

EARTH CAKE

Written by

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Inspired by true events

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EXT. ANIMATION - VIETNAM VILLAGE - DAY (HÙNG DYNASTY 1632 BC)

Hùng Dynasty 1632 BC, a young prince named **LANG LIEU**, barely in his **twenties**, dashes through the village barefoot in his impoverished clothes. Sweat glistens down his brow as he skillfully weaves through the bustling marketplace, dodging VILLAGERS. LINH'S female folklore voice narrates his journey.

NARRATOR LINH (V.O)

Once upon a time, there was a young prince named Lang Lieu who had twenty-one brothers but he was the most humble and poorest prince of them all.

Several of his BROTHERS draped in opulent royal robes, parade past him on their trophy horses, and golden chariots, bullying Lang Lieu to move out of their way.

Lang Lieu is shoved forcefully to the side, sending him sprawling into a puddle of mud. Undeterred, he quickly bounces back to his feet, mud dripping from his clothes, as he sprints with determination towards the Royal Palace.

He exasperatedly reaches the palace, last one to enter.

INT. ANIMATION - ROYAL PALACE - CONTINUOUS

He enters the grand hall, twenty-one of his brothers and the venerable King await his late arrival. The brothers snicker at his soiled attire.

NARRATOR LINH (V.O.)

Lang Lieu ultimately made it to the Royal Assembly as the weary King began his announcement.

THE KING

After defeating the Ân enemy, we are finally at peace. I have decided I will abdicate and pass the throne to whoever deems worthy to be King.

A riot of bewilderment ensues. The King silences them.

THE KING (CONT'D)

To honor our ancestors, I decree that whoever can prepare the most impressive dish for our filial piety shall be rewarded with the crown.

(MORE)

THE KING (CONT'D)  
(They all exclaim with  
excitement)  
You have until the end of the year  
to present your creation.

All the princes scramble to begin their requisition.

EXT. **MONTAGE** - VIETNAM, FAR WEST, MOUNTAINS - DAY

Various brothers, armed with their finest weapons, hunt or fish to capture the most exquisite creatures.

Many, travel as far west with their grandiose chariots, horses, or camels to trade for the most exotic dishes.

Others ascend the highest mountains or conquer the farthest reaches with their SERVANTS to gather the rarest flowers or plants.

NARRATOR LINH (V.O.)  
All the princes eagerly sought the most luxurious, rare, exotic dishes, scouring far and wide for the most unique delicacies. However, Lang Lieu, the poorest and loneliest of them all, was left to struggle alone after his mother passed away from illness when he was just a young boy.

INT. ANIMATION - LANG LIEU'S MOTHER'S BEDROOM - DAY **FLASHBACK**

**LITTLE LANG LIEU, eight years old**, prays beside his dying MOTHER in bed as her spirit ascends to the heavens.

EXT. ANIMATION - LANG LIEU'S HOME - DAY (TIME-LAPSE)

Lang Lieu learns everything on his own. He builds his own house, grows crops, raises a pig farm, and navigates many challenges along the way.

NARRATOR LINH (V.O.)  
Without guidance and little money, from an early age, Lang Lieu had to learn everything on his own... When the time came to prepare the most remarkable dish, he was at a loss.

Lang Lieu squanders around trying to figure out what to do but ends in despair.

INT. ANIMATION - LANG LIEU'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (1632 BC)

At night, tossing and turning in bed, a motherly SPIRIT illuminates in his dreams.

NARRATOR LINH (V.O.)

One restless night, as he tossed and turned, a spirit appeared to him in a dream and offered him some advice.

SPIRIT

Between heaven and earth, nothing is more precious than rice. Rice is the pearl that feeds the people and you never grow tiresome of it. Take the glutinous rice, knead it until smooth, and mold it into a *round* shape to embody the sky.

In his dream, Lang Lieu did exactly that. He picks rice, kneads it until smooth, and forms a polished circle. He then raises it towards the clouds, emulating the full moon as it beams down upon him.

SPIRIT

Pick the purest unbroken rice, pack it tightly, filling it with earthly ingredients that nature provides into a *square* to symbolize the earth.

His dream continues as he follows the Spirit's guidance. He carefully handpicks the purest unbroken rice and packs it into a square with lá dong leaves. He gathers some mung beans, soaks them, and then layers them with pork strips on top of his square rice.

SPIRIT

Take the lá dong leaves, and wrap them up, just like the embrace of mother nature's love.

Lang Lieu wraps it with the leaves, and in that moment, the Spirit wraps her arms around him like a mother's hug. It was comforting... A flash of light appears and the Spirit vanishes.

NARRATOR LINH (V.O.)

All of a sudden Lang Lieu wakes up, startled but enchanted by the dream.

EXT. LANG LIEU'S HOME - DAY (HÙNG DYNASTY 1632 BC)

Lang Lieu works endlessly, day and night until he perfects his creation.

NARRATOR LINH (V.O.)

The next morning --inspired-- he rushed out and worked tirelessly to make his dish.

INT. ANIMATION - ROYAL PALACE - DAY (HÙNG DYNASTY 1632 BC)

As the year draws to a close, everyone prepares for the first full lunar moon. All the princes along with their servants, present their elaborate dishes to the King.

NARRATOR LINH (V.O.)

When the day arrived, all the princes showcased their extravagant, delectable, exotic dishes. Only Lang Lieu's dish appeared modest.

The King samples all of the ostentatious dishes. But when it's time for Lang Lieu to present his, the King is bewildered by its simplicity in contrast to the rest.

THE KING

This is unusual, my son. Why is your dish unlike the others? So simple, round, and square?

Lang Lieu respectfully explains.

LANG LIEU

Dear Father, a spirit came to me in a dream and told me, 'Between heaven and earth, there is nothing more precious than rice. It is the treasure of mankind. Our people depend on it every day, yet never grow tired of it.'

The King perceivably agrees.

LANG LIEU

The spirit guided me to knead the rice into a round, smooth shape --bánh dày-- to represent our heavenly sky, and to shape the rice into a square shape --bánh chưng-- with our most wholesome essentials, to symbolize our precious earth.

The King, intrigued, takes a bite of bánh dày with pickled vegetables and is awestricken. He then takes a bite of bánh chung and chews slowly with concentration. His eyes bold as the mixture of mung beans, fatty pork, and glutinous rice melts together extraordinarily.

NARRATOR LINH (V.O.)

The King inquisitively sampled the dishes and was enthralled by the complimentary flavor melting in his mouth.

THE KING

This is exquisite--so rich, so unique, yet so wholesome. It is the most delicious dish I've ever tasted. No other dish compares. A taste of heaven and earth, a perfect representation of our filial piety! You, my son, are the winner and our new King.

The King dubs his hands on Lang Lieu's shoulder. Lang Lieu graciously bows and kneels before his father. A domino effect ensues as everyone in the royal assembly praises and kneels to the King and the future King.

EXT. ANIMATION - TIÊN MIEU - TEMPLE - DAY (HÙNG DYNASTY)

At the temple shrine, the King bows and prays to his parents and ancestors. Lang Lieu and the rest of the royal family follow suit.

NARRATOR LINH (V.O.)

By the end of the year, the King brought the prize dish to the temple as an offering to his parents and ancestors.

INT. ANIMATION - ROYAL PALACE - DAY (HÙNG DYNASTY)

Lang Lieu sits on the throne, now a strong and mighty KING.

NARRATOR LINH (V.O.)

Lang Lieu became king and reigned for many prosperous years, while his brothers protected and guarded the treacherous rivers and mountains.

EXT. ANIMATION - VIETNAM COUNTRYSIDE MAP - DAY

The map spreads out, showcasing towns and villages allocated to each brother. Wooden blocks pop up on riverbanks and mountains, forming protective barriers around the villages.

EXT. ANIMATION - TIÊN MIEU - TEMPLE - DAY (TIME-LAPSE)

Villagers bring bánh chưng and bánh dày to the temple. As each MONARCH passes on, more shrines accumulate as time progresses.

NARRATOR LINH (V.O.)

The tradition and celebration continued for thousands of years during *Tet*, our Vietnamese Lunar New Year. Everyone brought offerings to their kings and loved ones. Bánh chưng became the hallmark dish, celebrated to this day.

EXT. ANIMATION - VIETNAM VILLAGE - DAY (HÙNG DYNASTY)

Epic MUSIC. Birds-eye-view sweeps over the villages as everyone celebrates Tet and *makes* bánh chưng. The animation morphs into LIVE ACTION to modern-day Vietnam.

TRANSITION:

### **LIVE ACTION**

TITLE SEQUENCE:

#### **"EARTH CAKE"**

Inspired by true events

EXT. VIETNAM VILLAGE - PRESENT DAY

Birds-eye-view, SCOURING over a Vietnamese village, then targets a villager's home before landing on a pair of calloused HANDS prepping BÁNH CHUNG.

Various essentials proliferate over the kaleidoscope forecourt; golden mung beans, viridescent lá dong leaves, ivory glutinous rice, scarlet ribbons, pink strips of fatty pork, brindled wooden square mold, silver stockpots, and a cauldron ablaze on a wooden fire. Steam arises, blanketing over the bustling floor.

VIETNAMESE WORKERS assiduously make bánh chung; creasing the leaves in the square brindled wooden mold, spreading out the glutinous rice, topping it with pork slices and mung beans, then permeating another layer of glutinous rice atop. Pleating leaves, wrapping foils, tying strings, and dumping them into the cauldron of boiling water.

FAMILY working tirelessly, their necks ache as they bend and stretch their backs. Linh's contemporary voice continues.

LINH (V.O.)

Vietnamese people continue to make bánh chung to this day. It has evolved into a *family* tradition, requiring immense commitment, vigorous hours to prep, and staying up *all* night... It was something my parents made into a business in Vietnam. But the tradition continues every year long after we settle in America. --I hated it!

SCREECH!

INT. AMERICA, FAMILY ROOM - DAY (LINH'S FLASHBACK 1981)

TITLE CARD: ORANGE COUNTY 1981

**Little LINH, four years old**, flings open her bedroom door, flabbergasted by the dead-corpse odor of slimy pork guts across the floor.

Her **mother TIEN, thirty-three**, AXES a pig with a chopping knife.

Little Linh SCREAMS and immediately submerges back into her room SLAMMING the door behind her.

LINH (V.O.)

As a kid, I never understood why we clung to this exasperating tradition. This labor-intense, painstaking, sleepless nights, back-straining ordeal. The smell of a pig's corpse, guts hanging out, and blood splatter, makes me wanna puke! For a while, I couldn't even eat pork.

Various shots of her family enduring neck and back pain, sleep deprivation, and exhaustion as they buff and wrap bánh chung.



INT. LITTLE LINH'S ROOM - DAY (LINH'S FLASHBACK 1981)

Little Linh regurgitating.

INT. SUPERMARKET, MEAT SECTION - DAY (PRESENT DAY 2019)

TITLE CARD: January 2019

Foreground -slimy pork strips, background is **Linh** peering through the glass, now **forty-two years old**, creases between her knitted eyebrows, surveying the pork.

Her gaze darts between the slimy pork strips and to the already adorned bánh chung on display. Price tag FIFTEEN DOLLARS! The heavenly lights shine down on it, calling out her name! Bells chime, "The price is right!" TING! TING! TING!

Linh is tempted.

LINH (V.O.)  
If only I could just buy it. It  
would be so much easier... But--

Linh surrenders to her temptation, forcibly answering in broken Vietnamese to the IMPATIENT BUTCHER.

LINH (SUBTITLE)  
Ten pounds of pork, please.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARENTS' DRIVEWAY - DAY (PRESENT DAY 2019)

The garage door stands ajar: **Mother TIEN**, now **seventy**, decrepit with ancient hair, perched by the garage, resting her crinkled hand on her cane while she basks in the morning sun. Her weary eyes droop as she exhales the condensed air.

Jimmy Eat World's song "Work" ascends as Linh's car pulls up the driveway.

SONG  
"Can we take a ride? Get out of  
this place while we still have  
time?"

Linh sings passionately along with the lyrics as she parks the car waiting for the chorus to end before shutting it off.

SONNY, in the passenger seat, listens to his own AirPods to evade his mom singing.

He's a striking **mixed-black** adolescent with curly black hair and brown skin, barely **eighteen**, wearing stylish attire. He grabs the grocery bags and exits the car. Both he and Linh carry their Vietnamese iced coffees. (cà phê sua đá.)

Sonny passes his grandma and greets her in Vietnamese.

SONNY

Chào Bà.

She accepts.

Linh treads past her mother wanting to elude her but compels to stop. She musters up the courage and turns to her, in Vietnamese.

LINH (SUBTITLE)

Mom, it's cold, why are you sitting out here?

TIEN

Your dad used to sit out here all the time.

LINH

I know, but you shouldn't, you're gonna get sick.

TIEN

I'm already sick.

LINH

I'll get you a blanket.

Linh attempts to go but her mother stops her.

TIEN

I'm perfectly fine. The sun is keeping me warm.

Linh restraints and forces herself to grab a chair. She sits down next to her. Mother Tien did not expect this. They both soak in the sun and sit in silence.

Linh takes a sip of her cà phê sua đá.

TIEN

A girl drinking too much coffee is not good for you.

Linh gets irritated.

LINH  
Why can't we just have a peaceful  
moment without your criticism?

Mother Tien says nothing. Now it's an uncomfortable silence,  
then...

TIEN  
Did you get the peonies?

LINH  
Yes.

TIEN  
Good. We should get going soon.

Mother Tien pats Linh's hand. Linh fixates on it for a  
moment.

LINH (V.O.)  
I don't recall the last time my mom  
ever touched me unless it was for a  
spanking.

**FLASHBACK - LINH'S POV**

INT. AMERICA, FAMILY ROOM - DAY (LINH'S POV FLASHCUT 1981)

A quick snippet of Little Linh, **four years old**, receiving a  
SPANKING from her mother.

LINH (V.O.)  
To her, emotions are a sin, at  
least that's how I justify her  
impenetrable heart. After all, she  
didn't marry my dad for love, it  
was arranged.

EXT. VIETNAM, CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY (FLASHBACK 02/08/1966)

A black-and-white PHOTO of beautiful young Tien, seventeen,  
wearing her white veil, looking unhappy.

EXT. VIETNAM, SCHOOLYARD - DAY (LINH'S POV 1966)

TECHNICOLOR: Beautiful young Tien, effervescent with piercing  
eyes, is enthralled as a red phoenix flower plops on her flip-  
over-sixties hair. She looks up vibrantly at a massive red  
phoenix tree (hoa Phuong,) the centerpiece of the grandiose  
schoolyard.

Her gaze shifts to a YOUNG STRIKING GENTLEMAN holding his books and chatting among his FRIENDS. He coquettishly glances back at beautiful Tien.

LINH (V.O.)  
My mom was in love with another  
man, but fate intervened and she  
had to marry my dad.

INT. VIETNAM, ONG NGOAI'S HOME - DAY (LINH'S POV 1966)

Young Tien feuding with her parents @ NG NGOAI and B@ NGOAI, both in their forties. [Every dialogue in Vietnam will be in Vietnamese.]

TIEN  
I don't want to marry him!

Ong Ngoai SLAMS his hand on the table.

ONG NGOAI  
You can't argue back! I say you are  
getting married, and that means you  
are getting married!

TIEN  
But I don't even know him!

ONG NGOAI  
You don't have to know him. The  
matchmaker says he's the one, then  
he is the one, that is final!

Young Tien sprints out, fighting back her tears.

EXT. VIETNAM, CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY (FLASHBACK 02/08/1966)

Black-and-white PHOTO of beautiful Tien donning her white veil, looking unhappy; transforms to LIVE ACTION as she poses for the camera, containing her sadness.

LINH (V.O.)  
The obedient daughter that she was,  
married someone she did not love.

Beautiful Tien steps into a luxurious car with her **handsome groom, THANH**, barely nineteen.

As the car drives away, Tien catches sight of the young **STRIKING GENTLEMAN** breaking through the waving crowd, desperately chasing after her.

Her hand presses against the glass window, reaching out to him one last time as the car speeds up too fast for him to catch up.

LINH (V.O.)  
 She closed her heart and shifted  
 her focus to business, selling  
 merchandise and food.

EXT. VIETNAM MARKET - DAY (LINH'S POV - FLASHBACK 1967)

Beautiful Tien sells various merchandise and seasonal food. She is PREGNANT but barely showing.

Tet, Lunar New Year arrives and all the merchandise transforms into tet items: cherry blossoms, firecrackers, red envelopes, red seeds, sweet treats, tet games, pickled vegetables, giò lua, bánh dày, etc., and BÁNH CHUNG.

LINH (V.O.)  
 The most popular item was her bánh  
 chung. Everyone loves my mom's bánh  
 chung.

CUSTOMERS amassing all the bánh chung like a swarm of bees. The young **striking gentleman** appears, pining for her attention, and offers her money in exchange. Tien notices him and hands him the bánh chung. They lock eyes, fixating on each other for a moment.

She places her hand on her baby bump. He realizes it and swells up. Disheartened, he surrenders himself into the swallowing crowd, drowning amid the chaos.

Beautiful Tien's new husband, **handsome Thanh**, arrives and attempts to assist her in her glory but she discounts him and seizes all the attention from the swarm.

LINH (V.O.)  
 The distance between my mom and dad  
 only intensifies. Dad gradually  
 became cold and it spread toward  
 us, their children. They were our  
 parents but they were not our Mom  
 and Dad. At one point, my dad  
 almost divorced my mom.

INT. AMERICA, CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY (LINH'S FLASHBACK 2007)

At Brother Vinh's wedding, an **aging Thanh, now sixty**, trudges up the cathedral podium and gives a speech. Seated in the front, Linh and Mother Tien listened.

