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Cast of Characters

HUNG TRAN

HUY TRAN

TIEN NGO

KHUE TRAN

VAN PHAM TRAN

TONG TRAN / WHITE SCARFED GIRL

Acknowledgments

Trial By Water was originally produced by Ma-Yi Theater (Ralph Pena, Artistic Director; Jorge Ortoll, Executive Producer) at the Culture Project in March 2006 with the following cast & credits:

TIEN NGO Arthur Acuna
HUY TRAN Genevieve De Veyra
HUNG TRAN Dinh Q. Doan
KHUE TRAN Jojo Gonzalez
VAN PHAM TRAN/ TONG TRAN Karen Tsen Lee
PUPPETEERS Jessica Chandlee Smith and
Timothy McCown Reynolds

Director John Gould Rubin
Producer Suzette Porte
Scenic & Costume Design Clint Ramos
Puppet Design Jane Stein
Lighting Design Nicole Pierce
Sound Design Elizabeth Rhodes
Assistant Director Don Nguyen
Dramaturg Mallory Catlett
Production Stage Manager Katie Ailinger
Assistant Stage Manager Kimberly Jade Tompkins

TRIAL BY WATER

by Qui Nguyen

ACT I

Prologue: From the Sky

(A spotlight comes up on HUNG, who is playing solitaire. The rest of the cast is scattered around the stage wearing rice hats that obscure their identities.)

(They watch silently as HUNG lays each card down one by one.)

(In the background, we hear the sounds of screams. As the screams rise in volume, the STRANGERS begin to creep up behind HUNG.)

(The screams abruptly stop.)

HUNG. Paradise is...

(TONG enters.)

TONG. It's time, Hung. Take my hand.

(HUNG ignores TONG and continues to play.)

HUNG. I can't.

TONG. It's not healthy staying here.

HUNG. I don't think my health is a concern anymore.

TONG. Of course it is.

HUNG. I'm not ready.

TONG. No one ever is.

HUNG. My life's over.

TONG. You've come to a good place, Hung. I promise. Let me show you.

HUNG. I don't deserve this.

TONG. There's going to be a lot of lights on the other side. Don't be afraid, it can be overwhelming.

HUNG. I deserve Hell.

TONG. It's heaven, Hung.

(The STRANGERS suddenly rush tightly around them.)

HUNG. Please. Just give me one minute. That's all I ask. One minute. I need to say good-bye to my life.

(A young boy appears from the STRANGERS and huddles next to HUNG.)

(Beat.)

TONG. One minute.

(The sound of ocean waves as the stage transforms itself.)

Scene 1: Beginning the Journey

(Lights come up on HUNG and HUY, two young Vietnamese boys. They sit tightly in a crowd of STRANGERS. Stored between the two boys are a pair of rice bags and a pair of water jugs.)

(They are on a fishing boat.)

HUY. *Em dew di. Uh die, ngu wha.*

HUNG. Shhh.

HUY. *Houng bic yi hut. Gong di.* Come on. Let's get out of here. Hung, *Di di lai.*

HUNG. Just go to sleep.

HUY. But I'm not—

HUNG. Just go to sleep. Please.

HUY. How am I supposed to go to sleep, Hung? Look where we're at. We're in the middle of a fucking fishing boat. It stinks!

HUNG. Will you shut up?

HUY. Our lives are over.

HUNG. Actually, our lives are being saved.

HUY. No more soccer. No more spring rolls.

HUNG. We'll survive.

HUY. No more prostitutes living down the street.

HUNG. Actually, prostitutes living down the street isn't a good thing, Huy.

HUY. I was going to lose my virginity to one of those hookers. Now. I'm going die a fucking virgin.

HUNG. No, you're not.

HUY. How do you know?

HUNG. Americans do have sex too, you know?

HUY. Yeah. But they do it funny.
They do it in the butt.

HUNG. Go to sleep, Huy.

HUY. Hung, this isn't smart. If someone catches us here—

HUNG. No one's gonna catch us here.

HUY. We should run.

HUNG. The V.C. are out there.

HUY. There's no one out there.

HUNG. And what? We snuck all the way to Ben Tre harbour because Dad thought it'd be fun playing ninja?

HUY. We need mom and dad. We should be with them.

HUNG. They're hiding.

HUY. The city isn't that big.

HUNG. There's four million people in Saigon.

HUY. Okay, so give or take a few million, it's virtually empty.

HUNG. No, we'd get lost and in trouble—

HUY. And what do you call this?

HUNG. Freedom.

HUY. Freedom? This is trouble, Hung. *Rac Roi!*

HUNG. Shhhh!

(HUNG *physically quells* HUY.)

HUNG. Will you shut up? You're drawing attention.

HUY. How many free people do you know sit around on piles of rotting fish guts?

HUNG. Listen to me. We're going to be fine.

HUY. I can't sit this scrunched up much longer. Legs aren't supposed to stay bent for this long.

HUNG. It'll be morning in a few hours. I promise, time will go by quicker if you're unconscious. At least for me anyhow.

HUY. Can I at least stand up for a second?

HUNG. No.

HUY. My butt is all numb.

HUNG. *NGUNG LAI!*

In the morning, when we're at sea, I'll let you go up. You can stretch your legs out then.

HUY. "Let me go up?"

HUNG. When we're on this boat, I'm in charge.

HUY. I don't think so.

HUNG. *Hay nghe toi!*

(Silence.)

(One of the faceless STRANGERS shifts and begins to lean on HUY.)

HUY. Hung...

HUNG. Shhhh.

HUY. Hung.

HUNG. Why can't you just listen to me for once?

HUY. HUNG!

HUNG. Are you partially deaf? Retarded? What is it?

HUY. This guy's leaning on me.

HUNG. Just nudge him.

HUY. I'm trying. *Chao Ong.*

HUNG. Shhh.

HUY. But...he's not moving.

HUNG. Just push him off.

HUY. I can't. You do it.

(HUNG reaches over and taps the STRANGER on one side of his head. The STRANGER tries to fan away what he thinks is a bug and leans off of HUY.)

HUNG. You okay?

(Beat.)

Look, I'm sorry I raised my voice. I'm just trying to—

(HUY turns away.)

HUNG. We're going to be alright, you do know that? We have each other. You and me: Team Tran. The Tran brothers. What do you say?

(Silence.)

HUNG. Do you want to play a game?

HUY. No.

HUNG. Come on—

HUY. No.

HUNG. What's paradise?

HUY. I don't want to play a stupid game, Hung.

HUNG. What's paradise? Tell me.

HUY. Hung...

HUNG. Tell me. Or I'll get that guy to lean on you again. Maybe even get him to cuddle. Make you his cuddle monkey.

(Beat.)

HUY. Paradise is...me. Not on this boat. Really far away from you. Back home in my own bed.

HUNG. That's paradise, Huy? You're losing your touch. I know Buddhist prayers with more sex appeal.

(Silence.)

HUY. And the bed is filled with girls.

HUNG. Yeah?

HUY. And they're all wet...and wrestling. And kissing on me. And on each other.

HUNG. That's more like it.

HUY. They're all tall and thin. And they smell like honey dew melon.

HUNG. And then...

HUY. And then—

(HUNG reaches into his pocket and pulls a picture from his wallet.)

HUNG. This girl appears. What do you do?

HUY. Holy. Shit.

HUNG. What do you do?

HUY. TITS!

HUNG. Quiet.

HUY. They're *buh wha!* Where'd you get this?

HUNG. I was thirteen once too.

HUY. This girl—she’s amazing.

HUNG. Yeah?

HUY. Look at her.

HUNG. But as you pointed out—she’s the kind of girl that likes it “in the butt.”

HUY. I don’t think I’d mind.

HUNG. It says her name’s Tracy. She’s American.

HUY. Wow.

HUNG. This is going to be a good trip, little brother. Do you hear me? I promise.

HUY. Can I have this?

(KHUE, who is dressed as one of the STRANGERS, takes off his hat and rags. He enters the scene.)

KHUE. You should be happy.

HUY. She’s gorgeous.

KHUE. It’s what you’ve always talked about.

HUY. Too bad it doesn’t show below the belly.

HUNG. Okay, okay. Rest.

KHUE. It’s finally happening for us.

HUY. Tracy. Lovely, lovely Tracy.

HUNG. Guard her well.

HUY. I will.

KHUE. America.

(HUY covers himself as KHUE takes over the scene.)

(They are now back in Vietnam.)

HUNG. America?

KHUE. We’re sending you there.

HUNG. But without you and mom?

KHUE. This is not up for debate.

HUNG. This is our lives we’re talking about here. I think if there’s anything up for debate, this would be it.

KHUE. Look at your Aunt Tong.

HUNG. Aunt Tong?

KHUE. She's in America.

HUNG. She makes paper-bags for a living.

KHUE. She no longer has to worry about the V.C.

HUNG. She used to be a beauty queen.

KHUE. She still is *dep wha*—very beautiful.

HUNG. They don't see her that way.

KHUE. Hung, this is good news. Very good news. This is not an opportunity that's easy to come by—

HUNG. Why can't we just wait until another time? When we can all go together?

