

H C PALMER

Thơ Hòa Bình

*Trying to rule the world with force
I see this is not succeeding
—Lao-tzu*

The Cô who cleans our sick-call tent is missing two days and returns in great pain, her baby trapped inside her belly, the village mid-wife unable to save it. Every breath is a siren. We move her onto a table, where between contractions, I rotate the head with my bare hand, but can't turn it back on course. There is the aroma of decay and I am making things worse—the baby's scalp is peeling pulp.

Late afternoon, in the surgical tent, her child in her arms and wrapped in a bamboo mat, the Cô is chanting—inflected notes with sharpened edges. The interpreter says, *She sing, her baby name Thơ Hòa Bình, to honor ancestors. She sing, Americans kill baby from airplane, same way they kill trees and grandmother.* The interpreter says, *Thơ Hòa Bình is Poem of Peace.*

All True War Stories Are Named *Unhappy Ending*

In 1996, Newsweek Magazine named The Rooftop Garden at the Hotel Rex in Ho Chi Minh City as one of one thousand places to visit before you die.

Two weeks before his death, Thompson
said the name to the cyclo driver,
The Rooftop Garden at the Hotel Rex

& the pith-helmeted old man sang,
Numba' one café in Saigon.
Seventy five cent lobsters & Pouilly-Fuisse

& Saigon River sampans rocking in moorings,
reflections form their lanterns stirring
the water like goofy carnival rides

& across 50 kilometers—
to the edge of our world—arcs of tracers
& popping of flares & muzzle flashes

from 155's, & a few clicks south,
a progression of fiery billows,
precise as a garden row—750 pound

night blossoms, planted from a B52,
& two bites later, the grim rumbling—
a shaking of the earth.

Thompson said I appeared yellow
in the light of the candles. He sucked
the tail of his fourth lobster,

Surreal shit, man. Then, his napkin
pressing his lips, *I have a feeling*
we should get on a plane and go home.

After flaming desserts, we went
to a massage place on *Tu Do* Street,
agreed not to have sex but let ourselves

be touched by a girl. In a room
with blackboards on the walls,
mattresses on the floor & sheets

suspended from clotheslines for privacy,
I could hear everything. Thompson moaned,
Jesus & Oh my God, & the earth shook again.

What you name, baby? my girl whispered,
You give good tip, I say you name
while give you happy ending.

H C PALMER is a retired physician who dedicates his time to writing poems and working with veterans with Moral Injury, PTSD, TBI, Military Sexual Trauma as they return and adjust to a non-combat lifestyle. He was a Battalion Surgeon with the First Infantry Division in Vietnam, serving in 1965-66.