

A CUP OF COFFEE WITH NO COFFEE IN IT

(Trần Nghi Âu Cơ)

It was my goal to write everyday, from now until Christmas. Until the day we leave but I have nothing to write about. I wouldn't call it a writer's block. I have things to talk about; I think all the time about things. But to put them into words? That could be a different story. Or sometimes, I just have nothing in my head. If you were to shrink into the size of a flea, fly up my nostril, my right one of course, because my left one is currently stuffed, and up into my mind, you would find a room, a little untidy, might I add, full of things. This room could be known as the "Storage Room". But underneath all that junk, there's another door, and this door would be labeled, "The Building Room". When you enter that room, you will see a desk, a chair, a lamp, and a coffee cup with no coffee in it. The room is completely dark, with the only light coming from the lamp. You walk up to that desk and you see a pen, a pencil and a piece of paper on it. The paper is blank. And that, my friend, is my brain. Every time I try to squeeze out something, a word, I forget it, or I don't and the word, the exact word I'm looking for, disappears. It vanishes from the English dictionary, or any dictionary for that matter. Oh, I have things to write about, I discuss about it with myself plenty of times, but as soon as I sit down on a chair with a piece of paper, it all drains away. That's what my head is like, a drain, every drip, dripping away. Though, I remember the most random things, it's hard to explain really, so I won't go into details. But I do, I really do. It's frustrating really. Now, I ask you, is that normal? Is it something that all writers go through? Is it a phase? Or am I just crazy? Is it a disease? Made especially for writers like me? Though, can I call myself a writer? Is it in my destiny to become a writer? I'm growing crazier by the minute. Old Mother never seems to have that problem, she's always writing away, always composing. Imagine you're in a pine hill, in Viet Nam, she tells me, the wind blowing, the sweet

scent of pinewood swirling through the air. Get into your character.

Yes, yes I know, my character. The problem is, you see, I have no character, who do I become? It all goes step by step, first you think of something to write about, then you think about it some more, and decide how to put it into words, finally you become your character. You don't just become your character and a novel comes flying out.

Dear Old Mother is a pro at all of these things, she can do anything. But me? I'm only an amateur. I don't know anything. I write what I feel, and sometimes that's nothing. How do you write about nothing? Here, it's a blank piece of paper. I'm done. Subjects can come from anything, a cup of coffee, a leaf, a pretty girl, an over weighted man, anything. It doesn't even have to be special, like Van Gogh's "The Chair". Nothing special about it, a chair. Great. But that's what's special about it, it's ordinariness. It's lack of specialty. That's what attracts attention. But its only true talent that can make something out of nothing. That's what Dear Old Mother always says. She's right, I suppose. But I really have nothing. Do I just write nothing? Nothing.

I should hurry up; I'm running out of time, from now until Christmas. What do I give them? They're waiting for me. Do I just show up and give nothing? It's something, nothing. I'm afraid to disappoint them. Them, but most of all, it's Dear Old Mother that I'm worried about me. She expects too much of me. She expects the universe of me, life and energy, she sees from me. I can't give her that? I only have nothing. I can't give her nothing. She wants something.

Dear Old Mother, oh, she wants so much, yet the things she wants is simple. She wants me, me, to become like her. To write at will. That's a power, that's magic. She's live life; she's got Age on her side, Age and experience. The tragedies and comedies of life, she's seen it all. But me? What have I? A measly 16 years? That's nothing. I have nothing. I'm nothing. There's nothing in the Building Room. Except a cup of coffee with no coffee in it.

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