KHUE. You'll be sixteen next year—you know what will happen.

HUNG. We'll figure something out—

KHUE. No. We've worked too hard to have you drafted into their schools.

HUNG. No, you'd rather have me be an orphan.

KHUE. I'd rather my children not be slaves.

HUNG. It's not that bad. We have enough to eat and we have a home—

KHUE. I'm not letting you get brainwashed.

HUNG. We have each other. Isn't that important?

KHUE. No. You will go.

HUNG. I just joined the soccer team, Dad.

KHUE. You can play soccer over there.

HUNG. Americans don't play soccer.

KHUE. This is trivial. You will obey.

HUNG. Please don't do this.

KHUE. I know you don't see this now, but this is a boon. We're giving you a chance at life.

HUNG. But what kind of life, Dad?

KHUE. Look at our family photos—how many of our relatives have you never met? Never had the chance to meet because they were either locked up, sent away, or simply vanished? How long must South Vietnam be punished for simply wanting independence?

HUNG. Stop. Dad, I've grown up listening to your propaganda.

KHUE. This is not propaganda.

Hung, why do you think your Aunt sends us cases of toothpaste every month?

HUNG. She believes in good hygiene.

KHUE. *Do duyen!*

HUNG. Because she's rich.

KHUE. But why in toothpaste? Why does she have to hide it in toothpaste?

HUNG. I don't know.

KHUE. You're not anything here, Hung. You'll never be anything more than what they will allow.

HUNG. I don't need to be anything, Dad. What I need is a home.

KHUE. As long as they are in charge, this place will never be a home.

HUNG. Dad.

KHUE. We are done talking.

HUNG. But what about—

KHUE. We are done.

(The sound of ocean waves.)

Scene 2: Solitaire

(Back in the hull of the fishing boat, HUNG is alone in the huddle of people playing cards by himself. TIEN is watching.)

TIEN. Pssst. *Chao em.* What are you playing? Game can't be that fun by yourself?

(TIEN taps HUNG on the shoulder. HUNG shrugs it off.)

TIEN. *Chao Emmmm.*

HUNG. It's called solitaire and you're suppose to play it by yourself.

TIEN. Really?

HUNG. Yes, really.

TIEN. What keeps you from cheating?

HUNG. Self-discipline.

TIEN. Would you like to play something else? Something that requires a bit of the back and forth?

HUNG. No.

TIEN. We can keep each other company.

HUNG. I can't.

TIEN. Come on, it's not like your folks are here. It'll be fun. Or do you not believe in having fun?

HUNG. It's not that—

TIEN. Come on, kid, it's not like I'm going to bite...hard. Jokes, kid, jokes.

(HUNG turns away.)

TIEN. Look, do you want to see something neat? Sure ya do. I bet I can guess your name.

(TIEN pretends to be reading HUNG's mind.)

TIEN. Your name is...I'm picturing it. It starts with an "H"...and it sounds like...Dung. Could it be ... Hung?

HUNG. Lucky guess.

TIEN. I'm psychic.

HUNG. That's impossible.

TIEN. So you're a skeptic.

HUNG. You just overheard—

TIEN. They call me the Great Tien. I can do anything. Would you like to see me juggle some of your items?

HUNG. Keep away from those.

TIEN. Sorry. I just want to show you a trick.

HUNG. How about disappearing?

TIEN. You're funny. A funny kid.

HUNG. Stay away from my things.

TIEN. Suspicious and skeptical.

Look, kid, I don't mean any harm. Really. I just want to help. You're young. You're on this boat alone.

HUNG. Who said we're alone?

TIEN. Where are your parents then?

HUNG. They're up top.

TIEN. Really?

HUNG. Yes, really.

TIEN. I just want to make sure that everyone here stays safe. I know a lot about these ships and what can happen.

HUNG. It's very noble of you to want to be of assistance, but—

TIEN. You can defend yourself.

HUNG. Yes.

TIEN. Did you know that you could chew on a piece of cloth to get your stomach to stop growling?

HUNG. You can?

TIEN. You can.

HUNG. That's interesting.

TIEN. Did you know pee is sterile to drink?

HUNG. Bullshit.

TIEN. Yep, right out of the body, there's nothing in it. Completely safe. High in salt so it's not as hydrating as most liquids, but it's safer than sea water.

HUNG. That's neat.

TIEN. I'm full of neat facts.

Do you like to fish? Did you know if you ate nothing but fish, you would—

HUNG. I don't eat fish.

TIEN. But if you did—

HUNG. I don't. I find eating fish cruel.

TIEN. But it's fish.

HUNG. It's alive.

TIEN. Vegetarians eat fish.

HUNG. I don't.

TIEN. You're an interesting kid, you know that? A very interesting fella.

HUNG. Sir—

TIEN. Call me Tien.

HUNG. Please, Tien, you seem really nice, but—

TIEN. You're fine all on your own.

HUNG. Yes.

TIEN. You know all about these cruises and what type of people take them.

HUNG. I'm aware of what kind—

TIEN. Actually, kid, you aren't. I don't mean to scare you, but this isn't like being on land. People go nuts on these boats all the time. Real nuts. Not a pretty picture when you're this trapped—this cramped up for space. Trust me, it can get ugly real fast.

HUNG. What are you saying exactly?

TIEN. I'm saying—

HUNG. Is this a threat?

TIEN. Is what a threat?

HUNG. Are you threatening me?

TIEN. No. I'm not doing anything of the sort.

HUNG. Then what is this?

TIEN. I'm just talking ...

(Pause.)

TIEN. Look, kid... I know your folks.

HUNG. No, you don't.

TIEN. Your dad's name is Khue. Khue Tran. And your mom is—

HUNG. I'm not impressed by this trick.

TIEN. It's no trick. I know them. And I know they're not here.

HUNG. What do you want from us?

TIEN. I don't want anything.

HUNG. Please, you can have our things, just—

TIEN. Look, kid, I didn't mean to freak you out.

Your parents mean a lot to me. I trusted your father with my life. I owe him.

It was your dad who taught me all this neat stuff in the first place. I just want to help you. That's all.

(Silence.)

TIEN. Okay. Fine. Sorry. I'll keep an eye on you from a distance. I swear I just want to help. Stay safe.

(TIEN throws a rag over himself. The STRANGERS engulf him and he disappears in the crowd.)

(HUY enters.)

HUY. (*Singing to himself:*)

Do Ai

Do Trang

Do trang may tuoi trang gia

Nua dem ma tran den

Dung Cho o ngoai hein—

HUNG. Huy.

HUY. Paradise is getting to walk around in the open air.

HUNG. Where were you?

HUY. Where do you think I was?

HUNG. You shouldn't be out of my sight for so long.

HUY. Your breath stinks.

HUNG. Sorry.

HUY. What happened? You accidentally fall mouth-first into a whale turd or something?

HUNG. How was it up top?

HUY. Good. I guess no matter what you're riding, the sea still looks like the sea.

HUNG. That's incredibly insightful.

HUY. It's the ocean, Hung. It's blue. It's big. I was in awe of its infinite bigness.

It's crowded up there though. There's like a million people. And there was this girl, Hung.

HUNG. A girl?

HUY. Yeah. A woman. She's definitely someone who could have been one of our "neighbors" if you know what I mean...

HUNG. Stay away, Huy.

HUY. She has hair down to here and this round little butt. Small perky breasts.

(*As HUY describes the girl, we see her walk by in the back of the stage.*)

HUNG. Huy.

HUY. And style. I mean, look at this place. Everyone is in rags, but this girl—this girl is dressed like a model—her clothes are all silky

and shiny and she's walking around wearing this long white scarf and makeup...

HUNG. It's not a good idea to stick out.

HUY. She is definitely one lady I wouldn't mind losing it to.

HUNG. How can you even think about sex in a place like this?

HUY. It smells like fish, doesn't it?

HUNG. That's a bad joke.

HUY. Then why did you laugh?

HUNG. Yeah, well—

HUY. So what did Mom pack us?

HUNG. Potatoes.

HUY. What else?

HUNG. Potatoes.

HUY. Potatoes? There's nothing else? Rice cakes? Some sandwiches? Breath mints?

HUNG. Did I say rice cakes, sandwiches, or breath mints?

HUY. What is she trying to do? Kill us?

HUNG. Don't say that.

HUY. Say what?

HUNG. Mom was doing the best she can. It wasn't like she had a lot of time to—

HUY. Okay, okay, I'm just saying I can't eat potatoes for a week.

HUNG. You'll eat what you've been given.

HUY. There's nothing else?

HUNG. Potatoes are fine. In some cultures, potatoes are seen as delicacies.

HUY. Whoa, wait just a minute.

HUNG. What?

HUY. I should have known—I should have fucking known. This is your fault, isn't it?

HUNG. I'm not the one who packed the rice bags.

HUY. No. But you are the one that Mom was being courteous to.

HUNG. Don't be an ass about this.

HUY. You're so weird.

HUNG. I'm not weird.

HUY. No one else in the family is Buddhist.

HUNG. Don't start.

HUY. You don't eat meat.

HUNG. Stop.

HUY. That's pretty fucking weird.

