

Breakaway Heart

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(based on true events)

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FADE IN:

OVER CREDITS - The history of vietnam as rendered in rich and colorful silk paintings. Countrysides, pagodas, landscapes, and daily life blend seamlessly via meticulous brush strokes.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. UC IRVINE - HALLWAY - EVENING

Two WOMEN, visible only from the legs, march down a darkened hallway.

They stop at a stage entrance, face each other. They are MY LE NGUYEN (Pron. Me Lay Win), and TED event coordinator, SHARON VU.

SHARON

This is it. How are you feeling?

MY LE

A bit nervous.

SHARON

The audience likes you, remember that...and don't forget to breathe.

My Le taps the headset mic with her finger.

SHARON (CONT'D)

Mic is on, you look beautiful. You've got this in three, two, one...

My Le nods, takes a deep breath, then heads for the stage.

INT. UC IRVINE AUDITORIUM - DAY

The TED stage is empty except for a single round carpet. A monitor hangs behind the stage, displays a picture My Le.

My Le wears a classy skirt and low heels. Her hair and makeup are spot on. She's in her early 40's, but looks much younger. She enters the auditorium confidently. She approaches the carpet, steps into the light.

The audience claps.

MY LE

Thank you. Many of you know of or have heard of the Vietnam war.
(MORE)

MY LE (CONT'D)

You may have even heard the terms 'refugee' and 'boat people.' What you might not know is the struggle that took place after 1975 and ended around 1996. A struggle that I was a part of...a struggle that brought me before you today. I'm one of the lucky ones. Of the more than one million refugees who fled Vietnam during that time, approximately thirty percent were killed or lost trying to find happiness abroad. I'm a boat person, and my story may shock you...but that is not my purpose today. Rather, I want to share with you a piece of that twenty-one year exodus and how the bonds of family taught me a valuable lesson about survival and compassion. As a mother and a teacher, I am pleased to tell you and your children what the history books don't. This is my story, my piece of that history, and there are many, many more like it.

(beat)

I invite you now to take a journey with me...back to a day when my life changed forever...

EXT. VIETNAM - JUNGLE - DAY

Greenery as far as the eye can see. A fully developed tropical forest. There is brief serenity.

BOOM! A mortar EXPLODES. The scene erupts with the SOUND of WAR. A firefight ensues. The peaceful jungle becomes a noisy arena interspersed with VIETCONG AND AMERICAN SOLDIERS.

An American soldier, SERGEANT HATHAWAY, pulls in behind a tree and takes out his radio. Bullets ricochet.

HATHAWAY

We're surrounded goddammit! Fire mission, do you read?!

No response.

HATHAWAY (CONT'D)

Shit!...Fire mission! Do you copy?!

He stows the radio and signals another platoon member, PRIVATE MAIR, to advance.

Hathaway stands, lays out a cover spray with his M16. The rounds pierce through the forest.

Mair rushes over, staying low, dodging fire.

HATHAWAY (CONT'D)
Radio's dead!

MAIR
So are we if you don't think of something!

HATHAWAY
Give me the map!

Mair pulls out a well-used map, unfolds it. He sees the town "My Tho" printed near their location.

HATHAWAY (CONT'D)
Shit! One way through...

MAIR
Pull the squad into town!?

HATHAWAY
Damn right, private! It's improvise or die out here! Now fall back with the squad and prepare to move!

The entire squad of men move out on Hathaway's signal.

The squad becomes overwhelmed. The fight continues as it approaches town.

EXT. MY THO CITY - MY LE'S GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE - DAY

SUPER - "MY THO CITY - TET 1968"

Rushing out of the house, EIGHT YEAR-OLD MY LE, in pony tails, olive pants and open foot sandals, grabs her bicycle.

Her mother, LAN, storms out of the house. She's young, but war-torn and tired. She stands at porch's edge, watches My Le ride away.

LAN
(subtitled)
My Le, don't be long!

ON MY LE

She rides through the small village. A few of her NEIGHBORS wave as she passes by.

EXT. MY THO CENTRAL MARKET - DAY

My Le leans her bike against a post.

The market is booming with people and is decorated with New Year fluff. The market stalls extend out into the distance and come to a stop near the Mekong river. Boats along the water's edge make up a floating market.

She walks amongst the produce and fruit stands, passes by stalls with dried sea creatures and boat propellers.

AT NOODLE STAND - RIVER'S EDGE

My Le approaches a noodle stand. The elderly OWNER is busy arranging his stand.

He looks up, sees My Le standing there. Surprised, he pulls the hand-rolled cigarette from his mouth.

OWNER

(subtitled)

My Le. I was beginning to think you left the country.

MY LE

(subtitled)

We have little money for food. It's very difficult right now.

My Le looks over the dried noodle selection.

OWNER

(subtitled)

You came alone this time. Where's your mother?

MY LE

(subtitled)

Making supper with grandmother.

OWNER

(subtitled)

Staying in for the festival, eh? I don't blame her. Hard to be happy with the war going on.

She picks up a bundle of dried rice noodle, inspects it.

MY LE
(subtitled)
Same price?

OWNER
(subtitled)
Are you kidding? I raise the price
and you'll never come back!

She forces a small smile as she digs into her purse.

OWNER (CONT'D)
(subtitled)
Any sign of your father?

She is silent for a moment then hands him some change. He takes it, but realizes he's brought up a touchy subject.

MY LE
(subtitled)
Not yet.

She grabs the bundle, turns, walks back to her bicycle.

OWNER
(subtitled)
We'll be seeing you, My Le!

ON MY LE - STREETS OF MY THO

She enters her neighborhood and is confronted with people running from their houses, SCREAMING, panicking.

Confused, she continues on.

The RATA TATA TAT sound of gunfire suddenly shocks her into reality. She pedals faster.

MY LE
(don't shoot in Viet)
Dung ban, dung ban!

She nears her house, she sees American soldiers in a firefight with the Vietcong.

Bits and pieces of festival decorations drift into the air.

The moment lingers, her cries become washed out by the sounds of GUNFIRE.

My Le's mother runs down the street barefoot. She sees My Le approaching on the bike, frantically waives her away.

MY LE (CONT'D)
Maaa! Dung ban!

My Le starts to wobble on the bike and falls over.

She looks up, the SLOW MOTION bombardment of soldier fighting soldier overwhelms her.

The noisy arena begins to FADE. We hear only a HEARTBEAT.

Private Mair rears back with a grenade and begins to throw. A bullet clips his shoulder as he releases the grenade.

The grenade falls short of its target and EXPLODES near Lan.

Lan disappears in the explosion. My Le SCREAMS SILENTLY.

The HEARTBEAT stops.

MY LE (CONT'D)
Maaa! Maaaaa!

Tangled in the bike, she cries herself into shock.

The silence is replaced with DISTORTED AMBIANCE. The gunfire stops. The last bullet ricochets. The smoke clears.

Sergeant Hathaway walks up to My Le, kneels beside her. Shocked and stoic, she looks deep into his eyes.

HATHAWAY
It's called...war. Sorry kid.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. MY LE'S GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE - DAY

My Le lies in bed, sick, withered, depressed. Her grandmother, XUAN, approaches with a cup of water. She sits down at her bedside. Xuan is careful to display no emotion. She's a long-time survivalist who knows the pain of war.

XUAN
(subtitled)
Drink this, small one.

My Le sits up, holds the cup, hands frail. She takes a sip.

She says nothing, just a dry, exhausted look as she settles back into the pillow.

XUAN (CONT'D)
 (subtitled)
 Your sickness won't leave your body
 until you let go...

She points to My Le's head.

XUAN (CONT'D)
 (subtitled)
 Don't become weak up here!

There is a MORPHING of languages, a TRANSITION from
 VIETNAMESE TO ENGLISH.

MY LE
 The Americans should die! They are
 bad!

Xuan puts a comforting hand on My Le's forehead.

XUAN
 The Americans are not bad.

MY LE
 They are. They didn't have to come
 here.

XUAN
 Your father was a soldier himself.
 A soldier fighting this very
 war...with the Americans.

MY LE
 And he's dead too!

XUAN
 You don't know that.

MY LE
 Then why won't he come back?

XUAN
 Maybe he can't. Have you thought
 about that?

She kisses My Le's forehead and walks into the kitchen.

My Le watches her grandmother as she tends to various kitchen
 tasks, cleaning, arranging, etc.

MY LE
 Grandma.

XUAN
Quiet over there. Rest.

MY LE
I need to know if he's still alive.

XUAN
Rest first. Talk later.

MY LE
Please tell me what you know.
Please. I can't rest until you do.

Xuan returns, sits next to her on the bed.

XUAN
He worked at the embassy for some time, and I remember him telling your mother and I that he was being recruited by the Americans for a secret operation. He couldn't tell us anything about it or where he would be. After he left, we never heard from him. That was two years ago.

My Le simply rolls over and takes comfort with the bedding. Her eyes display the pain within.

MY LE
I remember him. I see him in my dreams...smoking his cigarettes, arguing with mom...fishing...the sand and ocean...we were a family.

My Le begins to sob.

XUAN
We are still a family.
(beat)
Your father is a strong man and he loves you very much. I know he would much rather be here with you now. Give it some time. The war is not over.

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - DAY

SUPER - "1972"

My Le is twelve now. She sits at a dilapidated wooden desk amongst her classmates and listens to a lecture from her teacher, MR. PHAM.

The school bell RINGS. My Le rushes out of the school house.

OUTSIDE SCHOOL

My Le is confronted by a few CLASSMATES.

CLASSMATE ONE
Where are you going, My Le?

MY LE
To the Library.

CLASSMATE ONE
Why don't you come with us?

MY LE
I have to study.

The classmates share a laugh. CLASSMATE ONE looks at My Le's books. She snatches them from her grasp.

CLASSMATE ONE
What is this?

She reads the covers and shares with the others. They laugh at her.

CLASSMATE ONE (CONT'D)
English? Why do you need that?

CLASSMATE TWO
Maybe her daddy is an American and she can't understand him!

CLASSMATE ONE
And this one, "Survival Skills and Tactics."

The classmates laugh. Continue to taunt.

My Le snatches the books back.

MY LE
Back off!

My Le walks away. The others watch curiously.

EXT. MY LE'S GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE - EVENING

A full moon hangs majestically over the house.

My Le stands before a healthy papaya tree in the far corner of the back yard.

She holds her survival book in one hand and practices some moves pictured within its pages.

Hanging from one of the branches is a dilapidated hand-made frame with a fading picture of her father. She kicks and spins and comes face to face with the photo. She stares at it.

MY LE
(whispering)
Come back, papa.

Xuan walks out with two bowls, takes a seat at a table.

XUAN
Time to eat, small one. Bring me
the papaya so I can cut them up.

My Le breaks her trance then picks two of the fruit.

My Le sets the papaya and book on the table and takes a seat. Xuan begins cutting.

My Le has already begun piling food into her mouth.

XUAN (CONT'D)
Slow down, try to taste it first.
Are you listening?

MY LE
You always told me, "A hungry belly
has no ears."

XUAN
Sometimes I really worry about you.

MY LE
You said it wasn't healthy to
worry.

XUAN
(regarding the book)
So much your father...in more ways
than one. You read and practice...I
just hope you don't need it.

MY LE
(beat)
Grandma, why am I different?

XUAN
Different?

MY LE
I get teased. I have no friends.

XUAN
You have no brothers or sisters,
and that is rare in this country.
Kids just don't understand the
virtues of being an only child.

MY LE
Virtues?

XUAN
Benefits. Good things. You have an
inner strength that they don't. You
are a free spirit, independent, and
they hate that.

MY LE
Why no brothers or sisters for me?

XUAN
Your parents wanted a big
family...but it wasn't in God's
plan.

My Le stops eating, looks into her grandmother's eyes.

MY LE
I wonder if God even has a plan.

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - DAY

SUPER - "APRIL 30TH, 1975 - THE FALL OF SAIGON"

Fifteen year-old My Le sits in class. He TEACHER, Mr. Pham,
goes over Vietnam history.

PHAM
...My Tho was under Cambodian rule
until around the seventeenth
century. After that time, the
Nguyen Lords...

Mr. Pham is interrupted by the sound of VIETCONG storming the
hallways.

The students are startled.

PHAM
Don't be afraid. Stay seated
please.

Some students stand and move to the back of the room.

Two VIETCONG soldiers enter the room. A higher ranking OFFICER follows behind.

OFFICER
The school is closed. Everyone out.
(to his soldiers)
Burn it.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE

The class has gathered outside. The school begins to burn. The students watch horrified.

Mr. Pham has words with the soldiers.

The soldiers then bind his hands and take him away.

MY LE
Wait! Where are you taking him?

The soldiers raise their guns, point them at My Le.

Mr. Pham turns and shakes his head no.

The officer approaches her.

OFFICER
He's an enemy combatant. You wish
to join him?

My Le grimaces.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
Go home, all of you, while you
still have homes to go to.

Pham bows his head as he's taken away.

The students cry as their school becomes a raging inferno.

EXT. MY LE'S GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE - DAY

PEOPLE litter the street, they carry what they can from place to place. THE FALL has caused chaos is everywhere.

My Le approaches the house, she is met by her NEIGHBOR, ANH TRAN, pre-teen daughter of MR. AND MRS. TRAN.

ANH

Hi, My Le. Not to worry you but my
papa took your grandmother to the
hospital.

MY LE

Hospital? Why?

ANH

Her chest hurt...

My Le runs into the house, puts her things down, rushes back
outside. She hops on her scooter and tears away.

INT. HOSPITAL - LOBBY - DAY

My Le bolts inside the lobby. MR. TRAN, her well-dressed
middle class neighbor, stops her at the reception counter.

MR. TRAN

My Le, it's okay! She wasn't
feeling well so she asked me to
bring her in.

MY LE

Where is she?

MR. TRAN

Resting. They gave her some
medication to relax her.

MY LE

I want to see her.

MR. TRAN

I don't think...

My Le tears away, approaches the reception counter. She
addresses the NURSE.

MY LE

Where is my grandmother? I need to
see her.

NURSE

Calm down...tell me her name.

Mr. Tran approaches the counter.

MR. TRAN

She's with me.

NURSE

I see. Mrs. Nguyen is fine now...resting. You can go in, but don't disturb the others.

MR. TRAN

Left hallway. I'll stay here.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM

My Le walks into the populated hospital room. Her grandmother lies in a bed at the other end of the room, asleep.

My Le quietly approaches. A single tear drops from her cheek.

At bedside, she stares at the many lines and wrinkles painted on her grandmother's face. She grabs her hand and holds it.

Xuan awakens. She focuses on the face staring back at her.

XUAN

Small One?

MY LE

You're okay.

XUAN

You shouldn't have come, child.
It's only gas.

My Le fights the urge to giggle.

MY LE

Can't fool me, grandmother.

XUAN

They are going to release me back into the wild tomorrow.

MY LE

You have to slow down, or you're going to work yourself to death taking care of me.

Xuan begins caressing My Le's hand.

XUAN

Then I will die a happy woman...

My Le leans over, gives her grandmother a tearful hug.

MY LE
Grandmother, I need to talk to you
about the Vietcong.

XUAN
I've been told. Saigon has fallen.
It's only a matter of time before
they've taken everything and put us
in reeducation camps.

MY LE
What can we do?

XUAN
You must leave.

MY LE
Me? What about you?

XUAN
I'm afraid not, child.

MY LE
You're all I have. It's just us.

XUAN
I'm too old and broken to make the
trip, you know this.

MY LE
I'm staying then. I will be taking
care of you now.

XUAN
So much your mother...

MY LE
When you are well enough to leave,
I will take you somewhere special.

