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# SCHWEGEMANN'S

BY LUCILLE SUTTON

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She shifted the wilted grocery bag higher onto her hip. With the sweat from her nose, she rubbed her cracked lips the way her mother had taught her. It was a temporary remedy used only in times of desperation, and as her lips absorbed the salty moisture, she knew they'd be cracked and bleeding within minutes. "Troï oi," she murmured, closing her eyes, praying she would find her home among the red brick duplexes.

She would start with something familiar.

She opened her eyes and stared at her sandaled feet. The flesh was swollen, wanting to burst through the cheap fabric. She had lost all feeling in her feet, and there was no shade anywhere to rest. The street, littered with potholes, extended beyond her vision. It was a liquid blur in either direction, caused by the sizzling heat, but she knew the street curved around, leading to more houses, all of them the same. All of them too close together. The same tiny front window, too small to catch the evening breeze. Not even big enough for the "Welcome Home" African violet her husband had bought her from the Navy Exchange.

Her husband had bragged about the green, green grass of America. "More beautiful than all the shades of green in Vietnam," he'd said proudly, "wait until you see." But these lawns were not more beautiful than Vietnam. These lawns spoke of neglect, their patches of omelet yellow and brown fried too long by the New Orleans sun. She turned away from the glaring light, exhausted and angry. She wanted her family, but they were ten-thousand miles away, seventeen hours ahead. They were living in the future: falling in love, getting married, having babies, living their lives in spite of the war. She hugged the grocery bag and headed down the street, wondering if she would survive long enough to have a lawn scattered with toys and screaming children, playing happily together.

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Mai hummed, stirring the pitcher of Nestea with a chopstick. Gazing out her kitchen window, she smiled at the sunshine and thought about all the things that she needed to do that day. "How I get them all done?" she said, tossing the chopstick in the sink, "Oh well, one thing at a time." Opening the refrigerator door, she pushed the gallon of milk aside in order to make room for the tea. She closed the door and then immediately opened it. "My honey," she said, pushing the pitcher to the back of the refrigerator; she knew her husband liked his Nestea cold.

At the kitchen sink, she piled in dirty breakfast dishes and turned on the hot water. "If you love me let me know, if you don't, let me go . . ." She sang her husband's favorite song, and since

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he loved to hear her sing, she practiced every day while she cleaned the house.

She had a great voice and singing in English had really improved her vocabulary. It was hard when she first started learning English two years ago, because she would forget the words. But it didn't matter too much; she would improvise and make up her own lyrics, sometimes substituting Vietnamese words for English. And when she couldn't think of any words, she would just hum. She enjoyed the look on her husband's face when she sang especially well, and though she never told him, it was what kept her going, practicing harder and harder every day. But she loved it best when he joined in. She would be at the stove, frying up some pork chops and he'd come up behind her, put his hands on her hips and spin her around to face him. And with her safely in his arms, the two of them would dance together in their tiny government-owned kitchen, bumping into appliances and rubbing each other's bruises while singing and laughing until they were hoarse.

She turned off the water. "Who that?" she said, looking out the window. Standing on her tiptoes, she leaned forward, her face nearly touching the glass. A young woman carrying a bag of groceries was zigzagging back and forth between the red duplexes. Stopping in front of one house, staring at it for a few seconds, moving onto the next house across the street, and then repeating the same pattern to the houses already examined. Mai forgot everything she was supposed to do that day and ran to the front door.

Standing in her doorway, she called to the woman. "Hey. You lost?"

Getting no response, she stepped onto her porch. "Hey," she called again, "come inside. I help you."

The woman in the street heard the clipped tone of a Vietnamese accent. She turned around, swaying from side to side until she faced the direction of the voice. The white heat of the sun was blinding as she tried to focus on the blurry outline standing in the doorway of a house across the street. "Chi Oi," she whispered, clutching the damp bag of groceries to her belly. Concentrating on the voice in the doorway, she took one step forward then stopped. She remembered hearing old stories of people dying of heat exposure in the jungle and claiming to see things, loved ones that were not really there.

Perhaps these stories were not true. Perhaps this was not that same sun. She squeezed her eyes shut and mumbled softly, willing the figure in the doorway to be real.

As if on cue, Mai scurried out of the doorway and into the sunlight. She was cool and comfortable in her white pedal pushers and matching white shirt, trimmed with red lace. Her sandals slapped against her heels as she beckoned with both hands for the woman to come to her.