HUNG. Look, just because I'm not willing to eat something that pisses and shits—

HUY. Pause. I've heard this a thousand times. I have it memorized. I could probably even recite it back to you in French.

HUNG. You're such a pain in the ass.

HUY. Here, just drink some water.

HUNG. I've already had my share.

HUY. I'm sure there is some amendment to Dad's golden rules if your breath begins smelling like decomposing ass.

HUNG. It's not that bad.

HUY. No? Look at these flies, Hung. They're trying to land in your mouth.

(HUY slaps at the flies.)

HUNG. Don't.

HUY. I'm just trying to help.

HUNG. Don't. They're only alive for three days. Just fan them away.

HUY. Weird. Weird. Weirder.

HUNG. *Do duyen!*

HUY. You're so damn serious about everything.

HUNG. Not everything.

HUY. Oh, yes. Pretty much everything.

HUNG. I'm just doing what's right. Dad said—

HUY. "Ration. Don't talk to strangers." Yeah, not quite the great works of Confucius if you ask me.

HUNG. They're rules.

HUY. They're bullshit.

HUNG. Being cautious about your supplies isn't bullshit.

HUY. Cautious about our supplies? We're already one-seventh of the way there.

HUNG. And as for communicating to strangers, you don't know what kind of people are on this ship. There could be criminals.

(PHAM enters into the scene from the STRANGERS.)

PHAM. I need to give you something, Monkey.

HUY. Criminals? Wow, you really are paranoid.

HUNG. It's only a week-long trip. We can follow these rules for one week. It's not hard.

PHAM. It's an American custom.

HUY. Hung, come on, there's no criminals here. All these people are like us. I'm sure some of them might even know mom and dad.

HUNG. No one here knows mom and dad.

HUY. I'm just saying—

HUNG. No one here knows anyone in our family. Now drop it.

(HUY fades out of the scene. HUNG is now back in Vietnam.)

PHAM. It's gold.

HUNG. Gold?

PHAM. Yes, Monkey.

HUNG. You shouldn't be giving me gold.

PHAM. It's a ring.

HUNG. You could sell that and use it for the boat.

PHAM. This ring isn't worth enough for that.

HUNG. Then what about the toothpaste money?

PHAM. Hung, we can't come with you.

HUNG. Huy and I will do it. We'll squeeze every single tube empty. Aunt Tong must have sent us hundreds of American dollars that way.

PHAM. That isn't for us.

HUNG. There has to be enough cash hidden in those things to send our whole—

PHAM. That money is for the community.

HUNG. But this is our family.

PHAM. That money is for medicine and supplies. We can't take that away from those who need it.

HUNG. Then let me stay. I can help.

PHAM. Hung, you've been talking about going since you were three.

HUNG. I'm not three anymore.

PHAM. Don't you want a home with more than three concrete steps for a yard?

HUNG. I'd rather have one with a Mom and Dad.

PHAM. Your father and I want you to have a good life.

HUNG. I have a good life.

PHAM. There's too much corruption and hate here.

HUNG. It hasn't affected us, though.

PHAM. It will.

HUNG. There's corruption everywhere, Mom.

PHAM. Not like here. It will claim your soul if we don't send you away immediately. The lord says if there is evil, you should pluck yourself away from it.

HUNG. The lord? Mom, what kind of reason is that?

PHAM. This country is full of sin, Hung. If you let yourself accept it, you will damn yourself forever.

HUNG. You're licking your teeth.

PHAM. We're saving you.

HUNG. What are you keeping from us?

PHAM. Take this ring.

HUNG. Don't avoid the subject.

PHAM. This is a good opportunity.

HUNG. You're still licking.

PHAM. There's something stuck in between them.

HUNG. You're lying.

PHAM. *Ngung lai nay.*

(Silence.)

Take it.

HUNG. Is there a problem, Mom?

PHAM. No.

HUNG. Is it the government? Money? What?

PHAM. Nothing.

HUNG. Is it Dad's secret job? Is he in trouble?

PHAM. Tell your Aunt we love her. And make sure she brings Huy to confession every week. He's smart, but he can get carried away—

HUNG. Is Dad in trouble?

PHAM. And that we appreciate her taking care of you.

HUNG. Mom.

PHAM. You ask too many questions.

HUNG. You used to think that was my strong point.

PHAM. Take this ring, Hung. Give it to Tong. I want her to hold on to part of our family for you. So you will always have a piece of home near you.

HUNG. I don't need a ring.

PHAM. You can give this to your future wife.
It's an American custom.

HUNG. And a Vietnamese custom.
You're giving up your worldly possessions.

PHAM. You're not losing us, Hung. We will be together again.

HUNG. And what if we aren't? What do I tell my future wife about this moment?

(Pause.)

PHAM. I don't know what to tell you. You're just a boy.

HUNG. Mom...please. I can't go without knowing why.

(Pause.)

PHAM. They're after him.

(The STRANGERS suddenly encircle HUNG. PHAM disappears into the crowd. HUNG backs out of them and crumbles into a fetal position. They linger over him. He tries to ignore them, but one pokes at him. HUNG brushes the STRANGER's touch away.)

HUNG. Stop!

(The STRANGERS begin to close in tighter.)

HUNG. I mean it. Leave me alone.

(A STRANGER grabs at his bags. HUNG fights it away from him.)

HUNG. Go away.

(The STRANGERS close in even tighter. They loom over, preparing to attack.)

HUNG. STOP!!!

(HUNG tries to get out of the entanglement but sees he's blocked in. He begins to cower. TIEN appears. He screams the STRANGERS away.)

TIEN. Aaaaaaagh! *Mày tuoi mày đi cho khác. Than nay của tôi. Di lầy đi!*
[Aaaaaaagh! Get away from this boy. He's mine. Leave! Now!]

(TIEN stands over HUNG as his protector. The STRANGERS slowly disperse away.)

TIEN. You okay, kid?

HUNG. Tien?

TIEN. They were just interested in your things. Nothing to worry about.

HUNG. I would have been okay.

TIEN. Yeah, you looked like you were handling yourself like the great Li Xiaolóng. You could have easily told those guys *Do ma moi* and they would have just left you alone.

HUNG. I don't use that kind of language.

TIEN. Hey, don't be embarrassed. It's okay to be a bit shaken up. Thing like that can be scary.

HUNG. I wasn't scared.

TIEN. Is that why you smell like piss?
 Jokes, kid, jokes.

HUNG. That wasn't funny.

TIEN. I have a daughter about your age.

HUNG. What?

TIEN. Her name is San. She just turned fifteen. Smart girl. Real bright. Pretty good at cards too. If she were here by herself, I'd want someone to look over her.

I just want to feel like I'm doing something useful while I'm stuck on this raft. What's that your dad always said? "It's better to die standing up—"

HUNG. "Than to always live lying down."

TIEN. Yeah, that's it.

HUNG. So you knew him pretty well?

TIEN. I worked with him for a long time.

HUNG. How long?

TIEN. Since the war.

HUNG. So you're part of his—

TIEN. Political group. Yes. He ever talk about it?

HUNG. What did you do for him specifically?

TIEN. I ran supplies and did other things.

HUNG. What kind of other things?

TIEN. I'm a soldier.

HUNG. How come I never saw—

TIEN. Look, kid, you don't have to grill me. Your dad was the one who put me on this ship.

HUNG. What?

TIEN. Someone betrayed him and placed us in one really fucked up situation. If it weren't for him, I wouldn't be here.

I'm like you—I just want to know why we're here as badly as you do. Trust me, I'm on your side.

HUNG. I didn't know there were sides.

TIEN. Kid, I'm telling ya—if I ever find the guy who put us here—

HUNG. Stop. Revenge is bad.

TIEN. Wow, you're as religious as your mom, huh?

HUNG. How do you know about her?

TIEN. Your dad was always joking about how he ended up marrying a nun. Said "Tien, I sincerely think my wife is having an affair with Jesus."

HUNG. Don't talk about my mother.

TIEN. I'm sorry. I didn't mean—

HUNG. We're different.

TIEN. I didn't mean any disrespect. Look, do you want a shot?

HUNG. I don't drink alcohol.

TIEN. Well, I figured as much. I just thought—do you want to try?

HUNG. I better check on my brother.

TIEN. He's on deck. He's fine.

Come on, try it. It's good. Come on, aren't you getting tired of just drinking water all the time? It's at least something different.

HUNG. I'll pass.

TIEN. Think of it this way. If you drink this, then you'll be saving your water for later.

HUNG. But—

TIEN. A little American whiskey goes a long way. You can have as much as you want. It's good. Tasty. Refreshing.

(TIEN takes a swig.)

TIEN. You sure? It's delectable.

HUNG. Hand it here.

(HUNG takes a big swallow and immediately gags.)

HUNG. It burns.

TIEN. Yummy, huh?

HUNG. How can you digest that stuff?

TIEN. Trust me, there's a lot worse you can put in you.

HUNG. I can't imagine.

TIEN. So did your dad ever tell you about all the shit we used to get into? Your dad could be a son of a bitch when he needed to be. And against them V.C.—I never saw someone so convicted—

HUNG. I don't want to talk about this.

