

SHAKESPEARE

in Saigon

An unusual love story with Shakespeare as matchmaker

A play by Cenarth Fox

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Reviews

"An absolutely charming, funny and thoughtful piece that really makes you feel a lot better after seeing it. The play is fresh and new and of today. It's bubbling with some very funny one-liners and has some rather poignant moments. It's one of the most delightful plays I have seen in a long time; a damn good night at the theatre. Highly recommended."

John Gunn – Curtain Up

"A delightful play, beautifully written. It's an unusual and moving love-story with Shakespeare as matchmaker. Don't miss it. Cenarth Fox's plays are exceptional." **Brian Amos Eastern FM Theatre**

"A delightful and touching piece of theatre which would be ideal for somewhere like Sydney's Ensemble Theatre in Neutral Bay." **John Bell – Bell Shakespeare**

People and Places

Thanh

A Vietnamese name pronounced Tun and meaning bright, sunny, light; sound that is pleasing to the ear; blue sky; slender and elegant in appearance.

David

A Hebrew name meaning dear one, beloved

Saigon

A city once the capital of South Vietnam; known today as Ho Chi Minh City but many Vietnamese still lovingly call it Saigon.

William Shakespeare

English playwright and poet; 1564-1616; wrote in a language known as Elizabethan English





Scenes from world premiere season staged by Encore Theatre Inc
Shakespeare in Saigon

Fred Barker and Ai Diem Le

Directed by Doug Bennett



SHAKESPEARE *in Saigon*

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Synopsis

David Cadwallader is a retired secondary-school English Literature teacher who has come down in the world. His savings and superannuation have been wiped out on a costly divorce and failed property investment. He lives alone in a basic, rented flat in a suburb heavily populated with working-class, non-English-speaking people.

Kim Thanh Nguyen is a young Vietnamese woman recently arrived in this country and living next door to David. Thanh speaks almost no English and is an outworker making clothes for a pittance. She lives with her paternal grandparents who speak only Vietnamese.

David is bitter about his lot in life whilst Thanh is uncertain. She is in a foreign land with no English skills and little knowledge of her adopted country's culture.

David and Thanh meet and life will never be the same again. One question is, can people change by overcoming their troubles?

Dialogue

The play is written in English, Elizabethan English and Vietnamese with a smidgeon of Greek.

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Characters

David is in his 60s, retired, poor and bitter. Life, he reckons, has dealt him a cruel blow. Blows more like. He spends his days brooding, boozing and battling verbally with his elderly mother.

Thanh is a young Vietnamese woman, well named. She is fiercely loyal to her grandparents, speaks almost no English and works extremely hard as an outworker. Thanh shops only in Vietnamese-speaking shops but wishes to understand the language and culture of her newly-adopted country.

The Matriarch Cadwallader is David's mother and full of complaints. She is heard but never seen. It is expected her lines will be pre-recorded.

First Performance

Shakespeare in Saigon was given its world premiere by Encore Theatre Inc in Melbourne, Australia in September 2006. Fred Barker played David, Ai Diem Le played Thanh and Louise Whiteman was "Mother". The director was Doug Bennett. It was a great success.

Accents

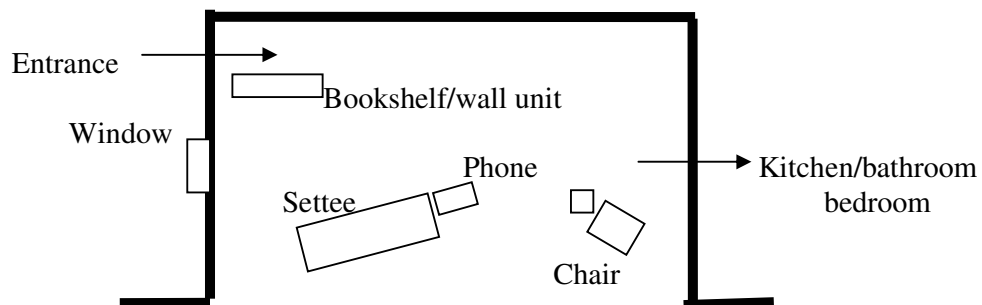
Thanh speaks Vietnamese fluently but no English. David speaks fluent English and has a strong grasp of Elizabethan English. He speaks no Vietnamese.

Costumes

The play is set in the early 21st century. Normal casual clothes are worn although more formal attire is needed for one special occasion.

Set Design

It's the living-room in a small, basic flat in a working-class suburb. David had a long career as a teacher of English Literature in secondary schools and as an avid reader, has books and literary type "stuff" in his room. The front-door entrance is upstage right perhaps hidden by some bookshelves. Once past the bookshelves, the actors enter the room which is dominated by an old settee which, at times, doubles as a bed for the stay-at-home David. Some nights he's too tired to go to bed. There is an armchair and small table LC or DL upstage of which one exits to the kitchen/bathroom. The flat is untidy.



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Pre-show music is Elizabethan – Tallis, Byrd. Curtain rises on morning scene in David's living-room. He has fallen asleep the night before on the settee. He is dressed casually with socks, slacks and shirt. His slip-on shoes/slippers are scattered beside the settee. DAVID is obviously asleep. Lights up and music fades.

