

"SHADOW OF THE DRAGON"

Based on the novel by  
Sherry Garland

INT. VIETNAMESE SUPERMARKET - DAY (1993)

Loud, indistinct chatter. The aisles of the supermarket are bustling with customers. Long, twisting lines of people behind checkout counters extend far into the store, their thin wire shopping carts filled to the brim with goods.

The place is decorated beautifully for the Vietnamese New Year, Tet.

Bamboo trees, artificially decorated on the top, line the entrances to the aisles. Peach flowers beautify the otherwise bland, white walls of the market.

Standing in an aisle filled with rows of colored tins of tea, is DANNY VO, a 16-year old Vietnamese. Tall, handsome and masculine. MÁ stands a few feet in front of him, searching through them intently.

Danny jams his fists into the pockets of his blue jeans. He feels awkward. Doesn't want to be here grocery shopping with his mother.

Suddenly, Danny's mother speaks. She talks with a Vietnamese accent, with a tinge of American mixed in, even though Danny speaks in a full American accent with no hint of a foreign accent at all.

MÁ

Do you think we should get some  
jasmine tea for the party?

DANNY

Má, we already have a lot of tea at  
the apartment. How many people are  
coming to Sang Le's homecoming  
party, anyway?

MÁ

I want to be prepared. You never  
know who may show up. Everyone  
wants to welcome your cousin to  
America after getting out of that  
refugee camp. I must have enough  
food for everyone. We don't want  
to look cheap.

She continues to peruse the endless selections of  
tea. Danny just watches with a hint of impatience.

MÁ (CONT'D)

Hmm, which do you think Sang Le  
will want more, jasmine or lotus?

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

Mom, Sang Le has been in a Hong Kong refugee camp for the past two years. And a prisoner in a communist re-education camp before that. I'm pretty sure he will appreciate anything you serve him.

Danny's mother picks up a tin. She looks at it for a beat before dropping it into the cart beside her.

MÁ

Danny, can you pick up a sack of rice for me? I forget.

With a sigh, Danny turns and exits the aisle. He heads over the rice section of the supermarket.

Danny eyes a certain sack of rice. He bends down and picks up the fifty-pound brute. Slings it over his shoulder. As he does this, he notices two, teenage Vietnamese girls across the way, several yards ahead of him.

Both are about the same age...sisters. One is slightly taller than the other, and is more beautiful, but both are equally as old-fashioned, with their old-fashioned skirts and blouses, blunt-cut bangs, and the same flat chests.

They are smiling and giggling, exchanging whispers to each other as much as they are exchanging looks with Danny. Danny smiles awkwardly at them. Not interested.

MÁ (O.S.)

Who are you looking at?

Danny looks behind him, startled. His short, stout mother is standing there, pushing the shopping cart in front of her.

DANNY

Oh, they're just girls I've seen from school before.

(beat)

Uh, shouldn't we be getting home if we're going to pick up Sang Le from the airport?

His mother stares blankly at him for a beat before responding.

MÁ

Fine, fine. You get some drinks. I get one more thing.

(CONTINUED)

With that, she departs, leaving the shopping cart with Danny. Still holding the sack of rice on his shoulder, he pushes the shopping cart with one arm towards the drinks aisle.

The two Vietnamese girls subtly follow Danny as he walks through the store. Still giggling and whispering to each other. Danny notices them, but doesn't make much of it.

He picks up a few six-packs of Coca-Cola and Sprite with his free arm. Puts them in the already full shopping cart. He turns the cart around and follows his mother.

She's looking in the foliage section, at the variety of bonsai trees and such on display.

Danny shoves the cart with great difficulty towards her.

DANNY

Hurry up, Má.

His mother picks up an artificial tree that is decorated with colorful, yellow silk flowers.

MÁ

I think I'll get this *hoa mai* tree for your grandmother. In Vietnam, she always bought a tree branch every Vietnamese New Year.

DANNY

She's not gonna like it. She'll say it's not alive, it's not from Vietnam, it's too cheap, blah, blah, blah. You know how Bà is.

Danny's mom looks at the tree in deep thought.

MÁ

I'll buy it anyway.

Danny rolls his eyes.

EXT. VIETNAMESE SUPERMARKET - DAY

Danny's mom pushes the shopping cart through the parking lot with both hands. Danny walks behind her, still carrying the bag of rice over his shoulder.

They stop at an old Toyota. Danny opens the trunk of the car with her key, and it snaps open. He pulls it off his shoulder and it lands in the trunk with a loud bang.

(CONTINUED)

He stands upright, rubbing his shoulder while he winces in pain. His mother starts unloading the grocery bags into the trunk.

As Danny rubs his shoulder, he notices the two Vietnamese girls exiting the supermarket...they're walking towards a group of four Vietnamese boys.

They are older teens. Nonchalantly puffing on cigarettes as they lean against the outside wall of the store.

As the Vietnamese girls walk through, the group of gang members start messing with them, aggressively. One of them blows smoke in their faces.

Danny becomes rigid.

DANNY

Má, hold on a minute, okay?

He works up a jog towards the two Vietnamese girls.

Danny approaches the group. Both girls are wide-eyed with fear, and they are crying. The gang members are all wearing black leather jackets. There is a golden emblem of a cobra sewn on the back of all of them.

Danny speaks in Vietnamese, with a slight American accent.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

There you are, sisters. Come on, mother is waiting.

He grabs both girls by the arm and pulls them away from the gang member's proximity.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Sorry, guys, I hope my sisters weren't bothering you.

One of them, a portly one, leans forward. He stares at Danny with a fierce intensity.

GANG MEMBER

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

You better teach these ugly sisters of yours some manners.

All the other gang members seem to stare at Danny and the girls with an ominous impression. Beat. Finally, the gang leader, COBRA, relaxes. He speaks in very poor English.

(CONTINUED)

COBRA

Okay. Cobra let you go this time.

He hisses. Danny looks strangely at the gang members before walking away, pulling the Vietnamese girls along with him.

Danny reaches the old Toyota. Má waits impatiently.

MOTHER

Danny, what were you doing?!

DANNY

Mom, these are girls I know from school. I told them I'd give them a ride to the other side of the market, if that's okay.

Danny's mother looks at him for a beat before giving in. Nods reluctantly. Danny opens the back door, motioning the girls to crawl into the backseat. Danny climbs into the driver's seat while his mother rides shotgun.

As Danny drives away, his mother eyes the gang members, suspiciously. The old Toyota circles the parking lot, and eventually arrives at the destination.

With a polite "Thank you" in Vietnamese, the girls scramble out of the car. Danny hits the gas, and the car goes off into the distance.

INT. OLD TOYOTA - DAY

There is an awkward silence before his mother begins speaking. A prominent austerity is heard in her voice. A little intimidating.

MÁ

I saw you talking with those gang members. Why were you talking with those boys?

DANNY

Uh, nothing...

MÁ

Those boys are very bad. Please, stay away from them. They belong to a *toan du dang*. We used to see them all the time in Da Nang during the war. Never, ever go with them.

Her voice is trembling, as is her own body.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

I didn't know them, I promise.

Danny's mother abruptly grasps his arm. He rapidly rotates the wheel to straighten himself on the road. Startled. She almost screams, with all seriousness.

MÁ

Promise me you'll never get mixed  
up with those bad boys!

He's slightly calmed. His mother, as serious-faced as ever, staring imploringly into Danny's face.

DANNY

Don't worry about me, Mom. I'm  
going to keep as far away from that  
gang as I can.

INT. DANNY'S APARTMENT - DAY

The pleasant sound of sizzling pork over the stove fills the apartment. Early guests fill the family room, chatting respectfully. Others manage the kitchen, peeling cucumbers, washing lettuce, and the like.

The front door opens. Danny enters, arms stuffed with groceries. His mother follows. Danny almost immediately drops the bags to the floor with a thud.

Two young children burst into the family room, one female, the other male. LAN, and THUY.

THUY

Brother! Kim and Bà are fighting  
again.

Danny sighs heavily.

DANNY

What is it this time?

LAN

I don't know.

Má walks up behind him.

MÁ

Go in there and settle the  
fight. You are the older brother,  
you must go discipline your little  
siblings.

(CONTINUED)

Danny lets off another sigh of exasperation, but reluctantly complies. He walks down the hallway to his sister's room. Jerks the door open.

KIM, Danny's 13-year old sister, dressed in the most hideous miniskirt one can imagine, with a noticeable orange streak running through her hair. She's shouting. BÀ, though in her 70's, frail and wrinkly, stands her ground in the chaotic scream-fest.

DANNY

Hey, hey! What's going on here?

Bà turns to Danny and immediately starts blabbering away in Vietnamese.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Grandson, tell your sister she cannot wear this disgraceful clothes! They are hideous. I am ashamed to be seen with her.

KIM

Danny, it's not fair. She won't let me wear this! Everyone at school dresses like this!

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Why do you want to be dressed like a prostitute standing outside a bar in Saigon when Sang Le arrives? What will he think of you?

KIM

Danny, I already told her. I'm going to the movies with my friends. I'm not going to be here for the party.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Selfish! You are the oldest daughter. It's your duty to clean and cook and watch children, not to go out and party!

KIM

I already did my chores! Má already said I could go!

Danny looks strangely at her. A brow raises.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

That was a week ago. We didn't know when Sang Le was coming then.

KIM

I don't care about Sang Le.

Bà's dark, wrinkly face sheds a tint of red. Anger rises through her frail, old body.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Such disrespect! Family always comes before friends!

Kim ignores her. Her imploring eyes staring at Danny.

KIM

Please?

DANNY

Not today, okay? Tell your friends you can't go. The movie will still be there tomorrow.

Kim glares through her dark, glistening eyes. Spinning on her heel, she storms out.

DANNY

And change out of that skirt!

Danny, just as irritated, leaves the room.

He stumbles into his own bedroom. The room is crowded with beds: one bunk-bed and one standard bed. Danny slumps down onto the bed with a heavy sigh.

Danny turns onto his side, and reaches with one arm towards the nightstand. He drags the drawer open. Reaches inside, grabbing a small Polaroid photograph.

He stares dreamily into the photo. It's a beautiful, teenage, American girl. She has a white, glowing smile, and her long, blond hair runs down her tight, knit-top.

DANNY

Your grandma doesn't live with you, Tiffany Marie. I bet you never argue with her either. Why should you? You wear great clothes, not the crap that Kim wears. You do your homework and chores. You're house is probably as peaceful and spotless as you are.

(CONTINUED)

He smiles. Brings his lips toward the glossy photograph and kisses it.

Danny sighs.

DANNY (CONT'D)

I'd never know...if only I could be  
with you.

He presses the picture up against his smooth, muscular cheek. His eyes close as he enters Dreamland.

A loud bang on the door. Danny jolts up, interrupted. The door creaks open, slowly. Danny presses the photograph against his chest, hiding it from view.

CHA, a small, compactly built man stands, peering in through the threshold.

CHA

Time to leave for the airport.

Danny sits up and nods, slightly embarrassed from that abrupt intrusion.

DANNY

Okay, Dad. I'm coming.

His father closes the door as Danny crawls out of bed. He checks his hair in the mirror...combs it down before heading out.

Danny walks through the narrow hallway. Stops at Kim's bedroom and knocks hard.

DANNY

Hey, Kim! Have you changed  
yet? We're going to the airport  
now, do you want to join us?

Loud, rock music blares through the wooden door. No response.

Danny shrugs and walks into the kitchen. He notices the 'hoa mai' tree, its bright yellow flowers, positioned in the corner of the room.

DANNY

How did Bà like the *hoa mai*?

Má scowls bitterly towards Danny.

MÃ

Hmph! What do you think? It's  
stuffed back here in the corner!

Danny just grins ear to ear. I told you so.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

The clouds are gray. Sunlight struggles to shine through  
the thick fluffiness.

A large group of people crowd around the old Toyota. Bà,  
Lan, and his Uncle Dao crowd into the back, while Danny's  
father sits in the front passenger seat.

DANNY

We won't be able to fit one more  
person in the car. Where will Sang  
Le sit?

Bà snaps hotly at Danny in traditional Vietnamese.

BÃ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

There's always room for another  
relative! We never turn away any  
family member, especially one who  
needs us so much.

Uncle Dao, in an attempt to cool down the heat, suggests a  
compromise.

UNCLE DAO

Lan will just sit in my lap on the  
way home.

Bà continues, jabbering away in Vietnamese. Danny crawls  
into the front seat, slamming the door closed.

BÃ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

We must greet Sang Le with many  
people. We must make him feel  
welcome. We're the closest family  
he has.

Danny sighs, tired and somewhat irritated.

DANNY

I know, I know...

WACK!

(CONTINUED)

Danny's hand flies to his temple. Massages it lightly as he winces in light pain.

DANNY

Ow! Bà!

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Of all people, you should show more respect than that! You're forgetting, Sang Le saved your life once!

Danny rolls his eyes, sighing exasperatingly.

DANNY

Please...not again.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

You were six years old. We had gotten permission from those communist pigs to return to Hue, my beautiful home town.

EXT. HUE, VIETNAM - DAY (1982)

The once beautiful city of Hue...destroyed. Bomb-stricken and war-torn by the communists in the Vietnam War. Despite the devastation, the air is bright and clear. Flowers find their way to reach the sun.

A lonely water buffalo trudges into the pond. Chickens prowl the courtyard where Bà sits, weeping. Danny's mother and another woman, Bà's daughter and Sang Le's mother, comforts her.

Two young boys run about. Danny is short and adorable, squealing with delight as he is chased by Sang Le, taller and lankier.

Danny runs up a hill, overlooking the moat surrounding imperial palace. Delighted, he sprints towards the water, until he reaches the lotus-filled moats. The lotus seeds in bloom. The pale pink petals reaching out, just waiting to be touched.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Sang Le! Look at the flowers!

Danny stares at the beautiful blossoms with a fascinated gaze.

(CONTINUED)

Sang Le is nowhere in sight. Occupied by something else.

Danny crawls down into his hands and knees. His arm shaking, he slowly reaches out towards the flowers. The small breeze buffets the floating water lilies -- they drift away, just beyond Danny's fingertips.

He stretches his arm further...his hand slips. With a blatant splash, Danny plunges into the brownish water. Struggling to reach the surface, he splashes with his arms, flailing in the water, hollering.

Sang Le immediately reacts when the sound of the splash reaches his ears. He sprints towards the edge of the moat, calling Danny's name.

He too gets down on his knees. He reaches his arm out. Grips Danny's hand firmly, dragging him above the water's surface. Danny grabs the edge.

Sang Le leans forward, trying to pull Danny up...he loses his balance. He plummets into the water below...just as Danny reaches safety.

Now Sang Le flails about in the water, struggling to keep a grasp on his own life. Screaming.

Bà looks up. Danny and Sang Le's mother hear the cries for help. They rush towards the noise.

SANG LE'S MOTHER

Sang Le!!

She ambles toward the moat, Danny's mother not far behind. Bà just stares, intense fear written all over her face...

INT. OLD TOYOTA - DAY (1993)

Danny and the gang are now speeding down a highway towards the international airport.

Bà gazes absentmindedly out the window. The clouds have darkened. A light rumble of thunder in the distance.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

He almost drowned that day. He became very ill from a lung infection that developed afterward. He could have died. Now, that is

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BÀ (cont'd)  
 sacrifice. Children today know  
 nothing of it. You have it too easy  
 here in America to regard lives  
 other than your own.

She sighs. Her dark eyes glimmering through the car window  
 as she stares off at nothing in particular.

BÀ (CONT'D)  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 But, of course, that day was only  
 the beginning of all their  
 troubles. She refused to come to  
 America with us. She would not  
 leave her sick child behind to  
 die.

Lan and Uncle Dao look with awe and pity as Bà as the story  
 unfolds. Danny's face is blank as he drives.

BÀ (CONT'D)  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 And in order for her to get  
 medicine for him, Sang Le's mother  
 was forced to sign papers that  
 indicated her husband was a  
 conspiracy during the war. A year  
 later, he died while serving in a  
 re-education camp. The officers  
 said he committed suicide because  
 of his wife's betrayal...

INT. RE-EDUCATION CAMP, VIETNAM - DAY (1983)

Sang Le's mother screams and raves in protest at the false  
 accusation. Tears run down her face as she shrieks  
 deafeningly. Young Sang Le, nine years of age, sits  
 watching. Waiting.

SANG LE'S MOTHER  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 Liars! Those accusations are just  
 a bunch of lies! How can you say  
 those things about me, murderers!

She strikes one of the officers. Hits him in the chest  
 furiously.

The officer grabs her wrists tightly, binding her. She  
 grunts in pain.

(CONTINUED)

OFFICER  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Shut your mouth!

He slaps her coldly across the face. She screams in agony before slumping to the ground. Sang Le's eyes grow red as anger rises within him.

He lurches onto his feet and charges at the officer, knocking him down, hard onto the ground.

Sang Le repeatedly punches the officer in the face...his fists getting bloodier each time he withdraws them, only to thrust them back into the officer's face.

Sang Le's mother watches in horror, speechless.

The surrounding officers immediately take action. They rush to the officer's aid, crowding around him. It takes three men to pry Sang Le off the maimed officer.

OFFICER #2  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Get off him, you little rat!

Sang Le thrashes and kicks his legs at the air while in the officer's grasp.

OFFICER #3  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
What do you want us to do with him?

OFFICER #4  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Arrest him.

Sang Le's mother, still lying on the floor, immediately objects. She extends her arm outward towards her son as they drag him away.

SANG LE'S MOTHER  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
No! Please, no! Sang Le!

INT. OLD TOYOTA - DAY (1993)

The car drives down an empty highway. Bà still gazing out the window as she speaks.

BÀ  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
She blamed herself for everything  
that happened. With no family  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BÀ (cont'd)  
left, no husband, no son, she saw  
no reason to exist any longer. She  
committed suicide.