"Too hot out here. Come inside. I give you something to drink."

Mai moved toward the young woman and noticed they were about the same age. A memory tugged at her mind, startling her momentarily, but like a stubborn child, she pushed it away.

The woman opened her eyes. The white figure drifted closer. She gripped the grocery bag, her parched lips trembling with relief and exhaustion. "Di," she said to her legs. She wanted to hurry, knowing that if this were indeed an apparition, and not a real person, she would surely crumble to the ground, begging her ancestors to take her and her unborn child away from this world. "Chi Oi," she moaned.

The hair on Mai's arms tingled; she recognized the Vietnamese word for older sister. She thought of her husband and smiled; she knew what she had to do.

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Stopping at arms' distance from the woman, Mai held her hand out to shake, American style. She paused, remembering the way she had rehearsed with her husband so many times, long ago. "Hello! My name Mai! Please-to-meet-you!" She waited, arm out, hand extended and laughed, realizing that the gesture was silly since the other woman's arms were full. The grocery bag crumpled softly to the ground as the woman swayed backward, the whites of her eyes gleamed beneath fluttering lashes. Mai scolded herself, leaped forward, and grabbed the woman to steady her. "What your name?" she said quietly, "you speak English?" Mai felt the hard, swollen belly against her own stomach. "Tro oi," she said, "you pregnant." The woman said nothing. Mai repeated softly, "Ban ten gi? Co biet noi tieng anh khong?"

"Xuan. My name Xuan." she whispered. Her deep brown eyes shifted quickly to Mai's then to the ground. "I lost."

"I know, Em Oi, don't worry," Mai whispered back. "I call my husband to come quick. He be home soon for lunch anyway. We tell him what happen, okay?" Mai looked at Xuan and smiled again to show that she was not worried at all, but Xuan continued to stare at the ground. The sweltering heat had taken their toll; Mai pulled Xuan closer.

"Hold on," she said, picking up the damp grocery bag. Carrying it with one arm and guiding Xuan towards the house with the other, Mai said, "Hot out here, huh. Make baby born too early." She tried to laugh at her own joke even though she could see that Xuan clearly wanted to pass out. "Don't worry, Em Oi," she said again, "everything be okay. My husband mechanic at Navy Base. He fix everything."

At the front door, Xuan noticed that Mai's house was one of the few with the American flag. She wanted to remember this just in case she came down this way again. Right inside the front door, she stared at the Welcome Friends mat. It was lucky color red with yellow lettering.

Mai pointed at the mat and said, "That say, 'Welcome Friend!' Chao mung cac ban! You understand?" Xuan looked at the thong sandals and tennis shoes near the mat. She nodded. Taking all of this as a good sign, she closed her eyes, leaned heavily against Mai, and felt herself float into the dry coolness and safety of the house.

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While Mai flitted back and forth between the refrigerator and stove, Xuan sat at the yellow Formica table, sipping a glass of ice water.

She stared at the kitchen walls, decorated with ceramic fruit. The red apple had wide eyes and a happy inviting grin while the pear's arched eyebrows gave it a clever look. There was a banana, purple grapes and even an orange. They were homemade, created and hung to give life and color to the bare walls. On the counter was a small, white rice cooker.

"You want lunch? I make sandwich. Bean and bacon soup for my honey. But I make rice for me. You want some? I got fish, too. Not too much, but enough for both of us." Mai stopped spreading the Miracle Whip and looked at Xuan, waiting for her reply. She decided this was a good opportunity for both of them to practice their English. Xuan stared at her blankly. "Hungry?" Mai asked again, pointing to the rice cooker. Xuan nodded once and Mai nodded back and continued her work. "My honey eat sandwich and soup everyday for lunch. I wonder he get tired, but he say no. So I say, 'Okay.'"

Bologna sandwich and with bean and bacon soup everyday. But that make it easy for me, huh?" Mai laughed at her own joke then laughed harder when Xuan smiled. "Bologna sandwich and bean and bacon soup everyday. My honey." She shook her head as she walked over to

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Xuan and refilled her half-empty glass of water.

Xuan nodded in thanks. “Cam on, Chi,” she whispered.

“You welcome.” Mai rubbed Xuan’s back. She walked over to the stove to check on the boiling soup. “Rice be ready soon. I make it when I see you outside looking around. I know you lost and I say, ‘Uh oh. Better go get her before she get into trouble.’”

