



# Catching Shrimp with Bare Hands: A Boy from the Mekong Delta

*Michelle Robin La*

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## **Catching Shrimp with Bare Hands: A Boy from the Mekong Delta** Michelle Robin La

*Catching Shrimp with Bare Hands* is the true story of Luong La, a boy growing up in the Mekong Delta in the midst of the Vietnam War. When the 1968 Tet Offensive forces Luong's family to flee the countryside, his mother continues to travel back and forth to their island farm despite threats from the Viet Cong and nearby firefights.

Out on their farm in the middle of the Mekong River, Luong wants to catch fish and slingshot birds, but Viet Cong, called mysterious misters by the villagers, stop by his family's hut and stay. "The frog dies because of its big mouth," his mother warns. The mysterious misters behead a neighbor, and Luong's aunt goes missing.

Luong plans to join the Army as soon as he's old enough to fight, but the war ends before he has a chance. Communism descends, pulling him back in time to a land without electricity or fuel where his family has to hide the books that haven't already been burned. Propaganda that "kneads their skulls," neighbors spying on each other, and the threat of starvation drive Luong to escalating acts of defiance. About to get caught by the authorities, he drops out of school to help his family build a boat to escape.

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