THANH (SUBTITLE)  
 If it weren't for God, I would've  
 divorced my wife a long time ago.

Linh pans up astonished by his comment. She turns to her mother, Tien, searching for a reaction, but there is none.

INT. AMERICA, PARENT'S APARTMENT - DAY (LINH'S POV - 1986)

Linh, **nine**, along with her **BROTHER VINH, thirteen**, and **BROTHER QUANG, seventeen**, pretzeled on the floor making bánh chung while they watch their father Thanh, **thirty-seven**, hefts his suitcase out.

SLOW MOTION: Mother Tien, **thirty-seven**, sits motionless with her back turned as Father Thanh exits, slamming the door behind him.

A Vietnamese calendar pinned on the wall by the door features a picture of a TIGER that reads JANUARY. The calendar flips to February with the NINTH circled in red for Tet.

TRANSITION:

INT. AMERICA, PARENT'S APARTMENT (LINH'S FLASHBACK 1986)

The calendar marks X one by one each day as it gets closer to Tet but stops on EIGHT. Zooms in on the ninth circled in red.

LINH (V.O.)  
 One more day before Lunar New Year.

SLOW MOTION: Mother Tien and the children are on the floor making bánh chung. Tien veers over her shoulder, expecting the door to open.

The door flings open, and Father Thanh rolls in, plonking his suitcase down. Mother Tien and the children gaze up. Tien and Thanh's eyes meet.

LINH (V.O.)  
 Eventually, he came back to Mom. No one knows for sure why, maybe it was because it was their anniversary. Who knows. We never talk about it.

Father Thanh strolls over, squats down, and joins the family in making bánh chung.

LINH (V.O.)  
 And little has changed. --They  
 remained cold until we started  
 having kids of our own.

EXT. HOSPITAL LABOR ROOM - DAY (LINH'S POV 2008)

Brother Vinh, **thirty-six**, and his wife **MAI, mid-thirties**, giving birth. The NURSE hands **BABY SIMON** to the parents. Mother Tien, and Father Thanh, **sixty**, elatedly present the newborn with a knockoff Kung Fu Panda gift and affectionately play with him.

INT. HOSPITAL LABOR ROOM - DAY (LINH'S POV - FLASHBACK 2003)

Brother Quang, **thirty-seven**, and his wife **TRAN, mid-thirties**, giving birth. Tran takes **BABY NATHAN** in her arms. Zooms out, Mother Tien and Father Thanh looking five years younger, stroll in with a plush knockoff of Finding Nemo to welcome the new infant.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY (LINH'S POV - FLASHBACK 2000)

Linh, **twenty-four**, with her rebellious, tousled millennial hair, sits in a birthing tub, aided by a MIDWIFE, and gives birth solo. She grabs her own **mixed-black BABY** and cradles him closely.

LINH (V.O.)  
 Actually, I was the first and  
 youngest to give birth and I was  
 alone, out of wedlock. This did not  
 sit well with my strict Catholic  
 parents, especially since he is  
 mixed-race. I was shamed and  
 disowned by my parents for a long  
 time, until many years later...

INT. PARENT'S HOUSE - DAY (LINH'S POV - FLASHBACK 2010)

Mother Tien and Father Thanh, **sixty-two**, open the door. Linh enters the house with her **ten-year-old** curly black hair son, **Sonny**. Mother Tien and Father Thanh welcome them.

Brother Quang and Tran arrive with their son **Nathan** now **seven**. Then Brother Vinh and Mai enter with their **two-year-old** son, **Simon** as well. Mother Tien and Father Thanh greet them, of course, more favorably.

LINH (V.O.)  
 The only time I saw my parents show  
 any affection was with their  
 grandkids.

The kids hug and kiss their grandparents. Mother Tien and  
 Father Thanh exuberantly return the affection.

LINH (V.O.)  
 They accepted Sonny and me back.  
 Eventually, they allowed us to give  
 them hugs as well.

Everyone hugs, and it feels good, but the moment is short-  
 lived when Mother Tien pushes all of them away.

LINH (V.O.)  
 But there were only three occasions  
 in my life I've seen my parents  
 show any affection toward each  
 other. The first time was at my  
 brother's wedding.

INT. AMERICA, CATHOLIC CHURCH (LINH'S FLASHBACK 2007)

Brother Vinh's wedding. Father Thanh delivers an emotional  
 speech.

THANH (SUBTITLE)  
 But I have to thank God for not  
 letting me divorce because it  
 forces me to realize how much I  
 love my wife.

Linh astonished! Turns to Mother Tien again, who is now teary-  
 eyed.

LINH (V.O.)  
 That was the first time I saw my  
 mom cry. Later at the reception.

INT. AMERICA, VIETNAMESE RESTAURANT - DAY (LINH'S POV - 2007)

The bride and groom are on the dance floor. Mother Tien  
 scurries to another table, trying to steal leftovers with an  
 empty container. Father Thanh snatches her, dips her  
 nosedive, and gives her a big passionate kiss.

Everyone is in shock! They reach for their camera but Mother  
 Tien shoves Father Thanh away before anyone can take a  
 snapshot.



LINH (V.O.)

Only the photographer managed to capture that moment, but Mom made sure he deleted it. So, there is no record of their first public kiss, at least to my knowledge.

Mother Tien hovers over the photographer's shoulder, ensuring he deletes every photo until she is satisfied. --Everyone is disappointed.

INT. PARENT'S HOUSE - NIGHT (LINH'S POV - FLASHBACK 2016)

Late night, dim lights. Linh sits alone at the dining table, scouring over paperwork. She glances up.

LINH (V.O.)

The second time was the night I stayed over to help with their paperwork. I was sitting at the kitchen table with a dim light. They did not know I was there.

Father Thanh's squinting eyes perk out of the bedroom as he arduously scuttles out, inch by inch. Mother Tien, hunched back, follows behind in the same manner, inch by inch trying to catch up.

Father Thanh reaches out his hand, and she grabs on. He clutches onto her fingers as he guides her through, gleefully beaming with twinkles in their eyes as they glide across the room. --It was priceless.

LINH (V.O.)

That was the first time I ever saw my parents hold hands. I was mesmerized and in awe.

INT. PARENT'S LIVING ROOM - DAY (LINH'S POV 2016)

The banner hangs across the living room reads: *"Happy 50th anniversary and Happy Lunar New Year! 02/08/16"*

Decorations of FIVES, and ZEROS gilt balloons from Party City float in the atmosphere. Mother Tien and Father Thanh emerge from their room dressed elegantly in traditional Vietnamese áo dài.

EVERYONE marvels, CHEERS, and APPLAUDS as they cross the room, passing out red envelopes. MUSIC plays in the background.

SONG  
 (New Year is Coming)  
 "Tet, Tet, Tet, Den Roi"

LINH (V.O.)  
 The third time I saw my parents  
 being affectionate was the most  
 memorable. It was their fiftieth  
 anniversary and Lunar New Year at  
 the same time.

Guests, like paparazzi, snap photos of "Bennifer" donning their formal áo dài. They are delighted to pose. Flashes and videos capture the moment as Father Thanh places his hands on Mother Tien's hips. Suddenly, she grabs his hands and wraps his arms around her tightly.

The crowd is stunned. Then she spoons his face, turns to him, and kisses him on the cheek. The mob goes wild. Pandemonium ensues as cameras flash and everyone clamors to capture this historical moment.

LINH (V.O.)  
 It was a marvelous sight--a  
 monumental moment in our family's  
 history. That was the first and  
 only time I saw Mom kiss Dad. And  
 those were the only three  
 occurrences...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PARENTS' DRIVEWAY (PRESENT DAY 2019)

Echoes of the pandemonium fade away.

Linh remains in her thoughts, recollecting as Mother Tien continues patting Linh's hand.

TIEN  
 Ready to go visit Dad?

Linh snaps back and complies.

EXT. FESTIVAL STAGE (PRESENT DAY 2019)

**Up close, AUNTIE KIM, sixty-three,** face front and center, both hands in a voguing position. She has that archetypical Vietnamese aging beauty with tattooed eyebrows, permanent eyeliner, and a long-drawn ruby lipliner adorning her face. She follows the moves to a monotonous traditional MUSIC.

FOUR FEMALE DANCERS all in áo dài (formal Vietnamese dresses) follow Auntie Kim's lead, each hand slightly following the other's, forming a wave in a very typical Vietnamese dance, on a DECORATED stage filled with Tet festivities.

A dour event coordinator, KHANH VAN, in her **fifties**, with surveying glasses, critiques their every move.

An electrician, JOO-HO, sixty-five, walks upstage with papers for Khanh Van to sign.

Auntie Kim decides to break the monotony with a quick, swift HIP-HOP move. Coordinator Khanh Van interrupts frantically.

KHANH VAN

No! No! No! What are you doing? Too fast! You need to slow down and do it correctly. Stop messing around!

Auntie Kim stops. Coordinator Khanh Van snatches Joo-ho's pen and quickly signs the papers.

AUNTIE KIM

Can't we speed up the music a little? This music is so slow even the old men watching will die of boredom.

Joo-ho chuckles as he retrieves his pen and papers.

KHANH VAN

This is traditional music. We can't speed it up.

AUNTIE KIM

Oh yes, we can! If we want to sell more tickets we gotta attract the younger crowd. Have you seen the K-pop the kids are into these days? They're really popp'n!

Some of the ladies agree. Auntie Kim glances over at Joo-ho, who winks at her. She begins to incorporate a few K-pop moves. It is unintentionally funny but surprisingly decent.

Joo-ho enjoys it, and some ladies are enthusiastic while others are amused. Coordinator Khanh Van deadpan--

KHANH VAN

Are you crazy? We are traditional dancers. That is why you ladies are called the Traditional Five. This is not America's Got Talent. Please be serious. Everybody back to one.

Auntie Kim rolls her eyes but resigns herself to the traditional dance routine. Joo-ho gestures a farewell as he heads backstage.

EXT. BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Joo-ho passes Brother Quang, Brother Vinh, their wives, Tran and Mai, and the three kids practicing their Lion Dance. Nathan, now fifteen, is having a hard time picking up Simon, ten, who is becoming too obese. Simon's adorable little sister ERICA, six, dressed in her cute mini Lion Dance outfit, cheers them on.

ERICA

Come on! You can do it!

She fans them with her lion's mouth. The whole family rallies behind them--Brother Quang beats on his DRUMS, Tran claps the CYMBALS, Brother Vinh pounds the GONG, and Mai in her ÔNG DIA costume wafts them with her leaf fan.

EVERYONE

You can do it!

As the music crescendos, Nathan braces himself for the lift. He counts silently in his head--one, two, three--before hoisting Simon into the air. His arms turn to jello, wobbling under the weight. Simon slips from his grasp and they both tumble to the ground.

Disappointment fills the room as everyone rushes to their aid. Both Nathan and Simon struggle to get on their feet.

NATHAN

Man Simon! You are getting too heavy! What have you been eating?

SIMON

I'm growing that's all!

NATHAN

Growing wider! Stop eating so much bánh bao.

Simon mad-dogs him.

Brother Quang and his wife Tran turn to Nathan.

BROTHER QUANG

We need to strengthen your arms.  
You're not lifting enough weight.

Tran massages Nathan's arms.

TRAN

We've got to add a few more pounds  
to your weights.

NATHAN

Wouldn't it be easier if he goes on  
a diet?

BROTHER QUANG

No, we only have about a week left.  
It'll be easier and faster if you  
work on your muscles.

Nathan moans.

NATHAN

Oh, man!

BROTHER VINH

(to Simon)

You have to help your cousin. Both  
of you need to do your part. We've  
got to put you on a stricter diet.

MAI

Sorry hun, no more bánh bao for  
you.

Simon groans too.

SIMON

Aww, man!

BROTHER QUANG

Okay everyone, let's try this  
again, from the top.

Everyone returns to their positions and continues their  
practice.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM (PRESENT DAY 2019)

The lifeline BEEPS as Father Thanh, **seventy**, and BALD, lies  
helplessly unconscious.

Linh ushers her mother through the door towards Father Thanh.

His etiolated face and feeble hands rest on the industrial  
bed. Tubes inserted up his nostril and down his throat, as he  
lies incapacitated.

Linh places the peonies in the glass vase next to the cherry blossoms on the nightstand; they're the only thing that's vibrant in the otherwise gloomy room.

Mother Tien sits beside Father Thanh.

TIEN (SUBTITLE)

Anh, wake up!

She gently runs her fingers up his arm. The camera follows his arm to his face as his desiccated features morph into his youthful vigorous self.

### FLASHBACK - FATHER THANH'S POV

EXT. VIETNAM CAFE - DAY (FATHER THANH'S POV 1966)

Handsome Thanh, **scantily eighteen**, smiles dreamily. He is dashing with his classy slick-back-parted haircut reminiscent of young Elvis.

Reveal from his POV, mesmerized by a **girl at the market** across the street. She is trying on a beautiful, floppy flower hat that's concealing her face.

**Another GIRL**, the same age, abreast next to young Thanh, running her fingers up his arms and calling for his attention in Vietnamese.

GIRL

Hey! Are you ready to go? Let's go!

He turns over to her. Wide shot to reveal Thanh's GROUP OF HOODLUM FRIENDS, all waiting and waving at him to come.

HOODLUM FRIENDS

Come on! Let's go!

The girl tows Thanh towards the group. They all gather and enthusiastically gallant off to the night out on a town.

INT. VIETNAM, ÔNG NOI'S HOUSE - DAY (THANH'S POV 1966)

In a distinguished upper-middle-class living room, handsome Thanh sits perched on a stool, center stage, while his father ÔNG NOI, in his **forties**, lectures him in Vietnamese.

ÔNG NOI

Every night you go out! You are a man now; you can't go with those girls and hoodlums anymore.

(MORE)

ÔNG NOI (CONT'D)  
 You need to get married --find a  
 good girl! Time to get you a  
 matchmaker.

Handsome Thanh sulks in his chair, meanwhile...

INT. VIETNAM, KIM'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Teenybopper **little Kim, twelve**, in her cutesy dress and ribbon pigtails, eyes wide with excitement, as she unwraps her new and latest vinyl record sent from America. She eagerly places it on her record player and slides the needle on.

She gets into her dancing position, one hand on her waist swinging her hips. THE SUPREMES come on loudly. Little Kim imitates their dance move, raising her other hand to stop as the lyrics begin--

SONG  
 "Stop in the name of love."

Then her fingers SNAP down as she sings along...

SONG  
 "Before you break my heart."

Her index finger taps a few times on the side of her forehead...

SONG  
 "Think it oh' oh'ver--"

All of a sudden, Ông Noi storms in and squawks at her.

ÔNG NOI  
 What are you doing? What kind of  
 loud music is this nonsense!? Turn  
 it off this instance! Can't you see  
 I'm giving your brother a lecture?

Little Kim's eyes pierce out into the living room and see Thanh in the background slumped in his chair.

Ông Noi darts toward the record player, the music SCREECHES to a halt. He returns to her, pointing his finger.

ÔNG NOI  
 Listen up, because in a few years,  
 you'll be next!

Little Kim sulks as well.

EXT. VIETNAM, ÔNG NOI'S HOUSE - DAY (THANH'S POV 1966)

Handsome Thanh stumbles home, hungover from another night out. He approaches the door and notices it's slightly ajar. He detects people CHATTERING and peeks in.

He sees beautiful Tien standing with her parents greeting his parents. His eyes widen as he recognizes her.

EXT. VIETNAM CAFE - DAY (HANDSOME THANH'S FLASHBACK 1966)

Handsome Thanh sits at the cafe, mesmerized by a girl from the market across the street. She looks in the mirror. Close-up on her as the floppy flower hat moves up to reveal it is beautiful young Tien.

The SALES LADY offers her a price. Beautiful Tien shakes her head and returns the hat. The lady continues to bargain, but Tien gestures "no" and detaches herself from the sale.

EXT. VIETNAM, ÔNG NOI'S HOUSE (THANH'S FLASHBACK 1966)

Handsome Thanh realizes it is her. He is captivated by her beauty.

EXT. VIETNAM, CATHOLIC CHURCH (THANH'S POV 02/08/1966)

A black-and-white photograph, of handsome Thanh, dressed sharply in his wedding suit, still captivated by his bride. The image transitions into live-action as we pull back to reveal Thanh, mesmerized by Tien in her white veil, her face betrays an inner sadness. -She meets his eyes, politely forcing a smile.

EXT. VIETNAM MARKET - DAY (THANH'S FLASHBACK 1967)

A crowd swarms like bees, jostling to snatch every last bánh chung from the bustling stand. Handsome Thanh attempts to assist his new wife in her glory. She disregards his attempts and basks in all the attention for herself. His disappointment sinks in.

Meanwhile, in the background, teenybopper little Kim is lost in her own world, grooving to sixties dance music inside her head.



EXT. VIETNAM, PARENT'S BACKYARD - NIGHT (THANH'S POV 1967)

Handsome Thanh is all dressed up for the night out on the town. A pregnant Young Tien, stays busy with little Kim and the WORKERS, as they prepare bánh chung. Handsome Thanh vacates the premises with his delinquent friends, slamming the backdoor behind him, unnoticed by anyone.

EXT. VIETNAM, PARENTS' BACKYARD - MORNING (THANH'S POV 1968)

Young Tien now carrying **baby Quang**, clutches a document in her hand, anxiously pacing back and forth.

The workers and little Kim prep the bánh chung.

Handsome Thanh staggers home, reeking with alcohol, and visibly hungover. Young Tien crowds over him and starts howling in Vietnamese.

