

Remembering Hue

A Musical Play in Two Acts
With Music, Text and Lyrics

By Clyde Coreil

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Characters

Charlene Ayer.....	26 years old, delicate, artistic, essentially lost at the beginning of the play, discovers herself in the Shangri-La city of Hue
Nguyen van Huong.....	32 years old, strong-willed but retiring man who scorns the regimes of both Hanoi and Saigon
Hal Garren.....	28 years old, a slightly aging Golden Boy who thrives on action and confrontation
Ben Hoggins.....	25 years old, an irony-loving ne'er-do-well who has shuffled sideways in life and wound up as a volunteer teacher of English
Renee Dupuis.....	27 years old, scarred by romance but who functions well as a more-or-less decisive leader
Balford "Baly" Deville.....	21 years old, sincere black university student majoring in music composition
Barbara Fields.....	22 years old, no-nonsense black university student, friend of Baly's
Stuart.....	29 years old, Charlene's very balanced, very decent ex-companion
Joe "Dummy" Skins.....	55 years old, a volunteer interested mainly in finding a way back to a lady in Dalat, Vietnam
Major Dai.....	40 years old, a suave man from Hanoi whose personality is half-French, half-Vietnamese
Steve Benoit.....	27 years old, university teacher, skydiving friend of Hal's
Vicki Alvarez.....	25 years old, companion of Steve's
Vui.....	23 years old, a Buddhist monk who is more inclined to eat than meditate
Phuoc.....	24 years old, a university student in Vietnam
Jeanette, Aldus, Tom.....	Barbara's students, can be from 5-9 years old
Ian Helson, David Schornhurst....	Reporters on the BBC Radio
Jeanne.....	Dummy's Vietnamese lady in Dalat

Prologue

Darkened stage. An apartment in Baton Rouge. Hal is holding a book. As he begins to sing without accompaniment the first words of "Remembering," a pool of cool light comes up gradually. Understated musical accompaniment joins him.

Hal is dressed in a quality collegiate sports jacket, colored shirt and necktie. He will serve as the best man at Baly's wedding. His hair is graying a little around the ears, and there is something of deep distraction about the man-a premature aging. The year is 1978, 10 years after the action of the play. In an epilogue, Hal will again sing "Remembering". His dress and demeanor will be the same as in the prologue.

(Song #1)

Remembering

I

Remembering
that's all I do.
Though years may pass,
you still rush back
like yesterday
sunlit in Hue.

You found your star;
your dreams came true
like fantasies
that fade at dawn
but move into my memory.

II

It's over now
but that time has run
into my heart with every sun.

'Til yesterday
tomorrow brings,
I'll be in Hue
Remembering.

THE COOL LIGHT HAS CHANGED INTO THE FULL ILLUMINATION OF THE PRESENT. BALY ENTERS AFTER A CURSORY KNOCK. HE IS ELEGANTLY DRESSED IN HIS WEDDING SUIT WITH A FLOWER IN THE LAPEL HE IS CARRYING A SMALL WHITE BOX, WHICH HE SETS CAREFULLY ON THE TABLE.

BALY

Hal, where you at, man?

HAL

I'm ready.

BALY

And I'm late. You'll come in my car. Let's go. Barbara will fry me. (BALY REACHES IN HIS JACKET FOR A RING BOX AND GIVES IT TO HAL.) Here's the ring. Don't lose it. (HAL SOMEWHAT ABSENT-MINDEDLY SLIPS THE BOX INTO THE OUTER BOX OF HIS JACKET. BALY TAKES IT OUT, PUTS IN THE INSIDE POCKET OF HAL'S JACKET FOR SAFER KEEPING, AND PATS THE JACKET OVER THE BOX.) That cost me a bundle.

HAL

Right. (BALY TAKES THE CARNATION OUT OF THE BOX ON THE TABLE AND ARRANGES IN ON HAL'S LAPEL.) You do look sharp.

BALY

Rented, but nice. (REFERRING TO THE CARNATION) That's fine. (EXTENDING HIS FOOT.) Dig the spats, man.

HAL

You having any second thoughts.

BALY

Sure. I tried to back out of this thing six months ago. Barbara didn't even get mad. She just said, "No way, Buster." So here I am...Got everything?

HAL

I believe so.

BALY

Okay.

Baly and Hal exit. Lights dim and strains of "Remembering" precede an overture of the songs in the play. Lights out.

End of Prologue

ACT I
Scene One

Charlene is dressed in a painter's smock, working at a canvas on a still life arranged on a small table in her Baton Rouge apartment. A younger, far more collected Hal enters, a parachute slung from his shoulder and a helmet under his arm. He is wearing a jump suit and boots. His face is flushed with excitement, and his hair is disheveled. Charlene is glad to see him but continues painting. It is the third week of May, 1967.

CHARLENE

Dashing.

HAL

(KISSES HER) How's my painter?

CHARLENE

I'll be done in a second. How'd it go?

HAL

Beautiful. Steve and another guy and I caught hands.

CHARLENE

Sounds interesting.

HAL

Perfect hook up. At 9,000 feet. You should try it. It'd be too much.

CHARLENE

I don't know how you can stand the excitement....of being around yourself all the time.

HAL

It is formidable. (FALLS SITTING INTO THE SOFA) Really, you should make one before we leave....There was a couple jumping together. Beautiful brown-haired girl. Handsome guy. Both radiant. They were married the day before yesterday.

CHARLENE

Before or after the parachutes opened?

HAL

(LOOKS CAREFULLY AT HER) Is there something bothering you?

CHARLENE

No.

HAL

What is it, Charley? (NO ANSWER) Why not take a break and come here.

CHARLENE

I want to finish before the light changes too much.

HAL

Want a beer?

CHARLENE

An inch of yours.

HAL EXITS TO KITCHEN. SHE WANTS TO CONTINUE PAINTING BUT HER CONCENTRATION IS BROKEN. SHE WIPES OFF HER BRUSHES, SETS THEM IN A CONTAINER AND TAKES OFF HER PAINTER'S SMOCK, REVEALING BLUE JEANS AND A T-SHIRT.

HAL (OFFSTAGE)

Anything in the mail?

CHARLENE

Another offer. To teach English at a school for adults in Osaka. One from International Volunteers.

HAL

(ENTERS WITH BEER AND TWO GLASSES) Oh? What'd they say?

CHARLENE

They regret their program in Japan has "failed to materialize." But that they would welcome my services in Vietnam.

HAL

Ha! I bet they would.

CHARLENE

Teaching English in elementary school. They asked me to call...one way or the other.

HAL

(DISMISSING THE PROPOSITION) None from Kyoto?

CHARLENE

(PAUSE) No.

HAL

(POURSBEER) Don't worry about it. The grant's enough to support both of us. (TOASTING) To Japan.

CHARLENE

(TROUBLED, SHE SETS HER GLASS BACK DOWN WITHOUT DRINKING AND SITS NEXT TO HAL.) I d go crazy with nothing to do.

HAL

(DRINKS) Something'll come up.

CHARLENE

That's not enough...(WITH RESTRAINED EMOTION)...It's not fair.

HAL

(EMBRACES HER) I'll be with you. Doesn't that count for anything?

CHARLENE

You know it does.

HAL

Of course. Once you're in country, things open up. Lots of things. Come on. Drink up. (SHE DRINKS WITH HIM. THERE IS A KNOCK AT THE DOOR. HAL GOES TO OPEN IT TO SEE STEVE AND VICKI.) Hey, long time no see.

STEVE

You forgot this in the car. (HANDS HAL A LINE DIVIDER, WHICH IS A SMALL

INSTRUMENT USED TO KEEP LINES STRAIGHT WHEN PACKING A PARACHUTE)

HAL

Thanks.

CHARLENE

(CROSSING TO DOOR) Come in.

VICKI

Sure it's okay?

CHARLENE

Of course.

VICKI

Excited about Japan?

CHARLENE

(AVOIDS ANSWER) Iced tea? Beer? Coke?

STEVE

Beer.

HAL

Coming up. (EXITS TO KITCHEN)

VICKI

Tea for me.

CHARLENE

(TO VICKI) Were you out there?

VICKI

All....day....long. But it was nice. You should have been there.

CHARLENE

I hear there was a brown-haired knockout.

VICKI

Two knockouts. He was a hunk, Darling. A hunk.

CHARLENE

Sounds interesting.

VICKI

And of course, our guys had to adjust the D-rings on her harness.

HAL

(ENTERS WITH DRINKS) They were binding. It can be dangerous...if you need the reserve.

VICKI

Or even if you don't.

STEVE

You ought to come up and keep an eye on us. You too, Charlene.

HAL

I'm working on her.

VICKI

I'm not jumping out of no airplane.

STEVE

You wouldn't have to jump. Just come along for the ride. Watch us heroes.

VICKI

Why not? Are you game, Charlene?

CHARLENE

I don't think so. That's the guys' thing.

STEVE

Just this once. We'll have a picnic. Don't say no.

CHARLENE

Well...allright.

HAL

Great. (HAL LEADS AND OTHERS JOIN IN "SKYDIVER SONG.")

(Song #2)

Skydiver Song

**Now we all go up to fly,
high up in that old deep blue sky;
where the hawks hang still
and red birds, well, they dive at will
as we tumble through the air.**

**Fast wind rushing round our heads
as we reach for others, see them smile;
troubles fly away,
worries seem to stray,
fiction's real in that blue sky.**

STEVE

I'll reserve a plane. Next Sunday? One o'clock?

CHARLENE

Could we make it Saturday? A project is due Monday. I'd like Sunday to work on it.

STEVE

Hal? Vicki?

HAL

Saturday's fine.

VICKI

Ditto. I'll be done about 10.

STEVE

Okay, then. (TO CHARLENE AND VICKI) You two are on....(SILENCE) Charlene, you get any offers?

CHARLENE

Several. None from Kyoto.

STEVE

(TO HAL) And that's where you're going....the University of Kyoto?

HAL

You got it.

VICKI

What is it... two weeks off?

HAL

Less.

CHARLENE

More like four for me. I promised Mama to spend a couple of weeks with her and Daddy. He hasn't been so well lately. We're close. He's a wonderful old guy.

HAL

He spoils her something awful. (CHANGING THE SUBJECT, PROPOSES TOAST) To Steve, on the occasion of his first link-up.

VICKI

Hear, hear.

AS THEY DRINK, A KNOCKING AT THE DOOR. CHARLENE ANSWERS IT. IT IS BALY, A BLACK STUDENT IN HAL'S CLASS.

BALY

(SLIGHTLY AWKWARD, SHY) Hi, Ms. Ayer. I was looking for...(SPOTS HAL)...Mr. Garren.

HAL

(USHERING IN BALY, WHO IS CARRYING A BOOKSACK.) You found me. Balford Deville....Currently in my writing class. Everybody calls him "Baly." You know Charlene. I'm not sure if you've met Steve Benoit and Vicki Alvarez.

BALY

(SHAKING HANDS) My pleasure.

STEVE

I've seen you around campus.

HAL

Baly is in music.

VICKI

What instrument?

BALY

Lately? Harmonicas... Big ones. But I'm majoring in composition.

HAL

(REFERRING TO FOLDER BALY IS CARRYING) Did you finish the song?

BALY

(AWKWARDLY) Yeah. I'm leaving for the gulf in a couple of days. (TAKES SHEET OF MUSIC FROM HIS BOOKSACK.) It's not much, but I had promised.

VICKI

The Gulf of Mexico?

BALY

My uncle's a shrimper. I'll work with him this summer.

HAL

Could we (GESTURES TO PIANO. ADDRESSES OTHERS.) This is an incredible man—harmonicas, pianos, guitars: if it makes noise, Baly can play it. Or learn within 24 hours.

BALY

(TO CHARLENE) You sure it's okay?

HAL

Play.

BALY

(ARRANGING HIMSELF AT THE PIANO) The words are a poem written by a guy named Vernon Johns. A friend of Hal's...A conscientious objector who's doing his alternate service in Vietnam. Hal says he's not much as a poet but one hell of a guy. The title is "Old Friends Like Us." (BALY PLAYS AND SINGS.)

(Song #3)**Old Friends Like Us****I**

**Old friends like us are rare,
Willing to share whatever;
Come thick or thin or somewhere between,
Just as long as we hang together.**

II

**Rock and oaks and steel are us in the long rows;
Our trust in each demands
Suns that cast no shadows.**

ALL APPLAUD.

VICKI

Rock and....?

BALY

(PLAYS AND SINGS) Rock and oaks and steel are us in the long rows;

Our trust in each demands

Suns that cast no shadows.

CHARLENE

Beautiful.

HAL

(EXAMINING THE PAGE OF MUSIC) Excellent work. Can I keep this copy"?

Vernon's a congenital grump...But he'll smile when he gets this.

BALY

Thanks. Sure.

CHARLENE

Hal said...you also play the guitar?

BALY

Yeah. Six-string, twelve-string-my uncle me blues on the twelve-string .

CHARLENE

I'd like to sketch you....playing the guitar....But it seems that we're all headed every which way.

BALY

Would it take very long?

CHARLENE

About an hour.

BALY

I'll be picking up some things from my locker at school tomorrow. About noon.

CHARLENE

That'd be perfect. I'm meeting Hal at one. Could we make it near the lake at 11:30?

BALY

Sounds good. Maybe you'll get a chance to meet Barbara. We hang out together.

STEVE

Is she a student?

BALY

She's finishing up. Student teaching at the Practice School. Third grade.

CHARLENE

(TO STEVE AND VICKI) Would you and Vicki care to join us?

VICKI

Thanks, but we've got a full schedule.

CHARLENE

So I'll go ahead and bring my things to the lake...near the big oak.

BALY

You're on.

VICKI

We've gotta run. Nice to meet you, Baly.

STEVE

We'd love to hear you play again. That's a beautiful song. Let's look each other up in the fall.

BALY

Sounds good.

CHARLENE

It was kind of you to drop by.

STEVE

We gotta go.

VICKI

'Till Saturday.

HAL

Later. Thanks for the line divider. (STEVE AND VICKI EXIT.) You ever pose before? (BALY SHAKES HIS HEAD.) It's murder. But if you're playing, it'll be different.

BALY

I look forward to it....(MORE SERIOUSLY) Mr. Garren, I...

HAL

(INTERRUPTING) The course is done. From now on, it's "Hal."

BALY

Could I see you alone for a minute?

HAL

Is it the exam? (BALY NODS.) It's okay. I mentioned it to Charlene.

BALY

I talked to Ed...Bradley. He's not going to testify or make a statement at the hearing or whatever you call it.

HAL

Why not?

BALY

I'm not sure. Maybe someone talked to him.

HAL

Someone like who?

BALY

I don't know. I really don't....That Cummings guy maybe. Ed did say...(HALTS)

HAL

What did Ed say?

BALY

That it was your responsibility to stay in the classroom during the final....That if you had, nothing would have happened. And that he's not going to.-you know...say that he saw Cummings take the papers out of his bag.

HAL

It was just for a few minutes. Cummings didn't do anything this semester but cut class. I don't fail people very often. When I do, they deserve it.

CHARLENE

Did Cummings copy from the papers?

HAL

No. He handed them in...It was perfectly clear to me that they were written by someone else.

CHARLENE

How would he have known the questions?

HAL

It wasn't exactly a question. I asked them to structure a brief scene and write dialogue for it. I had used the exam before. He knew someone who had taken the course before.

CHARLENE

And his "F" was based on that exam.

HAL

Yes. He said he had written it, and he made a formal complaint.

CHARLENE

(TO BALY) Did you see him take the papers out of his bag?

BALY

No. But Ed did tell me that he had seen him. He told me right after the exam.

HAL

(TO BALY) Would you appear before the Committee?

BALY

(LONG PAUSE) If you ask me to.

HAL

Let me think about it.

CHARLENE

Don't pull Baly into this.

HAL

(NERVOUSLY) There are ramifications.

CHARLENE

What ramifications? Pride?

HAL

There's a pack of lizards in that Department. They were green with envy when I got the grant from the NEA. They'd like nothing better than to see me roasted.

CHARLENE

So?

HAL

It could mean...Ja...a lot of trouble.

CHARLENE

How is that involved? They already gave you a leave of absence to research your novel.

HAL

A leave before tenure is usually out of the question. I got it because Brownell likes me and because he's the Chair. Three of the English Department lizards are on the Senate Grievance Committee. An adverse ruling would be grounds for reprimand. In which case they might pressure the Dean to revoke the leave.

CHARLENE

So there might not be Japan. (HAL DOESN'T RESPOND. SHE PUTS HER FACE IN HER HANDS) Why is it always like this? You going out to some brink or other. You do very well out there. Protesting Vietnam, leading parades, goading the police, getting yourself arrested, protecting whales, demanding this, demanding that. You're right, of course But it s all too much. I hate it. Hate it. You promised. I came back because you promised to stop that. You pleaded, and I came back. I just can't take it.

BALY

I'll do it if you ask me to. I've got to go.

HAL

Baly, I'm sorry.

BALY

No problem.

CHARLENE

(BALY BEGINS TO EXIT.) Wait. About tomorrow? Is it still on?...I'm sorry about this.

BALY

Sure. This sort of thing goes on all the time where I live.

CHARLENE

(BRIEFLY EMBRACES BALY) Thanks.

BALY

Anytime. Later. (EXITS)

HAL

I told that kid he'd get an "F." I read his paper right there. I told him it wasn't his work.

CHARLENE

Was it his handwriting?

HAL

Yeah. But there were no scratch-outs, the margins were perfect. Someone else wrote it. He copied it before the exam. And he waits until I hand in the grades.

CHARLENE

So now what?

HAL

They meet on Wednesday. There's no way I'm giving up this chance for Japan.

CHARLENE

And if they raise a fuss and say no?

HAL

I don't think they will.

CHARLENE

You just said that they're a bunch of lizards with their tongues hanging out.

HAL

They can do what they want.

CHARLENE

And if they do, what about us? After Japan? Do we pack up and look for a new pack of lizards in Alaska or Tierra del Fuego or God knows where?

HAL

The bottom line is that we're going. We'll worry about that we come back. Otherwise, you never do anything.

CHARLENE

That's easy for you to say. You're a guy. We do things that glorify you and push you up the ladder. We are expected to do things that tidy up the nest and stuff food down your throat. You expect me to be ready to move anywhere just to be near you, even though it rips up my things.

HAL

Take it easy, Baby.

CHARLENE

I'm not going to do it. Not again. I can't. And you have no right to ask me to....or even expect me to.

HAL

Okay. We'll find something for you. It's not a big problem. We've got some savings, and I want to be around you. With you. We'll work it out. I'll find a way to do my things and be with you.

CHARLENE

You go massage someone else with your fancy words.

HAL

I've dreamed about going to Japan. Since I read about Kyoto. In high school. I like this job. I like Baton Rouge. But there are other jobs. I can't not go to Japan. Do you understand that? I can't.

CHARLENE

(FALLS SITTING, EXHAUSTED) Yes.

HAL

(JOINS HER) It'll be alright. It really will.

CHARLENE

I'm alright now. Why don't you go see about your papers or something. I want to sleep for a while.

HAL

Come on. I'll turn the covers down.

CHARLENE

No. I'll see you tomorrow. After I draw Baly. I need to be quiet now.

HAL

Okay. If you're sure....

CHARLENE

(INTERRUPTING, STERNLY) I'm sure.

HAL

(REFERRING TO PARACHUTE AND HELMET) Can I leave this stuff here?

CHARLENE

Goodnight.

HAL EXITS. CHARLENE SITS AND LETS HER HEAD FALL BACK AGAINST THE CHAIR. SHE STAYS IN THIS POSITION FOR ABOUT 15 SECONDS, THEN REACHES FOR THE TELEPHONE AND DIALS A NUMBER.

CHARLENE (into receiver)

Stuart? Charlene....Thanks. Are you busy?....No, I'm fine....Well, almost fine. I'm in the mood for coffee with an old friend....No, I don't want to go out....Is here okay? No....Okay, but only a hamburger. And donuts....Thanks. I'll see you in a little while. Bye.

End of Scene One

ACT I
Scene Two

A darkened stage. The sound of a hammer knocking away broken wood. Lights come up. A small pool of light down center constitutes most of the set for this scene. It is late afternoon in the Citadel, the walled city that once encompassed all of Hue, the ancient cultural and political capital of Vietnam. Huong is a tallish, handsome, 31-year-old Vietnamese man. He is the lonely scholar type, refined but strong-willed and presently troubled. He is dressed in blue trousers and a somewhat worn white shirt. Huong is struggling to knock away the five-foot long rotten and broken beam that once supported a two-foot high, extremely heavy brass bell which is visible on the floor below. The bell is surrounded by clutter. Huong has brought a new beam. His intention is to replace the beam, hoist the bell with the block-and-tackle now in his large burlap sack, and tie it to the beam. Vui, a lazy Buddhist monk dressed in a grey robe, is eating fruit, leaning against the wall. It is late May of 1967.

VUI

How are you going to raise the bell?

HUONG

(BETWEEN KNOCKS OF HIS HAMMER) That's your job. You figure it out.

VUI

If it were up to me, we'd go for noodles and forget it. (HUONG CONTINUES TO WORK VERY HARD AT GETTING OUT THE BROKEN BEAM.) Hey, Huong. This old city's not going anywhere. You're gonna give yourself a heart attack.

HUONG

(TAKING A BREAK, MOPPING HIS FOREHEAD, WHICH IS DRIPPING WITH PERSPIRATION.) That's where you're wrong, Vui. The spirit of this old part of Hue is just about gone. You can't blame it. Neglect. So much neglect...If we let it fall apart much more, then no one will remember why they are not fighting here. And if they begin to forget, they won't quit until this magnificent Citadel is nothing but a pile of stones.

VUI

And why not. They're blowing up and bombing all of the rest of Vietnam. Who has time to look after all this junk? Besides, you couldn't do it alone if you lived 20 times. It's huge.

HUONG

The perimeter is about 10,000 meters and encloses several hundred buildings, including those here on the palace grounds....We are at the heart of the Citadel....And if you don't take care of your heart, it stops beating...(TAKING A SHORT BREAK, TOUCHES THE BELL WHICH IS LYING ON THE FLOOR HALF-COVERED WITH DEBRIS) This was a harmonizer bell. They struck it about two seconds after the big ones across there (HUONG POINTS OFFSTAGE). It was precisely tuned so that the effect was to prolong the reverberation in an almost magical fashion. It was used to welcome ambassadors from Europe, Africa, Japan. Some of those moments were of great historical importance to Vietnam. They helped shape our country and our minds. These bells and buildings and the legends they hold are--in a way--responsible for our being what we are today. If they fall apart, so does the core, the soul--not only of Hue but of all of the country from the

Mekong to the mountains of Hanoi. That is why both Saigon and Hanoi have agreed not to fight in Hue.

VUI

The Regional Commander's compound is attacked every two weeks.

HUONG

They drop mortars from the middle of the Perfume River to amuse themselves. But no fighting, no soldiers from the Viet Cong army or from the North ever come here.

VUI

Ha!

HUONG

I mean to fight.

VUI

How did you learn all this...or is it from your imagination?

HUONG

Books, records....A lot of them are still in the documents room. I'll show you sometime.

VUI

I've seen some of them. They're in Chinese and some kind of weird script no one can understand. That's what Old Nguyen the caretaker said.

HUONG

If a man studies, many things open up to him.

VUI

Study, study, study. That's all you do.

DAI ENTERS, UNSEEN BY HUONG AND VUI. HE IS WELL DRESSED IN A RATHER FASHIONABLE FRENCH SUIT. HE SMOKES A CIGARETTE IN A SDC-INCH SILVER HOLDER. HE IS AN ASTUTE, INTELLIGENT MAN WHOSE MORE OFFICIAL DRESS IS THAT OF A MAJOR IN THE ARMY OF NORTH VIETNAM. HE WALKS TO HUONG, WHO SEES HIM, STOPS FOR A MOMENT, AND THEN CONTINUES HIS WORK. VUI SEES DAI AND VANISHES WITHOUT A WORD.

DAI

You seem quite wrapped up in your work, Lieutenant Huong.

HUONG

What do you want, Dai? I'm busy.