TIEN. Why, kid? It's your dad. A boy should know about his dad—

HUNG. You should go.

TIEN. Come on, we were just starting to get to know one another.

HUNG. My brother will be back soon. He shouldn't see me talking to you. It'll give him the wrong idea.

TIEN. I'm just trying to share some stuff with you—

HUNG. I'm sorry, Tien.

TIEN. Come on—

HUNG. Good-bye.

Scene 3: Friends

(A single light on HUNG.)

HUNG. This is paradise—the ability to selflessly be part of a whole. A cycle. The awareness that you're part of something larger than yourself. That the bigger picture is more significant than your single self. The loss of self. To not have to fight. To not have to struggle. To just be part of the machine. To flow.

(HUY appears.)

HUY. And then...

HUNG. And then—

HUY. Ho Chi Minh and his goons show up and kick the shit out of you and your fellow monks. *Wa-kai!*

(HUY pretends to do kung fu.)

HUY. He takes them all down with a series of impressive kicks and punches and then...he looks you straight in the face and says "Now that I have defeated your brothers, I challenge you to a battle to the death!" What do you do, Hung? What. Do. You. Do?

HUNG. I do...nothing.

HUY. You'd what?

HUNG. I'd do nothing. It's called turning the other cheek.

HUY. It's called being a pussy.

HUNG. Humanity is something that we choose, Huy. It's not easy. We choose to make the better choice, not just live by our passions.

HUY. That's lame.

HUNG. It's not lame.

HUY. Hung, you can try to be as holy as you want, but down deep, you're just as corrupt as I am. I've heard you yell at Dad. Whether you wanna admit it or not, you're not the perfect Buddhist.

HUNG. Huy, get down from there.

HUY. Come on, Big Brother, you'd really do nothing? Ho Chi Minh shows up and you'd do nothing? It's Ho Chi Minh. The big bad.

HUNG. Huy, get down.

HUY. You know who wouldn't turn the other cheek. Dad wouldn't.

HUNG. Get. Down.

HUY. He would kick Ho Chi Minh's ass, that's what he'd do.

HUNG. HUY!

HUY. What?

HUNG. Down. Now.

HUY. Why? Are you scared I'm gonna fall?

HUNG. Listen to me.

HUY. Calm down. Unlike you, I do know how to swim.

HUNG. Just do it. Please.

HUY. I'm telling ya, it's not like I'm gonna...Whoa!

(HUY pretends to wobble.)

HUNG. HUY!

HUY. Gotcha.

HUNG. Stop being a dumbass.

HUY. Hung, you saved my life. You're my hero. When we finally get off this boat, I promise, the first hooker is on me.

HUNG. I should have just pushed you in.

HUY. You don't have the...

(The WHITE SCARFED GIRL walks by. HUY notices her.)

HUNG. I don't have the what?

HUY. There she is.

HUNG. There who is?

HUY. Who do you think? The girl who's destined to deflower me. Sex wrapped in a white scarf.

HUNG. Wow, she is pretty.

HUY. Pretty? Hung, she's paradise.

HUNG. You're right. She does have a cute butt.

HUY. Yeah. I'd love to take that butt and...

HUNG. And what?

HUY. Bite it.

HUNG. You'd bite it?

HUY. I don't know. Bite it, squeeze it, write poetry to it, name my first-born child after it.

HUNG. You're stupid.

HUY. Seeing that behind is literally the single greatest thing about this trip.

HUNG. Yeah, escaping an oppressive communist state, that's nothing special, right?

HUY. Compared to that ass, democracy sucks.

HUNG. I'm glad this trip has helped you figure out you priorities.

HUY. I'm going to talk to her.

HUNG. No.

HUY. This is the perfect opportunity. When is a girl like that going to give me the time of day besides now? Stuck here, though, I got a chance.

HUNG. No, Huy!

(The WHITE SCARFED GIRL leaves.)

HUY. Damn.

HUNG. I'm doing you a favor.

HUY. This sucks.

HUNG. This doesn't suck.

HUY. Do you find this fun?

HUNG. Not particularly.

HUY. As I said, it sucks. We are traveling on a boat of suck.

HUNG. We should hit land in two more days. It'll be over before we know it.

HUY. If I ever find the son of a bitch who started this, I would—

HUNG. Stop. Wishing harm on others is—

HUY. Shut up with your Buddhist shit. Don't tell me you wouldn't do the same thing, Hung. Even you aren't that upright. You're as mad as I am.

HUNG. No, I'm not.

HUY. Bullshit. I'm telling you, if I ever ran into this guy, I'd—

HUNG. You'd what, Huy? What could you possibly do? You're a toothpick.

HUY. I'd kill him, Hung.

HUNG. Don't talk like that.

HUY. I would. I don't care how big he is. I'd wait until he fell asleep, sneak up, tie his arms up with one of our shirts. And then... I'd slowly gut him to his bloody death.

HUNG. You'd gut them?

HUY. Yeah, I'd gut him.

HUNG. Right. With what? A deadly and sharp potato? It's kind of hard to be dangerous when you only have one of the four food groups to threaten people.

HUY. No, I have more than just potatoes, Hung.

HUNG. Oh no, not the jugs of water!

HUY. Seriously, though. I do have this.

(HUY pulls out a knife.)

HUNG. Hey, where the hell did you get that?

HUY. We could have run into trouble, I thought we'd just come packing.

HUNG. Alright, psycho, put that up before someone sees it.

HUY. I'd show what happens when you mess with a Tran.

HUNG. Are you insane? Put that down.

HUY. It'd be justice, Hung.

HUNG. It'd be murder.

HUY. Hung, this guy has split-up our family, put his friends in jail, and has probably cost the lives of all the people who—

HUNG. Alright, have you heard of morals? How about common sense?

HUY. If the V.C. catch Mom and Dad, they are going to kill them. This guy destroyed our lives.

HUNG. Well, maybe Dad shouldn't have gotten involved in the first place. Have you ever thought of that? Maybe this is his fault.

HUY. Don't say that.

HUNG. It's easy to blame someone else, Huy. But it was Dad's choice to put us here. He'd rather fight than have a family. If he weren't so busy trying to bring down the V.C., we wouldn't be here right now. We'd still be in Vietnam.

HUY. He was trying to help people.

HUNG. That doesn't give Dad the right to become a terrorist.

HUY. He's not a terrorist. He's a hero.

HUNG. Heroes don't kill, Huy.

HUY. He never—

HUNG. Look, let me tell you something. When you kill somebody, you lose your soul.

HUY. Buddhist talk.

HUNG. No, it's a universal truth. When you kill someone, you die as well.

Now hand me the knife.

HUY. Here.

HUNG. Good. Now stop doing things that will end up turning you into shark food.

(PHAM enters.)

PHAM. You have to look over your brother.

HUY. You know I was just kidding?

HUNG. Yeah, I'm sure you were.

PHAM. He's impulsive.

HUY. I was.

HUNG. Get revenge out of your mind and think of something else. Okay?

HUY. Okay.

PHAM. He needs you.

HUY. Hung...

HUNG. What?

HUY. Have you noticed how quiet it's gotten?

(Silence.)

HUNG. Go back under.

(HUY walks off and returns being a STRANGER as HUNG enters into a scene with PHAM.)

PHAM. You have to be a teacher to him.

HUNG. I'm just a kid.

PHAM. You have to be more now.

HUNG. We don't have the same values.

PHAM. That's not true.

HUNG. I can't teach him anything.

PHAM. Yes, you can.

HUNG. I'm not even Catholic.

PHAM. Well, he's not that religious.

HUNG. He debates me on everything.

PHAM. He's your little brother. That's his job.

HUNG. What if he gets sick? What then? I don't know anything about medicine.

PHAM. Just look over him. You've been sick before.

HUNG. What if he hurts himself?

PHAM. Make sure he doesn't do it again.

HUNG. You should be there.

PHAM. I can't.

HUNG. Yes, you can. I'll stay. I'll be with Dad and you can go with Huy.

PHAM. You know what kind of danger is after us.

HUNG. I'll stay.

PHAM. I won't let you.

HUNG. He needs a mother.

PHAM. And what kind of mother would I be if I let you take my place here?

HUNG. He hates it when I tell him to do anything.

PHAM. Then tell him that we order him to listen to you.

HUNG. Yeah. That's definitely never going to work.

PHAM. Well, you've been his big brother his whole life, you can find ways to make him listen.

HUNG. What if something happens to you?

PHAM. Nothing is going to happen.

HUNG. What if it does?

PHAM. Then it is better that I lost my life doing what is right, than to live doing what is wrong.

HUNG. That's just an ideal.

PHAM. Ideals are what make us people, monkey.

HUNG. See, there's another point. I don't know what his ideals are.

PHAM. Bit by bit, Hung.

HUNG. What?

PHAM. Bit by bit. If you have patience—if you work at it, slowly and intently, things will be okay. Bit by bit. It'll just take time.

HUNG. But what about—

PHAM. Bit by bit.

(Lights come up on HUY.)

HUY. Pass me something to eat, will ya?

(HUNG reaches into the bag and hands HUY a potato.)

