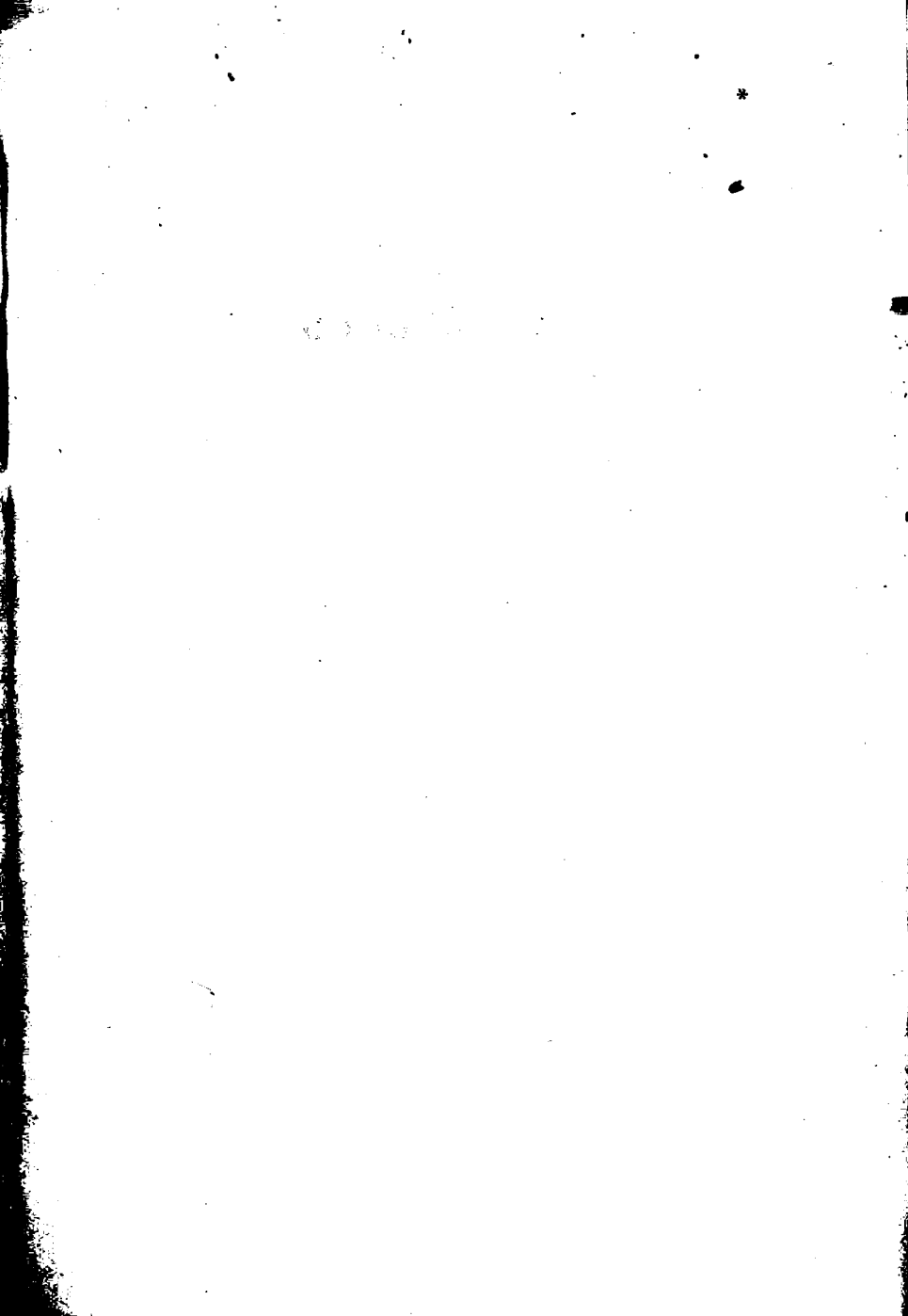




# *the fire places*

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE  
HANOI — 1965

THE FIRE BLAZES



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PREFACE

*A* South Vietnamese poet wrote to me, "For one year now, I've got enough kerosene and paper to write at night, thanks to the enlargement of the liberated zone. However, morale plays the decisive role. In the daytime, I am busy marching, counter-raiding, taking shelter from enemy air-raids, or sowing maize seeds and growing cassava. At night, I take up my pen to write when already exhausted. Sometimes, a fit of fever has assailed me after I've jotted down no more than a few lines.