DAI

I would advise you to be more....proper...in communicating with superior officers. Lest you wind up digging latrines in the Delta.

HUONG

If I showed you military courtesy, I'd be disobeying the orders of your father. You attend military events in Hanoi. Why not ask him for a few pointers on security?

DAI

I agree. No titles.

HUONG

(WITH SLIGHTING SARCASM) If you came to help, pick up that hammer.

DAI

How dare you, you insolent nobody!

HUONG

(CONTINUING TO WORK) Well, what do you want?

DAI

After November, you will not leave Hue.

HUONG

My work with the Americans involves making frequent visits around the country. You know that. Do you want me to quit?

DAI

NO....YOU travel until November. After November, no. You'll get additional orders when necessary. (HUONG IS SILENT.) Do you have a problem with that?

HUONG

With what? Not leaving Hue? No problem at all. I'll have more time for this. (GESTURES AROUND HIM) But I can't keep working for them unless I travel. General Giap said that work with American civilians is very important....for propaganda as well as for information.

DAI

General Giap did not use that word... "propaganda." He said "Understanding in America." Do you not think that he was right?

HUONG

Of course, he was right. "Their press is our press."

DAI

At least I'm glad to know that you were awake in that meeting.

HUONG

"Their weapons are our weapons."

DAI

Exactly.

HUONG

"Their destruction is our destruction."

DAI

(STIFFENS) No. You know that he did not say that either. That is your propaganda. (WITH INCREASING ANGER) Exactly what is it you're trying to do? ...With all this? (MOTIONS TO THE ROOM) Preserve a corrupt, class-conscious past? Get things ready for another emperor?

HUONG

General Giap obviously doesn't share your narrow view of our past.

DAI

General Giap and the Party have come to share exactly my contempt of what these cultural tombs represent.

HUONG

Then why in god's name do they support me here? Why don't they let you send me on some suicide mission?

DAI

You are a very intelligent man, Huong. But you are also a naive simpleton. For now, let's say that I don't know why the Party' supports your indulgence with all this crap. I obey commands; I don't question and mock them.

HUONG

If the Party said "All Hail the Emperor," your perfumed forehead would be the first to touch the ground.

DAI

(SLAPS HUONG IN THE FACE) Treason is not something to toy with.

HUONG

(THROWING HAMMER DOWN) Treason? Ha! Who could be more faithful to the Vietnamese nation than me. Saigon knows utter and complete corruption, and Hanoi knows utter and complete Communism. The nation of Vietnam gets chewed up and spat out.

DAI

One day, Huong, you'll regret your contemptuous disrespect. Remember, after November, no travel. We want you here. Got it? (HUONG IS SILENT. DAI HANDS HIM A SMALL SHEET OF PAPER.) And you will begin living in this building.

HUONG

(READING THE PAPER) But this is near the northeast gate. There's nothing there but stones overgrown with bamboo. What is all this about? Is this your idea of a joke?

DAI

(DEAD SERIOUS) Don't ignore it, Lieutenant. Get Vui to help you. There's no real hurry, but you should begin fixing the place now.

HUONG

I've got more important things to do.

DAI

That's a direct order, Huong. Why did you accept a commission if you can't even behave like a common soldier, much less an officer.

HUONG

You want to know the truth? Because they said I could stay here and continue my work. Okay, so I'll start fixing the guard house on the northeast gate. No travel after November. Anything else, Sir?

DAI

You'll regret your insolence.

HUONG

Give me my hammer and be careful of the flying stones. (DAI CONTAINS A BURST OF ANGER AND SILENTLY TURNS AND STRIDES OUT. AFTER A FEW SECONDS VUI CREEPS BACK IN. HUONG PICKS UP THE HAMMER) If the senior monks knew how much you goofed off, you'd be allowed to fast for a week.

VUI

You are destined to be either very powerful or very dead. Personally, I'd vote for the latter.

HUONG

Belief in something makes a man invincible, as any good monk knows. Now help me with this rotting beam.

VUI

(BELCHES AND STEPS TO THE OLD BEAM) So, "Hero of the North and the South," where do you want your tombstone? In Hanoi or Saigon?

HUONG

Right here in this tower if ever we get the bell up.

VUI

It must weigh 200 kilos. We'd need a dozen strong men. So let's knock off and come back in six months. After Tet. There will be a lot of young soldiers visiting their families to celebrate the Lunar New Year.

HUONG

(PICKING UP THE BURLAP SACK TO GET IT OUT OF THE WAY) I've got ropes and pulleys in here. Once we get the new beam in, we'll dig out the bell, hoist it up, and tie it in place. We'll be finished by tomorrow evening.

VUI

Will that be before or after supper? (BOTH PULL AND PUSH THE OLD BEAM UNTIL IT CRASHES DOWN, ENDING THE SCENE.)

End of Scene Two

ACT I
Scene Three

The whistle of a kettle awakens Charlene who has dozed off on the chair. She checks her watch and goes into the kitchen, turns off the fire and returns to minimally set the table with napkins and silverware. She puts on a recording of Chet Baker. She goes to her desk and begins looking over some letters, one of which she takes to her chair and reads carefully. Stuart knocks at the door. She opens it. He is carrying a take-out bag and a small bunch of flowers.

STUART

Good evening.

CHARLENE

Hi. It's nice of you...(GIVES HIM A FLEETING KISS ON THE CHEEK)...! hope you weren't doing anything important. I'll take those....Oh, they're beautiful. Thank you.

STUART

I thought you needed a little cheering up.

CHARLENE

Does it show?

STUART

No, not really. But you usually do when you call these days.

CHARLENE

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have bothered you.

STUART

Quite the opposite. It's far better than no call at all.

CHARLENE

Let me put these in water. (EXITS TO KITCHEN)

STUART

(AMBLES TO PAINTING, STUDIES IT) This looks still wet.

CHARLENE (OFFSTAGE)

It's almost done. Are you working much?

STUART

No. Not since the exhibition last fall. I did paint my kitchen about two weeks ago. Daniels said he liked it.

CHARLENE (OFFSTAGE)

You two still keep in touch?

STUART

I had him and his wife over for dinner last month. He's retiring...heading for Mexico.

CHARLENE

(ENTERING WITH FLOWERS) They're beautiful, Stu. You always know what to do. Permanently?

STUART

Yep. They'll give it a try at least. They'll keep their house near the College for a while.

CHARLENE

You going to visit them?

STUART
 Next summer, maybe. Me and my guest.

CHARLENE
 And who's the lucky girl?

STUART
 Don't know. Your name came up.

CHARLENE
 Flattering. But they should mind their own business.

STUART
 (TONGUE IN CHEEK) That's what I told them. Exactly.

CHARLENE
 (NERVOUS) Should I see about the hamburgers?

STUART
 Sit down is what you should do.

CHARLENE
 I have a new Otis Redding album.

STUART
 Sit down, Charlene.

CHARLENE
 I got it last week. (MOVES TO PHONOGRAPH, TAKES OFF CHET BAKER AND PUTS ON THE REDDING ALBUM. SHE SCRATCHES THE NEEDLE ON THE RECORD.)

STUART
 On a disaster scale of one to ten, I'd say you were at about seven-and-a-half.

CHARLENE
 And where are you on that scale.

STUART
 Without you to look after, I'm falling apart--virtually lost in a mad frenzy of booze fast women, and wild music.

CHARLENE
 I...we might be going to Japan.

STUART
 I had heard. Sounds wonderful.

CHARLENE
 Don't be sarcastic.

STUART
 I'm not. When does the boat sail?

CHARLENE
 Hal's leaving in two weeks. I'll meet him there in about a month.

STUART
 But...?

CHARLENE
 But what?

STUART
 But you don't want to go?

CHARLENE

I didn't say that. (NO RESPONSE FROM STUART.) I've spent a lot of time writing off for jobs, sending recommendations. (SHE HANDS STUART THE SHEAF OF RESPONSES WHICH HE SKIMS.) I've had half a dozen offers, mainly in teaching English...But none from Kyoto, where we'll be.

STUART

Do you need the income?

CHARLENE

Not really, but....(HALTS)....I can't just sit around....

STUART

(COMPLETING HER SENTENCE)...painting all day.

CHARLENE

Don't be patronizing....You know what I mean.

STUART

Do you? (SILENCE) You've been with him for two years. I didn't think it'd last two months.

CHARLENE

It's not that simple... It never is. Hal is....he's a really good guy, a straight shooter. And they've been good years. Very good.

STUART

So were the ones...(CLEARS HIS THROAT) the one that we had.

CHARLENE

I don't want to lose him.

STUART

Sometimes those decisions are not ours to make.

CHARLENE

You sound like someone's uncle. (SILENCE) I'm sorry. I hadn't expected all this.

STUART

And that's what's giving you migraine headaches. Being idle in Kyoto?

CHARLENE

I have to do something.

STUART

You paint. You paint very well.

CHARLENE

Thanks. It's important. And I hope I never stop. But there's got to be something else...Some...context...Some....meaning. I don't know. I'm 24 years old. Out of college and still doing freelance graphic design. When will my real life begin? Is art the most important part, or do you have to do something to keep from going crazy? And now I have to think of not going crazy in Japan of all places. And when we come back, what then? Will I be setting up housekeeping in the middle of Idaho or something?....I'm sorry. I'm not making much sense.

STUART

No, you aren't.

CHARLENE

(PAUSES. LETS THE LAST QUESTION EVAPORATE) It's just that it's always something. I always think that it'll be smooth sailing after the current crisis, but always,

it's more hassle. Like the job. And now some kid's complaining that Hal failed him without cause and Hal's worried that some English faculty members will take it to the Dean and that his leave of absence will be cancelled. It's always something like that. He invites it.

STUART

Of course he does. He needs it....You don't.

CHARLENE

But I need him.

STUART

Don't sell yourself short. There are a lot of other guys in the world, you know. They understand about things like this.

CHARLENE

Stu, you're one of the kindest people in the world. Maybe I should just run back to you. But I can't. It wouldn't be fair. To you most of all. It wouldn't work out.

STUART

What do I have to lose. (SILENCE FROM CHARLENE) Any other alternatives?

CHARLENE

I could go to Vietnam.

STUART

Or into boxing...Or wrestling....Or snake handling.

CHARLENE

I'm serious. I got an offer.

STUART

To do what? Learn to fix helicopters? Go on night patrol?

CHARLENE

To teach elementary school. As a volunteer...for an organization like the Peace Corps.

STUART

Charlene, there's a goddamn war going on in Vietnam.

CHARLENE

The description's there. It's not for military schools. Just regular schools.

STUART

There's nothing regular about wars.

CHARLENE

It's—teaching Vietnamese kids...not about taking sides.

STUART

Eventually, everyone take sides. People get hurt.

CHARLENE

There's already about one hundred volunteers over there.

STUART

You're hell-bent on destroying your life....Hal, Vietnam....More disastrous choices you could not make.

CHARLENE

But they're very different choices. (HER VULNERABILITY MAKES HER VOICE SHAKY.)

STUART

Yes, they are. I'll grant you that.... (SEES THAT SHE IS DEEPLY UPSET)...Take it

easy. It's all going to work out for the best. You have a powerful guardian angel looking out for you. (TAKES HER LOOSELY IN HIS ARMS WHERE SHE REMAINS FOR A FEW MOMENTS AND THEN STEPS TO THE WINDOW. STUART BEGINS SINGING "A MILLION DAYS OF BLUE.")

(Song #4)

A Million Days of Blue

I

**If you should go away,
there's only one thing I'd say-
Goodbye, my pal, and think of this,
a million days of blue, of walking, thinking of you.
That you, my love, would not return
in a million days of blue.**

II

**Your heart is tender and I knew
I'd have you only for a day;
that you'd go long and far away
and that I'd be a million days blue.**

CHARLENE

A million days is an awfully long time. You are a very dear friend, Stu. Remember this:

(CONTINUATION OF ABOVE)

**If I go away,
there's one thing I want to say--
Goodbye, my love, and think of this,
I'm often thinking of you.
I'm often thinking of you,
of days gone by all too few;
I'll send you gifts and souvenirs
cause I'm often thinking of you.**

STUART WALKS TO CHARLENE CATCHES HER BY THE HANDS AND PULLS HER UP INTO HIS ARMS FOR A BRIEF EMBRACE. CHARLENE DOES NOT RESPOND. HE WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND THIS MOMENT, BUT KNOWS BETTER). Maybe I should leave....before....(PAUSES)

CHARLENE

I'm sorry-It's just that.....Maybe you should.....

STUART

What about the hamburgers?

CHARLENE

I'll put yours in the freezer.

STUART

Call me again—anytime.

CHARLENE

I will.

STUART

That's what they all say.... You're at a crossroads, Charlene. Go carefully. Goodnight.

CHARLENE

Goodnight. (STUART EXITS.)

SHE RETURNS TO HER CHAIR, STARES AT THE PARACHUTE FOR A FEW MOMENTS, THEN BEGINS PICKING UP THE CUPS, GLASSES AND THE UNOPENED BAG OF HAMBURGERS. SHE EXITS TO THE KITCHEN. THE ORCHESTRA PLAYS STRAINS OF "A MILLION DAYS OF BLUE."

End of Scene Three

ACT I

Scene Four

CHARLENE IS SKETCHING BALY ON CAMPUS. HE IS PLAYING THE SONG "FRIENDS LIKE US" ON HIS GUITAR. HE CHECKS THE TIME ON HIS WATCH.

BALY

We've gone about 30 minutes over.

CHARLENE

What time is it?

BALY

One o'clock. Almost.

CHARLENE

It's almost done. Just a few seconds.

BALY

It's just that I was supposed to meet Barbara over at the school.

CHARLENE

You should have said something.

BALY

I told her about the drawing so it's okay. It's when I forget completely that she gets upset.

CHARLENE

There....Come have a look.

BALY

(WALKS OVER, LOOKS AT SKETCH) Hey, that's nice. Am I really that handsome?

CHARLENE

No. But I think that Barbara should think you are-.Do you think she'd like to have it?

BALY

You mean the drawing?

CHARLENE

Yeah.

BALY

You serious?

CHARLENE

Of course.

BALY

That's terrific. (JEANETTE, ALDUS AND TOM) RUN ONSTAGE SHOUTING TO BALY "SAY MY NAME, SAY MY NAME." THEY ARE FOLLOWED AFTER A FEW MOMENTS BY BARBARA.) Oh, no. The musketeer squad. (THEY REPEAT, "SAY MY NAME, SAY MY NAME.")

BARBARA

(TO BALY) You fight with them for a while. (TO CHARLENE) You must be Charlene Ayer.

CHARLENE

(SHAKING HANDS WITH BARBARA) Yes.

BARBARA

Barbara Fields. Glad to meet you.

CHARLENE

It's my fault he's late. I just finished. (INDICATES SKETCH)

BARBARA

It's great. You did bring out the...heroic. (TO BALY) You're not that handsome, you know.

CHILDREN

Say my name. Say my name.

CHARLENE

(TO BARBARA) If you like it, it's yours.

BARBARA

I...I...Yes. But you just finished it...Baly, did you go and ask for this?

BALY

No, Ma'am. I ain't done nothin'.

CHARLENE

It's my present to you and Baly. (HANDS BARBARA TISSUE PAPER) You can put this over the image when you roll it up.

BARBARA

Thanks. I really appreciate it.

CHILDREN

Say my name. Say my name.

BARBARA

I have to look after these students for about half an hour more. It's a favor to the principal. Tom, Aldus, Jeanette. Meet Charlene Ayer.

CHILDREN

Hello, Miss Ayer.

CHARLENE

I'm very glad to meet you.

BARBARA

Miss Ayer drew a sketch of Baly here. She's an artist. (KIDS GLANCE AT SKETCH AND BURST OUT AGAIN WITH "SAY MY NAME, SAY MY NAME.") So much for art appreciation. (BARBARA CAREFULLY PLACES TISSUE OVER SURFACE AND ROLLS UP THE SKETCH.)

CHARLENE (TO JEANETTE)

What's all this about "Say my name"?

JEANETTE

It's a song. Baly made it.

CHARLENE

Oh? Do you like it?

CHILDREN

Yeaah!

BALY

Barbara invited me to perform for her class. I thought I should bring them something.

CHARLENE

(SITS ON HER ARTIST'S STOOL. THE CHILDREN RESPOND VERY WELL TO

CHARLENE.) Maybe you can teach it to me.

ALDUS

He can. (POINTS TO BALY)

CHARLENE

(TO ALDUS) He might. If you ask him very politely.

TOM

Play it, Baly.

CHARLENE

My goodness. If I wanted someone to play a song, I'd say please.

JEANETTE

Please, Mis-ter Baly.

BALY

Okay but you gotta help. (REMINDING CHILDREN OF RHYTHM OF SONG) One, two, three- one two three. (AFTER GETTING BARBARA AND THE CHILDREN GOING, BALY SETS ASIDE HIS GUITAR, TAKES UP HIS BIG HARMONICA, AND ACCOMPANIES THEM.)

(Song #5)

Say My Name

**You can make me
smile wide all day;
just say my name
and look my way.**

**Frowns come my way
from everywhere;
but say my name
once again.**

**It means so much
to me and you,
so put my name in the air.
I'll be okay
if I hear my name.**

(CHARLENE AND BARBARA SING WITH THE CHILDREN A REPEAT OF THE ENTIRE SONG.)

BARBARA

You have the teacher's touch.

CHARLENE

I...I don't have much to do with kids.

BARBARA

It's a gift. I see the kids every day. They know.

JEANETTE

One more.....Please, Mis-ter Baly.

BALY

What's up in the sky?

CHILDREN

Sunshine. Yeaah. (BALY, CHARLENE, BARBARA AND THE KIDS SING "Plenty of Sunshine")

(Song #6)

Plenty of Sunshine

**Now we've got plenty of sunshine;
and we are feeling kind of fine.
The working's all done behind us;
the sign says good times up the road,
and over the sea,
as long as we live in sunshine,
as long as we live in love.**

**Oh there are days
when clouds roll in;
it seems that troubles
fall with the rain.**

**Don't give in,
don't you leave;
good times will
come again
and you'll see
that the sun
will come through the grey skies;
we'll laugh and sing once again;
so don't lose faith in the good years,
or your one chance
will fade and be gone,
and you won't be
what you could have been.**

*WHILE THE SONG IS BEING SUNG, A TROUBLED HAL ENTERS AND WATCHES.
CHILDREN CHEER WHEN SONG IS FINISHED. BARBARA NOTICES HAL.*

BARBARA

Hi, Mr. Garren.

CHILDREN
(MOCKING) Hi, Mr. Garren.

HAL
Hi, kids.

BARBARA
I've got to get them back to school. Come on, Baly.

ALDUS
Bye, Miss Ayer.

JEANETTE
Are you gonna come visit us at school sometime?

CHARLENE
I certainly will try.

BARBARA
Baly!

BALY
(PUTTING GUITAR AND HARMONICA IN CASES, HURRYING TO KEEP UP WITH HER) I'm coming. (TO HAL AND CHARLENE) Later.

HAL
Right.

CHARLENE
(BRIGHTLY) Barbara says I'm good with kids....I think she's right.

HAL
You've always had the knack.

CHARLENE
(REFERRING TO HAL'S MEETING) Did you see them?

HAL
Yeah...The guy was there...He lied through his teeth. I made my case...showed them the grade book, the absences.

CHARLENE
But they weren't convinced.

HAL
I'm not sure. They'll have a special meeting with the Dean on Friday. Brownell said he'd call as soon as a decision is made. He said the Dean likes to sleep on things like that.

CHARLENE
I hope....everything...(SHE TURNS HER FACE AWAY AS SHE COMES NEAR TO TEARS. HE TAKES HER IN HIS ARMS. SHE HOLDS ONTO HIM.)

HAL
It'll be allright. Screw 'em. They can't touch us, no matter what they do.

CHARLENE
(PULLS HERSELF GENTLY AWAY. SHE SPEAKS AFTER A LONG PAUSE) I gave 'em a call.

HAL
You gave who a call?

CHARLENE

The Vietnam people.

HAL

Forget about them. You'll do fine in Kyoto.

CHARLENE

There's a small group leaving in five weeks.

HAL

Well, let them leave.

CHARLENE

(HER FACE AWAY FROM HAL) I have to let them too, within the next week.

HAL

Have you lost your senses. They're fighting, shooting, bombing, killing people. You can't go waltzing into that place like Snow White...(CHARLENE IS SILENT.)...For God's sake, don't be that naïve...(SILENCE CONTINUES.)...Okay, go to Tokyo or Osaka...anywhere but Vietnam.

CHARLENE

Could you take this stool with you. (SHE CROSSES TO EXIT. HE GRABS HER ARM.) Please let me go. (HAL RELEASES HER AFTER HIS ANGER SUBSIDES A BIT.)

HAL

(PICKING UP STOOL) Okay. Let's talk about it this evening.

CHARLENE

(REFERRING TO STOOL) Bring it with you to the airport Saturday.

HAL

What are you talking about? Why not tonight?

CHARLENE

I need time to think.

HAL

So you don't want to see me tonight.

CHARLENE

Right.

HAL

I didn't do anything. It's that snot nose.

CHARLENE

Please, Hal. This is very difficult for me.

HAL

For you? What about me?

CHARLENE

I can't think when I'm around you. I'll see you on Saturday...if you still want me to be there.

HAL

Of course I want you to be there....But don't do anything... call them or anything like that. Promise me. Please!

CHARLENE

We'll see. (EXITS)

HAL

(FRUSTRATED, CONFUSED AND RATHER DEEPLY TROUBLED, HAL SINGS "WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN.")

(Song #7)

What Could Have Been

**It took my mind
and blew it apart,
when we started to go
and then turned back,
we were afraid.
I see what we could have been
had I trusted you,
had you believed in me,
when we came to the sea.**

**We would have dreamed forever,
been together
one as we should be;
we could have balled Pacific
on a porpoise
talking to him all the way
and learning just how it is to love
and all the secrets of the deep.**

**But we shook and ran
from the golden sand;
I know we'll never get that chance again.
We'll walk and maybe talk about
the birds in that old windy sky,
and then, we'll lie again
and say that we have seen the within--
that it is white and lit with
bright blue gems;**

**But we both know
it just ain't so.
We'll forget about
the suns we might have seen
in porpoise eye,
and forget that we only could have been
if you believed in me,
if I believed in you.**

End of Scene Four

ACT I

Scene Five

The following Saturday. A small hangar at the airport. A parachute is stretched out in a thin strip; that is, the lines are together. Steve is at a telephone at the side of the stage. Vicki and Charlene are waiting for him.

STEVE

There's still no answer.

CHARLENE

It's not like him.

STEVE

He must be on his way. Maybe you two can give me a hand. Charlene, hold the lines where the canopy is folded over. No, just press them to the ground. That's it. Now, Vicki, if you could slide the sleeve down to me. No, leave the pilot chute alone. We press it over the chute after we fold it. (DECIDING TO STOP THE PROCEDURE)...No...That's alright. Just let it be. We'll do it later. (HE PULLS THE SLEEVE DOWN HIMSELF AND FOLDS THE WHOLE PARACHUTE LOOSELY AND PUTS IT IN A CARDBOARD BOX.)

CHARLENE

He's expecting an important call today.

STEVE

I know. That bloody grade business. He told me about it.

VICKI

(MOTIONING TO PARACHUTE) You want to give it one more try?

STEVE

No. The Russians are known for their slapdash packing. No line dividers, no stretchers. They just stuff the chutes into the backpack and jump. We are meticulous.

VICKI

Do they open?

STEVE

As far as I know. What time is it?

VICKI

Twelve-forty-five.

STEVE

That plane's reserved for one. If he's not here by 12:55, I think we should take off.

CHARLENE

Would that be okay? I mean is it alright to jump alone?

STEVE

It's not the most exciting thing in the world, but it's okay. It's too late to cancel. And they'll charge us extra if we're not on board and ready to go by one....sharp. You'll have to pin up your hair and wear a helmet. Any trips to the John should be made now. (A CAR

PULLS UP OFFSTAGE. THE DOOR IS OPENED AND BANGED AND THE TRUNK IS OPEN AND BANGED SHUT.)

VICKI

I think the star has arrived.