The smallest trace of rainclouds become apparent. Light  
raindrops pelt the shiny metal roof of the car.

Danny sits slumped over the wheel, the sickening taste of  
guilt taking over his thoughts. It's overwhelming...  
degrading.

The rain is falling harder now. As everyone sits silently,  
the clamorous racket of precipitation pattering on the roof  
fills the car. Danny activates the windshield wipers.

LAN  
Bà says the rain brings good  
luck. She said that dragons bring  
the rain to the earth, and the  
clouds are their shadows. Bà says  
Sang Le will have good luck in  
America because he's arriving in  
the shadow of the dragon. Is that  
true, Danny?

Danny peers through the fogged up windshield, at the raging  
rainclouds. He lets out a heavy sigh.

DANNY  
I hope Bà is right. It's about  
time Sang Le had some good luck.

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

The rain is falling harder than ever now. A flash of  
lightning, followed by a rumble of thunder.

Danny, Bà, Cha, Uncle Dao, and Lan scramble into the front  
entrance, shielding themselves with their arms from the  
pelting rain. Their clothes are soaked.

Danny approaches the flight schedule monitor on display in  
the main lobby.

DANNY  
Damn...we're fifteen minutes late.

They hurry to the stark terminal. No presence of Sang Le  
anywhere.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY  
He's not here.

Danny's father sighs. Speaks in choppy English.

CHA  
Well, we must look for him. We  
split up.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING GARAGE - DAY

Danny darts through the parking garage on his own. They've split up.

A porter, standing just beyond in a navy blue uniform. Danny approaches him.

DANNY  
Excuse me, sir. Have you seen a  
Vietnamese boy, come through  
here? He's eighteen, kind of tall,  
probably looking really lost?

PORTER  
Was he real skinny? Wearing  
tattered thirty-year old  
hand-me-downs from a cheap thrift  
shop?

DANNY  
(chuckles)  
Probably.

PORTER  
I saw him walk up that exit ramp  
over there.  
(points)  
I yelled at him to watch for  
cars. He kept walking like he was  
deaf.

DANNY  
Thanks.

Danny sprints briskly up the exit ramp. Examining each floor for a lost, Vietnamese boy.

He continues up the parking garage, floor by floor, carefully checking each one. Finally he reaches the top. The rain has finally ceased, leaving behind a mucky, humid atmosphere.

(CONTINUED)

A tall, slender figure stands up against the railing across from Danny. Danny exhales raggedly, catching his breath from the jog. He wanders up towards where the figure stands.

DANNY

Sang Le?

The figure turns around. SANG LE, eighteen years old, stands tall and lanky, almost emaciated. A yellowed shirt from years of wearing hung loose over a pair of khaki pants. His skinny legs extending out from them into a pair of cheap sandals.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

It's your cousin. Vo Van  
Duong. You can call me  
Danny. Welcome to America.

Sang Le smiles. He bows politely at his cousin.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

It's an honor to see you once  
again, cousin.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Why are you up here on the roof?

Sang Le spins around, looking at the breathtaking view from the garage rooftop.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I had to see what freedom was  
like. I waited in the room with  
the chairs for a while, but I was  
too eager.

He inhales deeply, his bony chest swells as air enters his lungs.

SANG LE (CONT'D)

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

This must be what it feels  
like. To be free. I have waited  
so long for this moment. Isn't it  
beautiful.

(CONTINUED)

Danny stared at the view. The pine trees and buildings jutting out of the foggy haze, the after effects of the torrential downpour. Smiling, he responds in the affirmative.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Is that the Empire State Building?

He points at the tallest building, poking out of the opaque mist. Danny peers peculiarly at it.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
That's a hotel.

Danny can't help but chuckle.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Do you want to go back down,  
now? Everyone's waiting. Uncle  
Dao, Bà--

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Bà is here?  
(Danny nods)  
Good. I will be so happy to see  
her once again. It's been so long.

Danny turns around, towards the exit ramp, trying to keep a straight face. Sang Le follows.

DANNY  
(in English; muttering)  
Yeah, I'll let you find out for  
yourself how much fun she is.

Sang Le stares blankly at his cousin, confused.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
What did you say, cousin?

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Nothing.

INT. AIRPORT LOBBY - DAY

Bà and Lan sit waiting in the lobby impatiently. Suddenly, Bà's eyes light up. She squeals with delight.

BÀ

Sang Le!

Sang Le and Danny enter through the door abreast of each other. Sang Le's face immediately lights up as well.

This sparks life into the motionless grandmother -- She springs to her feet and runs into a tight embrace with her grandson. Tears streaming down both of their faces, Bà's frail body trembling with sobs.

When they break up from the embrace, they immediately start blabbering away in Vietnamese. Just as Uncle Dao and Cha arrive, rounding the corner.

Sang Le greets everyone with the utmost respect, bowing to each of them before embracing. When finished, he turns to Bà once more.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I brought you a present from Vietnam. A friend smuggled it out of Vietnam. I had to hide it in the cuff of my pants so no one would find it...

He unfolds the cuff of his worn-out pants and takes out what looks like a dried up twig. He hands it over to Bà. She grasps it with her shriveled fingers as she gasps.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Oh, this is wonderful! The best give I have ever received! Thank you!

She hooks one arm around Sang Le's neck and kisses it.

LAN

What is that?

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

It's *hoa mai*. The New Year's flower of Vietnam. It's been years since I've seen one of these. Thank you.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

Why don't we get to the car. Everyone's waiting back at the apartment.

Bà wipes a stray tear off her wrinkly face. She complies.

INT. DANNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Danny and the gang enter the apartment. Everyone inside erupts in a wave of joy, exclaiming their bliss for Sang Le's arrival.

They all crowd around, welcoming him. He bows and greets everyone respectfully.

CUT TO:

The party is already underway. A group of women stand and chat in the kitchen while preparing provisions. A circle of men sit in the living room, the television blaring some program in poor quality as they sip beer and converse loudly.

A light rap on the door. Danny gets on his feet.

DANNY

I'll get it.

He walks briskly to the door and opens it. Directly in front of him stand the two Vietnamese girls he saved at the supermarket. One, beautiful, the other taller and chiseled. Meet HONG (16) and CUC (17).

HONG

*Chao anh.*

She talks with a delicate fluency and eloquence. She hands Danny a tiny gift, wrapped with leftover Christmas paper. Danny takes it, a little shocked.

CUC

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Our uncle is coming, too. He's right behind us.

Cuc speaks with a firm austerity that, frankly, is unattractive. The contrast between her and her sister is stark.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

Oh, right. Your uncle works with my dad... Well, come in.

He holds the door open. Motions them to come inside. As they enter, a stout man with a black mustache appears at the landing. Danny's father immediately greets him with a bow, in his choppy English.

CHA

Welcome, Mr. Khanh. Come inside. This is my son, Duong.

MR. KHANH

These are my nieces, Hong and Cuc.

Hong and Cuc bow respectfully before Cha as their uncle introduces them.

CHA

Danny, show them to the refreshments.

Danny smiles politely at them, motioning them to follow him.

DANNY

What would you like? We have Coke, Sprite, soybean drinks...

He turns to face them. They stare at him with a puzzled look.

HONG

We no speak English no good. We only here six months.

Danny manages not to cringe at the horrible pronunciation as he tries to make out exactly what she says.

CUC

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

We are both in ESL. We study freshmen classes because we don't understand English. Maybe we will get promoted to the next grade once we learn English.

DANNY

Uh, well, why don't we speak English, so you can get some practice.

(CONTINUED)

CUC

Good. Hong need more than my.

Danny stifles a laugh. Hands them both a soybean drink. Mutters under his breath.

DANNY

Here. Something to occupy your mouths with besides talking.

He leaves them at the refreshments table. Sighs with relief. Until Sang Le comes. He pulls Danny aside into a corner.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Who are those girls?

He points. Hong and Cuc sip composedly out of the tiny plastic straws protruding from the soybean drink boxes.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

That's Hong and Cuc. Girls I know from school.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Hong...the rose.

Sang Le stares at Hong smitten, infatuation gleaming in his dark eyes.

DANNY

You like her, huh?

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

The girl is so beautiful. I'm in love, cousin. So graceful and shy. Like a rose bending in the wind.

Beat. He turns to Danny, getting knocked back into reality.

SANG LE (CONT'D)

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Is she engaged? A girl that beautiful must have had her marriage arranged to a wealthy man.

Danny lets out a light laugh.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

They don't arrange marriages here in America. People marry who they fall in love with.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Can you find out how she feels about me? Will she ever love me?

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I bet she's not allowed to date, cousin. They have strict limitations.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

She is perfect for me, cousin. Perfect.

One last glimpse of Hong, just casually sipping soybean drink from the straw.

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny is sprawled out on his bed, exhausted.

The door opens. The loud noise of indistinct chatter from outside fills the room before muting again, as the door closes with a click.

Danny sits up, alarmed, then relaxes. It's Sang Le.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

You going to bed now?

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

It is so chaotic out there. I'm happy that they come to welcome me to America, but now, I just want some peace and quiet.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Same here. You can have the bottom bunk, under Thuy.

Thuy lay fast asleep, snoring quietly on the top bunk.

(CONTINUED)

SANG LE

*Cam on anh.*

He crawls into the bottom bunk with a sigh. Danny's eyes shut for a moment as he enters sleep.

A cry. Danny's eyes fly open. Another loud whimper. His brows wrinkle curiously. His head turns to the side.

Sang Le thrashes around in his bed, his legs kicking, his arms flailing about as if suffering from a nightmare. The shouts, the moans, the mumbles...ringing in Danny's ears.

Danny sits up. Whispers sharply.

DANNY

Sang Le!

Nothing. Sang Le continues to jerk violently in his sleep.

DANNY

Sang Le!

The flailing abruptly comes to a stop. He's awake.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Are you alright? Are you having a bad dream?

Sang Le sighs. He rolls over, facing Danny.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

They are not dreams, cousin. They are memories.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Do you want me to tell you a bedtime story?

Sang Le chuckles tiredly. Rolls once again onto his back.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Sure.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I remember one that Bà used to tell me all the time when I was a kid...

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. BEDROOM - VIETNAM - NIGHT (1982)

Danny, now young and little, a 6-year old, lay in bed, listening attentively. Bà, much younger, sits beside the bed, telling a story.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Long, long ago, before people inhabited our land, dragons roamed the land. Brave, wise, strong, and the most honorable of all creatures. There were also fairies who lived in the mountains. Beautiful, kind, and gentle women, who looked like humans. One day, a handsome young dragon-lord named Lac-Long-Quan encountered a beautiful fairy princess named Au-Co. They fell in love immediately and got married. They settled next to the sea and had many children.

Danny stares, a half-smile on his face, with unwavering interest.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

As the children grew, the dragon-lord and fairy princess grew more and more irritable, and they realized they could never make peace with their differences. Au-Co yearned for her home in the misty mountains. Their love eventually faded away, and they decided they could not live together anymore.

Danny's face becomes solemn, his mouth hanging open with anguish.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Lac-Long-Quan was heartbroken when he said goodbye, but he knew this way was best. When the children grew up, the oldest, Hung Vuong founded his own kingdom and became its emperor. The kingdom grew, and the people who lived there were happy. That country was ours, and the people were our ancestors.

(CONTINUED)

Danny's frown turns into a smile. He's satisfied, thoroughly entertained by the story.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Hundreds of years later, the Chinese marched down the mountains into our kingdom and enslaving our people. Many brave men and women fought and sacrificed their lives to win this country's freedom. And over the years, others came to try and conquer Vietnam, but our people were always brave and never gave up, because they were the descendants of the dragon. You must always remember that you have the blood of the dragon flowing through your veins.

Danny suddenly has a puzzled look. He stares at his hands.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

But we don't look like dragons.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

That's because you also have the blood of the fairies in your veins. On the outside, you look like a human, but on the inside, you have the heart and soul of a dragon. You will have to make sacrifices that will break your heart, but you must be brave and strong. Even though everyone will see you as a mere human, you must know that your heart is the heart of a dragon. You must never forget that. You must always remember who you are.

Beat. Danny smiles, then nods.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Okay. I will.

Bà smiles and embraces her grandson tightly. Kisses him on the cheek.

BACK TO PRESENT:

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny sits on the edge of his bed, staring ahead with an eerie calm, before Sang Le's loud whimpering takes him back to reality.

Sang Le continues to flail about in his sleep. Danny sighs, and lays down in his bed. A loud moan escapes Sang Le's mouth.

Danny wraps his pillow around his head to cover his ears. Sighs exasperatingly.

DANNY

I'm sacrificing my sleep for my  
cousin. Like a true dragon. I  
hope your happy, Bà...

EXT. STREET CORNER - MORNING

Danny and Sang Le stand fully dressed at the street corner, with backpacks slings over their shoulders. The morning is slightly foggy. Dew covering the green lawns.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Are you excited? Your first day of  
school in America?

Sang Le trembles excitedly, just like an eager child. He nods. Danny smiles.

A moment later, the roar of the yellow bus becomes audible. It rounds the corner and squeaks loudly as it comes to a halt. The doors open. Danny and Sang Le enter.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - MORNING

The doors snap shut, and the bus takes off. Danny and Sang Le walk cautiously through the aisles.

CALVIN PICKNEY sits in a seat, about ten rows back. Tall, about Danny's height. American. He's waving at Danny.

DANNY

Hey, Calvin.

He sits down next to Calvin. Sang Le sits in the seat behind them.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY (CONT'D)

This is my cousin from Vietnam,  
Sang Le.

CALVIN

Hey, nice to meet you. Welcome to  
America.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Sang Le, this is my best friend,  
Calvin.

Sang Le speaks in horrible English. It's almost impossible  
to comprehend his exact words.

SANG LE

Hello, Calvin. It is pleasure to  
meet you.

Calvin stares blankly at Sang Le. Confused. Tries to think  
of a reply.

CALVIN

Uh...yeah.

He turns to Danny. Whispers under his breath.

CALVIN

He was speaking Vietnamese right  
then, right?

Danny laughs.

DANNY

You'll get used to it.

EXT. BUS RAMP - DAY

The bus is parked next to the curb. The doors open,  
students spilling out into the already crowded school  
grounds. Students chat briefly before class.

Calvin steps off the bus, followed by Danny then Sang Le.

SANG LE

Why nobody understand my? I  
practice English in refugee  
camp. Every day. Six months I  
learn. My teacher, very  
good. Work for American Army five  
year.

(CONTINUED)

He holds up five fingers. Danny shrugs, sighing.

DANNY

You just need more practice. Soon  
you'll be speaking English like a  
pro, I promise.

Another bus squeaks to halt. Danny eyes it as the doors  
unfold.

TIFFANY MARIE SCHULTZ, a gorgeous 16-year old American,  
bounces off the bus. Her wavy, blond hair bouncing along  
with her. Her beautiful blue eyes, her gorgeous white  
smile...

Danny just stares as she gathers into a group of friends,  
chatting and laughing away.

CALVIN

Danny, let's go.

Danny abruptly looks away.

DANNY

Right.

He follows Calvin and Sang Le inside the building.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

The hallways empty as the students rush to class. Danny  
walks up to the front desk. Sang Le walks behind him,  
staring in awe at the interior of the school like a child at  
a museum.

DANNY

Hi. I'd like to register my cousin  
for ESL.

RECEPTIONIST

What's his name?

DANNY

Sang Le.

Sang Le, still staring at the environment surrounding  
him. Amazed and awe-struck.

CUT TO:

Danny and Sang Le roam the now empty halls of the  
school. Danny's looking attentively at the room numbers,  
keeping track. He's holding a few papers in his hand.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

Here it is.

He turns the door handle. It creaks open. MS. RODRIGUEZ, a Hispanic woman stands before a classroom, filled mostly with Hispanic students. All eyes turn towards Danny.

A little embarrassed, he gives the papers to Ms. Rodriguez. She peruses them for a beat. Then looks up. Smiles at Sang Le.

MS. RODRIGUEZ

Students, I want you to welcome Nagooyen Le Sang. He just came to America from Vietnam. Say, hello Nagooyen.

The class speaks in unison, in a slightly detectable accent.

CLASS

Hello, Nagooyen.

Danny chuckles. His face is red, a little embarrassed. He clears his throat.

DANNY

Uh, actually, his first name is Sang. They put first name last in Vietnamese. And his last name is pronounced Nguyen, not...Nagooyen.

MS. RODRIGUEZ

Oh, I'm so sorry. How could I have forgotten. Class, this is Sang.

CLASS

Hello, Sang.

Danny smiles humorously. He faces Sang Le. His face is white, rigid with fear.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Don't worry. Relax, you'll be fine.

(beat)

Look, there's someone you know in the back. It won't be so bad.

Sang Le's eyes scan the back row. Hong and Cuc sit in the back corner looking directly at Sang Le. His eyes light up. He's thrilled.

(CONTINUED)

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

It is my beautiful rose, Hong! I  
have good luck already today,  
cousin!

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

See, you'll be alright. I will see  
you at lunchtime, okay?

Sang Le nods. Danny waves goodbye, turning towards the door. He pulls it open with a creak and exits. The door snaps shut.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Danny and Calvin sit abreast of each other on the lunch table. The cafeteria is filled to the brim with students...loud chatter echoes across the vast lunchroom.

CALVIN

So did you buy the solar pack for  
the science project yet?

DANNY

No. Sorry, I was busy...

CALVIN

Danny! How are we supposed to  
finish in time without it?

DANNY

I had Sang Le's homecoming party on  
Saturday. I was busy.

Calvin, a little disappointed, jams his fork into his salad.

CALVIN

Speaking of Sang Le, look who just  
walked in.