TIEN

Where have you been all night?

THANH

Out with friends, what do you care?

TIEN

Your friends, those troublemakers?  
You can't go out with them anymore!  
They are bad influence on you!

Thanh drunkenly mumbles.

THANH

They're more important than you!

TIEN

What? How can you say that they are more important than your family?

THANH

No, I meant they treat me... more important than you.

TIEN

That's not true! I'm the only one that cares about this family. What do you think I've been doing all this time? Working hard to make money for our family and what do you do? All you care about is going out with your friends.

Thanh burst out a frivolous laugh.

TIEN

You can't keep doing this anymore. You have a family and a business to take care of. We need you here, as much as possible.

THANH

Now you care what I do? Seems like you're doing perfectly fine without me.

TIEN

Because of the war, we're losing workers, and I need you here to help. You need to decide--are you going to be a part of this family or be with your hoodlum friends? Who is more important to you? You can't have both. Either it's your family or your friends.

THANH

Oh, so it's because of the war, you need my help. Now you're giving me an ultimatum? Forget it, you've already made the choice for me.

Tien shows Thanh the draft papers.

TIEN

Here's your ultimatum, either spend whatever time you have left with us or with your friends.

Tien swells up as Thanh grabs the paper. He analyzes it and then laughs it off.

THANH

Why are you upset? I thought you would be pleased to see me go. Or is it because everyone is gone, now you need me?

Tien begins to sob.

TIEN

Stop being so cruel. We need you here.

THANH

Oh is that all?

Thanh snickers and turns away.

TIEN

I need you here! I don't want  
anything bad to happen to you.

She convulses uncontrollably. He turns back to her.

THANH

Are you really crying?

Tien turns away, trying to control her emotions. Thanh  
realizes that she is serious.

THANH

So you do care for me.

TIEN

No, I don't.

THANH

Oh come on, just be honest with me  
for once.

TIEN

Yes, I do care and I don't want you  
to go. You have a family now.

Thanh can't believe his ears.

THANH

That's the first time you've ever  
said anything even remotely nice to  
me.

She wipes her tears.

TIEN

I don't want you to die.

He realizes Tien's sincerity and moves to comfort her. Baby  
Quang lets out a soft coo.

THANH

You don't know how happy I am to  
hear you say that.

(assures her)

I'm not going to die! Don't worry,  
you have nothing to fear. I'll take  
care of everything. I'll be the  
best husband and family man you've  
ever known. I'm not going anywhere.  
You'll see!

Thanh dashes off, leaving Tien perplexed.

TIEN

But you said you're not going  
anywhe-

Before she can finish, he is already out the door. Tien is baffled as she sways baby Quang and resumes her work.

INT. VIETNAM, PARENTS' BEDROOM - LATER (THANH'S POV 1968)

After an extensive day of work, and waiting for her husband, young Tien embeds baby Quang down next to her and they both drift to sleep. Day turns to dusk. LIGHT GOES DIM.

TRANSITION:

INT. VIETNAM, PARENTS' BEDROOM - DUSK (THANH'S POV 1968)

Beautiful Tien remains nestled in the same position until she is awakened by the sweet sound of music drifting in from outside.

SONG

(A Tet Song for My Love)  
"Bai Ca Tet Cho Em."

The baby is absent, replaced is a present wrapped in red ribbons with a note in Vietnamese. She reads it.

*"I bought this for you a long time ago but somehow could never find the right moment to give it to you until now... Know that I have always loved you from afar and now forever close in my heart. I will always be there for you. From now on, my friends are my enemies; family first."*

Beautiful Tien opens the present to find the floppy flower hat she had tried on at the market. Her face lights up. She goes to the mirror and places it on her head, admiring it. Hearing the music, she follows the melody outside.

EXT. VIETNAM, PARENTS' BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Beautiful Tien steps outside and sees handsome Thanh, cigarette dangling from his mouth, squinting as the smoke floats to his eyes. He's holding baby Quang, teaching him how to make bánh chưng. Baby Quang coos as Thanh catches Tien coming out with the hat. He is captivated by her radiant presence.

She approaches him coyly blushing. He wraps his arms around her and she falls in. He gives her a passionate kiss, but she presses him away--

TIEN  
Not in front of the baby.

He surrenders and releases her.

The machine BEEPS.

INT. AMERICA, HOSPITAL ROOM (PRESENT DAY 2019)

Mother Tien and Linh watch Father Thanh as the machine continues to BEEP.

LINH  
Ba! Please wake up. It's almost Tet  
and we promised to take you home  
for Tet but how can we if you are  
unconscious? Please wake up.

But there's no movement, only somber beeps echoing through  
the destitute atmosphere.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BOBA SHOP (PRESENT DAY 2019)

Sonny sits alone at a table for two, nervously sipping his  
boba tea. His features are reminiscent of his young  
grandfather's but with darker skin. Another drink, a matcha  
latte, condensates on the table next to his. He takes another  
anxious sip, hoping to calm his nerves.

SOPHIE, **eighteen**, sweet and sassy, burst into the scene with  
her bouncing pigtails and anime backpack. Spotting Sonny, she  
waves excitedly with her doe-eyes and darts towards him.

He waves back and takes another nervous sip as she tackles  
him with hugs and kisses.

SOPHIE  
I miss you so much!

Sonny rains in on all the kisses until she finally settles  
into her chair and hoards her drink.

SOPHIE  
Thank you, sweetie!

She takes a big slurp.

SOPHIE  
Mmm yummy! Matcha latte with cheese  
foam!

Sophie is in bliss. She scoots closer to Sonny and picots his arm tightly.

SOPHIE

It seems like forever since I last saw you. How's Grandpa doing?

SONNY

He's okay. Still stable but hasn't woken up yet.

SOPHIE

Awe! I need to visit him soon... Remember that time in fifth grade when he caught us kissing?

(titters)

I thought we were going to get in trouble, but instead, he just patted us on the head. It was such a relief. Ever since then, I thought Ông was cool!

Sonny remembers.

SONNY

Yeah, that was our first kiss.

SOPHIE

Yes, it was.

Sophie turns and kisses him. Sonny responds but then remembers why he asked her here. He eagerly separates their lips.

SONNY

Sophie, I have to tell you something.

SOPHIE

What is it?

He clears his throat and takes another nervous gulp.

SONNY

We've been together since we were kids. I've loved you for most of my life, and I will always... But I didn't know anything else.

Sophie confused.

SONNY

I was never exposed to anything else, which leads me to this...

(MORE)

SONNY (CONT'D)

I need to be honest with you. -  
There is something I need to say.

SOPHIE

What is it?

Sophie slurps her latte.

SONNY

This is going to surprise you, and  
I'm not sure how to say it, so I'm  
just going to say it. I'm not  
trying to hurt you, but I --I think  
I'm gay.

Sophie's mouth freezes midway slurping her matcha latte, her  
mouth nearly explodes with cheese foam. He waits for her  
reaction.

SONNY

Please say something! I'm really  
sorry. I didn't want to tell you  
until I was sure. I think I'm sure.  
Actually, I know I'm sure, but I  
didn't know how else to tell you,  
so I just had to come out and say  
it! I'm so sorry. Please say  
something.

Sophie, still shell-shocked, GULPS down her drink and then  
gasps for air.

SOPHIE

Wow! It finally came out.

SONNY

What?

SOPHIE

Took you long enough.

Sonny is in dismay.

SONNY

What do you mean?

SOPHIE

I've known you for a very long  
time. I was just waiting for you to  
come out. I had no idea it would be  
now. I thought I'd be prepared, but  
here it is.

SONNY

What do you mean you knew? I didn't even know. How could you have...?

SOPHIE

I know you better than anyone.

SONNY

Then why didn't you tell me?

SOPHIE

It's not my job to tell you. You had to figure it out for yourself when you were ready. I had to wait for that moment to come, and finally, it's here.

SONNY

So you waited all this time? No way! Why would you stay with me?

SOPHIE

Of course, I stayed. I still love you. We've been together for so long, that love doesn't stop just because you're... Maybe part of me hoped I was wrong or at least hoped you were bi or trans or something, so we can still be together. But you are definitely gay!

SONNY

What!? What does that suppose to mean? How could you be so sure when I barely figured it out myself?

SOPHIE

Come on, ever since we were kids, we've been playing dress-up and Barbies. At first, I thought you were doing it to please me, but as we got older, I started to realize you actually enjoy it. You'd always request to be the queen or princess! We both love One Direction and BTS--I adore that about you. We had so much in common, maybe too much... So deep down inside I knew. In a way, I guess I was selfish, and in denial, so we can be together forever.

SONNY

How come I didn't know?



SOPHIE

You did, but I might've made you confused because I know you love me. You just couldn't differentiate between love and sexual desire until now... Something happened to you, didn't it?

Sonny bobs his head.

SONNY

I met a guy. I went to a gay bar. I mean, even before that, whenever I saw a hot model on TikTok or a cute guy on the street I'd get excited but I always shook it off until I couldn't anymore. I still love you, but I had to go to a gay bar to be sure.

SOPHIE

And how did that go?

SONNY

I met someone, I didn't meet him at a gay bar but I ran into him. I mean I haven't cheated on you, I won't, but we have this connection I've never felt with anyone before.

A sharp pain enters Sophie's heart. Sonny feels a deep sense of guilt.

SONNY

Oh, Sophie, I'm so sorry! I didn't mean it like that...

Sophie soaks it all in and washes it away. She reaches over to him.

SOPHIE

I'm okay, Sonny. I'll be okay. I completely understand. I've been preparing for this day for so long. I'm the one who should be sorry-- sorry for holding you back. I was selfish and naive. Can you forgive me?

SONNY

I can never blame you for this. It's not your fault. It's no one's fault. I will always love you.

SOPHIE  
I love you too.

They squeeze tightly. Sophie sniffles as she clings to him.

SOPHIE  
Can we kiss for the last time?

SONNY  
We can always kiss.

And they kiss.

Someone in the background yells.

BOBA PATRON (O.S)  
Get a room!

INT. PARENT'S HOUSE (PRESENT DAY 2019)

Linh and Mother Tien enter the house, taking off their shoes. Mother Tien shuffles towards the kitchen, while Linh advances towards her guest room.

INT. PARENTS' HOUSE, GUEST ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Linh's suitcase remains unpacked as she idles over to her desk, papers of artworks featuring an oddly O-shaped design are spread out everywhere. She flips open her laptop to review graphics of the same object and resumes her work when -  
-interrupted by her mom's cry.

TIEN (O.S.)  
Linh! Come out here!

Linh irritated.

LINH  
I have a deadline, Mom! What is it?

TIEN (O.S)  
I need your help out here! It's an emergency.

Linh ceases her work and steamrolls out towards the kitchen.

INT. PARENTS' HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Colorful variation of bánh chung, bánh day, and giò tho essentials floods the kitchen table.

Everywhere else in the kitchen are recycled plastics that Mother Tien has retained for reuse--forks, knives, bottles, containers, etc.

Mother Tien's trembling hands struggle to cut the Vietnamese sausage (giò tho.)

LINH  
What is it, Mom?

TIEN  
I need you to cut this.

Linh glares down at the table, noticing a piece of giò tho cut crooked.

TIEN (CONT'D)  
The knife is too heavy, I can't cut it straight anymore. This was your dad's job. You have to do it now.

Linh is exasperated.

LINH  
You called me out for this!

She reluctantly grabs the knife and proceeds to cut the giò tho with a gripe.

LINH  
Why do you do this? You're weak now, and Dad is no longer here to help you, so why do you make it hard on yourself?

TIEN  
You mean hard on you?

Linh disregards the last comment and persists in berating.

LINH  
We make enough money for you now, you don't need to sell this anymore. It's the twenty-first century, and we live in America, not Vietnam anymore!

TIEN  
Your job is a disgrace!

Linh stops what she's doing.

LINH

My company helps me raise my son.  
My products help women all over the  
world, building confidence, self-  
esteem, and taking control of their  
lives. Empowering women!

Linh angrily starts wrapping the gio tho while trying to  
contain her frustration.

LINH

You know nothing of the modern  
world and what my generation goes  
through as women.

Mother Tien tunes out Linh's lectures, concentrating on  
Linh's immature foiling of the giò tho.

TIEN

You're doing it all wrong! Look how  
ugly that is. A girl needs to be  
gentle with her hand. A girl needs  
to know how to prepare food  
properly.

Linh frustratingly rolls her eyes.

TIEN

A girl has to know how to cook and  
clean. A girl has to know how to  
get a good husband.

LINH

(offended)

That is so sexist, Mom, even twenty  
years ago!

TIEN

You're a girl, and you don't even  
know how to make food look  
beautiful. Your father wrapped it  
better than you.

LINH

Well, Dad isn't here, is he? And I  
have real work to do! A real job  
that provides, Mom!

TIEN

It's an embarrassment.

Linh throws everything down on the table.

LINH

I built my company from the ground up, without any of your help or support. Now, I make more money than both of my brothers combined! When will you ever accept it and respect me?

TIEN

There is no respect for what you do, only shame.

Another painful blow to Linh's self-esteem.

LINH

Fine! Let me go to my shameful job so you don't have to look at this shameful face anymore!

Linh fumes off, and Mother Tien is left feeling the weight of contempt.

The doorbell RINGS as Linh storms past, causing her to stop in her tracks. Not expecting anyone, she composes herself and opens the door, only to find her brother Vinh and sister Mai, holding Erica with Simon between them. They walk straight in.

BROTHER VINH

Hi sis!

LINH

What are you guys doing here?

BROTHER VINH

Ma said there was an emergency that needed our help.

LINH

With what?

Mother Tien interrupts, changes to a happy tune.

TIEN

Vinh, you're here! Come over and help Ma.

Brother Vinh heads over to Mother Tien, while the rest of the group greets Linh and then moves toward Mother Tien. As Linh is about to close the door, Brother Quang and his family enter.

QUANG

Hey Linh!

LINH  
Are you guys here to help too?

BROTHER QUANG  
Yep!

Linh takes a deep breath and greets them in. Then they head towards Mother Tien.

Finally, Sonny walks in as well.

LINH  
You too!? I thought you were with  
Sophie.

Sonny shrugs.

SONNY  
Grandma needed help.

LINH  
Where is Sophie?

SONNY  
We broke up.

LINH  
What? What happened?

Sonny shrugs again.

SONNY  
It's fine, Mom. It was mutual.  
We're good! Still best friends.

Sonny acts cool, reassures Linh, and heads toward Grandma. Linh is baffled but watches as everyone gathers to greet Grandma.

Linh, accustomed to the frequent mother-daughter arguments, finds her frustration subsides as she sees how happy Mother Tien is to be surrounded by her loved ones. She realizes that making bánh chung is Mother Tien's way of bringing her family together.

Kids hugging Grandma. She takes a good look at them and runs her fingers through Nathan's hair.

TIEN  
How come your hair is so long?

Linh realizes that's her way of saying "hello."

Linh imagines the same scenario from her own perspective of what Mother Tien means to say. Mother Tien runs her fingers through Nathan's hair.

TIEN

It's been a long time, I miss you.

Mother Tien bends down to Simon and squeezes his cheeks.

TIEN (CONT'D)

You are getting too fat!

Linh's POV, Mother Tien is saying...

TIEN

I love you so much!

Brother Quang goes over and hugs her. She takes it and then pulls away.

TIEN (CONT'D)

We have a lot of work to do.

Linh's POV.

TIEN

Let's spend some time together!

It's all becoming clear to Linh now, the mystery is solved!

LINH (V.O.)

After all these years, I finally understand my mom's language. Because of her oppression, she doesn't know how to express herself or display affection; she does it through criticism and, of course, through making bánh chung.

Mother Tien presents them with all the color variations of bánh chung, bánh day, and giò tho on the table. She feels nostalgic, as she envisions a past ghost of her young husband, Handsome Thanh, sitting at the table making bánh chung.

CUT TO:

**EXT. FEW WEEKS PRIOR, PARENTS' DRIVEWAY - DAY**

**TITLE CARD: FEW WEEKS PRIOR**

Father Thanh sitting by the garage, similar to Mother Tien at the beginning of the scene.

A worn brown hunting hat covers his ears, though his outgrown, disheveled HAIR still perches out. He's bundled in warm clothes, fragile and forlorn, clutching his cane as he waits, motionless like the grim reaper.

His hands and feet are stiff, he sits stagnant even as a twinge on his finger stings--only a slight twitch breaks his stillness.

LINH (V.O.)

Before my dad went into shock, he was constantly in and out of the hospital. His blood sugar would spike dangerously high, or he'd fall and injure himself. Whatever the case may be, he always managed to recover and come back stronger... until now.

#### THANH'S VARIOUS FLASHCUT

INT. DAVITA CENTER - DAY (THANH'S FLASHCUT - FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Father Thanh sitting in the dialysis machine as it reconstructs his blood.

INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM - DAY (FLASHCUT - FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Father Thanh lies in bed in pain. Bruises mark his arms, remnants of countless needles. A CARETAKER lancinates another needle in his vein, causing him to twitch as a sharp lancet pricks his finger for a diabetes test.

Several bandaids wrapped around his fingertips.

The caretaker changes his diapers, while Father Thanh lies there jaded and motionless, spirit drained, lost in resignation.

LINH (V.O.)

He was exhausted from fighting. Tired of the endless trips to dialysis three times a week, tired of needles piercing his veins, and now someone had to change his diapers.

EXT. PARENTS' DRIVEWAY - DAY (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Another sharp twinge pulses on Father Thanh's finger, but he remains rooted in his chair.



The DaVita bus pulls up to the house, yet no reaction from Father Thanh.