EXT. BEACH - SUNSET

My Le stands at water's edge. The light ocean breeze streams
through her hair.

She picks up a conch shell, begins prying on it. It breaks
apart and cuts into her palm. She quickly drops the shell.

In the surf, her blood swirls and dilutes.

She clenches her teeth, and presses as hard as she can on the
wound. She's forces out the pain.

Xuan approaches, places her feet next to My Le's.

MY LE
Do you remember coming here with
mother and father?

XUAN
I'll never forget. We couldn't get
you off the beach.

MY LE
I like to imagine each grain of
sand is a person in a much larger
universe. But in this universe,
there is no war, no hunger, no
separation. Everyone is happy. The
beach is life.

They both ponder, looking out over the water.

XUAN
Small one?

MY LE
Yes?

XUAN
I don't want to call you small one
any longer.

MY LE
I don't mind.

XUAN
You are a woman now. I want to call
you granddaughter.

Xuan reaches over and grabs My Le's hand, she holds it
tightly, lovingly.

EXT. STREETS OF MY THO - NIGHT

SUPER - "1978"

A tropical storm has the village immured by rain and wind.

My Le runs down the street, food and supplies in one hand,
hat in the other.

INT. MY LE'S GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE

My Le rushes into the house, slams the door behind, sets the supplies down, tosses her hat.

MY LE
Grandmother? The storm is here,
time to pull the geese in.

No answer from Xuan. My Le walks through the house, wiping her rain-soaked hair from her face.

MY LE (CONT'D)
Grandmother?

My Le looks out of the back door. She sees the geese bathing in puddles of rainwater.

OUTSIDE HOUSE

My Le rushes outside and corrals the geese into a small, wooden hut. She latches the door.

INSIDE HOUSE

She walks through the house, now more soaked than ever.

MY LE (CONT'D)
Grandmother?

BEDROOM

MY LE (CONT'D)
Grandmother, the geese are in now.

She stands at the doorway and wipes her wet hair away.

She approaches the bed. She gives her grandmother a light shake.

MY LE (CONT'D)
Grandm...

She shakes again. Nothing happens. The body remains prone.

MY LE (CONT'D)
Grandmother!

She sits down on the bed, begins to weep.

She pulls the blanket back to reveal her grandmother's body.

There is a parchment neatly rolled and protruding out of her right hand.

My Le pulls it out, unrolls it.

XUAN (V.O.)

My dearest My Le. I'm so very tired and my body has reached its end. I can feel my soul breaking away from this shell, and I'm hoping this nap is my last--may you find me peacefully asleep. Your father would be proud of you and should you ever reunite with him, I hope you will bury any pain hiding in that heavy heart of yours.

She cries over the letter, tears dropping one by one over the smearing ink.

XUAN (V.O. CONT'D)

I have left you with enough money to get you started. Under my bed sits a small wooden chest given to me by my father...

My Le pulls a woolen blanket up, revealing the chest.

XUAN (V.O. CONT'D)

...inside is your ticket to freedom.

She raises the lid. Inside is a bundle of tightly wrapped rice paper.

She pulls the rice paper out and begins unfolding it. Nestled inside are several foil-thin taels of gold.

XUAN (V.O. CONT'D)

Handle it wisely, granddaughter, there are many who would harm you for it.

She holds the shimmering gold tael up to the candle light.

She places the gold down and resumes with the letter.

XUAN (V.O. CONT'D)

Thank you for taking care of me when I needed it most. You're a guardian angel with your mother's generous spirit. Just remember, there is more to life than suffering...there is you. Love me always, Grandmother.

My Le collapses over the small chest. Her cries, once washed out by the storm outside, now seem to overpower it.

OUTSIDE HOUSE

My Le fights the storm. She carries the small chest to the papaya tree.

She finds a spot underneath and begins digging.

She places the small chest in the hole and covers it back up.

She stares at the small scar in the earth and prays.

Above her, the framed picture of her father swings to near breaking point. She grabs it and pulls the picture out of the frame. She kisses the picture then stows it.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. MY THO CITY - DAY

SUPER - "ONE WEEK LATER"

My Le sits beside the water's edge. Behind her, the dying remains of the My Tho market.

A DIRTY MAN, dressed in seafarer's garb, approaches My Le.

MAN

You have the money?

MY LE

I have it.

MAN

Give me half now. The other half you will give to the captain's associate at the dock.

My Le pulls out a thin sheet of rice paper, hands it to the man.

The man inspects it. Satisfied, he refolds it and places it under his hat. He gives her a sour sneer then leaves.

EXT. DOCK - NIGHT

My Le approaches a small gathering of PEOPLE. There are about thirty or forty people standing next to a small junk.

CAPTAIN

The fee is stated by the Captain.
Hand over your offerings.

Commotion as the people relinquish their gold to the
CAPTAIN'S ASSISTANT.

My Le hands the assistant her gold. The assistant stops her
before she has a chance to board.

ASSISTANT

Wait! Where is the rest?

MY LE

I paid half to your man at the
market yesterday.

ASSISTANT

Man, what man?

The captain shakes his head no to the assistant.

ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

Nice try.

MY LE

I paid! You have to take me!

The assistant shoves My Le back. She falls to the ground.

The assistant unties the mooring line and pushes off. He
laughs at My Le.

ASSISTANT

Sorry, not this time.

The junk moves away.

MY LE

Come back! I can pay you more!

She sees the sad, disparate faces of the refugees as the junk
blends in with the night fog.

My Le dives into the water. She swims toward the junk.

The captain of the junk throttles up, speeds away.

A PATROL BOAT approaches. Nearly runs her over. A bullet
enters the water next to her head.

The boat moves close to her. TWO PATROLMEN reach into the
water and pull her aboard. They throw her to the deck.

ON DECK

PATROLMAN ONE
Trying to escape? What is your
name?!

Me Le remains silent. They kick her.

PATROLMAN TWO
Answer the question!

They yank her up off the deck, patrolman one smacks her
across the face.

PATROLMAN ONE
Your name!

My Le kicks patrolman one in the groin. He recoils.

Patrolman two uses the butt of his gun to knock her out.

INT. JAIL - DAY

My Le sits in a cell full to the brim with TWENTY INMATES.
The floor is dirt, there is a bucket for a toilet. She
sleeps.

The INMATES awaken, an OFFICER kicks a bowls of water and
stale rice into the center of the floor.

The inmates come alive, groping over the water, reaching for
the chunks of rice. My Le remains.

INT. MILITARY OFFICE - MORNING

Morning sun radiates a solid rift of heat through bamboo
shades. It's sweltering, humid, the flies are everywhere.

A VC SOLDIER thrusts her into the room. She falls to her
knees before a higher ranking, power-hungry OFFICER, PHONG
PHAT.

SOLDIER
She will not speak. She has no
identity. She was carrying only
this.

He holds up a soggy knapsack-like bag.

PHONG
Empty it.

The soldier opens it and pulls out some wet food. Disgusted, he lets the food fall to the floor.

He pulls out a picture. It is of My Le and her family. He places it on Phong's desk.

Phong takes a long look at the photo, disregards it, tosses it to the floor before My Le.

Phong removes himself from the comfort of his chair. He approaches My Le with a makeshift pointer in his right hand.

My Le remains hunched over on her knees. Hides her head.

PHONG
(using the pointer)
Look at me.

My Le slowly raises her head.

PHONG (CONT'D)
What is your name?

My Le remains silent, sullen, withdrawn.

Phong taps the pointer forcibly on the top of her head.

PHONG (CONT'D)
Your name!

Shocked and scared, My Le stammers but manages a firm reply.

MY LE
My Le Nguyen.

PHONG
Is that your family in the picture?

MY LE
Yes.

PHONG
They fled and left you behind?

MY LE
No, they are gone...dead.

Phong chuckles.

PHONG
I don't believe you.

MY LE

The war has taken my family. I am
the last.

Phong paces.

PHONG

How do I know you're not lying and
they're waiting for you at another
dock...ready to sail away to
paradise?

Phong tucks the pointer under his arm, kneels before her and
lifts her chin up with his free hand.

She is repulsed by him and his imposing hot breath.

PHONG (CONT'D)

You will help our cause and you
will be proud to do it. That is
your life now.

Phong stands and retreats to the comfort of his desk.

PHONG (CONT'D)

You'll work the plantation and make
yourself useful. Your refusal will
result in a sentence far more
brutal than incarceration in my
prison.

He leans forward in his chair, smacks the pointer on the desk
forcibly.

PHONG (CONT'D)

Do you understand!?

My Le manages a slow nod. She reaches for the wet picture.

PHONG (CONT'D)

Take her away.

EXT. VIETNAM - RICE FIELD - DAY

My Le is hunched over, picking rice, placing it in satchels.

ARMED SOLDIERS patrol the workforce.

A SHIRTLESS FARMHAND with more gums than teeth approaches
with an ox and cart. He stops next to My Le.

FARMHAND

Load up.

My Le carries her load to the cart, tosses them inside.

The farmhand stops her as she passes back by. He grabs her by the arm, whispers into her ear.

FARMHAND (CONT'D)

I might be able to help you out.

MY LE

Let go of my arm.

FARMHAND

I can help you escape.

MY LE

I don't need your help.

She tears away from his grasp.

FARMHAND

Look at you. You won't last here and you certainly won't make it out on your own.

MY LE

I will manage.

He moves her out of view of one of the soldiers.

FARMHAND

Do you want to be like them? Spend the rest of your life here?

MY LE

Why do you care?

FARMHAND

I am well liked, I could get you special privileges here. I can help you escape...that is if you're willing to help me out too.

MY LE

Help you?

FARMHAND

One night. That's all. I'm a lonely man.

Aggravated, she pushes him in the chest. He falls into the mucky water and stirs up a noticeable splash.

TWO GUARDS take notice and rush over to the cart.

The man gets up and stands embarrassed, angered, and wet.

GUARD ONE
Why aren't you working?

FARMHAND
I slipped and fell.

My Le returns to the job at hand.

INT. HUT - NIGHT

My Le lies in her bed, staring at the thatch roof above.

There is a RUSTLING SOUND outside the hut.

My Le gets out of her bunk. She gathers her shoes and puts them on. She places her pillow under the blanket and disappears into the darkness.

The farmhand pokes his head inside the hut.

Under the moonlight, the farmhand slowly creeps inside.

He approaches My Le's bunk, pulls the blanket back and sees the pillow.

Out of the darkness, My Le runs across the room and kicks him into the bamboo wall.

OUTSIDE HUT

My Le runs from the hut and into the dark jungle.

The farmhand stands at the doorway, holding his head, SCREAMING of her escape.

FARMHAND
Guard! She's escaping! Guard! There
is an escape!

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

My Le runs as fast as she can into the darkened jungle. The jungle opens up for her. She continues well beyond the farm.

She stops near a large tree, catches her breath. Exhausted, she sits against the tree and passes out.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. JUNGLE - MORNING

My Le awakens, rubs her face, looks up at the arm-like limbs which seem to reach out to her.

She brushes the debris from her clothing and smacks at the bugs crawling on her arms and neck.

There is a smoky blanket of stagnant air present. She sniffs, looks in the direction of the source, begins to walk.

ENCAMPMENT - MORNING

She approaches a campfire, cautiously squats next to it.

There is a CLICK. A gun barrel is placed into her neck.

MAN

Turn around. Slow.

My Le turns slowly. The gun remains on her head.

She sees a dirty VIETNAMESE MAN with very few teeth, a long grey beard, and a soldier's cap. He stinks of filth.

MY LE

I mean no harm. I'm just warming myself.

MAN

Where did you come from?

MY LE

A plantation nearby.

MAN

Which plantation? There are many.

MY LE

Hom Kieu.

The man lowers the rifle. He smiles.

MAN

Congratulations.

MY LE

Huh?

MAN

You have traveled far. You are safe now.

The man gathers some of the wood around the fire and throws it on top.

MAN (CONT'D)
They won't come for you here. You are young and they are lazy.

MY LE
What is your name?

The man squats down next to the fire.

MAN
Oh, no, no, no, no. No names.

MY LE
I understand.
(beat)
You have been here a while?

MAN
A while...probably. But who knows?

The man stands and faces My Le.

MAN (CONT'D)
Would you like some food?

MY LE
Thank you. But I prefer to take something with me.

MAN
I see. Stay here.

He walks bow-legged and semi-hunched over toward his bedding.

He returns with a wadded up shirt.

He presents it to her, opens it, inside is an old compass, a few pairs of dog tags, a match holder, a few pieces of jewelry and some face paint.

MAN (CONT'D)
Where are you headed?

MY LE
My Tho City.

MAN
Take this.

He pulls the dilapidated compass and a plastic match holder out of the wadded up shirt.

She takes the compass and matches.

MAN (CONT'D)

My Tho is southeast, I believe.
Stay low in the brush, and watch
out for roving patrols near the
farms.

MY LE

I will, thank you. What about the
food?

MAN

Food...yes.

The man walks over to his bedding and returns a moment later
with a handful of bundled leaves and a small canteen of
water.

MAN (CONT'D)

Rice. Unfold it and eat it. The
water won't last long so sip it.
You're very close so you shouldn't
need too much food.

MY LE

Thank you, sir.

MAN

Will you be staying long?

MY LE

I know I have troubled you, but I
need to keep moving.

MAN

Your eyes tell me you have a great
passion for what lies beyond those
trees.

My Le nods, looks at the compass, then at the jungle before
her.

MY LE

Thank you.

She begins walking.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

There is a RUSTLING of bushes, the CRUNCH of a light step. My
Le approaches the cave entrance.

She strikes a match and pokes her head inside.

Striking another match, she lights a twig. It ignites and soon she has a camp fire.

She opens the canteen and takes a small drink. She sits back against the cave wall and takes off her shoe.

She pulls out the wrinkled picture of her family and stares at it under the glow of the campfire. She presses the picture to her forehead and closes her eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BEACH - DAY - FLASHBACK

She is six or seven and My Le stands at water's edge with her father. He throws a baited fishing line into the water, hands her the line.

Her mother and grandmother sit in the sand behind them, peeling lychee fruit.

MY LE

Papa, I got a fish! I got a fish!

NAM

Pull it in slow...here, let me help you.

They work together to land the creature. It turns out to be a crab.

NAM

Wow, he's a big one.

MY LE

Yummy! I love crab!

Nam tosses the crab to Xuan and Lan, smiles, then re-baits My Le's hook.

He hands her the crude line and she tosses into the water.

The moment SLOWS, the sound of My Le laughing, giggling and having fun with her father intensifies then...

CUT TO:

INT. CAVE - MORNING

...the THROATY CAWING sound of an unseen jungle creature.

My Le awakens, rubs her eyes, looks at the dead campfire.

She pulls out her canteen and searches for one last drop of water.

She finds her family picture on the ground, looks at it briefly then puts it in her pack.

EXT. JUNGLE - MORNING

My Le EXITS the cave and begins walking into the jungle.

EXT. MY THO OUTSKIRTS - CEMETERY - DAY

An ancient cemetery, crowded with decaying headstones. The faded epitaphs are barely readable.

Covered in bug bites and exhausted, she approaches quietly.

She walks deep into the cemetery and stops before two headstones. They bear the name of Xuan, her grandmother and Lan, her mother.

She kneels before the headstones. She lowers herself, the headstones RISE INTO VIEW.

She pulls out her family picture.

Weeping now, she places it between the two headstones.

MY LE

Please forgive me for what I'm
about to do, but I will not give up
until I have found papa. I love you
both.

My Le bows her head and remains put.

INT. TRAN HOUSE - EVENING

The TRAN FAMILY, a middle-class ensemble of four, sit quietly in the living room. Their living conditions and clothing after the fall show no signs of prosperity.