Danny looks up towards the glass double doors at the entrance of the cafeteria. Sang Le stumbles into the room, lost and confused.

Danny waves his arm. He catches Sang Le's attention -- he smiles, relieved, and trots to Danny and Calvin's table.

DANNY

So, how's your first day of school  
so far?

(CONTINUED)

Sang Le lets out a worn-out, exhausted sigh.

CALVIN  
Was it that bad?

Sang Le shakes his head. He speaks in English, practicing his newly learned tactics.

SANG LE  
No, no. Is very good. American  
school very good.

He rests his head on the table tiredly.

Danny looks away from Sang Le. Something else catches his attention.

Tiffany sits quietly, elegantly, by herself at the corner of the lunchroom. Silently reading a paperback novel as she eats.

Suddenly, a large, bearish white man approaches Tiffany. He looks rough -- a tiny strip of blond hair on the top of his head. Broad shoulders, a little hefty.

He's speaking inaudibly to Tiffany. She nods along as he talks.

CALVIN  
Hey, who's that guy talking to your  
dream girl?

DANNY  
I don't know. I've seen him talk  
to her before.

CALVIN  
Looks like you've got some  
competition, buddy! You better ask  
her out to the dance soon before  
someone else does.

DANNY  
The Valentine's Day dance? That's  
not for another two  
weeks. Besides, I can't imagine  
why she would be anywhere near a  
guy like that.

Danny thrusts his fork into his salad, eyes still locked on Tiffany. He slides the soggy vegetables into his mouth and chews.

The guy walks away from Tiffany. Her nose immediately goes back into the novel she was reading.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

The bell rings.

Students spill out of the classroom simultaneously. Loud chatter fills the once silent hallways.

Danny walks casually to his locker. He opens it. Starts exchanging books and papers.

TIFFANY (O.S.)

Hey, Danny.

Danny's head turns violently. She's standing a few feet away in front of her open locker. Danny's ears are red-hot, his face full of shock.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

You weren't in history class this morning. Where were you?

She has such an elegant, chipper voice.

DANNY

Oh, I was enrolling my cousin in ESL class. He came here from Vietnam.

TIFFANY

Oh, well, I'm happy for him. I hope he likes it here.

DANNY

Yeah...

Danny smiles. Awkward silence. Beads of sweat roll down Danny's temple. Struggles for words.

DANNY

Uh...Tiffany, would you...

Tiffany suddenly looks away, focusing on someone behind Danny's shoulder.

SANG LE

*Chao anh.*

Danny whirls around, startled. Sang Le glances at Tiffany, who is staring at Sang Le with a blank expression.

(CONTINUED)

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Is that your girlfriend?

DANNY  
No. Uh, Sang Le, this is  
Tiffany. Tiffany, Sang Le.

Sang Le let out a cluster of garbled English words that are nearly incomprehensible.

SANG LE  
It is pleasure to meet you,  
beautiful lady.

He takes Tiffany's hand and shakes it up and down. A smile crawls onto Tiffany's face as she concentrates, trying to make out his speech. Danny just watches in horror, trying to hide his face behind his hand in embarrassment.

TIFFANY  
Welcome to America, Sang Le.

DANNY  
He still needs a lot of practice.

TIFFANY  
No, no, he's doing really well. I  
know English is a hard language to  
learn, right?

Sang Le nods, although he remains silent. It is followed by an awkward beat. Danny shifts his weight to his other leg. Tiffany finally speaks, breaking the ice.

TIFFANY  
Well, I gotta go now. My brother  
Frank supposed to drive me  
home. See you later, Danny.

She turns and departs while giving a small wave towards him and Sang Le. Tiffany's blond hair swings towards Danny's face as she turns.

FRANK SCHULTZ, the guy who talked to Tiffany at lunch is waiting for her at the door. The creepy skinhead, tall and pudgy. Tiffany approaches her brother.

Danny just looks onward at the shocking spectacle.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

## INT. DANNY'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Close up of the puny *hoa mai* twig. It stands upright in a glass vase filled partially with water. Three, tiny, pathetic buds have sprouted. Bà's grunt of exasperation is heard.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

The Vietnamese New Year, Tet begins tomorrow! The blossoms have yet to open! If they open on the first day of Tet, we will have double luck all year!

Danny sits at the round kitchen table. Books lay open, papers sprawled out over the surface area of the table.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

They are not going to bloom. Look at it, it's dying.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Shush! The bad spirits will hear you, and they will make it so!

She walks by the table, disgusted.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Look at this mess! Clean this up! Or the Jade Emperor in Heaven will think I'm a bad housekeeper and punish us all year!

Danny rolls his eyes. He sighs and picks up his books and papers, carrying them all down the hallway into his room. Shuts the door.

## INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

CALVIN

I can't believe it. I just can't believe it.

Calvin and Danny walk side by side down the hallway. The hall is bustling with students, scrambling to get to class.

(CONTINUED)

CALVIN

The Valentines' Day Dance is tonight, and you still haven't asked Tiffany out yet?

DANNY

I know...

CALVIN

What's the matter with you, man? Can't you see she likes you? She's always smiling and she's always saying 'Hi' to you.

DANNY

It's not that, Cal. I'm always busy. With helping Sang Le and everything. I'm also trying to get him a job.

CALVIN

Come on. Give me a break. Quit giving excuses already and just ask her out. Look, there she is.

Calvin turns Danny to his right. Tiffany stands exquisitely by her locker as she casually exchanges books. She has never looked so beautiful.

Danny turns to Calvin.

DANNY

I can't.

CALVIN

Why not?

DANNY

I chickened out. I sold the tickets.

Calvin stops walking abruptly. Shock in his face, like he's suffering a heart attack.

CALVIN

You...sold the tickets?! What the hell was going through your mind?

DANNY

I didn't have time. My family is having this New Year's party, and I have to be there.

Calvin exhales long and hard.

(CONTINUED)

CALVIN

Damn...and I thought you would blow off anything just to get a date with Tiffany Marie Schultz.

DANNY

I know, but this is important. It's a family tradition. Hey, why don't you come over too. There'll be plenty of food, and maybe we can finally finish our science project.

CALVIN

I like the sound of that. Sure, I'll come over.

They recommence walking down the hall to their next class. Danny stops at his locker and opens it. Calvin then speaks, a little too loudly.

CALVIN

Too bad about that dance. I'm sure Tiffany would have gone with you.

DANNY

Calvin!

Tiffany, standing just a few yards away in front of her locker, rotates her head. Staring directly at Danny.

CALVIN

See ya, man.

He rushes away. Disappears behind the corner.

Danny's face is beet-red. Embarrassed, he hides his face behind the locker door.

TIFFANY (O.S.)

Hi, Danny.

Danny winces. He inhales deeply, before closing the locker door. Staring face to face with Tiffany. Danny smiles clumsily. Scratches his head.

DANNY

Uh, I guess you heard what Calvin said.

TIFFANY

Not really.

Danny sighs with relief. Beat. He changes the subject.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

So. Did you get any studying done for the history test?

TIFFANY

Yeah. But not as much as I wanted. There are a lot of things about the Vietnam War I don't get. My dad was over there...but he doesn't talk about it. I have so many questions.

Tiffany's locker-mate suddenly walks up from behind, butting into the conversation unwanted.

ASHLEY

So do I. My uncle was there, and he said stuff like the Vietcong would give kids candy to shoot Americans. Did you ever shoot anyone, Danny?

Danny's face becomes rigid. He's speechless. Tiffany's blue eyes flare up. She swings her head, facing Ashley.

TIFFANY

Ashley! That's so rude! The war's been over for twenty years. Danny wasn't even born yet!

Ashley's eyes widen defensively. Waves her hands in front of her.

ASHLEY

Sorry...

She walks away. Tiffany faces Danny with a loud sigh. Gracefully brushes a strand of hair out of her face.

TIFFANY

Sorry about that. I guess she doesn't really read her history book much.

DANNY

It's okay. I'm just worried about Ashley. How she's going to pass the test if she doesn't even know when the war occurred.

Tiffany lets out a soft, high-pitched laugh. Not too loud, but just right. A beautiful sound. Danny smiles.

(CONTINUED)

TIFFANY

I was going to call you.

DANNY

When?

TIFFANY

Last night. I had a few questions about Vietnam.

DANNY

I wish you had.

TIFFANY

I wanted to, but my brother Frank was on the phone all night. He's always hogging the phone.

(beat)

So, I heard you have tickets for the dance tonight. I guess you're all ready for it.

DANNY

Actually. I don't have them anymore. A family party came up. It's Vietnamese New Year. I have to be there. I wanted to go to the dance. I planned to ask you...but my parents are so adamant about me being there. You probably wouldn't have wanted to go with me anyway.

A tiny sigh escapes Tiffany's pink, full lips. She looks a little hurt.

TIFFANY

Don't be silly. Of course I would have gone with you.

Danny breathes hard. His face is red. He can't take his eyes of Tiffany. Speechless.

TIFFANY

Here, happy Valentine's Day.

She hands over an envelope. Danny grabs it slowly, thrilled, albeit shocked. Tiffany hurries away. Disappears into the classroom.

Danny carefully opens the envelope. Takes out a Valentine's Day card. A giant, red heart on the cover. He opens it. Reads.

(CONTINUED)

His jaw opens. Danny recoils up against the rows of lockers behind him. Looks up.

DANNY  
She...likes me.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

The lunchroom is once again filled with loud-mouthed students. Danny doesn't seem to notice as he eats his lunch. A strange sense of happiness and joy overtakes him.

Sang Le runs up from behind. Sits next to Danny.

SANG LE  
Cousin.

DANNY  
Hey, Sang Le. What is it?

SANG LE  
I have very good news for you.

DANNY  
More?

SANG LE  
Beautiful girls says she like  
you. She wants to date you.

Danny's face registers an expression of shock and surprise.

DANNY  
She told you that?

SANG LE  
She stand by the door over  
there. So I invite her to party  
tonight.

DANNY  
What?! You invited Tiffany to my  
apartment!? Are you crazy?

Sang Le wrinkles his brow. Perplexed. Beat.

SANG LE  
Not American girl. I talk about  
beautiful rose -- Hong. But we  
have to invite Cuc and uncle too.

Danny sighs with relief. All concern he had before just vanishes. Doesn't seem to care much anymore.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

Okay...Invite whoever you want. This has nothing to do with me.

SANG LE

She say she like you. Want to date, maybe marry.

Danny scoffs loudly. Taken aback.

DANNY

Marry! I don't want to marry Hong. She's not my type. I'm not in love with her, can't you see that?

The bell abruptly rings, reverberates throughout the room. Students spring up from their seats. Danny stands.

DANNY

I like Tiffany, okay? Now, leave me alone.

He walks away from the table, leaving Sang Le at the table, staring at him with open jaws.

As Danny walks past the doors, a sobbing sound is heard. Hong sits, leaned against the wall, crying. Her face buried in her tear-soaked hands.

DANNY

Shoot...

Hong springs to her feet and dashes away.

DANNY

Hong, I'm sorry...

But she's already gone, out of earshot. Danny sighs, guilty yet relieved.

The lunchroom is pretty much empty. Stark. Sang Le walks up to Danny.

SANG LE

Why you hurt beautiful rose? Make her cry?

DANNY

I didn't mean for her to hear. I feel bad, but...

(CONTINUED)

Danny inhales deeply. Speaks with a prominent sense of austerity and seriousness.

DANNY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. But I'm tired, Sang Le. I'm tired of putting you, and the rest of the family first. I've done it all my life, but now I just don't feel like being generous right now. I know you're thinking I'm some spoiled American, and that I'm not acting like a dragon. But I'm not going to date someone I don't like just to make you happy. I'm sorry, but that's the truth.

Danny slams the door open, bursting through. Leaving Sang Le in the empty cafeteria.

EXT. DANNY'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Dusk. The air is is tinted blue, the faint moonlight casting shadows on the pavement.

Danny hurries up the steps to his apartment. Lan is waiting at the door.

LAN

Danny, where were you?

DANNY

I was at Calvin's working on the science project. Didn't Sang Le tell you?

LAN

He didn't come home from school. Everyone is worried. Má was afraid something had happened to you.

Danny sighs. Trudges up the rest of the stairwell. Enters the apartment with Lan.

INT. DANNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment is beautifully decorated. The place is buzzing with festivity. A beautiful bouquet is arranged before the family altar, along with a variety of sliced fruits.

(CONTINUED)

The wimpy branch of the *hoa mai* is on displayed in the center of the dinner table. Tiny blossoms manages to bloom.

CUT TO:

Danny stands before a mirror. Adjusting a tie on his bright, white dress shirt.

A knock on the door.

CHA (O.S.)

Danny! Celebration about to start.

DANNY

Coming.

A sigh. One last look in the mirror. Then exits.

CUT TO:

Bà commences. Kneels before the family altar. Prostrates three times, then whispers a prayer in Vietnamese.

The other family members follow suit. Approaching the altar, reciting a prayer to their ancestors.

CUT TO:

Bà sits before a crowd of young children in a chair. She utters aloud a phrase in Vietnamese. Then, one by one, the children line up in front of Bà.

Lan, at the front, bows before her grandmother.

LAN

*Chuc mung nam moi.*

Bà smiles. She gives her a small, shiny, red envelope, and Lan stands and walks away.

Like a line of people in line for a meal, the children shift forward. Thuy kneels before Bà.

THUY

*Cung chuc tan xuan.*

Again, Bà smiles while handing him a red envelope. The line shifts forward, and the process repeats.

A sound grabs Danny's attention as he stands watching. His head whirls around.

(CONTINUED)

The door opens quietly. Sang Le tiptoes silently inside, then shuts it. He's holding a bundle wrapped in newspaper. He walks up next to Danny.

Danny just stares. Wonderment and curiosity in his eyes.

The last of the children greet the elder woman with the blessings of the New Year. Sang Le walks up to Bà. Kneels before her.

He extends his arms, lays the wrapped up bundle by her feet. Unwraps it. It's a large, life-size plaster-of-Paris dog. A beautifully crafted and painted cockier spaniel.

Bà's expression is blank.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

What is it?

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

It is a bank. All the money I earn will be put in here. It's for you. To repay you for bringing me to America.

At first, Bà is speechless. Her face seems to be frozen in a daze, her jaws partly open. Then her eyes fill with gratitude.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Oh, my precious grandson. Sang Le!

She removes herself from the chair in which she is seated. Wraps her arms around Sang Le, embracing him tightly.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I am looking for a job. All the money I earn will go into this bank. I won't keep a penny. I don't want to have the burden on my shoulders.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

You sweet child! Only you could be so thoughtful.

Sang Le smiles as he scooches back a short distance. He bows before his elder.

(CONTINUED)

SANG LE  
*Chuc mung nam moi.*

CUT TO:

The children and some adults sit in a circle in a living room. Several cards laid out inside. Playing a Vietnamese gambling game, *bau-ca-tom-cau*.

In the kitchen, the women arrange the variety of Vietnamese dishes on the dinner table.

The doorbell rings. It sparks everyone's attention.

BÀ  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 That must be our special guest, Mr. Duy.

All the children and adults shuffle in front of the door, lining up by age. They stand tall, shoulders back.

BÀ (CONT'D)  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 The first guest is most important. He will determine what kind of luck we receive for the rest of the year. Show him tremendous respect.

The room is filled with an eerie calm. Bà trots up to the door. Deep breath. Opens the door.

Angle from behind door: Everyone stands fashionably and orderly, flashing creepy, white smiles as they peer through the door frame. Immediately, their faces transform into expressions of surprise and bewilderment. Every single face at the exact same moment.

Calvin Pickney stands at the threshold, carrying a large box filled with electrical parts and whatnot.

CALVIN  
 What's going on?  
 (sniffs)  
 Is that food I smell?

Each face in the room registers an expression of shock. A humorous, awkward beat. Danny stifles a laugh.

CALVIN  
 Uh, aren't you going to let me inside? It's pretty cold out here.

(CONTINUED)

Finally, Bà's lips turn downwards. Her eyes and nose scrunch with anger. She responds with an earsplitting shriek.

BÀ  
NO! You go away NOW! You bad  
luck! BAD LUCK!!

She hastily grabs a broom leaning up against the wall beside the door. Sweeping it at Calvin's feet. He retreats backwards.

BÀ  
I sweep away bad luck! Go!

She starts spitting out rapid words in Vietnamese as Calvin dashes back down the stairs. Danny, once again, comes to the rescue.

DANNY  
Bà, stop that. Calvin's just  
staying over so we can finish our  
science project.

Calvin, the big box of contraptions still in his arms, calls to Danny from the foot of the stairs.

CALVIN  
What do you want me do to?

DANNY  
Just wait there for now, or my  
grandma will blame you for all the  
bad luck that happens this  
year. Wait till Mr. Duy gets here.

He finally disarms Bà of the broom. Bà glares at Calvin through her gleaming, squinted eyes.

A man creeps out of the shadows thrown onto the concrete by the dimly lit streetlamps. He's wearing a beret and luxurious jacket. He carries a basket, filled to the brim with fruit, in one hand, the other, a bottle of fine champagne.

He stops at the foot of the stairs next to Calvin. Nods his head respectfully, then proceeds. Calvin's eyes follow him.

CALVIN  
(under his breath)  
You couldn't have arrived two  
minutes earlier, couldn't you?

Bà suddenly transforms from being furious and irritated, to respectful and courtly. She bows her head courteously.

BÀ

Oh! *Ong Dui! Cung chuc tan xuan.*

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

We are happy you honor us by being the first guest of the New Year. May you live a long and happy life.

MR. DUY

*Chuc mung nam moi.* A healthy, prosperous New Year to you and your family.

He bows politely. Bà shows Mr. Duy the way inside.

Calvin looks at Danny, his brows raised. A "can I come up now?" look in his expression. Danny motions his hand, and Calvin walks upstairs with a sigh.