I like to write at a table decorated with a bowl of flowers, overlooking a calm lake or an orchard laden with ripe fruit. However, in my opinion, what is written in such hard conditions as my poet friend experienced, is more realistic. He who treasures each ray from his lamp thrown on his sheet of paper is likely to be much more concerned about the light his literary works may throw on his readers' minds. The hands that in the daytime sow seeds in the earth to maintain life, and take up arms to prevent death from threatening his people, will not forget the cost of the sweat and blood shed the day before when handling his pen.



*All these stories were written in similar hard and oppressive conditions. The readers however should not overlook their aesthetic quality. Though writing under the threat of U.S. napalm bombs, the authors never neglected the artistic aspect of their work. However their value lies elsewhere, in the fact that with or without artistic perfection, they sometimes show us much greater truth about South Vietnam as it is today, the truth that must move all good-will people throughout the world.*

*First and foremost, the truth that imperialism is the most ferocious and dangerous enemy of mankind. One of the characters in this book, is a native of the land occupied by the U.S. command and its 50,000 advisers and men, where, according to the boastful words of "Voice of America", U.S. war planes have annually taken part thousands of times in the fighting; she says: "Even the jungle animals hate the U.S. - Diem bandits".*

*50,000 officers and men armed with U.S. weapons have been occupying South Vietnam, but as they cannot be everywhere at the same time, they do not figure often in this book; however, the danger of neo-colonialism lies there, in the fact that today's aggressors do not need to show their true nature and shed their own blood. Their schemes, and dollars, and guns are quite sufficient for them to perpetrate heinous crimes. Cam, whose young brother had been coaxed into becoming a soldier of the "nationalist army" built up by the U.S. - Diem clique, thought, "Who had put Suu into an American battle dress, thrust an American gun into his hands, and forced him to shoot at Cam and his friends? The*

*Americans. In that dreadful post, the hands of the Americans could be seen everywhere.*

*Imperialism is committing varied crimes all over the world: here they lynch negroes, there they release bacteriological or chemical bombs, elsewhere they contaminate and corrupt the people's minds or herd them into concentration camps, including women and children and even bonzes and other religious dignities.*

*What is the biggest crime of imperialism? Views differ according to the standpoint of each man. In my opinion it is the formation of creatures in its image by means of violence and gold and deceitful schemes. A puppet officer tortured a woman as old as his mother and another one of his wife's age. A puppet private thought, while on duty as a sentinel, that the tick tick of his wrist-watch kept reminding him the words " Vietcong, Vietcong!" and in a mopping-up operation, fired at a child. Again, a school-girl, pure and chaste in her virginity was corrupted by the American arrogant way of life, and at last was ready to become a spy with a card No. C. 127. In whose image were all these creatures formed if not in that of imperialism?*

*The blood-stained hands of the gun and gold dealers have taken the soft-clay of youth, kneaded it and remoulded it in the hope of turning out new creatures who are neither men as we have conceived nor gods as described in the Bible, but take after the bloodthirsty warmongers at the Pentagon and the White House, creatures with U.S.-made daggers in their hands and petrol-cans on their backs.*

*This book also illustrates another truth, which like a rising sun, can be seen by all from every corner of the earth.*

*An angel has been newly born, a sacred and miraculous power has come into existence to annihilate Satan. This angel has not three heads and six arms, nor has he descended from the mountain of heavens. He has emerged from the countryside, from factories and is endowed with millions of arms, millions of eyes, millions of hearts, and the wisdom of the entire people. He has not the supernatural power of a Saviour of olden times nor of a modern nuclear furnace. He has come from the sensible hearts of the angry masses. His power comes from their revolutionary violence. And the murderers have been stopped short by this angel and this power. In practice there is no one stronger and no means more effective to destroy the aggressors. This angel has been embodied in the persons of the young women who burnt up the grass in the Plain of Reeds to make a smoke screen to prevent the enemy planes from firing at their targets. This angel is represented by the workers who chopped up their hammocks and shirts to make the bellows in a smithy which turned out weapons. This angel is the Kinh\* cadre who filed his teeth according to the customs of the High Plateaux minorities, to identify himself with his mountain compatriots and win their trust. This angel is young Cam who rushed up through a blazing fire to storm an enemy post, and old Ban who advanced to the revolution with hesitating steps. All*

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\* Kinh: the Vietnamese majority people.