The DRIVER HONKS the horn, but Father Thanh stubbornly shakes his head, refusing to go on.

When the driver steps off the bus to assist him, Father Thanh snaps and scolds the driver in sharp Vietnamese.

THANH (CONT'D)  
Không đi nua!

The driver concedes, gets back on the bus, and drives off.

EXT. PARENTS' DRIVEWAY - DAY (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

The next day, the driver pulls up again. Father Thanh refuses to go on.

Mother Tien comes out, pleading with him to go but he squawks at her.

THANH (SUBTITLE)  
I'm not going!

She's taken aback and signals the bus driver to go on. The bus drives away.

INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM - DAY (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Father Thanh sits stubbornly in his bed cross-armed. Mother Tien tries to coax him out, but he will not budge.

Mother Tien heads to her closet and opens a round cookie-tin-can. Inside are her sewing kit, buttons, coins, pins, an envelope LETTER, and her flip phone. She picks up her phone and dials.

INT. LINH'S BUSINESS BUILDING CONFERENCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Linh, dressed in a sharp business suit, is in deep conversation with her potential INVESTORS. Behind her are her presentation graphics featuring the oddly O-shaped design. Her phone vibrates on the podium. It's "MOM." She ignores it, focusing on her pitch.

LINH  
Investing in the O-G Spot Vibrator  
means being part of a brand that's  
at the forefront of intimate  
wellness innovation.  
(MORE)

LINH (CONT'D)

With a robust marketing strategy  
and a commitment to quality, we are  
poised to lead the market and  
deliver impressive returns.

Her phone vibrates again, it's "MOM" and three missed calls.  
Linh quickly flips the phone over, returning to her pitch.

LINH

We invite you to join us in  
redefining pleasure and intimacy.  
Together, let's make the O-G Spot  
Vibrator a household name.

Applause fills the room.

INT. OUTSIDE LINH'S OFFICE

Linh's SECRETARY watches as Linh and the investors emerge  
from the conference room. Satisfied smiles and handshakes as  
Linh walks them to the elevator.

Behind the secretary are boxes filled with pleasure products,  
stacked and ready to be shipped. The secretary's phone RINGS.  
She answers in a sultry, seductive voice.

SECRETARY

G-spot incorporation, how can I  
help you?

TIEN (V.O.)

(filtered, stern)

Daughter, please.

The Secretary quickly adjusts her tone, becoming more  
professional.

SECRETARY

Mrs. Ho! What a surprise to hear  
from you.

TIEN

Bui!

SECRETARY

I'm sorry?

TIEN

I'm a Bui! My husband is a Ho. Ken  
Jeong's wife is a Ho. We keep our  
name.

SECRETARY  
My apologies Mrs. Bui.

Just then, Linh approaches the secretary. The secretary panics and mimes to Linh, "It's your mom!" Linh's eyes widen with surprise.

SECRETARY  
Your daughter just finished her meeting, I'll connect you now. Can I please put you on hold? Thank you, Mrs. Bui.

The secretary quickly presses the hold button.

LINH  
How did my mom get the office number?

SECRETARY  
(sarcastically)  
Google?

LINH  
My mom doesn't even know what Google is... How did she sound?

SECRETARY  
Stern.

LINH  
That's normal coming from my mom.

SECRETARY  
I just hope she doesn't know what G-spot means.

LINH  
I doubt it. Just program her number into the caller ID, so no more sexy voice when she calls.

The secretary agrees and does it immediately as Linh retreats into her office.

INT. LINH'S GLASS OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Linh sinks into her chair and picks up the phone.

LINH  
Hi Mom, what's up?

INTERCUT - conversation in Vietnamese (Subtitled)

TIEN

Linh ah? Why didn't you answer my calls? I've been calling you all day.

LINH

I've been in a very important meeting, Mom.

TIEN

You need a new secretary. That girl was very inappropriate.

LINH (ENGLISH)

Yes, Mom, I'll fire her.

Outside, the secretary overhears, her eyes pop through the glass wall. Linh catches her and gives her an "I'm not firing you" shake of her head.

TIEN

Who talks like that? She's very unprofessional.

Linh derails the conversation.

LINH

Mom, what do you need? I have a lot of work to do.

TIEN

Dad refused to go to his dialysis.

LINH

That's it? That's why you call me? He can skip a day and go tomorrow.

TIEN

No, this is his third time this week!

LINH

(sits upright)

What!? Third time already!? Are you serious? Why would he do that?

TIEN

I don't know. He just refuses and doesn't want to go.

LINH

That doesn't make sense.

As Linh continues to speak, Mother Tien gapes down to secure her round cookie-tin-can but pauses when she notices her letter envelope is ajar.

Linh proceeds to irate over the phone.

LINH (V.O.)

I don't understand, Mom? Why didn't you tell me sooner? He's going to kill himself.

Mother Tien pulls out the photo, revealing it's a recent photo of her, dressed elegantly, sitting beside an old striking gentleman who resembles her old lover. They're posing together at an upscale restaurant. Mother Tien views the photo as Linh continues complaining...

LINH (V.O.)

Why would he do that? Why didn't you force him to go?

Mother Tien peeks over at Father Thanh who is still stubborn in his oblivious world.

TIEN

You know how stubborn your dad is. He doesn't listen to anybody.

LINH (V.O.)

How can you let this happen? He's going to get worse and probably die. Why didn't you reach out to Anh Quang or Anh Vinh?

TIEN

They have respectable office jobs, they can't leave. You are more flexible.

LINH

(frustrated)

I'm flexible because I'm my own boss, Mom!

TIEN

Good, so you coming?

LINH

I guess I can reschedule my appointments. I can be there in-

The phone line CLICKS--silence. Linh realizes she's been disconnected.

LINH  
(exasperated)  
Ugh! She always does this!

Linh slams her phone down, grabs her belongings, and storms out of her office, throwing a quick word to her secretary...

LINH  
Reschedule all of my appointments  
for today.

The secretary obeys as Linh dashes out.

INT. PARENT'S KITCHEN (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Mother Tien sits alone in the dimly lit living room, weariness etched across her face.

Linh arrives and sees her sitting there in the shadow.

LINH  
Where's Dad?

TIEN  
In the room.

Linh rushes in.

INT. PARENT'S BEDROOM (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Linh enters the room, Father Thanh still protesting in bed. Linh approaches him.

LINH  
Dad! What are you thinking? Missing three days of dialysis? You're going to kill yourself. Come on let's get you dressed. I'll drive you there.

Linh tries to pull him up but he remains rigid like a statue.

LINH (CONT'D)  
Dad, please.

THANH  
No, I am not going anywhere.

LINH  
If you don't get up, you're going to die. Is that what you want?

Father Thanh remains silent. Mother Tien walks in to observe.

Frustrated, Linh pleas.

LINH (CONT'D)

Dad, please! Help me help you. We  
don't want you to die.

Linh tugs at his arms, guiding them around her shoulder, and  
forces him out of bed.

LINH

Come on Dad, let's go. I don't have  
time for this--I got a lot of work  
to do.

Father Thanh angrily stands his ground and swipes everything  
off the nightstand, shouting.

THANH

I don't want to go! Leave me alone!

His vertigo kicks in, causing him to collapse to the ground.  
Mother Tien and Linh shriek, and dive to his rescue.

TIEN/LINH

Ba!

They shake him, but Father Thanh remains motionless.

LINH

We need to call 911!

Linh grabs her phone and dials. ECHOES of her voice talking  
urgently to the 911 dispatcher.

LINH

Hello, is this 911?

EXT. PARENTS' DRIVEWAY (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW: The ambulance SIRENS and flashes as the EMTs  
steamroll Father Thanh in. Mother Tien and Linh frantically  
follow in pursuit.

INT. ER HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Everything is DISCOMBOBULATED. Nurses and doctors appear  
distorted as they explain Father Thanh's condition.

DOCTOR

There is a cyst in his neck  
blocking his nerves. That's why  
he's been having trouble moving his  
hands and legs. The surgery to  
remove the cyst should be quick and  
safe, with no major issues  
anticipated.

Mother Tien and Linh listen frantically, then slowly calm down  
and comply with the doctor.

INT. DANCE STUDIO (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Close-up on Auntie Kim.

AUNTIE KIM

Five, six, seven, eight!

Zooms out, revealing Auntie Kim encircled by the four female  
dancers dressed in ORDINARY clothes. In a meager dance  
studio, they swirl their hands in an unsynchronized formation  
to a very traditional MUSIC.

Auntie Kim's phone RINGS interrupting their practice. They  
stop and catch their breath as Auntie Kim picks up her phone  
and takes a sip of her water.

AUNTIE KIM

Hello.

(pause)

What!? Hospital? Which one?

(beat)

Alright, I'll be right there!

She hangs up.

AUNTIE KIM

Hey, I gotta go! There is an  
emergency--my brother is in the  
hospital.

DANCER 1

What? What happened?

AUNTIE KIM

I don't know but it doesn't sound  
good.

DANCER 2

I hope everything is okay.



DANCER 3  
Please keep us informed.

DANCER 4  
We'll pray for him!

Auntie Kim acknowledges their well wishes and scurries out the door.

INT. TAE KWON DO STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Auntie Kim hurries over next door where Brother Quang, Brother Vinh, Tran, Mai, and the kids are practicing their lion dance. They are in CASUAL clothes.

AUNTIE KIM  
Hey! Your dad is in the emergency room. We have to get to the hospital now!

They're all perplexed. Auntie Kim rushes back outside. Through the glass window, their eyes follow her as she sprints towards her car. She turns back, noticing their bewildered faces, and urgently shouts and gestures.

AUNTIE KIM  
Come on! Grandpa is in the hospital! Let's go!

They all drop their instruments and stampede out.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

The entire family hurdles towards Father Thanh, lying on the bed.

From Thanh's POV, his eyes open slowly adjusting, bringing everything into focus. The whole family stares down at him with anticipation.

EVERYONE  
Hi Dad/grandpa! You're awake! Are you okay?

He nods. A sigh of relief as they turn back to Mother Tien hiding in the back.

LINH (CONT'D)  
Mom! He's awake!

They parted ways to clear the path for her. Linh gives Mom her spot. Everyone hovers over Mother Tien.

TIEN (SUBTITLE)

Anh huh? You are awake now? Are you okay?

He blinks and nods in acknowledgment.

TIEN

I'm sorry.

Father Thanh teary-eyed, attempts to speak.

TIEN (CONT'D)

Don't try to speak. They just did surgery on your neck, so you can't talk. We'll talk later when you're better.

Frustrated with his inability to speak, he tries to talk despite the pain. Mother Tien stops him.

TIEN

Please Anh, whatever you have to say can wait till later.

He is disheartened but gives in to the situation.

INT. PARENT'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Linh and Mother Tien arrive home and remove their shoes. Mother Tien heads directly to her somber room.

INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mother Tien inserts an old cassette tape and presses play. A song filters the room.

SONG

(A Tet Song for My Love)  
"Bai Ca Tet Cho Em"

She crawls into bed and turns over to his empty side, it's desolated.

INT. DANCE STUDIO - DAY (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Auntie Kim is alone at the meager dance studio, watching hip-hop dance videos on her phone and mimicking the moves. Joo-ho wanders in and catches her dancing, clearly entertained. She performs a twist spin-around when he abruptly enters her view, startling her. Embarrassed but playing it cool, she asks...

AUNTIE KIM  
Can giúp cái gì?

JOO-HO  
Oh, I'm not Vietnamese.

Auntie Kim reiterates in broken English.

AUNTIE KIM  
How can I help you?

JOO-HO  
I'm Joo-Ho. I'm looking for Ms.  
Nuujin? I'm the sound engineer and  
I need the location address for the  
festival.

AUNTIE KIM  
You mean Ms. Nguyễn.

JOO-HO  
Oh yes, Ms. Nygwen.

Auntie Kim rolls her eyes.

AUNTIE KIM  
It's Nguyễn... but she's not here.  
They all moved to the festival. I  
can give you the address.

JOO-HO  
That'll be great, thank you!

Auntie Kim uncomfortably scribbles down the address and hands  
it to him.

JOO-HO  
Thank you again. Oh, by the way, I  
really like your moves.

Auntie Kim embarrassingly acknowledges it as he exits.

INT. HOSPITAL HALL/ROOM - DAY (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Linh still in her sharp professional clothes, strolls down  
the hospital hallway carrying a cherry blossom vase to  
surprise her father. As she approaches the room, she  
overhears Mother Tien intimately speaking to Father Thanh.

TIEN (SUBTITLE)  
Anh, don't get the wrong idea. You  
know I care for you.

Linh falls back behind the door, careful not to disturb them, and quietly eavesdrops as her mom continues speaking, while Father Thanh remains asleep.

TIEN

I know you saw the photo, but you have to hear me explain. He's just an old friend, that's all. If you read the letter, you'll understand. It's not what you think--

Mother Tien clasps the letter in Father Thanh's hands, squeezing his hand tightly.

TIEN

Anh, you have to wake up! You have to believe me. You have to wake up so you can come home and help me make bánh chung like always. I can't do it without you.

She tears up. Father Thanh's eyes open.

TIEN

Anh, you're awake! Did you hear anything I said? You believe me right?

He nods his head. She cradles his hand and caresses his hair.

TIEN

That makes me very happy. Then you have to remember to get better so you can come home to help me make bánh chung, okay?

Father Thanh agrees and tries to speak.

TIEN (CONT'D)

You don't have to say anything, just promise me you'll get better and come home.

Despite the difficulty, Father Thanh forces himself to speak anyway.

THANH

I promise I will come home to help you... as always, family first.

His assurance brings her relief as she clutches his hands tightly.

Linh stands there bewildered. She sees Sonny coming out of the restroom, drying his hands. She signals him to stay put and peeks in to ensure if the coast is clear, it's quiet now. She motions him to enter.

Concealing her conflicting emotions, Linh enters and tries to lighten up the room with the cherry blossom, displaying them on a BARE nightstand.

LINH  
(gleefully)  
Dad, I'm so glad to see you are  
doing better! I brought these  
beautiful cherry blossoms for you  
for Tet!

Father Thanh grapples to speak.

THANH (SUBTITLE)  
When is Tet?

LINH  
In a couple of weeks.

THANH  
When do I get to go home?

LINH  
The doctor said you should be out  
in a couple of days.

THANH  
I want to go home now.

LINH  
Dad, you can't right now. Your legs  
are weak, and you can barely walk.  
You have to go to physical therapy  
first.

THANH  
When is Tet?

LINH  
Dad! In a couple of weeks!

THANH  
Why so long?

LINH  
It's not long, just two more weeks.

THANH  
When do I get to go home?

LINH  
As I said, Dad, when you get  
better.

He woefully succumbs to the situation.

EXT. FESTIVAL STAGE - DAY (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Joo-ho on an UNDECORATED stage testing out the instruments.  
He plugs in an electric guitar and begins playing a well-  
known Korean SONG.

SONG  
(Magpie's Seollal)  
'까치 까치 설날'

Auntie Kim carries a box filled with Tet decorations onto the  
stage. She gently puts it down and eavesdrops on him, clearly  
impressed.

He stops to tweak the mixer and then resumes playing. The  
AUDIO improves, and he pours his heart out playing  
passionately until the very end.

Auntie Kim CLAPS.

Joo-ho turns around, surprised but pleased to see her.

AUNTIE KIM  
That was very good.

Joo-ho modestly denies it.

JOO-HO  
Oh no, thank you. It's a bit rusty.

AUNTIE KIM  
You were great! Where did you learn  
to play like that?

JOO-HO  
Oh, in Korea a long time ago.

AUNTIE KIM  
Were you in a band?

He cracks up.

JOO-HO  
No! I wish. Almost, but my parents  
expected me to become a lawyer  
instead.

AUNTIE KIM

Lawyer? Guess that didn't work out for you.

JOO-HO

Actually, it did. I was a very good lawyer. Went to Stanford and even got my own firm.

AUNTIE KIM

Stanford? Really? Wow! How did you end up here?

JOO-HO

I chose to be here. This is where I like to be.

AUNTIE KIM

You like being around us crazy Vietnamese?

Joo-ho chuckles.

JOO-HO

I started at Korean festivals, and thanks to word of mouth, I ended up here. You know K-town is not that far from here.

AUNTIE KIM

I am aware of that. I go eat Korean BBQ all the time. But why would you quit being a successful lawyer?

JOO-HO

It wasn't that hard. Even after achieving success, when you reach the top and you realize you're still not happy, that's when you know you've hit rock bottom. I mean, I wasted most of my life trying to please everyone. All of that success means nothing if you can't make yourself happy. That's why I gave it all up and left it behind.

(deep sigh)

Unfortunately, that also led to my wife leaving. She packed up everything, even took the kids. I didn't expect that.

(MORE)

JOO-HO (CONT'D)

But I should've known she wasn't happy with my decision, so she found another rich man, married him, and moved back to Korea.

AUNTIE KIM

What happened to your kids?

JOO-HO

The kids are all grown up now. They're fine. They didn't understand at first, but I think they came around. What about you? How are your kids?

AUNTIE KIM

Oh, I don't have any. My husband died. I mean, when he was alive, we tried but he was sick a lot. For years he thought it was his fault. But right after he passed, I found out it was me who couldn't have kids. I wish I could've told him, but it's too late now. It's my fault. That's why I stay by myself.

JOO-HO

It's not your fault. You shouldn't blame or punish yourself. You don't have to be alone.

AUNTIE KIM

Oh, I like being alone. No one to cook or clean for. I love it!

JOO-HO

Well, I love cooking and don't mind cleaning either. I make the best cold noodle soup. Maybe I can cook for you sometime.

Auntie Kim flusters at the gesture but changes the subject.

