part one
pulling tight the knots
inserting the ball-gag
strapping leather
mask/bandana blindfolds
with four year-old fists
we’d spend hours in the room
upstairs
(which mother now occupies).
i, watching hbo and cartoons,
he struggling, naked, with the
deft knots
until gramma called from below
and i left my uncle in the
darkness,
jailed within the walk-in closet,
and i went to my room
tucked in
knowing he’d escape
as he’d proven before
in Vietnam

part two
four-years
plump from overfeeding
a once malnourished infant
from vietnam.
she took me by the head.
i remember the light
(soft)
i remember her voice
(familiar)
i remember the bed
(wide enough to hold ten of me)
i remember the smell
(how the cape seaweed
reminded me of her)
i remember too much.
she pushed my head into her
--and with the authority of a
fifteen year-old babysitter,
told me to kiss her-there.

part three
still in battle dress uniform
eighteen years
with buddies off-duty
viewing rambo and full metal
jacket
trying to ignore outbursts of
gook/slant/charlie
knowing that for our/my
survival
we relied upon each other
in the field/bush--
and i would have to forgive
them
in order to save them.

part four
"she"
she said years later in a letter
with no return address,
guilty, remorseful,
that "it" only occurred twice.
she said years later in a letter
it was adolescent curiosity.
she said years later in a letter
that she now had children of
her own--
and without detail, she wrote of
my uncle

"him"
my uncle remains a shell.
he speaks to ghosts,
cannot hold
jobs/concentration/himself
and he still smells vietnam in
a michigan trailer park.
what was once amusing as a
child
is no longer amusing.
does he see his nephew or
does he see his vietnam?

part five
"i"
my dress greens remain
zipped, ignored-- closeted.

"we"
how america has loved--
teenage girls, young men in
uniform
and 4 year-old children.
how america forgets--
vietnam, its veterans, its
aggression
--and how i tried to forget.

Nghiep/Duyen:
Vietnamese Causality/Casualty
The words Nghiep/Duyen can be
translated from Vietnamese as
karma or causality. In Ba/Three,
three connected lives are drawn
and repelled by one another and
each person is both war victim and
aggressor.
The performance is an act of
forgetting.

-richard streitmatter-tran

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rstreit@massart.edu