

## **Thus is born the children of the red river**

*A postmodern retelling of Vietnam's creation myth.*

*~ À oi, à oi*

*Hush baby, sleep baby*

*Know your roots*

*À oi, à oi*

11:48pm, từ đũ hospital/ the mountain fairy moans/ is prostrate on the bed/ her bulbous abdomen rises/ falls/ mirrors oscillation between each electrical crest and trough/ green, fluorescent, [*beep beep beep*] on the blank monitor/ gazes, nonchalant, as her clay-molded legs swell to the size of two cainito trunks/ brimming with sap and milk.

we all know what she's here for/ instinctively, she draws one hand up to her belly, while the other/ lies limp on her pelvis.

but it starts wriggling now/ her knotweed eyes bulge in their sockets as sweat, thick and raw, crawls on her spine/ the mountain fairy jerks back her head of soot-colored hair/ digs nails into shin and canines into lower lip/ viscous crimson droplets trickle down ochre skin/ she counts cracks on the ceiling/ breathes in, breathes out/ each time, they loom larger/ criss-crossed cement gashes spelling out *hông* and *hà*, then *sống*, then *chết*, again and again /*chết*/ the mountain fairy screams/ feels movements inside her, emanating from this thing/ alien/ not alien/ herself/ not herself/ life tumor writhing between bones/ she/ sweet ripe peach flesh, while it is the seed/ stubborn, rough-edged.

*In the deep deep forest  
four chiliads ago,  
mountain fairy gave birth  
to a hundred-egg sac  
from whence sprang  
a hundred children*

ready darling/ ready/ eat me/ come out/ feast upon my latent stream of sap.

the nurse looks at her/ nods, *you are shrinking every five minutes*/ it is expanding/ behold/ from her opening slithers a translucent sac the size of a fist, slimey and vagina-smelling/ it crawls onto the floor/ paints linoleum red with placental blood/ drip, drop on white linen/ snuggles up in the fairy's hand/ no head, no body, no limbs, though/ if you look closely enough, detach carbonate from plastic/ you might be able to count/ 100 eggs.

cracked/ a hole /ripped vitelline duct/ eggs open umbilical mouths/ sing back.

*À oi, à oi*

*Hush fairy, sleep fairy*

*À oi, à oi ... ~*

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