AUNTIE KIM

What was that music you were playing? It was interesting.

JOO-HO

Oh, it's our New Year song.

AUNTIE KIM

Really? When is your New Year?



JOO-HO  
Same as yours.

AUNTIE KIM  
What? I didn't know that! I thought  
it was just us and the Chinese.

JOO-HO  
No, we celebrate Lunar New Year  
too. So do Laos, Singapore, and  
some other Asian countries. We have  
our own Seollal traditional dance,  
with drum beats and everything.

He opens his phone and shows her a YouTube video "Seollal Folk Dance (Part 1)." She watches, enjoying the beats as her body instinctively dances to the rhythm.

AUNTIE KIM  
So wonderful.

Joo-ho is impressed by her moves.

JOO-HO  
You know, you're pretty good for a  
mamasan.

He chuckles. Now she becomes self-conscious and stops.

AUNTIE KIM  
Oh no, I like dancing but like you,  
I'm too old now. We all have to be  
realistic and grow up.

JOO-HO  
What are you talking about? You're  
never too old to do what you love.  
Look at me-I'm sixty-five years  
young, and I finally get to do what  
I love, playing music. I get to  
travel to different places and meet  
interesting people. By the way, I  
like crazy Vietnamese.

He flirtatiously elbows her. Her insecurities return.

AUNTIE KIM  
But look what happened to you, your  
family left you. Now you have  
nothing.

JOO-HO  
My wife left me, but I still see my  
kids from time to time.  
(MORE)

JOO-HO (CONT'D)

If anything, her leaving me was the best thing that ever happened to me. Now I'm a free man.

He chortles...

JOO-HO

And you are free too. Listen, all those years of success, having the perfect image, and all that money-- I was miserable. When I started over, yeah, I lost almost everything, but I was the happiest I've ever been. That's when I realized that money and success don't mean anything if you don't make yourself happy first. So you have to do what makes you happy, no matter what anyone thinks. If you like to dance, then dance your heart out!

Auntie Kim contemplates, processing his advice.

EXT. GAY NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Sonny stands outside a nightclub, all DRESSED UP, staring down at his phone. His Grindr app is open. The chat reads with a HOT GUY attached:

HOT GUY ON GRINDR

Yeah, u shld come! It's 18+. Plenty of hot guys there. C u soon? [emoji kiss, heart, fire, peach, eggplant]

Sonny peers up at the entry door, contemplating if he should go in. TWO CUTE GUYS open the door and enter, one of them smiles at Sonny. The smile lures Sonny in.

INT. GAY NIGHTCLUB - CONTINUOUS

Sonny slips inside, he's wide-eyed at the raining MEN. The BOUNCER halts him.

BOUNCER

(intimidating)

ID?

Sonny panics, quivers, and indiscriminately darts out.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

The next day, Mother Tien feeds Father Thanh. Linh and Sonny arrive and notice Father Thanh is doing better.

LINH  
Hey Dad, you're looking good!

He eagerly responds.

THANH (SUBTITLE)  
When can we go?

LINH  
Today!

He accedes and tries to get out of bed.

THANH  
Let's go.

Linh stops him.

LINH  
No, not yet Dad, we have to wait  
for the orderly to wheelchair you  
out, okay?

He glances at Mother Tien and conforms.

A stylishly physique orderly, ROBERT, **early twenties**, rolls in with a wheelchair. Sonny takes notice.

LINH (CONT'D)  
They're here! Let's go, Dad!

Linh places Father Thanh's brown hunting hat on him as Robert props him into the wheelchair. Everyone is eager to assist, but Robert manages effortlessly.

They all follow Robert as he rolls out.

EXT. REHABILITATION (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

The wheelchair rolls up to the sidewalk. Weary Father Thanh, in his bushy hunting hat, looks up and sees a sign by the sliding door that reads, "REHABILITATION FACILITY." He turns to Linh as she pushes him in. Mother Tien and Sonny follow.

THANH  
This is not home. Why are we here?  
I want to go home.

LINH

Dad! You have to come here first so  
you can rehabilitate.

Father Thanh quivers, his unease apparent.

THANH

No, I want to go home now.

LINH

Dad, don't worry you'll be home in  
a few days.

Father Thanh clutches onto his wheelchair, disgruntled.  
Mother Tien tries to calm him as they roll in.

INT. REHABILITATION ROOM (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Father Thanh's room, the BEAUTICIAN buzzes his outgrown bushy  
hair. Mother Tien, Sonny, and Linh stand by watching. Now  
mostly BALD, Father Thanh looks displeased.

THANH

This is not home. Why are we here?  
I want to go home.

Linh explains again.

LINH

Dad, you can't go home yet. You  
have to do physical therapy before  
they can let you go.

Mother Tien chimes in.

TIEN

Anh, you have to do physical  
therapy so you can get stronger and  
better. You need to build your  
strength to make bánh chung.

Father Thanh discerns.

THANH

Then I can go home?

LINH

Yes! When you get stronger, then  
you'll get to go home.

THANH

Is it Tet yet?

LINH  
In two weeks.

THANH  
Still two weeks, why so long?

LINH  
It was just yesterday since you  
last asked.

The beautician brushes off the last remnants of his hair and swivels him towards the mirror.

LINH  
Look, now you are all cleaned up.

Father Thanh reflects in the mirror with disconcerting eyes.

INT. PARENT'S HOUSE - DAY (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Linh rolls in with her fancy carry-on luggage with Mother Tien. Linh places her luggage aside as they both take off their shoes.

Mother Tien goes straight to her bedroom. Linh attempts to follow, but the door closes behind her. She hears Mother Tien talking on the phone in hushed tones. She presses against the door, but it's too MUFFLED. Linh decides to leave her alone.

INT. GAY NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

It's still raining men. MUSIC bursts the room.

Robert sits in a corner with his drink. The door opens, and Sonny pokes in. Robert recognizes him. Sonny shows the bouncer his ID, and the bouncer allows him through without a wristband.

Sonny approaches the bar and orders a drink, but the bartender shakes his head, pointing to his wrist. Embarrassed, Sonny orders something else. The bartender hands him a cup of water. Sonny receives it and then evaluates the room. He catches sight of Robert. Their eyes lock as Robert approaches.

INT. PARENTS' GUEST BEDROOM - NIGHT (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Linh, sleeping in bed, feels her cell phone VIBRATES. She lethargically reaches for it.

LINH  
Hello... What!?  
(awaken)  
Yes! Of course, call the ambulance  
right away!

EXT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Ambulance SIREN blares as it rushes into the Emergency  
driveway.

INT. ER HOSPITAL ROOM (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Mother Tien and Linh, frantically in their pajamas, race into  
the emergency room.

LINH/TIEN  
Doctor! What's wrong?

The doctor explained.

DOCTOR  
He aspirated and developed  
pneumonia, which caused his body to  
go into shock. His blood pressure  
was very low, and we had to sedate  
him. He's stable at the moment, but  
with his weak condition and the  
shock he went through, he might not  
be the same again.

LINH  
What does that mean doctor?

DOCTOR  
He might have some brain damage.  
We'll do more testing tomorrow.  
Right now, he's sedated. There's  
nothing you can do at the moment.  
Go home and get some rest, and I'll  
update you in the morning.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT/MORNING - TIME LAPSE

Night turns to morning.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

The next day, the whole family visits. Father Thanh appears inanimate, his hands ice-cold, with tubes in his mouth. They try waking him up.

EVERYONE

Wake up! Please wake up!

But he is unresponsive, not even a twitch or a hand movement.

LINH

He is not brain-dead! No! I don't believe it!

The doctor comes in to explain the situation.

DOCTOR

We did tests on his brain, and everything seemed normal. His respirations are weak, which is why we had to put the tube back in his mouth.

LINH

But will he wake up?

DOCTOR

That's unknown.

The family is disheartened. Mother Tien goes to Father Thanh's side and pleads for him to wake up.

TIEN

Wake up Anh, please wake up!

LINH

(to doctor)

Thank you, doctor.

The doctor empathetically leaves the room. Linh turns to Father Thanh and also pleads.

LINH (CONT'D)

Ba, please open your eyes. I promise I will take you home, no more hospitals, no more rehab--just straight home. I promise.

No response. Father Thanh lies motionless, the only movement is his chest pumping up and down by the ventilator.

INT. PARENT'S HOUSE (FEW WEEKS PRIOR)

Linh and Mother Tien sullenly enter the home, removing their shoes. The living room is blanketed with supplies to make bánh chung. Mother Tien surveys it, then reminds Linh.

TIEN

We need more pork strips.

LINH

(bewildered)

What? This is not the time to be thinking about bánh chung!

TIEN

People are counting on me. Orders have been placed, money's been paid. There are lots of people waiting for their bánh chung.

LINH

I'm pretty sure people will understand if we cancel under the circumstances. We can always give them their money back. We don't have time for this. We have to worry about... about Dad's funeral.

A melancholy silence fills the room. Mother Tien brushes it off.

TIEN

No! How dare you say that! He'll come home. We have to make bánh chung. You are a girl. My only daughter, you have to help me. If you don't want to, then I'll just do it myself.

Mother Tien spearheads towards the supplies.

LINH

Alright, I'll go to the supermarket.

INT. SUPERMARKET, MEAT SECTION

Linh hovers by the meat counter, in the same scene as the beginning, deliberating to buy the new decorative bánh chung on display or the pork strips while the butcher impatiently waits for her reply.



LINH (SUBTITLE)  
Ten pounds of pork, please.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARENTS' BACKYARD - DAY (PRESENT DAY 2019)

TITLE CARD: PRESENT DAY

TWO MORE DAYS BEFORE TET

It's a beautiful day, slightly chilly, though the sun seems to mislead. The backyard is strewn with bánh chung supplies, firewood, and a big tin can with a hose inserted inside, steadily filling the tin can with water.

Nathan is lifting weights while Brother Quang encourages him.

BROTHER QUANG  
Come on! Five more to go!

Nathan strains as he lifts the weight, but he manages!

Meanwhile, Mai is trying to feed Simon greens, but he clamps his mouth and pulls away.

MAI  
Come on you have to eat this.

Simon shakes his head.

MAI  
If you eat this, I'll give you an extra hour on your computer games.

Simon contemplates and forcefully opens his mouth.

BROTHER QUANG  
(to Nathan)  
Keep going! You're doing great! You have to build up those muscles!

Nathan is getting restless.

BROTHER QUANG  
Come on! Two more to go!

Nathan struggles with the lift as Brother Quang monitors with anticipation. Nathan's arms tremble halfway and drops the weight to the ground. They're both disappointed.

BROTHER QUANG

It's okay, get some rest and we'll try again.

Tran hands Nathan a glass of pennywort juice (nuoc rau má) and massages his arms.

Sonny comes out carrying Erica, who is happily munching on an EGG ROLL. Simon sees it and is thunderstruck with delight!

SIMON

Oooh! I want one!

Brother Vinh taps his head.

BROTHER VINH

No!

Simon whimpers.

Erica offers Sonny a bite of her egg roll. He playfully snaps it, making her giggle. She curiously runs her fingers along his cheek, her eyes wonder.

ERICA

Why is your skin darker?

SONNY

Oh, it's because my dad was black.

She pauses, tilting her head curiously.

ERICA

Where's your dad?

SONNY

I never met him. He died... a long time ago. Before I was born.

Her expression softens with sadness.

ERICA

How he die?

SONNY

He died in a plane crash. He was on his way home to see Auntie Linh.

ERICA

(sullen)

He didn't make it home?

SONNY

(shakes his head)

No, unfortunately, he took an early flight because Auntie Linh was in labor with me. He wanted to be there when I was born. But... he never made it.

Erica's brow furrows in thought.

ERICA

Why didn't he just come home later?

SONNY

(smiling warmly)

He couldn't wait! Auntie Linh was about to give birth to me. He had no choice. Her belly was huge--she was about to explode!

Sonny spreads his arm out, imitating a huge explosion, causing Erica to giggle and join in, exaggerating the gesture.

ERICA

Explode like this!?

She mimics the explosion.

SONNY

Yeah, just like that.

Sonny grins, leans forward, and starts blowing raspberry on her belly. Caught off guard, Erica squeals with laughter, turning into snorts as she squirms away.

Suddenly, Mother Tien comes out of the house and calls them.

TIEN

Hey kids! It's time to come in and help Grandma.

Everyone stops what they are doing and scatters in with Grandma. She is pleased to have them all here.

**MONTAGE BEGINS.**

INT. PARENT'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS (PRESENT DAY 2019)

The family helps Mother Tien make bánh chung. It is crazy busy, with newspaper spread all over the floor with mung beans, banana leaves, pork strips, and all the other essential ingredients and supplies.

Everyone has their role.

Mother Tien mixes her secret ingredients in a recycled plastic container. Brother Vinh tries to poke his nose in but Mother Tien escorts him out of the kitchen. Then she carefully pours the secret ingredient over the pork strips.

Meanwhile, the kids are hard at work wiping and trimming the green banana leaves as Linh and Sonny garnish the house with Tet decorations.

Auntie Kim and Mai crease the banana leaves in the wooden square mold and place the glutinous rice, mung beans, and pork strips in. Then they wrap it up, binding it with strings before adding an extra layer of foil for good measure...

Brother Vinh carries the wrapped ones to the backyard.

EXT. PARENTS' BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS (PRESENT DAY)

The camera follows Brother Vinh and the bánh chung to a large tin can sitting over a roaring fire. He opens the boiling lid, a mushroom of steam billows out in a swirling dance, and he carefully places the bánh chung into the bubbling water.

INT. PARENT'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS (PRESENT DAY)

Tran cuts the string from the cooked bánh chung, the steam still clinging to it as she peels back the layers of foil. She gently wipes the exterior green leaves clean and dry.

At the table, Brother Quang sits with a sense of pride. He has the honor of taking on Father Thanh's role. His hands work deftly, wrapping the bánh chung neatly, and placing the bright red envelope in the center of the cake. He then wraps the bánh chung in a layer of clear, shiny plastic, the surface shimmering under the kitchen light.

The finishing touch is a delicate red ribbon bow. Erica's eyes focus, pressing her index finger down on the ribbon while Brother Quang ties the bow tightly as Erica withdraws her finger. They both pause with admiration. Voila, finished! It is beautiful.

For a moment, Mother Tien envisions Father Thanh sitting beside Brother Quang showcasing the exquisite bánh chung.

**MONTAGE ENDS.**

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM (PRESENT DAY 2019)

The whole family enters Father Thanh's room. The ventilator machine stands alone, unused. Father Thanh now wears an oxygen mask. The NURSE is at his bedside, monitoring him.

NURSE

He moved his fingers today.

Everyone optimistically sprints to him and pleas.

EVERYONE

Dad/Grandpa, wake up!

Nothing.

The doctor walks in. Everyone rushes to her with anticipation.

EVERYONE

Doctor! What's the news?

DOCTOR

Mr. Ho is showing some improvement. We've managed successfully to wean him off the ventilator a few times but we're keeping it nearby because his respiratory status fails intermittently. Given the considerable damage to his lungs, it's unlikely he'll ever breathe on his own again without the oxygen support.

LINH

But will he be able to wake up?

DOCTOR

That is still unknown...

The family absorbs the news, disappointment settles in but they thank the doctor and exchange quick handshakes as she leaves.

They gather back around Father Thanh to plead.

EVERYONE

Dad/Grandpa, please wake up.

Father Thanh's eyes roll open for a second. The family exclaims and starts screaming.

EVERYONE

Dad/Grandpa! Wake up! Wake up,  
please!

Movement stops.

The nurse hushes them. Linh lowers her voice...

LINH

Dad, please wake up, we've been  
making so much bánh chưng and we  
can't wait for you to see it.  
Please wake up so you can see how  
beautiful they are! Only two more  
days till Tet! Please wake up so  
you can come home and help us.

His eyes remain sealed, and the room falls into a quiet  
stillness. The family's hope wanes.

BROTHER VINH

Maybe tomorrow.

LINH

Yeah... tomorrow. We'll come back  
tomorrow to celebrate Tet with you  
Dad, okay?

The family walks out feeling dejected. As they leave, Father  
Thanh's finger twitches up but no one notices.

EXT. TET FESTIVAL - MORNING (PRESENT DAY - THE EVE OF TET)

Establishing shot captures the sprawling festival as it nears  
completion. VENDORS organize colorful food stalls,  
TECHNICIANS test rides, STAFFERS set up the game booth, and  
VOLUNTEERS decorate the main stage.

EXT. STREETS OF LITTLE SAIGON, SUPERMARKET - DAY

Traffic as people drive to get their last-minute items.

Supermarket stores are jammed. People funnel in and out of  
the parking lot with carts overflowing with cherry blossom  
trees, bags of red envelopes, trays of mooncakes, red melon  
seeds, groceries, games, broomsticks, and festive  
decorations.

TITLE CARD: **EVE OF TET**

INT. PARENT'S HOUSE (PRESENT DAY - THE EVE OF TET)

The final batch of bánh chung lands on the table. Mother Tien glances at the clock with urgency in her eyes.

TIEN

Hurry up, we are behind schedule!

The family speeds up their production. Linh enters, slipping off her shoes, and approaches her mother.

LINH

Mom, what are you doing? It's time to go visit Dad.

TIEN

I can't go.

LINH

What? It's almost Tet--you have to!

TIEN

I have too much work. No time to see him.

LINH

But Mom!

(whispering)

He's dying, this could be our last chance. I'm sure he wants you to be with him for Tet. Dad is more important than making bánh chung.

Mother Tien checks the clock again and glares at the door.

TIEN

I have a lot of work to do. Many people are counting on me.

Linh can't fathom.