DANNY

Sorry about that.

He relieves Calvin of the heavy box.

CALVIN

You told me she was crazy. I had no idea she was this crazy. I feel for you, man.

Danny smiles shyly. Cocks his head towards the front door of his apartment.

DANNY

Come on, let's go inside.

He starts up the stairs, but stops when he notices Calvin's not following.

CALVIN

(sarcastically)

I don't know. I don't want to intrude, you know. Ruin everyone's day with all my bad luck and everything.

DANNY

Actually, technically you'd ruin everyone's year with all your bad luck.

(CONTINUED)

CALVIN

So should I not go inside?

DANNY

Nah, who cares. No one will notice you. Come on in, there's plenty of food.

CALVIN

Okay...

The walk up the stairs to the apartment.

CUT TO:

Earsplitting crackling and bright flickers fill the outside air as firecrackers erupt on the cement. Red scraps of paper spew about from the blasting explosives. People cheer joyously.

Uncle Dao holds a string of firecrackers in one hand and lights it.

CALVIN

He's crazy! He's going to lose his arm that way.

Uncle Dao rotates his head and smiles at Calvin.

UNCLE DAO

Ah, this nothing. We do it all the time in Vietnam.

He releases the bundle, and it erupts in a blatant explosion, like the rapid fire of a machine gun. Smoke fills the air.

Lan and Thuy stand in the sidelines. Their palms pressed against their ears. A nearby baby cries in terror

Uncle Dao walks up to it and scoops it out of the bassinet, shushing it and calming it down.

UNCLE DAO

Sh, sh. Sweetie, don't worry. The loud noise scared the bad spirits away. You don't have to be scared anymore.

Of course, the baby just keeps bawling. Uncle Dao continues to shush it softly.

## INT. DANNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The loud bustling of people fill the apartment. People eat standing up. Others serve themselves from the many serving plates of various foods throughout the kitchen. It's a party.

Calvin and Danny sit at a table, snacking on chips and others of the sort.

CALVIN

So when are we going to work on the project. It's pretty late.

DANNY

We can start now. Let's go in my room.

They get up onto their feet.

CUT TO:

Calvin and Danny are sitting on the floor in Danny's bedroom. Unloading the tools needed for their project. The racket outside in the hallway is unbelievably loud.

DANNY

I'm sorry. It'll be real hard to concentrate with all that loud noise.

CALVIN

It's okay. We have all night to work on this.

He plugs in a soldering iron into the electrical socket on the wall. Heat emanates from the steel rod.

A light rap on the door. A second later, it opens ajar. Sang Le's bony face peers into the room.

DANNY

Come in, Sang Le. Sorry about the mess.

Sang Le trudges into the room and closes the door. He sighs. Looks truly exhausted.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Guess your ready to get some sleep, right?

(CONTINUED)

SANG LE

No. I still awake. Just tired  
from answering questions.

He plops tiredly onto the bottom bunk, still sitting upright.

CALVIN

What kind of questions were they  
asking?

Sang Le sighs. Beat as he tries to recollect the things that were inquired from him.

SANG LE

About me. About Hong Kong,  
camp. Vietcong.

CALVIN

What was that?

SANG LE

Vietcong.

His accent is extremely prominent as he speaks. It's almost impossible to understand. He repeats once again when Calvin registers a perplexed expression.

DANNY

(interrupting)

About Vietcong, Cal.

Sang Le sighs depressingly.

SANG LE

English way to hard. No one  
understand. I never learn  
good. Maybe I quit school.

CALVIN

Hey, don't give up. Keep  
trying. You'll get it eventually.

He slaps his shoulder encouragingly. Sang Le flashes him a weak smile. Then it's gone.

Sang Le watches curiously as Danny works.

SANG LE

What you work on?

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

We're building a miniature house, complete with electrical wires and stuff. It's a science project for school.

SANG LE

I help.

He grabs a thin sheet of metal and a pair of tin snips from the large cardboard box. Immediately starts working.

CALVIN

Wait! Danny, what if he does something wrong?

Danny, also showing anxiousness, walks up behind Sang Le, scrutinizing his actions.

DANNY

What are you doing, Sang Le?

Sang Le carves shapes onto the tin. He responds quickly, his eyes still glued to tin and snips, completely immersed in the project.

SANG LE

*Chim-phuong-hoang.* It bring your house good luck.

CALVIN

What the heck is that?

DANNY

It's like a phoenix that's supposed to bring luck and happiness.

(to Sang Le)

Look, Sang Le. You don't have to go through all that trouble for us. It's our project...

Danny's words drift on into nothing. Sang Le is too deeply engaged. He pays no attention to his cousin. He continues to incise the sheet metal into small, ornate shapes.

Danny sighs.

DANNY

Look, if this goes wrong, I'll just buy another sheet of tin. I can't tell him to stop. This is the happiest I've seen him in two weeks, with learning English and all.

(CONTINUED)

CALVIN

Fine...let's just work on something else then.

They both sit next to their miniature house. It looks incomplete, and at the moment, a mess. They pick up tools and begin their work.

Pan up towards a clock on the wall. It's hands signify that the time is 12:46 AM.

FADE TO:

The clock has shifted: it's hands now show 6:32 AM.

Danny's sprawled out on his bed fast asleep. Calvin lay on the floor, next to a now complete-looking house. The room is dark, the only source of the light coming from the dim blue sky outside the window.

Close up on Danny. He snores quietly, his chest inflating and deflating in time with his breathing. A sound jerks Danny awake. He raises his head, looking side to side.

Sang Le is stealthily climbing into the window. He's inside. He closes the window softly to not wake anyone.

DANNY

Sang Le? Is that you?

He rubs his eyes groggily. Sang Le turns, a little startled.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Oh, cousin. I'm sorry I woke you.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

What were you doing?

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I went for a walk.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

It's six-thirty in the morning.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I needed time to think about things. I was meeting a friend.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

A friend? You never told me you made a friend. Who is it?

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

You are not acquainted with him. His name is Tho. He was also in a refugee camp in Hong Kong. He came to America three years ago.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

That's great. I'm happy you have someone you can relate to.

(beat)

Anyway, you should get some sleep. Bà has several things planned for tomorrow.

Sang Le nodded as he gave a great yawn. He plopped down onto the bottom bunk. His eyes close immediately as his head makes contact with the pillow.

Danny lays back down on his bed. His eyes still opened...can't seem to find sleep.

There is a long silence.

Suddenly, the sounds of Sang Le's moans and whimpers fill the room. Danny rolls his eyes. He grasps his head with his hands exasperatingly. He sits up on the edge of his bed and sighs.

DANNY

You're keeping me up, man...

He rubs his eyes, then stands up. Danny walks across the room, but stops abruptly. He notices something.

Danny stoops over and picks up the completed house. The light drifting in from the window illuminates it, throwing wild shadows everywhere.

The very ornate, beautiful *chim-phuong-hoang*, cut out with the utmost detail, sits perched on the roof of the house, painted in every color imaginable.

Danny stares at it in amazement. His eyes are wide despite the fact that he just woke up. A whistle escapes his lips.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

Wow...

He glances over at Sang Le, who is shuffling uncomfortably and flailing around in bed as he sleeps, letting out cries and moans.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Thank you.

EXT. STREET - DOWNTOWN HOUSTON - DAY

The sun is high in the sky, beating down on the hundreds of civilians who have gathered on the streets.

The streets has been roped off, and pedestrians fill up the sidelines, laughing and cheering.

A giant, artificial lion-dog creature, a *qilin*, marches around in the street. Human feet jutting out from beneath. Loud firecrackers produce deafening pops as they explode.

Behind stands a line of men, beating on large drums and gongs. The *qilin* rocks to and fro in tune with the rhythm of the percussion.

Martial artists demonstrate their unique skills in another section of the street. Whether it be handstands, flying kicks, or backflips, the crowd responds wildly to the spectacle.

Danny, Calvin, and Sang Le stand together in a group next to the rope fence. Danny and Calvin clapping, smiling, and cheering, just like the others. All together, just having a good time.

Danny turns to Sang Le. He has a blank stare, almost solemn, across his face. His line of sight tilted slightly downward towards the ground. Sang Le seems to be the only one not enjoying themselves.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Are you okay, Sang Le? Is something wrong?

Beat.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

*Ma qui*. The shadow spirits. They are out today.

(CONTINUED)

Danny stares peculiarly at him. Then down at the street in front of him where the bright sunlight projects a long, black shadow onto the pavement.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Is that a bad thing?

Sang Le shakes his head. Responds in the negative.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
No. The *ma qui* is where our bad spirits -- all our evil, sin, and immorality -- all of that resides in our shadows. They make us perform acts of wrongdoing. And they follow us wherever we go, bringing sadness and bad luck. The only way to free yourself of the *ma qui* is to destroy your shadow.

Again, Danny stares strangely at him, now more and more curious. His eyebrows crinkle.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
How do you do that?

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
There are many ways to do that. You can stand in the path of a train. Or go parachuting without a parachute.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Then what's the point if you're just going to die anyway?

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Yes, the person is often killed along with his shadow. But the evil spirits die with him. It's worth putting your life in jeopardy. A life with bad spirits is worse than being dead.

Beat. Danny stares anxiously at his shadow, cast onto the street.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Do you really believe that? That these shadow spirits, and not you yourself, are responsible for all your sins?

Sang Le nods, giving a wordless response.

CALVIN

Hey, speak English. Please. What are two talking about?

DANNY

Nothing.

Calvin notices Sang Le's melancholy.

CALVIN

Hey, why so blue? I thought you were supposed to be happy today.

SANG LE

I am. But it remind me of Vietnam. Of last time I see mother on New Year nine year ago. She save penny to buy *banh chung* and a few firecracker. I'm very happy then, but it nothing like this.

He extends his arm out towards the festive crowd. They're cheering loudly, applauding at the delightful display.

SANG LE

I had nothing. I see this, and I feel sad. It remind me of people I left from my homeland.

Danny gingerly places his hand on Sang Le's shoulder, comfortingly.

DANNY

I'm sorry, cousin.

A long beat. Danny watches the lion-dance for a moment. Then something catches his attention from the corner of his eye when he lifts his head.

A tall, chiseled man. Long, black hair tied back into a pony tail. Wearing a black leather jacket...a golden emblem of a cobra on the back...He turns his head and notices Danny.

(CONTINUED)

At first, Danny's face registers an expression of shock. His eyes wide, his mouth hanging open. But it's wiped off in a split second. He abruptly turns away, towards Calvin and Sang Le.

DANNY

Hey, why don't we go to the other side. We can get a better view of the kung fu from over there.

CALVIN

No, man. I'll go deaf if I get any closer to those firecrackers.

DANNY

Well, It's hot here. The sun's shining right on us. Let's all go inside the shade.

CALVIN

I thought you wanted to get a better view.

The anxiety in his voice becomes more prominent.

DANNY

Uh...I'm just getting hungry. It's almost noon. I wanted to go get something to eat. Wanna come?

Calvin raises a brow. Somewhat catching on.

CALVIN

What's the matter, Danny? You're acting weird.

DANNY

Nothing. It's just--

COBRA (O.S.)

*Chao anh, mung xuan moi.*

Danny cringes at those words, as if the Cobra already struck. He turns around slowly.

But Cobra's not talking to Danny...he's talking to Sang Le. Danny's jaw drops to the ground as Sang Le too greets Cobra respectfully.

SANG LE

*Chuc mung nam moi cho ban, Tho.*

Danny is still dumbstruck. Sang Le turns to him and introduces his friend.

(CONTINUED)

SANG LE  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 Cousin, this is Tho. He is the  
 friend I told you about.

Tho, or the Cobra, smiles at Danny, a smug look on his  
 face. Danny remains completely speechless.

COBRA  
 Small world.

Danny doesn't respond. But Cobra doesn't care. He turns to  
 face the lion-dance. The festivity occurring in the  
 streets.

COBRA  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 Nice day, isn't it?  
 (beat)  
 All day, I think about  
 Vietnam. Even though I have no  
 family left. I see all this and  
 think about how much wealth and  
 happiness here, and how much  
 poverty and sadness there is in  
 Vietnam. I feel guilty  
 celebrating.

SANG LE  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 Exactly. I was telling my cousin  
 the same thing.

COBRA  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 A true Vietnamese would feel the  
 same way.

He looks bitterly at Danny.

COBRA (CONT'D)  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 You wouldn't understand, would  
 you? You're an American.

A glare crosses Danny's eyes, anger rising within him. He  
 struggles to stay calm.

DANNY  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 I know what it feels to be  
 Vietnamese.

Cobra scoffs.

(CONTINUED)

COBRA

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

You don't know how it feels to suffer. To sacrifice. To beg for food while the rest of your family is living the American dream. No, you do not. But your cousin does. The scars on his body are remnants of his past.

He looks at Sang Le. Places his hand on his shoulder.

COBRA

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Come. Let's go to the billiard hall with real Vietnamese friends, and let these Americans wallow in all their money.

Cobra immediately departs. Sang Le hesitates a moment before following him. But Danny won't have it. He grabs Sang Le's wrist. Sang Le whirls around.

DANNY

Sang Le, don't go with him.

SANG LE

I must. He my friend. I must go with him.

DANNY

You can't. We're supposed to go watch Lan and Thuy. They're going to perform. And there's going to be much more celebration. You can't miss it. You know how much you'll hurt Bà if you do.

Beat. Sang Le stares at Danny, then at Cobra, who is standing across the street, then back at Danny. A heavy sigh escapes his lips.

SANG LE

I must go. He is my friend. He need me.

DANNY

You don't know him! He's a gang member. His name's Cobra.

SANG LE

No. You wrong. He is my friend.

(CONTINUED)

He pulls his arm out of Danny's grasp. Squeezes through the dense crowd. Danny stares in horror. Calvin walks up behind Danny.

CALVIN

What was that about?

DANNY

I don't know. Sang Le's getting mixed up with some pretty bad people.

CALVIN

Yeah, I saw that guy. He gave me the creeps.

DANNY

I know. We can't let anyone know about this. He'll hurt my grandma more than anything.

He sighs. Danny watches from a distance as Sang Le and Cobra and a few other gang members walk abreast of each other and disappear around the corner.

DANNY

You know, I never thought I'd say this, but if Sang Le came all the way to America only to get involved with a gang, he'd probably be better off staying in that re-education camp.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. DANNY'S APARTMENT - DAY

A large, box of a television set. Some television program is playing on the screen. A split second of static -- the channel changes.

Danny sits draped across the sofa, aiming the remote at the television. Flipping channels.

Bà walks into the living room. Notices Danny in front of the television.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Have you seen Sang Le? I have barely seen him since New Year's.

(CONTINUED)

Danny hesitates. He knows.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I don't know.

BÀ  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Why do you waste your time sitting  
in front of the television? Do  
something worth your time.

Danny sighs. He's exasperated. Not another argument.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Spring breaks is almost over. I  
just want to relax and have fun.

BÀ  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
You call this fun? When I was a  
child, we did not have television  
and movies. When we were bored, we  
played outside with our friends.

Danny turns off the television and stands abruptly. Bà still blurting stuff out in non-subtitled Vietnamese. Danny just ignores her.

DANNY  
Okay, okay. I'm going.

He opens the front door, grabs his keys from the counter, and exits.

Danny pauses for a beat, taking in the silence. He sighs with relief, then heads off.

EXT. STREET - HOUSTON - DAY

Danny and Sang Le are walking abreast of each other down the sidewalk. Cars zoom past on the adjacent street.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Bà asked about you again. I think  
she's worried.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I know. I am sorry that I worry  
her, but I do what I must.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

You don't have to do this. You're getting involved with very bad people. It's wrong.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

They are not bad people, cousin. They need me as much as I need them. I need the money. It's the only way I can repay Bà for bringing me to America.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

By playing billiards? Cousin, those *bida* guys aren't wealthy. You don't get much money from those people.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

It's the only way to get money.

They walk into a shopping strip. There is a sign hanging in front of Tilson's Grocery Store: "Help Wanted". Danny stops walking when he sees it.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

What you need is a job. Come with me.

Danny takes off running around the back. Sang Le, hesitant at first, follows.

INT. LOADING DOCK - DAY

A large produce truck backs up slowly into the loading dock. A rather, large, plump man, MR. TILSON, carefully monitors it. He's old-looking, in his fifties. Gray hair, balding. He takes a long puff out of a cigarette in his wrinkly fingers.

Danny enters, Sang Le right behind him. Looks side to side for Mr. Tilson. He finds him. Waves his hand, then walks up to him.

The tailgate of the produce truck lowers slowly, along with a mechanical whirring sound that fills the loading dock.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

Mr. Tilson! Hi!

MR. TILSON

Danny. Nice to see ya. What do you want?

He speaks as he walks into the produce truck. He stoops over, and with a guttural grunt, he picks up a large crate.

DANNY

Well, I saw the 'Help Wanted' sign out front.

MR. TILSON

You want a job?

DANNY

Actually, it's for my cousin, Sang Le.

Mr. Tilson glances at Sang Le, who bows politely.

DANNY (CONT'D)

He's strong. He'll do any kind of work you give him.

(looks at Sang Le)

Right, Sang Le?

Sang Le nods eagerly.

SANG LE

Yes. I show you.

He approaches Mr. Tilson, and relieves him of the heavy produce crate. Sang Le carries it into the store. He walks back and forth, unloading the truck, as Danny and Mr. Tilson speaks.

MR. TILSON

Hey, I heard about your cousin. Some teenagers who came in here looking for work told me he was a Vietcong.

Danny eyes expand...his brows crinkle downward.

DANNY

NO! Who told you that? He wasn't a communist. It was the communists that put him in a re-education camp.

(CONTINUED)

MR. TILSON

Oh...why did they put him in a re-education camp?