HUNG. Only half.

HUY. We're practically there.

HUNG. Half.

HUY. But—

HUNG. Half or I won't give you any water.

HUY. Fine.

HUNG. And keep it down.

HUY. I don't understand all this Buddhist shit of yours. You don't eat meat. You don't kill flies.

HUNG. Those are living things.

HUY. This potato used to be alive.

HUNG. That's different.

HUY. See, you guys are so hypocritical.

HUNG. An animal used to be someone. I can't eat their flesh. I'd be stealing a soul.

HUY. That's stupid.

HUNG. There's nothing stupid about being humane.

HUY. When you were small, you ate meat. What about those souls?

HUNG. They don't count.

HUY. Hypocrite.
Is Aunt Tong Buddhist?

HUNG. Everyone in America is.

HUY. Great.

(One of the STRANGERS suddenly runs up and steals one of the bags.)

HUY. Fuck. Hey, Stop!

(HUY gets up to chase, but HUNG jumps in his way.)

HUNG. What are you doing?

HUY. He has half our food.

HUNG. You can't chase after that guy.

HUY. We need to get our shit back

HUNG. It doesn't matter. It's too much of a risk.

HUY. Then give me the knife.

HUNG. No.

HUY. I'll be fine.

HUNG. We're only here for a couple of more days. We can make this sack stretch.

HUY. Let me by.

HUNG. Huy, I'm not letting you—

HUY. If we don't hurry, that guy is going to eat all our food.

HUNG. Well, let's assume he already has and we can't do anything about it.

(TIEN enters with the thief. He makes the STRANGER give back the satchel.)

TIEN. *Ngoi yoi! Than nay của tôi. Di lai mao!*

[What did I tell you? These boys are mine to take care of. Now, go away!]

(The STRANGER drops the bag and runs off.)

TIEN. You kids missing something?

HUY. It's the potatoes, Hung.

TIEN. I told ya, kid, I'm here to help.

HUY. You know him?

HUNG. Yeah.

HUY. You've been breaking the rule! See, all this time I could have been talking to—

HUNG. *Hut noi!*

TIEN. You kids alright?

HUY. I think he's okay, Hung.

(KHUE enters.)

HUNG. You know what Dad said—

HUY. I'm sure if Dad met this guy, he wouldn't mind. I mean, he helped us out. He didn't have to.

KHUE. Ration your food.

HUY. We should talk to him. It's only two more days, Hung. We could use a friend, especially one that can scare away thieves.

KHUE. And don't talk to anyone.

TIEN. Well, you two look like you're going to be fine. Keep an eye on that. Don't want to lose it again...

HUY. Hung.

HUNG. No, wait. Please stay.

TIEN. Good.

(HUY and TIEN begin to play cards.)

KHUE. These rules are important.

HUNG. Wow, you should think about going into marketing, the way you're pitching this trip, it sounds like a real pleasure cruise.

KHUE. This is not a time for jokes.

HUNG. Dad, I know how to take care of myself.

KHUE. I need you to follow these rules. Ration. Don't talk to strangers.

HUNG. Dad.

KHUE. You don't know who could be on that ship.

HUNG. Where are you going to be? Where can you hide?

KHUE. When you get there, I'll send your Aunt a telegram letting her know where we are. We'll be with you soon.

HUNG. A telegram?

KHUE. It'll be waiting there.

HUNG. This is crazy.

KHUE. Promise me, you'll listen.

HUNG. I know, I know. Ration. Don't talk.

KHUE. It's important that you do this. Now, listen—once the boat leaves Mekong river, most of the passengers will want to travel on deck.

HUNG. We'll be fine.

KHUE. Stay in the hull, it will keep you hidden. And don't do things that will make you stick out.

HUNG. Dad, it's only a week-long trip.

KHUE. People get hurt when they aren't careful.

HUNG. No one's going to get hurt.

KHUE. *Ngung lai nay!*

HUNG. Yes, sir.

KHUE. Your Aunt Tong was hurt on her voyage. I don't want the same to happen to you.

Her boat wasn't as big as the one you're on, but it was big enough. These ships are filled with men, Hung. And the one Tong was riding was half the size with twice the amount of passengers. They were packed in so tight they couldn't even scratch their backs or stretch their legs. It was body on top of body for two weeks. Alone at sea. There wasn't even enough room for another baby's foot, but they found a way. It was a boat full of men, Hung, and they took turns, over and over...

HUNG. Dad.

KHUE. The ocean is a very big place, there's no one to hear you scream while you're out there. Not even if you scream for fourteen days straight.

HUNG. Aunt Tong?

KHUE. She was always very *dep wha*, wasn't she?

HUNG. Oh my god.

KHUE. A beauty queen.

HUNG. Dad.

KHUE. Don't talk to anyone, Hung.

HUNG. But I'm a boy, they can't do that to me.

KHUE. They're monsters on those boats, Hung. They will either hurt you or make you one of them. Don't talk to anyone.

HUNG. Yes, sir.

KHUE. If you listen, I promise nothing bad will happen.

Scene 4: Troubles

(The sound of the ocean and the waves hitting the ship rises in volume as lights come up on HUY by himself onstage.)

HUY. Paradise is...

(The WHITE SCARFED GIRL appears. She walks up to him.)

(They stand face to face and stare at one another.)

(Slowly, they fall into a dance.)

(HUY proves to be surprisingly graceful.)

(Abruptly, there is a faint scream in the distance. The fantasy breaks.)

HUY. What was that?

HUNG. A whale.

HUY. That didn't sound like any—

HUNG. It's a whale.

HUY. We were supposed to be there by now.

HUNG. A couple more days.

HUY. It's almost been two weeks.

HUNG. Don't exaggerate. We got a bit off course.

HUY. Why can't I go up on deck anymore?

HUNG. It's just safer down here.

HUY. It's safe up there too, Hung. Unless that wasn't a—

HUNG. They'll see you coming up. It'll draw attention.

HUY. I can't breathe down here. It's making me light-headed.

HUNG. Then eat this.

HUY. I'm not hungry.

HUNG. You're getting weak.

HUY. I'm fine.

HUNG. You're starving. That's why you're light-headed.

HUY. We have to ration, remember?

HUNG. No, we have to get to America, not starve.

HUY. I want to save my portion then.

HUNG. Then eat one of mine.

HUY. We're not supposed to share.

HUNG. This is different—a different circumstance, a different situation.

HUY. No.

HUNG. Huy.

HUY. I said no.

HUNG. Fine, but if I see you faint, I'm cramming this all the way down your throat and through your asshole.

HUY. Well, if I digest it that quickly, I might as well not eat it at all.

HUNG. Stop being an ass.

HUY. This is bullshit. Why won't you just let me go up?

HUNG. Too much sun. It's bad for you.

HUY. Too much sun? Hung, prisoners see more light than I do.

HUNG. It's crowded up there.

HUY. Of course, it's crowded up there. There's shit down here. No one wants to stay in the shit, except you.

HUNG. No, you have to reserve your energy. If you run around—

HUY. I just want some air.

HUNG. You have to stay with me. You have to stay within my sight.

HUY. Get out of my way, Hung. I'm tired of you telling me what to do. I'm not some kid.

HUNG. Yes, you are.

HUY. And you're not?

HUNG. We had a deal. I'm in charge.

HUY. Deal's off.

(Another scream.)

HUY. The fuck was that? Another whale?
Get out of my way.

HUNG. No.

HUY. If you don't move, I'll...I'll dump out the rest of my water.

HUNG. Huy, you don't want to go up there.

HUY. Let me make my own decisions.

HUNG. Please, don't.

(HUY *slowly begins to pour out his water*)

HUNG. Okay! Okay. Just a peek.

HUY. I make my own decisions.

(HUNG *steps aside as HUY goes up.*)

(TIEN *appears out from the shadows.*)

TIEN. He would have eventually ventured up there regardless—

HUNG. I can't protect him...

TIEN. It's a small boat, Hung. I'm surprised he hasn't noticed the silence of the engine yet.

HUNG. I don't believe this.

TIEN. How long did you think you could have hid it?

HUNG. We should have drifted there by now.

TIEN. How's your food?

HUNG. Almost gone.

TIEN. Want some help?

HUNG. There's nothing you can do.

TIEN. I have extra.

(TIEN *tosses HUNG a bag.*)

TIEN. Here. I stole this from some fat guy.

HUNG. What is this?

TIEN. Dried Sausage.

HUNG. I don't eat meat.

TIEN. Look at you.

HUNG. It's against my—

TIEN. You're starving and still talking religion. You're a regular monk, kid.

HUNG. I've lost too much already. I don't need to compromise my—

TIEN. Then don't eat it. Give it to your brother.

HUNG. I guess he doesn't have any problems with it. No soul there to be lost.

TIEN. So, take it.

HUNG. But you stole—

TIEN. Fuck your stupid rules, kid. Stealing, talking, rationing, none of that means shit anymore. It's time to start surviving.

HUNG. You shouldn't do this. It's too generous. What can I give you in return?

TIEN. Let's not worry about that right now.

(KHUE enters and looks on over them.)