LINH

I can't believe you! Dad is dying, and you're more worried about making bánh chung! With what little precious time he has left we may never get this opportunity again!

Mother Tien disregards Linh and resumes her work.

LINH

We promised him we'd celebrate with him at the hospital.

TIEN

You promised, I did no such thing.

Linh's anger boils over.

LINH

What is wrong with you? Do you even care about Dad at all? Do you even love him? Or is it all just an act? Or are you in love with that other man?

That caught everyone's attention. Mother Tien turns back.

TIEN

What did you just say?

LINH

I know about that man in the photo. I heard you and Dad talking about him at the hospital. Who is he? Why don't you just tell us the truth? Are you in love with him, is that why when Dad found out, he didn't want to live anymore?

TIEN

How dare you! That's none of your business.

LINH

It is our business! Dad is dying and you just want to make bánh chung! You don't even love him, you don't love any of us. You just want all of us to be your slaves and be miserable because you're miserable. He's dying and it's all your fault!

Mother Tien SLAPS Linh. Everyone stunned.

Silence.

Linh's face reddens as she struggles to hold back her tears.

LINH

I hate you! You never loved Dad. You never loved any of us! You never loved *me*!!!

She storms out the door. Sonny chases after her.

The door slams shut, echoing in slow motion as Mother Tien glances over. Father Thanh's voice resonates in her mind.



THANH (V.O.)  
Family first.

Mother Tien recognizes her mistake.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY (PRESENT DAY - THE EVE OF TET)

As they near Father Thanh's room, Linh wipes off her tears, still reeling from the argument, barely registers Sonny's presence. Yet, Sonny recognizes Linh's pain because he feels it too. He understands what its like to be unable to meet family expectations. Without saying anything, he simply comforts her as they enter the room.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Father Thanh is still on oxygen. Linh's puffy eyes notice the parched cherry blossom.

LINH  
Sonny, can you go fill up the vase  
for me?

SONNY  
Sure, Mom.

She faintly smiles as Sonny retrieves the cherry blossom next to the peonies and he vacates the room.

Linh holds up a bag filled with Tet decorations.

LINH  
I brought Tet decorations for  
you...

Her voice trembles as she tries to get the words out.

LINH  
I wanted to get the pig p-paper pop-  
up, but they were all out. I found  
some, some old ones f-from--

Suddenly, her voice falters, and she breaks down. Overwhelmed by emotion, Linh collapsed onto the bedside, her tears soaking the sheets. She doesn't even notice his rosier hands.

LINH  
Dad! I'm so sorry. I yelled at Mom  
today. I accused her of cheating. I  
didn't mean to. I'm so sorry.

Linh continues her logorrheic rambling.

LINH

And she hit me, she hasn't hit me since we were kids! I probably deserved it. Actually, I know I did. It's just that I don't understand why wouldn't she come to see you today? It's New Year's Eve and she'd rather make bánh chung instead of spending time with you. I was so upset with her that I accused her of seeing another man. I'm so sorry. I don't know if it's true or not but I know about the picture. I don't even know if she loves you. If she loves any of us. She's so cold, and so mean inside.

Linh convulsively buries her face on the blanket... then composes herself, and recuperates her thoughts.

LINH

I know deep down inside she loves you. I know she does. But she is so delusional. She thinks you're coming home like you always do. She's hoping that you'll wake up and keep your promise like always. But *this* is different, I know it, you know it but she doesn't know it. She's crazy! I don't know what to do or how to handle her. Please tell me. Please help me help her and make this right.

Linh continues her emotional plea.

LINH

I will do whatever it takes for you to wake up, to be with Mom for Tet because I know that is what you want and that is your promise to her. You always keep your promise so I promise you I will do the same, whatever it takes as long as you just open your eyes. I'll carry you out of here if I have to. Dad, please wake up, help me make this right! Please wake up!

Linh buries her face in the drenched blanket again, sobbing.

A hand mounts up and plops on Linh's head. He caresses her. She peeks up, his eyes gazing down on her.

LINH (CONT'D)

Dad! You're awake! You heard me calling?

He nudges. Linh beams up.

LINH

You're awake! I can't believe this.

Father Thanh mumbles but couldn't vocalize. He attempts to take off the oxygen mask.

LINH

Dad! You can't do that. The mask is the only thing that's keeping you alive. You need to keep it on.

Father Thanh resists, desperate to speak.

LINH

Don't speak! I know what you want. You want to go home right?

They both nod together in agreement.

LINH

You want to see Mom and help her with bánh chưng right? Just like you always do and you always keep your promise, right!?

They nod again in unison.

LINH (CONT'D)

Okay! I promise I will take you home. I will get you out of here.

Linh frantically gets up, ready to act when Father Thanh grabs her hand, stopping her in her tracks.

LINH

What is it, Dad?

He points to the nightstand drawer. She curiously opens it.

Inside is the crumbled letter from the striking gentleman. She pulls it out, and he gestures for her to read it.

LINH

You want me to read it?

He nods. Linh straightens out the letter and reads it out loud in Vietnamese, struggling at first but perseveres.

LINH

(subtitle)

Dear Tien, thank you for meeting me that day. It was so nice to see you. I know it's been a lifetime ago, but I wanted to take this opportunity, coming to America, to see how you are doing. My daughter just got married, and here's a picture of us that she took.

Linh pulls out the accompanying photo and takes a glance before tucking it back behind the letter. She continues reading in Vietnamese.

LINH

This is for your keepsake, don't worry, I have a copy too... You were my first love, and I could never forget you.

Linh falters, visibly uncomfortable but presses on.

LINH

When my daughter got married in Orange County, I didn't know anyone but people from our hometown told me you lived there. I thought it would be a nice opportunity to see how you are doing. I wasn't there to pry but just wanted to catch up with an old friend.

Linh flips the page, her voice growing softer.

LINH

I know you love your husband. I knew it that day in the Fall of Saigon when I thought I was rescuing you. I knew I only had this one last chance to get you back. An opportunity for us and your kids to come to America with me. But you refused. You choose to stay and wait for your husband.

Linh sneaks a glance at her dad and then continues reading.

LINH

That's when I realized you didn't need rescuing anymore.

(MORE)

LINH (CONT'D)

My heart sank that day. That's when I knew... you didn't love me, you love your husband, and I had completely lost you.

Linh takes a deep breath...

LINH

Fortunately for you, I got blocked and didn't make it to America either. I ended up meeting my wife at a re-education camp, she was a nurse there, and we have a beautiful daughter together, whom you met. My life became a blessing after meeting her. She saved me because she gave me a reason to live again. We got married soon after I--

Father Thanh interrupts Linh, reaches over, and flips the pages, signaling for her to skip ahead. She scans the third page and continues reading.

LINH

I am glad you are now happy in America. The way you talk about your family shows me how much you love them. Unfortunately, my wife passed away many years ago, and now my daughter has moved to America. I wish I could've had more time with them, and been more open--

Father Thanh interrupts again, pointing to a specific spot. Linh finds it and continues...

LINH

The way you talk about your daughter...

(Linh pauses for a beat)  
...how proud you are of her, how strong and brave she is for raising a child on her own against all odds, and how much you admire her for running her own company and being her own boss. Please don't waste any more time. Tell her all the wonderful things you told me about her. I wish I had more time with my wife and daughter. Time is of the essence. Hold onto those precious moments.

(MORE)

LINH (CONT'D)

Spend time and talk to them as much  
as you can before it all slips  
away.

Linh stops reading and digests the words.

LINH

Mom was just being Mom, fabricating  
her perfect family.

Father Thanh shakes his head and hints for a pen and paper.

Linh grabs a pen and paper from her purse and hands it to  
him. He writes down:

(It's true, Mom loves you very much) "DÓ LÀ SU THAT, ME YÊU  
CON LAM"

LINH

If she does, she sure has a funny  
way of showing it.

Father Thanh agrees and he writes down:

(I know she loves both of us, even if she shows it in her  
very cold way. But we have to love and accept her for who she  
is.) "BA BIẾT ME YÊU BA VÀ CON. VÀ ME CÓ CÁCH HIẾU RAT LẠNH,  
NHUNG CON VÀ BA PHẢI YÊU THƯỜNG VÀ CHẤP NHẬN NHÂN CÁCH CỦA  
ME"

LINH

But why do we have to accept it?  
Why can't she change?

(Your mom and I are old, hard to change, but with time, maybe  
she can.) "ME VÀ BA BÂY GIỜ GIÀ ROÌ, CUNG CÓ THỂ THAY ĐỔI  
NHUNG CÓ THỂ THAY ĐỔI NHUNG CẦN THỜI GIAN."

Then, with a soft smile, he writes.

(Look, I finally won her over.) "HÃY NHÌN, CUỐI CÙNG BA THANG  
DUOC ME"

They both chuckle softly. Linh takes a moment to reflect.

LINH

You are right... She *did* choose  
you... So, let's make it right and  
not waste any more time.

(she stands up)

Mom is waiting for you to keep your  
promise--we need to get you out of  
here now!

She peels off his blanket, observes his arms, and aims to detach his IV needles when Sonny interrupts with the freshly watered cherry blossom.

SONNY

Mom? What are you doing?

Linh freezes.

LINH

Ông is awake! We need to get him outta here.

SONNY

Ông is awake!?

Linh assures him.

LINH

And we need to get him home.

SONNY

Can we do that?

Linh shrugs.

LINH

We are doing it anyway, no matter what it takes. It's his dying wish. He promised Grandma, and I promised him.

Sonny is trying to make sense of all this.

SONNY

What about the oxygen tank? I don't think Ông will survive without it.

LINH

Then we'll take it with us.

SONNY

How? We can't just walk out of here with it.

LINH

We're gonna sneak it out if we have to. For him. For Grandma! He can't die in here!

Sonny calculates quickly.

SONNY

Wait! I can get help! I think--I  
hope... I'll be right back! Don't  
pull anything out just yet!

Sonny bolts out of the room.

Linh navigates away from the IV needle and probes the drawers. She stuffs all of his belongings into a bag and then examines the room. She observes the tubes and the huge oxygen tank. An idea ignites. She grabs her phone and calls.

EXT. FESTIVAL STAGE (PRESENT DAY - EVE OF TET)

Close-up on Auntie Kim gulping down a bottle of water. She is sweating and catching her breath alongside her female dancers. They are all exhausted. The stage is FULLY ADORN.

AUNTIE KIM

Okay, let us do this one more time.

She turns on the music. Traditional MUSIC plays slowly, everybody follows the formation, but just before the beat shifts, Dancer 1 springs forward and STOPS the music as Coordinator Khanh Van crosses by. Khanh Van waves at them and they reciprocate, eyeing her off-stage.

DANCER 1

That was a close call!

DANCER 2

How much longer do we have to  
practice?

DANCER 3

Maybe we should continue at the  
studio.

DANCER 4

Everything should be fine, we just  
have to stay alert, that's all.

AUNTIE KIM

It's okay ladies, the last one we  
did was great. We just need to  
remember to stay in sync, alright?

They all agree. --Auntie Kim's phone RINGS.

AUNTIE KIM

Must be from the hospital again.



She grabs her phone, sipping water as she answers.

**INTERCUT:**

Conversation with Linh at the hospital.

AUNTIE KIM

What's up?

LINH

Auntie Kim! I need your help!

AUNTIE KIM

What is it?

Auntie Kim listens, drinks her water, and her expression shifts as Linh explains.

AUNTIE KIM

Are you crazy? How am I supposed to do that?

(pause)

Why would you even need that?

LINH

Please, Auntie. It's complicated to explain over the phone. Just please help us! Can you bring it to the hospital as soon as possible!?

AUNTIE KIM

Hospital? Why hospital?

LINH

Look, we don't have much time but I need to sneak Dad out of here. He just woke up and he wants to go home! He made a promise to Mom that he would be home to help her make bánh chung and I promised him I would help him.

AUNTIE KIM

Your dad is awake? And you want to bring him home to make bánh chung!? Have you lost your mind!?

LINH

Please, Auntie! Bánh chung is the only thing that's keeping this family together. I promised him and he promised Mom! He doesn't want to die in the hospital, and Mom would be so happy to see him!

(MORE)

LINH (CONT'D)  
Please let them be together! It's  
his dying wish!

Auntie Kim recollects her memories...

**FLASHCUT - AUNTIE KIM'S Memory**

INT. AMERICA, PARENT'S APARTMENT (KIM'S FLASHCUT 1986)

Auntie Kim, sits quietly on the side, making bánh chung as her brother walks in and plonks down his suitcase. She watches as his eyes meet Tien's with pure love. Thanh plops down beside Tien and starts making bánh chung together.

EXT. VIETNAM, PARENTS' BACKYARD (KIM'S FLASHCUT 1968)

Little Kim watches from the background as her brother and beautiful Tien, adorn in a floppy flower hat, embrace lovingly while making bánh chung with baby Quang.

EXT. VIETNAM, PARENTS' BACKYARD - DAY (KIM'S FLASHCUT 1972)

The workers, teenager Kim, seventeen, and beautiful Tien, enormously pregnant, perched on the ground making bánh chung as four-year-old Quang runs around playing.

Suddenly, soldier Thanh arrives home in uniform. He plonks down his military bags while he gazes at his wife. Beautiful Tien looks up, catches him, and rushes over to a warm embrace.

EXT. FESTIVAL STAGE - (PRESENT DAY - EVE OF TET)

Auntie Kim recalls all of those memories and agrees to help.

AUNTIE KIM  
Alright, I'll see what I can do.

She hangs up and hollers to the dancers.

AUNTIE KIM  
My brother has another emergency. I  
gotta go!

DANCER 1  
Okay, but what about our routine?

AUNTIE KIM  
I think we got this. We can do it!  
Come on, everyone gather up.

They huddle together.

AUNTIE KIM  
Remember the beats and stay in  
sync, okay!?

They all bop their heads.

AUNTIE KIM  
We've been practicing hard at the  
studio, it's no different here.  
Just imagine this stage as the  
studio and perform exactly like we  
did and we will do great! Agreed?

ALL DANCERS  
Agree!

AUNTIE KIM  
Everybody hands in!

They enthusiastically put their hands together and cheer.

EVERYONE  
Vietnam Divas!

Their hands explode in an uproar then rejoice. Everyone gives  
Auntie Kim well-wishes.

DANCER 2  
Hope everything will be okay with  
Anh Thanh.

DANCER 3  
See you at the festival!

DANCER 4  
Good luck!

Auntie Kim backhand waves them farewell and surges backstage.

EXT. BACKSTAGE PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS (EVE OF TET)

Auntie Kim weaves through the large busy parking lot. She  
surveys all the laborers and finally spots Joo-ho by his  
truck. She bolts towards him.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM (PRESENT DAY - EVE OF TET)

Linh puts Father Thanh's brown hunting hat on for him. Sonny  
enters with Robert, the orderly.

SONNY  
I found our helper.

LINH  
Him? He's gonna help us?

Robert extends his hand to Linh.

ROBERT  
Hi Mrs. Ho-

LINH  
That's Ms.

ROBERT  
My apologies, Ms. Ho. It's an honor  
to finally meet you.

LINH  
Honor? Didn't we meet last week?

Sonny interjects quickly.

SONNY  
Oh! He just meant to formally meet  
you. That's all.

Linh creases her eyebrows.

SONNY  
(to Robert)  
Anyhow, can you help us get my  
grandpa out?

ROBERT  
I can try. Let me check the chart.

He analyzes it, his face grows serious.

ROBERT  
I don't think it's a good idea.

SONNY  
Please, this is really important!

ROBERT  
He can't leave without the oxygen  
tank.

LINH  
Yeah, that's why we need your help.

ROBERT

But what if he needs to go back on the ventilator?

LINH

We're willing to take that risk.  
Right, Dad?

Father Thanh gives his consent.

Robert's eyes dart at Sonny and Sonny pulls him aside. They whisper intently.

Linh studies their discourse.

After a tense moment, Robert intimately places his hands on Sonny's arm. Linh is intrigued.

ROBERT

Do you know what you're asking me to do? I can lose my job for this.

SONNY

I know, I wouldn't ask you if it wasn't important. I'm not forcing you, just asking. But my mom is determined to do this. I can't stop her so I'm gonna have to help her. I have no choice. It's my grandfather's dying wish. I understand if you can't help, it's up to you. But we're doing this.

Robert forces himself to evaluate the situation.

ROBERT

Alright! I'm only doing this so you guys don't kill your grandpa.

SONNY

Really!?

Robert looks at the time.

ROBERT

My shift ends soon. I will try to help you but I do have one condition.

SONNY

What is it?

ROBERT  
You have to tell your mom who I am  
to you.

SONNY  
I can't do that right now.

ROBERT  
Why not?

SONNY  
It's all so soon.

ROBERT  
(sincerely)  
Look, I really like you. I wouldn't  
risk my job otherwise.

SONNY  
Really? You really like me?

Robert smiles warmly. They are smitten.

ROBERT  
Besides, your mom seems to be ok  
with it.

They scan over to Linh, who is watching them curiously,  
waving impatiently.

SONNY  
It's not just my mom, it's my  
grandparents. My mom went through  
hell to win their hearts over  
because of me--being born out of  
wedlock and look at me.  
(points to his brown face)  
I can't let her go through that  
again. Now, if they find out that  
I'm gay, they'll really disown her!

ROBERT  
I doubt that. I'm sure your grandpa  
doesn't care about that right now.  
He'll just be grateful that you  
helped him go home to his wife and  
fulfill his dying wish. He'll be so  
happy he won't care *who* you are.

Robert persists.

ROBERT  
I want to be with you, but I can't  
live with another lie.  
(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

This is the best opportunity for you to come out. I'm sure he'll love you and your mom no matter what.