HAL

(ENTERING WITH GEAR, LOOKING UPSET. TO EVERYONE, HALF-MUMBLING) I'm sorry I'm late.

STEVE

Is everything okay? (NO ANSWER FROM HAL)....You should be suiting up.

HAL

Yeah. I'll be ready in a second. We've got ten minutes-maybe more. (HE BEGINS PUTTING A JUMPSUIT OVER HIS JEANS AND T-SHIRT.)

VICKI

(SPEAKING FROM PERSONA OF CHARLENE) Aren't you going to tell us "Hello"?

HAL

(MOODY) Vicki...Charlene. Are you girls coming along for the ride?

CHARLENE

(REACTING TO HAL'S RUDENESS) I think I'll just go on home. (STARTS TO EXIT)

VICKI

Nope. (CATCHES CHARLENE'S ARM) You've got a plane to catch. And a picnic to go to after.

CHARLENE

(GENTLY REMOVING VICKI'S HAND) I'd better go. I don't want a scene.

HAL

(DOESN'T STOP GETTING READY) Have you got helmets for them?

VICKI

Hal, for God's sake! You behave like a child when you get home. Here, you treat us like ladies and adults.

HAL

You got a problem?

STEVE

(ATTEMPTING TO DEFUSE THE SITUATION) Vicki. I think you and Charlene might try on these. (HANDS THEM HELMETS.) It doesn't matter if they're too big Just tighten 'em a lot....(VICKI PUTS ON A HELMET. CHARLENE ACCEPTS IT BUT SIMPLY HOLDS IT)Hal is right. We've still got a few minutes. I'm going to talk to the pilot. Vicki. (STEVE AND VICKI EXIT.)

CHARLENE

That was uncalled for, you know.

HAL

Yeah. I know. I'm sorry. (NO ANSWER FROM CHARLENE, WHO IS FACING AWAY FROM HAL)...Look, I apologize.

CHARLENE

So they revoked your leave.

HAL

You got it.

CHARLENE

(TURNS AFTER A FEW SECONDS, CROSSES TO HAL. SHE FLEETINGLY TOUCHES HIS FACE) I'm sorry..(LONG PAUSE) Anything else?

HAL

No. Not if I change the grade to "C". Which I will do because if I do it, there will be no mention of it in my file. Not quite the principled thing, but what the hell.

CHARLENE

And Japan?

HAL

That's another thing I'm gonna do.

CHARLENE

(INWARDLY SHOCKED) That means...(STOPS)

HAL

(COMPLETING HER SENTENCE) ...that I don't work here anymore.

CHARLENE

You told them.

HAL

I told Brownell.

CHARLENE

You didn't tell me.

HAL

You weren't around.

CHARLENE

I'm not going to Japan.

HAL

We'll talk about that later.

CHARLENE

Everything's always later. I can't. I don't want to lose you, but I can't go.

HAL

Dammit, Charlene. Let's talk about it later for Christ's sake...(GETTING NERVOUS)...Let's make that damn jump, eat our damn picnic and then go home and talk about it I'll apologize to Vicki. And to Steve. And to anyone else you suggest.(IN THE DISTANCE, THERE IS THE SOUND OF AN AIRPLANE TAXIING TO THEM.)

STEVE

(APPEARS FOR A MOMENT, SPEAKS AND THEN EXITS) He's coming.

CHARLENE

That's how it always is. Talk, talk, talk. And I always listen, listen and listen and take it, take it, take it....I'm not going to Japan. If you're going to Japan, we don't have anything to talk about. Per...(SHE STARTS TO BREAK DOWN.)...Period. End of story. (SHE STARTS TO EXIT.)

HAL

Charlene, wait! We'll find a way.

CHARLENE

No. (THROWS HER HELMET AT HIM.) You don't need me. You need an audience. Well I'm not going to be your audience anymore. I can't. (THE AIRPLANE HAS COME RELATIVELY NEAR. THE SOUND BECOMES VERY LOUD INDEED AND THE WASH OF THE PROPELLOR IS FELT.)

STEVE

(ENTERING AGAIN IN A RUSH, SHOUTS TO BE HEARD) Hal...Charlene. Come on! (CHARLENE CROSSES TO DOWN LEFT, SOBBING, HER FACE IN HER HANDS HAL DOESN'T MOVE. STEVE RUNS TO HIM.) You coming or staying? Yes or no? (HAL' GRABS HIS RESERVE PARACHUTE AND EXITS WITH STEVE.)

THE NOISE OF THE AIRPLANE BECOMES EVEN LOUDER AS IT OPENS THE THROTTLE FOR THE TAKE-OFF. FAIRLY QUICKLY, IT BECOMES MORE DISTANT. THE VOLUME DIMINISHES UNTIL IT CANNOT BE HEARD.

THE LIGHTS FADE WITH THE SOUND, ALL EXCEPT A SPOT ON CHARLENE AFTER A FEW MOMENTS, SHE CROSSES TO THE TELEPHONE LIFTS THE RECEIVER AND DIALS.

CHARLENE

This is Charlene Ayer. May I speak with Mr. John Harley, please...Yes, I'll hold Fine thanks....Yes, I am. Is the offer still open....Yes, I do....In Harper's Ferry, West Virginia.' That's what...June 24...four weeks....Yes, use the address on the application form....Thank you....So do I. Yes, I'll begin as soon the packet arrives. Thanks. Bye. (SHE CROSSES TO CENTER THEN TO DOWN RIGHT, LOOKS AT THE SKY, SINGS "WHO AM I" THIS SONG TENDS TO DEFINE ONE SIDE OF CHARLENE-THE DELICATE BUT LOST SOUL. THE SONG "MERRY-GO-ROUND," WHICH SHE WILL SING IN SCENE 14 DEFINES A PART OF HER SHE HAD NEVER KNOWN BEFORE-A PART THAT IS POSITIVE, IDEAL AND HOPEFUL.)

(Song #8)

Who Am I

I

**Blue wind sky
in the nightfall;
dark birds to no one call;
I see no one now at all.
Nor hear his voice
in crazy moons,
nor feel his touch,
oh where am I.**

II

**When the suns of spring
are in season,
and evening's full of song,
I laugh and then,
I hear your voice,
and then I am in
the nightfall-**

III

**Where silence is
simply sadness;
and I don't see children smile.
You are always with me,
I live in dreams,
I just don't know
who am I.**

End of Scene Five

ACT I

Scene Six

LATE AFTERNOON ON THE GROUNDS OF A SOMEWHAT RUSTIC HOTEL IN THE HILLS OF WEST VIRGINIA ABOUT FIVE WEEKS LATER. NINETEEN VOLUNTEERS, INCLUDING CHARLENE, HAVE JUST COMPLETED FIVE DAYS OF ORIENTATION, AND MOST OF THEM HAVE JUST LEFT THE HOTEL ON THEIR WAY TO VIETNAM. TWO MEMBERS OF THE GROUP, CHARLENE AND BEN HOGGINS, HAVE NOT BEEN TOLD WHY THEY DID NOT LEAVE WITH THE OTHERS. LATER, THEY WILL FIND OUT LATER THAT THEY HAVE BEEN SELECTED FOR THE VERY SENSITIVE POST OF HUE, LOCATED ABOUT MIDWAY BETWEEN SAIGON AND HANOI. BEN IS 25 YEARS OLD, A SLIGHTLY GOOFY BUT INTELLIGENT AND GOOD-HEARTED YOUNG MAN. HE IS PEELING AN ORANGE WITH GREAT CARE. BESIDE HIM IS HIS GUITAR CASE. FIFTY-FIVE-YEAR-OLD "DUMMY" SKINS IS A RATHER CANTANKEROUS VOLUNTEER WHO HAS JUST ARRIVED, IS ON HIS WAY TO THE HOTEL, AND IS UNKNOWN TO BEN. DUMMY HAS A WRY SENSE OF HUMOR AND RARELY SMILES.

DUMMY

(HUFFING AND PUFFING, DUMMY STOPS TO FAN HIMSELF, SEES BEN)
Cardiac alley.

BEN

Hilltop House Resort. Once you've made it up, you're not inclined to leave soon. Marketing device. Beautiful view, though.

DUMMY

The convergence of the Shenandoah and Delaware Rivers.

BEN

You with Hotel Promotions or something?

DUMMY

Joe Skins is the name. (OFFERS HIS HAND WHICH BEN AUTOMATICALLY SHAKES) My friends call me "Dummy."

BEN

Is that spelled with a "Y" or "-IE"?

DUMMY

I ain't never seen my bombing papers, so I don't rightly know.

BEN

At least it's not Liebowitz Zawatowsky or something like that.

DUMMY

You gonna smoke that joint all by yourself?

BEN

(BEN HANDS DUMMY A SLICE OF ORANGE) Don't poke too hard or you'll choke, young feller.

DUMMY

Mighty good. Where'd you get it?

BEN

My buddy. It was in a bag with bananas and Hershey's Kisses. They handed out the bags before he left. But he hates fruit, vegetables, steak, bottled water—everything. He's lived on hamburgers and coke since he was 15.

DUMMY

He gone to Vietnam?

BEN

Yep.

DUMMY

You going?

BEN

Don't know. I think I might have been washed out.

DUMMY

I been there.

BEN

Vietnam?

DUMMY

Before the GI's started showing up. Spent about 10 years in Dalat. You know Dalat?

BEN

I can't say that I do.

DUMMY

Up in the highlands. Beautiful town. I was working for a French car dealer. He wanted a Caucasian mechanic. Damn fool. Vietnamese can fix anything that moves. Very clever that way. Spit and thumb tacks, but they keep 'em runnin'.

BEN

You aren't...Naaah...You're not...(BEN STOPS. DUMMY JUST STARES DIRECTLY AT BEN, NOT SAYING ANYTHING.) You're too old to be a volunteer.

DUMMY

I'm too old to be anything else.

BEN

Why weren't you at the orientation? Did they "excuse" you or something?

DUMMY

No. They're too American to do that. I said I was coming, but at the last minute disguised my voice over the phone. I said I was Dummy's brother and that he had a bad case of the flu. I said Dummy would be glad to go to the Volunteers office in Washington and let them fill him in on all the details. They waited for a few minutes and said to show up here today. Rule One: put the heavy medicine ball in their court when you want to get out of something.

BEN

And what's Rule Two?

DUMMY

Act a little dumber than you think you really are. In my case, that's pretty dumb.

BEN

The name's Ben Hoggins. (THEY SHAKE HANDS AGAIN.) Are you going back to Dalat?

DUMMY

Gonna try like hell. There's a woman there, named Jeanne. Name's French, but she's Vietnamese. Hothead and stubborn. Drove me crazy. I thought I was finished with her, but when I got back here, I realized different.

BEN

Romance, huh?

DUMMY

Naah. I'm too old for that. Homesick. We'll fight like hell if ever I get back. I know it. But I still gotta get back. Human beings are mostly crazy....(MOTIONING TO GUITAR CASE) What you got in there?

BEN

Bananas. (BEN OPENS CASE, TAKES OUT A BANANA THAT IS TUCKED NEXT TO THE GUITAR, AND OFFERS IT TO DUMMY. DUMMY ACCEPTS BANANA, BEGINS PEELING IT. BEN BEGINS STRUMMING.

DUMMY

Play me a banana. One about Vietnam.

BEN

I only know one about Vietnam. (BEN SINGS "A TIME OF LOVE".)

(Song #9)

A Time of Love

I

A beautiful
bright silver plane,
a-lost in skies
all blue and white
with clouds.
So soft and calm
girls walk at dawn
until they hear
the silver plane.

II

White dresses,
long black midnight hair;
all neatly done
so gracefully.

Blue mist around
the morning sun,
a time of love,
a place to die.

DUMMY

You ever been there? (BEN SHAKES HIS HEAD, INDICATING A NEGATIVE ANSWER.) Jeanne plays piano....Where the hell is everybody? WE HEAR OFFSTAGE RIGHT THE DISTANT SOUND OF A TRUNK BEING SHUT, TWO CAR DOORS CLOSING, AND THE CAR LEAVING.

BEN

They all went on the train. I guess someone'll be back sometime. To give us the official news. "Thanks, but no thanks." I just hope they fly me back to San Francisco...I'll miss the food here though. Far better than I had ever hoped heaven would be. Especially the breakfasts. The biscuits make you weep.

HUONG ENTERS FROM DOWN RIGHT, WHICH IS THE OFFSTAGE PARKING AREA. HE IS DRESSED IN MODERATELY FASHIONABLE DARK PANTS AND A NEW WHITE SHIRT WITH NO TIE OR JACKET. HE IS CARRYING A SMALL SUITCASE AND A MUCH-USED BRIEFCASE. HE SEEMS A LITTLE LOST.

HUONG

Excuse me. Can you tell me where the main entrance is?

BEN

Right around that bend.(POINTS TO DOWN LEFT) You can't miss it.

HUONG

Thanks...(BEGINS TO CROSS TO DOWN LEFT, STOPS, TURNS TO BEN AND DUMMY)

BEN

Come and take a load off. The view is wonderful.

HUONG

(CROSSES BACK TO BEN AND DUMMY) Are you staying at the Hotel?

BEN

Yep. Can I help you?

HUONG

I'm looking for a group. They might have left or are about to. Is there another parking area. I would like to catch them before they go.

BEN

Volunteers?

HUONG

Yes. About twenty of them.

BEN

Gone. About two hours ago.

HUONG

I see.

DUMMY

There might be a couple of 'em wandering around. Lost or something. You want I should send them your way if I see 'em?

HUONG

Well....Just tell them...(CHANGES HIS MIND)...It's very kind of you, but I think not.

DUMMY

Maybe you'd like to tell them yourself.

BEN

I'm Ben Hoggins. And this is Dummy. At this point, I'm not sure if we're part of the group or not.

HUONG

Nguyen van Huong. I'm Counterpart Section Leader of International Volunteers in Vietnam....I-CORPS...(PRONOUCED "EYE CORE")...You don't know if you're a volunteer or not?

BEN

We sat through a week of flow charts, maps, and Washington drones. Then they told us that we weren't going with that group. I'll admit that I dozed off a couple of times. Maybe more than a couple. Maybe they'll recycle us in the next group. I really don't know.

HUONG

Did you meet a young woman named Renee Dupuis--the American Section Leader in I-CORPS?

BEN

Sure. Everyone knows Renee. An efficient woman, that Renee. Not much gets by her.. No sir. She was kind enough to come over and shout in my ear once when I was snoozing. Scared the hell out of me...Not really shouting...firm address is more accurate.

HUONG

Did she take the group to the airport?

BEN

Yep. Well, at least to the train station. I think she's coming back later...sometimes...someday...(HALF SINGING)..."Somewhere, over the rainbow." If she's supposed to come back, by golly, she'll be back.

CHARLENE

(ENTERS FROM DOWN LEFT. SHE IS CARRYING A BOUQUET OF WILD FLOWERS. ALTHOUGH SHE SMILES AND SPEAKS PLEASANTLY, THERE IS SOMETHING SAD ABOUT HER UNDERLYING MOOD.) Hi, Ben. This is really a beautiful area. The mountain trails are so...out of a postcard.

BEN

(REACHING INTO HIS GUITAR CASE) You want an orange?

CHARLENE

Don't mind if I do. (ACCEPTS ORANGE. LOOKS AT DUMMY AND THEN AT HUONG A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF ELECTRICITY FLOWS INSTANTLY

BETWEEN HUONG AND CHARLENE. BOTH ARE AWARE OF IT AND ARE SLIGHTLY EMBARRASSED BY IT SHE BLUSHES, LOOKS AT DUMMY.) Hi. Are you with the organization?

DUMMY

The CIA? No, they fired me. I wasn't dumb enough. (OFFERS HIS HAND) Joe Skins is the name. My friends call me "Dummy".

BEN

With a "Y".

CHARLENE

Charlene. (TAKES HIS HAND BRIEFLY.)

BEN

Were you just blushing, Darlin'?

CHARLENE

I was hiking. It gets to you after a while.

HUONG

I'm Nguyen van Huong....with International Volunteers.

CHARLENE

(SHAKES HIS HAND VERY LIGHTLY AND BRIEFLY) Charlene Ayer. Glad to meet you.

HUONG

My pleasure.(AWKWARD SILENCE) Excuse me for a few minutes. I've got to make a telephone call. (EXITS DOWN LEFT WITH BAGS)

BEN

You frightened off our strange bird, Charlene.

CHARLENE

Weird. Who is he? A volunteer?

BEN

He's a company commander or section chief or Counterpart something...You have a nice hike?

CHARLENE

I did in fact I think I know why they have orientation here instead of in-country. It's a place to sort of distance you from... everything. To make leaving easier.

BEN

It's wonderful if you go on to the Big V. If you gotta go back to San Francisco and sponge off your ex-girlfriend, it's a mite tricky. If they're gonna do it, I hope they wait till after breakfast in the morning. Slice a biscuit and put a glob of butter and a big wedge of that Virginia ham in it and bite slow and hard.

DUMMY

Son, you're a born volunteer.

TWO CAR DOORS CLOSE IN THE PARKING LOT. RENEE'S VOICE IS HEARD IN THE DISTANCE.

RENEE (OFFSTAGE)

Thanks a lot, Dixie. Maybe I'll see you at dinner.

BEN

Did I hear someone in the distance mention dinner?

CHARLENE

It sounded like Renee. Maybe she'll tell us.

BEN

She already did. (MIMICKING RENEE) "Ben, I can't explain now, but you won't be coming with us to the train. Just put your bags in that closet and take a long hike. Please leave by the back door. Now!" I'll bet they're all spooks on a holiday.

CHARLENE

Give her a chance, Ben. She's really not a bad person.

DUMMY

You got another one of those bananas?

BEN

Nope.

RENEE

(ENTERING FROM DOWN RIGHT, CARRYING A PURSE AND A LEATHER POUCH) Hi Quite a trek. (LOOKING AT DUMMY) Mr. Skins? I think I recognize you from your photograph. (EXTENDS HER HAND) Renee Bames. Glad you made it.

DUMMY

(SHAKES HER HAND) My friends call me "Dummy".

RENEE

I understand you were quite ill.

DUMMY

The fever broke yesterday.

RENEE

(STRAIGHT-FACED) It must have been one of those new antibiotics.

DUMMY

(CURIOSLY, STUDYING HER) Do you play poker, Miss?

RENEE

You're here. That's the important thing. I see that you've already met Charlene and Ben.

BEN

We've looked forward to one of Dixie's dinners together. You don't get much closer than that.

RENEE

Have any of you seen a Vietnamese man, late twenties?

CHARLENE

Something van Hung.

RENEE

That's him. "Nguyen van Huong." He's in the hotel now? (CHARLENE NODS.) Good. Ben, Dummy. Why don't you go find him and give him this. (HANDS POUCH TO BEN) And don't lose it.

BEN

(DEFTLY MANAGES TO KISS THE BACK OF HER HAND) A pleasure, Renee.

RENEE

Watch it, Buster.

BEN

(PUTTING HIS FINGER TO HIS LIPS) Golden.... Keep an eye on the guitar.(EXITS DOWN LEFT WITH DUMMY)

RENEE

I hope you weren't offended... about keeping you here?

CHARLENE

Curious...but not offended.

RENEE

There were ten people who wanted to go to Hue...Two of them almost desperate.

CHARLENE

That's your post.

RENEE

Yes. It's a beautiful old city.

CHARLENE

Tell me about it.

RENEE

Let's see. The winters are damp and chilly. It drizzles for days, weeks on end. And the summer gets very hot and humid sometimes. But with all that, Hue is very special...In spring and fall, and even summer, the place is alive and...almost spiritual. Lots of monks, Buddhist monks. You hear them chanting as you pass their temples in the old city. The very wide Perfume River more or less separates the newer part from the older part. That's where the Citadel is. It's very large...it's an old walled city, actually... a couple of miles on each side, massive walls, huge bells and quiet walks joining the main buildings where the king's family and administration had their offices... and where they lived.

The Viet Cong occasionally drop a few mortars on the South Vietnamese Regional Headquarters, but there's no real fighting in Hue. Both sides have agreed. The city is Vietnam...before...or outside the war. It's something from the past with memories of grandeur and pomp and ceremony floating around. I don't know if it was ever like that really, but it represents some sort of an...ideal of order. The way it should have been if it wasn't....for both sides. Royalty and privilege are condemned by the Communists. But it's not just that. It's the...soul of the country. No one wants to destroy that. God knows there are opportunities for planting bombs and things. But that would upset the ancestors. The Throne Room in the Citadel is locked, but you can walk up and touch the lock. There aren't any guards. A couple of attendants keep the pathways clean. But people don't go there much. It's a wonderful place to do some heavy thinking.

CHARLENE

It sounds like that special part...of everyone. The part no one can find.

RENEE

(AFTER A LONG PAUSE) David Jefferson was there...as a volunteer. He designed fertilizer converters... something for farmers. Had an engineering degree from Harvard...was very well liked. Always taking notes on everything. His tour ended a month ago. He wanted to renew for a third year, but his parents talked him out of it. They said one more year and he'd be lost forever....They were right, of course.

And there was a fellow named Charley Goodbridge. He was as an English teacher at the University. But his classes got more and more political. Anti-war. Questioned everything about the States. We asked him to ease up, but he wouldn't. Huong begged him to just not bring up racism and imperialism too often. We asked him not to come back for his second year. He had some very good friends, Vietnamese mostly, and they took it hard. Personal relations are very deep among the Vietnamese. We very, very much want to avoid that sort of thing in the future. The U.S. Agency for International Development subcontracts International Volunteers, with the understanding that we are a non-political group. By and large, they keep their hands off. And they didn't have any part in Charley's being sent home. It was a decision Huong and I and the Washington office had to make. Huong and Charley were very good friends.

CHARLENE

This conversation...seems to be getting confidential.

RENEE

Absolutely confidential. There are several other rumors floating around. But I wanted you to know it...from the horse's mouth.

CHARLENE

But why? Have Ben and I been washed out? Is it related to that?

RENEE

You aren't very swift, are you?

CHARLENE

Do you mean that Ben and I....

RENEE

You'll be teaching English at an elementary girl's school. A very good school. Probably the best in Vietnam. Ben will be teaching English and European history at a high school. Not particularly good, not too bad. And Dummy will work at the technical school. He spent a lot of time in country. We weren't that concerned about his getting out to orientation. I teach part time at the University and work with Huong s...joint section leader of I-CORPS. The country is divided into four sections or CORPS. I forgot what I-CORPS means. It's a military term..... How does that sound to you?

CHARLENE

I remember when they talked about Hue last week. I had not even dreamed, not even hoped. It seemed like a place for people who are far more...in touch with something or other.

RENEE

John and I were very careful in choosing people for Hue, both in the general applications and during the past week...It's...a politically sensitive place. We haven't to Id the guys who really wanted it. I was afraid that they would pack up and go home. Literally . It might seem callous and thick-headed, but I couldn't think of any other way. All of the assignments...anywhere in the country-are wonderful. We all fall in love with them and wouldn't change for anything. Or we simply go home. No questions asked. It happens from time to time.

CHARLENE

Sam and Christy.

RENEE

(NODS) They'll be disappointed. I thought you might like to know.

CHARLENE

I'll be careful—Thank you, Renee. Thank you so very much. Am I to go and tell Ben?

RENEE

Huong's doing that....There's one more thing. It's a policy that we stay out of personal matters....I just want to say again that this is a very sensitive location. It takes a very special person—somebody who can take it all seriously, and commit himself or herself for two years. I'm not inquiring, but...I would guess that you've recently left a relationship.

(PAUSE)

CHARLENE

I didn't think it showed.

RENEE

Is it over?

CHARLENE

His name is Hal. I don't know if it'll ever be over. A dashing guy—overwhelming. He went to Japan to research a novel. He wanted me to go with him. But I couldn't. It wouldn't have been fair to myself. (PAUSES) We broke up about five weeks ago.

RENEE

Have you heard from him?

CHARLENE

No, not directly. Friends have said he's having a little difficulty in adjusting. But he's tough.

RENEE

And if he writes in two months and begs you to go meet him?