(TIEN puts his arm around HUNG protectively. KHUE does this next scene while looming over TIEN and HUNG.)

KHUE. Do you know what they call us in America?

HUNG. I don't know.

KHUE. Gook.

HUNG. What's that?

KHUE. It's what American soldiers called the V.C. during the war. A Gook is someone who is heartless, inhuman, and willing to kill his own to get what he wants. When you are in America, they will think you are a Gook. But you must prove them wrong. A Gook is self-serving. You can never become that. Do you understand?

HUNG. Yes, sir.

KHUE. A Gook is filled with hate. Soul-less.

(HUNG notices TIEN's hands.)

HUNG. What happened to your hands?

TIEN. Small accident.

HUNG. They're covered in—

TIEN. Why don't you bring that food up to your brother?

HUNG. How'd you get this?

TIEN. You know, kid, we're a lot alike. We're practically family. Both products from the same father. The same ideologies. The same situation.

HUNG. What is this?

TIEN. We're like brothers, you and I.

HUNG. Let go of me.

TIEN. Did I ever tell you the time your dad and I hijacked a V.C. motorcade for a truckload of rice and grain?

HUNG. What have you done?

TIEN. Nothing I haven't been trained to do. Nothing your dad wouldn't have done himself.

A soldier wounded slows down the platoon. A dead soldier, though, you can strip away—use his ammo, his supplies, you could even drink his blood for nourishment if the situation becomes desperate enough. If you're that lost.

HUNG. What did you do?

TIEN. I'm saving everyone on this ship. I am, I am, I am.

HUNG. What's in this bag, Tien?

TIEN. Just some fish.

HUNG. You said it was sausage.

TIEN. Oops.

(HUY runs back on.)

HUY. HUNG!

HUNG. Huy?

HUY. I'm going to puke.

HUNG. I told you not to go up there.

HUY. We're not moving.

HUNG. I know.

HUY. The fucking engine is dead. The water, Hung. It's bobbing with—

HUNG. Shhh—

HUY. I want to go home, Hung. I want to see Mom and Dad.

HUNG. It's going to be okay, Huy. It's going to be alright.

HUY. The bodies. They aren't floating away. They just keep clinging on. This boat has lost its soul.

HUNG. We should hit land tomorrow—

HUY. They're eating the dead, Hung. They're eating each other.

HUNG. What?

HUY. The dead bodies, Hung. They aren't properly buried. Ghosts. They'll be uneasy.

HUNG. We'll pray for them.

HUY. They ripped some guy apart—

HUNG. What did they do?

(HUNG *looks at TIEN.*)

TIEN. I'm just trying to help. That's all.

(*Blackout.*)

(*The sound of ocean waves.*)

End of Act I

ACT II

Scene 1: Casualties

(Lights come up on the WHITE SCARFED GIRL. She dances onstage alone. For a moment, she is by herself on the ship, dancing in her own personal dream. As she finishes, lights come back up on the rest of the boat, revealing the crowd of STRANGERS. From the mass of bodies, we see TIEN.)

(They attack and drag her body away.)

(Lights come up on HUNG and HUY in the hull of the boat.)

HUNG. Did you know we get to see tits when we come into America?

HUY. What?

HUNG. Tits. Breasts. They're huge.

HUY. Who's tits?

HUNG. The Statue of America's.

HUY. You're lying.

HUNG. Have you ever seen a picture of her?

HUY. I think so.

HUNG. She's topless, you know.

HUY. They wouldn't do that.

HUNG. Sure they would. They're American.

HUY. Really?

HUNG. Each one is about as big as this boat.

HUY. Wow.

HUNG. Hey, let's see that picture of Tracy.

HUY. Tracy?

HUNG. The topless girl.

HUY. Oh. Her.

HUNG. Where is she—

HUY. I ate her.

HUNG. You what?

HUY. I. Ate. Her.

HUNG. Oh.

(HUY takes a sip from his bottle.)

HUY. You know, this isn't so bad.

HUNG. Don't drink so much of that. It's not good for you.

HUY. You're the one who said it's sterile.

(HUY continues to drink. HUNG pulls the jug away from him.)

HUNG. Okay. That's enough.

HUY. Did I tell ya? That white scarfed girl said "hi" to me.

HUNG. Did she?

HUY. She has a great smile.

HUNG. So you did notice her face?

HUY. I want to talk to her, Hung.

HUNG. Huy...

HUY. Please.

HUNG. You know the rules.

HUY. She can't hurt anyone. Have you seen her? She's thinner than us. What could she possibly do?

HUNG. Huy, drop it. You're not going to seduce this girl.

HUY. It's not about that.

She's alone, Hung. Could you imagine what this would be like by yourself? Here? I just want to let her know someone cares...you know, especially if...she just shouldn't be alone. No one should. Talking will help remind her that she's still alive. Please.

(Beat.)

HUNG. Okay. If she's willing to put up with your hormones, you can talk to her.

HUY. Thank you.

HUNG. Now hand me my jug.

HUY. Here. Just drink from mine.

HUNG. That's gross.

HUY. It's piss. It's gross no matter what.

HUNG. Just give it to me.

HUY. I wonder how much waste one person can digest before they just become waste themselves?

HUNG. Don't talk about it. It doesn't make it go down any easier.

HUY. Paradise is not having an empty stomach.

HUNG. That's not how the game goes.

HUY. I don't care. I'm changing the rules.

HUNG. We'll be in the states soon. We just have to make it for one more day.

HUY. You've been saying that for almost a month now.

HUNG. I know. I'm sorry. But I'm sure we'll hit land tomorrow.

HUY. Then if that's the case, you won't mind me planning my first meal on land –

HUNG. Huy.

HUY. A twelve course dinner consisting of...pho with meatballs. Shrimp summer rolls and peanut sauce.

HUNG. Stop.

HUY. Vermicelli noodles with bean sprouts. Fried vegetable spring rolls.

HUNG. Huy...

HUY. Eggplant with garlic pepper. Bean curd topped on wild rice. A bowl of mom's beef stew.

(KHUE and PHAM appear.)

KHUE. Now, this is paradise.

HUY. Aw, man, I feel dizzy.

PHAM. I'm just happy we could all eat together.

HUNG. I told you talking about it will just make it worse. You exhausted yourself.

KHUE. It's wonderful.

PHAM. Do you want another spring roll, Huy?

HUNG. Just rest.

PHAM. Huy?

HUY. I couldn't eat another bite, Mom.

KHUE. Boys, I want you to remember this moment. It may be some-time before we will all be able to share a dinner like this again.

PHAM. Shhh.

KHUE. No, they should hear this.

PHAM. We will be eating like this very soon.

KHUE. Pham.

PHAM. You'll just worry them.

(To HUY:)

You're going to listen to your brother on the boat, won't you?

HUY. Of course, Mom. I always do.

PHAM. See, they're going to be just fine.

KHUE. Do you remember what I told you?

HUNG. Yes, sir.

KHUE. Repeat it.

PHAM. You can do that later. We're having dinner right now, Khue.

KHUE. They should be prepared.

PHAM. They aren't soldiers. They're boys. What they need right now is some dessert.

KHUE. They're men. We have to treat them as such.

PHAM. They're our babies. Now stop.

KHUE. Listen, Hung, it's important that when you arrive—

PHAM. Khue, I said we can talk about this later.

KHUE. No, Pham, it has to be clear.

When you make it the states, you must contact your Aunt immediately.

PHAM. Khue.

KHUE. Do you understand?

PHAM. *Houng noy nhou!*

This is our family dinner, Khue. We should enjoy it. Not talk about certain issues.

KHUE. I'm not the one who put us in this situation —I'm just trying to ensure their safety.

PHAM. And we can do this after—

KHUE. Hung, when you're in the states, don't try to contact us. It won't be possible.

PHAM. Stop it, Khue.

KHUE. Hung, listen...

PHAM. No!

KHUE. Listen to me—

HUNG. STOP IT!

(Silence.)

HUNG. No more. Please.

PHAM. Monkey.

HUNG. I can't do this.

PHAM. Good-byes are always hard.

KHUE. We're just trying to make sure you'll be prepared.

HUNG. I'm sorry. I'm tired of listening to ghosts.

(HUNG walks off onto the deck of the ship. He steps onto the edge and looks. After a few breaths, he comes to his senses. He climbs down and tries to keep himself from crying.)

(The STRANGERS watch him.)

(TIEN appears and walks up behind HUNG. He holds up a piece of flesh in front of HUNG's face.)

TIEN. Want a bite?

HUNG. That's disgusting.

TIEN. Just thought you might be hungry, brother.

HUNG. I'm not your brother.

TIEN. I'm just trying to help you.

HUNG. I don't need your kind of help.

TIEN. Kid, it was inevitable it would come to this.

HUNG. What you people are doing is inhumane.

TIEN. We're granting mercy to those already dying. Through the sacrifice of a few, we all get to live a few days longer.

HUNG. This is wrong.

TIEN. We're holding the line—weeding out the stragglers.

HUNG. This isn't a war.

TIEN. Yes, it is.

Look, kid, whether you wanna swallow this or not, I'm helping. I want to help you. Let me. We're the same, you and I. Your father's legacy. He put us here to save us. And I want to save you. Please. You need to eat.