- FX** *Car revving, tyres squealing, horn being blasted, hoons yelling. Continue then fade*
DAVID is rudely awoken by these sounds
- DAVID** *[Groans]* What was that? *[Sits up causing plastic bowl/cup to spill on floor]* Bloody hell!
- FX** *Clock-radio music starts; it adds to DAVID'S bad mood. Continues until stopped by DAVID*
- DAVID** All right! I'm up! I'm up! *[DAVID gets up, shaky and disturbed. More groaning]*
- FX** *Telephone rings – it stops when DAVID hits speaker button*
- DAVID** *[Struggling to phone as fury increases]* Oh god, that's all I need.
[DAVID hits speaker-phone button enabling us to hear the caller]
- DAVID** *[He knows who it is]* Good morning, mother? *[He exits to investigate sounds and wash]*
MOTHER *[On tape]* David, is that you? I've had the most terrible night of my life. In fact I think I'm going to die. *[Pause]* David?
- DAVID** *[Calling. He always asks this question]* Have you had a bad night?
- MOTHER** It could not have been worse. And these new tablets are useless. *[Pause. Angry]* David?
- DAVID** *[Calls from off-stage]* How are those new tablets?
- MOTHER** You sound far away. Where are you? I can hear music. *[RADIO OFF]*
- DAVID** *[Enters and puts on shoes]* Spot of bother with some of the local lads – even first thing on a Sunday.
- MOTHER** Why are you living in that suburb?
- DAVID** *[Tidying up bowl etc]* We both know why, mother. It's your former daughter-in-law and her weaselly brother.
- MOTHER** I can't believe you lost *all* your money.
- DAVID** I'm busy, Mother. *[Taking cup/bowl etc to kitchen then returns and tidies a little]*
- MOTHER** And your suburb is full of foreigners.
- DAVID** *[Could call from kitchen]* Now don't be like that. Besides, there are advantages.
- MOTHER** "Birds of a feather" your father used to say. *[Realises what he said]* Advantages?
- DAVID** *[Facing away from phone or softer]* You'll never visit.
- MOTHER** I need you to take me to that heart specialist.
- DAVID** It'll have to be by taxi, Mother. Remember I've come down in the world.
- MOTHER** Your father would've taken me.
- DAVID** *[Sotto voce]* You'd've made him. *[Louder]* You could ask my darling brother.
- MOTHER** Your brother has a most important job *[DAVID makes face or mimics even speaks the standard reply]* and his children are going through a very difficult stage.
- DAVID** *[Moving to phone to end conversation]* I'll ring you this afternoon. *[Moving to hit the "Off" button]* Bye Mother.
- FX** *Loud knocking on door [DAVID ignores phone]*
- MOTHER** What was that?
- DAVID** *[Groaning, heading upstage to door]* God Botherers. It's Sunday.
- MOTHER** David? What's happening?

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- FX** *More loud knocking on door*
- DAVID** *[Calling to door. Angry] All right! All right! [Offstage opens door and is shocked] Hey! [Suddenly DAVID yells in fright and falls back into room as THANH enters in great distress. Underlined dialogue is the English translation]*
- THANH** Thua ong, ong noi cua toi bi binh nang lam.
Oh sir! Please help me. My grandfather is very sick.
- MOTHER** David! Who's that speaking?
- DAVID** *[To THANH. Annoyed] Whoa! I can't understand. [Slower] Speak English.*
- THANH** On noi cua toi co the sap chet
Ong lam on dien thoai cho xe ciu thuong
Lam on di ma.
He may be dying. [Looking around and points to phone] Please, sir, call an ambulance.
- MOTHER** That sounds like a foreign person.
- DAVID** *[To THANH] Look, I don't speak Chinese.*
- MOTHER** Chinese?
- DAVID** *[To phone] Mother, shut up!*
- MOTHER** *[Outraged] Shut up?*
- THANH** *[Clasping throat miming dying] Ong noi cua toi binh nang lam, ong dang dau.
He is in great pain. My grandfather is very sick.*
- [DAVID now speaks more slowly to THANH to try and help her understand]*
- DAVID** *[To THANH as in playing charades] Okay, you're sick. You want an ambulance?*
- THANH** Lam on nhanh len
Toi khong co biet so cap ciu la so may.
Please hurry. I do not know the emergency number.
- MOTHER** I don't want an ambulance.
- THANH** *[Picking up phone or speaking to it] Sinh loi co tinh hinh nay rat la nghiem trong.
Excuse me, madam, but we have an emergency.*
- MOTHER** David!
[THANH hits receiver and phone is cut. Holds receiver to DAVID who takes it]
- THANH** Lam on ma
Ong noi co the chet lien nay day.
Please, my grandfather may be dying.
- DAVID** *[Taking phone and hitting emergency number] Do you mind? That was my mother. And where's your phone. I see you young people in the street jabbering into your mobiles. [To phone] Yes, ambulance please. [Pause] I have an emergency with a woman who doesn't speak English. [To THANH] What are you? Chinese? Vietnamese?*
- THANH** *[Nodding] Vietnamese. Toi biet noi tieng Vietnamese.
Vietnamese. I can speak Vietnamese.*
- DAVID** *[To phone] Do you have someone who speaks Vietnamese? [Pause] I think a neighbour is ill but ... [Hands phone to THANH]... you tell them.*

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- THANH** *[Desperate to phone]* Da sinh chao,
On noi cua toi bi bihn tim rat nang
Can phai cap ciu gap.
Hello. Please send an ambulance. My grandfather is very sick. *[Pause]* I think he's had a heart attack. *[Pause. Hands phone back to DAVID]*
- DAVID** Hello? *[Pause]* Yes, I think she lives next door. *[To THANH]* What's your number?
- THANH** Ong noi cua toi bi binh nang lam.
My grandfather is very sick.
- DAVID** Your number? *[THANH shrugs. Frustrated, DAVID to phone]* My address is Flat 5, 21 Hudson Street, Footscray. ... Yes, I'll be here. *[Hangs up then mocks himself]* My social diary is currently free.
- FX** *Immediately phone rings. Continues*
- THANH** Ho co toi hay la khong
Ong lam on noi cho toi biet?
Are they coming? Please tell me.
- DAVID** *[Speaking slowly]* Right, the ambulance is coming. Okay? *[Pause. Makes finger waving a la flashing light and imitates ambulance siren. Then points to door]* You, go home. *[Slowly with signs]* I *[Himself]* will watch *[eyes]* for am-bu-lance *[Makes siren sound]*.
- THANH** Bao nhieu thi se toi?
When will the ambulance be here?
- DAVID** I cannot understand you. *[Gently indicating]* Look, go home. The ambulance is coming.
- FX** *Answer-phone message begins*
[DAVID escorts THANH off-stage]
- DAVID** *[On tape]* You called, I'm out, leave message.
[DAVID re-enters]
- MOTHER** *[Shrill]* David! You cut me off! What is happening? *[DAVID moves to phone and hits hands-free]* David!
- DAVID** I'm here, Mother. Don't panic. All is well.
- THANH** *[Bursts in calling]* Nho noi ho di qua nha ke benh nhe? *[Exits quickly]*
Please make sure the ambulance comes next door!
- MOTHER** Who is that person?
- DAVID** *[More tidying up]* What person? I'm alone.
- MOTHER** You're living with a woman. I heard her. A foreign woman!
- DAVID** Relax, Mother. I'm fresh out of concubines.
- MOTHER** You've imported one of those mail-order brides. You sick, old man!
- DAVID** *[Almost snaps]* Oh for God's sake, Mother. Some neighbour came in to use the phone. She needs a bloody ambulance.
- MOTHER** Don't lie to me. I've warned you about foreigners.
- DAVID** And she sends her love to you, too. *[END FX]*