Danny sighs. He's reluctant to answer.

DANNY

Uh...he attacked one of the officials. They arrested him for five years.

MR. TILSON

Five years! And to little kid. I'll be damned.

He takes a big long puff from his cigarette. A cloud of smoke emanates from his nostrils.

MR. TILSON

Well, I'm sorry to hear that. He must've had a tough life. War is hell -- especially that mess in 'Nam.

Mr. Tilson looks around. Sang Le is still unloading the truck, walking back and forth. Sweat rolls down his temples. A stack of crates lay neatly near the bins inside the store. Mr. Tilson looks directly at Sang Le.

MR. TILSON

That's enough. You can stop now, son. Come 'ere.

He waves his hand, motioning Sang Le to come over. Sang Le approaches Mr. Tilson and Danny, without setting down the crate he is carrying.

MR. TILSON (CONT'D)

I can see you're a hard worker. Exactly the kind I need at my store. Now, do you have a green card?

Sang Le stares blankly at the grocer. His eyes move back and forth between him and Danny. Danny interjects.

DANNY

Of course he's got--

MR. TILSON

No, no, let him answer. Do you have a green card?

Beat.

(CONTINUED)

SANG LE  
I hard worker.

Sang Le immediately rushes inside to continue unloading. Mr. Tilson stares strangely at him with a raised eyebrow. Then at Danny.

MR. TILSON  
He don't understand English, does he?

DANNY  
Uh, yeah. Not a lot. He's in ESL, he's still learning.

MR. TILSON  
(sighs)  
I'm sorry, Danny. I need someone who knows English to handle the register while I'm busy out back. I need someone who can read labels so he can stock goods.

Danny looks at the ground...it's hopeless. He lets out a heavy sigh.

MR. TILSON  
You can tell him to stop now. No need to impress me no more.

DANNY  
Sang Le!

Sang Le stacks the last of the crates inside. Then walks over towards Danny.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
He won't hire you because you can't understand English.

Sang Le has a surprised expression on his face. He pauses for a beat.

SANG LE  
I work half pay.

MR. TILSON  
What was that?

DANNY  
He says he'll work half pay. Look, you'll be making a mistake if you  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DANNY (cont'd)  
don't hire him. He's a hard  
worker, he's strong, he's got  
endurance. Please, give him a  
chance.

MR. TILSON  
I'd like to help him out, but it's  
the law. I have to pay minimum  
wage, or I'll get busted by the  
government. This happened once  
before, and they're still on my  
case. The IRS and Labor Board are  
scrutinizing me like an ant under a  
magnifying glass. You can tell him  
to come back once he learns  
English.

Danny sighs. He gives in.

DANNY  
Fine. Thank you for your time.  
(to Sang Le)  
Come on.

Mr. Tilson nods respectfully at Danny. Danny just walks  
away, Sang Le trotting behind.

EXT. OUTSIDE TILSON'S GROCERY STORE - DAY

Danny angrily pushes the glass door open and exits the  
grocery store and starts walking. Sang Le runs up behind  
Danny, panting.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Did you tell him I would work half  
pay?

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Yes, I did. But that's against the  
law in America.

Sang Le sighs. He suddenly becomes as upset and  
disappointed as his cousin. He slows his pace.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
American laws are crazy. In  
Vietnam, people are glad to find  
employees eager for work. It  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SANG LE (cont'd)  
 doesn't matter how old they are or  
 what languages they  
 speak. Americans are spoiled.

DANNY  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 It's okay. We'll find you a  
 job. Uncle Dao says you can work  
 at his video store downtown as a  
 last resort.

SANG LE  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 Downtown is too far. I need a car,  
 but I can't drive. How will I get  
 there?

Beat. Danny and Sang Le reach a street corner. A large Metro bus screeches to a halt before them.

DANNY  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 You can always ride the bus. Why  
 don't we go check it out now.

Danny breaks into a brisk jog and enters the bus, Sang Le following. The doors close, and the bus takes off.

INT. METRO BUS - DAY

Danny and Sang Le steady themselves, using the edges of the seats as handles, as they walk down the aisle of the moving bus. Danny chooses a particular seat, about three rows from the back and slumps into it. Sang Le sits in the seat across from Danny.

The bus is stark, with the exception of a few couples sitting near the front. Danny and Sang Le share a moment of silence. Only the loud roar of the engine can be heard. Sang Le stares out the window.

Danny attempts to break the awkward silence.

DANNY  
 Sang Le...

Sang Le abruptly looks up at Danny. He's all ears.

DANNY (CONT'D)  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 Is Hong still upset with me? About  
 what she heard me say?

(CONTINUED)

SANG LE  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 I don't know, cousin. She doesn't  
 tell me everything.

DANNY  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 Why don't you speak English? You  
 need the practice.

SANG LE  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 I don't care about English  
 anymore. The ESL teacher is not  
 fair. She speaks Spanish when the  
 other students need help, but she  
 can't speak Vietnamese. How can I  
 learn if she can't help me.  
 (beat)  
 Do you know what this paper  
 is? Cuc tried to explain it to me.

He fiddles in the pockets of his worn-out jeans. Sang Le  
 removes a folded up sheet of paper. He unfolds it and shows  
 it to Danny.

DANNY  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 Oh, your report card. I got mine  
 yesterday. Let me take a look.

Sang Le hands it over to Danny, who takes it. He squints  
 his eyes as he peers at the grades.

DANNY  
 Whew!

A whistle escapes his lips as he exclaims. He's clearly  
 appalled. Sang Le watches with nervous agitation.

DANNY  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 That's pretty bad, cousin. No  
 wonder you're in a bad mood. All  
 F's, D's...and an A in Art class?

SANG LE  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 Is it that bad? Will Bà be  
 upset? Is this report card that  
 important?

Danny chuckles as he gives Sang Le his report card.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

It is pretty important. Your future here depends on the grades you make in school. Especially if you intend to go to college.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

College? I don't care about college. All I care about is getting a job, and I can't even get that. The sign said they wanted help, so why don't they want my help? In Vietnam, we're glad to have any kind of work. Americans don't realize how lucky they are to have freedom of choice.

DANNY

Here we go again...

He sighs. He brings his hand to his head, as Sang Le continues blabbering away in Vietnamese.

EXT. CHINATOWN - HOUSTON - DAY

The large, white Metro bus brakes, and stops at a street corner on the edge of Chinatown. The doors fold open, and Danny and Sang Le hop off the bus.

The streets are overcrowded with Asian people. Some sit in outdoor Asian cafés and restaurants, slurping up rice noodles from their soup bowls. Food stands line the street curb, selling wantons or smoked duck. The area is brimming with Asian culture.

Sang Le inhales deeply, taking in his magnificent surroundings.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

This reminds me of Vietnam. I miss my homeland so much. Sometimes I think I should have stayed. But a man like me, who just got released from a re-education camp, has no future in Vietnam.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

It was the right decision to come here.

(CONTINUED)

They walk down the street together for a beat. Something catches Sang Le's attention -- he's delighted.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Look! There is a *bida* hall up  
ahead.

He raises his bony finger straight ahead of him. He points to an old, almost dilapidated club. The walls are crumbling and riddled with graffiti.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Sang Le, you spend all your time  
playing billiards.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Just one game, cousin.

Without another word, Sang Le breaks into a run towards the club. Danny, about to object, sighs and reluctantly complies. He trots up behind him.

INT. BIDA HALL - DAY

Sang Le pushes through the glass doors, holding it open for Danny. The moment Danny walks through the doors, he starts coughing hysterically...waves away the thick smoke that sits in front of his face. Sang Le is unaffected by it.

The billiards hall is dimly lit, like some sort of night club. A bar sits in the back with drinks. The rest of the place is filled wall-to-wall with pool tables, scratched up and torn apart.

Old, drunken Vietnamese men puff on thick cigars, expelling even more disgusting smoke into the already polluted air. They chat together, and laugh loudly as they knock the cue ball with a long, beer-stained cue stick. A ball pockets, and a group of men erupt into applause.

Danny is clearly extremely uncomfortable and out of place. It shows in his turned down lips and wrinkled nose. Sang Le, on the other hand, feels right at home. The owner, old and portly, approaches as soon as they enter.

OWNER  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Sang Le, it is nice to have you  
back!

(CONTINUED)

Sang Le smiles and bows to him.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Yes, thank you. It is a pleasure.

The owner takes out a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket and flips it open. Sang Le gladly takes one out -- the owner lights it up for him.

OWNER  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Are you ready to take on another challenger?

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Of course, as always.

The owner laughs gruffly. Sang Le grabs a cue stick from the rack and struts towards a pool table. Danny hesitantly and reluctantly follows, while looking around at his vulgar surroundings.

Sang Le stops at a pool table. The balls are already set up. He bends down, peering at eye level. Aims. He strikes...with a seemingly stroke of luck, Sang Le pockets three balls in one strike.

A group of eyewitnesses burst into excitement and cheer. They exclaim phrases in Vietnamese. Sang Le smiles shyly as they all pat his back and applaud.

Sang Le turns to Danny.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
See, cousin? I am already winning.

He holds up a wad of cash before Danny's eyes. Then stuffs it into his shirt pocket.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
That's good for you. Let's get out of here now, this place is making me uncomfortable.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I can't leave at this moment. I am winning. I am making a lot of money. I can put this in Bà's bank.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

This isn't the right way for you to earn money. Bà will not approve of this. You need a job, cousin. A real, paying job.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Maybe I don't need a job, if I can win money like this.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

You are not listening to me. You know you can't win like this all the time. You're just lucky.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

It is not luck that brings me victory. It is skill.

Sang Le stoops down again, aims carefully...and strikes. He skillfully makes the ball bounce into another ball that bounces into another ball... With that, he pockets another three balls. The crowd around him cheer at the awesome spectacle.

Danny sighs. He crosses his arms impatiently. Suddenly, an arm comes to rest on Danny's shoulders, a familiar face whispering a familiar voice into Danny's ears.

COBRA

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Sang Le is right. You should listen to your elders.

Danny immediately becomes rigid. His eyes wide with fear. Cobra is surrounded by his other gang member friends, all wearing uniform black jackets.

Sang Le notices Cobra's presence and smiles.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Tho! It is wonderful to see you again.

Tho releases his grasp from Danny, and walks into a friendly embrace with Sang Le.

(CONTINUED)

COBRA  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Hello, my brother.

They break from the embrace. Sang Le turns to Danny.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
You remember my little cousin,  
don't you, Tho?

COBRA  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Yes, I remember him well.

His small, black eyes seem to bore into Danny's soul. Danny trembles lightly - he struggles to compose himself. He's definitely intimidated.

Danny looks at Sang Le.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I'm going to leave. Are you coming  
with me?

Sang Le shakes his head.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
No. I want to stay and play *bida*  
with my friends.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
What about the job you wanted so  
much? What am I going to tell  
Uncle Dao?

Cobra hears this, a little surprised. He looks at Sang Le skeptically. He removes a cigarette from his pocket and sticks it into his lips. Cobra speaks through gritted teeth, the cigarette balancing in between them.

COBRA  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
You need a job, brother? Why  
didn't you tell me?

Cobra lights his cigarette. Blows a stream of secondhand smoke into the air.

(CONTINUED)

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I was ashamed.

COBRA  
No worries. I can find you a job  
easily.

Danny has a fixed glare on his face, staring directly at Cobra. He speaks confidently.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Oh yeah? What kind of  
jobs? Stealing handbags from  
innocent women?

Within the next second, a chubby gang-member, a friend of Cobra, grabs Danny by the collar of his shirt and pins him against the wall behind him with a loud bang. The building becomes silent -- everyone turns towards the noise.

GANG MEMBER  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
You want me to rip the mouth of  
this smart-ass?

Danny is terrified -- his eyes are wider than ever, his face is pale. The gang member scowls at Danny, his face inches in front of Danny's.

COBRA  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
No, no, my friend. Don't mistreat  
my brother's little cousin.

The gang member resists for a beat. His glare peering straight through Danny's eyes. Finally, he loosens his grasp and backs away. Danny steps away from the wall, massaging just below his neck.

Sang Le steps a bit closer to Danny.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Danny. Just take the bus home. I  
will come later. I will stay with  
my friends a little longer. Don't  
worry about me. There are plenty  
of shops around here. Surely, Tho  
will find me a job.

Danny stares at Sang Le for a beat, then spins on his heel and walks towards the exit.

(CONTINUED)

Sang Le turns back, now focusing on the pool table.

DANNY  
That's exactly what I'm afraid  
of...

With that, Danny pushes open the front doors and exits.

Sang Le hunches over, steadily aiming the cue stick. He thrusts it forward. The balls strategically bounce off each other, pocketing the remaining three.

INT. DANNY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Danny walks in through the front door. Bà is sitting on the couch, reading some kind of Vietnamese novel. She closes it and puts it down when Danny enters.

BÀ  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Where is my grandson?

Danny freezes in his tracks. Looks dubiously at his grandmother.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I'm right here.

BÀ  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I meant Sang Le.

Danny sighs, walks to the dinner table and takes a seat.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
He's...out.

BÀ  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Sang Le has barely been in this  
apartment for weeks. Do you know  
anything about this?

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
No, I don't.

BÀ  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Are you sure there isn't something  
I should know? You know him  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BÀ (cont'd)  
 best. If there is something wrong,  
 you must tell me.

Bà's eyes are fixed on Danny. Beat. Danny sighs.

DANNY  
 Uh...  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 He is ashamed. He is ashamed of  
 his report card and is too  
 dishonored to face you. That is  
 the reason why he has been gone for  
 so long.

Bà sits still. She's taking it in. Pondering over what  
 Danny says. A tiny smile forms on her face.

BÀ  
 Oh, Sang Le...

She turns and looks at Danny.

BÀ (CONT'D)  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 He does not need to feel shame. I  
 know what he is going through. I  
 admire him for feeling shame and  
 losing face. It only shows he is  
 not yet fully American.

(beat)  
 Danny, please tell Sang Le. Tell  
 him that no matter what he does or  
 what happens to him, he will never  
 dishonor me. He is an amazing,  
 young man and I am proud to have  
 him as a grandson. Please tell him  
 that he should not feel ashamed,  
 and that I am not ashamed of him,  
 and never will be. Please tell  
 him.

Danny stares at her. A little worried. Beat. He swallows  
 hard, then works up a nod.

DANNY  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 Okay.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

An empty hallway.

The bell rings. Students hastily exit the classroom, quickly crowding the hallway.

Calvin and Danny exit from one door together.

CALVIN

Man, I'm sure I failed that physics test. But no worries. The A on our project ought to balance it out.

Danny laughs and agrees with him.

CALVIN

You want me to save you a seat on the bus?

DANNY

Nah, it's okay. I gotta find Sang Le. I gotta talk to him.

CALVIN

Yeah, I was wondering. I haven't seen him at lunch or on the bus for a while.

DANNY

That's what I have to talk to him about. I'll see you.

They wave and then part ways.

CUT TO:

Moments later, Danny is walking down a now empty hallway. He enters the room ahead to his left.

It's the art room. The large tables have paint blotches on them. The room is filled with various art tools and supplies.

The room is empty except for Sang Le, stooped over an art table absorbed in some art project, and MRS. KENDRICK, the art teacher, standing a few feet behind Sang Le, watching.

Mrs. Kendrick notices Danny. She waves him over towards her.

(CONTINUED)

MRS. KENDRICK

Hey, Danny! Come see what your  
cousin is working on.

She tiptoes behind Sang Le's shoulders and watches in awe. Danny follows suit, and is equally awed by Sang Le's watercolor painting.

It is a painting of a large moat, filled with pink lotus flowers.

MRS. KENDRICK

Sang Le is my most talented  
student.

She watches for another beat, then walks away.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Hey, Sang Le. That's  
beautiful. What is it?

Sang Le doesn't stop or look up -- he continues painting as he speaks.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

The River of Perfumes in Hue.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

The old imperial city where Bà was  
born. Is that the emperor's  
palace?

Danny points to a beautiful illustration of a grand palace on Sang Le's painting. Sang Le nods.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Yes. We used to visit there as  
children. Remember? Once while  
you tried to pick a lotus flower  
from the moat, you fell in. My  
back was turned when I heard a  
splash. I ran over and pulled you  
out. Then I foolishly slipped and  
fell in.

Danny has an expression of embarrassment on his face. Beat.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I don't remember being there, but Bà has told me the story several times. You were a real hero.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I was a careless fool. It was my fault you fell in. My mother told me not to let you out of my sight, but I turned away. If I had been doing my duty that day, perhaps my life would be different than it is now. I have finally accepted that the bad spirits have punished me for disobeying my mother.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I'm sorry I was the cause of so much trouble. I'll guess I'll always be in your debt.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Thank you, cousin.

They exchange friendly smiles. Sang Le adds the finishing dab of paint onto his project.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

We should probably get home now. Bà is expecting you. Besides, I have a lot of homework.

CUT TO:

Sang Le and Danny walk together towards the bus ramp.

SANG LE

Cousin, you work too much. Is Friday. Everyone go on date.

DANNY

Not me. How about you? Don't tell me you have a date tonight?

Sang Le nods, grinning ear to ear. Danny falls about laughing.

(CONTINUED)

SANG LE

Tomorrow night. Big date. Double date.

DANNY

A double date? Hmm...I wonder who it could be? Maybe...Hong Pham?

SANG LE

(nods)

She has finally honored me by saying yes.

DANNY

And who's the other half of the date? Cuc and some geek?

SANG LE

No. The other half is you.

Danny is taken aback. He shrieks in surprise.

DANNY

WHAT?! You're crazy.

They now exit the school building and step aboard their bus. Calvin is stretched out in the back. Danny and Sang Le sit somewhere in the middle.

SANG LE

You must come, Danny. You need date. You too mad and worry all the time.

