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I often think about the Ocean Vuong quote, “Ma, to speak in our mother tongue is to speak only partially in Vietnamese, but entirely in war,” from *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*. It makes me wonder, once a war ends, does it really ever end within you? Does the violence from outside of your home travel inside of you to a strange, new place? My grandmother is 88 years old. That means she would have been in her forties during the Vietnam War. My father was born during the fall of Saigon in 1975, in the midst of the war. Being in a war changes your mindset to one of survival. As long as you get by, you don’t need anything more. As long as you stay alive, nothing else matters. War keeps you inside of it, even when you flee it. My grandparents still fly the South Vietnam flag, the red stripes contrasting with the yellow, and call Ho Chi Minh City Saigon. They still live in memory, in a forgotten country, with a culture that will live on within my family forever. They call it home, even though they’ve lived in New Orleans for decades.

My grandmother now has dementia and stays inside of her home every day for safety reasons. My grandfather still had his combat uniform hanging up inside of his home when I was younger. My siblings and I were usually babysat by our paternal grandparents and sat watching television half the time. When my brother would put on a random video containing some sort of game involving violence and guns, my grandfather’s eyes would stay glued to the screen until my father would tell him to turn it off. I think I will always be too afraid to ask what happened to him, and he will always remember. What does it do to you, the violence? A certain loneliness is created out of it, I believe, the shell of you is left in the past but it still hangs next to you.

I think immigration is to live in a city where no one knows you and you know no one, with a feeling of impending doom always surrounding you, but to also live in your childhood home where the air inside of your bedroom permeates your mind alongside the memory of cotton sheets where you used to cry. Does it make sense to feel like you are in two places at once? Two bodies simultaneously existing within one? I think my grandmother would understand, even underneath the layers of uncovered memories that she will never remember again. My maternal grandparents also emigrated from Vietnam, but my mother was born eight years after the fall of Saigon. Last year, they left New Orleans to go back to where their hearts really belonged, reuniting with my aunt and her child that I have never met in person but have seen on FaceTime. They left behind their house, their car that sits in the driveway of my home, and everything they ever owned for my family to rifle through.

Underneath my dresser holds a box of my grandmother’s old things: purses, makeup, designer clothes that are most likely fake, skincare, perfume, every other stereotypical thing you would think a Vietnamese grandmother would own. My paternal grandmother and my maternal one are very different. My maternal grandmother was never angry, always kind, and smelled of cherry blossom. My paternal grandmother smelled of Eagle

Brand medicinal oil and yelled more than she talked. Both of my grandfathers were particularly quiet, and my memory of them is blurred, although my paternal grandfather has a form of lung issue where he has to breathe artificial oxygen through tubes now. I think my family tries to understand each other, but they do not understand what it is like to be on the other side of things. Emotional vulnerability is not popular within my family, or really any Vietnamese one. This is what war does. It causes a strange feeling of resentment but sadness. War separates us, but there are two different ones inside of us. I have to remind myself that when I start to think it is the end, it is really just another beginning. To be an immigrant is to be proud. To be an immigrant is to exist within a unique microcosm. To be an immigrant is to persevere. Being an immigrant is an inexplicable, indelible art.