

WINTER COLORS

*Missing me one place, search another;
I stop somewhere, waiting for you.*

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

WINTER COLORS

CAST OF CHARACTERS/DESCRIPTIONS:

FRED- White male, late 60s, early 70s. Former Marine, served in Vietnam in late 1960s, early 1970s. Returned to US, went to college in mid-late 1970s, married. From 1980- present, FRED was a member of the police force in a small city (think Cambridge or Somerville, MA). His last position was detective. Recently widowed and retired, Fred is beginning to think a lot about his time in Vietnam. He is drinking more than usual.

HOA- Vietnamese, female, mid 40s, nail salon owner. HOA was born in a small village in Vietnam, came to the US in the 2000s to marry an older Vietnamese man who left Vietnam in 1975. HOA'S adult children from a previous marriage live in Vietnam. Though owing her own nail salon in the US had seemed like a dream come true, HOA is learning that with ownership comes many pressures and responsibilities.

DONNA- early 40s. white female, a lawyer. DONNA is the sole practitioner of a storefront law office in Cambridge or Somerville, MA. Competent and hardworking, she mourns her mother and is unsettled by Fred's current preoccupation with Vietnam and HOA.

SETTING:

A nail salon, FRED'S house. During the imaginary Vietnam trip, the setting is more fluid: Ho Chi Minh City, My Khe beach.

TIME:

Present or recent past

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PROLOGUE-

HOA lights an incense stick in front of an altar containing a statue of Buddha and some pieces of orange. DONNA goes through a box, opens a manila envelope, takes out: dog tags, a Purple Heart and some photos: Photo One is picture of two GIs, sitting next to a dead Vietnamese soldier; Photo Two is of FRED with his arm around a young Vietnamese woman.

Act I, Scene 1- An afternoon in early Spring, 2021. Lights up on Lotus Nails: the waiting room, with chairs and a table containing magazines; the nail room, containing a small oblong table, with a chair on each side, On the wall, a rack for jars of nail polish. In a corner, a small shrine. HOA enters, carrying a couple of plastic bags. She strews orange pieces at the shrine, lights an incense stick and places it at the shrine. Cellphone rings.

HOA

'Lotus nails.' Pedicure for twenty-five, manicure for-

(Looks outside.)

(Vietnamese) Not coming in? Kids not in school yet.

(Hangs up, muttering. Straightens magazines.)

(Vietnamese). Kids not in school yet. What about my customers?

After a few moments, FRED enters, startling HOA. He has been drinking.

FRED

I don't bite.

HOA

Manicure? Pedicure?

FRED

Sure.

FRED stumbles.

You OK?
HOA

HOA offers FRED a chair. FRED sits heavily.

FRED
This is a Vietnamese nail salon, right?

HOA
Manicure?

FRED
Whatever.

HOA
Nail polish?

FRED
Huh?

HOA
Polish? On nails!

HOA fills a glass bowl with water, then takes
FRED'S hand and puts it in the bowl.

FRED
This is my first time.

HOA
I do a good job.

FRED
Friendly.

HOA
What?

FRED
This place. Friendly, relaxing.

HOA
Color?

FRED
Color? Where?

HOA
This is a nail salon. We put color on nails.

FRED
You pick.

HOA brings bottles of nail polish over to FRED,
shows them to FRED.

HOA
Nice color.

FRED
Whatever.

HOA
Another nice color. You want this one?

FRED'S phone rings.

FRED
'At the nail salon! '
(Puts phone away.)
She doesn't believe me.

HOA
Wife?

FRED
Daughter.

HOA
Good daughter.

FRED
I don't need anyone checking up on me!

HOA
This one?

FRED
(Peers.)
The letters are so small!
(FRED reaches for his glasses, reads.)
"The Thrill in Brazil'. 'Affair in Red Square'. You can go on a trip, just sitting here.

FRED picks out another color.

HOA
Good choice. Nice winter color. Pay.

FRED
Pay?

HOA
Credit card, Paypal or venmo.

FRED takes out card. HOA processes card.

FRED
Put the tip on my card.

HOA
Tip later. Cash.

FRED
Now?

HOA
Cash later.

HOA rubs lotion on his hands.

FRED
Oh, that's nice. I am thinking about traveling.

HOA
Las Vegas? Miami Beach?

FRED
You like to travel?

HOA
No time. Nail salon keeps me busy all day.

FRED
Retirement isn't working out for me. I retire, then my wife dies. Cancer.

HOA
Sorry.

FRED
At the retirement party, everyone's congratulating me: "You and Tina, like a second honeymoon." One week later, she comes home from work, crying. Stage four something. Six weeks later she's gone. Never got time to quit her job. Some retirement. At the wake, people come up to me and go, "When you die, she'll be waiting for you." Really? *That's* supposed to make me feel better? Fred. My name is Fred.

HOA
Hoa.

FRED
That's a flower name.

HOA

How do you know?

FRED

I got to know a little Vietnamese when I was there.

HOA

In Vietnam?

FRED

US Marine Corps- Anyway, when I walked in the door, you looked at me, like-

HOA

Surprise?

FRED

Terror, more like. You're alone. Where are the other people?

HOA

She stayed home. Kids not back in school yet.

FRED

Is she coming tomorrow?

HOA

Yes!

FRED

Good. I notice these things. I'm a former cop and-

HOA

Policeman?

FRED

Nineteen years on the force, fifteen as a detective. These days, I may be drinking a lot, but I still notice things. You looked frightened.

HOA

In LA, a woman walked into a nail salon and began yelling at the ladies.

FRED

A lot of angry people, walking around.

HOA

They arrested her.

FRED

Chinese cop, right?

HOA

Korean.

FRED

A Korean policeman, on detail?

HOA

The Korean policeman arrested her. Hate crime.

FRED

What happened to her?

HOA

Maybe she went to jail.

FRED

No. Do you mind if I ask you a question? Why did you come to the US?

HOA

Run a nail salon.

FRED

That's why you left Vietnam?

HOA

Vietnamese people can't come to US?

FRED

That's not- Let me ask you another question. Did you come to the US in '75, after the war ended?

HOA

Not old enough.

FRED

When did you come?

HOA

Fifteen years ago. Many Vietnamese people come to US. They work hard.

FRED

Of course.

HOA

I study English and now I'm running a nail salon.

FRED

You're an American success story.

HOA

And I'm helping my family back home in Vietnam. I want them to come to the US.

(FRED writes on a card.)

Hey, your nails aren't dry!

FRED

Do you know Mrs. Tam, who works at the Small Business Association?

HOA

No.

FRED

She's a nice woman and she's Vietnamese. You should talk to her.

HOA pockets card. FRED admires his nails.

HOA
Because she's Vietnamese?

FRED
She could be helpful. If the guys on the force could see me now.

HOA
You want a pedicure?

FRED
No, I don't want-

HOA
Good for feet.

FRED
Oh.

HOA
Mani pedi, I give you good price. Thirty-five dollars.

FRED
Next time.

HOA
You can make an appointment now.

FRED hands money to HOA. As FRED
packs up, HOA bustles around, makes tea.

