

Enemies

(Trần Nghi Âu Cơ)

When Mimi told Julie
I wasn't allowed to be their friend,
I asked her *why*?

She replied,
because you're the enemy.

That night,
while we were watching
The Good, the Bad and the Ugly,
I asked my mother what
enemy meant.

She paused to think,
then raised a ruby painted fingernail
towards the television,
Enemies are people who shoot at each other.

(Autumn 2008)

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Holden ¹

(Trần Nghi Âu Cơ)

When I was six,
you were my Popeye, always ready, so ready
to beat up the pudgy boy with crumpled hair
who mocked the slanty Asian eyes that I didn't have
and made me teach him the Vietnamese swear words
that I didn't know.

Now I'm twenty-one.
And you were never Popeye, were you?
You were just the nervous teenage boy
who checked tickets at Great America,
hands trembling whenever a pretty girl passed by.

¹ Bài thơ Âu Cơ làm tặng anh Nô, nảy sinh từ sự xúc động trong lòng khi nhìn thấy anh Nô từ già gia đình ra đi, kéo lê chiếc valise nặng nề trên đường vắng, mùa Thanksgiving 2007..

You were supposed to be the Holden to my Phoebe,
letting me ride the carousel on a cool autumn day
and taking me home when I was tired,
your protective hand wrapped around
my trusting fingers.

But you're not, are you?

Instead, you're just a boy
who mistakes himself for a man,
dragging a battered suitcase down
the empty street of our childhood home,
the cotton-ball blurs of the streetlights
like accidental blotches of yellow paint
in a cheap duplicate of some anonymous masterpiece,
hanging on the off-white wall of
a jaded motel room.

(Autumn 2008)

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Waiting

(Trần Nghi Âu Cơ)

Sitting alone in the room full of
empty closets and empty drawers,
the child watches specks of dust
dancing in the sunlight like invisible
fairies waiting for May clouds.

A single tear wanders down her cheek
as she draws a circle around herself
in the gray carpet with her finger,
remembering his whiskered chin
against her forehead.

Her small hand reaches for the dust fairies
as if to capture them in her palm. But
they dissolve, leaving only air. Another tear
hangs at corner of her cheek, then slowly
drops.

She closes her eyes and tilts her head,
waiting for the sound of his foot steps.

(Autumn 2008)

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