DANNY

I appreciate it, Sang Le, but you don't have to meddle with my personal life. And frankly, I'd prefer not to go on a date with Cuc.

SANG LE

No, no. Your date not Cuc. I find nice girl for you. Blind date.

Danny moaned. He's speechless.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Cousin, I hate to do this, but you are indebted to me. I saved your life. You owe me this favor.

Danny sighs. Cornered. No other options now.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

Okay... If you put it that way, I  
guess I can't refuse.

Sang Le smiles. Victorious. The bus shifts into gear and  
takes off.

INT. DANNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Danny approaches the bedroom door. Raps lightly. He's  
dressed adequately: shiny, black pants with a white silk  
shirt.

DANNY

Sang Le, are you ready?

He turns the doorknob. It opens with a soft click. Sang  
Le, standing on the other side of the door, turns to face  
Danny with a smile.

Sang Le cleans up well, wearing clothes equally as formal as  
Danny's.

DANNY

You look nice, cousin.

SANG LE

Thank you. We go now. My friend  
let me borrow his car.

Danny smiles while nodding.

EXT. AN APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

A nice, shiny BMW pulls up in front of an unfamiliar  
apartment complex. Sang Le exits from the passenger seat.

Danny stays in the car. His hands firmly grip the steering  
wheel as he takes in a deep breath. Then lets it out.

A few seconds later, Sang Le arrives back at the car with  
Hong and Cuc. Danny smiles weakly at them, but they seem to  
have a blank expression. Cuc seems to glare at Danny.

SANG LE

(to Hong)

You look beautiful.

HONG

Thank you...

(CONTINUED)

Hong is wearing a pink silk dress that outlines her slender figure. Cuc on the other hand, is just wearing a casual skirt...nothing new.

DANNY

So where do we go next?

SANG LE

I tell you directions. You drive.

DANNY

Okay...

Unsure, he steps on the pedal. The luxury vehicle exits the parking lot.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Danny is steering aimlessly down the street. Sang Le directing him.

SANG LE

Turn here!

Danny abruptly rotates the wheel to the left, down another unknown street. Danny glances skeptically at his cousin.

DANNY

Where are we, cousin?

SANG LE

Ah...right here.

Danny turns into the driveway of a large, tan colored house.

DANNY

Wait. This is Tiffany's house.

SANG LE

She your blind date. Go knock on door.

DANNY

Are you out of your mind? I can't go in there.

SANG LE

Don't worry. She know about blind date. Hurry, go knock on door.

(CONTINUED)

Danny hesitates. A bead of sweat rolls down his neck. He's murmuring, questioning what he should do.

Sang Le's eyes penetrate into Danny's skin, dumping even more pressure on him. Hong and Cuc just sit impatiently in the back. Couldn't care less. Danny exhales loudly.

DANNY

Okay.

He opens the door and slams it closed. Walks nervously up the front path towards the front door.

Raises his fist -- deep breath -- and knocks three times.

A dog barking is heard. Shuffling footsteps from behind the door. It swings open.

Tiffany stands in the doorway, smiling up at Danny. She's drop-dead gorgeous. Danny involuntarily lets out a subtle gasp.

TIFFANY

Hi, Danny.

DANNY

Hi.

Tiffany opens the door for Danny, inviting him inside. Her house is actually quite messy. Books, sheets strewn about. Stains on furniture and carpet. A television is on, playing a sitcom. A young boy, BRADLEY (12), sits in a wheelchair in front of the TV.

An older woman, in about her forties, comes and greets Danny at the door. She's still attractive, though she had lost her figure. She's dressed in a nurse's outfit.

TIFFANY'S MOTHER

Hi. You must be Danny. I'm Tiffany's mother.

She extends her hand out. Danny shakes it.

TIFFANY'S MOTHER

So what are you guys doing tonight?

TIFFANY

We're going to a Vietnamese restaurant, then skating. Uh, excuse me while I get my purse.

She spins around gracefully, and trots up the stairs. Tiffany's mother looks and smiles at Danny.

## TIFFANY'S MOTHER

I'm glad Tiffany's going out. She rarely gets to date. She has to watch over Bradley all the time.

She cocks her head behind her wear Bradley sits in his wheelchair in front of the TV. He laughs at a funny line from the sitcom.

## TIFFANY

Mom, I hope you weren't talking about me.

Tiffany stands on the wooden staircase, shining a bright, beautiful smile. She walks down the rest of the stairs.

## TIFFANY (CONT'D)

I won't be out late, okay? Bye, mom.

Tiffany kisses her mother's cheek lightly, and waves goodbye.

## DANNY

Goodbye.

They walk out the door together, and it slams shut.

## INT. KIM SON RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Close on a bowl of rice. It sits in the center of a large table filled with several different Vietnamese dishes. Danny sits next to Tiffany. They're all smiling and laughing.

Sang Le sits next to Hong, serving food to her like a queen. They don't seem very enthusiastic.

Tiffany grasps her pair of chopsticks. Attempts to pick up a piece of chicken, but it drops back onto her plate. She breaks into giggles.

## DANNY

Here, you use it like this.

He grabs Tiffany's hand and holds it gingerly. Places the chopsticks in the correct positions.

## DANNY

You put one stick here, and then you put the other one under it...like that.

(CONTINUED)

Tiffany laughs. She turns and stares into Danny's eyes. A romantic beat.

Hong sits across from them, just staring at the two lovebirds with a sullen look.

CUT TO:

INT. ICE SKATING RINK - NIGHT

Danny and Tiffany zoom across the screen on ice-skates, holding hands and smiling. Booming music blares loudly from the speakers, echoing across the skating rink.

Sang Le's also trying his hand at ice-skating. He staggers around on the ice, occasionally slipping and then breaking into laughs.

He manages to crawl towards the door one uses to enter the ice-skating area. Hong and Cuc are sitting on a bench across from it.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Hong, Cuc! Come skating with us!

Hong shakes her head rapidly.

HONG  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
No. I don't want to.

Sang Le looks disappointingly at the girls. But there's nothing he can do. He pushes off and starts skating again.

Hong and Cuc can only pout and stare as Danny and Tiffany glide gracefully across the ice hand in hand, fingers intertwined.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Danny brakes right in front of Tiffany's house. Tiffany sits in the passenger seat beside him, while Sang Le is in the back with Hong and Cuc.

A 1967 Mustang sits in the driveway. Tiffany is frowning.

TIFFANY  
My brother's home...

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

I'll walk you to the door.

TIFFANY

No, it's okay. You don't have to.

DANNY

I'm not just gonna drop you off  
like a hitchhiker.

Danny exits the car, walks around, and opens the passenger door. Tiffany steps out. She doesn't look happy as they walk towards the front door.

DANNY

Is something wrong? Did I do something?

TIFFANY

You didn't do anything, Danny. I like you. Well...it's my brother. He can get pretty crazy sometimes. He never approves of the guys I date.

DANNY

He isn't the boss of you, is he?

TIFFANY

Actually, he kind of is. I don't have a father.

DANNY

Oh...I'm sorry.

TIFFANY

He's not dead, if that's what you're thinking. He left us after Bradley was born. Since then, Frank has been the man of the house.

DANNY

He must let you do things once in a while.

TIFFANY

Well, Frank's gotten mixed up with some pretty bad people lately. Mom can't even control him anymore. He just does what he wants. He's not a bad person. He used to be a nice person, but that creep he hangs out with, Brian...

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

Well, he can't keep you from dating forever. Hey, the prospects can't get better than me.

Danny extends his arms out and turns around. Tiffany laughs and playfully punches Danny in the shoulder.

They reach the front porch.

TIFFANY

You better go now, Danny. Frank has some of his strange friends with him again.

(beat)

I had a wonderful time.

As she turns for the door, Danny pulls her back and kisses her softly on the lips.

After a few seconds, Tiffany pulls away, breaking the kiss with a soft smooching sound. She looks into his eyes, smiling. Then she turns around and quietly enters her house.

Danny just stares at the door for a moment. He inhales deeply, then lets it out. He's ecstatic, a large grin on his face. He spins around and walks back to the car.

CUT TO:

INT. BMW - NIGHT

Danny and Sang Le are alone in the car. Cuc and Hong have already left. It's dark, except for the periodic lamp post that rolls by and illuminates the interior as Danny drives.

DANNY

That was an amazing date, Sang Le. I had a great time. I owe you big time.

Sang Le sighs.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Well, I am happy you enjoyed it. At least someone did.

Danny takes a quick questioning glance at Sang Le before putting his eyes back on the road.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
What do you mean?

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Hong.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I noticed that. She was acting  
strange the whole time.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
You are blind. Can't you see what  
was upsetting her?

Danny shrugs.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
It's you.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Me?

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
It's you that she likes. It's you  
she wanted to skate with and hold  
hands with.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I don't believe this. I told you,  
I'm not interested in Hong. I love  
Tiffany. Can't you just tell her  
that?

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I think she knows it now. She'll  
never speak to me again. She was  
so perfect...so beautiful. But who  
would want a skinny, ugly guy like  
me with no money and no future?

Sang Le expels a long, ragged sigh. Looks down as he plays  
with his fingers.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Don't say that, cousin.

The car pulls up into the parking lot of Danny's apartment. Danny brings the car to a stop, and pulls the hand brake.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I will wait for my friend to come  
get his car back. I will see you  
later.

Danny nods, then opens the car door and exits. He slams it shut. Sang Le sits by himself, upset and disappointed, in the passenger seat.

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny is laying down on the bed, his head propped up by the pillow. He dreamily stares at the photograph he has of Tiffany. Danny sighs.

He reaches onto the night stand and picks up the telephone. Dials. A few seconds later, a male, with a deep, gruff voice answers.

MALE VOICE  
(on phone)  
Hello?

DANNY  
Hi, can I speak to Tiffany?

MALE VOICE  
(on phone)  
Who is this?

DANNY  
Uh...Danny.

Beat. Some noise going on on the other line. Finally, Tiffany answers, her voice shaky.

TIFFANY  
(on phone)  
Hello?

DANNY  
Hi, it's me.

(CONTINUED)

TIFFANY

(on phone)

Danny. You should've hung up when Frank answered. I told you he gets real crazy.

DANNY

We're not doing anything wrong. We're just talking. What is he gonna do to you if you date someone?

TIFFANY

(on phone)

Danny, you don't know everything that goes on in my house. You don't know my brother. He's not in a gang. He's a sweet guy. The guy he hangs out with, Brian, is the jerk.

DANNY

Okay, but I don't see what that has to do with you and me. Are you just afraid of what Frank might say?

Tiffany sighs through the phone.

TIFFANY

(on phone)

It's not any boy I date he's opposed to -- it's you. He hates Vietnamese people. See...my dad got kind of crazy after he served in Vietnam, and Frank blames them for our father leaving us. I'm sorry. I should have told you.

Danny's a little appalled. He doesn't speak into the phone for a while. He's just shocked. Then he draws in a sigh.

DANNY

I don't want to have to date in secret. I want to be able to spend more time with you. I know you feel the same way.

TIFFANY

(on phone)

I do, really.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

So, how about we go on another date. Next Saturday?

TIFFANY

(on phone)

I'd love to, Danny... I have to go now, Frank just came in. I'll see you later okay?

The phone abruptly disconnects. Danny, a little surprised and frustrated, yet extremely satisfied, hangs up the phone.

He spreads out across his mattress, holding the photograph of Tiffany up against his chest. Danny's eyes close...

FADE TO:

It's getting brighter, almost morning. A hand reaches from outside the bedroom window. It pulls it open. Sang Le crawls through the small opening and staggers drunkenly inside.

Danny wakes up from the noise he makes. He's still drowsy, his voice his gravelly.

DANNY

Sang Le, where have you been? You've been crawling through the window almost every morning.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Don't worry, cousin. I have an explanation. I got a good job. Look.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out wadded up twenties.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

What kind of job?

Sang Le takes the plaster-of-Paris dog bank out of the closet. Shoves the cash into the slot.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

A night job. Bagging rice. They pay extra for working at night. I am tired. I would like to sleep.

(CONTINUED)

He plops down onto his bed and almost immediately falls asleep, bringing with it the moaning and crying that torments him every night. It starts out soft and mild before growing in intensity.

Danny sits up, holds his head for a bit. He looks up. The plaster-of-Paris dog is still sitting out.

Danny curiously looks at it. He walks up to it and picks it up. Rattling of coins and bills is heard. Danny holds it up against the window. Twenties and fifties can be seen through the plaster. Danny shakes it slightly, with minimal noise, and looks again. A one-hundred dollar bill is clearly visible.

Danny stares at it in shock. Looks at Sang Le, who lay asleep on the bed.

DANNY

Cobra gave you that job, didn't he? Oh, Sang Le...what have you gotten yourself into?

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Danny's locker is open. He carefully switches his books and supplies out. Tiffany runs up behind him.

TIFFANY

Hi, Danny.

DANNY

Hi, Tiffany.

TIFFANY

Guess what? I talked to my mom. She agreed to take the day shift, so I'm free Saturday...if it's still on.

Danny smiles. He kisses her on the lips.

DANNY

Of course. But right now, I'm going to find Sang Le. I haven't seen him at school for a while.

TIFFANY

Okay, well good luck. I'll see you, Danny.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

Bye.

Tiffany walks away and disappears behind the corner. Danny slams his locker closed.

CUT TO:

Danny strolls briskly down a hallway and enters a door to his left. Mrs. Rodriguez, the ESL teacher is at her desk grading some papers. The ESL students sit in arranged desks around the room. Mrs. Rodriguez looks up when Danny enters.

MRS. RODRIGUEZ

Yes?

DANNY

Hi, I was wondering if I could talk to my cousin, Sang Le.

MRS. RODRIGUEZ

Sang Le? He hasn't been in class for two weeks.

DANNY

What?

Danny whirls around. There is a vacant desk where Sang Le should be seated.

MRS. RODRIGUEZ

I figured you knew about it. I figured he had some family crisis going on.

DANNY

You got that right... Well, thanks anyway.

Danny turns towards the door, and leaves the room.

INT. OLD TOYOTA - DAY

Danny and Sang Le drive through downtown Houston.

DANNY

What have you been doing, Sang Le? You haven't been to school for two weeks.

(CONTINUED)

SANG LE

I tell you. I don't care about school. Need job.

DANNY

Those "jobs" Cobra is giving you? Those aren't real jobs, cousin. They're making you do bad things. I know you're not working at a rice factory. They don't pay in wadded up cash on the first night.

Sang Le sighs, staring out the window. Doing his best to ignore him.

DANNY

You'll understand everything soon... I'm just glad Uncle Dao let us help out at his store today. Keep you away from those guys.

INT. UNCLE DAO'S SHOP - DAY

From the inside view, we can see Danny pull up outside the large glass windows. Danny exits, along with Sang Le, and walk towards the entrance.

Danny pulls open the door, then freezes. His jaw drops.

All the magazines and other items that were once on the shelves are now strewn about all over the floor. Chairs, tables, other furniture have been knocked over onto their side.

Aunt Lien is crying hysterically behind the counter, pressing a paper towel against her neck. Uncle Dao kneeling next to her.

DANNY

Oh my god! What happened!

AUNT LIEN

*Toan du dang!* Look what they do to me!!

She raises her trembling hand. Each nail had been cut off.

AUNT LIEN (CONT'D)

Why they do this to me?

(CONTINUED)

A trickle of blood runs down her neck from underneath the red-stained paper towel.

UNCLE DAO

They say we have to pay money or  
else they will kill our children  
and tear up our shop.

Aunt Lien breaks into sobs once more. Danny and Sang Le are both wide-eyed in shock.

DANNY

Who did this? What gang was it?

UNCLE DAO

*Ran-ho-mang.*

Uncle Dao makes a fist with two fingers protruding. He strikes the air. The resemblance is uncanny. Danny and Sang Le both look at each other in shock.

After a beat, Danny stands and walks to the phone on the counter. Picks it up.

Sang Le's anxiety rises. He runs up to Danny.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Cousin, what you do?

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I'm calling the police.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
No! You can't.

Danny stops moving. He looks at Sang Le in surprise. Sang Le grabs Danny's arm and pulls him outside, the telephone slipping out of his grasp.

As soon as the glass doors close, Sang Le speaks.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
You cannot turn my friend into the  
police.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
How can you defend someone who  
robbed your uncle's store? How can

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

DANNY (cont'd)  
you get involved in something like  
that?

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Tho is my friend. He needs me.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Sang Le...do you know how  
heartbroken Bà would be if she knew  
you were in a gang? She thinks  
you're the most perfect  
grandson. She loves you and  
worships you. She even told me  
that nothing you do would ever  
disappoint her. How could you do  
this to her?

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I do it for Bà. I put all the  
money I make into the dog bank for  
her house. I tried to get a job,  
but nobody wants me. Nobody likes  
me. Tho is the only person I can  
relate to. He was in a  
re-education camp like me. He  
understands me. He doesn't make  
fun of me like Americans do. He is  
like a big brother to me.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
He's a thug! He lies, cheats, and  
steals! You can't just blindly  
obey his commands. What will you  
do when he wants you to rob another  
store? Would you do it?

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Never.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
You're making a big mistake. If Bà  
finds out, she'll kick you out of  
the apartment. I know her.

(CONTINUED)

SANG LE  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 Please, you must not tell Bà. I  
 have done you many favors. Now  
 it's time for you to do me a favor  
 by not telling her.

Danny hesitates for a beat. He peers into the tinted windows of Uncle Dao's shop. They're still sitting against the counter crying.

DANNY  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 Okay. I won't tell her this  
 time. But promise me you'll try to  
 break away from Cobra before it's  
 too late.

SANG LE  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 Okay, cousin. I will try.

They stare at each other for a beat before turning and entering the store again.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Danny walks down a crowded hallway. Mrs. Kendrick, the art teacher, is standing in front of her classroom door. She notices Danny and calls him over.