FRED
Jasmine tea!

HOA
You can buy it at the Vietnamese grocery store in Dorchester.

FRED

Last time I had jasmine tea was in Vietnam.

HOA

Army?

FRED

Marines. US Marine Corps, 67-68. You could be the age of the bar girls we used to talk to. What happened to them?

HOA

Why do you ask me?

FRED

I am asking a lot of silly questions, aren't I? Making assumptions.

HOA

I'm a businesswoman, not a bar girl.

FRED

But you do remind me of this girl I knew.

HOA

You think all Vietnamese women look alike?

FRED

I can't get her out of her head. When you're retired you have a lot of time.

HOA

No hobbies?

FRED

Everyone tells me, "Get a hobby."

HOA

Bar girls are grannies now. Great-grannies. Great-great-

FRED

OK, OK. I'm an idiot. Need to work on my people skills.

HOA

Tea?

FRED

Some of them had kids with the American GIs.

HOA

Mixed kids. We don't like that. We call them 'Dust of Life'.

FRED

What happened to them?

HOA

You?

FRED

I hope not. I'm glad I stopped by. I've been walking back in forth in front of this place, trying to get the courage to come in.

HOA

I saw you.

FRED

The shrine.

HOA

A lot of shrines in the city. Not in country.

FRED

Linh had one. In our apartment. I haven't said her name in so long.
Linh.

(FRED stands up.)

Linh! Where are you!

HOA

Nails not dry.

FRED

They aren't? They look dry to me.

HOA

Sit there, put nails under dryer!

FRED

OK!

HOA leads FRED to the dryer, makes him sit.

HOA

'As if We Were Never Apart.'

FRED

Huh?

HOA

English name of TV show: 'As If We were Never Apart.' Famous TV show in Vietnam, dedicated to reconnecting people with their dear ones.

FRED

You watch it?

HOA

First Sunday of every month. All the information you need. Go to online address, fill out application.

FRED

In Vietnamese?

HOA

And English.

FRED hands more money to HOA.

FRED

You already gave me a tip.

FRED

Keep it.

HOA

I'm going out for Chinese food!

FRED begins to leave, hesitates.

FRED

Can I come back? I promise I'll behave.

HOA

OK Fred. Next time, mani pedi.

FRED exits.

Scene 2- A few days later. At FRED'S house, FRED and DONNA drink coffee.

DONNA

What was I thinking, setting up a storefront law office?

FRED

Donna, you said you didn't want to work in a big downtown firm. You wanted to practice in the neighborhood.

DONNA

And for a while, things were great. I had great clients. I made money. Now, I work all the time and mail invoices to folks who say they can't afford me. I went to law school to help people, not send dunning letters.

FRED

You need money?

DONNA

No!

FRED

I can help.

DONNA

Dad, you're on a fixed income.

FRED

I got more pensions than I know what to do with.

DONNA

Hold on to them. Maybe I will quit my job.

FRED

Nothing wrong with taking time off.

DONNA

You never did.

FRED

If you retire, we can be bums together.

DONNA

I don't want to be a bum! I was just thinking out loud that working in a big office might be nice. Some of my law school buddies are making partner. Me, I'm trying to make my rent.

FRED

So work in a big office and see what that's like.

DONNA

I don't have the right mindset. It's your fault, you know.

FRED

What are you talking about?

DONNA

Service.

FRED

More like a lack of imagination. I come from a family of cops and nurses. Sure didn't prepare me for life now.

DONNA

Joyce told me you missed your last appointment.

FRED

I don't want you checking up on me.

DONNA

I happened to run into Joyce at the gym and-

FRED

Going to the gym, are you?

DONNA

- She asked after you.

FRED

How's the gym?

DONNA

I'm not going enough. Come with? We could lift weights together.

FRED

Donna.

DONNA

You're home all the time, drinking!

FRED

I'm retired. What else am I supposed to do?

DONNA

There are activities-

FRED

-For geezers like me? No thanks.

DONNA

I worry about you.

FRED

You can't take care of everyone.

DONNA

Don't I know it. My kids don't need me anymore. I miss my mother. You?

FRED

What about me?

DONNA

Do you miss Mom?

FRED

Sure. I just never expected she'd go when she did. When you're in my line of work you do know that bad things are going to happen.

DONNA

You ever got shot?

FRED

Of course.

DONNA

You never told me!

FRED

Nothing serious. I survived Vietnam and the police force.

DONNA

You think she suffered?

FRED

I hope not.

DONNA

She was looking forward to spending more time with you.

FRED

She said that?

DONNA

Yes. Dad.

(Pause)

And this is where you tell me you were looking forward to spending time with her!

(FRED goes into kitchen.)

Where are you going?

FRED

Coffee! Want some?

DONNA

Did you hear what I said?

FRED

I should have rebelled.

DONNA

Rebelled.

FRED

People did, in those days. They did something different. I should have done something different.

DONNA

She respected what you did.

FRED

But she didn't like it. I worked long hours, nights. She wanted me home more. I did things, saw things. She always said I had another life.

DONNA

She knew what she was getting into.

FRED

No one ever knows that.

DONNA

You're probably right.

FRED

There's a lot about my life-

DONNA

What?

FRED

-I never talk about.

DONNA

I never knew you got shot. Maybe I never asked.

FRED

I wouldn't have told you.

DONNA

I still want you to see Joyce.

FRED

Not the right person for me.

DONNA

There are other therapists. You're stubborn, that's what you are.

FRED

Heard from you brother recently?

DONNA

He'll reach out when he's good and ready.

FRED

He said that?

DONNA

In so many words.

FRED

I'm sorry.

DONNA

People grieve in different ways, right? Hey, if you don't want to see Joyce, can we agree on something else?

FRED

Like what?

DONNA

These carpets.

FRED

What about them?

DONNA

You used to say you hated them. How about-?

FRED

No.

DONNA

You don't hate them?

FRED

I used to hate them then.

DONNA

We're going through some changes, aren't we? Sometimes, I look in the mirror and I don't know who's there. I'll walk into my closet and I don't know what to put on. I never thought Mom would die so young. But she did and we're kind of- I wish I could talk to her. I have regrets.

FRED

Like what?

DONNA

I shouldn't have married Tom.

FRED

Tom is history.

DONNA

Of course, but it wasn't fair to the kids. Tom took me away from the kids.

FRED

Those kids love you.

DONNA

I shouldn't have married him! There's something I never told you. Before she died, we had this conversation. Couple of weeks before she died, Mom and I were sitting together and I started crying. She asked me what was wrong and I said, "I'm worried about Dad."

FRED

What did she say?

DONNA

"Your father will be all right!"

FRED

Sounds like a fine conversation to me.

DONNA

No Dad, I should have said something like, " Mom, I'll miss *you*." "I love you and I'm going to miss *you*."

FRED

She really said I was going to be all right?

DONNA

Her very words. You keep looking at your watch. Hot date?

FRED

Me?

DONNA

You could, you know. They have websites for-

FRED

-Everything. Websites for finding people. Websites for losing people!

DONNA

Just saying.

FRED

I heard you!