*these people whose combined power seems indeed supernatural, made Kennedy utter these oft-quoted words "We see no end to the tunnel (in South Vietnam — Publisher)."*

*In his effort to come to terms with imperialism, old San went so far as to desert his newly liberated native village to seek refuge in a place where he might live unheeded. But how could he live untroubled by the imperialists? 50,000 Yankees armed to the teeth crossed the ocean to South Vietnam not to rear birds, grow flowers and make friends with such people as old San. Therefore though his nervous system was sometimes paralyzed through fear, he became conscious of the revolution in the manner of a man "halting and halting after each step forward" but in the end, he had no alternative than to return to his beloved village, to the fighting position which demanded his presence.*

*Even the people to whom the idea of revolution was more foreign than to old San did as he did. Everything has its limit, let alone humiliation. Cuc in Awakened threw in the face of Tong, a bloodthirsty puppet captain, the following insult, even though she knew that it would make her enemy shoot her dead immediately, "Traitor to the country... lackey of the Yankees... Yes I'm a whore, as a whore, I sell my body only, but you, a running dog for the Americans, you sell your compatriots and your country, you traitor".*

*The miserable captain killed her after she had spoken the above words so that she went to her death a completely pure and chaste woman in the memory of her dear compatriots.*

*Another man, still more foreign to the revolution, is Thuy Thu, author of The Little Wooden Sandal. He lived for many years in the midst of the murderers, which gave him also the opportunity to see much blood shed by his compatriots, so much that one day, on seeing a single wooden shoe of a child, he was able to find the way back to his people. The wooden shoe was but a pretext. It was only like a match to set fire on a stock of explosive ready to blow up with the least spark.*

*People come to the revolution from all corners and all standpoints, because revolution is the truth, the Saviour of this era, and is easily understood. So said a character in this book "When the Revolution broke out, U.S. Diem propaganda did everything to smear it; but when old San heard that the "tillers have land to till" he understood immediately that the poor had risen up, that this revolution was his and would bring land to him and his children, he followed the revolution enthusiastically".*

*But there are also people slow in understanding. Even at the last moment they wanted to fire at the revolutionary fighters such as Tu in The Fire Blazes. He could not ignore the truth. Misled to the point of taking the tick-tick of his wrist-watch for the words "Vietcong, Vietcong" he was however awakened when he saw a Vietcong soldier dashing through the blazing fire to rescue his son.*

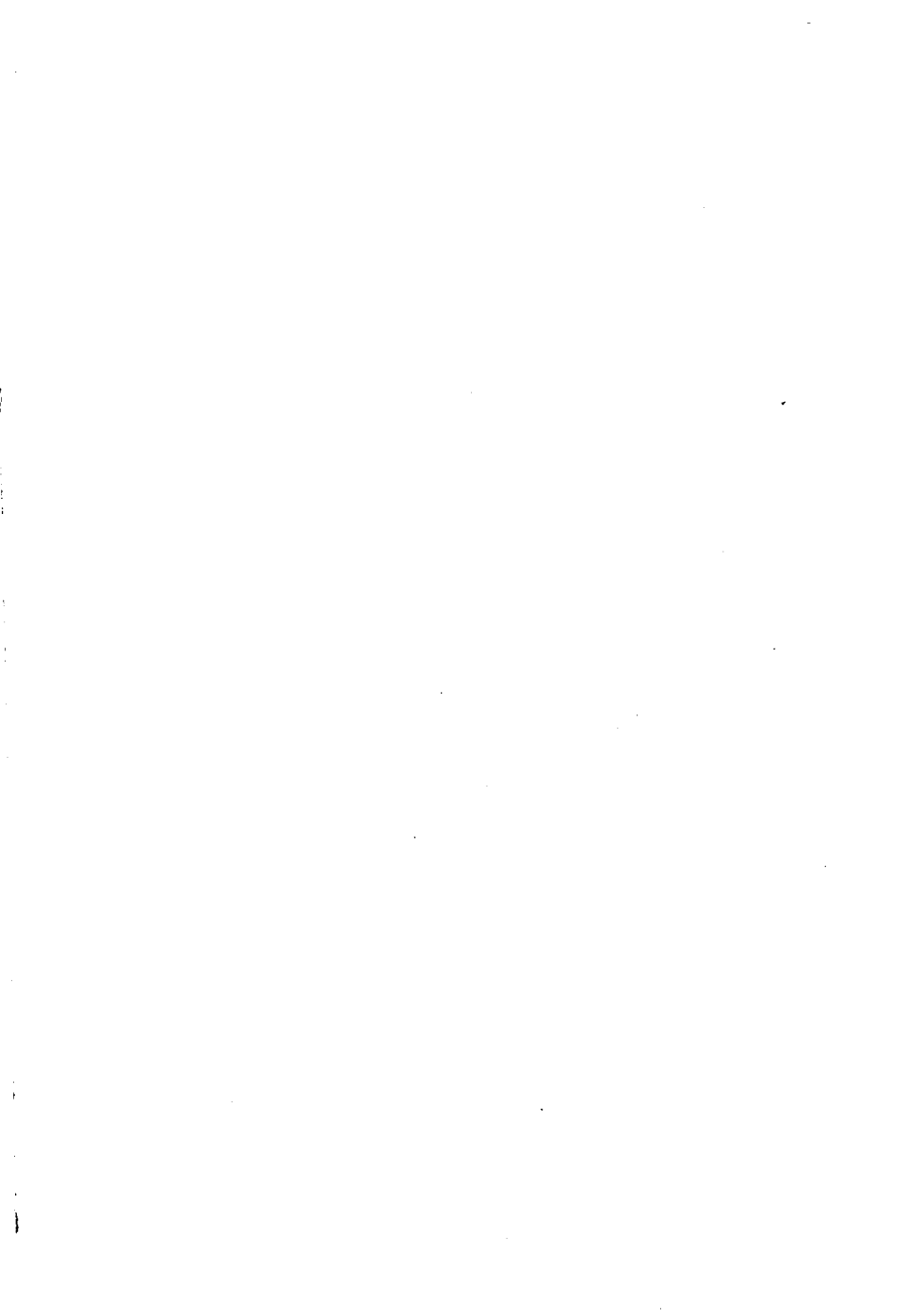
*Revolution is the means to greatness. It gives back not only land to the people, first of all it protects their lives, for land is but a means to serve them. That is the reason the U.S. imperialists are doomed. We are not the only people to destroy them. The weapons turned*

