

The Tran Family by Dan Corfield

About three years ago, Phillip Tran was forced to move. He was seventeen years old, a senior at Westminster High.

His father and mother and little sister arrived at school one afternoon to pick him up, and when he slid into the back seat they told him that they weren't going home.

"How come?" he asked.

His father kept driving and didn't say anything. Philip saw the worried look upon his mother's face.

"Something happened," his sister said.

"What?"

"Don't worry about it," said his mother.

His father then told him that they were going to spend a few nights at his aunt's house. Phillip liked his aunt. She went to church a lot and cooked delicious egg rolls.

"How long are we going to be there?" asked Phillip.

No one answered him.

When they pulled into the driveway, he spotted his aunt standing on the porch. She was wearing a flower dress. Tall and wide, her arms hung long by her sides.

Phillip waved to her from the backseat, and quickly got out of the car. But when he stepped onto the porch he saw how she was looking kind of strange. Normally she was smiling, a picture of warmth and goodness. Now she just stood there like an iceberg.

Turning around, Philip saw his father eyeing him through the cracked window, the car rolling backwards. "We'll be back," his father said. His mother then waved goodbye and pointed down the road.

On the other side of the driveway stood Philip's sister, and her suitcase.

Phillip remembered the conversation he had had with his Uncle Duc. This was two weeks ago. Duc told Philip that his dad hadn't paid the mortgage for three years.

"You guys are going to lose the house," Duc had said.

Two days before that a cop had showed up at their door. Phillip tried to hear what he was saying, but his father kept telling him that it was between him and the officer and to go back to doing whatever it was he was doing.

At his aunt's house, Philip shared a room with his sister. She never brushed her teeth, made her bed, or put her clothes away. Philip would tell her to stop being so lazy, but

then she'd cry and say how much she missed her mom and dad. Phillip's aunt would then barge in and start screaming at the top of her lungs.

This went on for about a month.

Then one afternoon Phillip was sitting on the porch when he saw his Father's Honda Civic cruising down the street. He jumped up quickly and ran to greet him in the driveway. Philip's mother was there too.

"Where's your sister?" his father said.

"Inside."

"Go get her."

"Will we be coming back?"

"No."

Now they were living in a motel, the four of them. It was very tense. Phillip's father yelled at his mother for every little thing. He threatened to beat her with the wooden stick he always walked around with. Phillip told him that if he touched her he would beat him senseless.

"You can't talk to me like that," his father said.

"I just did."

Phillip's father raised his stick and shouted, "Go to your room!"

But there were no other rooms.

One evening Philip was over at his friend's house when he heard a strange noise outside the window. The two boys decided to investigate. Up and down the street a crazy man was pacing back and forth, talking nonsense.

"That looks like your dad," said Phillip's friend.

Philip dropped his head and closed his eyes. Then he ran out into the street. He tried to shush his father, but his father kept on spewing nonsense. He was babbling about the Viet Cong, about communists, about prison. It was hard to understand. Philip's Vietnamese wasn't so good.

"Stop it, you're embarrassing me," said Philip.

But he didn't stop, and soon the cops showed up. Then came paramedics. Then came the hospital. Phillip had not been allowed to ride in the back of the ambulance. His father had to be strapped down, and Phillip would only have gotten in the way.

Dr. Nguyen told the three of them-- Phillip, his mother, and his little sister-- that Quan was suffering from drug induced paranoia.

"What kind of drug?" asked Phillip.

“Crack Cocaine,” said Dr. Nguyen.

“You’re shitting me.”

So now it was just the three of them in the motel room.

In the evening, Phillip would visit his father in the hospital. Doctor Nguyen had moved him to the psych ward. Apparently he was still crazy, even though he couldn’t do drugs in there. Dr. Nguyen assured Phillip that he wouldn’t have to be in the psych ward forever.

“How long?” asked Phillip.

“I will let you know as soon as I am sure,” said Dr. Nguyen.

A few days later the cops showed up at the motel room. There were a bunch of them this time. Phillip had been lying on the floor reading *Of Mice and Men* when he heard a commotion through the window. When he looked out, he saw four squad cars and a line of officers, some of them kneeling behind their vehicle and aiming guns, their arms draped over the hood. One of them had a bullhorn.

“We know you’re in there,” the bull horned cop said.

Phillip’s mother was running around like a madwoman while his little sister stood there with tears streaming down her face. Phillip tried to stay calm, seeing as he hadn’t done anything wrong.

“Hide your sister,” said Phillip’s mother.

“Hide her, where?”

Phillip’s mother grabbed his little sister by the wrist and drug her into the bathroom. She dropped the toilet lid, then told her daughter to sit there and be brave. Phillip’s mother then kneeled before the little girl and calmly told her how everything would be okay and how she had to listen to her brother now.

“What is happening?” Phillip said.

His mother stood and turned to face him, but then there was a loud crash at the door. All at once the cops came pouring in. Phillip watched as they threw his mother on the bed and swallowed her in handcuffs. With her face buried in the bed, her arms behind her back, he couldn’t believe that this was his mother. He turned around to ask the cops why they were doing this.

Just then one of them stepped out of the kitchen. He was holding up a trash bag that was stuffed with something other than trash.

“Got it,” he said.

Phillip could see through the bag that there were brown rectangular packages in there. He had a feeling he knew what it was, having seen this scene in movies a thousand time, although his mother never starred in any of them.

Phillip's mother was sent to jail for dealing heroin. Since it was her first offense she only had to serve three months. But with his father in the hospital it was now just Phillip and his sister.

Phillip's sister wasn't the brightest kid on the block. She reminded Phillip of Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*. Now he was George. He thought about going back to his aunt's house but he knew she wouldn't want them. Then he thought about the end of the book. If he could get hold of gun he could put a bullet in her head and then be rid of this lousy family entirely. He figured his Uncle Duc could get him one. But this line of reasoning didn't stick. As much of a pain in the ass his sister was sure to be he knew he couldn't kill her.

Instead, Phillip decided he was man enough to take care of his little sister, not to mention himself. He had turned eighteen a month ago, so legally, he was a man. He had job at Radio Shack; he had some money coming in. His mother also told him where she had hid the cash from all her drug deals. All he had to do was get through the next few months and then his mom and dad would be back. He would keep the family afloat till then, and when his parents came back they'd have a brand new start.

When Phillip's father returned he seemed much better. But that didn't last very long. He had stopped using crack, but now he gambled all the time. He gambled away what was left of the drug money and he gambled away what his son Phillip had given him.

When his mom came home, well, she went right back to selling drugs.

"We got to get out of here," said Phillip. He was talking to his little sister, but she was clueless. She kept asking her brother why he wanted to leave their Mom and Dad. As far she knew they were taking care of things just fine.

"Maybe you aren't lazy after all," he said. "You're just a moron." He didn't mean to hurt her feelings when he said this. He was more or less just talking to himself, stating a point of fact. Now that he accepted this he knew it didn't matter. There was nothing to stick around for. For a couple months he lived with his Uncle Duc. Then he joined the army.

Dan Corfield teaches writing at Golden West College in Huntington Beach, California. His fiction has appeared in various literary journals, including CLRI, and his poetry can be found in *Beside the City of Angels: An Anthology of Long Beach Poetry*. He enjoys surfing and playing beach volleyball in his spare time.

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