DONNA

If you did start to see someone, I'd probably kill you! You got anything to snack on? I'm hungry.

DONNA exits.

FRED

Help yourself.

Sounds of rummaging . Surreptitiously, FRED checks contents of a small manila envelope.

DONNA (O.S.)

What's with all this food? Lasagna, macaroni and cheese-

(She enters, eating off a plate.)

Mmm! Someone did a lot of cooking for you. Mom's sisters?

FRED

Nope.

DONNA

Who?

FRED

Ginny. From the hospital.

DONNA

You have a hot date with her?

FRED

Donna-

DONNA

Just asking.

FRED

I was checking my watch because I want to get to the post office before it closes.

DONNA

I can drop off your mail. It's on my way.

FRED

My passport expired. I'm applying for a new one.

DONNA

Going somewhere?

FRED

Vietnam. Maybe.

DONNA

You've been there. Why not Paris or London?

FRED

Those places sound great, but Vietnam keeps me up at night.

DONNA

Dad, no one's sleeping very well these days. Let me see your passport pictures. These are all right!

FRED
For an old guy.

DONNA
Really Vietnam?

FRED
A piece of me is there.

Doorbell rings.

DONNA
Don't move!

DONNA exits. FRED looks at photos, pockets manila envelope, begins to put on his coat.

FRED
Vietnam.

Door slams. DONNA enters, carrying a big paper bag.

DONNA
Fellow at the door says you ordered some Chinese food.

FRED
Oh!

DONNA
I was about to send him away, but he showed me a receipt with your name and credit card number.

FRED
Want some?

DONNA
I better get back to the office. This is an awful lot of Chinese food! A feast!

FRED

I get tired of my own cooking.

DONNA

You have pans and pans of food in the freezer!

FRED

You like dumplings, don't you? I ordered a lot of dumplings. You could take them to the office, eat them there.

FRED hands a couple of Chinese food containers to DONNA, then tries to push her out the door.

DONNA

Dad, what's going on?

FADE lights.

Scene 3- The nail salon, a few weeks later. HOA reads a book. Looking better, FRED pokes his head in the door.

FRED

Hi Hoa. Got time for me?

HOA

Manicure?

FRED

Sure!

(FRED enters, examines colors. HOA fills bowl with water.)

What about this?

HOA

'Midnight'?

FRED

Maybe not. This? 'Licorice'?

HOA
You want black nails today? OK!

FRED
Just a seventy-year-old punk rocker.
(FRED sits, puts his hands in the bowl.)
Ooh.

HOA
It feels good.

FRED
Sure does.
HOA clips FRED'S cuticles, buffs nails. FRED
tries to give HOA his credit card.

FRED
My credit card.

HOA
Do you want a pedicure today?

FRED
I don't think so. Where are the other women?

HOA
Home.

FRED
Aren't the kids back in school?

HOA
They tell me they aren't ready.

FRED
Hoa, I worry about you being here all by yourself. Where do you live?

HOA
Dorchester.

FRED

Field's Corner?

HOA

How did you know?

FRED

I grew up there, when it was all parishes. People would ask, what parish do you live in? Not anymore. In the eighties, I remember when the Vietnamese people moved in. Vietnamese restaurants up and down Dot Avenue. Vietnamese kids playing in the town soccer leagues. They were good, too. The kids.

HOA

People call Field's Corner Little Saigon. You grew up there?

FRED

Me, I was an Upham's Corner kid. Completely different. I hung out in with kids from Field's Corner. Ronan Park. Do you have a big family?

HOA

My kids and my mom are in Vietnam. I want to bring them to the US.

FRED

How's that working out for you?

HOI

Problems with visas. It takes too long! US government doesn't care about the Vietnamese people. Maybe they think we are all Viet Cong.

FRED

That's not right.

HOA

People say that it takes five years to bring someone over from Vietnam. I have been in the States more than ten.

(HOA smudges FRED'S nails.)

Sorry!

FRED

When I was in Vietnam, I knew a lot of South Vietnamese interpreters, drivers. They did a lot for us.

HOA

I will do over.

HOA wipes FRED'S nails.

FRED

You don't have to.

HOA

I do good work. You want a pedicure?

HOA redoes FRED'S nails.

FRED

What would I do that for?

HOA

Old feet need taking care of. You want to make an appointment?

FRED

I remember how people used to talk about how their feet never got dry. After days and days in the jungle, they got something called immersion foot.

HOA

That happened to you?

FRED

I didn't spend that much time in the jungle.

HOA

What did you do?

FRED

In Vietnam? What was my Military Operation Code? My MOS? My MOS was GRU.

HOA

What's that?

FRED

Graves Registration Unit. How did I end up there? Hell if I know. Anyone asked me, I always said, "I wanted to be a truck driver. See the country." We took some tests- I'm still thinking I'm going to be a truck driver- and in June '67, I end up working in the mortuary unit in Danang, right after it opened. Some of the guys with me, they had worked in the funeral business. Me, I was the newbie. We washed and prepared the bodies so they would look all right for the families. They came over in uniforms, we sent them back that way. Then, we had to look over everything. Distinguishing marks. Wounds. Anything compromising. We had to figure what personal possessions the family might want and what needed to stay back here in Vietnam. All day every day. Nights, weekends. We'd get called after there was a big battle or firefight. Only time I saw Vietnam was flying in and out. So green and lush. The mortuary unit wasn't green, it was located in this big hangar-like building. Bodies stacked up everywhere. We even slept there.

HOA

Fred, no!

FRED

We didn't sleep with the bodies!

HOA

Fred!

FRED

In the same building. They isolated us. There was this bar, not too far from the unit. I went there to get a drink and there she was. I think that Linh was the first person who didn't say anything about the smell. Whenever we went to the mess hall, even if we had showered and put on lots of cologne, everyone moved away. There we'd be. The same

FRED (Cont'd)

bunch of guys I worked with in the unit, sitting together in the mess hall. But Linh said the smell didn't bother her at all.

HOA

She lied.

FRED

Linh would never lie to me. Hoa, I don't come here for the nails. I like talking to you about Vietnam. I'm drinking less.

HOA

Sure.

FRED

Makes me feel better.

HOA

I like to talk about Vietnam, too. I miss my family and my country. Talking about Vietnam- Time for nails to dry.

(HOA turns on dryer, helps FRED put his hands underneath.)

Not too hot? Too cold?

FRED

Just right. I changed my mind.

HOA

Pedicure?

FRED

About Vietnam. We shouldn't have gone in.

HOA

The Vietnamese people were fighting for independence for a long time.

FRED

They knew what they were doing and we didn't. Even though I was only nineteen when I worked at that fucking GRU, I could tell that something

FRED

was off. The official casualty list, it didn't come close to what was happening on the ground. The military always said we were winning, but we knew better. We saw all the bodies. The US didn't leave until much later.

(Admires nails.)

Would you look at these black nails! Think I should get another tattoo?

HOA

You have a tattoo?

FRED

My Marine tattoo. And I have a Vietnam tattoo.

FRED tries to roll up his sleeves.

HOA

Hey! Not dry yet!

