**YOU BRING OUT THE VIETNAMESE IN ME**
*This was inspired by Sandra Cisneros's poem, "You Bring Out the Mexican In Me."*

You
bring out the Vietnamese in me

The waiting fireball.
The suntanned angel on a rice terrace.
The black haired miracle.

You
bring out the Vietnamese in me,
the salted yellow boat child and military brat on airplane in me,
the tracer-bullet eyed buddhist who gets presents on Christmas in me,

the nuoc mam, ca phe sua da, mangoes and mang cut,
mit and coconut, sugar dried strawberries in Da Lat
and sweet xa xui stains Asian/American in me,

the dry-season-heat hearted and black-eyebrow-as-floodgate
for monsoon eyes in me,

the three stripes of Song Huong blood
under yellow flag skin and Song Me Kong spine in me,

the phillips to cedar square projects to frogtown
in a powderblue used Datsun blaring Depeche Mode in me,
the aquanet mane and switchblade, razor boxcutter in left pocket
baseball bat in the backseat
gun in the glove compartment refugee in me,
You, yes you,
whiplash of black hair
and your heart a rose of flame,

You bring out the Vietnamese in me,

The dragon and phoenix cuz though I tell everybody
I'm Vietnamese I'm half Chinese in me,

The agent orange kool aid drinker and burner of government cheese in me,

The sharpener and painter of fingernails
sipping ginger ale in plastic snap champagne glasses
at Prom center while twisting tornado tango fandangoes
in mango colored suits and white ruffled shirts in me,

the I'm not gonna talk about love
I'm gonna be it in me,

the college degree prodigy thug in me,
the communist/republican/I wish there were more
Vietnamese progressives in me,
the i'll change the oil filter my goddamn self and
spend the money I saved on lottery tickets in me,
the incense and cigarettes and white clothes at the funeral in me,
the hip hop tennis captain kung fu expert don't fuck with me
the thinking snow is beautiful and keeping it to myself in me,

I am the most realistic dream you ever had,
the dream you had to fight for to love,
I am the one you stay up too late for,
I am the one that tells his heart and soul to you
after all the other stories have died,

You bring out the Vietnamese in me,
circling on the Le Loi boulevard loop
with a thousand other young Saigon Viets,
blinking tail lights of Honda Dream II mopeds like flicked
cigarette butts and laughter like wind in the face,

the firefly in a lee kum kee jar
the terraced voice
the sugarcane chunks in plastic bags
v the weak beer and strong cigarettes
the fanta cola
the toothpick slinger
the sudden death syndrome
the Linda Trang Dai Dustin Nguyen Shortround Data kid in Goonies
the Hai Ba Trung Nguyen Du Thich Nhat Hanh

You bring out the Vietnamese in me
tell my life by reading my palm
and you'll find callouses
that's why love is at home
in my tired muscles
and burns under my eyelids while I sleep,

men, women, soldiers of every color
have walked into my life,
left burning flag shaped scars,
left ghosts shaped like my family,
left me
for dead,

I was the one who survived to love you.

That's why my love is like
rice growing from flooded bomb craters,

I love to save myself from myself,
I love so these things become me without ruling me,
I love
the way only a Vietnamese man can.

-bao phi