**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