CHARLENE

When I make up my mind, it's made up. I guess I got that from Daddy. He was a Marine in the Second World War and Korea. He's the most stubborn man I've ever met....I... hope....all this about breaking up doesn't disqualify me.

RENEE

If it weren't for broken hearts and lost souls, we'd have to close up shop. It's what you do with that that counts....Listen, what you have just told me is confidential. Totally and completely. But if ever you need someone to talk to, I'm around. Now I've got to find Huong. You'll learn a lot about Hue from him in the next few days. He knows a lot and is a very responsible person. First rate. He will also cram a lot Vietnamese down your throat in the next few days. He's good at that too... Plans are for you to leave for Saigon in five days. You'll be there for three days and then join the others for three more weeks of language training in Nha Trang. It's quaint and it's on a gorgeous beach. You'll get to Hue in early August.

CHARLENE

Will I see much of you before then?

RENEE

I'll be around for a couple of days—Resting, enjoying the mountains. Then I'll head back. There's a chance I'll see you in Saigon. If not, Hue—And then there's dinner tonight. I thought we would...celebrate...with champagne. Dixie has an old bottle he wants to give us. He retiring after his eightieth birthday next month...he's getting rid of a lot of

things...and I think he has a crush on me. (RENEE CURTSIES.) Dinner's at seven.
You're on your own until then.

CHARLENE

Perfect. (RENEE EXITS. CHARLENE DRINKS IN THE EARLY EVENING BREEZE.
SHE SINGS "AFTER THE NIGHT GETS BLUE.")

(Song #10)

After the Night Gets Blue

**After the night gets blue,
when moon and stars are new,
I wander through the hills
and think of days gone by;
I wonder where you are,
I wonder who am I.**

**The night is just made for loving;
young girls go walking with their man.
I long to join them in the moonlight,
I want to ramble, holding hands.**

SHE STOPS SINGING AND SITS IN A REFLECTIVE BUT UPBEAT MOOD. SHE SAYS, "You keep coming back" AND THEN LETS HER HEAD FALL INTO HER HANDS. AFTER A FEW SECONDS, SHE LIFTS HER HEAD, SMILES AND EXITS. THE SONG "AFTER THE NIGHT GETS BLUE" IS HEARD IN THE BACKGROUND AS THE SCENE ENDS.

End of Scene Six

ACT I
Scene Seven

DINNER IS JUST ENDED AND HUONG, RENEE, DUMMY, AND CHARLENE ARE GATHERED ON THE VERADAH OF THE OLD HOTEL. DOWN LEFT, THERE IS A SMALL TABLE. WICKER CHAIRS ARE SCATTERED AROUND. BEN ENTERES HOLDING AN UOPENED BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE.

BEN

Dixie came through. But then I am the one who found it. It was from his wedding thirty-five years ago. You believe that? (STUDYING THE LABEL) Sir Hennings. Never heard of it. (HODLING UP A CORCKSCREW.) Who knows about getting a crumbling cork out. Dummy?

DUMMY

Not me. I'm on the wagon. Twenty years, but the devil waits a long time.

HUONG

Here. Let me try. (TAKES BOTTLE AND CORKSCREW FROM BEN, AND STUDIES THE CORK.)

BEN

Hell, just break the top of the cork and push the rest into the bottle.

HUONG

(CAREFULLY EMPLOYING THE CORKSCREW, REFERRING TO DUMMY) One always knows when one is dealing with a connoisseur. Carefully...(HUONG PULLS THE CORK OUT.) Voila! (ALL APPLAUD. HUONG FILLS THE EXTENDED GLASSES. AT THE LAST MINUTE, DUMMY PICKS UP A GLASS AND EXTENDS IT.)

HUONG

Are you sure?

DUMMY

Yeah. But don't give me another one.

RENEE

You do the honors, Huong. You're good at that sort of thing.

HUONG

I propose a toast to the new volunteers who are joining us in the old capital of Annam.

BEN

Hear, hear.

HUONG

(DELIVERING THE ORATION REQUIRED OF PERSONS TOASTING) Hue is more than a city: it is-a state of mind and a fascination of the soul. It can take you from where you are and show you another road. May each of you--Ben, Dummy...and Charlene--slowly come to understand and appreciate it as much as I do--and Renee does. It's the very special place where you will spend the next two years. We Vietnamese will be grateful for your contribution which will undoubtedly return to you many times over. (RAISES HIS GLASS A LITTLE, OTHERES DO THE SAME, AND ALL DRINK.)

BEN

Well said, old man. ALL ARE SILENT-THE PASSAGE OF ANGELS) Tomorrow's our

first day-of what? Language training? (HUONG NODS.) There's no need to overdo it. Why don't we begin about eleven-fifteen or eleven-thirty?

HUONG

I think nine will be fine.

BEN

Make it ten. Renee told us that Vietnamese were excellent negotiators.

HUONG

We are. I had wanted to start at eight. It was Renee who won that negotiation (BEN STARTS TO PROTEST AGAIN, HUONG CUTS HIM OFF GOOD NATUREDLY) 9 a.m. The table is closed.

BEN

(IRONICALLY) That's what I said. Nine. That'll give us plenty of time to clean up and have breakfast if we get up at, say, 5:30—which is what I always used to do back home.

RENEE

Dummy, are you doing all right with that champagne?

DUMMY

Yeah. Renee. I want to say thanks. If-things work out for me in Hue, can I put in for a transfer to Dalat? After, say, the school year is over-or maybe even at Christmas. Or sooner? It's not that I don't appreciate everything...

RENEE

No. Forget about Jeanne for now. Settle down. Let some relationships develop. You might be able to visit her at Christmas for a couple of days—and she can visit you later—At Tet. She could stay with us. That's as far as we'll go. We told you before...If that's not good enough, we'll pay for a ticket back home right now.

DUMMY

Makes my ears ring a little, but I gotcha loud and clear.

BEN

Boy. This stuff goes right to your head.

HUONG

You don't drink much.

BEN

Not really. (POURS HIMSELF ANOTHER GLASS)

RENEE

Ben, Dummy. Before you get soused, there's some paperwork we've got to complete. I want Huong to have your full attention in the morning.

BEN

You want to do it now?

RENEE

Frankly, I want to be free tomorrow. So, yes. Huong, Charlene: I'll see you in the morning.

CHARLENE

(HAVING WANDERED UP RIGHT, CROSSES TO DOWN LEFT) Yes. Goodnight. And thanks for everything. (RENEE, BEN, AND DUMMY EXIT DOWN LEFT TO HOTEL. HUONG AND CHARLENE ARE AWKWARD IN EACH OTHER'S PRESENCE.)

HUONG

Confused?

CHARLENE

About what?

HUONG

I don't know. Going to Vietnam. Being told to stay behind the others. Not being told why.

CHARLENE

It is-exhausting. But Renee did the right thing. The others would have been upset.

HUONG

And you? Would you have been upset if you had been assigned somewhere else?

CHARLENE

Not at all. I didn't expect it. But I do appreciate it...I'm--I don't know. Tired right now. Not tired...But very clear. I'm not sure why. Very peaceful-tranquil is the word. Like I just stepped out of a lot of vines and tangled trees—That was a moving toast.

HUONG

Thanks. Sometimes my English comes out all-like your vines-twisted and tangled.

CHARLENE

You love that city. Were you born there?

HUONG

No. I was born in a very small village. The countryside actually. My parents died when I was about ten years old. They were very poor.

CHARLENE

Did someone take you in?

HUONG

Not for about two years. I stole things, sold them on the black market. Always getting in trouble. Finally, I was sent to take care of an old French priest in Nha Trang by a Catholic policeman. It was that or go to jail. Eventually, the priest died. But not before straightening me out—Why am I telling you all this? You're tired.

CHARLENE

So he taught you French. And what else?

HUONG

Everything. I was his final project. He couldn't get around_ Everyone was always expecting him to die. But he held on for almost six years. He was a Jesuit and an excellent scholar...a dedicated historian. Sometimes I think that he wanted me to complete his work.

CHARLENE

In Vietnamese history?

HUONG

Yes Mainly Hue Before there was a Vietnam, Hue was the seat of culture, the court life, the government, the military...in Annam, what is now Central Vietnam. Even today, Hue is regarded as a special place by Vietnamese. And it is....He—the old pries--- thought in...(SEARCHING FOR THE RIGHT EXPRESSION) He conceived history as a vast, living...epic. Individual destinies and personal ambitions realized and not realized in a larger context of...of almost mythological ideologies and nationalities. He said that to see the grand pattern is the historian's task. And to tell those willing to listen...and for those not willing, to shout. Personal involvement...is inevitable. But there must be

someone to keep watch on the vast, deep patterns that keep evolving no matter what anyone does or says or believes. That is the historian's...role.

CHARLENE

Is that your role?

HUONG

I think he was right about the role itself-in general. I'm not sure of where I fit in. I'm a student at the University of Hue. I have been for a long time.

CHARLENE

Working on... a doctorate?

HUONG

Yes. The equivalent.

CHARLENE

When do you hope to get it?

HUONG

When the long paper is done.

CHARLENE

What's it about? Or would I understand?

HUONG

The Citadel was constructed between 1802 and 1835. It was-is a large fort and palace with a great many small and large buildings connected by streets and-sidewalks. In the center is the Inner Royal Court. It's virtually abandoned now. There's so much history inside. But it's slowly falling into ruins. Someone must take photographs of the old structures and label them and say how they were used. It's an enormous job. But someone has to do it.

CHARLENE

Why? Why not just let it fade away?

HUONG

It's not for the sake of the stones piled up to make the walls. But for the sake of what it, the Citadel—embodies, which is nothing less than the soul of Vietnam.

CHARLENE

You need to talk about it—I'm a good listener.

HUONG

Why do we try to teach children about a god we cannot begin to understand? Why do we tell and retell the stories of dragons and magical animals and spirits? Why do we set up altars for our grandparents? It's because all of that is what we've worked so long to create. It is what we human beings are. The past is the present, and the present is the future and the future is the past. When I finish that project, those pictures, that book my thesis—maybe long after the war, someone will find them and see in the pictures and words, something from a new perspective that I can't begin to see because I'm too close. Those pictures—the words—they are not enough but it's all I can do. I don't know how to capture the ghosts and their songs. I don't know if anyone does. But I have to do the best I can. I have to shout. I have to use the press, the radio, television. Talk to reporters, to writers ...No one will listen—I know they won't. But maybe the kids will one day talk about the crazy man who would go around shouting. And maybe one of them will ask "What was he shouting about?" And maybe that kid will find my book. And then my

ghost will then be released from Hue.

HUONG HAS BECOME MORE AND MORE PASSIONATE. WHEN HE STOPS_ CHARLENE INSTINCTIVELY PUTS HER HAND SOFTLY ON HIS. AFTER A FEW SECONDS HE LOOKS AT HER IN THE EYES, STARTLED. CONFUSED AND UNDER PRESSURE, HE BACKS OFF AND STANDS.

CHARLENE

(BLUSHING BUT TRYING TO BE LOGICAL) That's a calling, Huong...(AWKWARD PAUSE) Do you take snapshots or...

HUONG

Yes, small ones. And when I can, I make the good ones large. I enlarge them. The priest left his camera equipment to me. It's very old, but it works. I put together chemicals from the pharmacist at the University. I get used X-Ray film from the hospital, take off the images with acid, and coat the plastic with silver oxide. It's a lot of processes, but it's cheap and it works. Besides, I enjoy it.

CHARLENE

Maybe I could help...

HUONG

Maybe...(JOKING) Do you know how to develop film?

CHARLENE

I have worked in the darkroom. I took two courses in photography. I was an art major. I paint...and draw. I minored in graphic design.

HUONG

What is "graphic design"?

CHARLENE

Anything printed-typeface, ink, photos, drawings. Those kind of things.

HUONG

(VERY MUCH INTERESTED BUT ALLOWING CHARLENE A WAY OUT) You will be very busy with your students.

CHARLENE

I want to help...but if it's your thing...or if I would get in the way...I understand.

HUONG

Certainly it's not that...I had never mentioned...that part of my background to anyone in this organization. That...and my studies....are another part of my life. (HALTS) Please don't say anything to Renee or....

CHARLENE

Of course not—..Why do you work for the organization? (THE QUESTION OBVIOUSLY IS UNEXPECTED BY HUONG AND BY CHARLENE AS WELL. SHE IS EMBARRASSED.) Excuse me. That's none of my business.

HUONG

I have no other means of support. (HUONG HAS STIFFENED.)

CHARLENE

(TOUCHING HUONG'S ARM BRIEFLY) Huong--I'm sorry.

HUONG

You didn't do anything.

CHARLENE

There's just so much a person can do alone. You need a buddy.

HUONG

How do you know I don't have lots of....buddies.

CHARLENE

You're a loner. It shows. You're trying to carry too much.

HUONG

That's what the priest said.

CHARLENE

I can help. Let me get my feet on the ground. Then ask. Will you do that? (HUONG IS SILENT.) I can help a lot and I want to. Tell me yes so I can go off and get some sleep.

HUONG

(STUDIES CHARLENE, THEN TURNS AWAY) Yes—Goodnight. (BEGINS TO EXIT TO HOTEL. CHARLENE CALLS HIM RIGHT BEFORE HE GOES OFFSTAGE.)

CHARLENE

Huong—(HE PAUSES.)...Goodnight. (HE EXITS.)

CHARLENE IS SOMEWHAT STUNNED BY THE ENCOUNTER. SLOWLY SHE - COMES BACK TO HERSELF, SMILES, PUTS HER HANDS BEHIND HER BACK AND STEPS DOWNSTAGE.

CHARLENE

(HALF THINKING, HALF TALKING) For a moment, it was like listening to Hal...If Hal had ever listened. (SHE TURNS TO HER EVENING AND SINGS "THAT OLD MAGIC LAND," SHE EXITS AFTER THE SONG.

(Song #11)

That Old Magic Land

**My dreams and hopes
seem to have come true;
I'm going to that old
magic land,
where kings once walked
at night
and marveled at the sight
of slender women laughing
in the pools
while washing
midnight hair.**

**I wonder
am I forgetting him,
his crazy heart**

**and all of his dreams.
I only know
there's something gone;
when I'm happy, when I'm sad,
I seem to feel him near.**

END OF ACT I

ACT II
Scene Eight

(Scenes are numbered consecutively throughout the play.)

In Act I, there was no underlying, thematic scenery representing one or another grand aspect of physical America. In Act II, the set is rather full depicting subtropical vegetation, expanses of the river, the heavy stone construction of the type found in the slowly crumbling Citadel, the residential architecture often influenced by the French, the murmur of Buddhist monks chanting, and their bells being sounded. This additional fullness and dimensionality tend to unconsciously ground Charlene's identity which she seems to have encountered for the first time.

Against that basically thematic set, individual locations are established minimally. These include the exterior of the women volunteers residence (Scene 8); Huong's rustic dwelling that he made out of a collapsed guard hut in the Citadel (Scenes 9,10,13); an area near the Perfume River (Scene 11); the interior of the women volunteers' residence (Scene 12); and the street near a representative part of a hand-made, fairly rough carousel (Scene 14). This carousel or a part of it-say, the crudely carved, brightly colored head of a horse set with tiny mirrors -can be treated as a focal image for the entire play. It refers to a deliberate attempt to carve an ideal fantasy out of the often sordid and hateful landscape of reality.

Charlene was not particularly accomplished in any given area and had little or no direction in the heavy business of life. Her positive qualities were sincere kindness, unthinking respect for all persons, a native straight-forwardness that often rose to elegance and royal-like comportment, and slight naiveté. Often, the result of such a personality configuration is neglect and loneliness in one's native country. One of the few situations in which the positive side of the configuration surfaces is that of a beloved expatriate-a permanent guest of honor. Probably, this role does not exist within a society for any of its members. It most definitely is real, but it is reserved for visitors who can never become insiders. Because of the complex, well developed personal interactivity one finds in Vietnam, this role can there be richly elaborated and deeply appreciated.

It was Charlene's good fortune to encounter exactly such receptivity in Hue and her work with schoolchildren, who adored her. Of course, she fell in love with the city, with her situation, and with the side of herself that was-for the first time in her life-coming into full blossom. For her, it was Shangri La-graceful, antique, quiet, refined, charming. It was surprisingly peaceful, despite the fact that the trappings of war were much in evidence-barbed wire, sandbagged guard posts, uniformed soldiers and the sound of carbines at night. Like puddles of rainwater, however, these are easily avoided. Charlene consciously sensed that she was at the center of something wonderful, the one place on earth that the 'world was focusing on very intensely and where she was doubtlessly meant to be. Unconsciously, she probably knew that this was the tranquil eye of the hurricane.

As the second act begins, it is early October. Lights come halfway up and we hear

an offstage Charlene leading young schoolgirls in the singing of "Say My Name," which we heard in the first act. She then wishes them a good weekend and cautions them to remain silent until they get outside.

CHARLENE (OFFSTAGE LEFT)

You have worked very well this week. Your writing is improving. On Monday, you will give me your new essays and the completed exercises in the book. When the bell rings, you are to quietly walk outside. No shouting and screaming. Last week was terrible. Try to... She is interrupted by the clanging of a hand-held schoolbell. This is followed by laughter and shouts of "Goodbye, Miss Charlene." Outside, the children release scattered shouts and screams that quickly die away. Stage lights come up higher on the volunteer house downstage left that is represented by a table, chairs, small verandah, and perhaps part of a facade. Renee is speaking with Ben.

RENEE

Ben, you're charming and sweet. And so is Dummy. That doesn't mean that you two can take a vacation two months after you get here. All of your classes haven't even met yet.

BEN

(BEN SLOWLY INCREASES THE PACE OF HIS SPEAKING, PARTLY OUT OF EXCITEMENT AT BEING NEAR RENEE, PARTLY BECAUSE HE VERGES ON BEING A COMPULSIVE SPEAKER.)...Okay, forget about me. But he's driving me crazy. I've never seen such a horn...(HALTS)... "romantic" old bastard. And he's always puttering with things around our house. It'll be November before his school gets going and he gets out from underfoot....I don't know how the Vietnamese know when to stop—they're so late getting started.

RENEE

They know.

BEN

I asked Dean Thuoc for a schedule. He said they didn't print such things. I told him that in the States, they made schedules four years in advance. He was nice...but he didn't believe me...He smiled but he thought I was loco.....

RENEE

(INTERRUPTING) Ben, you know, sometimes you talk too much. It confuses the Vietnamese. It confuses me.

BEN

That's not much, but it's better than no response at all....I suppose.

RENEE

(IRRITATED) I suggest that we stop this conversation right now. There're a lot of people who would give their eye teeth to be here.

BEN

...she said, hiding her just-erupted fangs with the collar other cape.

RENEE

(AWKWARDLY) Okay, you're right. Threats are not the way to handle these kinds of situations.

BEN

Hey. It's me who'll do the apologizing. I need to be told to shut up now and then.

RENEE

Maybe I've been here too long. (SHE TURNS AWAY AND IS SILENT.)

BEN

(BEN GOES TO HER, PUTS HIS HAND ON HER SHOULDER, SPEAKS SINCERELY. WE HAVEN'T HEARD THIS TONE FROM IRONIC BEN BEFORE.) Promise number one...I'll try to cool it. I really will. Promise number two—You know how I feel about you, but I won't push. If the urge is irresistible, I'll ask for a transfer to the grungiest hole in the Mekong Delta. And from now on, if Dummy wants to do something, he does it himself. Scout's Honor.

RENEE

Thanks. It's hard to be hard. (SHE TOUCHES HIS HAND FOR A SECOND. THEN SHE PUTS HER HAND LIGHTLY OVER HIS MOUTH) Just...shut...up....(KEEPS HER HAND TO HIS MOUTH)...Okay? (CONFUSED AT RENEE'S TOUCH, BEN NODS HIS HEAD. SHE REMOVES HER HAND.)

BEN

Mercy. You wouldn't consider doing that again, would you?

RENEE WAVES TO CHARLENE AS THE LATTER ENTERS FROM UP LEFT RIDING HER BICYCLE AND PARKING IT STAGE RIGHT. AS BENNETT'S ATTENTION FOLLOWS THE MOVEMENT OF CHARLENE, RENEE PICKS UP THE CANVAS BAG SHE USES TO TRANSPORT VARIOUS ITEMS, TAKES HER BICYCLE, AND SLIPS AWAY INTO AN OBSCURE PATH.

BEN

Charlene has really made a place for herself here...(LOOKS AROUND, FINDS RENEE GONE, CALLS OUT) Renee! Renee! What the devil? (WALKING TOWARD CHARLENE) Hey. I heard your kids singing when I walked by the school this morning. They're pretty good.

CHARLENE

You ought to come help them sometimes.

BEN

You mean with my guitar.

CHARLENE

Yeah. How about next Friday.

BEN

I teach one class in the morning...off at noon. Could we make it about two?

CHARLENE

You sure don't work very much, do you?

BEN

I have been "engaged" to teach two classes at the University when, if ever, it opens. That will bring my total to 19 hours a week. A highly respectable figure, at least in my books.The latest rumor is October 12.

CHARLENE

Have you met any students yet?

BEN

Renee introduced me to a few the other day in a...subterranean coffee shop. It was one in the afternoon, and it seemed like midnight in there. Nice guys. Very bright. Very polite. Very close to the vest.

CHARLENE

Would that include Phuoc?

BEN

(THINKING) Ahhhh, yes. The very same. Another was....something like "Van Anh." They invited themselves to my place next week. They'll bring a couple of friends, and we'll sing songs...At least so they informed me. Renee says that's part of the way they do their socializing. Not quite....

CHARLENE

(INTERRUPTING AS SHE OPENS HER DATEBOOK) Next Friday is October 8 .Oh, I'm sorry, Ben. I'm taking my classes to the Citadel that morning. Many of them have never been to the Inner Court. Which is a shame because that was the center of cultural life in old Hue.

BEN

There's a fellow named Huong that you must meet. I'm sure he'd be delighted to sing songs with you and me. And he probably wouldn't mind all that much if I stayed home and sang by myself...(BEN'S HUMOR IS GREETED BY COLD SILENCE ON THE PART OF CHARLENE) Just this morning, I promised Renee to...

CHARLENE

(INTERRUPTING) It was Huong's idea. He's a very serious guy...loves that old inner court...loves children...loves Hue....loves Vietnam...

BEN

(SUDDENLY BLURTING OUT) Loves you....(CHARLENE DOESN'T RESPOND IMMEDIATELY. BEN KNOWS THAT HE HAS SAID MORE THAN IS PROPER. MORE SOBERLY) I understand you're giving him a hand with his dissertation project.

CHARLENE

(STERNLY) You have no right to meddle in people's personal lives. You seem to think that your weak attempt at facetiousness and wit take away your responsibility. They don't....(CHARLENE HALTS, MOVES AWAY.)

BEN

(SERIOUS AGAIN. AFTER A LONG PAUSE) Sorry. It won't happen again.

CHARLENE

(STARES HARD AT BEN, THEN AWAY, THEN CONTINUES) But you're right about the project. A few hours a week. He's trying to define the role of the Citadel in the...I don't know...the spiritual or mythical history of Vietnam. (CHARLENE STOPS SUDDENLY, APPARENTLY CONFUSED AND IRRITATED.)

BEN

(TRYING TO SAVE FACE-FOR BOTH OF THEM) It's important.... especially for him.

CHARLENE

(ATTEMPTING TO PRETEND THAT BEN DID NOT OPEN A SENSITIVE TOPIC) And that involves photographing virtually every building and shrine there.... I've asked

my parents to send a book I used in college...on architectural rendering. I'd sketch cut-away views of the buildings. That might help in charting the ceremonies and rituals that used to be conducted there. At least, that's what I hope to do.

BEN

Sounds fascinating. Really.

CHARLENE

He'll be by in a little while. We're going to a pho [fuhh] shop near the Citadel. Curried noodles is their specialty. I'll take you there one day...on me.

BEN

Do you....think we might ask Renee along?

CHARLENE

(SOMEWHAT STIFFLY) What you and Renee do is your business. (STILL UPSET, SHE SITS AND BEGINS TO READ, IGNORING BEN, WHO BEGINS TOSSING PEBBLES AFTER A WHILE, HE SPEAKS.)