FRED

OK.

(FRED puts his hands under the dryer.)

What about you, Hoa? Do you have a tattoo?

HOA

No!

FRED

I was just being fresh. Mrs. Tam told me you stopped by her office. You talked to her about English classes.

HOA

When I came to the US, I took classes. Chinatown, Bunker Hill Community College.

FRED

Your English is good.

HOA

When I got the training to work in the nail salon I stopped. Hard to do everything. Mrs. Tam wants me to take advanced English classes.

FRED

Are you going to sign up?

HOA

I think so. Mrs. Tam gave me some books.

Shows her book to FRED.

FRED

Poetry?

(Whispers.)

Poetry is confusing!

HOA

One word, many meanings.

FRED

You don't think that's weird? What's that? *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman? You read it?

HOA

I like it.

FRED

Good for you! You know who would know about that book? Donna, my daughter. Before she became a lawyer, she thought she was an English major. Her mother and I had to talk to her. What can you do with that? So she went to law school and became a lawyer. At one point, Donna was threatening to throw away all her English books.

HOA

No!

FRED

Her kids had moved out and she was trying to downsize.

FRED tries to get up, bumps into dryer.

HOA

Hey!

FRED

Regular bull in a china shop. Well, see you next week!

FRED throws a wad of bills on the table, exits.
HOA pockets money, picks up a book. Fade light
on HOA, reading.

HOA

'I stop somewhere, waiting for you.'

Scene 4- The nail salon, a few weeks later. HOA sweeps floor. DONNA
faces her.

DONNA

Is he giving you money?

HOA

No!

DONNA

My father is on a fixed income. He can't be throwing away money.

HOA

He pays for his manicure and gives me a tip.

DONNA

I bet it's a big one. He's been acting weird. Yesterday, I went to his house
and he was wearing gloves.

HOA

Cold outside.

DONNA

In spring? When I asked him why, he showed me his fingernails. Then he showed me his feet. Black nail polish, really. Then, he told me all about you, Hoa. You and Lotus Nails.

HOA

I run a good nail salon!

DONNA

Seventy-year-old men don't hang out in nail salons! He's ordering Chinese food. My father doesn't like Chinese food!

DONNA hands her card to HOA.

HOA

Donna. You want a manicure, Donna? Mani pedi?

DONNA

I want to know what's going on with my father!

HOA

Lotus Nails is a good-

DONNA

-Nail salon.

HOA

Happy customers.

DONNA

Where are they?

HOA

They come in the morning.

DONNA

And in the afternoon?

HOA
I clean the salon.

DONNA
Could be a front.

HOA
Front?

DONNA
You know, illegal activities in the back room-

HOA
Lotus Nails is a good business!

DONNA
You have competition:
(Points)
'Hot Nails. Brazilian Nail Salon.'

HOA
Sexy Brazilian women. They do nails, play Brazilian music.

DONNA
Have you been?

HOA
I send one of the Vietnamese ladies who works with me. Better quality here. Lotus Nails-

DONNA
'Good nail salon, happy customers.' If he isn't giving you money-

HOA
Advice.

DONNA
Advice?

HOA
"Go to Small Business Administration."

DONNA
And?

HOA
I meet with people there. They want to support me.

DONNA takes out photo of Linh, shows it to
HOA.

DONNA
Do you know who this is?

HOA
You think I know every woman in Vietnam?

DONNA
(Reads)
'With Linh in Saigon, 1967.'

HOA
Before I was born.

DONNA
I found it in my mother's things. She's very thin and pretty.

HOA
Fat granny now. Great-granny.

DONNA
Do you think my mother knew about my father and that Vietnamese
woman?

HOA
Long time ago.

Teenagers.
DONNA

Mom and Dad?
HOA

Dad and the girl in the photo. They look so young.
DONNA

He talks about her.
HOA

About who?
DONNA

Show him the photo.
HOA

I wanted to talk to you first. See what you knew about her.
DONNA

Nothing!
HOA

Are you going to Vietnam with him?
DONNA

No!!
HOA

He talks about going.
DONNA

I am busy here. Running a nail salon is a lot of work.
HOA

Of course it is. Especially when you have competition from a Brazilian nail salon.
DONNA

HOA

Lotus Nails better.

DONNA

Some men have a thing about Brazilians, you know.

HOA

And Asian women. American men love pretty Asian women.

DONNA

Confusing.

HOA

Men? Confusing?

DONNA

They're different. Can I tell you something? My mother just died. Do you have a mother? What a question. Everyone has- or had- See what I mean about confusing?

HOA

In Vietnam.

DONNA

You're so lucky. My mom died suddenly and now my father is home alone. Can you tell when he's been drinking?

HOA

He isn't drinking so much.

DONNA

More than he should. How often does he come?

HOA

Once a week.

DONNA

You don't have to cover for him.

HOA
Sometimes two, three-

DONNA
Does he bring Chinese food?

HOA
Sometimes.

DONNA
Sometimes?

HOA
We talk.

DONNA
Just talk?

HOA
Drink tea and talk.

DONNA
Eat Chinese food. Two people, just drinking tea and eating Chinese food.

HOA
Talking about Vietnam.

DONNA
Maybe I will have that manicure.

HOA fills bowl with water.

HOA
Pick color.

DONNA looks at colors.

DONNA
'Coral Candy'.

HOA
You like that one?

DONNA
"Coral Delight'.

HOA
Better.

DONNA
What kind of colors does my father like?

HOA
Winter colors.

DONNA
I used to wear 'Cherries in the Snow'. You know it? It's a lipstick.

HOA puts DONNA'S hands in a bowl.

HOA
Too hot? Too cold?

DONNA
Heaven. I haven't done anything like this in a long time. Between work, sorting my mother's things and worrying about my father-

HOA
He has nice hands and feet now.

DONNA
My clients don't care what I look like.

HOA
They want a good lawyer who will help them.

DONNA

I try.

(HOA rubs lotion into DONNA'S hands.)

Ooh.

HOA

He says the same thing. Ooh.

DONNA

It feels good. Smells good, too. What's this you're rubbing into my hands? Tea tree lotion? I should pick some up.

HOA

Makes your skin very soft.

DONNA

I still think there's something you aren't telling me. He's a lonely widower and you remind him of Vietnam.

HOA

I told you everything. You want to make an appointment?

They glare at each other. DONNA gives HOA her business card.

DONNA

If he comes in and-

HOA

Credit card.

DONNA

-He's not sober, you'll call me?

HOA

He isn't drinking now.

DONNA

He was!

HOA
Credit card!

DONNA
Oh.

(DONNA hands credit card to HOA.)
What about the tip? You want me to put that on the credit card?

HOA
Cash better.

HOA applies nail polish.

DONNA
Nice! If I don't pamper myself, who will?

HOA
Coral looks good on you.

DONNA
I have a coral necklace. And a coral ring. The jewelry used to belong to my mother, and now it's mine.

HOA
You wear it?

DONNA
I need to find the right time.
(Tearfully.)
Your mom is in Vietnam, but at least you can talk to her on the phone.