Mai stirred the soup as she talked. She looked over at Xuan. The young woman’s cheeks were flushed as she held the glass of water in both hands and stared into it. Mai looked into the reddish-brown soup as she stirred and continued with her story. “I remember when I first came here. I get lost so many time! Every time I go somewhere. Even down the street, I get lost! Only place I know is Schwegemann. People help me there. They say, ‘You lost?’ I cry so hard. I can’t talk. Only nod.” She turned off the fire and glanced over at Xuan who was now watching her intently.

Mai lifted the lid of the rice cooker and looked in, pretending to check on the rice as she talked. “People at Schwegemann. They let me use phone—no charge. I call my honey at work on Navy Base and I cry and he say to me, ‘You lost again? Troi oi!’” Mai kneeled to get a small cast iron skillet from a cabinet. She pointed the pan at Xuan and laughed, “Can you believe he say, ‘Troi oi?’ That only Vietnamese phrase he know. ‘Oh God,’ he say, ‘Oh God!’” The two women laughed together as Mai put oil into the pan. She continued to smile as she grabbed a marble mortar and pestle from the counter top, plopped two garlic bulbs into it, and squatted on the floor with ease. She turned the mortar round and round, pounding, scraping, and folding the garlic until it became a yellow-white paste. “This good with salty fish. You can use any kind fish but I like tilapia. I cut up some onion to go with it. You like onion, Em Oi?” She pointed at the mortar and nodded, just in case Xuan couldn’t understand her.

“Yes.” Xuan smiled. She liked the way Mai talked and worked and laughed all at the same time. Even though she could only catch a few phrases, the friendly tone was enough to make her feel safe. It was like being home again with her mother, learning how to cook. “Always put garlic in the pan when it’s hot. Remove the garlic before it turns black,” her mother would say. “You just want a touch of flavor. You leave it too long, it makes the food bitter.” Xuan would squat next to her mother, watching everything she did, hoping some day she would cook as well as her mother. She shook the memory from her head. In the past, she thought sadly. She sighed, put down the empty glass and stood up. Grabbing the side of the table for support, she said, “Onion, Chi? I chop.” She walked over to the cupboard, knowing they’d be next to the garlic because that was where she kept hers.

Mai nodded, glanced at Xuan’s feet, and was glad to see the swelling had subsided. She knew that it was better she didn’t argue with Xuan. It was customary for the guest to help the hostess, not like the American way. Still, she was glad that Xuan was practicing her English. One thing at a time, she thought. “Hey, Em Oi! Get fish out, too. They in baking dish. Garlic ready to go.” Mai stood up and put the garlic in the pan, filling the room with the heavy scent. She watched Xuan hold the counter as she slowly squatted in front of the cabinet.

Her large belly made it difficult for her to see the onions, so she used her hands. She found the bag, palmed an onion, and pulled herself up, breathing heavily. She grabbed the fish from the refrigerator. Like an offering, she presented the fish and onion with both hands.

Mai took the small salty fish and laid them in the skillet. “Chopping board here,” she said, pointing. She watched patiently as Xuan slowly, deliberately removed the skin from the onion, exposing the fragrant white flesh. She turned back to the fish, watching their flat bodies sizzle and pop in the hot oil. They were almost done. Listening to the rapid chop-chop of the sharp knife against the onion, she smiled.

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Mai opened the new bag of Doritos. "Ice tea in fridge if you want it." She said this without looking at her husband.

"Alright." Chief Taylor walked over to the refrigerator and grabbed the plastic pitcher. He headed for the table.

"Wait. Call Xuan husband first." Mai rubbed her husband's arm affectionately. "Let him know she okay." She smiled up at him, never taking her gaze from his. She was determined not to let him eat lunch until he made that phone call.

Chief Taylor kissed his wife on the cheek. "Whatever you say." He put down the pitcher and nodded to Xuan who sat quietly at the table. "Don't worry," he said to her. "I'll sort things out in no time. Just need to make a quick call." He walked over to the telephone and dialed quickly.

Both women watched him. It amused Mai that her husband gave his rank every time he introduced himself on the phone, even if it wasn't a military related call. She leaned against the counter, smiling proudly as she arranged his lunch—sandwich in the middle and Doritos surrounding it.

