

HUY DANG

VERMINCELLI, UNCLE VINH

My favorite coffee shop musician has a side gig
doubling as a Christmas elf in malls.
Her replacement plays a choppy Clapton improv,
only I was never an aficionado.
What is more, a new vituperation vexes me.
My heart chants, "Return to Vietnam!"
I want to hug my uncles before they die as poor
as when they started. I'd like to see if a son can sense
the father reflected in the eyes of his brothers.

Meanwhile, my uncle living in Ho Chi Minh City,
has been detained for storing an illegal cache
of prescription medication worth thousands of dollars,
worth more cash in Vietnamese currency
but still a pittance. Mother telephoned his house to no avail.
Our kin learned of it by newspaper account.
I think my uncle may be in a dank government cell.

I often hear my countrymen's despair
but I can only imagine Uncle Vinh's
terror before his personable judges.
The ocean's distance may have estranged us,
but the crater of uncertain knowing compels me.
My own hidden cache of compassion
helps me imagine how alone one must feel
to retain the shame of illicit fortunes one cannot
pretend ownership over,
from family who can't be made privy.
They will judge you like the masses, how
they'll judge you like the masses.
O I hate that ocean!
It renders doubting loving men isolationists.

My parents packed me with the luggage years ago.
Our St. Louis apartment had mismatched
lawn chairs around a meal table in the living room.
I recall buying a microwave was a profound achievement.

Eventually, we found a home in this safe part of town
where policemen didn't chase addicts through neighbors' yards.
Dad exploded canes at night
across my brother's arm, after whiskey time,
on tougher days than usual.

When the school teacher pointed to a color word,
she hinted at the pigment in her skin. I glanced back and forth
from the board, and answered "Black," somewhat uncertain.
Her woolen-haired, smiling head shook no, corrected
that the word was "Brown." At school I learned color.

Eight years trudged past. Before long, I perused numerous
books of spells, and felt eased by the mental shambles
marijuana wrought, for the Author's face seizes and controls.
It seemed light between almost shoulders which weren't finished.
His chin touched the knuckle of his right forefinger.
It wasn't his hand, it was the book cover's photograph of him.
Inside, were thoughts mingled with the verses.

Sensation did occur for me, as reader, uncivilized
peristalsis set to the flesh of aspiration.
I circumnavigated the horizons of light's regularity,
calling out contracting spheres of acceptance
wherever I would find them. More attuned my actual voice,
I scribbled, I scribbled! Couldn't write the ocean's
distance smaller, but I scribbled onward, nonetheless.

Verses hit the lining of my chasm right, though they bled
intestines if they simply sounded wrong.
So I honed you, Poem:
Your eyes now reflect my dopamine. I have contrived you.
We guess a second-guess of one another that is mutual.
Still, a worm can be a rational sacrifice,
though unities that take their inspiration from the ants
reap calories from cosmic grunge, by other
modes than prayer,
but always, spoken words articulate our yearnings.

