

The President's Daily Brief

Đỗ Nguyễn Mai

The President's Daily Brief, 17 May 1967
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*For Nhất Chi Mai
Chùa Từ Nghiêm, Chợ Lớn, Sài Gòn
16 May 1967*

Beneath the shroud of morning, two mothers watch
their daughter die. One keeps her eyes closed,
the other, her hands clutching prayer,

a kaleidoscope pool collected at their naked feet
as a lotus ruptures upon the gasoline garden.

A hundred kilometres to the north, another body is bursting.

Here, spring's breath evaporates into azure sky,
early hours condensing onto what she left behind:
a poem, a letter, a name fifty thousand mouths carry
because a telegram will not. A torch exhausted,
steeped deep in petrol, waiting
for another match to strike.

Đỗ Nguyễn Mai is a Vietnamese poet and educator from Santa Clarita, California. As a junior scholar in the social sciences, Đỗ's literary work often draws from historical and archival sources. They utilize poetry to explore gaps left within these sources — spaces usually carved out not only by the mere passage of time, but also often by the interests of state authorities. While government has no interest in the preservation of individual human dignity, Đỗ attempts, through poetry, to outline moments and people the state apparatus tries to render indistinct.