BEN

I'll wait for Renee if it's okay?

CHARLENE

Right.

MOMENTS PASS. RENEE ENTERS ON HER BICYCLE FROM PATH SHE HAD TAKEN TO EXIT. HER TRANSPORT BAG IS NOW FULL.

RENEE

(TO BEN) You still here?

BEN

Maybe I'd better leave while I'm ahead....While I still have a head. Because I've ne....

RENEE

Bye, Ben. (FORCING BEN TO LEAVE.)

BEN

I thought....we might.....(GIVING UP).....Adios, all. (EXITS)

RENEE

(NOTICING THAT CHARLENE IS STIFF.) Are you okay?

CHARLENE

Yeah. Fine.

RENEE

It's that damn Ben. Is it something he said?

CHARLENE

No....Maybe. It doesn't matter.

RENEE

(SITS, TAKES CHARLENE'S HAND FOR A MOMENT.) Was it a wisecrack?

CHARLENE

(LOOKING AWAY) Yes. I told him to stop. I think he will.

RENEE

I told him he's already on thin ice. I can have him out of here in two days.

CHARLENE

No. Please. It wasn't...There was no malice.

RENEE

Was it about—your work at the Citadel?

CHARLENE

Is this place bugged or something?

RENEE

You've been here only a couple of months, and you've already spent more time in the walled city than all of us put together.

CHARLENE

The project is interesting.

RENEE

(PARTIALLY REDIRECTING THE CONVERSATION) The kids at school love you. I've never seen anything like it. And the teachers....And the principal. How do you do it?

CHARLENE

I haven't the foggiest idea. But I'm flattered.

RENEE

That should be the center of your life at this time...that school...those kids. The other things are secondary.

CHARLENE

The other things being the Citadel project.

RENEE

The other things being....((HALTS))

CHARLENE

(FINISHING RENEE'S SENTENCE)....Huong? (RENEE IS SILENT.)...He's just a friend—I've always had men friends.

RENEE

Huong is a very special kind of person. Intelligent. Committed. Takes things seriously. I don't want you two getting into something that neither of you is aware of.

CHARLENE

I don't particularly want to go into this—with Ben—or with you. He's a friend, nothing more. I'd like to drop the subject.

RENEE

(AFTER PAUSE) I just was at MAC-V. I picked up some mail...a package for you...Feels like a book...The guys there often cop something for me from the PX and put it with my mail...Today it was a couple of bars of soap...Palmolive. Would you like a bar. (OFFERS ONE TO CHARLENE.) It's almost impossible to get that local stuff to lather.

CHARLENE

(ACCEPTING SOAP.) Thanks...

RENEE

(REMEMBERING) Oh. And there was a letter for you in the pouch from Saigon. (REMOVES LETTER FROM BAG, HANDS IT TO CHARLENE.) An important-looking envelope with lots of signatures and stamps. Japanese stamps. It was sent a while back through the Vietnamese mail to the volunteer headquarters in Saigon. And

Don probably dropped it in the back of his jeep for a few weeks.

CHARLENE

(STUDYING THE ENVELOPE) It's from Hal. It's more than two months old. (SHE OPENS IT, READS.) Nothing personal. He's got...press credentials from the Morning Advocate in Baton Rouge and...he said he was leaving Japan the following week. Because...(PAUSE)

RENEE

(SARCASTICALLY) I have no idea. Writer's block?

CHARLENE

Some kind of block. (READS AND THEN COMMENTS) My God! He's coming to Vietnam...(READING ON)...He's probably in the Mekong Delta by now. He was going to meet a contact in Saigon and head for Can Tho.

RENEE

Are you...surprised?

CHARLENE

I...Yes...In a way. He gave up a lot for this year in Japan.

RENEE

He gave you up. When he shows up here, don't forget that. He'd do it again if he ever gets you back.

CHARLENE

You think he'll come here?

RENEE

Why do you think he came to Vietnam?

CHARLENE

He said it was to write about the war.

RENEE

He came to Vietnam because Hue is in Vietnam and because you're in Hue. He'll try to take you away, and if you go, he'll do the same thing he did before. I've been through it, Charlene. You might not think he will, and he might not think he will. But he's a man, and men are bastards from birth....obsessed with sex-sex-sex, or a tiny bit of romance and a lot of sex, or fake-romance-and-sex-sex-sex. Take your choice.

CHARLENE

(SMILING AT RENEE'S CYNICISM) The voice of experience. Huong will be by in about twenty minutes. We're going to have something to eat across the river and then try out a camera that he more or less made. It's huge...makes eight-by-ten negatives....You...want to join us for noodles?

RENEE

Gimme a break.

CHARLENE

Is there water? I want to take a quick shower.

RENEE

The electricity is off, but I think there is enough in the tank. (CHARLENE EXITS TO HER ROOM OFFSTAGE LEFT. RENEE SITS DOWN AT THE SMALL TABLE NEAR THE HOUSE. SHE POURS A CUP OF TEA FROM A POT AND PREPARES TO BEGIN GOING THROUGH THE MAIL SHE HAS BROUGHT BACK FROM

MAC-V. SHE BECOMES AWARE THAT SOMEONE IS WATCHING HER FROM A PILE OF STONES UP RIGHT. SHE STRIDES TOWARD THE STONES AND SEES HAL.) I'll show you where the bathroom window is. You might find that more...."romantic."

HAL

I'm sorry. I didn't....

RENEE

Didn't I just see you at MAC-V? Did you follow me?-(HAL DOESN'T ANSWER.)
Well, did you?

HAL

Yes—I've been there about a week. I...

RENEE

(IRRITATED) What are you? CIA?

HAL

You're a volunteer.

RENEE

I've got a radio in the house. I can have the MP's here in two minutes.

HAL

I knew you guys were in Hue, but I couldn't get a street address. And when I did no one knew where the street was.

RENEE

Well, you've followed me and found us. Now why don't you go back to Saigon and drink margaritas in the Continental. I'm sure you can find a loyal boy to trot press releases from Ton Son Nhut and the Embassy.

HAL

You don't give a guy much of a chance. Are you always this hard?

RENEE

Not always. Only when I know how incredibly messed up things will get if I'm not.

HAL

You don't even know who I am? (NO RESPONSE FROM RENEE) I've been sleeping on a cot sometimes and on the floor sometimes, and fabricating hyperbole about the grunts at MAC-V for their local papers back home—all because I didn't want to leave without seeing one of your volunteers who I...used to know.

RENEE

So you want a purple heart or something? I do have a couple inside. A GI had stolen a boxful and traded me two for a home-cooked meal. He was selling them to paper-pushers at Phu Bai.

HAL

Obviously you know who I am.

RENEE

You got a sign over your shirt pocket, Mr. Garren. It doesn't take a speed reader.

HAL

You can call me "Hal."

RENEE

I can do anything I please.

HAL

Self-confidence comes to us all sooner or later.

RENEE

You got a problem with that?

HAL

(SOMEWHAT AMUSED) You do know who I'm here to see.

RENEE

I know...But why can't you leave her alone. Charlene is finding herself here. That's something she never did around you. She's...

HAL

(STIFFLY) Don't you think you're a little out of line?...Pretty far out of line, I think. This doesn't concern you.

RENEE

No. Not one bit out of line. She left you, friend. She left you to putter with your heroic fame in Japan. You failed at that, and now you come here because you want someone to hold your hand while you try for that faded glory by watching men die and acting the hero. Well you watch somewhere else. Hue is a very sensitive area, and you are not needed. Period. Over and out.

HAL

(FLASHING ANGER) I don't even know your name, and you're insulting me personally, accusing me of things you know nothing about. Is Charlene in there? (HAL BEGINS TO MOVE TOWARD THE HOUSE.)

RENEE

(PHYSICALLY BLOCKS HIM) If you come onto this property, I'll have you arrested by the Vietnamese civil police. I speak Vietnamese, and know a couple of policemen who won't hesitate one second to throw you in jail. In fact, they'd like nothing better than to rough up an American.

HAL

(STOPS) But why are you so very nasty with me. I haven't done anything.

RENEE

I'm responsible for the volunteers at this post. We go out of our way to select people who are politically and emotionally stable, and that means uninvolved. Coming to Vietnam as a volunteer teacher is a very risky thing to do. We are completely unprotected. No barbed wire, no soldiers, no guns. We get seventy dollars a month. The organization pays the rent and utilities, but we have to buy our own food and bottled gas and toilet paper and things we need at school and this and that and everything else And then there's the stress of living in a goldfish bowl, with few if any friends to talk to. Now don't get me wrong: no one's making us do it. If I want to quit, I can be out of here and back in Brooklyn within a week. But I don't want to quit, and Charlene doesn't want to quit. We've found something priceless here. It won't last long, but while we've got it, it should be respected. Ex-boyfriends and ex-girlfriends have a tremendous effect on us. We only remember the good times, and it seems that we were in heaven. Of course, we weren't, and if we are lured back to the USA and those ex'es, we would never stop being sorry. Very sorry.

HAL

I didn't ask you about any of this, and I don't want to hear it.

RENEE

I don't care if you want to hear it or not. You're going to—Heaven always seems to be the place we just left. There's nothing easier than going home. But there's no chance of coming back here. And when the two years are up, it's over. Sometimes we get one more year. Never more than that. We all know that. We expect it. But if we quit, we never forgive ourselves. I know four people who went back early. It's like they lost the only person they ever loved. I doubt that they'll ever get over it. Charlene's an especially delicate person. It's not fair for you to see her again. Wait until her two years are up. Go back to your precious Japan or at least the Delta and your precious typewriter. That's what you wanted: take it. You pushed Charlene so she had nowhere to turn, and she was lucky enough to get here. Now leave her be. If you don't, I swear I'll have some people do some very bad things to you.

HAL

I didn't come to take her home.

RENEE

Yes, you did.

HAL

Okay, okay. But it's different now....Up close, it's different. It's enormous. This whole war—the bombing, the destruction. It's like some horrible science fiction of the Second Coming and Sodom and Gomorrah and the Book of Revelations and the Sunday Comics all rolled into one. I've only been here for two months, and it seems like twenty years.... To find this quaint, green city is like something out of fairyland. I won't disturb it for Charlene. I wouldn't dare. I'm going to see the Citadel tomorrow, and I gotta be in Phu Bai on Friday. Gonna get a ride on Air America with a friend of mine. We're going up to Quang Tri. There's word of NVA and VC troop movements. You hear anything about that?

RENEE

That's not exactly my cup of tea.

HAL

I might be back this way; I might not. I wanted to say hello. It didn't seem decent not to.

RENEE

I still advise you to get back to Japan—Forget about journalism. If Charlene weren't here, I would advise you to do whatever you damn well like. But she is.

HAL

Is it something I said?

RENEE

Is what something you said?

HAL

Forget it. Don't tell her I was here.

RENEE

Thanks.

HAL

After Quang Tri, I'm going back to the Delta. I rented a small room in Can Tho (kahn tuh). There's a lot happening around there. I doubt that I'll ever come back.

RENEE

And you're leaving this Friday... Day after tomorrow.

HAL

Yep.

RENEE

Do you mean what you said... about not bothering Charlene?

HAL

Yes.

RENEE

Good. (THINKING FOR A MOMENT) If you're in the Citadel tomorrow, you—you might run into her. She's become very friendly with a guy named Huong. He works for us—and he's obsessed with the mythical history of the Citadel or something like that. A very intelligent, very decent man. Don't interfere with them. If you see her, turn around and walk the other way.

HAL

I don't think I've ever been raked over the coals like this....And I don't even know your name...One of the guys at MAC-V thinks it's Rachel.

RENEE

Renee.

HAL

Renee....Nice name. I'll be seeing you around, Renee. I will be at the Citadel tomorrow. And if I see Charlene, I'll tell her hello briefly and then leave.

RENEE

Thanks. I don't believe you, but thanks anyway.

PHUOC

(ENTERS ON HIS BICYCLE. HE IS SMILING AND APPEARS TO BE SOMEWHAT OF A SIMPLETON. THAT IS THE IMPRESSION HE WANTS TO GIVE. HE IS FAR MORE IN CONTROL OF THINGS THAN HE PRETENDS.) Hello, hello. How's my sweet passion this afternoon? (PHUOC RIDES TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STAGE WHERE HE PARKS HIS BICYCLE BESIDES CHARLENE'S.)

RENEE

(TO HAL) Phuoc still has trouble with idiomatic expressions. (TO PHUOC) Good afternoon, Phuoc.

PHUOC

Good afternoon, good afternoon. Do I interrupt something?

RENEE

Not at all I just met this man, who is named Mr. Garren. Mr. Garren, this is a former student of mine, Phuoc. (THEY SHAKE HANDS.)

PHUOC

Anh bao chi, khong?

HAL

Ya co. Bao chi. I'm sorry. That's all the Vietnamese I know.

PHUOC

No sweat, GI. Renee like you, you number one. I like Renee too much.

HAL

I'm not a GI, not a soldier. I'm bao chi-a journalist.

RENEE

Phuoc is always at least two steps ahead of you. He understands very well what you do.

PHUOC

You teach me write newspapers. I be very happy. (TO RENEE) Huong is here, no?

RENEE

Not yet.

PHUOC

I meet you Mister Huong. Very smart. I meet you. You like him. Him like doctor.

RENEE

Not a medical doctor. He's working on a dissertation.

PHUOC

About Citadel. Old city. You wait here. He like bao chi very much. I meet you him.

HAL

A dissertation—about the—.Citadel?

RENEE

(AWARE THAT HAL IS QUITE INTERESTED, SHE DE-EMPHASIZES) About the history of Vietnam, really. He's sort of a.—perpetual student type.

PHUOC

I take you round Hue—We go see railroad station. VC blow up tracks. Government fix them again. They okay now. We go see. You intview people there. You inview Huong. Everyone in Hue they know Phuoc. You tell America about Hue. Very important.

RENEE

Phuoc isn't usually this aggressive, are you Phuoc? What's behind this sudden enthusiasm?

PHUOC

When you want go see everyone in Hue? I be translator. I know beaucoup English.

HAL

I'm going to Quang Tri. After that...

PHUOC

After, you come back to Hue, and Phuoc he meet you everyone.

RENEE

Mr. Garren has his own plans, Phuoc. We don't want to interrupt them now, do we?

HAL

It might be interesting. An in-depth series of the only tacitly non-combat zone in Vietnam....What do you think, Renee?

RENEE

I've already made it perfectly clear what I think.

HAL

You have indeed. And I don't want to make things tough for Charlene.

RENEE

But...?

HAL

(FLASH OF IRRITATION) But I wonder just how far do I have a right to let myself be pushed.

RENEE

You let yourself be pushed out LSU and out of Japan and out of the Delta.

HAL

You do like jugulars, don't you? (LONG PAUSE. AT FIRST, HE STARES DIRECTLY

AT RENEE, THEN AWAY.)

RENEE

From now on, it's between you and Charlene. I can't handle all this crap. (PAUSE)

HAL

You seem to understand this place pretty well.

RENEE

It's (PAUSE. LET'S ANGER DIMINISH)- like a beautiful spider web. It entangles you, and the mysterious spider has you hypnotized before you know what's happening.

HAL

Nice image—Maybe...in time—you'd let me interview you—Or at least tell me more about this city. I don't know how it has virtually escaped attention.

RENEE

It's so important to get it right.

HAL

You could help...You must know a lot of people here. Between you and Phuoc, I might know what they're talking about. I could get a room for a couple of weeks—or months.

RENEE

I had almost gotten rid of you...Where did that change?

HAL

Phuoc said I was a bao chi.

RENEE

(LOOKING DIRECTLY AT PHUOC) I don't quite understand. I've never seen him so enthusiastic about anything.

HAL

Renee...thanks.

RENEE

Across the river—If you're going to get a place, get one across the river. Do you hear, Phuoc? (PHUOC NODS.)- And you give me your word, Mr. Garren...

HAL

Call me "Hal".

RENEE

And you give me your word, Mr. Garren....

HAL

About what?

RENEE

Charlene. Stay away from her...I can have her transferred....

PHUOC

(INTERRUPTING) I find place for you. Okay? How long you stay?

HAL

One month...Two. I don't know. I'll have to do some stories in the field to support myself. But a series on Hue is what I have in mind. I could be back here a week from Friday.

PHUOC

Very good. Very good.

HAL

So where should I meet you, Phuoc?

PHUOC

You no go nowhere now. You stay wait Huong. Very important. I meet you Huong. He come tout suite. I go find him. (PHUOC EXITS.)

RENEE

You've certainly made some—progress this afternoon.

HAL

I had no idea that any of this would happen. I know you aren't very pleased. I'm sorry.

RENEE

I just wish that you had not come—I wish they'd stop fighting. I wish, I wish, I wish. Hue is a wonderful world. Or it would be if ever things stopped changing. Maybe they'll stop after the war.

HAL

How long have you been here?

RENEE

One year in Nha Trang. One here. One to go. Then I go.

HAL

Back to the States?

RENEE

(BECOMING A LITTLE LESS FORMAL) Probably not. I can't imagine going back there. Maybe to Saudi Arabia...Make a nest egg teaching at a girl's school—Oh, there's Huong.

PHUOC ENTERS, LEADING HUONG BY THE HAND. UNTIL TODAY HUONG AND HAL HAVE NEVER HEARD OF EACH OTHER. FAIRLY SOON IN THE FOLLOWING CONVERSATION, HOWEVER, HUONG BECOMES AWARE THAT HAL AND CHARLENE WERE MORE THAN FRIENDS IN THE UNITED STATES THERE ARE THREE SIDES TO THE RELATIONSHIP FROM HUONG'S POINT OF VIEW—1 THE TWO YOUNGISH MEN BASICALLY LIKE EACH OTHER PERSONALLY—2 THEY ARE UNDERSTANDABLY JEALOUS OF EACH OTHER OVER CHARLENE-- 3 LIEUTENANT HUONG HAS BEEN INSTRUCTED BY HIS SUPERIORS TO BE VERY CORDIAL TO JOURNALISTS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHOSE WRITINGS CAN BE INTERPRETED AS ANTI-WAR.

PHUOC

Anh Bao Chi, I meet you Huong. Anh Huong, I meet you Anh Bao Chi.

HAL

Hal Garren is the name. Pleased to meet you.

HUONG

(SLIGHT BOW) And I am Nguyen van Huong. I work with International Volunteers. I am pleased to meet you. What brings you to Hue?

HAL

I'm on my way to Quang Tri. Then back to the Delta. I've been there for a couple of months. Phuoc here wants me to come back here instead of the Delta. For a while. Write about Hue.

HUONG

Journalists are generally the most interesting foreign people in Vietnam. Of course they're

second to volunteers (BOWING SLIGHTLY TO RENEE) who are helping our country.

HAL

Kind of you to say so. Actually, I stopped in Hue to say hello to one of your volunteers.

HUONG

How very thoughtful.

HAL

Charlene. I believe you know her.

HUONG

A charming, beautiful person. (AGAIN BOWING TO RENEE) Second only to Renee here.(RENEE COURTSIES.)

RENEE

Phuoc, you might as well get Charlene. (PHUOC EXITS.)

HAL

I can stay only a few minutes.

RENEE

We all know that, Mr. Garren.

HUONG

I would like very much to read some of the articles you have written. Do you have any with you?

HAL

Do you mean now?

HUONG

When a country is at war, the only certainty is uncertainty.

HAL

I take that for a yes.

HUONG

In Vietnam, it's impolite and quite confusing to be straightforward—But yes.

HAL

(OPENING HIS BAG) Wrinkled photocopies. One about an American who takes care of shoe-shine kids in Saigon, one about people living in shacks on the banks of the Saigon River, and one about a pacifist monk who developed a fantasy island in the Mekong in spite of pressure from the police. (HANDS STORIES TO HUONG) Not exactly bedtime reading.

HUONG

(STUDYING TITLES OF ARTICLES AND PHOTOS) Are these photos taken by you?

HAL

Yes.

HUONG

Very sensitive. Very good. I'll read these and give them back when you come to write stories about Hue. Ransom—Is that the word?

HAL

That'll do just fine.

RENEE

Hal...Mr. Garren, could I have a word with you.

HAL

(STEPS AWAY FROM HUONG WHO CANNOT HEAR RENEE WHEN SHE

SPEAKS. HIS VOICE IS FULL OF SUBDUED ANGER.) You want me to leave now?
Is that it?

RENEE

Not quite....

HAL

Cause I've had it with being the bogeyman. If I don't run into her tomorrow, I'll see her when I get back...Charlene and I go back a ways, but it's over...and it's none of your business, despite your being the....supervisor here.

RENEE

I don't think Huong knows anything about you. He's a very sensitive man. And Charlene is a sensitive woman. I don't want her to...to be.-surprised by the sight of you two talking together. Let's let her catch her breath. There's a charming grocery store around the corner. You'll like it. (LEADS HIM AWAY, CALLS TO HUONG)... We'll only be a minute, Huong.

HAL

What is all this? Okay, okay. (EXITS WITH RENEE)

HUONG SITS ON BENCH AND GOES THROUGH PHOTOS AND STORIES WITH GREAT INTEREST. CHARLENE WALKS UP LOOKING REFRESHED BY HER SHOWER AND EAGER TO BE WITH HUONG. SHE IS CARRYING HER BOOK ON ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING IN HER SMALL BACKPACK, WHICH SHE HOLDS IN HER HAND.

CHARLENE

Hi. (EXTENDS HER HAND FOR HIM TO SHAKE. HE TAKES IT.) I have a surprise..
..not really a surprise—but something like that.

HUONG

(WITH A SHADE MORE DISTANCE THAN USUAL) Hi.

CHARLENE

(PERCEIVING DISTANCE, SHE LOOKS AROUND, SEES NO ONE.) Phuoc said something about Renee and some guy.

HUONG

Where is Phuoc?

CHARLENE

He said he had to see someone right away. Huong, is everything all right?

HUONG

You weren't...expecting him?

CHARLENE

Expecting who? Phuoc? I don't understand—I was expecting you.

HUONG

You are becoming Vietnamese very quickly.

CHARLENE

I'm not sure what that means, but it does seem like some sort of backhanded compliment-at best—or at worst. (SLIGHTLY CONFUSED) Is Renee around?

HUONG

She'll be right back. She took him to the grocery store, I believe.

CHARLENE

(SLIGHTLY IRRITATED, CHARLENE IS COMING TO SUSPECT VERY STRONGLY THAT THE VISITOR IS HAL.) How would a Vietnamese go about finding out who "he" is.

HUONG

He—or she would stop asking.

CHARLENE

Would a Vietnamese be willing to go to the restaurant as we had planned?

HUONG

Maybe you've seen the originals.

CHARLENE

Originals of what?

HUONG

These. (HANDS PHOTOS AND ARTICLES TO CHARLENE, WHO QUICKLY LOOKS AT A COUPLE OF PAGES AND STOTS HAL'S NAME.)

CHARLENE

(ACTING SURPRISED) Hal! Is he the guy? ...(NO ANSWER FROM HUONG) He's an old friend of mine...(NERVOUSLY) Nothing more. (STILL NO RESPONSE)...Did he give you these? Of course. Where....

HUONG

(INTERRUPTING) He hasn't gone far...why didn't you say anything about this journalist friend?

CHARLENE

He wasn't a journalist when I knew him. I don't think he cared for them too much.

HUONG

He's a fast learner. (HUONG GETS UP TO LEAVE. HE ALMOST SUCCEEDS IN HIDING HIS JEALOUSY OF CHARLENE.) I think you and Hal should spend the afternoon getting back in touch with each other.

CHARLENE

(TOUCHES HIS ARM TO STOP HIM) I don't want to spend the afternoon getting back in touch with him. I want to spend the afternoon with you and with the Citadel. I had a surprise for you...It doesn't exactly feel like a surprise anymore.

HUONG

What is it?

CHARLENE

Later.

HUONG

No, now....Tell me about the surprise.

CHARLENE

(WITHOUT MUCH ENTHUSIASM) That old book I was telling you about—it came in the mail today. (TAKES BOOK FROM HER BAG, HANDS IT TO HUONG)

HUONG

The one about how to make cut-away drawings?