HOA
Sometimes connection is no good. I want to bring my family to this country. Big problems with visa.

DONNA
I could give you the names of some good immigration lawyers.

HOA

Cost too much money.

DONNA

Fine. I was asking you a lot of questions earlier, it's the lawyer in me. We ask a lot of questions.

HOA

Law and Order.

DONNA

You watch it, too?

HOA

Every Thursday night.

ONNA

Two ladies, watching a cop show. Maybe my father has more of a life than I do.

HOA

He's an old man!

DONNA

With secrets.

HOA

I want to talk about Vietnam, too. I tell him about my family. My village.

DONNA

He never used to talk about Vietnam. Maybe my mother didn't know how to draw him out. I do remember arguments about photos. Not of Linh, photos of American GIs, posing-

(Deep breath.)

American GIs, posing next to dead bodies of Vietnamese- what were they? Soldiers? Civilians? I saw one before someone snatched it away. I do remember those arguments, then they stopped. My mother told me that when he came home he didn't know what he was going to do. That's what he told her. He went to college- they met there- then he dropped

DONNA (Cont'd)

out. Then, he went to the Police Academy- like all the other men in his family-and that was that. He worked as a detective for a long time, which he liked, but we could never ask him about his cases. I guess you would say what he did was confidential, but from where I sit now, I'd say more secrets. So many secrets. That girl, Linh.

HOA

She could be dead.

DONNA

What a thing to say!

HOA

Vietnamese people in war generation had a hard life. Maybe she escaped in 1975 and came to US as a refugee. Maybe later. Maybe she was a boat person, captured by pirates. Maybe-

DONNA

Or maybe she's alive and well.

(FRED enters, carrying a large paper bag, hands it to HOA.)

Dad?

FRED

Donna, what are you doing here?

(To HOA.)

I went to that new place. Hope you like what I picked up.

As DONNA and FRED talk, HOA spoons rice, then vegetables out of paper containers and into bowls. She places the first bowl at the altar.

DONNA

(Waves nails in Fred's face.)

How do you like my nails?

FRED

I keep telling you, don't check up on me.

DONNA

I was getting my nails done!

DONNA shows photograph to FRED.

DONNA

Who's this?

FRED

Linh! Where-?

DONNA

In Mom's things. Who's Linh?

FRED snatches photo from DONNA.

FRED

Thank you! I have been looking all over for this.

DONNA

Who's Linh?

FRED

A woman I knew in Vietnam.

Carefully, FRED turns over photo.

DONNA

What does the Vietnamese writing say?

FRED

You want to pull up a chair?

HOA

Sit here.

DONNA

I have to go.

FRED

Hoa, excuse me. Donna, are you upset because Hoa is Asian?

DONNA

Dad! If you think- I do have Asian clients.

FRED

So pull up a chair and have lunch with us. I picked up a lot of Chinese food. Me and Hoa can't possibly-

DONNA

Me and-?

DONNA throws a stack of bills down on the table, exits. HOA places Chinese food on the table.

FRED

Donna!

(TO HOA.)

What about you? Aren't you going to eat?

HOA

Not hungry.

FRED

Hoa, I picked up all this food! OK, I'd appreciate it if you'd stop running around and help me with something.

HOA

OK.

HOA sits and they look at the photo. FRED turns over the photo.

FRED

We went to Saigon for a visit. She sent me the photo after I got back in the world. That's what we called it.

(Points.)

FRED (Cont'd)

What does that say?

HOA

'I have something to tell you.'

FRED

She's reaching out to me.

HOA

Fred-

FRED

I have been dreaming about her. About Linh. She's looking at me, holding out her hands-

HOA

Fred.

(FRED reaches into his pocket, pulls out a map.)

A map of Vietnam. Can I see?

Projection: a map of Vietnam. The towns light up when FRED and HOA say them.

FRED

Saigon.

HOA

Ho Chi Minh City,

FRED

Pleiku.

HOA

Tan An

FRED

Danang

Tan An

HOA

What's-?

FRED

HOA points.

HOA

My village. On the map it's very small.

HOA closes her eyes.

What do you see in Tan An?

FRED

HOA

Pigs, chickens.

FRED

Your family had a farm?

HOA

We worked on a farm. I can see my little house and the big house of the neighbor with the farm. I miss it. I miss it all. Vietnam.

HOA closes her eyes.

Vietnam.

FRED

FRED closes his eyes. Sound and light shift.
FRED is pulling two roller bags.

FRED

You can open your eyes now! Here.

FRED hands a roller bag to HOA.

HOA

Where are we?

FRED

Saigon! Wow. I know it's called Ho Chi Minh City now, but it will always be Saigon to me.

Light change again. They are in an imaginary space. Airport noises. AIRPORT OFFICIAL enters.

AIRPORT OFFICIAL

Welcome to the People's Republic of Vietnam!

Sound of passports being stamped. FRED and HOA exit, pulling bags. Blackout.

Act II, Scene 1- In (imaginary) Ho Chi Minh City, HOA sits at a café table and drinks iced coffee. She wears big sunglasses, looks great. FRED enters. He wears a baggy Hawaiian shirt, looks disheveled.

FRED

You should have come with me!

HOA

Fred, sit. You're so tall-

FRED

Didn't speak English! Didn't like me!

(HOA signals to waiter.)

No, I don't want any more coffee!

HOA

Lunch?

FRED

I'm not hungry.

HOA

It's lunchtime,

FRED

-Everyone eats lunch at the same time? That's so bureaucratic!

HOA

-Government offices close during lunchtime or the person in charge leaves-

FRED

Meaning someone nicer could be in his place? OK, I'll try again.

(Begins to leave, hesitates.)

Come with?

HOA

I'm staying right here. Like Walt Whitman wrote, "I stop somewhere, waiting for you."

FRED

You look nice.

HOA

I'm in my country with my people. Drinking Vietnamese-style coffee.

FRED

Don't move!

FRED exits. HOA tries to make calls, but isn't successful. FRED returns.

HOA

How was the meeting?

FRED

That scooter almost knocked me over! And I thought the traffic in Boston was bad. I showed the women in the office the photograph and the inscription.

HOA

And?

FRED

I couldn't understand what she said.

HOA

Did she speak English?

FRED

Yes, but she spoke fast and- Bottom line, she wasn't interested.

HOA

Next time, tell her you are a rich American businessman who wanted to invest in my country.

FRED

I guess there are a lot of us, veterans of the Vietnam war-

HOA

Here, we call it the American war.

FRED

-Who are looking. Looking for girlfriends, for-

HOA

-Children?

FRED

Hoa, I don't think-

HOA

Sure?

FRED

I don't know. I don't know what to think.

HOA

Vietnamese people don't like Dust of Life children.

FRED

OK! So, what do we do now? I struck out at the government offices. At the TV station-

HOA

They asked you if you wanted to be on the show!

FRED

I didn't know what I was supposed to say! After all these years I come back and I'm tongue-tied. Time to go to Danang.

HOA

Did you pack your bathing suit?

FRED

Bathing suit? We are on a mission!