"Yeah, this is Chief Billy Taylor. Yeah. Tell 3rd class Petty Officer Pruitt that his wife got a little lost going to Schwegemann's. Have 'im come get her when he can." He held the phone against his ear as he grabbed a plastic cup from the cabinet. "What's that? Yeah," he laughed. "Happens often enough. Okay. Tell 'im she'll be here. Alright then. Good 'nough." He hung up the telephone then turned to his wife who stood, smiling and waiting with his lunch cradled in her small hands. He leaned forward and kissed her smooth, brown cheek. "Thanks, Sweet. Looks good." He took the plate from her, balanced it in the same hand as the cup. With his free hand, he smacked his wife's bottom as she headed for the refrigerator. He smiled and sauntered over to the table, enjoying the sound of his wife's singsong voice as she chastised him in front of Xuan. Sitting at the head of the table, he placed his lunch in front of him, the ice tea directly to the right of his food

. "So Xuan," he said, "How long have you been in Algiers?"

"Two month." Xuan noticed that Chief Taylor took big American bites, washing each piece down with gulps of ice tea, just like her own husband.

"Hey, Xuan Oi," called Mai, "you want nuoc mam? I make fresh this morning." She let the refrigerator door slam behind her as she held up the bright orange sauce. Xuan nodded and started to get up. "No, no!" Mai cried as she shuffled over to the pregnant woman. "I bring you! You too pregnant! No need get up."

Xuan nodded again. "Cam on Chi." She looked at Mai who waited. She then said it again in English, forcing teeth and tongue to make contact. "Thank you."

Mai smiled broadly. "Welcome." She looked at her husband as he devoured the sandwich and soup. She wondered if he even tasted any of it. "Everything okay?"

Chief Taylor wiped his lips with a napkin and reached out for her hand. "Everything's fine, Sweet. Come on and eat with us. You're movin' around too much." He watched his wife spoon a large portion of rice into a bowl, before placing the fish onto the nicest plate they owned. He sighed as she grabbed two matching rice bowls from the cabinet.

"I coming. I coming." Mai sat between her husband and Xuan. "Here we go." She scooped a

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...serving of rice into one bowl and placed it in front of Xuan. Then she scooped another serving into a bowl for herself. Mai picked up the jar of nuoc mam, gently shook it, and asked her husband, "Work okay, honey?" She poured a tiny bit over both bowls of rice.

"Uh huh. Just fine. Fixing stuff. The usual." He smiled at his wife then took a sip of his tea. "So Xuan. How long were you lost before Mai found you?"

Mai noticed Xuan's face turn bright red. "Please eat, Em Oi," she said, gesturing to the fish.

Xuan nodded at Mai. "Not sure," she replied. "Hot outside. Long time." She carefully pulled apart the fish with her chopsticks, pushing the bones to one side of her plate.

"I bet it did feel like a long time." Chief Taylor leaned forward, resting his elbows on the table. "Did your husband know you were going to the store?" He took the last bite of his sandwich and wiped his mouth.

"No," Xuan said quietly. "I want," she looked around the kitchen as she searched for the words to explain. "I want surprise him. House all look same." She picked at the fish, wishing she were home.

"House all do look the same. Plus so hot." Mai nodded her head.

She knew Xuan felt ashamed for getting lost. She knew the woman was too proud to ask for help. She would've wandered around until she found her way home, no matter how long it took. It was the Vietnamese way. Mai thought about what she'd just said, hoping Xuan wouldn't interpret it as pity. "Don't worry. I know this last time you get lost, huh. You strong woman. Wander around in heat with grocery and baby coming soon." Mai nodded again to show that she meant what she said.

Chief Taylor sat back in his chair, folding his arms behind his head. "Don't worry, Xuan. Everything's taken care of. Petty Officer Pruitt will be here soon." He looked at his wife and smiled broadly. "Remember your first trip alone to Schwegemann's? What an ordeal that was." He laughed softly, shaking his head back and forth.

Mai stared at her own plate of food. "I told her already what happen." Mai nodded to Xuan to make her agree. She did not want this discussion to go any further. "We laugh hard about it." She started to pick apart the fish, placing piece after piece onto Xuan's plate. "Too much for me. Can't eat." Mai looked only at Xuan as she removed bones from Xuan's plate to make room for more fish. She knew that Xuan would refuse the fish and that was fine. She just knew that she needed to change the subject.

"No, no Chi," said Xuan. "Too much for me. Thank you. I full."

Xuan tried to cover her plate with her tiny hands, but Mai was determined.

"You need eat. Build strength. Baby need food, too." Mai grabbed the rice bowl and began piling on rice.