*out by our people are not the only ones to kill them. The very creatures they have formed in their image will one day throw off the American way of life, come back to the truth, to their fellow countrymen, and turn their guns on the aggressors. And by then, like Thuy Thu, author of The Little Wooden Sandal, or the republican youth group of Y nong's village, people will have plenty of captured U.S. weapons in their hands.*

\*

*The following stories were written at a time when the liberated area was not yet as large as it is today — when glorious dawn is sweeping away the darkness — before the successive victories at Anlao, Bienhoa Binhgia, Apbac II, victories which have encouraged all those oppressed by imperialism throughout the world to hold up their heads. They were written before the U.S. imperialists mapped out their devilish scheme of introducing into South Vietnam many more mercenaries from Korea, the Philippines, Australia and Argentina — poor cannon fodder who go to their death in place of their American bosses! Though this booklet is imperfect, we should however read it because it is capable of introducing us to the living reality of South Vietnam. If it has shortcomings let us sympathize with those who in the daytime drive back the enemy attacks and protect the people and their luxuriant crops, and still at night, try to write stories to stimulate our understanding and for our enjoyment.*

CHE LAN VIEN



## THE LITTLE WOODEN SANDAL

*Among those participating in the November 1960 coup d'état against Ngo Dinh Diem was Second Lieutenant Thai Tran Trong Nghia, alias Thuy Thu, former editor of the monthly Luot Song (Skimming the Waves), organ of the South Vietnam puppet naval forces. He has written a number of stories denouncing the crimes perpetrated by the Americans and their agents. The following story is from his collection "A thousand and one stories".*

I was born in North Vietnam. I have known South Vietnam only since 1954 when I let myself be herded aboard a ship and taken to the South, hardly giving the matter a thought. Then I served on a ship sailing on the Mekong river for two years. I found the South a land brimming over with life. The fruits — the mangoes, avocados... are fleshy and full of juice, the people are lovable. The way they live and the way they look at life is linked in my mind with the blue immensity of their sky so full of sun and wind, and the vast expanse of their fields and orchards. And the river... O the river!

•



But now I am thinking of my own life...

It seemed that I was standing outside the hut, looking at the night sky dotted with twinkling stars. Before me, the river rolled, its strong current breaking into waves. I thought, "How pleasant it would be to lie on board a ship and let oneself be carried downstream, if our country knew peace!" On the other side of the river, the groves stretched as far as the horizon. On this side, a miserable little hamlet lay at the tip of an islet overgrown with thickets.

The old owner of the hut gave a little dry cough. His grand-son whined from his bed. The yellow light of the paraffin lamp coming through the chink of the door made a streak on the uneven ground. I thought of the way the old man and the child had looked at me, and this made me feel uneasy. Before joining my present unit, I had been warned of the situation. The guerillas were very active and the population could not be trusted, perhaps the old man having sent his children to the town, remained to keep watch over his hut; perhaps the child had wanted to stay with his grand-pa. Or perhaps his father, the old man's son, had been killed in a raid by government troops or had joined the guerillas. My thoughts wandered over various hypotheses about the child's father. He had joined the guerillas probably because he had someone to avenge, or an ideal to pursue. At least, he did not want his child to grow up in an atmosphere of press-ganging and forced labour and heavy taxation, he did not want his father to die at the hands of U.S.-Diem troops. They killed a man as one would a fly or a mosquito, my friends had told