MRS. KENDRICK  
 Danny!

Danny responds to the call. He looks up towards her.

MRS. KENDRICK  
 May I speak with you for a moment,  
 please?

DANNY  
 Alright.

He walks over a few feet towards her.

DANNY  
 Yes?

MRS. KENDRICK  
 I heard Sang Le dropped out of  
 school. I'm so disappointed to  
 hear that.

(CONTINUED)

Danny has a shocked expression on his face. But he quickly wipes it off.

DANNY

Uh...well he was having a hard time learning English. He couldn't really keep up in his classes.

MRS. KENDRICK

That's terrible. He was such an exceptional artist. I'd hate to see his talent wasted. Perhaps he could take English lessons this summer and enroll again next fall.

DANNY

Yeah...I'll let him know you asked about him.

MRS. KENDRICK

Danny, tell him to come by and see me. The art school downtown is looking for someone for their work-study program. I showed them Sang Le's work, and they agreed to take him. So if he wants to work there, it's a wonderful chance to start a career in art.

DANNY

That's great, Mrs. Kendrick. I'll be sure to tell him. Thanks.

He waves politely at her. She walks into her classroom. Danny spins around, then abruptly stops when Hong is standing in front of him.

DANNY

Oh...sorry. Were you listening to what Mrs. Kendrick said?

HONG

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Yes.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I had no idea he dropped out. How long ago was it?

HONG

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

About a month.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
You knew? Why didn't you tell me?

HONG  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Well, if you had ever taken the time to pay attention to your cousin instead of being so involved with Tiffany Schultz, maybe he would have told you about his problems.

Danny gives Hong a grimacing look, a little offended.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Okay, I guess I deserved that. I was rude once, but I've been nothing but friendly to you. You know Sang Le is crazy about you. Give him a chance.

HONG  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I can't help it if my heart feels this way. Perhaps if I had met Sang Le before, it wouldn't be so.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Hong, my cousin loves you. If you tell him about the job at the art school downtown, or about learning English, he will listen to you. He needs help.

HONG  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I agree. I will talk to him.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
So, I'll tell him to visit you.

HONG  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
That would be great. Any day is available for me. I am home every night.

She turns around and walks away. Her shoes tapping loudly on the tile floor. Danny just watches as she turns the corner.

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A thud. Danny's eyes jerk open. He turns his head towards Sang Le's empty bed. He glances at the window. Sang Le is pulling it closed. It locks with a click.

DANNY

Sang Le, what are you doing?

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I had business to take care of.

Danny jerks up. He reaches over and flips on a lamp on the nightstand. It creates a dim orange glow in the room.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

You promised you would try to break away from that gang.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I would like to, but it is impossible. I have become too useful to Tho.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

What about what Hong told you? I thought you wanted that job at the art center. It's time for you to turn over a new leaf, cousin. You have to leave them now before it's too late.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

It already is too late.

At that moment, there is a rapping on the door. Danny and Sang Le stare at each other in bewilderment. Who would be up now?

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Who's that?

Sang Le walks slowly to the door and opens it. He's caught off guard and he recoils a few steps.

(CONTINUED)

SANG LE

Bà?

The frail, old woman grabs Sang Le's arm and starts thrashing his legs with a bamboo switch in her other hand.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Go away, bad spirits!

Danny, also taken aback, leaps out of bed.

DANNY

Bà! What are you doing?!

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I am driving those bad spirits out of my grandson! They make him do terrible things!

Sang Le crumples to his knees, as if bowing before her, taking his punishment without complaint. He begins to sob, fresh tears flowing down his face. Bà continues to lash at him with the bamboo stick.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Bà, stop! Sang Le doesn't have any evil spirits.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

No, cousin. Leave her alone. She is right. Let her drive them away.

Sang Le is sobbing like he never has before, the tears flowing uncontrollably. He winces every time the bamboo switch makes contact with his skin, leaving red marks behind.

Danny walks up behind Bà and grabs her arm, restraining it. He pulls the switch out of her hand and tosses it onto the carpet. Despite being unarmed, Bà continues to chastise her grandson.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I know you belong to that bad *toan du dang*! You don't think I notice you stay out late? Uncle Dao saw you with those guys who robbed his store! How could you join a

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BÀ (cont'd)  
 gang? Didn't your mother teach you  
 better? You disappoint me. You  
 bring shame to my whole family.

Sang Le, still sobbing, sniffs, then paws at his shirt pocket. He removes a crumpled up roll of cash. He holds it in front of Bà.

SANG LE  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 I did it for you, Bà. For the  
 house you want. For you and the  
 family. I have to pay you back for  
 bringing me to America.

Bà glares at the cash for a second, then she grabs it from his hand, waving it in front of Sang Le's face.

BÀ  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 This is bad money! This money  
 belongs to evil spirits. I would  
 rather die than live in a house  
 bought with tainted money.

Sang Le hangs his head low, on his knees.

SANG LE  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 Bà, please forgive me.

BÀ  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 It is not for me to forgive. Your  
 mother and Duong's mother can tell  
 you about gangs. In Da Nang, a  
 gang attacked and raped them. I  
 don't want this gang money!

Bà spits on the bills and throws it onto the ground by Sang Le's knees. Danny swallows hard as he goes pale, watching painfully.

BÀ  
 (VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
 Your mother sacrificed everything  
 for you! She suffered through hard  
 labor to save money to try to get  
 your father out of re-education  
 camp. She stayed in Vietnam  
 because you were sick. She killed  
 herself because you went to

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BÀ (cont'd)  
jail. She died for you! How would she feel if she knew you were in a gang?

Sang Le continues to sob, a little quieter now. His head still hung low.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I only did it for the money, Bà.

Bà's wrinkly, slender finger reaches down, gently touching his chin. She pushes up, forcing Sang Le to look directly into her eyes.

BÀ  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Money is nothing. Honor and respect are everything. Without honor, money is worth nothing. Always remember who you are. You have the blood of a dragon flowing through your veins. You must act with honor and bravery like a dragon. You must sacrifice for the good of the family. Now, tell me. What are you going to do?

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I promise, I will leave the gang. I will never take another cent from them. I will give them the money back.

BÀ  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Good. And you will return to school and learn English?

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Is there nothing you do not know?

BÀ  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I only know what I'm supposed to know.

She stands fully upright and, after a quick glance at Danny, turns around and silently exits the room. The door closes softly with a click.

(CONTINUED)

Danny rushes to Sang Le, who is still kneeling on the ground sniffing.

DANNY

Come on, Sang Le. You should get some rest.

Danny helps Sang Le to his feet and directs him to his bed.

CUT TO:

The lamp is off. The room now has a bluish aura from the dim moonlight from outside the window.

Danny lay awake in bed with a blank expression on his face. He's just staring at the ceiling. The room is dead silent. In the next moment, Danny's blankness transforms into a look of skepticism. He turns his head and looks over at Sang Le's bed.

Sang Le lay in bed, snoring quietly. No more thrashing around. No more crying and moaning. He is sleeping peacefully.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A slow, romantic song plays from the stereo. The dance floor is packed with couples, slow-dancing to the music. Danny and Tiffany dance into the screen, stepping slowly and rhythmically to the beat of the song.

CUT TO:

Danny and Tiffany retreat to a small table in the corner of the restaurant. Danny pulls out a chair for Tiffany. She smiles and sits down.

TIFFANY

This is so wonderful.

DANNY

I know. Finally, we get to spend a night together, just the two of us.

Tiffany smiles that beautiful smile of hers as she brings her hand up with Danny's and their fingers intertwine.

DANNY

I got you something.

(CONTINUED)

Danny reaches inside his pocket and takes out a small, velvet black box. He flips it open. A small ring sits inside, a big red ruby glimmering in Tiffany's eyes. She gasps.

TIFFANY

Oh, Danny. It's so beautiful.

Danny pulls the ring out of the box and sets the box on the table. He slips the ring onto Tiffany's finger. It's slightly too big -- it hangs loosely on her ring finger. Danny's face becomes red.

DANNY

Uh, I'm sorry. I'll bring it to the jeweler and have it re-sized.

TIFFANY

Oh, no, that's okay. I'll just wrap tape around it or something.

DANNY

No, let me do this for you. I'll return it for the right size.

Danny places the ring back into the box, and places the box back into his jacket pocket. Tiffany smiles as her hand again slips into his.

TIFFANY

I'm so happy tonight.

Danny leans forward. Presses his lips firmly on hers.

EXT. TIFFANY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Danny's car pulls up on Tiffany's driveway. Danny and Tiffany kiss a few more times, then pull apart.

TIFFANY

I had such a wonderful night. Thank you, Danny.

Danny exits the car and rushes around the hood of the car. He opens the door for Tiffany. As Tiffany steps out of the car, a bright light shines in their faces. They both look toward it.

A red Mustang turns the corner, it's bright headlights shining in Danny and Tiffany's face. Tiffany's body stiffens. She pulls away from Danny's body.

(CONTINUED)

TIFFANY

Danny, you have to leave. My brother's here.

DANNY

Wait, Tiffany. It's time we faced your brother. We can't run away every time we see him.

TIFFANY

You don't know my brother. Go now, Danny. Please.

Danny doesn't budge. He's as firm as ever. The red Mustang pulls up next to the curb in front of Tiffany's house.

FRANK

Hey! Get away from my sister!

Frank leaps out of the car. Three other men, burly and gruff, also jump out and follow him. They are all characterized by shaved heads at the top. They stomp across the lawn towards Danny.

FRANK

What the hell are you doing with my sister?

Frank grabs Danny's arm and pulls him away from Tiffany's proximity, but she darts to his side and tries desperately to remove Danny from Frank's grip.

TIFFANY

Stop, Frank. Leave him alone.

DANNY

Hey, hey, it's okay. I just took her to a restaurant for dinner, that's all.

BRIAN, the tallest, oldest guy behind Frank laughs.

BRIAN

Hey, Frank. You're letting your sister date a gook?

Frank eyes become slits as his glare pierces into Danny's eyes. He grabs Danny by the collar and shoves him against the car. Tiffany screams in shock.

FRANK

Don't ever touch her again. Just go back to the rice paddies and

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

FRANK (cont'd)  
jungles where you belong, you  
Vietcong pig.

Danny's look of terror suddenly becomes anger. He pushes Frank off of him, glaring at Frank.

DANNY  
I don't want to fight you Nazis.

BRIAN  
He just called you a Nazi,  
Frank. You gonna let him get away  
with that?

Frank growls as he throws a punch at Danny. Danny dodges and hits Frank square in the jaw. Tiffany just watches with her hand over her mouth. Danny holds his fists up, ready for combat. Frank rubs his jaw in pain. JASON, another skinhead gang member laughs.

JASON  
Ooh, he knows kung-fu. You better  
be careful, Frank.

He cackles loudly, along with the other gang member.

BRIAN  
Shut up. Go get the baseball  
bat. We have to teach this piece  
of trash a lesson.

Jason, still laughing, darts towards the red Mustang. Tiffany runs at Brian, grabbing his arm in protest.

TIFFANY  
Brian, stop! Leave him alone! He  
didn't do anything!

BRIAN  
Frank, get this tramp off me.

Frank grabs Tiffany's arm and pulls her away. She screams in pain.

DANNY  
Hey, get off her!

Danny runs to Tiffany's rescue and attempts to pull her out of Frank's grasp, but instead, Brian grabs Danny and restrains him. Danny thrashes and writhes in his grip.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

Let go of me.

BRIAN

Come on Frank. Teach him a lesson. Go ahead.

TIFFANY

NO! STOP!

Frank hesitates a bit at the sound of his screaming sister, but ultimately ignores her. With a guttural roar, he slams his fist against Danny's face. He repeatedly plunges his fists into his stomach.

Blood runs out of his nose and mouth and runs down his face. His eyes getting darker and darker with bruises. He grunts every time Frank strikes. Tiffany is screaming at the top of her lungs.

TIFFANY

STOP FRANK! Please stop! I promise I won't ever see him again. I promise. Just stop hurting him!

The front door opens, and the light from indoors pours out onto the front lawn. Tiffany's mother is standing in the doorway.

TIFFANY'S MOTHER

What's going on--oh my goodness! Frank! What do you think you're doing, stop!

FRANK

Go back inside, mom. This doesn't concern you.

Frank throws another punch into Danny's stomach. Tiffany screaming, tears flowing down from her eyes. Tiffany's mother darts down from the porch.

TIFFANY'S MOTHER

Look at you! Getting into fights. Quit acting like your father.

Now this works. Frank spins around, indescribable anger all over his face. He glares at his mother.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

No, I am nothing like my father. Don't you ever say that!

TIFFANY'S MOTHER

Look at yourself right now. You're a spitting image of him.

Frank is breathing hard. He scowls at her for a beat. The he spins around. Stares at the battered up Danny. There are bruises and blood all over his face. It runs down and stains his clothing.

FRANK

Let him go, Brian. He can't take anymore.

Brian reluctantly unbinds Danny. Danny slumps down onto the grass. Tiffany and her mother rush to his aid. Danny raises his hand, telling them to back off.

DANNY

It's okay...

Danny, trembling, comes to his feet. He staggers across the lawn into his car. The engine ignites, and the car pulls off the driveway.

INT. OLD TOYOTA - NIGHT

Danny, maimed and bruised, blood staining his clothing and skin, carefully steers the wheel of the car. Tears of shame flow down his cheeks. He brings up his bloody sleeve and wipes them away with a loud snuffle, smearing even more blood onto his face.

INT. DANNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment is dark. All the lights are out. The lock on the door rattles. It creaks open, and limps painfully into the apartment. Closes the door.

INT. DANNY'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

The horrible sound of vomiting fills the room. Danny is bent over the sink, emptying his stomach of the dinner he just had with Tiffany.

Danny moans, then looks up. The extent of his injuries is now clear as he examines his wounds in the mirror. He lightly touches an abrasion on his chin. Winces in pain.

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny opens the door to his bedroom and enters. He goes to his closet, removes his blood-stained jacket.

The creak of a mattress spring becomes audible as Sang Le sits up, propping himself up by his elbow.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Hello, cousin. How was your date?

Danny replies in a weak, hoarse voice. He quickly clears his throat.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
It was okay.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Are you alright?

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I'm fine.

The lamp clicks on. The room is filled with an orange glow. Sang Le gasps at Danny's pummeled face.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Cousin, what happened?

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Nothing...I just...fell down and hurt myself.

Sang Le sits upright on the edge of his mattress, still shocked, his mouth hanging open.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
You have been fighting. Who beat you like that. Please, tell me.

Danny sighs. He walks to his bed and sits down.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
It was a bunch of skinheads.

(CONTINUED)

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
The guys with shaved hair on top of  
their head.

Danny nods.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Yeah. They hate anyone who isn't  
white. They go around beating them  
with baseball bats. Tiffany's  
brother was one of them. He was  
angry because I was dating her.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Oh, cousin. They are nothing  
compared to Cobra and I. We will  
take care of them.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
No! Stay out of this. You  
promised you would stay away from  
Cobra. I'll get even with them  
myself. I don't want to get caught  
in the middle of a gang war.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Okay, then. I will stay out of  
it. But whenever you need my help,  
please tell me. I will save you  
again, like I did when you fell in  
the moat.

Sang Le stretches his hand out towards Danny. Danny stares  
at it for a beat.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Okay. It's a deal.

He reaches over and clasps their hands together.

INT. CAFETERIA- DAY

Two hands clasped together. One hand pulls away, leaving  
rolled up cash in the other hand. Panning outward, Danny  
and Calvin are sitting across from each other in the lunch  
room. Calvin counts the money Danny just gave him.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

That's all I owe you for the shirt  
I borrowed. Now quit bothering me.

Danny's face has healed tremendously. His bruises are now faint and are barely noticeable.

CALVIN

Dude, I'm sorry this had to  
happen. Has Tiffany ever spoke to  
you since then?

DANNY

Nope. I tried looking for her  
everywhere, trying to get her to  
talk to me.

CALVIN

So she really meant it... Face it,  
Danny. She's history. You'll  
probably never speak to her  
again. As long as her psycho  
brother is still around.

DANNY

Thanks, man. Just the optimism I  
needed.

As Danny scoops mashed potatoes into his mouth, he notices Tiffany on the other side of the room. Without a glimpse at Danny, she briskly walks towards the exit, pushes the door open and just walks out.

Danny just stares solemnly as she disappears. His eyelids shut and he takes a deep breath. Lets it out.

EXT. DANNY'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - EVENING

Danny trudges along the sidewalk towards his apartment. He pulls himself up the staircase. When he's about halfway, the sound of a car engine causes him to turn around.

A silver Honda is parked in the parking lot. Sang Le steps out from the passenger door, a large painting tucked underneath his arms. He faintly says "Thank you" before closing the door. The car steers towards the exit and drives away.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Who was that?

(CONTINUED)

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
That was Mrs. Kendrick. She took  
me to the art school downtown  
today.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
You took the job?

Sang Le nods. He walks up the stairs and meets with  
Danny. Danny smiles and places his arm on Sang Le's  
shoulder.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
That's wonderful. I'm proud of  
you, cousin. I knew you could turn  
your life around if you just left  
Cobra. You did leave them, right?

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Yes...but he predicts I will  
return. Our friendship is too  
strong. It is tempting.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Well, remember. There are several  
good protections against  
temptation, but the surest is  
cowardice. As long as you know the  
bad things that could happen, you  
won't give in to temptation. I  
have faith in you.

Sang Le eyes Danny with a smile. They continue walking up  
the stairs together.

DANNY (CONT'D)  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Besides, I'm not letting you go  
anywhere tonight. I got great  
plans for the both of us.

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny plops down onto his mattress. Sighs.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

So, what do you wanna do?