There is a KNOCK at the door.

MR. TRAN gestures for Anh, his daughter, to answer. Her younger brother, LINH, reads a book.

MRS. TRAN and Anh walk to the door. Anh opens. There stands My Le, dirty, tired.

ANH

My Le!

Anh and Mrs. Tran greet her at the door.

MRS. TRAN pulls My Le into the house like a worried mother.

MRS. TRAN

Oh, my! My Le, you're ragged. Anh,
make a spot for My Le.

MR. TRAN

She can have my spot.

They escort her in and set her down on Mr. Tran's favorite chair.

TRAN HOUSE - KITCHEN

My Le sits at the table in fresh clothes. She tells the family her story over a fresh bowl of pho.

MY LE

I need to find my father.

MRS. TRAN

Not a good idea.

MR. TRAN

There is danger everywhere.

MY LE

I'm not afraid.

Mr. Tran stands and paces the kitchen.

MRS. TRAN

Papa...you know better. She's safer
here with us.

MR. TRAN

Safer, but not at all content.

MRS. TRAN

Papa...

MR. TRAN

Your father may be in America.

MY LE

How do you know?

MR. TRAN

We found this in your grandmother's mail not long after she passed. I'm afraid there was no return address.

He hands her a letter. She opens it. Reads it quickly.

MY LE

He's safe in a camp...but that is all. It only says he's trying to convince the UNHCF to send him to America.

MR. TRAN

He could be anywhere by now.

My Le shoves the bowl aside, stands up.

MY LE

Then you must help me!

MRS. TRAN

Papa...

MR. TRAN

(beat)

I know some...people. They are good people. There is a boat leaving in three days but...

MY LE

But what?

MRS. TRAN

Papa...you know this is wrong.

Mr. Tran sits back down and faces My Le.

MR. TRAN

Quiet, mama!

(beat)

At least we can help her make it to the right boat this time.

My Le grabs Mrs. Tran's hand, kneels before her. Their eyes meet.

MRS. TRAN

She will need gold. We don't have that much to spare.

MY LE

I have some, but not enough.

MR. TRAN

I will make room for you on that boat. I hope God forgives us for what we're about to do.

MY LE

Thank you. I will not forget your generosity, nor will God.

EXT. MY LE'S GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE - MORNING

My Le stands before the Papaya tree. The morning sun pokes through its branches, tickles her hair.

She kneels and begins digging frantically with her bare hands. Soon the top of the chest becomes visible.

She picks it up out of the hole, brushes the dirt away. She stares at it for a moment before prying the lid open.

The last tael of gold. She removes it, presses it firmly on her lips, closes her eyes.

MY LE

Thank you, grandmother.

She turns to walk away but sees one papaya hanging near her. She picks it, smells it, stows it in her bag.

INT. BUS - SUNSET

My Le sits in a crowded bus full of Vietnamese WORKERS. She has fresh clothes, a fresh face, but tries to hide her fear.

MR. TRAN(V.O.)

Take the commuter bus out of My Tho to Den To. Outside of Den To, there is a road called Ba Mui Oi road. Take it all the way to Tram Xang...

She stares out of the window, daydreams.

TIME TRANSITION - In and out of the bus as it covers the landscape, making stops, letting off passengers.

INSIDE BUS - ON MY LE

My Le looks down the aisle of the bus and out of the windshield as it comes to the last stop.

EXT. TRAM XANG - NIGHT

My Le steps out with a small pack strapped to her back. The driver closes the door and speeds off.

MR. TRAN(V.O. CONT'D)
Once in Tram Xang, walk about one
kilometer to the water...

My Le hikes down the dark road. Behind her a couple of lights from the small town.

MR. TRAN(V.O. CONT'D)
Stay near the road but keep an eye
out for patrols. Before you know
it, you will be at the river. There
will be only one boat and a small
crowd...

AT RIVER'S EDGE

My Le approaches the river's edge cautiously.

Sitting before her, a small junk measuring ten meters.

A gathering of thirty REFUGEES stand near the boat while others board.

MR. TRAN(V.O. CONT'D)
The boat captain is an old friend.
He will be expecting you. Good
luck, My Le, and God bless. We hope
you reach your father safely.

AT BOAT

My Le approaches cautiously. She doesn't recognize anyone in the group.

Refugees hold suitcases, belongings, useless items.

The BOAT CAPTAIN and his WIFE, both weathered and wrinkled from years on the boat. He holds a flashlight, frantically gives instructions for boarding as his wife takes the offerings.

CAPTAIN
Board quickly please. Leave all
large objects behind! There is no
room for suitcases and luggage!

My Le waits in line. In front of her, a WOMAN holds a sleeping BABY. My Le stares emphatically at the baby.

The Captain rips the bags from some of the refugees, tosses them aside.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
No room for this on the boat! Keep moving, that's it, come on...

My Le approaches the Captain's wife.

She hands her the offering.

CAPTAIN'S WIFE
You must be My Le?

MY LE
I am.

CAPTAIN'S WIFE
Tran said you would come alone. You can be part of our family for now.

The wife takes the offering and stacks it in her hand with the others.

MY LE
Thank you.

CAPTAIN
She is the last?

CAPTAIN'S WIFE
She is.

ON BOAT

The boat, or junk, is a converted and hollowed-out fishing boat. It has a small console or helm and a less than spacious deck and semi-open bilge.

My Le boards and squeezes in near the back.

The captain starts the motor and puts the boat in motion.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT)
I was now officially a refugee, and like many before me, my fate rested in the hands of strangers and the foreboding waters.

The evening moon glow shimmers over calm waters as the boat departs.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)
 I had heard the stories of what
 lies ahead in the South China
 Sea...but I had no idea it would be
 so bad.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

SUPER - "DAY ONE"

The ocean is massive, uninviting. My Le hangs her head over the edge of the boat and vomits.

My Le is pale, sweaty, tired. She lets an arm dangle in the water then wipes her mouth clean.

She glances across the cramped boat. Everyone is sick.

She takes a small rice paper-wrapped lemon half out of her pack. She sticks it in her mouth and sucks the juice from its core.

Next to her, a YOUNG WOMAN nurses an eight month-old BABY, their eyes meet.

MY LE
 What is your child's name?

TRAN
 Liem. After his grandfather.

MY LE
 Liem. I like that name.

A MAN near My Le stands and pees over the side of the rocking boat. He nearly falls overboard.

MY LE (CONT'D)
 I am My Le.

TRAN
 Tran.

MY LE
 You have a beautiful baby, Tran.

TRAN
 Thank you.

MY LE

His father is not with you?

TRAN

He had to leave before us. He waits now at a camp in Galang.

MY LE

I'm sure he can't wait see you both.

TRAN

It's been six months and we haven't heard from him. We can only hope at this point.

(beat)

I'm feeling very ill right now, My Le. I'm sorry, but I need to rest.

Tran leans back against the boat and cradles her son. She falls fast asleep.

My Le stares into the faces of mother and child.

The Captain's Wife stands at the bow, makes an announcement to the group.

CAPTAIN'S WIFE

The boat does not have a toilet. We ask that the women come to the bow to relieve themselves. We have a large blanket for privacy.

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

SUPER - "DAY THREE"

It's scorchingly humid. Black clouds above cast a late afternoon darkness over the water.

The boat motors slowly through light ocean swells. Everyone is sick, hungry, parched.

INSIDE BOAT

My Le walks between the huddled group. She makes her way toward the captain's helm.

There is a barrel between the helm and the bow. She approaches the captain.

MY LE

May I have some water please?

CAPTAIN
Can you hold out?

MY LE
I have held out more than the
others. You know this.

The captain takes a small cup and dips it deep into the barrel. He hands her the cup.

My Le drinks the paltry serving of water and hands him the cup. We see that she does not swallow all of the water.

BACK OF BOAT

My Le sits in her spot next Tran.

Tran tries to breast feed but she's unable. Liem is crying.

My Le takes a hardened rice lump and places it in her hand. She spits the water onto the rice, forms it with her hands.

MY LE
Here, give this to Liem.

She hands Tran the softened rice ball. Tran Feeds Liem.

TRAN
How old are you, My Le?

MY LE
Eighteen.

TRAN
Try not to look eighteen out here.

She nods then pulls the papaya out of her pack. She tries to hide it, showing only Tran.

MY LE
Take this for yourself. Eat what
you can.

TRAN
Where did you get it?

MY LE
I grew it.

TRAN
I can't, it's yours and...

MY LE
 Eat it. Leave nothing behind. You
 need to provide for Liem.

Tran takes the papaya, bites into it. They eat in secrecy.

TRAN
 Thank you. That was kind of you.

There is a quiet exchange of appreciation as they eat.

MY LE
 I think our captain is lost.

TRAN
 I have wondered myself.

MY LE
 He had the look of worry.

TRAN
 We must pray then.

My Le gazes back down over the deck. She sees another REFUGEE
 dry heaving as he lies half-asleep.

Yet another REFUGEE is curled up in a ball and MANY MORE lie
 about sick, filthy and anemic.

Tran looks curiously at My Le as she stares into the
 distance.

TRAN (CONT'D)
 You are alone.

MY LE
 Yes.

TRAN
 You have no family?

MY LE
 That's right, how can you tell?

TRAN
 You haven't spoken of a single
 family member.

MY LE
 It's true, they are gone.

My Le sighs then pulls out her family picture. Shows Tran.

TRAN

That's okay, you don't--

MY LE

--my mother was killed in a firefight near my house when I was ten. My father disappeared during the war with no trace, and I lost my grandmother recently to old age. I am the last.

TRAN

No brothers or sisters?

MY LE

No. We were a family of only's.

TRAN

I see something else in those beautiful eyes of yours...but I can't quite place it.

MY LE

I haven't gotten over the loss. That is what you see.

Tran nods, remains quiet after that.

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

SUPER - "DAY SIX"

The oceans are unrelenting. Huge swells engulf the boat.

ON BOAT

Refugees hang on for their lives. Water consumes the boat.

The storm grabs the boat, tosses it about. Refugees are thrown across the deck.

They help each other up, struggle to hold on to whatever they can.

My Le approaches Tran, fights her way across the slippery deck.

Tran is holding on for dear life. Liem is not visible.

MY LE

Liem! Where is Liem!?

TRAN
I lost him! Help me! Help me,
please!

My Le looks frantically around the deck.

She sees Liem's blanket near the edge of the bilge.

She slides across deck and peers into the compartment.

POV - MY LE - Liem floats face down in the watery compartment.

My Le jumps inside.

INSIDE BILGE

It's cramped and flooded. She sees Liem floating haplessly, tossing about with each rock of the boat.

She grabs Liem and turns him over quickly.

MY LE
Liem! Liem!

She wipes the water away from his face and opens his mouth.

A wave POUNDS the boat, sending her under water with Liem.

She comes back up and is disoriented, yet she still has Liem.

MY LE (CONT'D)
Please! Please! Liem!

She makes several attempts to resuscitate. The boat continues to toss.

Liem chokes and coughs to consciousness. Relieved, she kisses his forehead and cries out her satisfaction.

MY LE (CONT'D)
Yes! Yes! You're alive,
Liem...breathe! That's
it...breathe!

Liem belts out a cry.

ON BOAT

My Le pulls herself out of the compartment with one arm. She has Liem tucked tight with the other.

She stumbles across the pitching deck and meets up with Tran who is barely conscious.

MY LE
 Tran. Wake up. I have Liem. Take
 him. Take him.

She places Liem in Tran's arms, huddles against them both.

The storm continues, the pounding of the ocean continues. We
 FADE OUT of the storm and into...

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

...a dead calm.

SUPER - "DAY EIGHT"

The humidity and blistering sun consume the boat.

ON BOAT - PORT SIDE

There is commotion near the side of the boat.

The captain helps an older MAN. He clutches the dead body of
 his WIFE.

The man will not let go, he insists on holding her limp body.

CAPTAIN
 You must let her go. She is gone.

MAN
 N...noo...sh...sh, she stays w-with
 me. Please God, please God...

The captain pries the man's hands from his wife. He rests her
 body against the gunwale of the boat.

The captain asks a YOUNGER MAN close by for help.

CAPTAIN
 You look well. Give me a hand with
 her.

The young man approaches the woman's body.

Once again, the husband clutches her body, groping, clinging.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
 Sir, let go. She's gone.

MAN
 Please God, please God!

The Captain pushes the man away. The Captain and young man wrap the woman in a blanket.

They both lift, slowly raising the body to the edge of the boat.

OUTSIDE BOAT- WATER LEVEL

The woman's body is lowered slowly into the water. Her husband tries to prevent the burial, but finally succumbs, collapsing in exhaustion.

INSIDE BOAT

TRAN

I knew them. They lived near me.

MY LE

I'm sorry.

TRAN

They have been together more than twenty years. I am sorry, too.

(beat)

I've been praying, My Le, but it looks as if we'll be joining her soon.

My Le's eyes are locked on the event port side.

The reflection of a dying boat becomes apparent in each pupil. We CLOSE IN further and TRANSITION to another day.

EXT. OCEAN - DAWN

A blanket of white morning fog drifts over the ocean. The calm water is eerily SILENT.

SUPER - "DAY NINE - THE RAID"

A boat MOTOR becomes audible. The boat trolls INTO FRAME.

My Le opens her eyes, sees the boat moments before it RAMS the refugee boat. Bodies fly, people scream.

The boat, comprised of a eight THAI CREW (PIRATES) wearing sarongs, hold swords and AK-47's.

Startled, My Le begins rubbing dirt, vomit, feces, all over her face and arms. She does the same for Tran while trying to shake her awake.

MY LE
Tran, Tran! Wake up, wake up! We
have to cover our bodies. They
won't touch us if we're filthy.

Tran is out, barely responsive.

TRAN
Where is Liem?

MY LE
He's here. He's here, just hold
him. Come on, Tran. We're being
boarded. You need to help me!

TRAN
(groggy)
I...can't...take care of Liem. Take
him to his father...

My Le shakes her as she trails off.

MY LE
Tran. Tran!

The pirates are positioned at all corners of the boat,
watching, smoking...scanning eagerly. Pure evil incarnate.

The DRIVER powers down the motor and lets the boat drift.

Three THAI PIRATES rush to the bow.

They pull the refugee boat close and tie up.

The men and their driver stand fast with guns.

DRIVER
(subtitled Thai)
Fresh meat.

The driver walks through the filth on the decaying vessel,
peering down at the dismal faces of the refugees.

The captain peers up and sees the man standing before him.

The driver stares at the blisters and bumps on the captain's
unshaven face.

CAPTAIN
(delirious)
You have come to help us?

The driver laughs and turns away from the captain. He
whistles at his crew to join.

The three men jump onto the refugee boat and approach the driver.

DRIVER
(subtitled Thai)
They still have their belongings.
Take it all. Throw the dying over
then bring the men forward and
strip them down.

My Le sits and hides her face between her knees.

The pirates begin searching. They rip the only belongings from the weakened refugees. There is crying, screaming.

The pirates come across a body of an OLDER MAN. They give him a kick, but he only moves a little.

They pick him up and throw him over.

The women who remain alive sob their last bit of energy away.

My Le reaches into her small pack and pulls out two small balls of hardened rice and a dried lemon peel.

She stuffs it all into her mouth and swallows.

Tran is barely coherent. Liem cries as he slowly falls out of her arms.

My Le grabs the baby from her arms and holds it tight against her chest. Tran's body slumps, limp, ragged, lifeless.

MY LE
Tran!

My Le cups her mouth to hold back a cry.

FRONT OF BOAT

The driver fires his gun into the water barrel. It is empty.

He grabs the captain up off his console and turns him around face down. He places the rifle in the back of his head.

DRIVER
(subtitled Thai)
Gold?