"No, no Chi Oi!" Xuan shook her head and tried to move her plate away from Mai, who kept pulling it towards herself. Xuan hated to refuse food even though she knew it was acceptable in American customs, but she knew she couldn't even finish what was already on her plate. It would be shameful to accept more than she could finish. "I full. No need to give more. Save for later." She grabbed the plate and pushed it away from both of them, nodding her head to persuade Mai that she was speaking the truth.

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“Okay,” said Mai. She got up and scurried toward the refrigerator. “How 'bout fresh fruit? You like mango?” she asked, pretending to search for her favorite knife. “Not big like in Vietnam but still good for baby. Make strong and healthy. I cut some for you.”

Xuan sat holding her plate of rice and fish, shaking her head no. She glanced over at Chief Taylor, unsure of what to do next. “Honey, she doesn’t want any more. I know you mean well, but Jesus Christ!” He laughed, taking the mango from her.

“I just try to make everyone satisfy.” Mai’s empty hands dropped to her sides.

“You do, honey. Of course you do.” Chief Taylor guided his wife back into her own chair as he rubbed her arms. “I know it’s your way. You’re just hard-headed, that’s all. Like Schwegemann’s. I came home and you weren’t there. No note. No nothing. Gone for hours. Remember that?” He continued to rub her arm as he sat at the head of the table.

“Yes,” said Mai. She stared at the Formica.

“It’s a good thing I found you when I did. I was worried sick about you.” Chief Taylor reached for his wife’s hand, patting it gently. “But everything turned out just fine.”

Mai said nothing. She continued to stare at the table, remembering when she had asked for help at Schwegemann’s.

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The stickiness of the afternoon sun had distracted her, making her homesick, reminding her of the summers in Hue where she and her mother had worked and sweated side by side in the rice paddies.

As she walked, she remembered how the rice had danced during the big winds among the rows of flowing bright green and her mother taunting and cooing to the stubborn water buffalo that refused to pull the plow when he was too tired. She remembered those fields turning from vibrant green to napalm orange to black. She remembered the months of frantic letters back and forth between her husband and herself. And then, as if in a dream, she was whisked away from home to a new world of muted colors. Now she was lost.

Unfamiliar brick red duplexes surrounded her, and she wished more than anything that she were at her husband’s office at the Navy Base. Looking down the road, she wondered how she would find him. Everything was the same. No color. No friendliness. She knew she had to cross the Algiers River, though now she was not even sure where that was.

But then she thought of Billy. Imagined how excited he would be to learn that she went to the store and back without him. No help. He could stop worrying about her and she would prove to him that she was now an independent American woman. So she sacrificed her pride and found her way back to the grocery store.

First, she’d asked the cashiers for directions to get home, but they had simply stared. “Speak English,” some said. “This is America” said the stock boys, “we can’t understand you.” The bag boys said nothing. They had all turned away, acting as if packing groceries was more important than helping a lost customer.

She wandered up and down the aisles of canned fruit and boxed rice and neatly packaged meat, asking over and over again for help. But no one would. “I lost,” she’d said. “I live at govament housing. Govament housing. You undastand me?” But these people ignored her. They acted like she wasn’t speaking English. They simply pushed their carts down the aisle,

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pretending to read the labels on the jars of spaghetti sauce and peanut butter. It was as if she wasn't there.

She had even spotted a young woman with long, dark hair like her own. The woman had a baby and Mai saw how tender she was with the child. She hurried toward the woman, nearly slipping on the shiny linoleum. "Please. Navy Base," she whimpered, "I lost."

But the woman with the long, dark hair had cringed at the sight of Mai. Covering her baby's eyes, the woman stepped back, wrinkled up her nose and said in a perfect southern drawl, "Well you wouldn't be lost if you'd just stayed where you belong."

Mai had run from there, clutching the grocery bag to her chest. She ignored the people who stared and scolded herself for being stupid enough to think that she could survive here. She thought of home. 348 Pham Van Hai, Saigon, Vietnam. Seventeen hours ahead. Mama would be next door, asking Uncle Tu for fresh eggs and French bread. Uncle Tu would invite her in for hot jasmine tea and a steaming bowl of pho. Outside in the streets of Saigon, people would be well into their morning routine. Students on bicycles going to school, the tunics from their ao dais flapping like butterfly wings in the hot breeze. Vendors shouting their wares: Baked squid! Bahn bao dumplings with barbecue pork! Café sua with sweet rolls! Military trucks would zoom by, heading to the next destination. Who knows where? People said the war was almost over. No one knew what would happen but everyone was afraid. "Get out," they'd said, "if you can." And she did. But in her heart, she believed that she had shamed her family for marrying a foreigner. For running away and leaving them, forsaking her duties as a daughter. She was now lost in a world she did not understand. This was her punishment. She knew she could never go home.