Sonny reevaluates. He looks over at them.

Father Thanh, lying there patiently as Linh waves at them impatiently, miming, let's go!

Sonny steals himself.

SONNY

Okay, Mom, Ông! I have something to tell you.

LINH

What is it?

SONNY

I have to tell you that... that  
—I'm gay! And this is my boyfriend,  
I mean Robert is my boyfriend.  
(to Robert)

Wait, are you my boyfriend?

ROBERT

(Under his breath)

We can talk about that later.

Linh pauses...

LINH

Oh... is that all?

SONNY

Is that all? What do you mean by  
"Is that all?"

LINH

Oh yeah, we figured that out a long  
time ago. Can we go now?

SONNY

What?

Linh moves over to shake Robert's hand.

LINH

Welcome to the family. At least for  
now. Alright, should we get Ông out  
of here?

SONNY

What do you mean you figured it out?

Linh sighs.

LINH

All those years playing dress-up and Barbie dolls. Not being able to get it up. Still a virgin.

SONNY

What!? Oh my god! What are you talking about? How do you know-- did--did Sophie tell you?

LINH

Sophie and I talk a lot. She's like a daughter to me.

Sonny paces around frantically, embarrassed.

SONNY

Oh my god! I can't believe this.

LINH

It's okay!

Robert stops Sonny in his tracks.

ROBERT

Wait, you're still a virgin?

Sonny embarrassingly flustered.

SONNY

Oh my God! Oh my God!

ROBERT

I think that's hot.

Sonny halts.

SONNY

Wait. What!? Really?

ROBERT

Yeah.

SONNY

That doesn't scare you?

ROBERT

No! I admire you for that.



They both share a brief tender moment before Sonny turns to Father Thanh.

SONNY  
 Ông, are you okay with me being  
 gay?

Father Thanh blinks with approval. Sonny exhales with relief and embraces him tightly.

SONNY  
 Thanks, Ông!

He stands up and faces Linh.

SONNY  
 We'll talk more about this later.

He turns to Robert.

SONNY  
 Okay! What's the plan?

Robert tosses them two EMT uniforms.

CUT TO:

INT. EMERGENCY HALLWAY - LATER (PRESENT DAY - EVE OF TET)

Linh and Sonny now dressed in EMT uniforms, assist Robert in rolling Father Thanh on a stretcher bed down the hallway. The huge oxygen tank is carefully strapped alongside. Linh multitasking, her phone clutched between her ears and shoulder.

LINE  
 (to the phone)  
 Are you almost here?  
 (beat)  
 One minute? Good! Meet you on that  
 corner and please try to be  
 incognito! Okay? Bye!

She hangs up and continues pushing next to Sonny.

LINH  
 So, does Sophie know about you?

SONNY  
 Yes, I told her the other day.  
 She's good and happy for me, but  
 I'm still gonna need to have  
 another talk with her.

(MORE)

SONNY (CONT'D)

I can't believe she told you that  
I'm a virgin.

LINH

(protecting Sophie)

She didn't tell me everything, I  
just figured it out.

Sonny shoots her an evil eye.

LINH

It's true! She was uncomfortable  
talking about your sex life, so I  
just figured it out. Call it a  
mother's intuition... She's still  
going to be my daughter, you know.

SONNY

Of course, she'll always be a part  
of our family and my best friend.  
But now I have to make sure you two  
don't talk anymore.

They both exchange competitive glare.

LINH

Okay, deal!

Linh smirks as they shake on it and continue their escape.

Inadvertently they run into their doctor talking to another  
doctor. They panic. Robert shrieks.

ROBERT

This way!

They hold their heads down, made a quick turn, and narrowly  
escaped the doctors.

Their escape becomes a series of fast twists and turns down  
the labyrinthine hallways. Finally, they pass the Emergency  
Room trying to act natural as the RECEPTIONIST eyes them  
suspiciously. Just as they think they're in the clear, a  
SECURITY halts them.

SECURITY

Stop!

They freeze, panic flooding in. The security picks up a badge  
on the ground, picture facing down.

SECURITY

You dropped this.

He holds it up facing towards Sonny, without realizing the photo is of a funny grumpy old lady. Sonny, wide-eyed, grins frantically, and grabs it as quickly as he can.

SONNY

Thank you.

And out the door, they dash.

EXT. EMERGENCY EXIT - CONTINUOUS (PRESENT DAY - EVE OF TET)

They burst out the sliding door, sharply turning a corner as Joo-ho and Auntie Kim pull up in a huge truck with a bright, not-so-incognito big banner that read "KIMCHI AUDIO," covered in vibrant funny animated cartoon characters.

Linh rolls up next to Auntie Kim in the truck.

LINH

I said incognito! This is not incognito!

AUNTIE KIM

How do you expect me to do that?

Joo-ho waves hi, Linh smirks back, though still fretted. Joo-ho hops out of the truck and heads toward the back.

He opens the back of the truck as they roll Father Thanh over. Inside the truck, there's a surprising amount of equipment and outrageous FUNNY cartoon costumes. Everyone gawks at it, but Joo-ho gestures to hurry in and they roll inside.

INT. BACK OF TRUCK - CONTINUOUS (PRESENT DAY - EVE OF TET)

Joo-ho and Robert secure the oxygen tank and the bed while others grab onto whatever they can. Joo-ho tells everyone...

JOO-HO

Hang on tight!

Joo-ho gets out and closes the door behind them. Everyone braces themselves.

EXT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY - CONTINUOUS (EVE OF TET)

Joo-ho has no choice but to drive through the emergency drop-off lane. EMTs and doctors turn their heads as the not-so-incognito funny truck screeches on, bumping over the curb.

INT. BACK OF TRUCK - CONTINUOUS (EVE OF TET)

Inside the truck, Linh, Sonny, Robert, and Father Thanh remain quietly as the air hisses from Father Thanh's oxygen mask. There's an odd feeling as they sense the creepy eyes staring at them, bobbing their silly heads with each bump on the road.

Linh checks on Father Thanh.

LINH  
Dad, are you okay?

He affirms.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET LIGHT - LATER (EVE OF TET)

The vibrant animated truck makes a quick turn down Euclid St.

INT. KIMCHI AUDIO TRUCK, FRONT SEAT - CONTINUOUS

Auntie Kim feels a sensation.

AUNTIE KIM  
Can you hurry up? I think I need to pee.

Joo-ho glances at her.

JOO-HO  
Pee?

AUNTIE KIM  
Yeah, I drank too much water, I really gotta go!

She crosses and squeezes her thighs tightly.

AUNTIE KIM  
Please hurry, or I'm gonna burst!

Joo-ho gears up.

JOO-HO  
Hang on!

He steps on the gas, the truck surges forward.

INT. BACK OF THE TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

The truck's velocity speeds up forcing everyone flying back. One of the animated heads falls off and lands perfectly on Robert's head. He's wearing it now. Sonny bursts into laughter while Robert takes it off.

Linh goes over to check on Dad again.

LINH  
Are you okay?

He nods but before Linh can relax, the truck makes another quick turn, thrusting them to the right side. Linh bumps into one of the characters and it springs to life, banging cymbals and SINGING loudly in Korean.

Linh rubs her head in pain.

LINH  
Man, what is going on out there?

Everyone shares a confused look before bursting into laughter as the cymbals CLANG repeatedly.

EXT. BROOKHURST ST. / READING AVE NEIGHBORHOOD - CONTINUOUS

The truck curves into Reading Avenue, nearing its destination.

EXT. PARENTS' DRIVEWAY (EVE OF TET)

The truck finally screeches to a halt in front of the house.

INT. BACK OF TRUCK

The back door swings open, and bright lights glare into their eyes and disheveled hair. CYMBALS and a Korean song continue SINGING. A silhouette of Joo-ho and Auntie Kim waiting outside as their eyes adjust. Auntie Kim doing an urgent pee dance.

AUNTIE KIM  
Sorry for the rough ride guys. I  
really have to pee!

Joo-ho quickly turns off the noise and helps them unstrap. They roll Father Thanh down the truck.

Linh turns to Robert.

LINH

Thank you for helping us. Please  
join us to celebrate Tet and meet  
our family.

Robert glances over to Sonny.

LINH (CONT'D)

I'm inviting you, and I'm sure I  
speak for my dad and Sonny too. You  
have to come.

Sonny confirms.

AUNTIE KIM

(pee dancing))

Hurry guys!

SONNY

Yes please come join us.

ROBERT

It will be my pleasure. Thank you.

AUNTIE KIM

(under her breath)

It's not like he has anywhere else  
to go.

Linh elbows Auntie Kim, who continues her desperate pee  
dance. Everybody spearheads Father Thanh toward the door.

INT. PARENT'S HOUSE (PRESENT DAY - EVE OF TET)

Mother Tien watches over the family, ensuring the final  
touches on the bánh chưng are perfect. She glances at the  
clock. Then veers over her shoulder towards the door hoping  
it will open. She hides her disappointment.

All of a sudden, the door storms open and Father Thanh blazes  
in with his gang. The whole family peers up in disbelief.  
Auntie Kim darts straight for the bathroom. Linh bursts out.

LINH

Mom, Dad is here! He made it home!  
He made it home for you!

TIEN

What?

Mother Tien rushes over to Father Thanh in disbelief.

TIEN  
Is it true? Are you really here  
right now?

He nods. They rejoice.

TIEN  
You are here!

Linh approaches her mother.

LINH  
Mom, I'm sorry, I didn't mean what  
I said. Dad showed me the letter  
and I was wrong. I'm so sorry.

Mother Tien forgives. She tries to catch her voice but can't,  
instead, she shifts her focus on the gang.

TIEN  
(to everyone)  
How did this happen? How did you  
guys get him here?

Linh, as usual, expects nothing.

SONNY  
With the help of our new friends  
Robert and...

He looks at Joo-ho with a blank face.

JOO-HO  
Joo-ho, nice to meet you.

Joo-ho extends his hand to greet Tien as Auntie Kim reappears  
from the restroom. Mother Tien thanks him in Vietnamese.

TIEN  
Thank you. I don't know what to  
say.

Auntie Kim translates to English.

AUNTIE KIM  
She said thank you, she's  
speechless.

Mother Tien reaches out to Robert and shakes his hand.

TIEN  
Cam on!

AUNTIE KIM

Thank you.

Everyone crowds together and thanks them.

Mother Tien turns to Father Thanh.

TIEN

I knew you would come home, just  
like you always promised.

She caresses his face.

TIEN (CONT'D)

Welcome home, Anh. Look at all of  
this beautiful bánh chung we've  
made for you!

Father Thanh's eyes explore the room. It is glorious. The home is surrounded by effervescent, festive Tet decorations. The table is laden with delicious Vietnamese food and desserts, and an abundance of intricately adorned bánh chung ready to bestow.

Mother Tien brings an unfinished bánh chung to Father Thanh. He steadily places his index finger over the untied red ribbon. Mother Tien ties it into a bow as he gently withdraws his finger. The bánh chung is now perfect. A tender moment passes between them.

TIEN

Now we're all perfectly together.

The doorbell RINGS, breaking the moment. The house lights up with excitement as the family is ready to celebrate.

### **MONTAGE BEGINS.**

INT. PARENTS' HOUSE - (PRESENT DAY - EVE OF TET)

The house fills with activity as extended family, RELATIVES, COUSINS, and FRIENDS arrive, bearing food, gifts, and red envelopes. Some VISITORS come to pick up their orders. Everybody takes off their shoes before entering.

Even Sophie shows up. Sonny goes over to greet her and introduces her to Robert.

All hands pitch in to complete the bánh chung decorations. Then they all celebrate. The atmosphere is lively, and festive, with everyone enjoying themselves.



Linh notices the light in Father Thanh's eyes as people greet him with warm well wishes, and "Chuc mung nam moi!" (Happy New Year)

Aunts and uncles hand out red envelopes, while games are played and money flying around. Great food is devoured, and KARAOKE fills the air.

Dusk turns to night. SBTN is on TV, and they begin the countdown.

Everyone counts down together:

EVERYONE  
Five! Four! Three! Two! One!

Confetti burst into the air. Jubilation erupts as hugs and kisses are shared. Music starts to play and everyone sings along.

EVERYONE  
(singing)  
Tet, Tet, Tet, Tet Den Roi.

Father Thanh's eyes glisten as family and friends embrace each other. Mother Tien holds his hand, both watching as their family comes together.

As the night winds down, gradually one by one, families and friends begin to disperse. Joo-ho and Auntie Kim say their goodbyes, followed by Brother Vinh, Simon, and sleepy Erica, carried by Mai. Brother Quang, Tran, and Nathan offer their farewells.

MONTAGE ENDS.

INT. PARENTS' KITCHEN - NIGHT (PRESENT DAY - EVE OF TET)

Only Linh, Mother Tien, Father Thanh, Sonny, Sophie, and Robert remain. The kitchen is filled with empty plates, cups, and used red envelopes everywhere. Mother Tien packs a few egg rolls into a ziplock bag before calling out to Sonny and Sophie.

TIEN (SUBTITLE)  
You two kids, come help grandma  
collect the red envelopes for next  
year and don't throw away those  
plastic cups--wash them.

Sonny and Sophie obey Grandma, while Robert helps Father Thanh into the bedroom. Linh and Mother Tien follow.

INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM (PRESENT DAY - EVE OF TET)

Robert places Father Thanh into bed. Father Thanh pats Robert as a gesture of thanks. Robert acknowledges it and prepares to leave when Linh interrupts.

LINH  
On behalf of all of us, we want to  
say thank you.

She hands him a thick red envelope. He refuses.

ROBERT  
Oh no, I can't take this.

Linh insists.

LINH  
You must! This is my gift, our gift  
to you--you can't refuse it.

Sonny and Sophie enter. Robert looks at Mother Tien and Sonny for help. Mother Tien gestures to him to take it. Sonny agrees.

SONNY  
You have to take it. It's custom,  
you can't refuse.

SOPHIE  
Plus, it'll probably help with your  
soon-to-be unemployment.

Sonny elbows Sophie.

SOPHIE  
It's true!

LINH  
Please take it.

After a moment of hesitation, Robert finally accepts.

ROBERT  
Thank you.

LINH  
No, thank you for being here.

ROBERT  
I've never been to a Vietnamese New  
Year party before. It was  
incredible!

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

So much fun and good food! You guys  
have the best food ever! Those egg  
rolls are the bomb!

LINH

You can thank Grandma for that.

They both look over at Mother Tien. Robert attempts to say  
thank you in Vietnamese.

ROBERT

Cam on bac.

Pleased, she hands him a zip-lock bag filled with egg rolls.

TIEN

Take home.

Robert's eyes widen at the egg rolls.

ROBERT

Thank you!

He hugs her. She allows it for a second then pushes him away.

SONNY

Come on, I'll take you home.

As they head out, Sophie intervenes.

SOPHIE

(to Sonny)

Hey! Just so you know, I'm happy  
for you. He seems like a great  
catch.

Sonny and Sophie rejoice. Sophie sees Robert just standing  
there and insists Robert join in their embrace.

SOPHIE

Come on in!

Robert joins in, as they all share a moment.

Linh approaches Father Thanh and gives him a goodnight kiss.

LINH

Love you, Dad!

She turns to her mother and offers an awkward hug.

LINH

Good night, Mom!

Mother Tien pats her back and pushes away.

TIEN  
Sleep well, con.

The children leave the room, closing the door behind them. Mother Tien goes over and lies next to Father Thanh, who gestures for a pen and paper. Mother Tien hands them to him and he writes

(You need to tell Linh how proud you are of her.) "BA CAN NÓI LINH, BA TU HẦU CON"

She understands and agrees.

TIEN  
I know...

She caresses him and switches off the light.

INT. PARENT'S BEDROOM OUTSIDE DOORWAY - CONTINUOUS

Outside their bedroom, Linh can hear the cassette playing in the room.

SONG  
(A Tet Song for My Love)  
"Bai Ca Tet Cho Em"

Lights go out all around as the song quietly plays on.

EXT. PARENTS' HOUSE - NIGHT/MORNING (TIME-LAPSE)

TIME-LAPSE of sunrise outside the house.

INT. PARENT'S HOUSE - MORNING (PRESENT DAY - TET)

TITLE CARD: TET!

It is Tet! A festive morning and the house is brimming with energy. Everyone bustles and hustles, preparing for the day's celebrations, and packing all the bánh chung.

Robert arrives bearing gifts--a wheelchair and a portable oxygen tank in exchange for the hospital equipment. Grateful smiles spread across the family as they help Father Thanh settle into the wheelchair. They give it a test drive, and it rolls smoothly.

Robert pulls Sonny aside for a private conversation.

ROBERT

Hey, I really had a great time last night.

SONNY

So did I.

They exchange meaningful looks, the unspoken connection between them is clear.

ROBERT

I just want to make sure you didn't feel... I don't know, pressured about coming out yesterday. If I pushed too hard, I'm sorry.

SONNY

No not at all. Honestly, I needed that. And what you did was beyond comparison.

ROBERT

(relieved)

I'm glad. It's just... I've spent so much of my life hiding who I really am. I don't want to do that anymore--especially with you. Does that make sense?

SONNY

(softly)

Yeah, it does.

ROBERT

(takes a deep breath)

I really like you, Sonny. Especially for what you did for me yesterday. It means a lot to me that we can live an honest life and you proved to me that it is possible, so I hope to take this further...

SONNY

Really?

ROBERT

Yeah. So... would you officially be my boyfriend?

SONNY

What!? Yes! Yes, I will absolutely be your boyfriend!