CHARLENE

(SHE TAKES THE BOOK FROM HUONG. FINDS THE SECTION SHE WANTS, AND GIVES THE BOOK BACK TO HIM.) Yeah. Like that.

HUONG

(SILENTLY BUT CAREFULLY STUDYING THE DRAWINGS) This is most valuable. We could add letters like "A" and "B" to show exactly where different things happened, where they walked, the paths and doors in the buildings and outside the buildings. That would be wonderful! Can you do that with this book?

CHARLENE

(LOOSENING SLIGHTLY THE GRIP SHE HAD ON ENTHUSIASM) Yeah, sure. We did a couple of examples in class. I think I can pick it up. Working with your photographs will make it much, much easier.

HUONG

(TAKES BOTH OF HER HANDS IN SINCERE APPRECIATION) Thank you. (EXCITED) If we could draw the main buildings of the inner city and of the royal court—that would be wonderful! And then of the rest of the Citadel.

CHARLENE

I really don't think it would be all that difficult or take all that long.

HUONG

You could sign your name to them. And legends would develop about your being a reborn Vietnamese princess who closed her eyes and drew from memory.

CHARLENE

(ATTEMPTING TO RESIST BEING CHARMED) Now that's a little far-fetched.

HUONG

I forget what it was like to work alone—Your help—means so much to me. (RELEASES HER HANDS) Are you ready? (OFFERS HIS ARM TO HER DISCREETLY)

CHARLENE

(TAKING HUONG'S ARM) Yes.

RENEE (OFFSTAGE VOICE)

Charlene!

CHARLENE

(TO HUONG) Don't stop.

HUONG

We have to.

RENEE

(ENTERING) Hal's here. We saw you leaving—He-wants to say hi.

CHARLENE

(HOLDING ON TO HUONG'S ARM) Of course. (WITH TONGUE-IN-CHEEK MILD SARCASM) Where is he?...Hiding in the grocery store.

HAL

(ENTERS, APPROACHES) Charlene.

CHARLENE

(RELEASING HUONG'S ARM, EXTENDS HER HAND TO HAL PRETENDING NOT TO FEEL CONFUSED AND FLUSHED) Hal! It's so nice to see you again.

HAL

(SHAKING HER HAND BRIEFLY) Same here...(AWKWARD PAUSE)-Vietnam certainly agrees with you. You're looking great.

CHARLENE

Thanks—(AWKWARD PAUSE)—So, you're a journalist now.

HAL

A guy's gotta do something.

CHARLENE

Lights. Glamour. Action. (HAL IS SILENT.) Hear from any of the guys back home?

HAL

Only that student Baly. About every two weeks-a cryptic message on a greasy postcard
He's a good kid.

CHARLENE

I taught my students here two of his songs. Tell him that if you write.

HAL

Right.

CHARLENE

(ANOTHER AWKWARD PAUSE) Huong, I think you've met Hal.

HUONG

Yes. He has written some interesting articles on the orphans in Saigon. And has taken
some interesting photographs. I'll show them to you later. The Vietnamese people
appreciate such efforts.

HAL

Renee introduced us. (LOOKING DIRECTLY AT HUONG) And it seems that he is
quite a scholar.

CHARLENE

Huong also takes fine pictures.

HAL

Oh, does he?

HUONG

Snapshots. Now and then. Not artistic. Functional.

CHARLENE

(STILL DISTANT) Huong and I have to do some work across the river. Will we be
seeing you again?

HAL

I hadn't thought so. But Phuoc-and Huong, I believe-seem anxious to line up some stones
here in Hue.

CHARLENE

(COOL) I see. Journalists are well received in this country.

HAL

So are volunteers-I've got to go to Quang Tri for a few days. After that, I thought we
might get together for a meal. All of us. On me.

CHARLENE

Nice of you to offer-but I'm booked through December. Renee and Huong might be
interested.

RENEE

(COLDLY) I'll have some papers to correct.

HUONG

Maybe Phuoc and I would be interested. We'd like to introduce you to some people.

CHARLENE

(STRUCK BY HUONG'S UNEXPECTED RESPONSE) Sounds like a guy's evening

doesn't it, Renee?

RENEE

(TO HAL, WITH MILD SARCASM) I hope you know a couple of folksongs from the — States.. “Clementine” is always a hit.

HAL

I learned the words in the Delta. And "Birmingham Jail."

RENEE

You'll have them eating out of the palm of your hand. I've got some things to do. If you'll excuse me Charlene, Huong?

CHARLENE

Later.

HUONG

(TO RENE) We'll have to talk about the annual report-Saturday? Around ten?

RENEE

Sounds good. (RESERVEDLY ACKNOWLEDGES THEIR VISITOR) Hal.

HAL

Good afternoon. (RENEE EXITS.)

CHARLENE

Huong, are you about ready. (HUONG NODS.) Hal, I hope you find whatever it is you're looking for here...and that you never run out of places to look—I'm sorry...That didn't come out right.

HAL

Thanks. (CHARLENE BEGINS WALKING SLOWLY.)

HUONG

We should stay in touch. Have a safe trip.

HAL

Thanks.

HUONG JOINS CHARLENE AND THEY EXIT. HAL SINGS:

(Song #12)

I Know It's Gone

**I know it's gone;
I see it in your eyes
and in the way you smile.
I'm glad its that for you.**

**Now you can laugh
the way you should,
with open heart
all full of love.**

**I hope that you can
love him all the way,
believe in him each day.**

**For me,
it'll never come again;
I know I'm through.**

**I'll never be once more
all wild and full of dreams
of you**

**I'll talk and smile
like everything's right;
but walk the night,
all empty inside
and try.**

End of Scene 8

ACT II
Scene 9

HUONG'S DWELLING, ASSIGNED BY DAI, WHO IS SLEEPING ON A SMALL COT. THERE IS ALSO A WRITING TABLE TAKEN FROM AN ABANDONED ROOM IN THE INNER COURT, AND A COUPLE OF OTHER MAKESHIFT FURNISHINGS IT IS HUONG'S THIRTY-SECOND BIRTHDAY, AND CHARLENE ARRIVES WITH A GIFT ELEGANTLY WRAPPED. IT IS 2:30 P.M. ON DECEMBER 15, 1967 AND IT IS DRIZZLING AND CHILLY. CHARLENE IS WEARING A U S MILITARY PONCHO SHE BOUGHT IN THE MARKET. IT COVERS THE GIFT. SHE KNOCKS AT THE DOOR, AND IT IS DAI WHO ANSWERS. CHARLENE HAD EXPECTED TO SEE HUONG AND IS SURPRISED. DAI IS QUITE COLLECTED AND SUAVE.

CHARLENE

Chao, ong. Anh Huong o dai, khong?

DAI

You speak Vietnamese very well.

CHARLENE

(REALIZING THAT DAI'S ENGLISH IS VERY GOOD, SHE SWITCHES TO ENGLISH) Is Huong here?

DAI

He's expected shortly. I'm a friend of his...An old friend...from the highlands.

CHARLENE

Maybe I should come back at some other time.

DAI

Nonsense. (HE OFFERS TO HELP HER REMOVE HER PONCHO) May I? (CHARLENE ACCEPTS HELP.) I thought for a moment that the Citadel had been invaded.

CHARLENE

(HOLDING THE WRAPPED GIFT, WHICH IS A 20 BY 30-INCH PORTFOLIO FOR HOLDING DRAWINGS) Hardly. Hue is off-limits to GI's. Except for the small compound south of the river. And they're restricted there.

DAI You're right. To the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army as well, I think. A virtual paradise in a lost country. (REFERRING TO THE GIFT) Here, let me take that. It's for Huong, no doubt?

CHARLENE

It is a gift.

DAI

(NOT WISHING TO GIVE TOO MUCH INFORMATION, CHARLENE SHRUGS HER SHOULDERS SLIGHTLY AND RAISES HER EYEBROWS AT THE FOLLOWING SUGGESTIONS.) It can't be for Tet, the Lunar New Year. That's six weeks away. More likely for Christmas. That's only ten days away. But it's still a little early. The other major occasion that Americans observe is birthdays. It wouldn't be for your birthday now, would it?

CHARLENE

(RESPONDING SLIGHTLY TO DAI'S CHARMING, PARTLY FRENCH MANNER

OF TEASING) Of course. We always give ourselves gifts on our birthdays. It's an old tradition.

DAI

And you're a traditional young woman, are you not?

CHARLENE

I had never thought about it. I guess I am...in some ways...Where is Huong?

DAI

Your guess is as good as mine.

CHARLENE

(BECOMING A LITTLE APPREHENSIVE) I see. Well, I think I'd better be going.

DAI

I have frightened you. (DAI STANDS UP AND PICKS UP HIS RAINCOAT AND HAT.) I didn't mean to. (CROSSING TO LEAVE) Have a seat and make yourself comfortable. If he was expecting you, I don't think he will be long.

CHARLENE

He wasn't really expecting me. We just—I have no right to drive you away.

DAI

(LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW) It's going to clear up. (CHARLENE IS SILENT.) I understand that you know Mister Garren. Those were very nice articles about Hue--especially about the Citadel. They were picked up by the Associated Press.

CHARLENE

I know. War is just wonderful for instant fame.

DAI

You're-skeptical. (CHARLENE IS SILENT.) About all wars, or just the one here in Vietnam?

CHARLENE

Is there a difference?

DAI

When you're involved, there's a difference....Are you involved?

CHARLENE

I want an end to the fighting.

DAI

So do many Americans. I am sure Mr. Garren feels the same.

CHARLENE

(HAVING BECOME SOMEWHAT UPSET WITH THE CURIOUS DIRECTION OF THE CONVERSATION, SHE BEGINS TO FIDGET.) Ask him. Don't ask me. He doesn't talk to me about his articles.

DAI

What do you two talk about? He does spend a lot of time at your house.

CHARLENE

(GLARING AT DAI) It's not my house; it's the volunteer women's house. And next door is the guys' house. If you think he's spending too much time at either, tell him, not me. (BEGINS ONCE MORE TO GATHER UP THE GIFT AND HER RAINCOAT.)

DAI

I'm sorry. Please. Let me be the one to leave. (PREPARING TO EXIT) Tell Huong that his old friend from the high country will be back.

CHARLENE

No. I have to be on my way. (SHE BEGINS TO EXIT WHEN HUONG APPEARS AT THE DOOR. HE IS MOTIONLESS AS HE STUDIES THE SITUATION.)

DAI

There. See? I told you he wouldn't be long. Huong, old friend, I was in the area and thought that I'd drop in. But I prefer not to interfere with your rendezvous. Ms. Ayer is a sincere, charming lady.

CHARLENE

How did you know my name?

DAI

Now really. I doubt that there is anyone in Hue who hasn't heard about the lovely young woman who teaches with songs.

CHARLENE

Huong, let me come back another day.

HUONG

No. It's my friend who can come back later.

DAI

Well said, Huong. Well said. I will be back at eight. You should have told me that today is your birthday. I would not have come empty-handed. (EXITS)

HUONG

Charlene-Are you alright. (TAKES HER IN HIS ARMS) It's nothing. He's an old friend who visits when he is in Hue. You're trembling. Did he say anything?

CHARLENE

No. But there's something about him that frightens me.

HUONG

He said something about a birthday.

CHARLENE

It is your birthday.

HUONG

How in the devil did you know that?

CHARLENE

You told me about two months ago. According to the lunar calendar. I calculated. I hope I am right. At least within a week or two.

HUONG

You're right exactly. The hour of my birth is at three this afternoon.

CHARLENE

(TAKES UP GIFT WHICH HUONG HAD NOT SEEN) Happy birthday.

HUONG

Charlene! I do love you very much.

CHARLENE

And I love you, Huong. Beyond all measure. (THEY KISS.) Aren't you even going to open it?

HUONG

Yes of course. The paper is beautiful I will cut a small piece and keep it with me always (HUONG CAREFULLY OPENS THE GIFT.) A portfolio. For your drawings and my photographs. This gift is perfect-it is our house.

CHARLENE

I'm glad you like it. I had Baly choose one and mail it. He insisted on paying half bless his heart.

HUONG

Thank him for me—The reason I was late is that I went to the place I was living before They are very trustworthy people. I knew that today is my birthday, and I wanted to give you something they were holding for me. I don't have many belongings, but there is one thing that I value more than any other object in the world. And I want you to have it. (PAUSE.)

CHARLENE

(LAUGHS) You have gotten my attention.

HUONG

The old French priest gave it to me a few weeks before he died. It had belonged to his mother. He said that one day, I would meet the right lady. And when I met her he said there would be no doubt that she was the right lady.

CHARLENE

Are you sure that you have met her?

HUONG

Positive. (TAKES OUT AN OLD BUT ELEGANT BOX FOR WEDDING RINGS AND CHARLENE

I'm afraid to open it. I'm afraid of what I know it has inside...and afraid of what it might not have. (TAKES THE BOX AND OPENS IT AND BEGINS TO CRY WITH HAPPINESS AND FULFILLMENT.) Thank you, Huong. (THEY KISS. SHE TRIES IT ON AND SAYS WITH GREAT SURPRISE) It fits!

HUONG

How could it not fit?

CHARLENE

Do you understand what you're doing? Do you know what this means?

HUONG

Of course I know what it means. It means that you and I have been one since we were born. It took us a while to find each other, that's all.

CHARLENE

(EMBRACES HUONG WITH ALL HER PASSION) This moment is perfection Never in a million years would I have ever even hoped for it. That old French priest. Your mother and father. They're watching us at this moment.

HUONG

And they're breathing a sigh of relief.

CHARLENE

The ring is mine...forever. But you have to keep it until our wedding.

HUONG

Which can be very soon.

CHARLENE

It could be. But I want the whole world to know...We could have a June wedding. My mother and father would want to come over...She once told me something like your priest told you. We could be married in the Citadel.

HUONG

(LOOKING A LITTLE BIT TROUBLED) It would be very difficult for them to make the journey to Hue.

CHARLENE

Saigon, then. The marvelous old cathedral in Saigon. That would be perfect.

HUONG

A quiet ceremony here could be arranged sooner.

CHARLENE

You have made me the happiest woman in the world. I won't insist. But do you understand what this means to me? Can you see why I want to share it with other people I love and with some I have never even seen?

HUONG

(AFTER A LONG REFLECTIVE PAUSE, PRETENDS ENTHUSIASM) Yes— I will write to your parents tonight asking their permission. The wedding will be in June. The old priest is remembered by those at the Cathedral in Saigon. I will also write to them.

CHARLENE

Look, Huong. It has stopped raining and the sun's coming out. Let's go out for a while. Let's walk to that carousel that's going up near the gate.

HUONG

But there's no one there. Mr. Nguyen doesn't plan to have it ready until the Tet celebration. And even then it will only be a few roughly made horses on a big wheel.

CHARLENE

I know. That's why it'll be so lovely. And it will go round and round and nothing more. I often walk by and wave to him. Sometimes we talk about the carousel. He carves and paints the horses himself and glues hundreds of tiny mirrors in the eyes and ears and nose and everywhere. He's been doing that all of his life. In the North, in the Delta. And all over in between. He said that the day he stops will be the day he dies. He loves the magic he makes. Children can feel that. They can imagine....that it's the grandest of rides in a magnificent carnival.

HUONG

Okay. But I'll bring an umbrella. (HE TAKES HIS UMBRELLA.)

THEY STROLL HAND-IN-HAND. CHARLENE IS RADIANT. THEY APPROACH THE IN-PROGRESS HORSES OR THE REPRESENTATIVE HEAD OF A HORSE DOWN LEFT, AND HUONG PUTS HIS ARM AROUND CHARLENE'S WAIST. THE LIGHTS BECOME MULTI-COLORED, AND A CALLIOPE BEGINS PLAYING "MERRY-GO-ROUND," A SONG THAT CHARLENE WILL SING LATER. THEY KISS AS THE LIGHTS DIM.

End of Scene 9

ACT II
Scene 10

IT IS 8 P.M. DAI IS AGAIN IN HUONG'S SMALL HOUSE, THIS TIME SEATED AT A TABLE EXAMINING CHARLENE'S DRAWINGS WITH GREAT INTEREST. HUONG ENTERS AND IS NOT SURPRISED TO SEE DAI.

DAI

These are very good. And there're so many. Guard these carefully. They are extremely valuable. How did she do so many.

HUONG

(ANGRY THAT HIS BELONGING'S HAVE BEEN TAMPERED WITH) Those do not belong to you. Do you rummage around other houses at which you are not a guest?...*(DAI IGNORES HUONG'S DISPLEASURE.)* ...She's a trained artist...*(NOTICING MUD)* You have tracked mud across the floor. Be careful next time. I live here. *(DAI RESPONDS WITH A SUPERCILIOUS STARE BUT LETS IT PASS.)* She read a book and did the exercises, and in a few days, she completed her first one. *(HUONG IS PROUD OF CHARLENE'S WORK.)* She works with the pictures I take and actually looking at the buildings. With these, it will be possible to trace the steps of the royal processions and of the crowds.

DAI

But how do you know which building is which?

HUONG

The throne room is 1. *(LEAFS THROUGH STACK OF DRAWINGS)* Facing out of the throne room, the first building on the left is 1-L. The one facing the room is 1-F. There is a key on this page *(HUONG FINDS THE PAGE)* which is a birds-eye view of the entire Citadel. See the small numbers...She did this last week using something she calls "angular perspective."

DAI

These are very valuable. One day, they will be prominently displayed.

HUONG

I thought Dai had scorn for my obsession.

DAI

There are many sides to Mister Dai.

HUONG

Glad to hear it.

DAI

Have you heard anything lately?

HUONG

Renee mentioned that the Americans at MAC-V were talking about major troop movements of our soldiers across the country. A few in Saigon seem more and more convinced that there will be a large offensive. Most are too fat to care.

DAI

No one is talking. No one. Specific orders only. So it will be big, I believe.

HUONG

Do you have any idea when it will....

DAI

None.

HUONG

How big?

DAI

Very big. Bigger than anyone imagines...everywhere...coordinated. Many people will be forced to make choices...hard choices....Us...or Saigon. People who would prefer not to choose...will be in trouble.....! will mention the work of your friend. This might well be the center of Vietnam when the war is finished....General Giap grew up here. He will value the work of you and your friend.

HUONG

Do you know him personally?

DAI

Yes. But not well. I will send word to him about your work here. I think he will be interested.

HUONG

(SUSPICIOUSLY) Dai....What is this all about?

DAI

No one is saying anything. Only passing on specific orders.

HUONG

You're lying. What's going on?

DAI

You're a commissioned officer, although all you've done is sit on your ass counting roses. Commissioned officers don't ask questions. You are not under any conditions to leave Hue until further notice. No even to go to Phu Bai. You are to continue living here in this room. And you are to keep these drawings here until we can manage to make good copies You are not to give them for a moment back to that Ayer woman. And you are not ask any questions.

HUONG

(INCREASINGLY, HE IS STRUCK BY HIS REALIZATION) My god. No, it cannot happen It would be an obscenity that is unthinkable,

DAI

No questions.

HUONG

I'm not asking any goddamned questions. You're going to make a battlefield of this sacred ground. And you re going to ask me to help you. (SHOUTING) You have no right.

DAI

You will not fight except to defend yourself. Dig a small bunker in here. What we need is the information in your head...and these. And any others she does. (DAI REFERS TO DRAWINGS.) They are invaluable. For now, you will not tell anyone anything. Especially Ms. Ayer. You were stupid to get romantically involved with her in the first place.

HUONG

Is this your filthy idea? Is it?

DAI

Is what my idea? Bringing the battle to the Citadel? You flatter me with a vast overestimation of my influence.

HUONG

Whose then? (SARCASTICALLY) General Giap's?

DAI

(AFTER A LONG PAUSE) Possibly.

HUONG

(DESPERATELY) I must be allowed to talk to him. He can't do this to the Nation of Annam. It is bestial. He can't. It would serve no purpose. Destruction for the sake of destruction. I can convince him. I know I can. Please!

DAI

He grew up in Hue, probably played in the Citadel every day when he was a boy. But now, he's a man. And he has decided that there are no more Hue's. The time of fantasy is over. The battlefield is all of Vietnam. A decisive blow now would be invaluable. The American people would revolt in their own country. Without that ultimate blow now and without the American press on our side, our children and our children's children will still be dying in ricefields. General Giap had to put aside his love of Hue in favor of total commitment.

HUONG

The coming battle will annihilate the truth of Vietnam.

DAI

You. are indulging yourself in the fiction of a jade garden. Your Vietnam died a long time ago.

HUONG

(RESIGNED) You're wrong. It lives deep in each of us.

DAI

Think what you want, but keep it to yourself. You will be an old man wandering the streets speaking of a magical kingdom. The children will call you names. You will beg for rice.

HUONG

And the American volunteers? What will happen to them?

DAI

They are showpieces. They will be taken into the hills, photographed, filmed, and released in a few weeks. No member of the press, however, will be taken or even touched. They will be far more effective doing our work for us.

HUONG

Then why bother with the volunteers? They're not political...at least not those that are here now.

DAI

At least not Ms. Ayer.

HUONG

Certainly not her.

DAI

Just how.....serious are you about her?

HUONG

I...(SITS DOWN, TAKES FACE IN HANDS)

DAI

What is it? (BECOMING ALARMED) Huong, what is it?

HUONG

Why wasn't I born 100 years ago....or 100 years from now.

DAI

(GRABS HUONG BY THE COLLAR, PULLS HIM TO A STANDING POSITION)

What is it?

HUONG

(PUSHING DAI AWAY) Let go of me!.....(DAI SITS, WAITING.)....I...Today, I asked her to marry me.

DAI

(HONESTLY STUNNED, HE THINKS HE HAS HEARD WRONG.) You what?

HUONG

(SHOUTING) I asked her to marry me. Marry, you know. I gave her this ring. It's hers now. I'm in love with her. We'll be married in June.

DAI

(WITH EXTREME DISGUST) Such gross stupidity. You can't be in love with her, she's the enemy. That's treason.

HUONG

Then go tell your daddy that I am guilty of treason.

DAI

You forget yourself, Huong...(THINKING ABOUT IT FOR A MINUTE) Okay. go ahead and tell her you'll marry her if that's what it takes to get her to finish those drawings. Personally, I don't give a damn. My only interest in you is your knowledge of the Citadel And my only interest in her is her drawings../ SERIOUSLY)...Huong, you realize that they could make the difference between living and dying for a great many of your friends and countrymen. With these (LIFTS DRAWINGS), we will be able to make sense of this maze of buildings and plan the movement and positioning of our troops.

HUONG

I need assurance that she will be okay. Something more than a reference to policy.

DAI

That's all I can give.

HUONG

(DEMANDING, BESIDE HIMSELF) I need more. A lot more.

DAI

What more?

HUONG

(SEARCHING) I don't want her hurt. Understand? A guarantee...A letter signed by General Giap. A letter assuring her safety.

DAI

Don't be absurd.

HUONG

I've had all I can take. And I can't take any more. You want me to help you destroy the Citadel and you won't even give me a letter? You and your whole god damn army can go

to hell.

DAI

You love to play with fire, don't you....Okay. A concession..... If she completes the drawings, then I give you my word as an officer that I will do my best to get a letter of safe passage signed by General Giap for her....If she doesn't finish or if you tell her....then there'll be no letter.....I can't do more than that.

HUONG

We'll do drawings of all parts of the Citadel. As many as humanly possible. But without the letter, you'll never find the rest.

DAI

(ANGRILY, SLAMMING TABLE) Dammit, don't play with me!...(HUONG IS SILENT) Allright. But you keep the drawings. Not that woman. Begin making photographs of them, organize them with your pictures of the building. When it's over, we'll return them to you. (WITH SLIGHT SMILE) Who knows, maybe a monument to you and Ms Ayer will be built on this very spot....(PAUSES, STUDIES A TROUBLED HUONG DAI MOVES INTO A LIGHTER TONE OF VOICE.) Keep her away from the CIA house, and you have nothing to worry about. The volunteer teachers, that journalist-great care will be taken to save those Americans. That's the policy. That plus the letter will be truly powerful protection for your friend. It doesn't matter if our people get blown to hell....But we must save the innocent Americans so that they can go to the PX and buy beautiful silverware.

