary fighter and martyr, I have the blood of a romantic petty bourgeoisie. I love flowers, indeed, because I often identify myself with flowers, after a verse in the Tale of Kieu, such as... something I forgot..."

"*A flower drifting aimlessly knows nowhere to end up*", I reminded her.

"That's right. Thank you, uncle", she exclaimed. "Between the life of a flower and my life there's no difference, do you think so, uncle?"

After that, following with her melancholic eyes a pair of butterflies which hovered playfully above the magnificent yellow flowers, Binh An whispered:

"Life is so sad, isn't it, uncle? Everyone has to carry one's own sadness, even you, an army officer whose demeanor, I think, in the past, showed that you had been a very lucky, very happy gentleman. Not to mention the fact that I'm just an orphan, not knowing either the face of the father or the face of the mother. The halo that people had deceitfully created for me would not fill up the sadness that is contained in my heart. Every time I feel lonely, like this evening, I yearn for a love, a cozy family, a word of love, and I dream of having a mother, a father..."

Pausing for a while, she continued:

"Coming from a far-away place, one day, on an operation, and as a stranger, you stopped and rescued me and my mother. The bayonet used to kill, to cause death, that day turned into a miraculous weapon of life and of human love. After having searched with you, and found again, that long-lost time, I thought very much about you, your noble demeanor, your honest words, the grand beauty in yourself and in other South Vietnamese soldiers. I have also thought for many years about my life, about my past that people have written wrongly on purpose, about the truth, the entire truth that people want to destroy..."

Shortly thereafter, and suddenly, looking up at me, she talked, fast and without hesitation, at a stroke, as if she had been prepared for a long time:

"I would like to skin off my old self. I want to belong to you, to your family, from now on, as my mother had recommended to aunt Hoa at her last death throes. I wish you would accept me as your own daughter –in place of the child that your lover, Ms. Tho Tho, wished to have and to name Binh An..."

I was stunned to the point of standing petrified. I looked deeply into her shining teary eyes, apparently full of sincerity. My throat choked up for a long while, and I was speechless, in the face of the irony of such unbelievable situation. I did not expect such an end, beautiful and marvelous, like in a fairy tale. Suddenly my tears poured out, abundantly. I raised my arms, waiting... She threw herself against my chest while calling softly "oh uncle, oh daddy."

Strange emotions filled in my heart, and I said:

"No other better happiness for me, now your dad, when the shadow of my life is on the wane. Oh my daughter, my Binh An, my Peace! Binh An of my Tho Tho and of her dream forever buried along with a long-gone past!"

I closed my eyes for my sentiments to settle down, for a multitude of blurry old memories from an obscure place to surge back, to disappear, to rush back, again, floating adrift on the river of the past... Here, village roads filled with the odor of thatch and wild grass, rice paddies dried up and cracked, water hyacinths quietly flowing along with human corpses. There, defense trenches and foxholes muddied with rainfalls. Days of operations conducted through desolate hamlets. Children's bodies covered with blood in land mines and mortar explosions. Qui Nhon beach and the moon above looking pallid and yellowish like the color of a forgotten love letter envelope, and sad like a broken promise. The time to part, at the Bong Son bridge, with bittersweet kisses, with Tho Tho's shadow hazing behind the dim curtain of the descending night. Villagers were running in confusion on the national route. The silhouette of a woman holding her pregnant belly, and squatting on the grass. The wailings of an infant, the bayonet, and the umbilical cord, and the medic helicopter...

"Am I awake or dreaming, daughter? That's it. From now on as you have me, you would not be alone anymore on your pursuit of peace and happiness. Suffering, self-pity, humiliation, anxiety from past days and months, you'd better forget. Forget all. Let them all wither away, like dark nights. As of now, there is only future. Start again, from the beginning, from today."

Binh An smiled radiantly, through a veil of tears. Leaning against my bosom, she whispered:

"Dad, you left me behind, without traces whatsoever, for thirty-one straight years. Miracle is reborn. I have dreamed of being held in your embrace, not only today, but a long time ago, from my previous life, when you stopped your military car on the roadside, stepping down to bring me back into this life, to name me Binh An. In some unknown place, my mother is certainly very happy and satisfied. So is Ms. Tho Tho, up there. I love you, Dad, and am proud of you. Dad, please promise not to leave me again! Never again."

I looked up to the sky. And thanked God for the love, pure and miraculous. The night was immensely blue, and stars began to rise, glittering like thousands of tiny diamonds.

10/23/2017

Julien