The Captain can only moan.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
(subtitled Thai)
Last chance...

Still no response.

The driver lowers the gun and fires it into the captain's right leg.

He collapses to the deck.

The captain's wife SCREAMS and throws herself at the driver.

The driver points the gun at her and fires. She falls dead in front of her husband.

Grief-stricken, the captain submits.

CAPTAIN
G-g-gold. We have...g-g-gold.

The driver relaxes his grip on the gun, smiles.

The captain uses his last bit of energy to reach out for the gun and swing at the driver. He misses.

The driver pushes the captain to the deck, steps on his wounded leg. He puts the gun to the captain's head. Spares him.

All hell breaks loose. The pirates tear up the boat, ripping the belongings from the refugees, firing their guns into the engine bay.

The pirates gather the men together and stand them in a row. They have stripped them of their clothes.

The driver approaches the first refugee.

DRIVER
(subtitled Thai)
Open your mouth.

He inspects then moves on to the next refugee.

DRIVER
(subtitled Thai)
Open...

The driver signals one of the pirates to hold the refugee's hands tight.

The driver uses a pair of pliers to pull out a gold tooth. The refugee struggles, blood pours from his mouth.

My Le cowers back with Liem in her arms. She watches helplessly as the process repeats itself.

Tran is shaken by the Bow Man but doesn't respond.

She is taken from the deck by the Bow Man and thrown overboard.

My Le begins to tremble uncontrollably as Tran's face slowly disappears over the edge of the boat.

The Bow Man grabs My Le by the arm and stands her up. He shakes his head.

BOW MAN
(subtitled Thai)
We'll just have to hose you down,
make you pretty again.

MY LE
Don't hurt my baby...please!

The Bow Man takes the baby from My Le. He cradles it in his arms teasingly.

BOW MAN
(subtitled Thai)
Tiny baby. He is not yours though.

He grabs My Le by the arm and escorts her across the deck.

He approaches pirate two.

BOW MAN (CONT'D)
(subtitled Thai)
I won't be long with her.

PIRATE TWO
(subtitled Thai)
I'm next, right?

BOW MAN
(subtitled Thai)
Looks like there's enough to go
around. Call the others on the
radio.

ON PIRATE BOAT

The Bow Man pushes her onto the boat. She stands there, frightened, shivering.

Pirate two begins hosing her down, washing the filth away. My Le covers her face. He slaps her hands away, sprays her face, wipes away more dirt.

He shoves her toward the steering console. Through the center is a stairwell into the boat.

BOW MAN
(subtitled Thai)
Inside.

INSIDE SLEEPING QUARTERS

The Bow Man pushes My Le into the small room. She stands there as he places the child on an opposite bunk.

My Le presses her lips together.

The Bow Man pulls a crude wooden door shut on the stair entrance. The room becomes as dark as My Le's situation.

ON REFUGEE BOAT

The group of pirates pull the rings and jewelry off the dead and dying. They pocket everything of value no matter how small. More crying and struggling.

OUTSIDE BOAT

A second THAI FISHING BOAT approaches. Seven or eight more PIRATES board the two boats.

There is a reunion of sorts, a pass-down of information between pirates. The new pirates are eager, hungry, excited.

ON PIRATE BOAT

The LEAD PIRATE from the new boat walks to the lower hold of the first pirate boat. He bangs on the door.

Outside the door, we hear the sound of Liem crying.

LEAD
(subtitled Thai)
Save some for us, brother!

INSIDE SLEEPING QUARTERS

We CLOSE IN on Liem as he CRIES amidst the unrelenting physical exploitation on My Le.

On the bunk wall, a faint shadow of the act, brutal and without compunction. Liem's CRIES become louder and louder, blending in with the painful CRIES from all around.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. REFUGEE BOAT - MORNING

The boat is in shambles. The pirates have left nothing.

SUPER - "DAY ELEVEN"

My Le lies asleep on the deck of the boat, Liem pressed close. Her face rests on the dirty planks. A single drop of rain impacts her cheek, then another, and yet another.

The deluge begins.

My Le removes her torn, rain-soaked shirt, wrings the water into Liem's mouth.

She gets up and crawls toward the bow of the boat. Many are holding up bowls, containers, to capture the rain.

She passes by the remaining survivors. Children moan the words, "mum, mum, mum" indicating they are hungry.

She approaches the water barrel near the bow and stares at it's bullet-ridden shell.

She grabs hold of it and drags it into the rain.

As she peers inside, she sees the sparkling reflection of the gold tael foil resting in its bottom.

She pulls a handful of gold out and stares at it. She rears back as if to throw it overboard.

A hand reaches out and grabs her, stopping the throw.

A MAN, the husband of the first dying woman, stands behind her.

MAN

Our...gold. Why would you throw it over?

MY LE

It has no value. It's blood money.

MAN

Is it blood money if it can save just one of us?

She ponders.

MY LE

If it is here, it can betray us.

MAN

You overestimate the intelligence
of the pirates. Now leave it in the
barrel and let it catch this rain.

She places the gold back inside then drags the barrel to a
more open area of the boat.

The rain pours in. It fills the barrel to the first bullet
hole and begins to leak out.

She signals the others to take advantage of the trickle.

MY LE

Water! We have water! Hurry, take
all you can!

The remaining refugees get up and grab any and all containers
they can muster. They find plastic tarps and spread them out
over the surface of the boat.

The barrel spits out the rain water in small, steady streams.

The thirsty savor the taste of the water, pushing, shoving,
groping for the clear survival potion.

As time passes, the deluge turns into torrential rainfall.
The boat begins to fill up quickly.

CAPTAIN

God has given us more than we need,
my friends. We have to remove the
water or we'll capsize!

The refugees look at him curiously, hesitantly.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

I know you're all thirsty, but you
must do this now or we'll sink!
Come on! Move it! Move it!

The refugees begin bailing the water. Many cry as they do so,
and many are unable to move at all.

But they are not fast enough. The boat continues to fill.

My Le helps bail water whilst holding Liem with one arm. She
pauses and looks up at the sky.

MY LE

Please, God, have we not been
tested enough? Is this how you will
have us die?

There is a BEAT, then the skies relent and the rain subsides.
There is relief amongst the refugees.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

SUPER - "DAY THIRTEEN"

There is commotion. The refugees hear the captain SHOUTING.

They lift their heads, look out over the water and see an island. There are other boats nearby.

My Le walks to the front of the boat, approaches the captain.

MY LE

An island?

CAPTAIN

Yes, and there are others.

The captain steers the boat toward the island. Two boats near the shore head toward the refugees.

MY LE

Look, here they come. Oh, thank God, they're going to help us!

The remaining refugees approach the bow, there is hope in their eyes.

The captain presses on, the refugees rejoice.

There is a WHIZZING sound, a ricochet, near My Le's head. Then another, and yet another. A bullet splinters the helm, rounds pierce the water.

CAPTAIN

Get down! They're firing at us!

The refugees cover their heads and fall to the deck in near panic.

The two boats approach, one gets close enough for communication.

The captain remains at his console, hands in the air. A Malaysian BOAT OFFICER addresses the refugees.

BOAT OFFICER

You can't dock here. The camp is full.

CAPTAIN

We need food...water. We're dying.

BOAT OFFICER

We'll tow you out. You'll have to find another island.

My Le approaches the gunwale with Liem in her arms.

MY LE

We need food and water! Please help us! There are babies...children. They will die soon if you don't help!

The boat officer ignores her, turns his back.

My Le hands Liem off to the captain then jumps from her boat to the patrol boat.

The officers immediately apprehend her.

MY LE (CONT'D)

Heathens! We just need food and water! Tow us out if you must, but give us something to eat!

The boat officer looks deep into her eyes then converses with his crew.

They toss a few scraps of food and some water over to the refugee boat.

The refugees scramble to pick up the food and water.

Another CREWMAN ties a line from the Malaysian boat to the refugee boat.

The boat officer's crew releases My Le and hands her some additional food and water.

BOAT OFFICER

Keep sailing, there are many islands nearby.

My Le holds the supplies in hand and makes her way back to her boat, retrieves Liem.

The patrolman begin pulling the refugees out to sea.

INT. REFUGEE BOAT - NIGHT

My Le lies on the deck of the boat. Liem sleeps quietly on her chest. She looks up at the stars, reaches out to them, twirls her palms.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT)

The stars above reminded me of the endless grains of sand on my favorite beach. So far apart from one another, yet so close in meaning to me. This journey across the borders, this "vuot bien" as we called it, gave me some quiet moments which allowed me to pray and to reflect.

My Le strokes Liem's dark baby hair. She kisses his head, rubs his back.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)

I had grown fond of Liem and were it not for him, I don't know how I would have coped. Caring for him occupied my time and kept me from toiling over the events before. He gave me further purpose. He kept me sane.

Night MORPHS into morning. The sunrise casts a golden glow on the horizon.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)

For the others, the journey had taken its toll, only fifteen of the original thirty remained. We were barely alive and had given up hope...but then our luck changed for the better. Was God listening?

EXT. REFUGEE BOAT - MORNING

There is a THUD, the boat is impacted by another. The refugees are met by TWO VIET MEN.

VIET MAN ONE

We're here to help! Attach this rope and we'll pull you in!

The refugees come alive. The captain takes the line and attaches it.

CAPTAIN
Finally, some friendly faces!

The captain and the others take a deep breath, smiles appear.

My Le stands with Liem in her arms, she approaches the bow and looks out over the water. An island comes into view.

SUPER - "DAY FIFTEEN - PULAU KUKU, INDONESIA"

EXT. KUKU ISLAND - MORNING

The captain eases off the boat, holds his wounded leg. He reaches down and grabs a handful of sand.

The two boat men and THREE VIETNAMESE walk up to the refugees, offer assistance.

CAPTAIN
Everyone is sick and weak. Please help them off the boat.

The rescuers board, the boat men remain, speak to the captain.

CONG
Welcome to Kuku island, I'm Cong and this is my brother, Le. How long were you at sea?

CAPTAIN
I don't know. A couple of weeks at least.

CONG
You're safe now. We help each other here on the island.

CAPTAIN
We are grateful.

The refugees are helped off the boat. Many are in tears, all are happy to be on solid ground.

My Le helps herself off the boat with Liem in her arms. She sees only trees and makeshift huts. She approaches Le.

MY LE
Where is the camp?

LE
You're looking at it. We are building it ourselves.

MY LE
Building it? With what?

LE
With our hands, young lady. Now
follow the others, we have food and
water in the camp.

My Le walks toward the huts.

CAPTAIN
How many people are here now?

CONG
About one hundred, including your
group. We get more each day.

CAPTAIN
Thank you. I doubt we could have
made it another day.

AT CAMP

The camp is crude, with huts made of old boat lumber, plastic sheeting, tree limbs tarps and palms. Clothes lines run from huts to trees and a few children play nearby.

The tropical rains begin. The refugees make their way without noticing. Each is greeted by someone in the camp.

My Le approaches the huts. A WOMAN, mid-twenties, holding a bamboo hat to her head, runs from her hut.

THUY
Come, bring the baby out of the
rain!

My Le follows her into the hut.

INT. THUY'S HUT

Thuy dips a cup into a water bowl then walks it over to My Le and Liem.

MY LE
Thank you.

My Le feeds Liem first. He begins to cough and cry.

My Le cradles him in the other arm, tries again. Again, Liem cries. My Le becomes frustrated.

THUY

May I?

My Le hands Liem to Thuy. She refuses. Helps reposition him on My Le.

THUY (CONT'D)

No, you hold him, but put him on your shoulder like this. Give him a few pats on the back while rocking him.

My Le looks at Thuy, looks for affirmation. Thuy nods.

THUY (CONT'D)

You must be hungry.

Thuy stands and hands her a small cup of rice.

My Le devours the rice, scooping it all into her mouth with her hand.

THUY

I am Thuy. I am here with my two boys and my husband.

MY LE

I am My Le. This is Liem.

My Le gazes up at a picture of Thuy and her boys. She looks confused as there are three boys in the picture.

MY LE

I see three boys...

THUY

We lost one of the boys on our trip here.

MY LE

I am sorry.

Thuy refills the cup, hands it to My Le.

THUY

Try giving him the water again.

My Le cradles him in her arm. Thuy assists. Liem is relaxed and drinking the water.

MY LE

There is much to learn with children.

THUY

Indeed, especially when they are not yours.

MY LE

How did you know?

THUY

No resemblance...and when I first saw you, it wasn't the way you carried *yourself*, it was the way you carried *him*. Like a pack mule carrying its cargo.

My Le looks a bit puzzled, hurt.

THUY (CONT'D)

No, no, no. I don't mean that in a bad way. If you are not his mother, then you are his savior, and you are the most important person in his life right now. I could see that right away.

MY LE

(beat)

Pack mule?

They both start giggling.

A MAN enters the hut, Thuy's husband, BINH. He carries a container of water. Sets it down at one end of the hut.

THUY

My husband, Binh. Binh, this is My Le and Liem.

BINH

Your from the group that just arrived?

MY LE

Yes.

BINH

Welcome to Kuku. Hopefully it will be a short stay. You can rest here tonight, but we'll need to build you a hut of your own in the morning.

MY LE

You are very generous.

BINH

You will need to be just as generous when others arrive. We take care of each other here on the island. We must if we want to survive.

My Le nods in agreement.

MY LE

I wish to meet your sons. Where are they?

BINH

Out gathering palms and wood for the huts. They have more energy than you can handle, so be careful what you wish for.

THUY

We really need to get you and Liem cleaned up and into some cleaner clothes. We'll burn those.

My Le pulls her shirt up to smell. She wrinkles her nose.

BINH

I'll show you where you can bathe, but only if you feel you have enough energy to make the walk.

MY LE

I can do it. I would even crawl on my belly to get a bath.

THUY

Liem can stay here if you don't mind. I Have water to clean him with.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

My Le and Binh walk out of the camp and into the jungle. They don't get far before encountering a tiny cemetery with makeshift headstones, many bare or without identification.

MY LE

So many...

BINH

Sadly, there will be more. Malaria, dehydration, Deng fever...suicide. We're all at risk.

They walk out of the cemetery and continue through the jungle. They arrive at a stream as it cascades out of the jungle canopy.

BINH

The stream is broken down into sections.

UPSTREAM

My Le and Binh approach a small pool attached to the stream.

BINH

Top section. This is where you can collect water. The stream brings with it a fair amount of germs, so you'll need to boil it before drinking.

MID-STREAM

My Le and Binh approach the bathing area. There are WOMEN AND CHILDREN bathing in the stream.

BINH

Middle section. This is for bathing only.

DOWN-STREAM

My Le and Binh approach the wash portion. The area is empty.

BINH

This is the last section. It's for washing clothing mostly...or soiled items. It is important that you remember how this works.

MY LE

I will remember, thank you, Binh. If you don't mind, I think I'm going to bathe now.

BINH

Take your time. The first bath is always the best.

EXT. THUY'S HUT - MORNING

My Le stands outside the hut in cleaner clothes, her skin clean, her hair up. She looks out over the ocean as the sun climbs on the horizon. She closes her eyes, smells the breeze.

Binh walks out of the hut, stands beside her, smokes a cigarette.

BINH
Are you ready for this?

MY LE
I am.

The boys, ten year-old TOAN and twelve year-old HUNG, race out of the hut, chasing each other, playing tag, being boys.

BINH
Hey, hey! It's not play time. We have work to do.

MY LE
You were right about the boys. They do have a lot of...spirit.

BINH
It can be a virtue.

MY LE
Ah, yes...virtue. A good thing. A very good thing.

BINH
Come on, I have a spot you might like.