FRED and HOA exit. My Khe Beach. Sounds of waves crashing, seagulls. HOA enters, wearing a straw hat and tunic. She carries a big beach bag. As HOA lays her towel and beach bag, FRED enters, holding two umbrella drinks. Hands drink to HOA.

HOA

Thank you! First time in Danang?

FRED

No, what about you?

HOA

No.

FRED

Back then, Danang was a real shithole. We went to the beach, but then it was called China Beach and it was pretty bad.

HOA takes a selfie.

HOA

My Khe Beach, the best beach in Vietnam.

FRED

The Danang airbase was huge and the bars were the worst.

HOA opens an umbrella, hands a baseball hat to FRED.

FRED

Geez, I forgot how hot Vietnam could be.

HOA

Your face is red.

(Rubs sunblock on FRED.)

Old white skin turning red.

FRED

You look pretty, Hoa.

HOA

Like a lobster.

FRED

Sorry! Found us in a nice hotel.

HOA

Five stars?

RED

Roomy, with a view of the ocean.

HOA

I want to stay in a five star hotel!

FRED

In a few hours we will be standing there, on that balcony. Then, we'll change and go down to the terrace. We'll have drinks.

HOA

Dancing?

FRED

Tonight? Hoa, I've been drinking a lot and-

(HOA picks up things.)

Where are you going?

HOA exits. Lights change/time passes. At the beach, FRED sits and drinks heavily. After a long while, HOA joins him, sits.

HOA

Hi.

FRED

Hoa, I have been waiting here for hours, days, almost a week. Where did you go?

HOA

My village.

FRED

That's so far away! How did you get there?

HOA

Bus? Taxi? Walking. Long trip. I need to take a shower.

HOA begins to exit.

FRED

I want to hear more about your trip! Did you see your family?

HOA

Yes.

FRED

And?

HOA

All grown up. Son taller than me. Daughter married with six kids.

HOA shows FRED photos on her cellphone.

FRED

Beautiful family. Are all of those kids-?

HOA

My three kids, their kids. Nine grandchildren. My Mom.

FRED

They must have been overjoyed to see you.

HOA

They say, "Who are you?"

FRED

Did you explain to them about the visa situation, that it takes-

HOA

-At least five years. And they say, "You've been in the States so long! Maybe you don't want us to come?"

FRED

Tell them you're doing your best.

HOA

They don't see it that way. They think I am some kind of superhero. Then they ask, "What you bring us?"

FRED

I remember, walking down the streets of Saigon or Danang or Bangkok- I went to Bangkok once for R&R- and the little kids would run up to me, asking for gum and candy. People always want something. Whatever you give them is never enough.

HOA

I gave them nice presents. Spent a lot of money.

HOA gets tearful.

FRED

Maybe it was the wrong size. Or the wrong color. Or you just didn't spend enough money on them.

FRED cracks open a can of beer.

HOA

Too much drinking.

FRED

My wife dies, I can't find Linh and you walk off on me.

HOA

I told you I was going to visit my village!

FRED

You did not.

HOA

I did! You don't remember. Because you're drinking too much!

FRED

You have a tattoo? Where did you get it?

HOA ignores FRED, applies lipstick.

FRED

I met someone.

HOA

Nice Vietnamese lady?

FRED

Old American guy like me, Jerry. Jerry told me that for the last few years, he comes here to the beach, rents a room and stays.

HOA

You want to do that?

FRED

I might. He says that he sits and looks at the ocean for a long time. Then he turns around and looks at the mountains.

HOA

Fred, never turn your back on the ocean.

FRED

Jerry might join us later on. Jerry said that he always requests a room on the ground floor, so that he doesn't pitch over the balcony.

HOA

He's drinking too much, too. Where is Jerry's wife?

FRED

Back in the States. There are two, three wives, but I don't think he's in touch with any of them. I think there are a lot of guys like Jerry, staying in hotels up and down this beach. Jerry's room has a kitchenette. Sometimes he cooks; most of the time, he orders a fish dinner and eats it on the beach.

HOA

I don't want to talk about Jerry!

FRED

What do you want to do? Are you hungry or do you want to stay on the beach a little longer. Would you like me to pick up another one of those umbrella drinks or would you like iced coffee?

(HOA bursts into tears.)

Hoa, what's wrong?

HOA

"Why did you come back?" "We don't have a mother!"

FRED

They said that?

HOA

"You left us!" "Don't come back!"

FRED

I am so sorry.

HOA

They are angry with me!

FRED

Those kids love you.

HOA

I don't think so. My Vietnamese family thinks I'm a selfish person with a comfortable American life. I work all the time. For them! If I can't bring them to the States, I don't know what I'm going to do. I should have stayed in Vietnam!

FRED

Maybe they need to do more. Take English classes in Vietnam. The US government likes that.

HOA

Take English classes.

FRED

You did. You came to the US so you could learn English.

HOA

Fred-

FRED

Anyway, I say that being angry at you means that they care.

HOA

Thanks Fred.

FRED

Good for something.

HOA

But I don't like them to be angry with me. I want-

FRED

What?

HOA

Respect. I made a long trip to see them!

FRED

Hoa, you will reunited.

HOA

When?

FRED

I don't know. You will. You got to have hope, Hoa!

(HOA leans against FRED.)

This trip to Vietnam, I knew it wouldn't be easy. I didn't know it would be this hard. This morning, I woke up with this cold feeling, that we- That I would come all this way and wouldn't find out anything.

HOA

I would come all this way and my kids wouldn't want to see me.

(HOA tries to pull FRED to his feet.)

Come on.

FRED

OK, OK. Don't rush this old man. My knee-

HOA

Linh could be dead.

FRED

Did you have to say that?

HOA

People of the war generation had a tough life.

FRED

When Linh sent me that picture, I had just met Tina and I was beginning to think about the possibility of a life with her. Her brother was helping us buy a house near here. I really didn't want to live in Dorchester anymore. When I read Linh's message- I could read a little Vietnamese in those days- I just thought she wanted money. I put the photo aside. It got lost and Donna found it.

(FRED sobs.)

I abandoned her. I abandoned Linh!

HOA

You don't know what. I think, Linh had a life. Maybe she stayed in Danang. Maybe she went home to her village. Maybe, like me, she came to the US.

FRED

You think she mailed the letter in the US?

HOA

Linh had a life and you will, too.

FRED

But I always I tell people that a piece of me is in Vietnam.

HOA

Leave it there.

FRED

Come on, let's go home.

HOA and FRED exit. Big sound (roller boards, plane departure) and light changes.

Scene 2- Lights up, briefly, on DONNA. She tries to do her nails, then lights up on nail salon, immediately following the end of Act I. In their regular clothes, FRED and HOA eat Chinese food.

FRED

More dumplings?

HOA

No thanks.

FRED passes out fortune cookies.

FRED

(Reads)

'You are about to go on a long trip.'

HOA

(Reads.)

'If you look back, you'll soon be going that way.' Fred, I have to go home. My husband is waiting for me.

FRED

Husband?

HOA

Yes.

FRED

But, you said-

HOA

I came to the US to better myself.

FRED

Yes, but-

HOA

You think someone like me could pay for an airplane ticket to the US?