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[DAVID hits machine and MOTHER is no more. DAVID lifts receiver from cradle and switches off answer-phone. MOTHER can't communicate by phone - for now]

[Heading to kitchen] Coffee, my son. You need caffeine in your brandy. [Kitchen sounds as DAVID potters offstage. Singing offstage] "Oh how I hate to get up in the morning, oh how I love to remain in bed ..."

FX *Ambulance siren in distance. It gets louder then stops.*

DAVID *[Re-enters perhaps holding kettle] That was quick. [Heading upstage] Must remember to have my heart attack on a Sunday morning. [At the door. Calling] Next door; where the young lady is waving. [Re-enters and heads back to kitchen] What a good neighbour I am.*

[Stops and goes back to re-set phone. Expects an immediate ringing sound. Pause. Silence] Mother? [Speaks to silent phone] The line is free, Mother. Normal service has been resumed. [Silence. Pause. Part sarcastic, part worried] That'd be right. Now she really does need an ambulance.

[Shaking head, exiting to kitchen] So Davy, apart from the heart-starter, what tasty morsels await? [Looks at available food] Ah, crumpets with mould, mildewed jam and ... [Makes revolting sound – errggh] lumpy milk. Stick to the scotch.

THANH *[Knocking, reluctant to enter but does so with food container]*

Chao ong

Ong oi?

Ong co o do hay la khong.

Hello? Sir? *[Pause]* Hello?

DAVID *[Enters, peeved] What now? Fire brigade? Police? [Thinks he knows] Ah, immigration!*

THANH Ong co the cho toi noi chuyen voi ong hay la khong?

May I speak with you, please?

DAVID *[Threatens] If your visa's run out, young lady, you've come to the wrong address. [She approaches with deference]*

THANH Toi chi muon bao cho ong biet rang on noi cua toi bi binh rat la nang.

I wish to inform you that my grandfather is not seriously ill.

DAVID So how's the patient?

THANH Ong dao ruot thua.

He only has very bad indigestion.

DAVID I'd recommend a social worker if I knew one but, as you can see, my life is perfect. *[Pause. Indicating his flat and himself]* Slumming is the new black.

THANH *[Pause. Holds out food container] Tang cho ong.*

This is for you.

DAVID For me? *[She nods; he accepts container] What is it? [Sniffs outside of container. He means unusual not dodgy] Smells funny.*

THANH Qua nho de cam on ong. *[She bows]*

It is a small gift to thank you for all your kindness.

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- DAVID** But will it give me the runs? *[She looks at him]* The trots? Diarrhea? Delhi belly? *[Embarrassed by her lack of English and his boisterous behaviour. She shakes her head as she has no idea]* Shitty shitty bang bang?
- THANH** Ong co thich do an cue Vietnam hay la khong?
Mon an nay rat la dat biet
Toi tu nau do.
Do you like Vietnamese food? This is a very special dish. I cooked it myself.
- DAVID** *[Putting down container]* I'm not a great fan of Asian food; more your Greek and Italian. *[Speaks with syllable emphasis]* Souv-la-ki. Car-bo-nar-a.
[Pause. Neither can understand the other]
- THANH** Toi sinh loi
Toi khong co biet noi tieng ... English.
I am sorry. I cannot speak ... English. *[One of the few English words she knows]*
- DAVID** *[Sieves on her last word]* English! Now you're talking. I'm a big fan of English.
THANH *[Smiling but struggling]* Eng-lish.
DAVID In fact, *[Looks around prior to telling a secret]* English literature and I have been having it off for the last fifty years! *[Holds two fingers together]* We're like that.
- THANH** *[Pleased he's pleased. Nodding]* Dung roi English toi khong co biet tien anh English.
Chi hieu tien viet thoi Vietnamese.
Yes, English. I cannot speak English; only Vietnamese.
- DAVID** Glorious language, English; Milton, Keats, Shakespeare ... *[Sarcastic intent though not necessarily in delivery]* Jeffrey Archer, Barbara Cartland. *[She nods not understanding a single word]* You would do well to learn English young lady. It's international.

Are you aware Americans speak a form of English? And what's more - you can order a local ambulance *[Touch nasty]* without interrupting the *[Louder]* boring old fart next door!
[Pause. Atmosphere tense]
- THANH** *[Bowing]* Cam on ong
Toi phai ve voi ong ba noi cua toi.
Thank you, sir. I must return to my grandparents.
[Exits with one final bow at the door]
- DAVID** *[Imitates her bowing]* And the same to you, my lovely. *[Calling]* And thank y'mother for the rabbits. *[Sighs, tidies settee, reflects]* That went well, Dave. *[He mocks his name and himself - 'Dave' has a ring of contempt]* First opportunity for social intercourse in years and the old chat-up charm is alive and well - not!
[He knows some modern jargon]

[Smiles, sits or lies down. Thinking] When was the last time you had sex? With another person I mean? *[Shaking head]* Even without dementia I can't remember.

