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Walking Point

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He’s probably 13 or 14, matchstick thin, dressed in black pajamas like so many Vietnamese, flip-flops, thick black hair:

but startled now, wild headlight eyes. (He’d been walking the narrow jungle trail, rifle casual over his shoulder, like

a 14-year-old carries a baseball bat, when the American soldier stepped into his path.) And the boy stands

frozen for a moment, then drops his weapon and runs. The soldier snaps his rifle to his shoulder, sights square

on the boy’s back, then hesitates. Do it, he thinks. But in that second, the whisper in his head—half-remembered words

from childhood wedged for weeks now in some itchy corner of his brain—begins its tuneless buzz: tongues of men,

tongues of angels, sounding brass, tinkling cymbal. And as the boy vanishes, he lowers his weapon, no longer a soldier.