EXT. MY LE'S CAMP SITE - MORNING (MOMENTS LATER)

SERIES OF SHOTS - My Le and the men building her hut:

- Palms placed in a pile.
- Bamboo placed as poles in each corner.
- Toan and Hung horse around, get smacked by Binh.
- Walls built with boat lumber and tree limbs.
- Walls attached to poles.
- Roof put on as the rain pours.
- Binh, the boys, and My Le admiring their work. Binh smokes.

BACK TO SCENE

My Le hangs a painted sign with her boat number near the entrance.

BINH
 Yours is even better than ours.
 Must be the woman's touch.

MY LE
 Thank you so much for the help. I
 couldn't have done it without you
 and the boys.

BINH
 You're pretty crafty...good with
 your hands. That will come in handy
 around here.

Binh holds a small bucket. He hands it to My Le.

MY LE
 For water?

BINH
 No, toilet. It's not always easy to
 run into the jungle when you have
 to go.

INT. MY LE'S HUT - DAY

My Le puts the bucket in the far corner. She arranges a small
 pile of palms and a blanket as a bed.

She takes her family picture out of her pocket, kisses it,
 then tucks it on the wall above the bedding. She kneels
 before it and prays silently.

Thuy walks into My Le's hut with Liem. My Le finishes and
 greets Thuy.

THUY
 He wanted to see his new home.

Thuy hands Liem to My Le.

MY LE
 Welcome, little man.

THUY
 What will you do with Liem when
 you've reached one of the main
 camps?

MY LE
 Do?

THUY

Adopt him? Turn him over to the UN?

MY LE

Before his mother died, she told me his father was waiting for them in Galang. I will request to be transferred there with him when the next delegation arrives.

THUY

There have been very few supply boats to the island, and even fewer representatives. Prepare yourself for a long stay.

INT. MY LE'S HUT - NIGHT

My Le awakens to SCREAMS, COMMOTION outside.

She gets up, peers outside, sees people running toward the beach.

She takes a glance over at Liem who is fast asleep, then joins the others.

AT BEACH - NEAR DOCK

She approaches the beach, sees bodies being pulled from the water. She pauses from shock, then jumps in to help the others.

She pulls a SMALL CHILD from the water. The child is unresponsive.

There is SHOUTING, more commotion, as the group continues to pull bodies from the water.

My Le places the child on the beach, begins to resuscitate.

Binh carries the body of a woman out of the water and places her next to My Le. He finds no pulse.

BINH

My Le.

My Le ignores Binh, continues to work on the child. Binh checks for pulse on the child.

BINH (CONT'D)

My Le! I'm sorry. There are more and we need your help.

He places a hand on her shoulder, helps her up.

MY LE
We need to save them all...

She looks out over the water, the moonlight casts its silvery glow over a debris field littered with bodies. She looks up at the heavens, closes her eyes.

MY LE (V.O. PAST)
Oh, Lord, please give us the
strength to survive when strength
is in short supply...

She opens her eyes, heads for the water to bring more bodies ashore.

MY LE (V.O. PAST CONT'D)
Give us the guidance we need to
make a clear path to freedom...

She finds the body of a woman and pulls her ashore. Binh helps her drag the body to the sand. He reaches down to check the pulse. He shakes his head and heads back for the water.

MY LE (V.O. PAST CONT'D)
Free us from starvation and
sickness and the darkness all
around us...

My Le finds a BOY, a teenager. She pulls him ashore, checks for pulse.

She gives the boy a few breaths then rolls him on his side. She pats his back and repeats.

MY LE (V.O. PAST CONT'D)
And give us the breath to fill our
dying friends with life.

The boy coughs and sputters. My Le holds him close to her.

MY LE
You're going to be okay. It's okay.
Shhh...

Binh walks up to her and the boy. Kneels beside.

BINH
We've cleared all the bodies we
could find. He seems to be the only
survivor, thanks to you.

MY LE
No thanks to me, Binh. This should
not be happening to our people.

BINH
Young man, what happened out there?

BOY
We were too far out when we sank
the boat.

MY LE
You sank it?

BOY
Yes, sir. We didn't want to get
towed back out again.

My Le looks out over the water. She closes her eyes once
again as tears roll down her cheeks.

EXT. JUNGLE - CEMETERY - AFTERNOON

My Le follows Binh's family into the cemetery. Incense burns.
TRADITIONAL VIET TUNES are played out with sticks and bowls.

There are makeshift headstones on the newly excavated graves.

My Le stands in semi-circle with the rest of the group. She
is silent, withdrawn.

A woman approaches one of the wooden caskets. She begins
cutting the buttons off of the deceased.

MY LE
What is she doing?

THUY
We don't bury the dead with
buttons. Buttons are bad luck.

An ELDER addresses the dead in Vietnamese, speaking of the
final rest, the afterlife, and the ultimate sacrifice.

My Le is transfixed by the headstones. She is taken back to
her grandmother's death. In FLASHBACK V.O., she hears her
grandmother's words from the goodbye letter.

XUAN (V.O.)
"...you're a guardian angel with
your mother's generous spirit. Just
remember, there is more to life
than suffering...there is you."

The ceremony continues. Thuy takes note of My Le's detachment.

THUY

You feel guilty...that somehow it should be you in that grave.

Thuy leans in, gets close.

THUY (CONT'D)

You're a survivor by your own hand, My Le. Freedom has a price when the heart loses hope.

MY LE

But this hurts so much.

THUY

Don't let that pain stop you from helping our people survive. Your father would be proud of the way you give your heart and soul to others.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. MY LE'S GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE - DAY

A very young My Le and her father finish digging a hole.

Nam places a papaya tree into the hole. They begin backfilling with dirt.

NAM

The papaya is life, My Le. It will feed us when we are hungry. We have a saying, "When eating a fruit, think of the person who planted the tree."

MY LE

But I'm hungry now. When can we eat it?

NAM

Silly, girl. You must first nurture it...care for it...help it grow. If you do this, it will reward you with beautiful fruit.

My Le purses and bows her head. Nam is puzzled.

NAM (CONT'D)
 Why the sad face? The tree will
 bring happiness to us all.

MY LE
 I'm not sad, papa.

NAM
 Then, what is it?

MY LE
 You did this for us because we're
 poor and hungry.

He lifts her chin, looks into her eyes.

NAM
 No, child, we did this so you can
 learn how to give back.

BACK TO PRESENT - CEMETERY

MY LE
 Thank you, Thuy, for keeping me
 focused.

THUY
 We've all been through harsh times.
 We must all stay focused.

The ceremony has wrapped up. People place flowers, incense,
 and candles next to the new graves as they EXIT.

My Le takes a flower and places it next to one of the graves
 and leaves with Thuy and her family.

MY LE
 You have helped me in so many ways.
 Now I want to help you.

THUY
 With what?

MY LE
 Would you mind if I teach the boys
 English?

THUY
 Was that your area of study?

MY LE
 It was. I'm quite good, I think.

THUY

That would be fine with me. Binh?

Binh shrugs, smiles and continues walking with the boys.

INT. THUY'S HUT - MORNING

My Le sits with the boys, Hung and Toan, and works on the alphabet.

MY LE

(subtitled Vietnamese)

One more time. Let's start with the alphabet again.

(English)

A...B...C...D...

The boys catch on, follow, giggle.

My Le joins in to assist and enunciate each letter.

Thuy watches and smiles.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT)

My time with the boys was even more valuable than I had anticipated. They caught on quickly and it made me realize that I had found a purpose, a calling, that didn't involve dealing with the dead or dying. I would teach.

We RISE UP out of the hut and above the encampment.

EXT. KUKU CAMP - TIME TRANSITION - DAY/NIGHT/DAY

The encampment grows, more huts appear, more people populate the island and mill about, tending to various tasks.

Boats pull in, people get off, huts and structures pop up.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)

Thuy convinced me that I need to teach others as well.

EXT. MY LE'S HUT - DAY

My Le stands before a small group and reads passages from a book. The class looks on.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)
 The small groups made the time pass
 and I found great enjoyment in
 helping others learn.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

My Le and Thuy collect water from the stream.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)
 I began to settle in, learn how to
 survive, and help others along the
 way.

SERIES OF SHOTS - MY LE ON THE ISLAND

- My Le picks fruit from a tree, places it in a burlap bag.
- My Le and Thuy wash clothes together in the stream.
- My Le and Liem playing together. He's walking.
- She cooks food over an open fire. Brings food to others.
- Unloading UNHCR, CARE, and Feed The Children supplies.
- Helping with construction efforts.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)
 But the island was no picnic, and
 our exodus brought with it many
 shameful atrocities.

EXT. JUNGLE - MORNING

More COMMOTION. The camp comes alive, My Le carries Liem into the jungle, follows the others. There is a crowd. Everyone is staring up.

A man hangs from a tree.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)
 He watched as each member of his
 family succumbed to sickness. The
 shame of not being able to help
 them...overwhelming.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

More refugees arrive. The sick, the dying. The dead.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)
 The cycle continued...an endless supply of refugees made their way to the island. Once there, many realized the horror of not knowing what lies beyond. We had no home to go back to and no country of residence. There was death, but no toll. We were unclaimed and invisible...unwanted.

EXT. HONG KONG HARBOR - DAY

Aerial view of the harbor, clogged with refugee boats.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)
 And there were many refugee camps.
 Hong Kong...

EXT. THAILAND - LAEM SING DISTRICT - DAY

Aerial view of the coast, refugee boats parked ashore.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)
 Thailand...

EXT. MALAYSIA - PULAU BIDONG - DAY

Aerial view of the crowded camp.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)
 Malaysia...

EXT. KUKU ISLAND - DAY

Aerial view of Kuku. Barely a shantytown.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)
 Singapore, Philippines and our very own Kuku island in Indonesia. We were everywhere, and many of us were stuck, left to languish in these camps for years.

INT. ADMINISTRATION HUT - DAY

A DELEGATION from the U.S., the Philippines and Malaysia, sit at a table. My Le sits across, a look of disappointment on her face.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)
 Each time a delegation arrived, I
 was refused transfer. Without
 family or connections abroad, my
 chances of leaving Kuku any time
 soon were slim...or so I thought.

INT. MY LE'S HUT - NIGHT

My Le is curled up at one end of the hut. She's sick, sweaty,
 breathing is labored, in and out of consciousness.

Liem CRIES loudly, My Le is too sick to attend to him.

Thuy and Binh enter the hut and find My Le barely responsive.

MY LE'S POV - Blurred figures, more CRYING, unintelligible
 dialogue, a blanket tossed over her...then BLACKNESS.

INT. INDONESIAN RED CROSS HOSPITAL (PMI) - DAY

SUPER "GALANG REFUGEE CAMP - 1979"

FROM BLACKNESS - A hospital room. Not the neatest. My Le lies
 in one of the small beds.

She awakens slowly. Checks her surroundings. More blurriness,
 confusion. She's a bit addled, restless.

A NURSE walks in, tries to calm her. Tends to her needs of the
 room.

NURSE
 It's okay. You're safe here.

MY LE
 Safe? Where?

NURSE
 Pulau Galang. Indonesia.

MY LE
 But I...

NURSE
 Shh...rest first. Talk later.

The nurse walks out.

MY LE
 Where's Liem? Excuse me!

My Le tries to get up but is too weak. She falls back.

MY LE
Where's Liem!!??

There is a brief pause and more frustration, then...

A MAN walks into the room carrying Liem. He approaches My Le.

MINH
I think he misses you.

My Le composes herself, exhales, smiles.

MY LE
He's okay.

MINH
Of course he is. How do you feel?

MY LE
I don't know. I don't know where I
am...how I got here, or how long
I've been asleep. The nurse said
I'm in Galang. Is that true,
doctor?

MINH
It is true, yes, you've been asleep
for about two weeks.

Minh steps closer. He stands at bedside.

MINH (CONT'D)
But I'm no doctor. I'm Minh Vu,
Liem's father.

My Le cups her mouth, begins to tear up.

MY LE
(muffled)
I'm sorry, Tran...she fought...

MINH
It's okay, I know what happened. I
know she didn't make it. I want to
personally thank you for all you've
done for my family.

MY LE
But I didn't...

He pulls a letter from his pocket, unfolds it.

MINH

The family who sent you here explained it in this letter. It was addressed to both of us.

MY LE

Family?

MINH

Binh and Thuy. Your neighbor friends on Kuku. They finished this letter on the boat and stuffed it into your clothes.

He hands her the letter.

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. KUKU ISLAND - NIGHT

SUPER "TWO WEEKS BEFORE"

A large boat sponsored by WORLD VISION sits dock side. It is the SEASWEEP. A few refugees are allowed to board once they are verified.

INT. MY LE'S HUT - NIGHT

Binh rushes into the hut, sees Thuy writing a letter. The boys sit next to an unconscious My Le. Liem lies asleep in the background.

BINH

Come on, momma! Our name was the last to be called. We need to board now if we're going to get off this island. Finish it later!

Thuy folds up the letter, stuffs it in her pocket.

THUY

Grab Liem and help me with My Le. They are going with us.

Binh becomes annoyed.

BINH

No! They won't let us on.

THUY

Help me with them! Boys, come on!

BINH
 We can't! The boat has limited
 space and they are not on the list.

Thuy approaches Binh, gets within a nose.

THUY
 We're not leaving them here. They
 deserve a chance. Do you hear me?
 (beat)
 She has saved a life...lives! Now
 it's her turn to be saved. We do
 this, or I'm staying back with the
 boys. I won't take "no" for an
 answer.

The boys are on mom's side, it's written on their faces.

Binh takes a glance around the hut, bites his lip, then nods.

Thuy pushes Binh, he turns then she smacks him on the head.

THUY (CONT'D)
 Move your ass, old man! Come on!

EXT. KUKU ISLAND - DOCK - NIGHT

Binh's family approaches the Seasweep gangplank. Binh holds
 My Le in his arms.

A BOATSWAIN'S MATE stands by.

BOATSWAIN'S MATE
 Family name and number please?

BINH
 Nguyen. Number 24150.

The boatswain looks through the manifest.

BOATSWAIN'S MATE
 I see four listed but you have six.

BINH
 Our friend needs help. Can she
 board with us?

BOATSWAIN'S MATE
 Why haven't you had one of our
 people look at her first?

THUY

We thought we could help, but then she worsened.

The Boatswain heads up the gangplank and talks to another CREW MEMBER. Binh's family stays put.

Moments later, the Boatswain returns with the crew member and the CAPTAIN of the Seasweep.

CREWMEMBER

We'll have our doctors look at her, but we can't take the entire group.

CAPTAIN

I'm sorry, folks. We are limited and can't do this without splitting you up.

THUY

Her child must go with her.

CAPTAIN

We can do that, but have room for two more only. Like I said, we'll have to split you up, or you can wait for the next boat.

BINH

(subtitled Viet)

Momma, this is our chance. We don't know when the next boat will arrive.

THUY

(subtitled Viet)

There will be others. We'll be fine. I'm not splitting us up. She will die here if we don't do this.

BINH

(subtitled Viet)

We can die here, too!

THUY

(subtitled Viet)

Go then. Take one of the boys with you. Go! Go! Go!

CAPTAIN

Ma'am. Ma'am!

More arguing, then a MAN wearing khakis, and a sweaty button up shirt, walks down the gangplank. He is the World Vision president, STAN MOONEYHAM.

MOONEYHAM
Folks, why the ruckus?

CAPTAIN
Sir there seems to be some confusion as to who is boarding.

MOONEYHAM
I see. And who is to board?

CAPTAIN
This family, but they have a sick friend who is not on the list.

Mooneyham looks over the group. Analyzes.

MOONEYHAM
Does that put us over?

CAPTAIN
By two, sir.