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If the average male thinks about sex every four minutes, you, David, are definitely not average. You think about sex every four *years*. It's called PV - post-Viagra.

And look at you; self-loathing, self-pity with cynicism writ large. Two years ago, a well-off, married man with all manner of retirement plans. Today, [*Looks around room*] a penniless pensioner, alone in a rented shoebox in ... Footscray [*Gives mock drawl pronunciation*] Foot-is-cray.

[*Sighs, looks at watch*] How long till death? And how can I fill in the time? Sue my incompetent solicitor? Garotte my ex-brother-in-law?

I could take up sitting in parks or ... pass wind professionally. [*Idea*] Of course! Join a reading group. [*a la voiceover*] Man with insatiable reading habit joins book club.

[*Gets up and looks outside through window*] You're spot on, Mother. Not a lot of Anglo-Saxons. [*Mock calling to those outside*] Hello there! I say, how many of you speak English? I can! I adore English literature and the beauty of language. None of your media mangled words here. [*Mocks himself*] Hey! Lookee me! I can speak proper. [*Wiggling hands*] Hey!

[*Idea*] Hang on. [*Sarcastic-American accent?*] This is a window of opportunity. [*Normal voice*] I'm surrounded by locals who can't speak the lingo. I'm an ex-teacher desperate for cash.

[*Looking around*] I can teach in here. No rent. [*Referring to boxes of books*] I've got enough books to start a shop. Cash in hand; something to do. [*Inspired, mimes giving high-fives then gets pad and pen*] 'Well done that man!' [*Starts planning*]

Now ... advertise with flyer in library. [*Speaks as he writes*] *Learn English. Experienced friendly teacher. Reasonable rates. Contact David Cadwallader. Telephone ...*

[*Stops writing annoyed*] Oh shite! [*Tosses pad aside*] They can't read English thou puking motley-minded clotpole! The ad has to be in *Vietnamese*. [*Puts pen aside*]

[*Pause. Tries to solve problem*] Don't panic, Dave. Find a translator. [*Thinks*] The library. No. They'll want money. [*Gets up thinking and looks out window*] Don't go public – strictly black market economy.

[*Suddenly sees THANH outside*] Hang on! What about Miss Ambulance from next door? She owes me. [*Annoyed again*] But she can't speak English. [*Hopeful*] Unless her relatives can.

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[Taps on imaginary window, waves and calls] Hey! Hey you! Oi! [She looks up] Yes you! [She sees him. He beckons] Come here. [More beckoning. Speaking slowly] Come here. I need to speak to you. [She moves to his flat] Yes! [After thought] And hurry! [Darts off to front door] Go, Dave, you beauty. [Suddenly changes direction and rushes to bathroom] Appearances dear boy, appearances. [He ablates quickly]

FX *Knock on door*

[DAVID re-enters smoothing his hair. Going to door] And now for the Cadwallader charm. [From upstage, full of charm, opening unseen door] Come in, come in, dear maiden fair.

THANH *[Enters nervously] Chao ong
To thay ong vay tay toi.
Hello, sir. I think I saw you waving.*

DAVID *Indeed, indeed. Now everything's fine, nothing to worry about. [Indicates settee] Please, be seated. [She is not sure] Go on, take a pew. [She smiles then moves to settee and sits. THANH is concerned but not frightened. What is going on?] Look, ah, my Vietnamese is a bit scratchy and ...*

THANH *Ong noi dang nghi
Cam on ong da giup toi hom nay.
My grandfather is resting. Thank you again for helping me today.*

DAVID *[Hasn't a clue what she just said] Right. [Slowly with hand actions] Look, I have a problem. I speak English. You speak Vietnamese.*

THANH *[Nodding] Vietnamese.*

DAVID *[Smiles at the minute progress] Ah. So how about I teach you some English and you translate my sign into Vietnamese?*

THANH *[Nodding] Vietnamese.*

DAVID *[Lamprooning himself] Going well so far, Dave. Okay. [Indicates himself] Me, David ... sir. [Indicates THANH] You? You?*

THANH *Vietnamese.*

DAVID *[Frustrated] Yes, I know where you come from. Ah, [Looking around, fetches photo, shows it to THANH, points at photo] yes. Look, this is me, David. There. Da-vid.*

THANH *[Uncertain] Da-vid.*

DAVID *Good. Very good. Okay. [Indicates himself as person] Me, David. [Points to her] You?*

THANH *[Pause then smiling] Vietnamese.*

DAVID *No, no. [Indicates himself as person] Me, David. [Points to her] You?*

THANH *[Twigs] Ah, [Indicates herself] Thanh.*

DAVID *[Delighted] Thanh? [Offers hand and they shake] Hello Thanh.*

THANH *Hello Thanh.*

DAVID *No, you [Indicating himself] Me David, [Indicating her] you Thanh.*

THANH *[Thinks she is meant to copy and does so] Me David, you Thanh.*

DAVID *[Growl almost] God help me. No. I am David. Me. [Points to himself] Da-vid.
[Points again to himself]*

THANH *Da-vid.*

DAVID *Yes, yes. [He points to THANH, pause then points at himself] Da-vid. [Points at THANH]*