HUONG

You about finished? (REFERRING TO THE MUD THAT HAS BEEN TRACKED ON THE FLOOR) And scrape your boots on the stones next time you come here. That's why I put them near the door.

DAI

(FLASHING ANGER) You will never learn, will you. You will do everything exactly as I have ordered you to. And whatever you do, don't try to leave Hue with that woman. If you do, I'll have you both shot when I catch you and I will because a picture of you in uniform and of her will go up in every village in the country....If I don't catch you, then the Americans or Saigon will....Do you understand?

End of Scene 10

ACT II
Scene 11

HUONG LIES DOWN ON THE COT WITHOUT ACKNOWLEDGING DAI WHO STORMS OUT. A FEW MOMENTS LATER, HE RISES, TAKES HIS OVERCOAT AND HAT, WALKS OUTDOORS AND SINGS.

(Song #13)

There's Nothing Left of Time

**The night is dark and full of clouds;
there's nothing left of time anymore.**

**Once happy people sang in the streets,
made love in the fields of stars;
and life was what it seemed and should be—
a thing of time and love. But for me,
there's only night and foolish hopes
and dreams that linger on,
though I know it's gone.**

**Grass should not grow,
and sun should not shine,
reminding us how it was in a time.
And sleep itself should die—
it makes us dream
of things that cannot be.**

NOT SEEN OR HEARD BY HUONG, CHARLENE IS DOWN RIGHT LOOKING AT THE RIVER. THERE IS A GREAT CALM AND RADIANCE EMINATING FROM HER AS SHE SINGS "Twelve's A Lonely Hour." THIS SHORT SONG, PLUS THE ONE THAT HUONG JUST SANG ("There's Nothing Left of Time") AND THE ONE THAT THEY WILL SING TOGETHER SHORTLY ("When Someone Holds Your Hand") CAN BE CONCEIVED THEMATICALLY AND MUSICALLY AS THREE PARTS OF ONE PIECE.

(Song #14)

Twelve's A Lonely Hour

**By the windy cold river,
on the streets of Hue at night—
silence of children sleeping,
and even the hills are quiet**

**Twelve's a lonely hour;
soldiers stare as I walk by;**

**moon and my tangled mind
are upon the magic waves.
And I've known since forever,
that he has won my heart.
Now I sing of us, together;
soldiers smile and understand.
I dance in the moonlight
cause I just gave my heart away.**

HUONG BUTTONS THE OVERCOAT TO HIS NECK AND PULLS THE HAT LOW TO FIGHT THE DAMP COLD. HE WANDERS AND COMES ACROSS CHARLENE WHO IS DOWNSTAGE RIGHT LOOKING AT THE RIVER.

HUONG

(SURPRISED TO FIND CHARLENE. HUONG IS DEEPLY TROUBLED.) Charlene' I thought you'd be in bed by now. It's not safe here at the river.

CHARLENE

(LOOKS CAREFULLY AT HUONG) What's happened to the happy young man I left earlier?

HUONG

It's nothing....With plans for the wedding.... will you still have place in your mind for our project here?

CHARLENE

Is that all you're worried about? Those drawings...the completed project will be the gift I bring you as a dowry. And you will write the best dissertation ever written. And you will become Doctor Huong.(HE PUTS HIS ARM AROUND HER WAIST.) This place has brought us together. It's very special to me too....If you like, we can both work like crazy and have it done...by...When?...Mid-January? Before the Lunar New Year? Before Tet? (HUONG NODS. CHARLENE'S CHANGING THE DIRECTION OF HER REMARKS INDICATES THAT SHE HAS COMMITTED HERSELF TO THE NEW DEADLINE.) The Perfume River...not the best translation....The River...The River of Fragrance....That's a little better. Isn't it absolutely gorgeous-the moon playing hide-and-seek with the clouds. Mysterious shapes in the dark waters. How many generations of lovers have stood where we are standing now and been hypnotized by the magnificence of moments like this. (CHARLENE SINGS.)

(Song #15)

When Someone Holds Your Hand

I

(Charlene:)

**When night gets this way,
when colds nips your ears and nose
and someone holds your hand.
When you could run and dance,
and sing the night away,**

**but somehow you just stand close by a
and hold his hand.**

II

(Huong:)

**When night gets this way,
when river moves the moon along
and we hear distant songs.**

**When troubles fall away
into the flicking waves,
and nothing is not as it seems—
a night of dreams.**

End of Scene 11

ACT II
Scene 12

IT IS DECEMBER 23, 1967. BEN AND RENEE ARE DECORATING A CHRISTMAS TREE IN HER HOUSE. THE TIME IS 5:30 P.M.

RENEE

My goodness, but you're slow. Why don't you get out of my way and fiddle with your guitar or something.

BEN

We could say screw the tree and mess around before they get here.

RENEE

(BEN TRIES TO GET A LITTLE FRESH WITH HER.) No, Ben....We...I have to finish. God made one big mistake when he put testosterone in little boys instead of a brain.

BEN

(HE PICKS UP HIS GUITAR AND BEGINS STRUMMING.) Speaking of which. Dummy is beside himself. He's been playing poker non-stop with the GI's at MAC-V. If they win, he puts up cash. If he wins, they give him things from the PX. Did you know that at one time he was a professional gambler. He was so good at counting cards that they told him to stay away from the casino or he would get hurt bad.

RENEE

Presents for his lady in Dalat?

BEN

Yeah. He can hardly wait. I never saw an old guy so...devoted.

RENEE

I still don't know how he managed to set up the Christmas party in Dalat instead of Saigon. But it is far more beautiful there. It'll be nice to see everyone. Are you all packed?

BEN

Yep. Toothbrush, socks and underwear. Is Charlene coming?

RENEE

No. I think she should, though. She and Huong are working on his project day and night 1 m worried about her.

BEN

You worry about everyone. She's radiant, happy. Huong too, in his own way.

RENEE

He really should go to Dalat. Counterpart leaders are expected to attend things like that. Every volunteer in the country has heard of their engagement.... We'll have a big bag of gifts to bring back for them....You're right, I suppose...! worry too much. They need some time alone.

BEN

Speaking of which, do you want your gift now?

RENEE

Can it wait for a moment?...*(NO ANSWER)*...Do you have something in your bag?

BEN

Not in my bag....in my heart.

RENEE

Oh, Ben. You're such a dope.

BEN

You won't even have to stop your frantic decorating. I call it, "Song for Renee." (HE BEGINS TO SING.)

(Song #16)

Song for Renee

**I have all that I need in you;
No nothing more nor less will do.
A sunny sky, with blue wind
rushing by is grey without you.**

**Wherever we might go,
for sure, I'll be by your side.
So when we're old and grey,
I'll have no more than only
this to say:**

**I have all that I need
in you alone--all of my life,
I will sing this song.**

**It's true I'll tell you with my years.
Though I may stumble sometime fall,
I'll tell you this, believe it if you can:**

**You are all and everything to me;
please let me be your life.**

AS BEN IS SINGING, FIRST DUMMY AND THEN HUONG AND CHARLENE SHOW UP AND SETTLE THEMSELVES IN CHRISTMAS WARMTH. RENEE JOINS THEM, AND IS FOLLOWED BY HAL, WHO QUIETLY ENTERS. ALL APPLAUD AT THE END OF THE SONG.

BEN

That is from me to You-Know-Who. The next one is from Huong to You-Know-Who.

HUONG

(EMBARRASSED) You...want me to sing? (BEN NODS.)...I'm afraid I can't.

BEN

(EVERYONE BUT CHARLENE URGES HIM TO SING) You're outnumbered.

HUONG

I...don't know any.

BEN

Hal, I happen to know Huong can read music. Can I have him do the piece you gave me last week? (BEN TAKES OUT SHEET MUSIC.)

HAL

Huong, I know this guy, Vernon Johns, in Saigon. The only poems he writes are about friendship and labor unions....To make a long story short, he wrote this and I sent it to a guy back in the States and he added music. You want to give it a try?

HUONG

No...But what choice do I have?

BEN

None....(BEN SETS MUSIC WHERE HUONG CAN SEE IT.) We'll take it at this beat....one, two , three, four. The introduction is four bars. Okay? Let's go One Two Three, Four. (HUONG BEGINS SINGING AFTER THE INTRODUCTION.)) '

(Song #17)

Christmas Friends

I

**Here's to friends
who've traveled
from a distant place
to celebrate
this Christmas time—
so welcome now.**

II

**Our gifts are wrapped
in paper bright
just like our hearts
set free by trust,
friendship held true
throughout the years,
across the oceans,
mountains high.**

III

**And now let us drink a toast
to pledge on this night
to be true in spades
to what we think is right,
to what to us is dear—
that is what we are,
this is who we'll be, forever.**

AFTER HE FINISHES SINGING, HUONG SPEAKS. HIS VOICE IS EMOTIONAL.

HUONG

I wish you a very merry Christmas. A very....

HUONG CANNOT CONTINUE AND TURNS AND EXITS SWIFTLY CHARLENE EXITS TO FIND HUONG. HAL FOLLOWS AFTER A FEW SECONDS.

BEN

I say I deserve a round of applause for directing the decorating of that tree.

DUMMY

It's beautiful, Renee. (BEN AND DUMMY APPLAUD. DUMMY HANDS HER A PRESENT.) From me to you. I'm sorry I gave you a rough time with all of my requests. Open it. If I pester you too much, you are hereby authorized to use it.

RENEE

(OPENS GIFT TO FIND A SOMEWHAT UNDERSIZED, HOLLOW, IRON CLENCHED FIST AT THE END OF A 15-INCH METAL ROD. IT WAS MADE BY DUMMY.) It's beautiful. Really. Exactly what I need to get some guys around here into line. (TAPS BEN WITH IT. HE PRETENDS PAIN.) Exactly. (TO DUMMY) Did you make it yourself?

DUMMY

Yep. At one point in my life, I was a sculptor. They called me that, anyway. I just welded things together....The symbolic meaning is that you need an iron fist but don't really have one. Now you do.

RENEE

(KISSES DUMMY ON THE CHEEK) That's a very sweet thing to say, Dummy. Thank you ever so much.

DUMMY

(ADMIRING TREE) You know, there's something beautiful about a Christmas tree. At another point in my life, I was seeing a woman who left the same tree with the same decorations up for three Christmasses. Never took it down. You are going to leave it up until after Tet, aren't you?

CHARLENE ENTERS.

RENEE

I hadn't thought about it, I guess. Why not? They're both celebrations. You will like Tet Charlene. You've never seen so many flowers in the market and children playing the dragon and lion and everyone singing.

CHARLENE

Huong is fine...just exhausted. Hal's taking him home in a taxi....Tet's what...about four weeks away?

RENEE

It'll fall on February 2 this year.

BEN

(BEGINS PLAYING "AULD LANG SYNE." BEN POINTS TO CHARLENE WHO STARTS SINGING THE SONG, THEN DUMMY, RENEE, AND FINALLY BEN JOIN IN THE ACTUAL SINGING.

End of Scene 12

ACT II
Scene 13

HUONG'S REBUILT GUARD HOUSE IN THE CITADEL. IT IS 10 O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING FOUR DAYS BEFORE TET. CHARLENE ENTERS FROM THE BEDROOM WRAPPED IN A HEAVY, DARK PINK ROBE THAT WAS A CHRISTMAS GIFT FROM HER PARENTS. SHE HAS DRESSED AND IS USING THE ROBE AS AN OVERCOAT THE CHILL OF EARLY MORNING IS BEING SOMEWHAT LESSENERED BY THE BRIGHT SUN, WHICH CASCADES INTO THE ROOM AS SHE OPENS WHAT IS ESSENTIALLY AN INSIDE WOODEN SHUTTER. CHILDREN OUTSIDE LIGHT A STRING OF FIRECRACKERS AND THROW THEM NEAR THE WINDOW THE SOUND WAKES HUONG. THROUGHOUT THE FOLLOWING SCENE, THERE ARE HEARD SIMILAR SOUNDS OF FIREWORKS AND SINGING AND CHILDREN SHOUTING AS SHE IS REACHING FOR THE PORTFOLIO, HE COMES THROUGH THE BEDROOM DOORWRAPPED IN A HEAVY DARK BLUE ROBE THAT IS OTHERWISE IDENTICAL TO HERS.. THEY LOOK AT EACH OTHER AND LAUGH.

HUONG

Which of your parents has the sense of humor?

CHARLENE

My mother. My father probably said that such a gift would encourage some sort of immoral behavior. He did pack them, though. I could tell by the careful wrapping. My mother can't do things like that.

HUONG

(EMBRACING CHARLENE) He was right, you know...about encouraging one kind of behavior.

CHARLENE

Without a doubt. (THEY KISS.)

HUONG

I have a confession to make.

CHARLENE

Well go find a priest. I'm more interested in sinning than in forgiving sins.

HUONG

You know, I have had....encounters with several women.

CHARLENE

So I could tell. You're very good at some of those....maneuvers.

HUONG

But I had never slept all night with any of them. It really is without comparison. All night, our bodies, our skins touching, pressing each other with nothing between. How many.....

CHARLENE

I certainly don't mind doing....those things, but I don't like to count....My god, it's nine o'clock.

HUONG

So? Let's go back to bed until noon.

CHARLENE

Someone will see me.

HUONG

Take some vegetables out the back door and then head for the front door. Like you're making your first visit of the day. Old Vietnamese trick.

CHARLENE

I've got to get back to my house before noon. Or tongues will start to wag....What time did we finally go to bed. It seems like years ago.

HUONG

It must have been two-thirty.

CHARLENE

I was so sleepy that I barely remember what we were working on? (REFERRING TO PORTFOLIO WHICH SHE IS OPENING) We are finished...at least I think we are.

HUONG

We are....(SPREADING RECENT DRAWINGS ON TABLE).! can't really believe it. It was four months, but it seemed like four years. These are so very important to me....to us...to Vietnam. The first part of my dissertation is done. In the second part, I will use all of them to describe in detail movements in the Citadel on important occasions and suggest the underlying meanings. Vietnamese are very much inclined to see underlying meanings, but not to discuss them.

CHARLENE

Then you'll be able to work at the University. After we return from the wedding in Saigon, I will never leave this city. For me, it is the center.

HUONG

For me, you are the center...the house at the center. (THEY KISS.)

CHARLENE

Not that again. I'm hungry. Let's go get some cafe sua and pastries. Are you dressed? (SHE REMOVES THE ROBE REVEALING A SKIRT AND BLOUSE.)

HUONG

No....(TAKING HER BY THE HAND AND LOOKING AT HER) Maybe it would be a little more wise to not spend every night together. The organization would get very nervous. And I don't want them sending you to some godforsaken place in the Delta.

CHARLENE

Oh, I do agree. I couldn't stand being away from you.....So many firecrackers.

HUONG

If you think there's a lot now, just wait for the eve of Tet. That's still four days off. It will make you deaf.

CHARLENE

(GOING TO THE WINDOW) And the flowers...Where do they get them all? (SHE TURNS AND SINGS AS HUONG CAREFULLY PACKS UP THE DRAWINGS IN THE PORTFOLIO AND PUTS THEM NEXT TO THE DOOR.)

Song #18
The Time of Tet

I

**The time of Tet is here;
it seems that everyone
is selling flowers
to each other;
smiles are everywhere,
and love is in the air.**

II

**Great dragons roam
the streets of Hue;
young children shout
and run and play,
and war seems far away.
Oh let it stay that way.
Oh let it stay that way.**

CHARLENE

Are you taking these with you? (REFERS TO DRAWINGS)

HUONG

I want to have them copied. There's a shop that can make 35 millimeter slides.

CHARLENE

You know Huong, you worry too much. You're a little like Renee that way.

HUONG

I know their true value....In time, you will too.

CHARLENE

Put them away. Copy them later. Now, we have to see what's happening outside. (SHE OPENS THE DOOR AND SEES MISTER NGUYEN. THE MAKER OF CAROUSELS.) Ong Nguyen! Ong man gioi, khong?...Ya. Ya co...(PAUSE).....Mister Nguyen says that the carousel is ready.

HUONG

You go ahead. I'll meet you at his place in about 20 minutes.

CHARLENE

See you there. (EXITS)

HUONG GOES INTO HIS ROOM, AND WE HEAR WATER RUNNING. AFTER A SHORT TIME, THE FRONT DOOR OPENS AND DIA ENTERS. HE PICKS UP CHARLENE'S ROBE AND KNOCKS SOMETHING DOWN, UNINTENTIONALLY MAKING NOISE. HUONG ENTERS, HIS FACE IN A TOWEL.

HUONG

I said not to wait for....(HE SEES DAL.)

DAI
I agree. I can't wait much longer.

HUONG
Do you have the letter from Giap.

DAI
General Giap.

HUONG
Do you have it?

DAI
Yes. How about your end of the deal?

HUONG
They're done.

DAI
All of them?

HUONG
All that you need.

DAI
Is this some sort of game? You said you would do all of the Citadel.

HUONG
It's not a game. I want that letter. When you examine them, you will be satisfied.
(TAKING A SHEAF OF TYPEWRITTEN PAGES FROM A HIDING PLACE) Here's
a guide to the drawings. With this, any fool can interpret them. (DAI EXAMINES THE
PAGES.) I was going to have slides made today. And the originals-when will I get them
back?

DAI
(ABSORBED BY THE PAGES HUONG GAVE HIM) I will do that today. It will take
the photographer quite a while to make multiple slides of all these. (MATCHING THE
DRAWINGS TO THE PAGES) This is far more useful than your knowledge could have
ever been.

HUONG
When will the offensive begin?

DAI
Soon.

HUONG
The eve of Tet?

DAI
A tacit truce will be observed until after the New Year.

HUONG
Like the tacit declaration of no fighting in Hue?

DAI
There never has been fighting in Hue.

HUONG
Give me the letter. We have worked very hard for this. She deserves it. And what about
the original drawings? When can I pick them up?

DAI
Yes. (GIVES HUONG THE LETTER INSIDE A SMALL LEATHER CASE) Examine

it carefully. It was not easily secured.

HUONG

(EXAMINES THE LETTER. PUTS IT BACK IN THE CASE) For you, the drawings are valuable for the offensive. For me and Vietnam, they are invaluable period. Please, please get them back undamaged. And I would like to have a set of slides made for' myself. I will pay for them.

DAI

You have your letter! What more can you ask?

HUONG

(WITH INCREASING DESPERATION) A set of slides. And these originals....(DAI IS SILENT.) Can I get them from the photographer? I must know!

DAI

You can pick up your set tomorrow afternoon from our man.....General Giap has personally asked for the originals. So they will probably go to the War Museum in Hanoi. You and Ms. Ayer will become famous. And she doesn't even know what she's done... And who will remember Dai. No one.

HUONG

(DISTANTLY) You have what you need. Goodbye. Charlene's waiting for me.

DAI

Don't try to leave Hue.

HUONG

If I left, I couldn't come back. I'd prefer to be dead.

DAI PICKS UP THE PORTFOLIO. TURNS AROUND AND LEAVES WITHOUT ANOTHER WORD. LIGHTS FADE.

End of Scene 13

ACT II
Scene 14

CHARLENE IS WALKING AROUND STARRY EYED. SHE HAS JUST SAID GOODBYE TO SOME OF HER STUDENTS, WHOM SHE MET BY ACCIDENT SHE IS HOLDING TWO BOUQUETS OF FLOWERS. THE WOODEN HORSES HAVE BEEN COMPLETED AND ARE BRILLIANT AND FESTIVE IN THEIR COLORS COLORED LIGHTS AND MUSIC REPLACE THE CROWD, UNLESS ACTORS ARE PLENTIFUL IF THEY ARE, GIRLS IN AO DAI'S, THE TRADITIONAL DRESS, WITH FRESH CONICAL HATS FLUTTER LIKE BUTTERFLIES, LAUGHING AT BOYS WHO ARE FASCINATED BY THEM. MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN CALLED BA'S SMILE WITH TEETH BLACKENED BY BEETLE NUT WHICH THEY CHEW CONSTANTLY. MEN CONCENTRATE ON CHINESE CHESS. THE CALLIOPE FROM NGUYEN'S FLYING HORSES PLAYS "MERRY-GO-ROUND."

CHARLENE

(SPOTTING HUONG IN THE CROWD) Huong! Huong! Over here. (HUONG ENTERS) It s beautiful....beautiful. I've never seen anything like it.

HUONG

(TRYING TO OVERCOME HIS GREAT CONCERN) I never get over it. The people are so happy about Tet, and that the rain is gone, and the sun is shining, and the air is clean and dry.

CHARLENE

In just over four months, I will be your bride. Forever and ever.

HUONG

You overestimate my value.

CHARLENE

(REACHING A RARIFIED ZONE) Alone, we are nothing. But together, we are like the sun and the moon in the sky.

HUONG

You are definitely becoming more Vietnamese than me.

CHARLENE

I am more myself than me....Look at those horses reared back...litde mirrors every-where, (SHE TOUCHES SOME OF THE MANY, TINY MIRRORS GLUED TO VARIOUS PARTS OF THE HEAD, ADDING A DELIGHTFUL AIROF FANTASY) eyes bulging manes flying, nostrils opened wide. Mister Nguyen has carved out an expression of...extreme anticipation in those blocks of wood. Who would have ever guessed that he would understand the depth of those great emotions?

HUONG

Those things are in all of us. But you're right. You have to know exactly where to reach and not be afraid when you see them.

CHARLENE

I want to ride. I promised Mister Nguyen.

HUONG

Usually, those rides are for children.

CHARLENE

I promised Mister Nguyen. And besides, I want to fly with those horses who know what it is to want something with all of your heart. (MOUNTS. THE HORSES START MOVING-FOR REAL, IF THE SET ALLOWS; THROUGH A PLAY OF LIGHTS IF IT DOES NOT. CHARLENE SINGS TO THE ACCOMPANIMENT OF THE CALLIOPE.)

(Song #19)

Merry-Go-Round

I

**Let's go like this forever;
Don't stop the ride no never.
Forget what you were doing
over the foaming waves.**

II

**When you are here,
the soft winds blow
over my troubles.
The dreams we'll dream
are endless,
so make them all come true.**

III

**Our time is running;
our angels coming;
so let us meet them halfway,
where heaven has
dark brown eyes.**

End of Scene 14

ACT II

Scene 15

IT IS 3 A.M. ON THE MORNING OF TET. A SOUND LIKE DISTANT FIRECRACKERS IS HEARD. CHARLENE, DRESSED IN PAJAMAS AND HER PINK ROBE, IS SLEEPING IN THE ARMCHAIR BESIDE THE CHRISTMAS TREE WHOSE LIGHTS ARE STILL BURNING AND A LARGE SIGN THAT SAYS: "HAPPY NEW YEAR OF THE MONKEY." THE SOUNDS HAVE AWAKENED RENEE, WHO HAD DRUNK TOO MUCH WINE AT THE PARTY TO GREET TET. THERE ARE SOME OF THE NEW YEAR'S HORNS AND HATS WHICH THE VOLUNTEERS HAD SAVED FROM THEIR OWN PARTY ONE MONTH BEFORE AND USED AGAIN TO WELCOME THE MONKEY.

DURING THE SCENE, THE RANDOM SOUND OF FIRECRACKERS IS REPLACED BY THE DISTANT SOUND OF RIFLES, MACHINE GUNS AND EXPLOSIONS BEING ANSWERED BY OTHER RIFLES, MACHINE GUNS AND EXPLOSIONS.

RENEE

(OBLIVIOUS OF FIGHTING) Charlene....Charlene! (SHE STUMBLES TO THE TREE AND TURNS OFF THE LIGHTS.)

CHARLENE

(WAKES UP) What? Is Huong here?

RENEE

No. He never showed up. You should go to sleep in your bed....Ben and Dummy got very, very drunk. God, the champagne was flowing. (HOLDS HER HEAD WITH HER HAND) I want to sleep for at least a year....

CHARLENE

Do you think he got in some kind of trouble?

RENEE

Who? Huong? No. Turn off the lights and turn in. He'll be here tomorrow. It's 3 a.m. People don't go anywhere at 3 a.m. I do wish they'd stop those damn firecrackers.

CHARLENE

I'm worried. That sounds like shooting... and it's coming from the direction of the Citadel.