MOONEYHAM
Let them board. All of them. And get her to the infirmary right away.

Big smiles from everyone.

THUY
Thank you, Mr. Mooneyham. You're a savior.

MOONEYHAM
God bless you child.

Binh hands My Le over to the crew member.

Thuy kisses Liem's cheek, hands him to the captain.

THUY
Hope to see you on the other side, little one.

INT. GALANG RED CROSS HOSPITAL ROOM - BACK TO PRESENT

MY LE

They didn't stay here. It says they went to another camp to rendezvous with other family members.

She tries to get up again and manages. She swings her legs over the side of the bed.

MINH

You need to take it slow.

MY LE

I'm fine. I want to see them.

MINH

They are at another camp, My Le.

MY LE

I will go to the other camp.

MINH

You can't! The other camp is in the Philippines.

(beat)

You can try to reconnect with them at another time. That is your only option.

Sadness washes over My Le's face.

MY LE

May I hold Liem?

Minh gently hands Liem over. Color returns to her face. She rocks him gently.

MINH

There is more, My Le. Liem and I will be transferred as well. We have a sponsor waiting for us in America.

MY LE

But, so soon?

He sits next to her and Liem on the bed.

MINH

My volunteer work here has opened some doors for me.

(MORE)

MINH (CONT'D)

I will try to help you off the island as well. It's the least I can do.

MY LE

I'm more interested in finding my father. Can you help me?

MINH

I'll do what I can. For now you will remain in camp one.

MY LE

Camp one?

MINH

There are three camps here on Galang. One is for new inductees. Camp two is for those transferring soon. The accommodations are a bit nicer there. Camp three is the cemetery. You are pretty good with English I hear, so I've arranged to have you help one of my volunteer friends in camp one. You'll like him, his name is Gaylord.

She nods, forces a smile.

MY LE

When do you leave?

MINH

Next week.

MY LE

Then I would like to spend as much time with Liem as I can.

MINH

We would like that.

EXT. GALANG CAMP - RESETTLEMENT PROCESSING CENTER - DAY

My Le carries a handful of supplies out of the office. She reads the camp directions with her free hand.

GALANG CAMP - BETWEEN BUILDINGS AND PATHS

My Le gets a good look at the camp. She passes by a makeshift coffee hut, a store hut, and the school hut. She observes life in the camp and its occupants.

KIDS play, ADULTS trade items and mill about, conversing, smoking, relaxing.

EXT. GALANG CAMP - REFUGEE BARRACKS

My Le approaches the long, two-story structure. She checks her map, compares the building number on the barracks.

She enters the building.

INT. BARRACKS

My Le walks in, finds an empty bunk near the opposite end of the building. She takes a seat, checks her surroundings, looks at OTHERS as they mind their own business.

In walk Minh and Liem.

MINH

It's a lot better than the sand at Kuku, but not as private.

MY LE

It's a blessing to me.

MINH

Have you had a chance to walk around the camp? Check things out?

MY LE

Yes. It's much bigger than Kuku.

MINH

If you get a chance, climb up the hill and visit the Mahayana temple. It's quite a view and good for prayer.

MY LE

I will do that. Maybe I'll take Liem and we can pray together.

MINH

Good. Once you get settled in here, meet me at building six. We'll have some food ready for you there.

INT. BUILDING SIX - EVENING

My Le, Minh and Liem sit on the floor. A low-rise table covers the length of the room. REFUGEES sit and drink tea and eat.

MY LE

You have more family waiting for you?

MINH

Yes, in the America. My brother and his wife are helping with my sponsorship.

MY LE

(beat)

Tell me about Tran, your wife. If you don't mind.

MINH

I worked for her father in a rice mill near Saigon. He immediately took a liking to me. Our families were very similar and we shared the same values. I remember seeing her on occasion. She would come by the rice mill where I worked, and each time she did, I fell in love all over again.

My Le giggles.

MINH (CONT'D)

It's true, and her father noticed my reaction each time she walked into the office. We connected eventually, and she told me she had the same crush on me. The rest is history. We married, had Liem, and the country died before our eyes.

(beat)

I'll never forget the smile on her face when Liem was born.

MY LE

I am sorry, Minh. She was a brave woman. She gave her own life to keep Liem alive.

Minh holds up his tin tea cup.

MINH

And so have you. Cheers.

INT. PRIMARY/SECONDARY SCHOOL HUT - MORNING

My Le walks into the hut carrying two lychee fruit. She is the only one present.

A MAN walks in, thin and tall, bearded, carrying a happy and pleasant demeanor. He introduces himself to My Le.

BARR

Hello there. You must be My Le.

MY LE

Yes.

BARR

Gaylord Barr. I'm one of the volunteers here. They said you'd be helping me.

My Le holds out the lychee fruit.

MY LE

For you, teacher.

Barr holds up his hands as if to stop her.

BARR

Oh, no, no, no. You keep those. I have something for you instead.

He holds up a papaya fruit.

BARR (CONT'D)

You can eat it, or use it to trade up to something bigger in the camp.

My Le takes the papaya and admires it.

MY LE

My favorite, thank you.

(beat)

Will you teach English only?

BARR

Some English, some math. I'm really here to help around the camp. Teaching's only part of it...

Barr sees My Le holding the papaya up to her nose. She's drifted off in thought.

BARR (CONT'D)

Look, My Le, I know the trip was rough. I know what happens out there on the water. If you're not up for this...

MY LE

No, no. It's fine. I was thinking of my father. I miss him.

BARR

I'm sorry.

She pulls out the wrinkled picture and hands it to Barr.

MY LE

Still alive. Somewhere in America I believe. I gave his information to the UNHCR, but they have no record. Can you help me?

BARR

I'll see what I can do. Okay?

She offers a soft smile.

EXT. GALANG CAMP - CHUA KIM QUANG TEMPLE - MORNING

An orange sunrise blankets the sky. The temple glows.

My Le passes by two lion statues, pulls her rucksack off. She takes a seat with Liem on the temple steps.

MY LE (V.O. PAST)

Our last day together. I'm going to miss this little man.

Liem crawls around on the steps, plays with a small pebble.

MY LE (V.O. PAST CONT'D)

You have your reasons for bringing us together Lord...perhaps that part of my quest has been fulfilled.

PEOPLE pass by, mostly elderly, smile at My Le and Liem.

MY LE (V.O. PAST CONT'D)

If that is so, then please give him a chance at a good life.

My Le picks up Liem and walks toward the temple.

She kneels at a shrine near the entrance. Liem sits beside.

MY LE (V.O. PAST CONT'D)
 If you can find it in your plan to
 reunite us someday, that would be a
 true blessing. Thank you, Lord...

ON MY LE - She finishes the prayer, hands folded, speaks...

MY LE
 Amen.

EXT. CAMP STORE - LATER

My Le approaches a shanty store with Liem in hand.

THREE YOUNG GIRLS sell cigarettes, canned milk, coffee and
 tissue among other items.

One of the girls plays with a Polaroid camera, snaps a photo
 of another.

My Le takes notice.

MY LE
 Would you be able to take our
 picture?

GIRL ONE
 Five dong.

MY LE
 I only have two dong.

GIRL TWO
 Anything to trade?

My Le pulls up her rucksack and removes the papaya.

GIRL ONE
 We'll take that...and two dong.

My Le shakes her head and begins to walk away.

GIRL TWO
 Okay, okay, the papaya!

My Le stops. She takes a deep breath, kisses Liem on the
 forehead.

MY LE
 For us.

She slowly hands Girl One the papaya.

Girl Three takes the camera and points it at My Le and Liem.

GIRL THREE

Okay, ready?

My Le adjusts her hair, combs over Liem's hair with her hand, and stands straight and tall. Both are semi-serious, content.

MY LE

Ready.

Girl three takes the photo, hands My Le the print. She looks confused.

GIRL THREE

You have to wait for it.

CLOSE IN ON PHOTO - We see My Le and Liem slowly appear.

Satisfied, she stows it in her pack and leaves the store.

EXT. BEACH - AFTERNOON

My Le and Liem sit near the surf. Liem plays and splashes.

Refugee families occupy the beach, some with inner tubes and flotation devices.

Minh walks up to My Le and Liem.

MINH

I was beginning to think you kidnapped my boy.

My Le giggles.

MY LE

I guess I don't want this day to end.

Minh sits in the surf next to My Le. They both take in the moment.

My Le picks up a handful of sand, admires it as if she's counting each grain.

MINH

It doesn't have to end like this. There is a way for you to come with us.

MY LE

A way?

Minh stammers a bit before making her an offer.

MINH

We...could marry.

My Le is speechless. Surprised. Baffled.

MINH (CONT'D)

People do it all the time to get out of the camps.

MY LE

Oh, no. No, I can't do that. No, no. I'm too young and you're still married...and we met only a week ago...

MINH

I'm a widower now. And you've been a mother to my child for a lot longer than that. He needs you.

Blind-sided, My Le stands and paces in the sand.

MINH (CONT'D)

It could be a means to an end, My Le. A way to reunite you with your father.

My Le remains silent. She ponders, looks at Liem, emotion overwhelms her.

MY LE

I-I can't. Those are all the wrong reasons to marry.

MINH

You're a grown woman. How long do you want to stay on this island?

She turns and walks away. Half way up the beach, she turns around. She returns to Minh who is now holding Liem.

MY LE

I will say goodbye at the dock tomorrow...if that's okay with you.

MINH

We would like that.

EXT. GALANG CAMP - BOAT DOCK - MORNING

My Le and Minh approach a small but capable boat. My Le carries Liem down the dock.

REFUGEES gather around the boat as the boarding process begins. Once aboard, they wave to REFUGEES on shore.

MINH

I'm sorry if I upset you yesterday.
I was only trying to help.

MY LE

It's okay. I want to thank you for thinking of me and my father. It was very caring of you. I'm just not ready to jump into the unknown again.

MINH

I understand.
(beat)
You have my information. I will write and send pictures. Let's stay in touch.

MY LE

Here, I want Liem to have this.
Something to remember me by.

She hands the Polaroid picture to Minh. He accepts, smiles.

MINH

If you settle in America, look us up.

My Le hands Liem to Minh. She kisses them both on the cheek.

MY LE

I will. Have a safe trip.

Minh and Liem board the boat. Once on, they turn and look back at My Le. Minh grabs Liem's hand and makes him wave.

My Le tears up as the boat pulls away from the dock.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. PRIMARY/SECONDARY SCHOOL HUT - DAY

SUPER - "SIX MONTHS LATER"

My Le has a picture of a hot dog and displays it in front of the confused class.

MY LE
In America, the hot dog is a food item...not a real dog.

A STUDENT raises his hand. My Le acknowledges.

MY LE
You have a question?

STUDENT
I don't understand. Why do they call it that?

Barr sits at the side, giggles a bit then checks his watch.

BARR
Okay, class, that's a great question for tomorrow. Right now, it's time to go.

The class dismisses. Students EXIT. Barr approaches My Le.

BARR
I have something you might be interested in.

He hands My Le a picture. She looks at it, eyes widen.

MY LE
Papa? My papa? You found him?

BARR
We did. One of my UNHCR friends did some searching for me...for you.

MY LE
Where is he?

BARR
Arkansas.

MY LE
Ark...?

BARR
Arkansas. He was transferred to Fort Smith in the first wave.

She takes a closer look at the photo.

MY LE

But why is he in a wheelchair? Is he hurt?

Barr kneels before her, rests a hand on her shoulder.

BARR

He suffered a stroke some time ago. His host family is doing a great job taking care of him though.

MY LE

When can I see him?

BARR

It's going to take some time to get you processed and transferred I'm afraid. Could be as long as six months or as short as three...with a stop or two in-between.

MY LE

A stop?

BARR

Batan, the Philippines, more processing there probably. Then you'll catch a plane to America.

MY LE

What will it be like for me in America?

They EXIT the school.

OUTSIDE SCHOOL

BARR

It won't be easy at first, but you have a head start with the language. For your fellow countryman, it will be a struggle. Perhaps you can make that a part of your mission in America?

MY LE

What about you?

BARR

I'll stay another six months, head back home...then do it all over again in another country.

MY LE
 You're a kind man, Mr. Barr. You
 have helped our people and we will
 be forever grateful.

BARR
 Thank you. I wish I could do
 more...as more needs to be done.

BARR (CONT'D)
 You need to head over to
 processing. I told them you'd be in
 after class. Today. Now.

MY LE
 I'm leaving soon?

BARR
 Probably tomorrow...but you need to
 hustle. Go!

She thanks him again, turns, and sprints away.

My Le runs through the camp...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. JUNGLE - MY LE'S DREAM - DAY/NIGHT

My Le running through the jungle. Everything is dream-like,
 distorted.

She trips over some brush and falls face first onto the
 ground.

A woman's hand reaches down, helps her to her feet.

She is face to face with her mother.

LAN
 Don't be long, My Le.

MY LE
 Momma...

My Le hears a SOUND behind her and turns. She turns back to
 her mother and her mother is gone.

She starts to run again.

Through the thickness she struggles, her mother's voice
 overwhelms her, repeating, ECHOING off the jungle.

In her path, she sees Liem. He sits upright holds his arms out.

She approaches and reaches down and picks him up. There is a tap on her shoulder.

My Le jumps, turns around frightened. The entire crew of the scavenger boat stands before her.

DRIVER
Not your child...

She turns and runs further into the woods, trying to scream but unable. The forest morphs into My Tho City.

MY THO CITY - MY LE'S DREAM - CONT'D

She stops in the middle of the street. The firefight consumes everything.

Out of the smoke, she sees her mom and dad walking calmly down the street, holding hands. They smile, untouched by the surrounding fight.

My Le runs toward them but cannot reach them.

MY LE
(screaming in Viet)
Dung ban! Dung ban!

She struggles, unable to make up ground. The street becomes sand. Her feet sink, her pace slows.

AT BEACH - MY LE'S DREAM - CONT'D

She wades out onto a colorless beach.

She approaches the surf and falls to her knees. There is a CLICK. She turns.

Sergeant Hathaway stands with a rifle pointed at her head.

HATHAWAY
We call it...war.

MY LE
Dung ban!

ON HIS TRIGGER FINGER - It squeezes. There is a BANG! Then BLACKNESS.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

SUPER - "1980"

MY LE
Dung ban! Dung ban!

My Le is shocked awake by the sound of a BOY SMACKING a toy at the back of a seat.

She regroups, calms her breathing and averts her attention to the window. She gazes outside.

MY LE'S POV - ARKANSAS LANDSCAPE - The ground is covered in snow, an airport runway becomes apparent.

EXT. LITTLE ROCK NATIONAL AIRPORT - TERMINAL - DAY

My Le's plane pulls up to the terminal. We see her face in the window.

INSIDE TERMINAL

My Le walks into the terminal. Arms crossed, she shivers from the frigid cold outside. She wears only a light sweater.

An older LADY holds up a sign with My Le's name. She is Barbara Rice, Cavanaugh church ministry assistant. She's a mid-sixties fast-talking fireball with energy to spare.

My Le notices and approaches, offers an apprehensive smile.

MY LE
I am My Le Nguyen.

BARBARA
(deep accent)
Hi, Miss Noogen. I'm Barbara Rice with the Cavanaugh Church. Welcome to Arkansas.

My Le continues to shiver.

MY LE
Thank you.

BARBARA
Heavens, you are absolutely frozen. Don't you have a winter coat, darling?

MY LE
 (regards sweater)
 Just this.

BARBARA
 Well, we'll just have to get you
 somethin' from one of the shops
 before we go. Come now.

INT. BARBARA'S CAR - DAY

My Le sits in the front seat bundled up in a new winter coat.
 She stares at the snow outside as they drive.

BARBARA
 You're awful quiet over there,
 darlin'.