THANH *[Pause then she understands] Thanh.*

DAVID *[Relieved and quite excited] Yes. [Points at himself]*

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- THANH** Da-vid. *[DAVID points at THANH]* Thanh. *[DAVID points at himself]* Da-vid. *[DAVID points at THANH]* Thanh. *[DAVID points at himself]* Da-vid. *[DAVID plays a trick. He starts to point at THANH but quickly points back to himself]* Thanh. *[THANH laughs]*
- DAVID** *[Still indicating himself]* No.
- THANH** Da-vid.
[It's touching and a fun moment but he wants to move on]
- DAVID** Okay. *[Grabs pad]* Now, I know this may sound a tad far-fetched but can you – Thanh – *[Shows note to her]* translate this, write this *[Mimes writing, indicates note]* in Vietnamese?
- THANH** *[She stares at note then him. She shakes head. Indicates herself]* Thanh, Vietnamese.
- DAVID** *[He takes back pad talking to himself]* What else could I expect? *[Looks around]* Ah, okay, how about I teach you a few words of English?
- THANH** *[Nodding]* Eng-lish.
- DAVID** And when I do, you tell your friends I'm brilliant and they can pay me to teach them. What say ye, Thanh?
- THANH** *[Nodding and pointing to him]* Da-vid. *[Pointing to herself]* Thanh.
- DAVID** *[Catches her smile and nodding]* I'll take that as a 'yes'. *[Pause]* Now before we begin, a brief statement in support of my suitability.
- I taught English Literature for thirty-nine years; and taught it damn well. Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy and the Bronte sisters are some my closest friends. *[Reality check]* Actually, they're my only friends.
[She smiles but remains mute understand nothing. His passion shows]
I'm passionate about the great English novelists, poets and playwrights including of course, the greatest, the glover's son from Stratford-upon-Avon.
- THANH** *[Nodding but still understanding nothing]* Eng-lish.
- DAVID** However, *[DAVID must tell the truth]* on the subject of teaching English to non-English speaking students *[Indicating THANH]* – namely your good self - I do admit to a teensie-weensie lack of experience. *[She doesn't understand. Accelerating]* In short, Literature? brilliant. *How now brown cow?* Not a sausage.
- THANH** *[Wants to learn]* Saus-age.
- DAVID** *[Cockney]* So whilst 'enry 'higgins I ain't, I am willing to give it a go ... *[Grinning, indicating THANH]* Miss Doolittle. *[Looks at totally mystified THANH]* Wotcha reckon?
- THANH** *[THANH nods and smiles]* Eng-lish. *[They both smile]*
- DAVID** *[No longer Cockney]* Well said. So English it is. *[Full of bravado]* Lesson One. *[Bravado has vanished. He hasn't a clue]* Oh gawd. *[Launches into the first lesson, flying by seat of his pants. Looking around sees his hand]* Ah! *[Wiggles hand]* Hand. *[Pause. Keeps wiggling hand]* Hand.
- THANH** *[Gets the hang of it and mimcs his wave]* Hand.
- DAVID** Very good. But there's no need to wave. Now, ah ... *[Indicates nose]* nose.
- THANH** *[Indicates her nose]* Nose.
- DAVID** *[He smiles and nods. This is going well]* Well done. *[Indicates his ear]* Ear.
- THANH** *[She copies his action]* Ear.
- DAVID** *[Looking around then pats settee]* Sett-ee.
- THANH** *[Pats settee]* Sett-ee.
- DAVID** Ah, *[Moves to window, indicates]* win-dow. *[THANH stands to move to window but is stopped]* No, stay there. Sit. *[She sits. He indicates]* Win-dow.

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THANH *[She indicates from afar]* Win-dow.
DAVID *[Looking around]* Ah ... *[Grabs book and hands it to her]* book.
THANH *[Holding book]* Book.
DAVID *[Looks at book then taps cover]* Will-iam Shake-speare.
THANH *[Taps cover]* Will-iam *[Next bit is too hard]*
DAVID Shake-speare.
THANH Shake-speare.
[DAVID gets carried away. He has no ESL experience but his passion for Shakespeare shows]
DAVID Very good. Ah ... *[Dramatic hand gesture, dramatic voice]* To be or not to be.
THANH *[Copies hand gesture and voice intonation]* To be or not to be.
DAVID I will wear my heart upon my sleeve.
THANH I will wear my heart upon my scheve *[sic]*.
DAVID No, *[Indicating his sleeve]* sleeve. Sleeve.
THANH *[Mimics]* No, sleeve. Sleeve.
DAVID *[Holds out hand but not too close. Poetic]* Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
THANH *[Returns his gaze and gesture but has no idea what she is saying]* Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
DAVID Thou art more lovely ... *[He suddenly stands and ends the lesson]* Right that'll do for today. *[THANH is confused]* Finish. No more. *[THANH doesn't understand. Slowly]* We stop now. Con-clus-ion. Fi-ni-to. The end.
[Indicates she should stand. She does]
THANH *[Nodding]* The end.
DAVID *[Indicating watch]* To-morr-ow. *[Pointing to her]* Thanh, you come *[Indicates room]* here, *[Indicates watch and speaking slowly]* ten o'clock. To-morr-ow. Mon-day. Under-stand?
THANH *[Nodding. She obviously doesn't understand. Mimics his pronunciation]* Un-der-stand?
DAVID *[Under his breath]* Oh God. *[Indicating door]* See ... you ... la-ter. *[Waving]* Bye!
THANH *[Heading to door]* See ... you ... la-ter. *[Waving]* Bye!
DAVID *[Loud]* No, wait! *[She is startled, stops, worried. DAVID gives a broad sweeping bow]* Parting is such sweet sorrow, fair maiden.
FX Elizabethan music begins softly
THANH *[Imitates bow]* Parting is such sweet sorrow, fair maiden. *[She smiles, waves and exits]*
DAVID *[Shaking his head – what has he done? Mock foreign accent]* Wah, wonder what Will sounds wike in Wee-et-nameese. To wee or not to wee.
[Laughs in mock foreign accent]
[MUSIC swells and LIGHTS fade to black. Music plays for about 15 seconds. DAVID changes shirt or adds or removes cardigan or tucks in shirt. THANH changes headband and/or shirt. LIGHTS up with DAVID at bookshelf checking books and notes. MUSIC fades]

SCENE 2 – some twenty-four hours later

DAVID *[At bookshelf looking at books. Calls to his mother on the phone]* I'm busy, Mother.
FX *[Mother on tape]* I've telephoned the doctor. God knows when he'll arrive. I'm quite sure I'm dying.
DAVID *[Reading books and not listening to her]* Good. *[Meaning nothing sinister]*
MOTHER What did you say?
DAVID *[Paying attention to her]* Oh, Mother, I've got news. I've gone back to teaching.