FRED

How did you get here?

HOA

'Old Vietnamese man wants young Asian wife from the country.'

FRED

Sounds like a personals ad to me.

HOA

Vietnam Cupid.

FRED

Vietnam Cupid? Aren't there nice, age-appropriate Vietnamese women in this country?

HOA

These old Vietnamese men from the war generation want a nice country girl. My husband brought me to the US, paid for English classes, sent me to nail salon school. He had a friend who had a nail salon and I started to work there.

FRED

And then you took over the nail salon.

HOA

Took a long time. My husband did everything for me. Now he's not very healthy and I have to take care of him.

FRED

Does he know about your kids?

HOA

I say, 'They are all grown up.' He believed me. He's very old.

FRED

From the war generation. Just like me, right?

HOA

Yes.

FRED

Go home, Hoa. Your husband is waiting for you.

HOA holds door open for FRED. FRED exits.
HOA exits.

Scene 3- Several months later, summer. DONNA admires her nails. Nearby, a large tote bag. HOA tidies up. Both women are dressed for summer. DONNA wears a dress and sandals, HOA slacks and a tee shirt.

DONNA

Maybe coral is my color.

HOA

Pedicure?

DONNA

I better get one, right? Now that it's summer.

HOA

You want to make an appointment?

DONNA

I might.

(DONNA puts down tip money.)

Hoa, I tried to do my own nails, but it didn't work out. Then, I went to the Brazilians. I looked at the travel posters, listened to the bossa nova music.

HOA

How was the manicure?

DONNA

It was all right.

HOA

A lot of sexy women with big boobs?

DONNA

They must have had the day off. My- what do you call her -

HOA

Nail salon worker?

DONNA

Aesthetician. She wasn't into it. Practically fell asleep on me. Not very professional. When you go someplace to have something done, you want someone who will do a good job. Like you. Seen my father recently?

HOA

No.

DONNA

Me neither.

HOA

He's busy.

DONNA

When was the last time he came in?

HOA

A few months ago.

DONNA

He and I were trading telephone calls, then- You don't think he went to Vietnam without telling us, do you?

DONNA begins to pack up.

HOA

Make an appointment? Pedicure for sandal weather?

DONNA checks her calendar.

DONNA

I should, but my schedule keeps changing. Everyone is getting married and you know what that means? Prenups. Some of them, they shouldn't be getting married.

(Glances at telephone.)

Excuse me.

(Into telephone.)

Dad!! I'm at the nail salon. Lotus Nails. Lotus Nails!

(Hangs up.)

He's in the neighborhood and he's coming over!

HOA

Maybe he wants a pedicure.

DONNA

He says he wants to speak to both of us.

(HOA tidies. DONNA combs her hair, applies lipstick, attempts to read a magazine. FRED enters. He is clean-shaven and wears a short-sleeved shirt, slacks.)

Dad, you're out of breath.

FRED

I'm excited.

HOA

You want-

FRED

Not today.

DONNA

Hoa and I were wondering if you had taken off to Vietnam.

FRED

Vietnam?

DONNA

What's going on?

FRED

(Deep breath.)

Ginny and I are getting engaged.

DONNA

Ginny at the hospital? Lasagna Ginny?

FRED

She's so much more than that. Here.

FRED pulls out his cellphone.

DONNA

When-?

FRED

We started talking. Look at her.

DONNA

At the hospital?

FRED

I was visiting Donna's mom and Ginny was visiting her husband. Donna, Hoa, isn't she a knockout?

DONNA

And you just decided to get married?

FRED

We started talking, meeting for lunch. We have a lot in common.

DONNA

Losing a spouse.

FRED

Hawaii. R&R in Oahu for me, growing up on the Big Island for Ginny.

DONNA

You tell her about Vietnam?

FRED

We talk about it all the time. She's part of the war generation, too. Here's another one. Isn't she something?

DONNA

She was in Vietnam?

FRED

Her husband served. Army, though I'm not holding it against him. *He* spent his time in-country. In and out of the villes, talking to the locals. Humping in the jungles. The more typical Vietnam experience. Aren't you going to give me a hug?

DONNA

Dad, I'm speechless.

HOA

Congratulations, Fred. You tell Ginny, I will give her a special wedding mani pedi with glitter!

FRED

She might like that.

(To DONNA.)

What do you say?

DONNA

This is so sudden!

FRED

Love can be sudden. Ginny and me, we're not children.

DONNA

You're seventy.

FRED

(Whispers.)

Don't tell her.

DONNA

Ginny doesn't know how old you are?

FRED

Just kidding! About the wedding? Ginny's kind of the impulsive type and I like that.

(FRED shows another photo of Ginny.)

Look at that smile.

HOA

Complementary mani pedi for Ginny!

FRED

She'll love that.

DONNA

You want me to do your prenup?

FRED

Ginny and I are marrying for love!

DONNA

Dad, that's what they all say.

FRED

We are! Neither of us owns anything.

DONNA

You have a house. Does Ginny have a house?

FRED

Of course. A nice one on the South Shore. Ocean view.

HOA

Wow.

FRED

I already told your brother.

DONNA

And?

FRED

He's very happy for me.

DONNA

Wow, dad.

DONNA hugs FRED.

FRED

Thanks sweetie. I'm going to move in with Ginny.

DONNA

Sell your house?

FRED

I guess so. Unless you want it. Donna, we're happy.

DONNA

Does Ginny have kids

FRED

Four and some grandchildren. Listen to this, I think her kids approve of me.

DONNA

Why not? Former cop. Veteran.

FRED

Just last weekend, one of them took me aside and said, "Mom's happy."

HOA

Nice! You tell Ginny-

FRED

About the complementary mani pedi. You bet I will.

FRED begins to leave.

DONNA

You aren't leaving.

FRED

I don't like to keep Ginny waiting.

DONNA

You didn't tell us-

FRED

I didn't? I thought I told you everything!

When?
DONNA

Like, the wedding date?
FRED

The wedding date.
DONNA

We haven't set it, but when we do you and your brother will be the first to know. You too, Hoa.
FRED

Thank you!
HOA

You aren't giving Ginny Mom's engagement ring, are you?
DONNA

Of course not. Your mother's engagement ring is for you, Donna. Whenever you want it.
FRED

FRED exits.

Linh.
DONNA

Your father is happy.
HOA

What about her?
DONNA

Time to forget about her. Do you know Ginny?
HOA

DONNA

I met her a couple of times at the hospital. I asked him once, but he brushed me off. The whole time, he was seeing her. Do you have kids?

HOA

In Vietnam.

DONNA

Husband?

HOA

He died.

DONNA

When?

HOA

Couple of months ago.

DONNA

In Vietnam?

HOA

In US.

DONNA

Hoa, I am so sorry.

HOA

He was very old. Seventy-five.

DONNA

Just like my father. Does he know?

HOA

No.

DONNA

Your husband. My mother. Loss. There's no getting away from it, is there? How are you doing?

HOA

All right.

DONNA

Ho, if there's anything I can do-

HOA

He left me his house. Triple decker in Dorchester. Field's Corner.