MY LE
 ...snow?

BARBARA
 You're first time seein' snow?
 Well, you can have it. I'm tired of
 it, quite frankly. I'm ready for
 summer.

MY LE
 It's very pretty. I want to touch.

BARBARA
 You'll have plenty of time to touch
 it when we get to your new home,
 little lady.

MY LE
 My father is there?

BARBARA
 He is, and boy is he's excited to
 see you again. The whole family is
 excited to meet you. You're gon'
 love'em.

My Le looks over at Barbara, confused. The delivery too
 aggressive, the accent too strong.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
 Great people. Been coming to our
 church since forever. And they got
 a boy, too. A bit younger than you,
 but he's a real peach.
 (MORE)

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Just fun to be around even though he's a bit different with his skin condition and all.

MY LE

When did my father arrive?

BARBARA

He was part of the Operation New Life program in 1975. Many refugees came to Fort Chaffee during that year. Wasn't long after that, the Catholic Conference found him a host family. The Nilson's have been taking care of him ever since in Fort Smith.

MY LE

Taking care...

BARBARA

Best they can. You'll certainly be a big help around the house. The stroke left him a bit incapacitated.

MY LE

Incap...?

BARBARA

He needs a lot of help. Whole left side is paralyzed and he can't talk like you or me. Has to write things down on his notepad.

My Le resumes her silent gaze out the window.

EXT. NILSON HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Barbara's station wagon pulls into the driveway. The Nilson house is circa 40's with a small porch.

My Le gets out of the car. Her feet touch snow. She kneels down and grabs a handful, admires it, then quickly tosses the cold mass.

The front door opens and the NILSON FAMILY shuffles outside. The wife/mother, ELIZABETH, the fourteen year-old albino son, LUCAS, and the husband/father, MAYNARD.

Lucas, smiling big with sunglasses on, holds a small sign written in crayon that reads, "Welcome, My Le".

BARBARA
Hi there, Nilson family! Long trip,
but we finally made it.

Barbara rushes over to My Le, grabs her by the arm.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
Come on, sweetie, let's meet your
new family.

They great on the porch, but My Le is mostly silent. Her eyes search for her father as she greets the Nilsons.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
My Le, this is
Elizabeth...Lucas...and big daddy,
Maynard. The Nilsons.

MAYNARD
Welcome home, little miss.

ELIZABETH
So nice to have you, dear.

Lucas offers a hand. My Le stares momentarily, then accepts.

ELIZABETH
So, My Le, there is someone here
that you're probably dyin' ta'
meet. Lucas?

LUCAS
Be right back!

Lucas runs into the house and returns moments later pushing a wheelchair.

My Le squints to get a look as the wheelchair emerges from the dark interior.

The legs, then the torso, then the face of the MAN in the wheelchair becomes visible.

My Le slowly approaches.

The Nilson's and Barbara watch with eager anticipation.

My Le cups her mouth with her hand, slowly kneels before the man. His head is cocked a bit sideways, face drooping slightly. Their eyes meet, an unspoken negative connection.

A tear emerges from My Le. She's in shock.

BARBARA

Praise the Lord. Finally united.
Dont'cha just love it? Now how
sweet is that?

ELIZABETH

It's a miracle. Oh, thank you, Lord
Jesus.

The man begins breathing heavier, becomes agitated, face
twitching, mouth trembling.

My Le moves in closer. Speaks in her native tongue.

MY LE

(subtitled Viet)

I'm sorry, old man.

She places her hand on his, purses her lip. The sad reality
sets in for both. This is not her father, Nam, but an older
man with the same name and likeness.

MY LE (CONT'D)

(subtitled Viet)

Someone has made a mistake, haven't
they? You understand, right?

(beat)

I'm not her.

Nam nods his head yes, closes his eyes. Clenches. Exhales.

LUCAS

What did she say?

BARBARA

She's speaking their language,
Lucas. Lord have mercy, I think I'm
gonna cry.

MAYNARD

Let's cry inside then. It's too
damn cold out here.

ELIZABETH

Maynard Robert Nilson, now you
watch that mouth of yours!

BARBARA

Oh, yes, of course. Y'all get
yourselves inside where it's warm.
I've got to get back to the church
and those two have a lot of
catching up to do.

Barbara and Elizabeth cheek kiss. Barbara heads to the car.

ELIZABETH
Thank you, darling. We'll see you
on Sunday!

INT. NILSON HOUSE - MY LE'S ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Elizabeth shows My Le her room.

MY LE
This is more than I can dream of.

ELIZABETH
Dinner in an hour. You must be
hungry.

MY LE
I am. Thank you, Miss Elizabeth.
The room is nice.

ELIZABETH
You can just call me Elizabeth or
Beth. Welcome to your new home.

My Le nods as Elizabeth shuts the door.

My begins to cry. She falls onto the bed, buries her head.

OUTSIDE MY LE'S ROOM

Elizabeth puts her ear to the door. She can hear My Le
crying. She remains momentarily, then walks away.

BACK IN MY LE'S ROOM

My Le lies on her back, holds her family photo up. She stares
at her father in the photo.

She rolls over, looks out the window. The moon's blue note
paints the snowscape.

MY LE (V.O. PAST)
Where are you, papa? Why won't you
reach out to me?

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

At the dinner table: Chicken, mashed potatoes and corn. My Le
tries to look interested.

Lucas, sitting next to My Le, stares at her arm. He reaches over to touch it.

MAYNARD

What'cha doin' there, boy? Eat up now.

LUCAS

She has perfect skin. I wanted to touch it.

My Le pulls her arm off the table.

ELIZABETH

Lucas, it's not nice to touch. You'll have to excuse him, sweetie. He's never seen a young Asian girl before.

MY LE

It's okay.

More silence and eating.

ELIZABETH

My Le, we were sorry to hear about your brother.

MY LE

My brother?

My Le stops herself, gazes over at Nam. Nam shakes his head.

ELIZABETH

It must have been very difficult for you to lose him.

MY LE

Oh, yes, it was. Many people died. I miss him.

ELIZABETH

You were not together?

MY LE

We split up, took different boats. We lost touch.

She looks over at Nam for confirmation.

LUCAS

I hate my skin.

MAYNARD

Quiet, boy. Your momma has the table now.

MY LE

Mr. Nilson, please. I want to know. Why does Lucas hate his skin?

She pulls her arm back up onto the table. She presses her arm against his. He looks to his dad for approval.

MAYNARD

Go on, boy.

LUCAS

Because it makes me feel alone.

MY LE

But you are not alone. You have your family. You are a lucky boy.

My Le pats his hand. Comforts him.

LUCAS

I have no friends. Look at me.

MY LE

I am looking at you. Are we not friends?

(beat)

Your skin feels just like mine. Skin is only a shell, Lucas. Underneath, we are all the same.

ELIZABETH

She has a point there, sweetie.

MAYNARD

Damn right. Girl seems wise beyond her years. Got that from your daddy, right?

Maynard continues to pile food into his mouth.

My Le glances over at Nam, they share a reluctant smile.

INT. NILSON HOUSE - BATHROOM - EVENING

My Le gives Nam a sponge bath.

MY LE

(subtitled Viet)

How many children do you have, Nam?

Nam raises his good hand, displays two fingers.

MY LE (CONT'D)
 (subtitled Viet)
 I'm an only child. How did I get
 here?

He points to his writing pad on the counter. My Le reaches for it and holds it steady for him. He scribbles.

She watches him write.

MY LE (CONT'D)
 (translating, subtitled
 Viet)
 I...don't...know. UNHCR
 mistake...too many people leaving
 Vietnam...confusion...many names
 alike.
 (My LE)
 What about your family?

He shakes his head, no.

MY LE (CONT'D)
 (subtitled Viet)
 No? No family? Your children? They
 are still out there, no?

He continues to shake his head, no.

MY LE (CONT'D)
 (subtitled Viet)
 But how do you know?

He taps her hand to hold the writing pad. He scribbles.

MY LE (CONT'D)
 (translating, subtitled
 Viet)
 Boy...died of deng fever in
 camp...daughter never found...no
 trace now...you were last
 hope...you...you.
 (My Le)
 Then we have to let the Nilson's
 know...

Nam taps her hand frantically, shakes his head no, grunts.

MY LE (CONT'D)
 (subtitled Viet)
 Why not? She might still be alive.

He taps her hand again to hold the pad. He scribbles.

MY LE (CONT'D)
 (translating, subtitled
 Viet)
 They...must...not...know.

He tosses the pencil aside, gives her a firm stare. She nods.

EXT. NILSON HOUSE - DAY

SUPER - "SIX MONTHS LATER"

My Le walks from the mail box with Lucas. He hands her a letter from the stack.

LUCAS
 For you. Him again.

Excited, she takes it, reads the address. It's from Minh. She runs inside.

INT. MY LE'S BEDROOM - DAY

My Le opens the envelope. She unfolds a letter, photos drop.

She looks at all of the photos. Various shots of Minh and Liem in California, palm trees, sunshine, beaches, paradise.

She begins to read the letter, but is interrupted by Maynard O.S..

MAYNARD (O.S.)
 (shouting)
 Hey, everyone, come to the living
 room. Hurry!

IN LIVING ROOM

All are present except Nam. My Le is the last to arrive.

MAYNARD
 Hey, watch this. It's Sixty Minutes
 and one of the hosts is at a
 refugee camp.

ON SCREEN - CORRESPONDENT ED BRADLEY pulls refugees out of the water. He NARRATES the events over the footage. Many refugees are being rescued from a sinking junk off shore.

LUCAS

Look at all of those people. Is that where you were, My Le?

MY LE

This is Pulau Bidong. I was in Pulau Galang. They are very close.

LUCAS

I don't think I could live there.

MY LE

You could if you had to.

ON SCREEN - Bradley interviews a Vietnamese woman after pulling a refugee ashore himself. (ACTUAL EPISODE)

BRADLEY

...the United States will take all (refugees)?

WOMAN

...yes...

BRADLEY

You really believe that?

WOMAN

...I hope.

LUCAS

Holy smokes, that's a lot of people!

MY LE

There are thousands more you don't see.

MY LE'S ROOM

Nam manages the wheelchair through the hallway on his own. He passes by My Le's room, sees the photos on her bed. Backs up.

Curious, he makes his way clumsily into the room.

He picks up some of the photos, then the letter. He reads it.

MINH (V.O.)

My Le. Thank you for staying in touch over the last few months. Liem is three now, can you believe it? He's always running around and making messes like little boys do.

EXT. WESTMINSTER, CA - GAS STATION - EVENING

Minh hoses down the gas station island area.

MINH (V.O. CONT'D)
I've been working long hours at a
gas station and saving money.

The OWNER approaches Minh.

OWNER
I don't pay you to just hose the
pad down. Get in the bathroom and
scrub it.

MINH (V.O.)
But the owner is a jerk and I told
him someday I'll own his station.

He removes his work coveralls and clocks out.

MINH (V.O. CONT'D)
California is nice. The sun is
always out and our area in
Westminster is growing so fast.
It's like Little Saigon here.

EXT. BOLSA AVE - NIGHT

Minh walks with his lunch box down the darkened sidewalk.

MINH (V.O. CONT'D)
I was sorry to hear that you were
not able to reunite with your
father. There seems to be a lot of
that happening with our people. You
shouldn't give up hope.

INT. MINH'S APARTMENT - EVENING

He unlocks the door, steps inside. Puts his things down.

MINH (V.O. CONT'D)
My brother and his wife own my
apartment and it's dirt cheap. I
don't get to see them very often.
They live in San Diego now and
rarely come to Orange County.

There is a knock on his door. He opens. His NEIGHBOR, a young
lady with THREE KIDS at her side, hands Liem to Minh.

MINH (V.O. CONT'D)
I've been very fortunate to have a
neighbor who looks after Liem for
me.

He thanks her then shuts the door.

MINH (V.O. CONT'D)
But when I look in his eyes, I see
that he misses you and he misses
his mom.

Minh walks over to the table, retrieves his lunch pail. He
opens it and shares some fruit with Liem.

MINH (V.O. CONT'D)
His favorite picture is the one you
took with him. He looks at it every
day. He calls you maaaaaaa.

On a small table next to a single chair, the photo is propped
against a lamp. Minh reaches for it. Stares deeply.

MINH (V.O. CONT'D)
Our door is open. It would be
really nice if you could visit
someday.
(beat)
We would like that.

INT. MY LE'S BEDROOM - BACK TO SCENE

My Le steps into the room, shuts the door, startles Nam.

MY LE
I won't bother getting upset. It
was my fault for leaving these out.

She snatches the photos and letter away. Holds them close.

MY LE (CONT'D)
Privacy isn't something I'm used
to, but I do expect it from you.

He points to one of the photos in her clutch. He tries to
mouth the word, "baby."

She pulls the picture up, looks at it.

MY LE (CONT'D)
Baby? Yes.

He reaches for it. Demands it. Reluctantly, she hands it to him. He looks at the picture and points to her.

MY LE (CONT'D)
No, not my baby.

Nam pulls out his pad, wedges it against the chair arm. Begins scribbling. He holds the pad for her to read.

MY LE (CONT'D)
Go to him? My home is here now. I want to help.

Nam shakes his head, no. He points at the picture and taps it. Then taps her arm. He scribbles again.

He shows her the pad. We see the ENGLISH TRANSLATION - "Child needs mother...I don't!"

MY LE (CONT'D)
I don't know. I can't just leave.

He scribbles on the pad in Vietnamese. We see the ENGLISH TRANSLATION - "You rescued? You his mom. Go to him. Go!"

My Le begins to sob.

He writes again, the ENGLISH TRANSLATION - "Don't belong here."

She sits on the bed, continues to cry. He pulls close. Taps her knee, then lifts her chin.

He writes again, the ENGLISH TRANSLATION - "Thank you for help. No future here. Future in California."

MY LE (CONT'D)
What do I tell the Nilsons?

Nam writes slowly, the ENGLISH TRANSLATION - "The truth."

INT. NILSON HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Scrambled eggs and bacon for breakfast. Encircling the table, we see My Le inaudibly explaining her situation to the Nilsons. As she speaks, a range of emotions capture each of the Nilsons: happy, sad, concerned, confused, accepting.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT)
We stretched the truth a bit. Nam helped me convince the Nilsons that my true purpose is in California helping baby Liem.
(MORE)

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT) (CONT'D)

The Nilson's would never know Nam was not my real father. And when they realized I had his blessing and he was insistent on me going, they were more at ease with the news.

INT. MINH'S APARTMENT - DAY

Minh carries groceries and mail in one arm, Liem in the other.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)

After I told the Nilsons, I wrote a letter to Minh.

He sets Liem down on the floor, groceries on the table. He sees My Le's letter and opens it quickly. Quarters fall out.

He begins reading, a smile forms on his face.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)

He would later tell me that it was the best news he ever got.

EXT. WESTMINSTER, CA - PHONE BOOTH - DAY

Minh and Liem are stuffed into a phone booth. Minh speaks inaudibly into the phone. Liem plays with the receiver, makes baby noises.

MINH

Yes, yes, yes. This is fantastic news. Two weeks is plenty of time, take more if you need it. Liem is excited too. He won't stop grabbing the phone!

EXT. NILSON HOUSE - DAY

Springtime, with blue sky, green grass and wild flowers. My Le wheels Nam to the edge of the yard, next to the flowers. She squats next to the wheelchair.

MY LE

Thank you for helping me with the plane tickets.

He gives her a thumb's up and nods.

MY LE (CONT'D)
I will come back and visit.
Promise.

He writes on the pad, shows her.

MY LE (CONT'D)
Of course, I will bring them too.

He writes on the pad again, she reads it.