Shakespeare in Saigon 13

MOTHER What!?! You're too old. You're on the pension.

DAVID I agree, it's a little radical.

MOTHER Radical?

DAVID *[To settee with books]* It's English literature for those who can't speak English.

MOTHER Your father was insane.

DAVID Apparently some American universities offer degrees in the subject.

MOTHER Have you got rid of that foreign woman?

FX *Knocking on door*

DAVID *[Moves to phone, almost excited]* Must dash, Mother. Opportunity knocks.

MOTHER Who?

DAVID Bye. *[Hits button, MOTHER is gone. Steps toward kitchen door, proclaims]* Enter. *[Pause]*

FX *More door knocking*

DAVID *[Louder]* Come in. *[Pause. Door opens and THANH enters with small container]* Ah ha.

THANH *[Nervous, unsure. She bows and indicates him]* Da-vid. *[Indicates herself]* Thanh.

DAVID No, no, no. You say, "Good morrow my lord" and then you curtsy. Like this. *[He demonstrates a curtsy. Pause]* I'll show you. Come here. *[He escorts her into the room and demonstrates the routine once she has entered the room]* "Good morrow my Lord" and then you *[Curtsies again]* curtsy. Got that? *[Moving to one side and she prepares to start]* Wait, wait! *[Pause. Announces]* Enter.

THANH *[Pause. She steps forward]* Good morrow my Lord and then you *[She curtsies]* curtsy. Got that?

DAVID *[Shaking head]* Yes, all right. *[He indicates settee. Cockney]* Come on Eliza, move y'bloomin' arse! *[She has no idea. He points at settee]* There, Thanh! Sit! *[She moves to settee and sits while he stands to one side]*

Let's start at the very beginning – a very good place to start. *[Suddenly THANH stands and offers the small container of food]*

THANH Chao ong
Day la mot mon anh qui cua Vietnam.
Excuse me, sir. This is another traditional dish from Vietnam.

DAVID *[Taking container]* More food? I haven't finished the last lot.

THANH *[Indicates container]* Shitty shitty bang bang.

DAVID *[Looks at her thinking she is taking the piss. She's not. He accepts container which he puts to one side]* I sincerely hope not, for your sake. And here's a tip. Never stand down wind of a boring old fart. *[She doesn't understand. He points to settee]* Sit. *[She sits]*

Right, my name is *[Points to himself]*

THANH My name is

DAVID *[Shaking head]* No. *[Points to himself]*

THANH Da-vid.

DAVID *[Nods]* Yes. *[Pointing to her]* And?

THANH Thanh.

DAVID Yes. So my name is David and ... *[Indicates her]*

THANH *[She's smart and has had a chance to think about things]* My name is Thanh.

DAVID *[Applauding]* Excellent. And again. My name is David and ...

THANH My name is Thanh.

DAVID Brilliant. *[But now we move on]* Now. *[Indicates hand]*

THANH Hand.

Shakespeare in Saigon 14

- DAVID** And? *[Points to nose]*
- THANH** Nose. *[He points to ear]* Ear. *[He points to window]* Book. *[She immediately corrects herself]* Win-dow.
- DAVID** Good, well done. Now ... *[Hands her book]*
- THANH** Book.
- DAVID** *[He's pleased with her skill and learning]* Yes. Perfectly correct.
- THANH** *[She taps cover]* William Shakespeare.
- DAVID** *[Even more pleased]* Well done. Your memory is first class.
[He's about to continue but she gets in first. She could even cut him off]
- THANH** *[Rapid fire, doesn't miss a beat]* To be or not to be. I will wear my heart upon my sleeve. Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely.
- DAVID** *[Pause. Stunned]* Bloody hell. *[She has no idea]* Your first English sentences are straight from the Bard.
- THANH** *[Doesn't understand]* The Bard.
- DAVID** The swan of Avon. The greatest playwright ever. William Shakespeare!
- THANH** *[Smiles, taps cover]* Ah, Will-iam Shake-speare.
- DAVID** *[Amused]* You copy everything I say. *[At her, nodding]* You're a bloody parrot.
- THANH** *[Nodding, smiles, copies him exactly]* You're a bloody parrot.
- DAVID** *[Thinking]* You know, I could use Will to teach you English.
- THANH** Eng-lish.
- DAVID** *[Thinking aloud, not at her]* It makes sense. I know Elizabethan English. It's a way to get her started. *[To her]* Thanh, do you fancy a bit of the Bard? Will-iam Shake-speare.
- THANH** *[Nodding, smiling]* Will-iam Shake-speare.
- DAVID** *[To himself]* I'll be some ageing guru; star of the *Weekend Age*. *[Broadsheet newspaper. Mimics headline]* Non-English speaking migrants fluent in Shakespeare. *[Sarcastic]* I'll be the talk of Foot-is-cray.
- THANH** Foot-is-cray.
- DAVID** *[To her]* And in the streets, instead of you lot going *[Makes rude imitation of Asian language in sing-song fashion]* Ong co quen ai biet noi tieng Anh khong?
Do you know anyone who can speak English?
[This is poetic licence. DAVID cannot speak the language but has guessed at what he thinks are some well-known words. THANH is very impressed]
- THANH** *[Nodding, smiling, impressed]* Ah, Vietnamese.
- DAVID** We'll hear *forsooth* *[in truth, indeed]*, *verily* *[in fact, with confidence]* and *skimble-skamble*. *[rambling nonsense]*. So what say ye, O Mistress mine?
- THANH** Toi rat la hen hanh vi ong la thay giao cua toi va
Toi cung rat la vui long duoc ong nhan toi la hoc cho.
I am very happy to study English with such a great teacher as you, sir.
- DAVID** *[Hasn't a clue]* Really, Thanh?
- THANH** Really, David?
[Pause. He smiles. She smiles]
- DAVID** *[Leaning towards her]* This could be very interesting. *[Launches his plan]* Say after me. *[Pointing to his/her shoes]* Shoon.
- THANH** *[Pointing to her shoes]* Shoon.
- DAVID** *[Indicating his trousers]* Strossers.