HUNG. Keep that away from me.

TIEN. This is your salvation, Hung.

HUNG. Tien, I want you to leave us the fuck alone.

TIEN. Hung.

HUNG. You're not his family, Tien. You may have been one of my father's soldiers, but that doesn't make you family.

TIEN. We fought alongside one another. That makes me more—

HUNG. And is this what you fought for? This? Is this your ideal Vietnam? Killing people, playing God, eating the dead? This is your democracy?

TIEN. You're just a stupid little brat. You don't know shit.

HUNG. I know that my father would never do what you're doing.

TIEN. You're wrong.

HUNG. He'd be disgusted by you.

(TIEN suddenly grabs HUNG violently.)

TIEN. Don't fucking push me, kid!

HUNG. I have a knife. I'll use it if I have to.

TIEN. Oh, yeah? Here's a free shot. Stab me.

HUNG. What?

TIEN. So you think you can do this on your own? You want to man up? You want to threaten me, kid? Then do something about it.

(Silence.)

TIEN. You're not your father's son, are you? You don't have the testicles to be me. You won't even eat a piece of fucking meat.

HUNG. I guess it was harder to breathe up here than I thought.

TIEN. I can help you breathe a bit harder.

HUNG. That's not funny.

TIEN. You sure you aren't little hungry? I mean, you don't want to get weak, now do you? That wouldn't be good. You'd just hold us back.

HUNG. Get out of my way, Tien.

TIEN. Sure you don't you want a taste? It's juicy. Moist. Succulent. Fresh.

HUNG. Please. We just want to make it to America in peace.

TIEN. How about "pieces?" Jokes, kid, jokes.

HUNG. You have no heart.

TIEN. I'll remember to take one out from the next guy. It's my democracy after all.

Come on, kid, just a little bite?

HUNG. No.

(HUNG tries to push TIEN out of the way. TIEN isn't affected. TIEN grabs HUNG by the hair.)

TIEN. Just touch it.

(TIEN places the flesh in HUNG's hand.)

TIEN. How does it feel? Kind of like raw fish, isn't it? Cold, slimy, drained of blood. Do you know what blood tastes like?

HUNG. Stop.

TIEN. It's the best part.

(TIEN takes the meat and crams it into HUNG's mouth. HUNG fights free and runs off down in the hull while TIEN once again disappears into the STRANGERS.)

(HUNG coughs the meat right up onto the ground.)

TIEN. *(Offstage:)* Enjoy! Come back when you want some more.

(As HUNG is spitting up the flesh, he sees HUY. HUY is lying on the floor over a body. HUY's shirt is halfway off. HUNG runs to him.)

HUNG. Huy.

HUY. They got her. They fucking killed her.

HUNG. Oh my god.

HUY. Why, Hung? Why did they have to pick her?

HUNG. Is that?

(HUY raises a bloody white scarf.)

HUY. Why?

HUNG. They mutilated—

HUY. She was so beautiful. So beautiful. She never hurt anyone.

HUNG. Get off her, Huy.

HUY. She was the only one here with any style. Any class.

HUNG. Get up, Huy. HUY!

HUY. I can't move.

HUNG. Yes, you can.

HUY. I can't feel my limbs.

HUNG. You're just weak.

HUY. I tried standing, but I just kept falling. My legs don't work.

HUNG. Shhhh...save your energy. You're going to be fine.

Now, come here. You're covered in blood.

(HUNG drags HUY away from the body.)

HUY. It's gotten real bad, Hung. We aren't going to make it out of this.

HUNG. You're talking crazy.

HUY. Look, the flies are already eating at me. They already know.

HUNG. It's the blood, Huy. Not you.

HUY. No, it's me.

(HUNG slaps the flies dead.)

HUNG. There. Dead. No more flies.

HUY. You hit me.

HUNG. I'm sorry.

HUY. No, it felt good. It's nice to have some kind of feeling.

HUNG. What can I do?

HUY. Tell Mom to cook me up some more potatoes.

HUNG. Huy, you have to get up.

HUY. I can't without any food.

HUNG. Here.

(HUNG rips off a piece of his shirt and hands it to HUY.)

HUY. That's not food.

HUNG. You can gnaw at it. It'll feel like eating. Now stand up. You're okay.

HUY. I can't.

HUNG. TRY!!! Goddamnit just listen to me.

Why do you have to debate me on everything? Just do it. Stop being such a little shit and do what I say. Just listen to me this once. You have to try. You can't give up. We are going to make it. Stand up. **STAND UP, GODDAMNIT!!!**

(HUNG backs up to leave. HUY lies down with his head facing away. HUNG stares for a long time and begins to walk away. But he stops and looks at the dead body. He realizes what he must do.)

(HUNG takes in a deep breath and pulls out the knife. He leans down and cuts off a piece of flesh from the WHITE SCARFED GIRL.)

HUNG. I'm sorry.

(HUNG returns to HUY.)

HUNG. Huy.

HUY. Why are you so stubborn?

HUNG. Eat this.

HUY. We don't have any food.

HUNG. I found it.

HUY. You did? Where?

HUNG. Don't worry about that.

HUY. What is this?

HUNG. Just some raw fish.

HUY. Really?

HUNG. Really.

(HUY begins eating as HUNG watches.)

HUY. It's not bad.

HUNG. Just get your energy back, okay?

(KHUE enters.)

KHUE. Don't feel bad about this.

HUY. It's real good, Hung. It actually doesn't taste so bad.

HUNG. Just keep eating.

KHUE. Do not ponder on the negative.

HUY. Thank you, brother.

KHUE. It's not all terrible.

HUNG. What's happening to us?

KHUE. Look at it in a good light.

(As HUNG leaves the scene, the STRANGERS quickly begin creeping up on HUY like vultures.)

HUNG. In a good light, dad? How?

KHUE. Be strong. Keep focused on what you must do.

HUNG. It's too much.

KHUE. It's always too much. But you cannot let that be what controls you. Remember—it's better to die standing up, than to always have to live lying down.

HUNG. I'm not one of your solders, Dad. I can't handle this.

KHUE. Listen to me. I know this is hard. But it's having the strength to make it through moments like this that will get you through this journey.

HUNG. I don't have that kind of strength.

KHUE. You can and you will. I know you will.

HUNG. Why? Because you're ordering me to?

KHUE. No. Because you're my son.

(A STRANGER pokes at HUY.)

HUY. Don't do that.

KHUE. I know this is hard—but for your safety, some sacrifices must be made.

(A STRANGER grabs at HUY.)

HUY. Leave me alone.

KHUE. The only thing important now is your survival.

(The STRANGERS suddenly pounce onto HUY.)

HUNG. Why did this have to happen?

KHUE. Because someone betrayed me. Will you?

(HUY pops out of the STRANGERS for just a second.)

HUY. Help!

(KHUE embraces HUNG.)

(The STRANGERS drag HUY off and drop him in front of TIEN. HUY tries to flee, but TIEN grabs him. There is struggling. TIEN bites HUY on the neck. HUY pushes TIEN's face off of him.)

HUY. HUNG!

(HUNG comes out of his embrace from KHUE noticing HUY's scream.)

(TIEN pulls HUY back to him. HUY tries to fight, but TIEN subdues him and snaps his neck. HUY falls dead.)

(The STRANGERS quickly huddle around HUY's body and begin eating him.)

(HUNG appears on stage looking for HUY. TIEN and the STRANGERS raise the body and dump it off the boat.)

Scene 2: Guilt

(HUNG is calling.)

HUNG. Huy! Where are you?

TIEN. Why if it isn't big brother back up on deck to say hello?

HUNG. Huy! Huy, you shouldn't be up here!

TIEN. Looking for someone?

HUNG. Don't touch me!

TIEN. I don't think your father would be so happy about how you're handling this situation.

HUNG. You remember what I told you.

TIEN. Yeah, yeah, you'd kill me. But I'm willing to take that risk.

HUNG. Huy!

TIEN. What's that I smell on your breath?

HUNG. That's none of your—

TIEN. Come on, kid. Tell me. We've been out here a month. Certainly, you still don't have any potatoes left.

HUNG. I'm fine.

TIEN. I smell it on you. Do you know that?

HUNG. You don't smell anything.

TIEN. And you say I'm sick. Piss drinker. You sure you're not a tad sick yourself?

HUNG. You shouldn't be up here, Huy!

TIEN. He's not going to answer you.

HUNG. Fuck off.

TIEN. I'm just trying to help.

HUNG. Then jump off.

TIEN. Now, this is a small boat. Where could your brother be? If he's not down below and you can't easily see him up here, where could he be?

HUNG. What have you done to my brother?

TIEN. I haven't done anything, piss-breath.

HUNG. I'll kill you if you hurt him.

TIEN. There's nothing I can do to him now.

HUNG. What are you talking about?

TIEN. If he's not on board, then there's only one other logical place he could be. And who could that be floating around out there right now?

HUNG. HUY! Help him.

TIEN. Now why would I do that?

HUNG. Please.

TIEN. Looks like you're going to do a bit of swimming.

HUNG. I can't swim.