Overcome with emotion, Sonny leaps forward, planting a huge smooch on Robert's lips. A beat passes before Sonny pulls back, aware of their surroundings in his family's home.

SONNY

We gotta keep it conservative  
around here.

They both chuckle.

ROBERT

Now I've got to go face the music  
at work.

SONNY

You think you'll be okay?

Robert shrugs.

ROBERT

I hope so. They do love me there.  
But if not, I've got options.

SONNY

Don't worry, my mom already talked  
to them this morning and backed you  
up. But just in case, worst  
scenario, you can always move in  
with me.

ROBERT

(raising an eyebrow)  
Already asking me to move in, huh?

SONNY

Too soon?

ROBERT

(changing subject)  
I'll call you later.

They share an embrace before Robert grabs the huge tank and rolls out the empty stretcher.

EXT. TET FESTIVAL (PRESENT DAY - TET)

The massive Tet festival is in full swing with THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE coming to celebrate the new year. Carnival rides, games, cherry blossoms, and food stands galore with various food, BBQ, desserts, and boba drinks.

EXT. FESTIVAL STAGE (PRESENT DAY - TET)

The stage is set up with instruments and embellished Vietnamese Tet decor. Multi-cameras and journalists capture the festivities.

An MC announces a popular Vietnamese singer on stage.

MC

Please welcome, Quang Le!

The crowd applauds as QUANG LE steps onto the stage and starts singing beautifully.

EXT. FAMILY'S FOOD STAND (PRESENT DAY - TET)

Amid the vast festivities, we target the family's food stand behind the stage seats. CHERRY BLOSSOMS all around. Mother Tien sells the bánh chung while the family assists. The sign has various options: Whole bánh chung wrapped in red ribbons, small cut portions with sugar, fried bánh chung slices served with pickled vegetables, bánh day with giò lua, and among other delights like bánh tet and giò tho.

Father Thanh sits on the sidelines in his wheelchair watching his whole family prep the orders in unity.

Coordinator Khanh Van in high-fashionable áo dài, locates Auntie Kim.

KHANH VAN

Hey, you guys are up next. Time to go get ready!

Auntie Kim finishes up her duties and scurries toward Coordinator Khanh Van, passing Sonny.

AUNTIE KIM

You guys coming to see my show?

SONNY

Wouldn't miss it for the world!

Auntie Kim and Coordinator Khanh Van disappear into the crowd.

Sonny observes the scene, it's mildly busy.

SONNY

Who's coming to see Bác Kim's performance?

Everyone seems occupied.

BROTHER QUANG  
Can't Sonny, after this, we've got  
to prepare for our performance.

TIEN (SUBTITLE)  
Why don't you go, we can handle it  
from here.

LINH  
I'll come with you. We'll take  
Grandpa too.

Sonny is pleased.

SONNY  
Yes!

Linh goes over to Father Thanh and unlocks his wheelchair.

LINH (SUBTITLE)  
Dad you're coming with us to see  
Auntie Kim perform.

He blinks.

SONNY  
Cool! We can get front-row seats!

Sonny and Linh roll Father Thanh off.

#### EXT. FESTIVAL STAGE

It was effortless to move toward the front since there was a minuscule crowd. Mostly old people or somnolence kids who are forced to sit with their parents, all scattered across the open space.

Linh settles Father Thanh into the front corner of the handicapped zone. Both Linh and Sonny sit down next to him.

Quang Le is holding his last NOTE beautifully, some audience members CLAP, and some continue feeding their kids. Quang Le ends his note and bows. The MC steps back on stage.

MC (SUBTITLE)  
Everybody put your hands together  
for the great Quang Le!

Staggering CLAPS. Then the MC introduces the next performer.



MC

Up next, we have a classy group of ladies who have been practicing tirelessly to bring you a unique traditional musical dance. Please give a warm welcome to the Traditional Five!

Auntie Kim rushes towards the MC and whispers in his ear. She scurries back out.

MC

Oh, my apologies, I meant to say, please welcome, the Vietnam Divas!

Scattered APPLAUSE, mostly from Linh and Sonny enthusiastically CLAPPING. Auntie Kim leads her crew out in a straight-line formation. She is surprised but excited to see her brother, Thanh, seated in the front.

Joo-ho stands on the sideline for support. Auntie Kim glances over and winks at him.

Traditional MUSIC begins slowly--accompanying the graceful hands, synchronize into a fan, then a wave--a typical Vietnamese style dance.

All of a sudden the music changes course to upbeat hip-hop. The crowd quickly realizes it's K-POP. The dancers shift their moves and start K-Pop'ing.

Everyone wakes up and adjusts their eyes, confused but also captivated. Journalists and cameras pivot on them.

Coordinator Khanh Van, busy checking her clipboard offstage, hears the foreign music and looks up, alarmed.

Auntie Kim and the ladies are pretty impressive with their hip-hop moves.

More people walk by, notice, and stop to watch. People start rushing to the front and filling up seats. Curious onlookers crowd around, jaws dropping, eyes glued as cheers erupt.

The growing crowd fills up the seats around Linh and Sonny. They can't believe it. The Vietnam Divas are incredible! Coordinator Khanh Van recognizes it.

EXT. FAMILY'S FOOD STAND

At the food stand, Mother Tien overhears one PATRON excitedly talking to a CUSTOMER in Vietnamese...

PATRON

Hey! You got to come check these ladies out, they're amazing!

The patron pulls the customer away from Mother Tien as they maneuver into the growing crowd. Mother Tien tiptoes up, peeks over the tightening mass, and catches Auntie Kim and the ladies performing from afar. Even from a distance, she's impressed.

Most of the customers disperse toward the stage. The family wonders what's going on. They all look up, stunned at Auntie Kim's performance, doing moves they never expected.

Sophie shows up but her eyes are glued to the performance. With the flow of the customers dwindling, Brother Quang checks the time and notifies the family.

BROTHER QUANG

Alright, it's time for us to get ready.

Brother Vinh, Mai, Tran, and the kids wrap up their tasks and follow Brother Quang. Only Sophie and Mother Tien remain behind, mesmerized.

EXT. FESTIVAL STAGE

On stage, the Vietnam Divas pull off a bold impressive move that sends the audience into a frenzy. It is crazy! The dancers hit a few more show-stopping breakdance before reaching their grand finale. It is pandemonium!

The audience erupts with deafening ROARS, WHISTLES, and APPLAUSE as the Vietnam Divas bow off stage. Even the MC is mind-blown coming back on stage.

MC

Wow! Wow! That is all I have to say. What an incredible performance! That was definitely not traditional. How did you ladies learn to move like that? Everyone, please give another round of applause for the fabulous Vietnam Divas!

The crowd SCREAMS and CHEERS even louder. Breathless but glowing with excitement, the Divas return for the encore bow. As they scurry back offstage, Auntie Kim blows a kiss towards her brother.

Gradually, the cheers begin to fade and some crowd disperse. The MC introduces the next performance.

EXT. FAMILY'S FOOD STAND - MOMENTS LATER

Linh rolls Father Thanh back and positions him IN FRONT of their food stand. Most customers have drifted towards other food stands, games, or carnival rides.

Sonny greets Sophie and helps her with the merchandise.

SOPHIE

So how did it go with Robert last night?

SONNY

It was great! Even better this morning--he asked me to be his boyfriend.

Sophie's face widens in disbelief.

SOPHIE

No way!

SONNY

(nods)

Yes, yes he did.

Sonny blushes enthusiastically.

SOPHIE

That's incredible! This means he's officially your first boyfriend!

Sonny's phone interrupts. He glances at the screen and tells Sophie.

SONNY

It's Robert.

Her excitement grows as he picks up the call.

SONNY

Hey, how's it going?

(pauses)

Wait, what did they say? ...You got suspended?

Sophie listens, her curiosity piqued.

SONNY

But not fired! That's a win, right?  
Two days suspension--could be  
worse. They must really like you  
there. Guess we won't have to move  
in together anytime soon.

Sophie gives an inquisitive look. Sonny glances at her,  
chuckling into the phone.

SONNY

I'm very happy for you. I'll talk  
to you soon. Bye, love!

The word "love" lands with weight, bringing shockwaves to  
both of them. Sonny freezes, realizing what he just said.

SONNY

(nervous)

Too soon? ...Okay, sorry, I'll see  
you tonight then. Bye.

He hangs up, immediately clutching Sophie, his face flushed  
with embarrassment. They both shared an excited teenage-like  
embrace, overwhelmed with giddy energy.

Meanwhile, the BEATING rhythm of the lion dance draws near as  
Linh stands to the side, on her phone with her investment  
team. Her face is tense with anticipation.

LINH

So, what's the news on the  
investment?

(listens intently)

How much?

(suddenly shouting)

...Two million dollars!!!

Linh screams excitedly as Mother Tien eavesdrops on the news.

LINH

Oh my god! This is incredible! I  
can't believe it! I knew we could  
do it. With this, we can go  
globally!

(already planning)

Alright, we need to contact our  
lawyers and throw a huge launch  
party --next Friday! Let's plan  
everything, and I'll make sure  
there's a bonus in everyone's li si  
envelopes. Congratulations to all  
of us, and Joan, thank you. Happy  
New Year.

Linh hangs up, elated. She does a celebratory dance, barely able to contain herself. As she twirls around, she catches sight of Mother Tien preparing to climb a ladder, holding the red envelope and green lettuce. Linh races over to help her.

LINH

Mom, let me take care of that for you.

Mother Tien hesitates but eventually hands Linh the red envelopes and lettuce. Just as Linh is about to climb, Mother Tien halts her.

TIEN (SUBTITLE)

Con, I just want to let you know that... that I love you and I'm sorry for hitting you. I regret it every second. I also want to say that I'm very proud of you, for everything that you have achieved. You're definitely not just a girl-- you're so much more than that. You're strong, smart, independent. A remarkable woman who defies everything this world has thrown at you, especially from this cold-hearted, old woman like me. And you've come out stronger and more successful than any man or person I've ever known.

Linh is stunned by her words, her eyes swell up with emotion.

TIEN

I may not fully understand your products, but I know your heart is in the right place.

Linh blinks her tears away as Mother Tien continues, her voice wavering with emotions.

TIEN

I-I wish I could be more like you. You inspired me, Linh. I'm so, so proud of you...

Linh is speechless, overwhelmed.

TIEN

I-I'm at a loss for words now--

Waiting for Linh to respond...

LINH  
Mom! You had me at 'I love you.'

Mother Tien is not familiar with the Jerry McGuire reference.

LINH  
You had me at 'I love you.' I've  
been waiting my whole entire life  
for you to say that. That's all I  
ever wanted to hear from you.

Touched and heartbroken, for the first time Mother Tien embraces her daughter, holding her tightly. Allowing the embrace to linger, not pushing away this time, and finally letting years of withheld love flow between them.

The DRUMBEATS of the lion dance pulse louder, signaling the approaching festivities. The crowds swarm towards their food stand. Sonny scurries over.

SONNY  
Hey! We haven't hung the red  
envelope yet? We need to do it now!

Linh pulls back from her mom. Mother Tien encourages her.

TIEN  
Go!

Linh nods and quickly clamors up the ladder. Just before reaching the top, she realizes something. She hovers down at her mom.

LINH  
(shouts)  
Mom! I love you too!

Mother Tien looks up endearingly, places her hands over her heart, and accepts it with love.

Linh smiles and takes her final step, swiftly hanging the red envelopes and fresh lettuce on the center hook. From her elevated position, Linh gets a sweeping view of the massive Tet celebration below. She takes a long deep breath, the crisp cool air fills up her lungs, it's invigorating. As she exhales, the weight of all of her resentment washes away.

The DRUMBEATS are here, the Lion Dancers arrive. Everyone below signals for Linh to hurry down. She scampers down the ladder, and as soon as she's safely on the ground, Sonny pulls the ladder away.

Father Thanh watches silently as the DRUM beats continue. The family Lion Dancers is now fully in their embellished costume. Erica performs her solo wushu lion dance. She is adorable. Everyone CLAPS. DRUMS, GONGS, and CYMBALS continue to beat.

Nathan peeks out, his eyes and mouth gape open at the height of the red envelope. Then Simon lays a boisterous fart. Nathan cringes.

NATHAN  
Seriously Simon!? Now!?

Simon snorts.

SIMON  
Oops!

They continue their performance. Brother Quang pounds the DRUM with fervor, signaling the climactic moment. Music continues with intensity. Everyone watches with anticipation.

Simon shows off his alluring lion eyes. Nathan braces himself as Simon readies to leap, then Simon JUMPS. He lands sitting on Nathan's shoulder. Everyone CHEERS! Nathan holds him by the waist steadily, struggling for balance but bearing firm. They sway back and forth. Simon barely reaches the red envelope.

The crowd watches in suspense. The Lion's head continues his flirtation dance. Nathan drenched in sweat, takes another deep breath, counts "one, two, three" in his head, then THRUSTS Simon higher in the air, and Simon's feet land on Nathan's shoulders.

The family ROARS and revels in their accomplishment as if winning a gold medal. Nathan is relieved. Simon grabs the lettuces and red envelopes and triumphantly spits out the lettuces to the crowd. People scramble to catch it for good luck.

The celebratory music continues as Nathan lowers Simon swiftly down. The family beams up with pride. Everyone pats them on the back and offers them additional red envelopes. The family graciously accepts with gratitude.

An OLD LADY hands Nathan a banh bao. Simon eyeballs it. Nathan, with a smirk, teases Simon but decides to give it to him. Simon grabs it and devours it instantly. Nathan joyously arm-hooks his cousin in celebration.

Auntie Kim and Joo-ho look on together, enjoying the moment as the crowd disperses.

A Korean middle-aged woman, SONIA, in flashy clothes, a fanny pack, and a colorful visor approaches Auntie Kim.

SONIA

Hi, you must be Kim. I'm Sonia.  
(shakes Kim's hands)  
Joo-hoo told me so much about you.

Sonia and Joo-hoo exchange a glance of recognition.

SONIA

I'm the co-founder of a group called Ajumma. We are a group of middle-aged women who do flash mob dancing for the community.

Auntie Kim is surprised.

SONIA

We're performing in San Diego this March for Women's International Day. At first, I was going to ask you to join our squad, but after seeing your performance, I'd love for you to be our choreographer as well.

Auntie Kim and Joo-hoo exchanged shocked glances.

AUNTIE KIM

Really!?

SONIA

Yes! What you did out there was incredible. I've never seen moves like that before. Very impressive. Where did you get your inspiration?

AUNTIE KIM

Oh, a mix of the classics--the Supreme, James Brown--a little bit of Missy Elliot and Blackpink.

Sonia chuckles, thinking back.

SONIA

Oh yeah, I can definitely see that now. Very creative! We need someone like you. Will you do it?

AUNTIE KIM

I'm not sure... I have a job, and clients to take care of.



JOO-HO  
You can work around your nail  
clients. They'll understand.

AUNTIE KIM  
Oh... I dunno.

SONIA  
The choreographer position comes  
with pay.

AUNTIE KIM  
Really?

JOO-HO  
Plus you'll be doing what you love.

AUNTIE KIM  
It's paid, and it's for Women's  
International Day!?  
(contemplating)  
Alright, count me in!

Excitement bursts between them.

SONIA  
Great! Here's my card. We'll  
schedule a meeting with the rest of  
the Ajumma ladies. I can't wait for  
them to meet you.

Sonia presses her card into Auntie Kim's hand and bids them  
farewell. As she leaves Joo-ho and Auntie Kim share a  
congratulatory moment.

Just then, Joo-hoo's ASSISTANT runs up to him.

ASSISTANT  
Mr. Kim! We need the extension cord  
from the truck. Can I get the keys  
from you?

Joo-ho tosses them the keys. Auntie Kim looks puzzled.

AUNTIE KIM  
Wait, your last name is Kim?

JOO-HO  
Yes.

AUNTIE KIM  
So, if we ever get married, I'll be  
Kim Kim?

It just registered.

JOO-HO  
 Maybe I can take your name. What's  
 your last name?

AUNTIE KIM  
 Ho!

JOO-HO  
 So I'll be Joo Ho Ho?

With revelation and humility, they both agree on--

AUNTIE KIM/JOO-HO  
 Let's just keep our own names.

A comedy *relief*.

Auntie Kim joins Linh, handing out red envelopes to the Lion family. As FIRECRACKERS explode, CHERRY BLOSSOM petals erupt out, floating through the air.

SLOW MOTION: Father Thanh observes his whole family huddle together, marveling at the display. Mother and daughter embrace as the children plug their ears but in awe! Everyone he loves is in view. He takes it all in.

Moments later, Linh strolls over to Father Thanh, bending down to check up on him, eye-to-eye. His gentle Mona Lisa smile is contagious. She reciprocates.

LINH  
 Hey Dad, how are you doing?

The smile on his face does not waver. His eyes remain on the scene. Linh follows his gaze back to where he is smiling --it is with the whole family, perfectly picturesque. Linh takes it all in and then returns to him.

LINH (CONT'D)  
 Isn't it a wonderful sight, Dad?

Her smile freezes as her eyes pierce through his eyes. His pupils are still fixed on the moment but he is not blinking. She nudges him.

LINH  
 Dad?

His face remains unwavering. She shakes him again.

LINH  
 Dad!?

Stillness... She takes it all in, in deep thought...

With bittersweet contentment, grief, and acceptance, she concedes in her cognizance that in his final moment, he has sustained peace and happiness, surrounded by the people he loves, before taking his final breath.

She contains her mixed emotions as the family serendipitously celebrates in the background, her Mona Lisa smile and somber gaze continue in solace, sweltering eyes...

FADE OUT.

CREDIT CAPTION: FOR MOM AND DAD.

End credits.