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- THANH** *[Tugs her trousers]* Strossers.
DAVID *[Removes, waves handkerchief]* Napkin.
THANH *[Waves handkerchief]* Napkin.
DAVID *[Indicates his head]* Noddle.
THANH *[Indicates her head]* Noddle.
DAVID *[Lifting trouser legs and indicating legs]* Forks.
THANH *[Indicating her legs]* Forks.
DAVID *[Patting his plump belly]* Fulsome
THANH *[Patting her stomach]* Fulsome.
DAVID *[Meaning she ain't fat. Aside]* Not really in your case, my lovely, but now these.
[Indicates his lips, puckers] Sweet friends.
THANH *[Indicates her lips, puckers]* Sweet friends.
DAVID *[Points to his crotch]* Codpiece.
[A pouch at the crotch of the tight-fitting breeches worn by men in the 15th and 16th centuries]
THANH *[Without missing a beat, innocent however]* Codpiece.
- FX** *Elizabethan music begins and plays for about 10 seconds then fades. It is used to help re-inforce the passing of time. The dialogue and action continue without interruption*
- DAVID** *[Laughing]* Her voice was ever soft, gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman.
[Love's Labours Lost]
- THANH** *[Catching his good humour]* Her voice was ever soft, gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman.
[MUSIC swells, plays a wee while then fades]

SCENE 3 – go straight on

[Both characters could move to a new position. This scene covers several lessons from an immediate continuation of the above scene to the next lesson and then the next. At first THANH is simply copying, parrot fashion, but then, as the lessons progress and as she has done her homework, THANH is becoming better at speaking English albeit Elizabethan English. She develops markedly by the end of this scene. In order to accentuate the start of the next lesson, the actors could change or add a scarf, remove a cardigan, etc. MUSIC fades]

- DAVID** Come, fair maiden, let us commence thy second lesson and start with revision. Repeat after me. *[Indicating quickly]* Shoon, strossers, napkin.
THANH *[Indicating quickly]* Shoon, strossers, napkin.
DAVID *[Indicating quickly]* Noddle, sweet friends, forks.
THANH *[Indicating quickly]* Noddle, sweet friends, forks.
DAVID Vegitives, *[vegetables]*, canakin, *[small drinking vessel]* baldrick *[belt]*.
THANH Vegitives, canakin, baldrick.
DAVID Gaberdine *[loose outer coat]*, maggot-pie *[magpie]*, vex *[to annoy]*.
THANH Gaberdine, maggot-pie, vex.

[The excitement of the lessons builds. DAVID is in love with the language and teaching – THANH is in love with learning and enjoys DAVID'S passion for words. He gives rich meaning to the words and she imitates him meaning she learns the beautiful language and, at the same time, gets an insight into the human condition]

Shakespeare in Saigon 16

DAVID Excellent. Thy progress is commendable. But now, resolve [*explain*] me with all modest [*appropriate*] haste.
Brevity is the soul of wit.

THANH *Brevity is the soul of wit.*

DAVID *No legacy is so rich as honesty.*

THANH *No legacy is so rich as honesty.*

DAVID *Be not afraid of greatness.*

THANH *Be not afraid of greatness.*

DAVID *I must be cruel, only to be kind.*

THANH *I must be cruel, only to be kind.*

DAVID *The course of true love never did run smooth.*

THANH *The course of true love never did run smooth.*
[They laugh at the game and move with delight]

FX *Elizabethan music plays for only a few seconds then fades. The action if not the dialogue continues almost uninterrupted*
[Lighting could change in a subtle way to indicate a new day – more or less sunlight. The characters move to a new position or add a scarf etc. Now the lessons are more advanced]

DAVID Thanh!

THANH David!

DAVID A new day and a new lesson.

THANH Aye, sir.

DAVID Durst thou wish to speaketh well?

THANH [*Stronger*] Aye, sir.

DAVID Thou art so fine a student.

THANH Thou art so fine a teacher.
[The lesson or game begins in earnest. THANH completes what DAVID begins]

DAVID *What's mine is yours*

THANH *And what is yours is mine.*

DAVID *Hereafter, in a better world than this*

THANH *I shall desire more love and knowledge of you.*

DAVID *Our doubts are traitors*

THANH *And make us lose the good we oft might win.*

DAVID *That man that hath a tongue, I say, is no man*

THANH *If with his tongue he cannot win a woman.*

DAVID *But, soft! What light through yonder window breaks?*

THANH *It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.*

DAVID *When beggars die there are no comets seen;*

THANH *The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.*
[Now they're playing games with one another. The tension/drama builds. She does not complete his sentence but rather hits back with a retort. She gives as good as she gets]

DAVID *Asses are made to bear, and so are you.*

THANH *How poor are they that have not patience!*

DAVID *Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?*

THANH *Done to death by slanderous tongue.*

DAVID *Frailty, thy name is woman.*

THANH *Nothing can come of nothing.*

Shakespeare in Saigon 17

DAVID *Get thee to a nunnery.*
THANH *Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice.*
FX *Ten seconds or so of Elizabethan music which fades*
[Again the action does not stop. Slight clothing change, position of characters may change and slight lighting alteration but keep the lessons flowing.