TIEN. Really? Well, that's just too bad.

HUNG. I'll talk to you. I'll do whatever you want. Just go out there and get him.

TIEN. Let me see what I can do.

HUNG. Hurry!

(TIEN leans against the edge and gets himself prepared to piss off the side of the ship.)

HUNG. What the fuck are you doing?

TIEN. He might be thirsty out there. He's a piss drinker too, isn't he?

HUNG. I can't believe you.

TIEN. There's nothing I can do for him even if I wanted to.

HUNG. What have you done to him?

TIEN. Nothing.

HUNG. Did you want to eat him? Is that what this is? Were the rest of the bodies not enough for you that you had to take his life also?

TIEN. I didn't kill anyone.

HUNG. Liar!

TIEN. How long do you think you two could go without food? I didn't kill him. You did. You did this, because you were just too good to eat with me. Too good to bow down to something your own father would have done. Would have ordered me to do.

HUNG. My father would never—

TIEN. Trust me, if I killed him, I would have already shitted him out.

HUNG. It's not my fault.

TIEN. Oh yes it is.

HUNG. No, you did this.

TIEN. That's what you want to think. But you know I'm telling the truth. As a matter of fact, if it weren't for your folks, he'd still be jacking off back in Saigon, and I—

HUNG. Shut up!

TIEN. I'm not a liar.

HUNG. You kill innocent people for food.

TIEN. These fish are anything but innocent, kid. I fought for them. I suffered for some stupid ideal that we all could live in a democracy. For them. A stupid ideal your father—

HUNG. Shut up.

TIEN. They all owe me. I've lost my life for them. For you, your mom, and your fucking gutless father. Now where do I go? America? Land of the free, the brave? A land without my family, my wife, my daughter. This is not about just you and me, kid. They all owe me. Too scared to fight for their own freedom, so I'm stuck suffering for it. Well, I'm done with it.

HUNG. You can't just eat—

TIEN. A bit of meat for the freedom I sacrificed for them? It's a small price really.

HUNG. It's wrong.

TIEN. Don't blame me. It's your family's fault that we're here.

HUNG. No.

TIEN. I'm not the one who brought this on us. I'm just taking back what has been stolen from me. Life. All of it. Don't you wish your brother could get some it back for himself? Don't you wish you could have stolen just a bit of it for him? Brother.

HUNG. I'm sorry, okay. I'm sorry. Just help me.

TIEN. No.

HUNG. If you don't do this, I'll—

TIEN. Heard it.

HUNG. I can't just let him stay floating out there.

TIEN. Kid, you're fucked. If you ask me, I'd just join him.

HUNG. Don't go.

TIEN. Better get in there before the sharks get him.

HUNG. HUY!

(HUNG begins to jump, but HUY appears behind him.)

HUY. Okay, okay, you win.

HUNG. Get out of my room.

HUY. But, it's barely dark.

HUNG. I know.

HUY. Stop being a lazy ass, just one more round.

HUNG. I'm not in the mood. Go away.

HUY. Not in the mood? It's "Go-fish."

HUNG. I don't care.

HUY. "Go-fish" is like the staple to all games. If I were stranded on a desert island, I would want cards just to be able to play this game.

HUNG. Funny. I would want a boat.

HUY. Well, if I couldn't have a boat.

HUNG. Let me sleep.

HUY. Hung, you know, one day, I may not be here and you're going to miss talking to me.

HUNG. You mean arguing with you.

HUY. I don't argue that much.

HUNG. Let me go to sleep.

HUY. No.

HUNG. Point proven.

HUY. Come on, just one more round.

HUNG. No.

HUY. Please.

HUNG. Mom and Dad told us to go to bed already.

HUY. Hung, this is our last night in our home. Do you really want to spend it unconscious?

HUNG. You're going to piss them off.

HUY. What are they going to do? Send us away?

HUNG. That's not funny.

HUY. You're just scared that I'll prove that you're a loser.

HUNG. If I let you convince me to play, then technically, I already lost.

HUY. Fine by me.

Look, can we at least talk?

HUNG. About what?

HUY. Anything. I'm just in the mood to converse.

HUNG. Huy, I know this is hard for you to understand, but I'd rather not be awake right now.

HUY. Why?

HUNG. Because I don't want to think about this. Okay? I just want this moment to fly by. I'm not strong enough to just wait around.

HUY. You're scared, aren't you?

HUNG. Yeah. I'm scared.

HUY. Well, me too.

HUNG. Well, you're a pussy. No one expects more from you.

HUY. Hung, don't worry. If anyone ever tried to hurt you, I would hunt them down and kill them slowly, sadistically, and painfully.

HUNG. Thanks, little brother. You're my hero.

HUY. Hey, I might be small, but I'm quick and wiry like a fox.

HUNG. I bet you are.

HUY. I am.

HUNG. Right.

(Pause.)

HUY. Look, Hung, I'm sorry I'm such an ass all the time.

HUNG. I'm sorry you're one too.

HUY. Fuck you.

HUNG. Apology accepted.

HUY. I love you, Hung.

HUNG. I love you too, Huy.

HUY. Now, about that game...

HUNG. Alright, I guess I'll play just one more round.

HUY. Loser.

(The two boys embrace. When they stop, the lights change as HUNG pulls out the knife and is staring at it.)

(HUY stands over him lingering.)

HUY. That never happened.

HUNG. Yes, it did.

HUY. No, Hung, you just slept that night.

HUNG. I can remember it any way I want.

HUY. How will you remember this moment?

HUNG. Go away. I don't even know why you're here. You're dead.

HUY. Hung, you can make it.

HUNG. Fuck off. I don't want to hear it.

HUY. This isn't your fault.

(HUY fades away into the shadows.)

HUNG. Paradise is no longer caring anymore.

HUY. Hung, stop.

HUNG. My soul is dying, Huy. I can feel it escaping from my pores. I feel my heart slowly rotting. And I don't care. I don't care if I make it anymore.

My stomach's hurt for so long that it's just become numb. I'm so dehydrated that I can't even cry. And I hear your body, Huy. It's calling me. It wants me to join it.

HUY. What about Mom and Dad?

HUNG. They're dead too, Huy. Their ghosts have been haunting me longer than yours. I'm sure they won't mind another broken promise.

HUY. You'll hit land soon.

HUNG. That's bullshit! I've been saying that for a fucking month now and we never get there. It's hopeless.

HUY. Don't give up.

HUNG. I don't think it's my choice anymore.

(*PHAM enters praying.*)

HUNG. I should have known then that this was a mistake.

PHAM. Father, our lord in heaven, please look over my children and make sure they will be safe.

HUY. Hung, stop!

PHAM. Let their souls be cleansed. Let not our sins follow them on their journey.

HUNG. Just one big mistake.

PHAM. In your son's holy name, Amen.

HUNG. I can't sleep.

PHAM. You startled me.

HUNG. I'm sorry.

PHAM. What's wrong, Monkey?

HUNG. Our family is being destroyed.

PHAM. It is not being destroyed.

HUNG. This man deserves to die.

PHAM. Stop it, Hung.

HUNG. But—

PHAM. Wishing harm on others is wrong.

HUNG. He betrayed Dad. He betrayed everything he stood for—

PHAM. It wasn't a "he" who has done this.

HUNG. I don't care. He deserves to be slaughtered.

PHAM. Is that what you think?

HUNG. I just want justice.

PHAM. What if I told you that I did this? Would you want harm to be done to me?

HUNG. That's ridiculous.

PHAM. Would you?

HUNG. No.

PHAM. But you're so angry.

HUNG. You're my mother.

PHAM. By your reasoning, I deserve to die.

HUNG. I would never—

PHAM. Monkey, I am the one who did this.

HUNG. Did what?

PHAM. I was the one who went to the police.

HUNG. That's impossible.

PHAM. I can't watch your father lose his soul.

HUNG. You told the V.C.?

PHAM. I told the police that they're men murdering men out in the streets. Your father is a good man and he thinks he's fighting for a good cause. But he's fighting for a Vietnam that died in 1975.

HUNG. You're the one splitting up this family? Why?

PHAM. So you can be something more than an ex-soldier's dying dream.

HUNG. Oh my God—

PHAM. I love your father very much, but I can't watch him do this any longer. It's killed too many people in our family already. I look at you and I see someone free of pain and anger. You have good morals and a good heart. You would never even hurt a fly, but your father has killed men.

HUNG. He's a soldier.

PHAM. In a war, yes, he would be. When it is just life, no matter for what reason you kill, it's just murder. You know that. If we don't do this now, our sins will haunt you and our souls will be forever damned.

HUNG. Our souls aren't in jeopardy.

PHAM. You are willing to justify killing already, Monkey. You, a Buddhist who won't even eat meat in fear of losing his soul is searching for vengeance. Looking for blood. From whom? Me? Your mother?

HUNG. I would never hurt—

PHAM. You will not hurt anyone, Monkey. You must stay obedient to the values which you stand for now. On that boat, in America, you owe it to us and yourself to not compromise your spirit. It's all we have left.

KHUE. It's time. We must go.

**THIS PLAY IS
NOT OVER!**

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