Sang Le laughs as he puts down the frame he his holding onto his desk.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

You said you had lots of plans for us tonight.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I was just saying that so that you would stay home.

Danny sighs again. He reaches over to his nightstand and tugs on the drawer. It rolls out. Danny leans over, peering into the drawer. He takes out a deck of playing cards.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

You want to play cards?

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Sap-sam?

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Poker? I thought you agreed to give up gambling.

They both laugh.

SANG LE

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

What about tien-len?

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I'm cool with that.

Danny sits cross-legged on the carpet and deals out the cards on the floor.

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

Come on, Sang Le, I'm ready.

Sang Le is rummaging through the drawers of his desk and bureaus in search of something.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
What are you looking for?

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I am looking for my cigarettes. I  
can't play well without one.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Cigarettes? I'm pretty sure we  
don't have any here in the  
apartment.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Then I have to go buy some.

Sang Le finds a few dollar bills in his desk and stuffs them  
into his pants pocket.

SANG LE (CONT'D)  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I will be back soon.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Where are you going?

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Tilson's Grocery Store is a few  
blocks away.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I'll go with you.

Danny starts to get up on his feet, but Sang Le stops him.

SANG LE  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
No. I will prove to you that I can  
resist temptation and stay away  
from Cobra.

Danny smiles at him. He sits back down on the floor.

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Okay, cousin. I trust you.

(CONTINUED)

Sang Le smiles, then opens the door. He quietly exits the room, then disappears.

Danny is left alone in the silent bedroom. He breathes deeply, then comes to his feet.

He walks by the desk and slumps down into the wooden chair. It creaks under his weight. The desk is strewn with papers with scattered writing on it. Danny closely examines one of them.

It shows extremely unkempt, almost indiscernible, handwriting, in English, across the page. Tiny notes in Vietnamese are written in the margins. The page is cluttered with eraser smudges and whatnot.

Danny smiles. His eyes move back and forth across the page as he reads Sang Le's writing for a minute.

Danny lets go of the paper -- it drifts slowly onto the desktop. He opens the desk drawers, rummaging through the papers inside looking for others. Slams it shut. He opens the drawer next to it. He freezes.

Danny reaches inside slowly, pulling out a small Polaroid photograph. He stares blankly at it for a moment...then sighs. He puts it down and picks up the phone. Dialing.

A moment later, a boy picks up. His voice is calm and gentle -- it's not Frank.

BRADLEY

(on phone)

Hello?

DANNY

Hey, Bradley. It's Danny. Is Tiffany home?

BRADLEY

Uh, sorry, she's not home.

DANNY

Did she just tell you to say that so she won't talk to me?

BRADLEY

No. Honest. You just missed her. She went over to Julie Martin's house.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY  
Oh...okay then. Thanks,  
Bradley. Bye.

Danny, crestfallen, hangs up the phone and sighs heavily.

EXT. DANNY'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

It's much darker now. Faintly glimmering stars dot the black sky. The crisp sound of crickets chirping fills the night air. Street lights cast an orange glow onto the ground below.

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Danny jerks awake. He's lying on his bed. The lights are still on. With a moan, Danny reaches over towards the desk clock and looks at the time. Then pushes it away.

He looks around. The cards are still dealt on the carpet. No Sang Le. Rubbing his eyes, Danny sits upright on his mattress. He yawns.

DANNY  
Sang Le, where are you?

Danny stands and walks towards the door. He pokes his head outside...it's still dark, everyone's asleep. Just as it had been before. Danny makes confused look as he exits his bedroom.

He walks to the front door. A pair of cheap sandals lay on the tile floor next to the welcome mat -- Danny slips them onto his feet. He turns the doorknob and exits. Closes the door quietly in his wake.

EXT. DANNY'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Danny bounds cautiously down the stairs and enters the crisp, night air. The crickets chirping can be faintly heard.

Danny looks around, closely searching the surrounding area. He walks past a giant oak tree in the courtyard. A faint sound attracts his attention. He spins around, looking for the source of the noise. Another moan becomes audible.

(CONTINUED)

SANG LE

...Duong...

DANNY

Sang Le, is that you?

Danny scans the area near the oak tree with his eyes. A dark shadow sits at the base of the large trunk.

Danny rushes over to him as the light falls onto Sang Le's face. It's covered in bruises, lumps, blood... Danny can only stare in awe.

DANNY

Sang Le, what happened?!

SANG LE

Nothing. Cousin, please...take me inside.

DANNY

Oh my god...you're too bad to walk inside. I have to call the police.

Danny's voice is trembling. He starts to turn around when Sang Le's bloody hand reaches over and tugs on the tail of Danny's shirt, leaving a red streak on the fabric.

SANG LE

Please, cousin. Bà can't know. She will think I go back to Cobra.

Danny hesitates. A man walks by and notices them.

DANNY

Call 911!

The man nods and runs off screen. Danny turns his attention back onto his cousin, whose life is slipping just beyond his grasp.

DANNY

It's okay, Sang Le. They're calling 911. You'll get through this.

SANG LE

Duong...you must tell Bà...I kept my promise...Tell them all...I love them. Tell Hong...my beautiful rose...

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

I will, cousin. I promise.

SANG LE

The *ma qui*...the shadow  
spirits...They are gone...No more  
bad luck. No more...

Danny is breathing frantically. He can hardly speak.

Sang Le's hands start to slip off Danny's shirt. His grip loosens, his fingers relax... His arm slumps down by his side and his eyelids close over his eyes like a shroud as he becomes silent.

CUT TO:

Flashing blue and red lights everywhere. They flicker incessantly over the small parking lot.

An ambulance and a few police cars are parked in front of Danny's apartment complex. People stand outside their apartment doors, in pajamas and night clothing, gazing in awe at the shocking spectacle.

An unconscious, bloody Sang Le lay on a stretcher. The medics pick it up and load it into the ambulance. Danny just watches nervously. A medic approaches Danny.

MEDIC

Are you his relative?

DANNY

Yes. I'm his cousin.

MEDIC

Where are his parents? We need to  
speak with them.

DANNY

He doesn't have any...he lives with  
me. Please tell me he's going to  
be okay.

The policeman sighs. He hesitates for a beat.

MEDIC

I'm afraid not. Your cousin is  
dead.

Danny remains unresponsive at first, but he steps back in disbelief, his knees trembling, his eyes watering as the realization hits him.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY  
 (stammering)  
 He...he can't. He can't be  
 dead. Are you sure?

MEDIC  
 I'm sorry. But we need to speak  
 with your parents. Where are they?

Danny turns around and looks up towards the staircase in front of his apartment. Bà and the rest of the family stand on the balcony watching. Lan squeezes through and darts down the stairs.

LAN  
 Danny, Danny. There's a phone call  
 for you. It's Tiffany.

Danny quickly scoops her into his arms and rushes back up the stairs, redirecting her away from the scene.

LAN  
 What happened? Why are the police  
 here?

Danny doesn't respond. He just drops her off next to his parents and rushes inside.

INT. DANNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The receiver of the telephone sits on the kitchen table. Danny picks it up and brings it up to his ear. His eyes glisten from the tears. His voice is shaking.

DANNY  
 Hello?

TIFFANY  
 (on phone)  
 Danny? It's Tiffany. I'm at  
 Julie's house.

DANNY  
 Look, Tiffany--

TIFFANY  
 (on phone)  
 Danny...a lot of things happened  
 over the past week, and I've been  
 thinking. Maybe we should give it  
 one more chance. I miss you so  
 much.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

Look, Tiffany...I can't talk right now. There's been an accident.

TIFFANY

(on phone)

Oh no, what happened?

DANNY

It's my cousin...he's dead.

A gasp is heard on the other line. Danny can barely hold the phone in his trembling hand.

TIFFANY

(on phone)

Oh my goodness...how? I just saw him like an hour ago.

Danny suddenly becomes alert. He sits erect, his eyes wide, almost screaming into the phone.

DANNY

Where?!

TIFFANY

(on phone)

Tilson's Grocery Store. I was there with Julie, when I saw him. He came over and talked to me.

DANNY

What did he say?

TIFFANY

(on phone)

He said you were miserable and depressed. That's actually why I called you. I was worried. I'm so sorry about him, Danny. He was so sweet.

DANNY

Did he talk to anyone else?

TIFFANY

(on phone)

Is it important?

DANNY

Someone beat him to death.

(CONTINUED)

Tiffany gasps again. There is a long beat before she responds in a quiet, shaky voice.

TIFFANY  
(on phone)  
This can't be... It just can't.

DANNY  
Who was it? Were they wearing  
black leather jackets? Was it  
Cobra?

Tiffany's sobs can be heard through the phone. She struggles to get out her words.

TIFFANY  
(on phone)  
I...I don't know what you're  
talking about. I have to go.

DANNY  
Wait! Who were they? You have to  
tell me!

TIFFANY  
(on phone)  
I can't.

The phone disconnects.

DANNY  
Tiffany!!

The dial tone blares in Danny's ears. Frustrated, he slams the receiver back into its cradle. He jolts up out of the chair and exits the apartment.

EXT. DANNY'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Danny walks cumbersomely down the steps in front of his apartment. His parents and Bà stand at the base of the stairs, a policeman standing before them.

Bà spins around when she notices Danny. Her face is gleaming with wetness from tears and heartbreak.

BÀ  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
Grandson, you know who did this to  
my precious Sang Le. You must tell  
the police who did it.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
I don't know, Bà. I swear.

BÀ  
(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)  
You know him better than anyone  
else. Search your heart, and you  
will know.

The police officer cuts in. Danny turns his head and looks directly at him.

POLICEMAN  
You're the boy's cousin,  
correct? Can I ask you a few  
questions?

DANNY  
Yes, of course.

POLICEMAN  
Do you have any idea who could have  
done this? Any enemies?

Beat. Danny shakes his head and answers quietly.

DANNY  
No, not that I know of.

POLICEMAN  
Any drugs? Alcohol?

DANNY  
No.

The policeman peers suspiciously at Danny through squinted eyes. He flips his notepad closed and pockets it.

POLICEMAN  
Now, why do I get the feeling  
you're hiding something? You  
trying to protect someone.

DANNY  
No! I swear, I want whoever did  
this to be caught and punished!

POLICEMAN  
Alright.

He reaches into his shirt pocket and takes out a small card. He gives it to Danny.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)

If you find out anything, call me. It'll do your cousin justice -- being kicked and beaten with a baseball bat is a terrible way to die.

Danny becomes wide-eyed. Now he's listening.

DANNY

Kicked? Baseball bat? Are you sure?

POLICEMAN

Yes. The coroner saw boot imprints on his back and marks consistent with those of a baseball bat. Now do you remember something?

Danny just stares ahead in shock. He manages to shake his head slightly before turning around and starts walking away, gradually getting faster until he's sprinting like his life depends on it.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Danny dashes along a dimly lit street. He eyes a car, pulling out of its driveway and moving down the street towards Danny. Danny jumps in its path. The car screeches to a halt. The window rolls down, and a teenage girl sticks her head out.

JULIE

Danny?! What are you doing?

DANNY

Julie, where's Tiffany?

Before Julie can even answer, Danny runs over to the car. Tiffany is crying in the back seat. Her face is red and covered in tears. Danny opens the door and pulls her out.

DANNY

It was Frank, wasn't it, Tiffany? That's why you're so upset?

Tiffany slowly lets out her words in between large sobs and breaths. She's crying like never before.

(CONTINUED)

TIFFANY

I know Frank wouldn't do it. Please try to understand, Danny. I have to go home and talk to him.

DANNY

No, you have to go to the police.

TIFFANY

Not yet. I have to talk to him. I know he's innocent. I can't turn in my own brother.

DANNY

Then I will.

Tiffany grabs Danny's arms in protest. Her nails dig into his skin as she stares into his eyes imploringly.

TIFFANY

Danny, please. If you care about me at all, our future, don't turn my brother in yet. Wait until I've talked to him. I love you, Danny. Please don't ruin everything for us.

Danny stares into Tiffany's beautiful blue eyes, almost sympathetic. He's lost for words. After a long beat, Danny replies.

DANNY

Your brother took care of that.

Tiffany slowly lets go of Danny's arm. She's calmed down. Her face turns sour, and her voice becomes raspy.

TIFFANY

All right. If you tell the police, I'll deny I ever saw him. It's just your word against mine.

Beat.

DANNY

Do what you have to, Tiffany.

They stare at each other one last time. Tiffany turns and steps back into the car. Danny just watches overwhelmingly as the car drives off into the distance.

(CONTINUED)

Danny starts walking back where he came from. He approaches a bridge over a bayou. Danny stops at the very center and stands up against the railing. He inhales deeply, his blank eyes fixed on the black water of the bayou.

Danny looks down as he reaches into his pocket, and turns his hand up. He's holding a black velvet jewelry box. Danny gazes back across the water. With a yell, he hurls the box with all his strength.

With a faint splash, the box plummets into the water. Ripples radiate outward and fade into nothingness. The dark water becomes still.

EXT. DANNY'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Danny walks sullenly into the parking lot. His family are still outside grieving. The policeman is still there. He notices Danny's presence.

POLICEMAN

Did you remember something?

Danny walks up next to Bà. He stares at the policeman for a moment, then to his grandmother, then to the ambulance that is pulling out of the parking lot. Then he looks back at the police officer.

DANNY

Yes, sir. I did remember something. I remembered that the blood of a dragon flows through my veins. Just as it flowed through my cousin's veins. An honorable, brave dragon that will do anything for his family, no matter the sacrifice. Yes, I did remember something, officer. I remembered who I am.

The police officer looks at Danny peculiarly. His eyebrows crinkle in bewilderment. But Bà again breaks into quiet sobs. She grabs her grandson close and hugs him, squeezing him with all her strength as Danny returns the embrace.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. DANNY'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

A thin trail of smoke rises into the air from three sticks of incense that are impaled into the ground at the base of the large oak tree where Sang Le passed.

Panning upward, a stone plaque is bolted onto the bark of the tree, which reads in English and Vietnamese: "In Loving Memory of Nguyen Le Sang 1975-1993."

One red rose is laid down next to the incense. It is Bà. She prays silently, then bows down before the memorial.

There is a large moving truck in the parking lot. Danny's father exits the back and pulls the door closed.

CHA

That is everything.

(looks at Bà)

Bà. We must go to our new house before it rains.

Bà nods, then comes to her feet. She walks over to Danny and the rest of the children. She sighs.

BÀ

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

I do not want to leave this place. Who will take care of Sang Le when we're gone?

DANNY

(VIETNAMESE: subtitled)

We can still visit. Our new house is only a few blocks away. It's time to go now.

The children enter the old Toyota, and Bà follows. Danny's about to step into the driver's seat when he notices something. An old car pulls up into the parking lot. Tiffany steps out. She walks slowly towards Danny.

DANNY

Tiffany? What are you doing here?

TIFFANY

I just came to say goodbye.

Danny searches Tiffany's face. She's still beautiful, even though she's extremely overwhelmed. An awkward beat. Danny jams his fists into the pockets of his jeans.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

Okay...Goodbye, Tiffany.

TIFFANY

I see you're moving.

DANNY

Yeah. The Vietnamese community went a little overboard with the donations.

TIFFANY

We moved too. We had to sell our house to pay for Frank's lawyer and bail. We're moving to an apartment on the other side of town.

She looks to the ground and sighs. A tear drop forms in her eye and falls onto the concrete.

TIFFANY

I just wanted to say goodbye...

Suddenly she jerks her head up and draws in a breath. Her beautiful eyes glisten with tears.

TIFFANY

Please don't hate me, Danny.

DANNY

Why should I hate you?

TIFFANY

For what my brother did. I'm sorry I didn't stop them when I saw them talking to your cousin. I swear I didn't know they'd kill him.

Danny gazes at her with a wave of pity. He almost feels sorry for her.

TIFFANY

Frank knows what he did was wrong. He's sorry about what happened. He's not a mean person, he just got messed up when our dad left. He's just been having a lot of bad luck.

DANNY

Maybe he had evil spirits living in his shadow.

(CONTINUED)

TIFFANY

What?

DANNY

Nothing.

Tiffany snuffles. Then stares into Danny's eyes.

TIFFANY

I should get going now. I guess  
this is goodbye forever.

She steps forward and kisses Danny lightly on the cheek.

TIFFANY

I'll always love you, Danny.

Tiffany turns around and hurries back to her car as the sky starts churning thunder and lightning. She steps inside, and the car drives away. Danny's eyes are fixed on it as it disappears.

DANNY

I'll always love you too, Tiffany.

Danny spins around and steps into the driver's seat of the car. He rotates the key and starts the ignition just as the rain starts pattering against the steel roof and windshield. Danny turns on the windshield wipers.

Lan stares out the window towards the sky. Then at Danny.

LAN

Bà says the rain will bring us good  
luck in our new house. She says  
the clouds are the shadows of the  
lucky dragons.

KIM

That's just a superstition isn't  
it?

THUY

Are there really such things as  
dragons?

The three children stare eagerly at Danny. Danny gazes out of the foggy windshield toward Sang Le's memorial under the oak tree. The embers of the incense have become dormant as the rain extinguishes them.

Danny glances over at Bà in the passenger seat. She looks out the window with a blank stare. A smile forms on Danny's face.

(CONTINUED)

DANNY

Dragons? Of course, there are such things as dragons. We all have the blood of the dragons flowing through our veins. Has Bà ever told you?

The three children shake their heads simultaneously.

DANNY

I'll tell you now. Long, long ago, a handsome dragon-lord named Lac-Long-Quan met a beautiful princess named Au-Co on the misty mountain of Vietnam...

Pan upward towards the churning sky as the car takes off down the road. A rumble of thunder and a flash of lightning distinguishes a single cloud, shaped like a dragon, in the dark sky as we

FADE OUT.

THE END