MY LE (CONT'D)
Yes, I will continue to search for
my father. Dead or alive, I need
some closure. I need to move on.
(points to her heart)
Here.

He pats her hand. They both look out over the landscape.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT)
I did keep my promise to return,
but it was not to my liking. Three
years later I would fly back...to
attend Nam's funeral.

EXT. ORANGE COUNTY, CA. - JOHN WAYNE AIRPORT - AFTERNOON

A beautiful sunny day in So Cal. My Le's plane touches down.

INT. MINH'S CAR - LATER

Minh drives out of the airport terminal. They're all packed
in the front seat of his beat up Toyota. Lots of
conversation. Everyone's in a happy place.

MINH
Orange County is booming right now.
So many Vietnamese arriving every
day and businesses going up in
Westminster, it's crazy. You're
going to feel right at home here.

MY LE
So sunny and warm, I feel better
already. I want to see the ocean,
to touch the sand. Will you take
us?

MINH
Right now? Don't you want to see
your home first?

My Le pinches Liem's cheek, cuddles with him.

MY LE
 I want to go to the beach
 first...with this little man.
 You're so big now! Oh, I missed
 you, Liem. I missed you so much.
 Okay, I missed you, too, daddy.

EXT. HUNTINGTON BEACH, CA - SUNSET

My Le, Minh and Liem play on the beach. We INTERCUT between her past with her family and present with Minh and Liem.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)
 The beach was everything I dreamed
 it would be, and California's
 climate was more to my liking. But
 I couldn't help think about my
 father. My memories of him were
 much like this very moment with
 Minh and Liem.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - BATHROOM - DAY

My Le scrubs a toilet, washes a mirror, stows her gear.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)
 I promised myself I'd never give up
 my search, but at the same time, I
 had to be realistic. I had a new
 life in front of me and it would
 unfold quickly. It was time to go
 to work....

INT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE - DAY

My Le sits in a class and studies.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)
 Time to go to school...

INT. ST. ANSELM'S IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE C.C. - DAY

My Le stands before a small class of REFUGEES. A hand is raised, question asked. She answers inaudibly.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT CONT'D)
Time to give back. I was now the
papaya.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

SUPER - "TEN YEARS LATER"

My Le stands in line with a cart full of charity food. There is another Vietnamese WOMAN in front of her, and an impatient CAUCASIAN COUPLE behind her.

MAN
Ridiculous. They're taking over, I swear. Never had to wait in line here.

WOMAN
Shhh...don't talk too loud.

MAN
Oh hoey! Gook's can't understand what I'm saying anyway. They have their own stores down on Bolsa, why don't they go there?

My Le steps aside and gestures for the couple to go ahead of her.

MY LE
(articulate)
I understand you're in a hurry, sir. Would you like to go in front of me?

The woman smacks her husband on the shoulder.

WOMAN
Can't understand, huh? You big bully.
(to My Le)
No, we'll wait our turn honey.

INT. ST. ANSELM'S IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE C.C. - DAY

My Le pushes a cart of food into the center. The community director, CHARLES NGUYEN, accepts the cart.

CHARLES

Thank you for picking this food up for us, Nancy. No issues?

MY LE

Oh, the usual. You know how it is out there in the trenches.

CHARLES

Unfortunately the big chain stores are the most charitable. Will you be teaching here tomorrow?

MY LE

No, studying. Two more days of it. I've asked Myra to fill in for me.

CHARLES

Cal Fullerton, right? Your master's?

MY LE

If my head doesn't explode first!

(beat)

So Charles, was there any progress on my father?

CHARLES

We're still trying. This is really messy right now and the paper trails are spotty at best. There are fewer refugees making it in now, and many are being repatriated to Vietnam from the various camps around the world.

MY LE

I want to help though, I really do.

CHARLES

You are helping. Trust me. And we are doing everything we can to help you. This process will take time I'm afraid.

INT. MINH AND MY LE'S HOUSE - EVENING

My Le walks into the house. It's empty.

She walks into the kitchen and sees a vase full of roses and a card from Minh.

MINH (V.O.)
 Eight years, my love. What can I
 say? A miracle brought us together,
 but it will be our love for each
 other that keeps the torch lit.

FLASHBACK - WEDDING DAY - JUSTICE OF THE PEACE

They finish their vows, rings are fitted, kisses made.

MINH (V.O. CONT'D)
 I will forever remember the day we
 said our vows.

They walk to the counter to sign.

JUDGE
 You may sign here, ma'am and your
 husband here. Will you be using
 your English names?

MY LE
 We don't have English names.

JUDGE
 You can chose one for the marriage
 certificate if you like.

My Le looks up on the wall, sees portraits of Ronald and
 Nancy Reagan.

MY LE
 Nancy. I like that name.

MINH (V.O. CONT'D)
 And the look on my face when you
 chose Nancy as your English name.

Minh look up at the portraits. Shakes his head.

JUDGE
 Sir? How about you?

MINH
 No, just Minh. Thank you.

BACK TO SCENE - MINH AND MY LE'S HOUSE

MINH (V.O. CONT'D)
 Liem and I are both lucky to have
 you. Good luck with finals this
 week. I'm taking Liem fishing for a
 couple of days so you can study.

She puts the card down, admires their family portrait.

EXT. CAL FULLERTON CAMPUS - COMMENCEMENT - DAY

Nancy Nguyen is called, My Le enters the stage, shakes hands with the presiding officer, accepts her scroll tube. She walks across stage. She looks a bit empty, expressionless.

Minh and Liem are in the audience. They clap.

LIEM
Why isn't she smiling, papa? I would be jumping up and down if I got my master's degree.

MINH
I know why.

LIEM
Why?

MINH
I will let her tell you.

INT. CAR - DAY

Minh drives. My Le is quiet. Liem is concerned.

LIEM
We're very proud of you, mom.
(beat)
Mom? You okay?

MY LE
I'm okay.

LIEM
You don't look okay.

My Le glances over at Minh. Minh remains eyes forward, silent.

MY LE
I'll be fine. I have a lot on my mind.

LIEM
Papa, I tried.

MINH
Talk to him, please. I told him you would.

MY LE

(beat)

I'm an only child, Liem, like you.
Your father and I have been trying
to give you siblings, to build our
family.

INT. MINH AND MY LE'S HOUSE - DAY

Minh comforts My Le on the sofa. She sobs.

MY LE (CONT'D)(V.O.)

But it's not going to happen. We
got news from the doctor yesterday
that I could not have children.

BACK IN CAR

MY LE (CONT'D)

I carry a family curse, like my
parents.

LIEM

It's okay. It sounds like God has a
different plan for us. Right dad?

MINH

That's right. We have a house, we
own two gas stations, your mom got
her master's degree in education,
she volunteers and helps the
refugees coming in and...you're a
good student. That's a pretty good
plan, wouldn't you say mom?

(subtitled Vietnamese)

It's no disgrace to move out of the
way of the elephant.

MY LE (V.O.)

I could always count on Minh to see
the bright side.

INT. SCHOOL - MORNING

My Le stands before a class of junior high students. Liem is
in the class.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT)

I would spend the next ten years
teaching.

(MORE)

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT) (CONT'D)

I even had Liem as a student for one year before he moved on to high school.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Minh approaches Liem, now one of the attendants.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT)

We now had four gas stations and we were living comfortably. Liem was learning the business quickly.

Minh walks to the back of the station. There is a freight carrier picking up a load of boxes.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT)

We wanted to be more charitable, so we used the stations as a staging area for goods to be shipped to the needy in Vietnam.

The freight DRIVER hands Minh a form to fill out. Shrugs his shoulders.

Minh refuses to fill out the form, hands it back to the driver.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT)

But that didn't last long, as U.S. Customs got wind of what we were doing and put a stop to it.

Minh points to Liem and has him unload the truck.

EXT. ORANGE COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE - DAY

My Le walks past the chamber sign and into the building.

INT. ORANGE COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE - NANCY'S OFFICE

At her desk, sitting tall. She shuffles through her mail.

MY LE (V.O. PRESENT)

I sat on the board for the Orange County chamber of commerce for several years. I would eventually become president and CEO. It was then that I decided to retire from teaching and spend more time at home...more time searching...

One of the envelopes has a big, red TED logo on it. She opens it.

INT. MIN AND MY LE'S HOUSE - DINNER - EVENING

Liem is eating hastily and reading My Le's TED letter at the dinner table.

LIEM

Yeah, TED is huge. A real honor to be selected. You need to do it.

MINH

Did you apply for this?

MY LE

No, the city of Orange petitioned for me to be a TED speaker. I don't even know what I'd talk about.

MINH

How about twenty-one years of struggle?

LIEM

Do it, mom.

Liem shovels more food into his mouth.

MY LE

See what having two jobs does to you? You never taste your food anymore.

LIEM

We talked about this. I'm paying for grad school on my own.

MINH

Stubborn, like someone else I know.

LIEM

Not stubborn. Grateful. I'm not going to be a burden to you guys.

MY LE

You will never be a burden to us. Ever. You understand me?

LIEM

Yes, ma'am.

MY LE

Good, now you should just quit the second job, keep your job at the station. You have flexibility there and decent pay.

LIEM

I need the second job. Really. Just...trust me on this, please.

MY LE

Second job, second job. We don't even know what you're doing at the second job. What is it?

Liem shovels in a last bite, stands up.

LIEM

Oh, wow, look at that. I'm running late. I really need to go now. Please excuse me?

MINH

No! Not until you thank your mom.

Liem stands, walks over to My Le. Plants a kiss on her cheek.

LIEM

Do the TED talk, mom. Do it for the Boat People.

MY LE

I'll think about it. Go on, get out of here! Shoo!

Liem runs out of the room.

MINH

When?

MY LE

When...what?

MINH

When is this TED thing?

MY LE

Four weeks.

MINH

Liem's right. You need to do it.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. UC IRVINE AUDITORIUM - TED EVENT

The auditorium is fixated on My Le. Many are wiping away tears. There is utter silence, except for My Le.

MY LE

History tried to crush us...but we endured. There is living proof all around you...in your community...in this audience. These harrowing journeys brought us to you, and we are ever so grateful for the opportunities provided to us, the Boat People. Although I was unable to locate my father, I think I'm finally at peace with his...

A man stands up, center audience, and walks down the stairs toward the stage. It's Liem. My Le is interrupted by the stir.

MY LE (CONT'D)

...I'm at peace...Liem?

Liem approaches the stage, TWO SECURITY PERSONNEL try to stop him. He holds up his hands, continues to approach. Rustling from the audience.

LIEM

It's okay, I'm her son.

SECURITY ONE

You have to remain seated, sir.

MY LE

Liem, you can't come up here.

LIEM

I need to come up there. I need to say something. Please.

TED event coordinator, Sharon Vu, enters the stage with a microphone. She asks the security personnel to allow him to come up to the stage.

SHARON

It's okay, son. Come on up. We're running long, you only have a moment. My Le, do you mind?

She looks around the room, at Liem, at Sharon, tries to grasp the situation.

MY LE

It's okay. Let him speak.

He grabs the microphone, takes a deep breath.

LIEM

I'm sorry, mom. You won't be able to finish this without me.

(beat)

Thank you, everyone. I do apologize for the interruption, I'll try to be brief. I am Liem Le Nguyen, and this woman is the reason I'm standing here tonight. You know the story now, you know how she made sure I, and many like me, had a fighting chance. How do you thank someone like that? How? I thought long and hard and realized that I couldn't thank her...without lying to her.

(audience stirs)

Yeah, I know, crazy. Anyway, I've never lied to her, ever, but I had no problem with it this...one...time. So, I want to confess. I hope you can forgive me.

(to her)

I'm sorry, mom. That second job I told you about? There was no second job.

My Le is looks confused. Some audience reaction.

LIEM (CONT'D)

You see, for the last six months, I've been out...searching. It wasn't easy and I almost gave up several times. But you know what? A power above gave me a lucky break...all the pieces came together, and I found who I was looking for. I found him...for you. Your father.

My Le's mouth is agape. She's breathless, frozen. She inches toward Liem. His eyes fill with water.

More audience reaction.

MY LE

(choked up)

But Liem, How?...Where?

Liem grabs her by the shoulders, looks deep in her eyes.

LIEM
Turn around.

He helps her turn. She sees her father ENTER the stage. The audience gasps.

MY LE
(breaking down)
Oh my god, papa...

Nam, in his mid-60's now, walks slowly toward her.

Liem helps My Le across the stage. Me Le breaks away and gives her father a long, warm hug.

The audience erupts. Much clapping, celebration.

MY LE (CONT'D)
Oh, papa. Papa I missed you so much!

NAM
My baby girl.

MY LE
I knew you were out there, I just knew it...and I never gave up hope.

NAM
I know now how much you tried. I'm so sorry, My Le.

Liem watches the exchange. My Le pulls him over.

MY LE
Come here you little shit.

She gives him a big hug.

MY LE (CONT'D)
I spent my whole life looking for this man. Where did you find him?.

Liem looks to Nam for approval. Nam nods.

LIEM
Vietnam.

MY LE
What?

NAM
I never left.

MY LE
I was looking in the wrong
direction the whole time?

INT. TRAN HOUSE - FLASHBACK

Mrs. Tran and Anh look out the window, they see My Le standing at the front door.

Anh turns to Nam and Mr. Tran, looking for instruction.

ANH
She's here, just like you said.

NAM
But I'm not. You must not tell her
I'm in the other room.

MR. TRAN
Are you sure about this my friend?

NAM
I'm sure. She can't risk being seen
with me. Hand her this
letter...then send her on her way.

MRS. TRAN
What is the letter?

NAM
A distraction.

Nam disappears around the corner.

The Trans sits quietly in the living room.

My Le continues to KNOCK on the door.

MR. TRAN gestures for Anh, his daughter, to answer.

Anh opens the door. There stands My Le, dirty, tired.

ANH
My Le!

Anh and Mrs. Tran greet her at the door.

MRS. TRAN pulls My Le into the house like a worried mother.

MRS. TRAN
 Oh, my! My Le, you're ragged. Anh,
 make a spot for My Le.

MR. TRAN
 She can have my spot.

They escort her in and set her down on Mr. Tran's favorite chair.

IN SPARE ROOM - AROUND THE CORNER

Nam listens in as the Tran's help My Le. He can hear her reading the letter, eating dinner, asking for money, then her departure as the front door shuts.

He pulls a cigarette out, lights it. On his face, sadness, loss, regret.

Mr. Tran walks into the room.

MR. TRAN
 I hope you know what you just did
 to that young lady.

There is a long pause, he inhales, holds it, then exhales.

NAM
 I just saved her life.

BACK TO PRESENT - UC IRVINE AUDITORIUM

Sharon walks over and taps them on the shoulders.

SHARON
 We need to wrap this up folks.

NAM
 I will tell you everything at home.

MY LE
 No, I have a better place.

My Le grabs her father and Liem and turns to the audience. The audience continues to clap.

EXT. HUNTINGTON BEACH - SUNSET

My Le, Nam, Minh and Liem walk down the beach. It's golden hour, the sun drops into the horizon.

MY LE

You were within my grasp...a room
away from me that day.

NAM

It was the hardest decision of my
life, and it was the only way to
keep you alive.

MINH

Your military profile must have
been a terrible burden.

NAM

It did me no favors. I was
eventually captured, sent to a
reeducation camp for four years,
tortured, and nearly killed. Had
you stayed with me My Le, you would
have suffered a fate worse than
mine.

They stop and look out over the surf, into the setting sun.

LIEM

We're all lucky to be alive, I
guess.

MY LE

It's not luck, Liem. We chose to be
the papaya. Right papa?

Nam affirms, smiling.

FADE OUT:

The End