

*Hospital for Tropical Diseases, 8 February 2021*

My dear little sister, my angel,

You sleep a carefree sleep, your lips sucking as if on a candy. And I look at you, this little angel born as the Covid pandemic rages, and my heart is filled with joy. How I long to tell you of these days we spend together in this quarantine camp, but you are too small to understand. And so I am writing to you.

Little sister!

That morning, when the news broke of more than a hundred million people infected with the virus and more than two million deaths worldwide, with our country seeing a new wave of the pandemic, Mum started to have contractions; you were about to be born. I remember all those emotions! The quarantine room turned into an emergency room. Nurses and doctors rushed in and did their best to help with the delivery. And I was in the next room, thinking of my Mum as I waited for you to come into the world. I couldn't keep still. At that very moment, I knew that only someone who has waited anxiously for something would ever understand this long, painful wait...

Little sister!

Your first cries lit up the room. A doctor, in his blue protective uniform, his face masked, took you in his arms, his eyes shining with joy. You were crying, and I felt as if a huge weight had been lifted from my shoulders, I was trembling with happiness, I heard Grandma's laughter mixed with tears, Dad's sudden silence in the middle of the video call. The emotions were surging.

Born in great expectation, wrapped in the care and attention of the whole family, you and your first tears gave the doctors and nurses hope, confidence in the victory that will one day be won over the epidemic. Outside, the whole world is in turmoil because of the deadly COVID-19 virus, but here peace reigns for you. Sleep well little sister, for you are protected by good people: the doctor who takes care of his patients day and night, his protective visor fogged, his overalls glued to his back with sweat, even on these winter days; the hospital volunteers who agree not to go back home to be with their families, even during the Tết [*Vietnamese new year*] festivities; the nurse who leaves her children with their grandparents so that she can take you in her arms when you are not feeling well, and sing you a lullaby: "little stork, you fly this way and that, from the little garden you go to the rice field".

Little sister,

I was very lucky to experience these days of quarantine. Almost a month here has helped me understand that the "Special Quarantine Area" sign doesn't hide horrible things as we tend to think; this quarantine camp turns out to be a world of warm care, attention, love and solidarity, a world of heroes who silently sacrifice their well-being and ask nothing in return. Happiness for me now is not only to eat well, to wear pretty clothes, to play all the time, but also to live in a world of love between human beings. Now I understand why our little country is admired by the whole world in the fight against COVID-19. It's very simple, we all follow the five recommendations to the letter: "wear masks; disinfect objects and hands; avoid crowds; keep your distance; make medical declarations". Everyone can follow the example of the famous song "The Hand-Washing Dance".

Everyone acts according to one slogan: "fight the epidemic because it is our enemy". And, in this fight, it's the medical staff who are the heroes.

Seeing you sleeping in Mum's arms, without a care in the world, my heart is calmed, just as if it had just sailed through a storm and reached the safety of the harbour. We will return home with joy in our hearts in the springtime, while the people here continue their silent fight until the final victory is won. You will grow from day to day. We will be like strong trees that withstand everything, typhoons and storms. It all starts today, my beloved little sister.

With all my love,

Your sister