RENEE

Firecrackers....They don't fight in Hue. Go to bed and put a pillow over your head.

CHARLENE

Can I use the radio in your room?

RENEE

(STANDING ASIDE FOR CHARLENE TO GET THE RATHER LARGE SONY PORTABLE RADIO) Okay, don't go to bed and don't put a pillow over your head. See if I care. (EXITS TO HER BEDROOM, CLOSING DOOR)

CHARLENE

(SHE HAS SOME TROUBLE EXTENDING THE ANTENNA AND TURNING THE RADIO ON TO HEAR A SENTENCE JUST ENDING).....on Saigon. Reports are also coming in of fighting in Nha Trang and Pleiku. These could be localized and minor breaches of the cease-fire in observance of the Lunar New Year, or it could be that the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army are launching a coordinated attack against positions held by the Americans and the South Vietnamese Army. We will go live now to

David Schomhurst who is reporting from Phu Bai, Vietnam: Although no major attacks have yet occurred at the large airport here, fighting in the nearby town of Phu Bai is very heavy with many casualties in a U.S. compound there. More detailed reports on fighting in Hue were just recorded in a report from BBC newsman Ian Helson:

CHARLENE

(RUNS TO THE DOOR TO RENEE'S ROOM, OPENS IT AND RUSHES INSIDE)

Renee. Renee! They're fighting in Hue. (CHARLENE EMERGES FROM THE BEDROOM FOLLOWED AFTER A WHILE BY RENEE.) It's the BBC. Listen.

RADIO This is Ian Helson of the BBC reporting from the U.S. military compound in Hue the revered cultural capital of Vietnam. Until now, there was, by tacit agreement, no fighting here. It seems, however, that that policy has been reversed by the Viet Cong and the Army of the People's Republic of Vietnam, which have apparently begun a joint siege of the city, despite a country-wide cease-fire in observance of Tet, the Lunar New Year

Havoc, confusion and accusations of betrayals of trust are coming out of the South Vietnamese Regional Commander's headquarters south of the Perfume River This wide waterway separates the northern part of the city, which includes the four-mile-square Citadel from the southern part which was built largely under French influence Anti-Saigon forces have found their way into the Citadel and appear to have lodged themselves in the inner city, the former seat of government, and at the center of that inner city the unoccupied palace quarters of the days of royalty. Built in the early 19th century, the thick walls and moats of the Citadel are formidable, even in these days of motorized warfare. Careful and extensive intelligence work is credited with the highly successful penetration and tactical utilization of the walled city.

As I stand atop a three-story building, I can see parachute flares dropped near the perimeter of the Citadel. They illuminate several columns of smoke from fires set by mortars and small cannon now being fired from this small U.S. compound and from South Vietnamese military positions located around the city. I also see the streams of tracer rounds, bullets that bum red and eery, fired from U.S. helicopters sent from Phu Bai and Danang. More recently, I could hear the awful buzz-saw sound of an aircraft the GI's call "Puff the Magic Dragon," which can release a torrent of fire reportedly able to kill anything on a soccer field within thirty seconds. The drifting flares are now not being replaced. The helicopters too have stopped firing. Is it a momentary pause? Or is their silence due to the extensiveness of what is being called the Tet Offensive of 1968.

U.S. soldiers in full battle dress are manning positions all over this five-acre compound. Sandbags, barbed wire, and bunkers are everywhere, and the place bristles with small cannon and mortars. Only a prolonged and very intense siege could take this compound, but such an attack could begin at any moment. I return you now to David Schomhurst in Phu Bai. Thanks for a excellent report, Ian. Flares are lighting up the perimeter of this airfield, but....

CHARLENE

(TURNS OFF RADIO) Oh God. Let him be alright. Please let him be alright.

RENEE

(HOLDING CHARLENE) Huong's very clever. He's probably in someone's basement at

this very moment.

CHARLENE

But everyone knows he works for us? He will be shot if they catch him.

THE BATTLE HAS BEEN APPROACHING, SLOWLY BUT SURELY. AFTER AN INTENSE FIREFIGHT ABOUT TWO BLOCKS AWAY, THE NEIGHBORHOOD BECOMES RELATIVELY CALM.

RENEE

(STILL REACTING TO CHAMPAGNE) I suggest that we get dressed....! expect that we will have gentlemen callers of one persuasion or another before the night is done.

DURING THE FOLLOWING SPEECHES, THE TWO WOMEN PUT ON JEANS, BLOUSES AND SWEATERS AND FOLD THEIR PONCHO'S AND KEEP THEM NEARBY. THEY PACK A BASKET WITH CHEESE, BREAD AND OTHER ESSENTIALS.

CHARLENE

Oh, my god. Should I turn off the light?

RENEE

I'm not sure. It might attract the VC slash NVA. On the other hand, it might attract the GI's who might be out looking for us. I suggest we pack some food, make some tea, and listen to some Crosby, Stills and Nash.

CHARLENE

I've got an Otis Redding tape....My god. What are we talking about? People are being shot and dying down the road.

RENEE

Our chances are enormously improved if we keep our heads screwed on and keep on packing all the food we can carry and throw in some tapes. The VC adore Crosby, Stills and Nash. I'm not sure about Otis Redding.

THERE IS A KNOCKING AT THE DOOR. RENEE OPENS IT. THE VISITOR IS PHUOC WHO HAS REMOVED HIS HAT AND BOWED HIS HEAD.

PHUOC

Hello, hello my sweet passion flower.

RENEE

Come in out of that doorway. You are going to get us all shot. (SHE GRABS PHUOC BY THE COLLAR AND YANKS HIM IN. HE IS WEARING THE SIMPLE BLACK OUTFIT OF THE VC SOLDIER ALONG WITH A CONICAL STRAW HAT, SEVERAL BELTS OF BULLETS AND AN AK-47 RIFLE. RENEE'S MOUTH DROPS.) Phuoc....you...are you Viet Cong?

PHUOC

(AMUSED AT RENEE'S SURPRISE) Ha. Everyone VC. No problem. We take you to new school in hills. Very safe. Everyone there is VC. Even Saigon soldier. You teach us

English, we dream of to marry you. But you hurry.

RENEE

We have no choice, Charlene. Let's go. We'll be alright.

PHUOC

Sorry, no. (TO RENEE) Only you. Other miss be okay. She stay here.

RENEE

But she is a volunteer, the same as me.

PHUOC

No. Only you. Please. Hurry.

RENEE

(SITTING DOWN) If she doesn't go, I don't go.

PHUOC

If you no go....we....take you. You be okay. She be okay. But we hurry. Please. Don't say no. Now. Put on coat and come.

CHARLENE

Don't be foolish. He has his orders. Do what he says. If they wanted to hurt me, they would have already done so. Go and god bless you....(CHARLENE AND RENEE EMBRACE TEARFULLY. RENEE EXITS. PHUOC BOWS TO CHARLENE, WHO WIPES THE TEARS FROM HER EYES.)

PHUOC

You wait Lieutenant. He come soon. Drink tea. Eat cookie. (PHUOC TAKES ONE OF THE COOKIES STILL ON THE TABLE FROM THE TET CELEBRATION.)

Ummmm. Very good. Please don't leave. Very danger on street. Okay? (OUT OF RESPECT, PHUOC BACKS THROUGH THE DOOR.)

CHARLENE

What will happen, will happen. Maybe Huong is in someone's basement. It's inconceivable that he would sit down and let himself be taken. (THERE IS A KNOCK AT THE DOOR. CHARLENE IS HESITANT TO OPEN IT. SHE DOES SO. IT IS HUONG IN PARADE DRESS AS A LIEUTENANT IN THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY.) Huong! Thank god. Thank god. (THEY EMBRACE FOR A LONG TIME.) Oh come in. Come in. My dear Huong. I was so afraid that you had been captured. They came for Renee.-.They didn't want me.....Where on earth did you get those clothes? It doesn't matter. They helped you get to me. What's happening out there? They're destroying our Citadel, Huong. The radio said so. But they can't destroy us, thank god....(SHE REALIZES THAT HUONG HAS NOT SPOKEN.)...Are you alright?

HUONG

You'll be fine. We'll take very good care of you. In a few minutes, a black car will come for you. (HE PRESENTS THE LEATHER CASE CONTAINING THE LETTER TO HER AS THOUGH IT WERE A PRECIOUS JEWEL.)....This is the most precious gift our people could give you. It will guarantee your well being.

CHARLENE

(OPENING THE LEATHER CASE) What is it? The wedding ring? A letter?

HUONG

From General Giap, the Commander in Chief of the Army of the People's Republic of Vietnam.

CHARLENE

(TRANSLATING) "In appreciation"....(TO HUONG)..Correct me if I make a mistake...."of distinguished service to the Nation of Vietnam, I order that....(PAUSES BECAUSE SHE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND THE NEXT WORD)

HUONG

Safe passage.

CHARLENE

....safe passage be....

HUONG

Afforded....given...

CHARLENE

...given the bearer of this letter, Miss Charlene Ayer, as a person of special merit." Signed by General Giap....and several others with different colored stamps across each signature....What is this, Huong. Something you made up....some scheme like those clothes.

HUONG

For me, you are the most valuable being in the world. Second is my love for Vietnam and all that the Citadel represents. (MOTIONING TO HIS UNIFORM) This is an accident....A joke of fate.

CHARLENE

But...(INCREDULOUS)..So.....It's real? This letter? That uniform?

HUONG

Real? Yes, I suppose so.... For the present....I chose it because that was the only way I... could work in the Citadel. Long before I knew you. Then I met you and you showed me what reality is...It's having someone believe in your dreams-It's...

CHARLENE

(INTERRUPTING) So you have been...a spy? For all this time? When I met you in Virginia-you were working for the Viet Cong?

HUONG

Not the Viet Cong...the North.... Charlene, I had to get through this somehow....I...

CHARLENE

(DESPERATELY) Why didn't you tell me? I would have told you? We are....

HUONG

(ANGRILY) And what would you have done? You would have gone home, and I would never have seen you again. And if you hadn't, you would have felt that you were betraying every American in Vietnam. That was my cross. I couldn't ask you to bear it.

CHARLENE

The French priest said you were trying to carry too much weight....! wanted to help...(TOUCHES HIS CHEEK)...! knew you were alone with the most sincere noble feelings....I wanted so very much to help you. (CHARLENE SINGS.)

**Song #20
All My Love**

**All my love,
I gave you
All my love.
And now it is no more.**

**You were everything
in this old world to me,
and now it's all gone by.**

**(Answered by Huong)
All your love,
I needed all your love;
from now my life
is a shell of what never could have been.**

CHARLENE

I wanted so very much to help you.

HUONG

You did....(DAI IN THE FULL DRESS UNIFORM OF A MAJOR, QUIETLY POSITIONS HIMSELF WHERE THE AUDIENCE CAN SEE HIM, BUT HUONG AND CHARLENE CANNOT. HE IS CARRYING THE PORTFOLIO THAT CHARLENE GAVE HUONG) I was no longer alone. I can care for you...I have a friend with a small house near Hanoi He and his wife would take you in. You'd be welcome. A special car is coming for you. With that letter, you could get there easily. I'm of no more use to them. They would discharge me soon and I could take a degree at the University of Hanoi. After the war, we could come back to Hue....It's not perfect. I know that. But we would be with each other for as long as we live.... Of course I can't stay here...And neither can you. When the Americans mush using their enormous power, Hue will be in ruins.

CHARLENE

The shame my parents would feel...especially Daddy. He would never talk to me again. He couldn't. Even if he wanted to.

HUONG

If only we didn't have to make choices.

CHARLENE

God, I love you, Huong. How could I ever choose to live without you?

HUONG

(ENTHUSIASTIC) So you'll go...to Hanoi. Tell me so that we can set this in motion I don't have much time. I must get back to the Citadel....We are in control of most of the city, I believe. But no one knows about resistance or a counter-attack. I am in charge of a company. Those men depend on me.

CHARLENE

Could I go to meet Renee?

HUONG

No...She'll be safe. But you will have a...different level of protection.

CHARLENE

Why? That letter....Why would General Giap be interested in me?

DAI

(CLICKING HIS HEELS) Good evening, Miss Ayer. Nice to see you again. Huong we /- have obligations. The car is here for her.

CHARLENE

(SPOTTING THE PORTFOLIO) What are you doing with that. They're my drawings...our drawings. (WITH HIGH ANXIETY)...Give them to me. (SHE RUSHES TO GRAB THE PORTFOLIO. DAI PUSHES HER AWAY.) Huong...Why does he have them? What's happening?

DAI

Miss Ayer, go to the car. I cannot assure your safety if you stay here. Huong, we must get back...now.

HUONG

(WITH GREAT URGENCY) Charlene, go to the car. You can't stay here. These people will risk their lives for you. And I have to go with Major Dai. There is no more time. I will be in touch.

CHARLENE

(CRYING) Why? Why would they risk their lives for me? I know it's because of this (SHE HOLDS UP LEATHER CASE WITH LETTER). But why would....

DAI

(REFERRING TO THE PORTFOLIO) These have been invaluable to us. Huong demanded the letter.

CHARLENE

(IN SHOCKED OUTRAGE) Huong? Did you give him the drawings?... (HUONG IS SILENT.) Is that why we've been working night and day on them?

HUONG

(INTERRUPTING) I made a difficult choice. Now, we have a choice. A chance to be together.

CHARLENE

(CONTINUING) So they could find their way around all of those buildings and make war and destroy the Citadel? Was there any truth in anything you told me? Was it all a horrible trick to make your invasion succeed? (SHE BEGINS TO SOB IN ANGER AND LOSS AND BETRAYAL. SHE THROWS AN ASHTRAY AT DAI AND RUSHES AT HIM.) Give those to me. They're mine. (SHE TRIES TO TEAR THEM OUT OF DAI'S HANDS. SHE SCRATCHES HIS FACE. HE ANGRILY PUSHES HER DOWN WITH GREAT FORCE. SHE SAYS TO HUONG:) You let me sign them. I'll be shamed and disgraced and spat upon. How could you do that? (HUONG GOES TO HER.) Get away! (SHE PUSHES HUONG AWAY WITH ALL OF THE FORCE SHE CAN MUSTER.) You got what you wanted. You and that pig (REFERRING TO DAI).

DAI

(ENRAGED) Okay. That's it. Huong. Move. Now! That's an order.

CHARLENE

(TO DAI) You are beasts. Both of you. (SHE GETS UP AND RUNS AT DAI AGAIN ATTEMPTING TO GRAB THE PORTFOLIO.)

DAI

(SCREAMS) Huong! (DAI PUSHES CHARLENE DOWN AFTER SHE HAD GOTTEN HOLD OF THE PORTFOLIO, WHICH DAI WRESTED BACK FROM HER.

HUONG

Charlene! Stop!

HUONG ATTEMPTS TO GRAB HER, BUT SHE BREAKS LOOSE AND GOES AFTER DAI AGAIN. BY NOW, DAI HAS TAKEN HIS PISTOL OUT OF ITS HOLSTER AND FIRES TWICE WHEN CHARLENE REACHES HIM. HUONG RUSHES TO CHARLENE, BUT SEES THAT SHE IS VERY MUCH DEAD.

HUONG

Oh, no. Tell me it isn't so. (HE CRADLES HER HEAD AND ROCKS BACK AND FORTH.)

DAI

It's finished. I had no choice. (HUONG CONTINUES TO ROCK BACK AND FORTH.) ...Huong, come to your senses. You'll be shot for desertion if you don't get back to your men now. Right now! I'm willing to forget this if you come with me.-.now. (HUONG SLOWLY REACHES FOR HIS PISTOL. IT IS OBVIOUS THAT HE IS THREATENING DAI.) Don't do this, Huong. I have never liked you, but I don't want to hurt you (HUONG CONTINUES TO SLOWLY TAKE THE PISTOL FROM THE HOLSTER.) Dammit, Huong. Drop it on the floor. Now!... If that's what you want, point the damn thing at me and I'll do it.

HUONG MOVES THE PISTOL SO THAT IT IS POINTING DIRECTLY AT DAI. DAI FIRES TWO ROUNDS, KILLING HUONG.) THE SOUND DRAWS IN HAL, WHO SEES DAI WITH HIS PISTOL STILL DRAWN THEN HE SEES CHARLENE AND RUSHES TO HER. DAI EXITS. HAL SEES THAT HUONG IS DEAD AND THAT SHE IS DEAD. HE KISSES HER ON THE LIPS AND GENTLY SETS HER HEAD DOWN AND STRAIGHTENS OUT HER DRESS SLOWLY HE STANDS AND SINGS "WHO AM I," WHICH CHARLENE HAD SUNG EARLIER.

(Song #& Repeated)

Who Am I

**Blue wind sky
in the nightfall;
dark birds to no one call;
I see no one now**

**at all.
Nor hear her voice
in lovely moons,
nor feel her touch,
oh where am I.**

**When the suns of spring
are in season,
and evening's full of song,
I laugh and then,
I hear your voice,
and then I am in
the nightfall--**

**Where silence is
simply sadness;
and I don't see children smile.
You are always with me,
I live in dreams,
I just don't know
who am I.**

End of Scene 15

Epilogue

Lights grow increasingly blue and dim on the death scene, but stay up somewhat on Hal. They become slowly more and more white as he slowly crosses to stage left where he exchanges his field jacket for the costume he wore in the prologue. Keeping Hal visible will possibly reduce the inclination of the audience to assume that the entire play is at an end. After a long pause during which Hal is lost in memory, he begins to sing without accompaniment the first words of "Remembering." Understated musical accompaniment joins him.

(Song #1" Repeated)**Remembering****I**

**Remembering
that's all I do.
Though years may pass,
you still rush back
like yesterday
sunlit in Hue.**

**You found your star;
your dreams came true
like fantasies
that fade at dawn
but move into my memory.**

II

**It's over now
but that time has run
into my heart
with every sun.**

**'Til yesterday
tomorrow brings,
I'll be in Hue
Remembering.**

THE COOL LIGHT HAS CHANGED INTO THE FULL ILLUMINATION OF THE PRESENT. AS IN THE PROLOGUE, BALY ENTERS AFTER A CURSORY KNOCK HE IS ELEGANTLY DRESSED IN HIS WEDDING SUIT WITH A FLOWER IN THE LAPEL HE IS CARRYING A SMALL WHITE BOX, WHICH HE SETS CAREFULLY ON THE TABLE.

BALY

Hal, where you at, man?

HAL

I'm ready.

BALY

And I'm late. You'll come in my car. Let's go. Barbara will fry me. (BALY REACHES IN me a bundle.

HAL

Right (BALY TAKES THE CARNATION OUT OF THE BOX ON THE TABLE AND ARRANGES IN ON HALS LAPEL.) You do look sharp.

BALY

Rented, but nice. (REFERRING TO THE CARNATION) That's fine. (EXTENDING HIS FOOT.) Dig the spats, man.

LIGHTS DIM. THE "WEDDING MARCH" BEGINS SOFTLY AND INCREASES IN VOLUME. VUI, THE YOUNG MONK, HAS ASSUMED THE POSE OF A MINISTER READY TO PERFORM THE RITES OF MATRIMONY. HE IS STANDING ON A PODIUM UPSTAGE. STUART, STEVE, VICH AND PHUOC ARE THE SEATED MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION. BARBARA, IN APPROPRIATE WEDDING DRESS ENTERS FROM STAGE LEFT, PROCEEDS TO DOWN CENTER STAGE, WHERE HAL IS WAITING. HE WILL GIVE HER IN MARRIAGE. BALY ENTERS FROM UPSTAGE LEFT AND WAITS FOR BARBARA DOWN LEFT OF VUI. HAL WALKS BARBARA UPSTAGE TO MEET BALY. VUI SPEAKS.

VUI

Do you, Barbara Fields love Balford Deville and want to be with him until the end of time?

BARBARA

I do.

VUI

And do you, Balford Deville love Barbara Fields and want to be with her until the end of time.

BALY

Uhhhhh...Uhhhh...(BARBARA DISCREETLY DRIVES HER HEEL INTO THE BACK OF BALY'S LEG.) Oh, yes. Without question.

VUI

Then I pronounce you man and wife.

BARBARA AND BALY KISS AND ARE SHOWERED WITH RICE. THEN, THEY STAND ASIDE AS HAL ESCORTS RENEE IN THE SAME FASHION TO BEN, WHO ENTERS IN THE SAME FASHION. RENEE IS WEARING A MORE SUBDUED WEDDING DRESS-AND BEN, A MORE SUBDUED SUIT.

VUI

Do you, Bennet Hoggins love Renee Dupuis and want to be with her until the end of time.

BEN

Yep. Longer, if possible.

VUI

Then I pronounce you man and wife.

A SHORTER SHOWER OF RICE GREETES RENEE AND BEN. HAL THEN ESCORTS JEANNE, A VIETNAMESE LADY WE HAVE NOT SEEN IN THE PLAY TO DUMMY WHO HAS ATTEMPTED TO DRESS APPROPRIATELY BUT HAS NOT QUITE SUCCEEDED.

VUI

Jeanne thi Hoa, do you love Joseph Skins and want to be with him until the end of time?

JEANNE

I do.

THEY KISS AND SLOWLY STAND ASIDE. LIGHTS DIM EXCEPT ON HAL WHO STEPS UP TO REPLACE VUI ON THE PODIUM. ALL OTHERS GATHER WITHOUT FANFARE TO UPSTAGE LEFT AND RIGHT IN ORDER TO AVOID DRAWING ATTENTION FROM DAI, WHO ENTERS FROM DOWNSTAGE RIGHT IN FULL MILITARY DRESS AND POSITIONS HIMSELF AS DID HAL EARLIER. AFTER HE IS IN PLACE, HAL SPEAKS. ALL MUSIC STOPS.

HAL

Friends, we are gathered together here today to pay tribute to those who have gone before us, blessed with the divine gift of humanly love. That and that alone is what makes life worth living and death worth dying. It has the strength to lift us out of ourselves and give us life everlasting, it enables us to heal ourselves and those we hold dear It gives us the supreme power to forgive....and be forgiven.

THE POOL OF LIGHT ON HAL FADES AND COMES UP ON HUONG WHO ENTERS FROM UPSTAGE LEFT IN THE FULL TRADITIONAL DRESS OF THE VIETNAMESE GROOM. HE POSITIONS HIMSELF AS DID BALLY, BEN AND DUMMY THE GRAND FINALE ENTRANCE IS CHARLENE, IN THE FULL WHITEWEDDING DRESS WITH VEIL OF A WESTERN LADY. SHE WALKS IN FROM DOWNSTAGE LEFT, MAGNIFICENTLY LIGHTED IN AN OTHER-WORDLY SHADE OF BLUE. SHE IS LOFTY AND IN THE SPIRIT OF PROFOUND HAPPINESS. SHE TAKES DAI'S ARM AND THEY CROSS UPSTAGE TO MEET HUONG. DISTANT STRAINS OF "MERRY-GO-ROUND" ARE HEARD UPON HER ENTRANCE. THE CHORUS ONSTAGE SINGS THE WORDS OF THE SONG SOFTLY.

HAL

What has been put together in heaven, no human being can pull asunder. And these two spirits are surely and inseparably joined for always and evermore.

HUONG LIFTS CHARLENE'S VEIL AND KISSES HER THE ORCHESTRA PLAYS THE SECOND VERSE OF "REMEMBERING". HAL BEGINS SINGING. HE IS JOINED BY THE CHORUS ONSTAGE.

**(Song #1)
Remembering**

2nd verse, repeated as necessary

II

**It's over now
but that time has run
into my heart
with every sun.**

**'Til yesterday
tomorrow brings,
I'll be in Hue
Remembering.**

As Hal begins singing. Huong and Charlene begin to waltz. After they have gracefully danced around the stage twice, they are joined by other couples, one by one. (NOTE: At the discretion of the director and/or the actors playing Baly and Ben, those two characters can together ask that the audience join in the singing of this verse of "Remembering.") The sparkling atmosphere is enhanced by colored lights reflected off the many mirrors of the carousel horse's head. This head has been elevated and revolves as the dancers dance, and the stage becomes dark, except for the horse's head, which itself fades slowly, ending the play.

Curtain