DONNA

Good. Are you going to rent it out?

HOA

Already rented. His brother lives in one apartment and his sister lives the other apartment. When my family comes, they will live with me and work in the restaurant.

DONNA

You own a restaurant?

HOA

His brother.

DONNA

You never told me.

HOA

Sometimes I work there.

DONNA

Work in the restaurant after your day here in the nail salon?

(HOA shows business card to DONNA.)

'Pho Eiffel Tower.'

HOA

Picture of Eiffel Tower in the window and on the paper napkins. Pretty good Vietnamese food. Come any time.

DONNA

I will. I like Vietnamese food. We're talking like this now, like friends, but before I felt so threatened. Hoa, I was rude and I said some things. I'm sorry. Is there something I could do-

HOA

I need a real estate lawyer.

DONNA

That would be me. What's going on?

HOA

My husband's brother says the triple decker belongs to him.

DONNA

That can be cleared up easily. All we have to do is look at your husband's will. He left a will, didn't he?

(HOA holds out will to DONNA.)

There it is, in plain English.

DONNA shows will to HOA.

HOA

Brother says that, right before he died, my husband told him that he wanted to leave the triple decker to *him*. Keep it in the family.

DONNA

Aren't you-?

HOA

Before he was friendly to me, now he says he doesn't like me. He doesn't want to talk to me. He says- he says I married his brother for his money and I don't belong to the family anymore.

DONNA

May I take this?

HOA

Keep it. I made a copy.

DONNA

I'd like to look at the will more carefully. Maybe talk to the lawyer who helped your husband draw it up.

HOA

Come to the nail salon? We talk about the will and I will give you a complementary mani pedi.

DONNA

I'd rather you come to my office. I like to think that your owning property will help with bringing your family over to the US. Hoa, I do know an immigration lawyer. We went to law school together and I just ran into her.

HOA

Where will I get the money to pay for all these lawyers?

DONNA

Sometimes lawyers take on what we call pro bono or free of charge clients, because we think that the case is that important. Maybe we could start with a three-way call with my friend the immigration lawyer.

HOA

OK.

DONNA hands HOA her business card.

DONNA

My card.

HOA

I have it.

DONNA

Of course.

(DONNA hands the tote bag to HOA.)

I almost forgot. My poetry books.

HOA

Heavy!

DONNA

It's a pretty good selection of American poets: Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson. Those two aren't easy, especially Dickinson.

HOA

I like Emily Dickinson.

DONNA

You know her?

HOA

I like Emily Dickinson.

DONNA

(Holds up a book.)

Here's a nice anthology. This poem is one of my favorites: "This is Just to Say," by William Carlos Williams.

DONNA shows poem to HOA.

HOA

(Reads.)

'...So sweet and so cold.' A poem about plums?

DONNA

I don't know why I like that poem so much. Williams was a doctor, but instead of writing about love or death, he writes about plums.

HOA

In Vietnam we eat a lot of plums. Plum blossoms mean transition and hope.

DONNA

I just thought the poem was about eating a plum.

(HOA returns book bag.)

Hoa, I want you to have my poetry collection!

HOA

These books are old and dusty. I want to buy new books.

DONNA

Fine.

DONNA packs her bags. HOA stops her.

HOA

Can I keep the book with the plum poem?

DONNA gives that book to HOA.

DONNA

Good choice.

HOA

I'm taking Advanced English classes. The teacher tells us to read all the time. I am very motivated. I read a lot. Mrs. Tam is giving me books.

DONNA

Mrs. Tam? The Vietnamese woman at the Small Business office?

HOA

You know her?

DONNA

Everyone knows Mrs. Tam. Maybe Mrs. Tam can talk to your brother-in-law.

HOA

She wants me to explore my options.

DONNA

That sounds like Mrs. Tam.

HOA

Running a nail salon is hard work. Maybe I want to do something else, like be a teacher?

DONNA

Why not?

HOA

Mrs. Tam gives me poetry books by Vietnamese Writers. I can read poems in two languages. If my family-

DONNA

Not if, when-

HOA

When my family comes here, I will show them my library. That plum poem, maybe some day I can translate it into Vietnamese.

DONNA

The words might be the same, but the poem will have a different meaning.

(Pause.)

Linh.

HOA

Always talking about Linh!

DONNA

You think she could be alive?

HOA

I don't know. But 'As if We Were Never Apart' is a very popular Vietnamese TV show that connects people with their dear ones.

DONNA

'As if...'

HOA

She wrote both names on the back of the letter: Linh Ly. In Vietnam, we say Ly Linh.

DONNA

Ly Linh.

HOA

Very common name.

DONNA

It's a beginning. If I can't find out anything online, maybe I should go.

HOA

To Vietnam?

DONNA

I need a change. You and Dad are moving on, changing, why not me?

HOA

Here.

HOA hands Vietnam map to DONNA.

DONNA

Aren't you going to visit Vietnam one of these days?

DONNA holds out map to HOA.

HOA

I will buy a new map.

(DONNA exits. HOA opens book, reads, first in English)

'This is just to say, I have eaten the plums...'

(HOA then reads the poem in Vietnamese.)

Scene 7- A year later. HOA gives FRED a pedicure.

FRED

... And I even went to the GRU. What used to be the GRU unit in Danang. All torn down now. Apartments.

HOA

Ginny come with you?

FRED

She came to Vietnam, but when we went to Danang, she went to the beach. Hoa, I closed my eyes and it was like I was back there. The smell was awful and I saw things, but we prepared those bodies with respect. Gave them back their dignity. When I opened my eyes, the GRU unit was gone, of course. Then I went into a coffee shop and ordered coffee-Vietnamese coffee- and that took me back, too. The aroma of Vietnamese coffee. I closed my eyes again there I was again. I was just a kid when I went over there. I don't know how long I stayed. The women left me alone, which made me wonder if I wasn't the first vet to return to Danang.

HOA

What about Linh?

FRED

We asked around, but we didn't find anything.

HOA

You think she's dead.

FRED

Maybe. Or maybe she didn't want to be found. What have you been up to?

HOA

I'm in school.

FRED

Good for you!

HOA

I'll get my teaching certificate in the Spring.

FRED

How's your family?

HOA

One son and one daughter are coming to the States. With my mom.

FRED

Hoa, this is fantastic. When?

HOA

Later on this year.

FRED

For the holidays?

HOA

Maybe. I almost gave up, but Donna helped me find an immigration lawyer.

FRED

She does know a lot of lawyers.

HOA

Took me another year, but now I have a home for them. I'm ready.

FRED

Good. When I was in Vietnam, I picked up something for you.

FRED hands HOA a wrapped package. HOA unwraps it. It is a large square of painted silk.

HOA

Ginny helped you pick this out?

FRED

How did you guess? Like it?

HOA

I love it. Thank you.

FRED

Thank you, Hoa. For everything.

HOA

What about your feet?

FRED

They're all right.

HOA

Just all right?

FRED

OK, these old feet feel almost new.

HOA

I do good work.

FRED

You sure do. So, why did I wait so long?

END OF PLAY