Billy found her several hours later, wandering around the Algiers River, a few blocks behind the low-income housing. He had run up to her, frantic, touching her arms and legs and face, asking if she was hurt. She had looked at him blankly and said, "Algier water remind me of Perfume River in Vietnam. Very brown and dirty."

He had taken her home, gently scolding about how she needed to call when she was lost or how she needed to ask for help. "You know how to speak English," he said, wrapping his arms around her. "You could've asked for help." She just nodded, defeated, clinging to him as he took the groceries from her and led her home.

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Mai looked at her husband, then at Xuan, then back at her husband. "I ask for help," she said slowly.

"What was that, honey?" Chief Taylor continued to rub his wife's hand. He was in the middle of giving Xuan directions to their house, just in case she needed anything.

"I ask for help." Mai looked hard at her husband, and saw the confusion in his eyes. "I ask for help. They won't help me."

"Who wouldn't help you?"

"Schwegemann." Mai removed her hand from beneath her husband's and placed them in her lap.

"What do you mean?"

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Mai looked at her husband. "I ask for help. In Schwegemann. They won't help me."

"Can't or won't?"

"Won't," she said. She knew he would not understand.

Chief Taylor stared at his empty hand. He examined his nails, stained from fifteen years of fixing motors. He looked at the cuts on his palm, remembering the time he had tried to show another chief how to replace a flywheel and the socket wrench had been slippery—he'd sliced himself from wrist to middle finger. He rubbed the scar at the tip of his middle finger with his thumb, circling over and over its now white smoothness, remembering how much it had hurt, how much it had bled. He had only wanted to help. He flexed his fingers, once, twice, and then placed his hand slowly, gently back onto his wife's. It felt soft, like always. He looked into her face. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why? What you do?" Her eyes never left his. "Can't fix. This my problem. Not yours. I tell you, only make things worse."

"Worse for who?"

"Worse for me."

Chief Taylor started to speak, but nothing came out.

"No. Don't worry, honey. Everything okay now. I learn. See?"

Mai nodded her head up and down, hoping it would soothe her husband.

She sat up straight in her chair and smiled, desperate to convince him. "Only make mistake one time. No more. I independent. No one help me. That okay. I American woman. Take care of myself. It in the past." Mai took her husband's hand into her own. "Now you know," she whispered, gently kissing his fingers again and again.

Xuan looked at Chief Taylor. Touching Mai on the shoulder, she spoke slowly, careful to articulate the foreign words as best she could. "Tomorrow I come by. You teach me cook. We eat."

Mai turned her head, her hand still in her husband's. She stared at Xuan's bulging stomach, the blue dress so thin and worn she could see the knob of bellybutton. She wondered about the unborn baby: Did it hear my story? What does it think of me? Her eyes met Xuan's. She had only wanted to show this young mother that she was not alone. Help was available if she wanted it. Feeling tired, Mai closed her eyes. "Cam on, Em Oi," she whispered.

Xuan took Mai's hand, placed it on her pregnant belly and said, "You welcome, Chi." In spite of everything that had happened, Xuan felt lucky. Her husband would arrive soon to take her home. He would be worried, but she would tell him that she was fine. She was safe. The baby kicked reassuringly, and in that moment, Xuan envisioned the future: A home in America, the front lawn green with life and strewn with colorful toys. Inside, family and friends were having dinner, sharing hopes and dreams, and stories. Her oldest child, a daughter, asking again and again to hear about the day Auntie Mai had saved them.

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**Lucille Sutton** earned her MFA in Fiction at California State University, Fresno. Her most recent publications can be viewed online at [prickofthespindle.com](http://prickofthespindle.com) and [JMWW.150m.com](http://JMWW.150m.com). Previous publications include *Bamboo Ridge Press*, *Out of Thin Air*, *VenturaCountyStar.com*, and *The San Joaquin Review*. "Schwegemann's" was acknowledged in the *Indiana Review: Writers of Color Edition* and as a top-ten finalist for the 2004 Dana Awards Short Fiction Contest. Her novel excerpts were finalists for Fall 2004 SLS/ St. Petersburg Writing Contest and Fall 2006 SLS/ Kenya Writing Contest, respectively.