This scene provides the climax where THANH has advanced in learning. Her speech in itself is good but she is also giving an accurate description of DAVID'S life today. He is thrilled with her linguistic skills but finds her words a little too close for comfort. His concern is shown by a mixture of modern English even slang mixed in with his Shakespearean language]

DAVID *[Tired after the lesson] Thy lesson endeth, mistress.*
THANH *O, my good lord, why are you thus alone?*
DAVID *Prithee, cease thy quilllets. [wisecracks]*
THANH *For what offense have I this fortnight been*
A banished woman from my Harry's bed?
DAVID *[A touch worried] Hang on! I hath not taught thee thus.*
THANH *Tell me, sweet lord, what is't [is it] that takes from thee*
Thy stomach, pleasure, and thy golden sleep?
DAVID *Now let's not get personal.*
THANH *Why dost thou bend thine eyes upon the earth,*
And start so often when thou sit'st alone?
DAVID *[Angry] Stop this!*
THANH *Why hast thou lost the fresh blood in thy cheeks*
DAVID *Thank!*
THANH *And given my treasure and my rights of thee*
To thick-eyed musing and cursed melancholy?
DAVID *[Anger increases] Enough, woman! Hold thy tongue!*
[THANH says what is literally true about DAVID at this time in his life]
THANH *Thy spirit within thee hath been so at war*
And thus hath so bestirred thee in thy sleep
That beads of sweat hath stood upon thy brow.
DAVID *[Furious] O most pernicious woman!*
FX *Elizabethan music begins softly.*
THANH *And in thy face strange motions have appeared.*
Oh, what portents are these?
DAVID *I'll give thee portents!*
THANH *Some heavy business hath my lord in hand,*
And I must know it, else he loves me not.
DAVID *[Roars] Enough!*
[BLACKOUT. Music swells and plays for 15 seconds or so then fades]

SCENE 4 – the day after the last lesson

[Music fades and lights come up but the room is dim. It is early evening. DAVID is lying on the floor in front of the settee or else sitting on the floor up against the settee. He groans. He is poorly, lonely and miserable. The drink has only added to his poor self-esteem. DAVID has become more scruffy whilst THANH has made a simple costume change, new shirt perhaps]

FX *Knocking on door*
THANH *[Pause. Calling from offstage] My lord, art thou within?*

Shakespeare in Saigon 18

DAVID *[Softly. Is he drunk?]* Go away.
FX *More knocking*
THANH *[Pause then THANH opens door and enters quietly. She cannot see him]* My lord?
DAVID *[Groaning]* Go away.
[THANH follows the sound and is alarmed moving quickly to help him]
THANH My lord, thou art ill.
DAVID *[Angry]* Begone woman. And I am not thy lord.
THANH I am gasted, *[frightened]* sir, to see thee so.
DAVID Taketh thy bleeding heart to someone who *doth* give a damn. *[She is shocked].*
THANH *[Confused]* My lord?
DAVID I am a miserable, embittered old man and wish to wallow in self-pity without help from any do-gooder including and especially thy good self. In short, piss off!
THANH *[Thinks she is to blame]* Oh sire, what canst I do to earn thy forgiveness?
DAVID *[Staggering to his feet]* For chrissake, woman; taketh thee thy leave!
THANH What ails thee, sire?
DAVID What ails me? Why, *[Sarcastic]* tis nothing. My wife hath left me, my children hate me, my ex-brother-in-law defrauded me and my mother harasseth me.
THANH Oh nay, sir.
DAVID And thy sympathy is useless so I suggest thou taketh thy fried rice, forsooth and verily and *[Louder]* bugger off!
THANH *[Genuinely upset. Speaks Vietnamese. She has never seen him like this]*
Ong oi, toi rat la so
Please sir, I am afraid.
DAVID *[Snaps]* And you can stop that bloody gibberish!
[He collapses onto settee or chair, a broken man. Pause]
THANH I wilt not forsake thee, my lord. *[He looks at her ready to explode, raises a hand with pointed finger then lets the hand drop, a broken man]* Verily I knew nothing of thy troubles. Prithee unburden thy soul, sir, if such be thy heart's desire.
DAVID Ah, cook *and* social worker?
THANH Thy mistress *[wife]* and thy marriage, my lord, art everything to thee.
DAVID Not in this country, not in *my* culture. Here we promise to love as long as ye both shall *give*. Once the giving's gone, so's the marriage.
THANH But thy children, sir. A child must its parents love.
DAVID You feed, clothe 'n wash them. You taketh them to the zoo and lighteth their birthday candles. Then, as "teenage adults" they decide you don't fit the mould of perfect pater. They calleth you a sad and miserable old git; and knoweth thou something?
THANH My lord?
DAVID They're right.
THANH If it pleaseth thee, sir, I canst proffer thee money.
DAVID *[Incensed]* What?
THANH I know I must neither a lender nor borrower be but for all thy ministrations to my learning, surely a small repayment I couldst make.
DAVID *[Angry]* I want not thy money, housewife, *[Shak: hussy, prostitute]* and here's another *ministration* to thy precious learning. *[Indicating himself]* There's no fool like an old fool. Now wilt thou prithee begone?

Shakespeare in Saigon 19

THANH *[She's going nowhere]* Nay, my lord.
DAVID *[Furious]* Nay? Nay!?
THANH Thou promised a lesson with shopkeepers, my lord and I must keep thee to thy word.
[It is not so much that she wants the lesson, which she does, but more that she wants to take him out of his self-pity and misery]
DAVID *[He whispers at her]* Witch. *[He struggles to stand, she offers to help, he orders her away]*
[Standing, pointing DR] Well get thee yonder. Thou art not yet in my shop.
[Excited. she moves DR and produces cloth bag from her pocket/sleeve]
THANH *[Indicating bag]* My basket.
DAVID *[Going behind small table DL. Muttering, mocking]* My basket. *[He makes a face sending up her "green" attitude. Indicating himself]* Behold thy green-grocer.
THANH *[Bounces into the shop]* Good morrow, sir. Tis ...
DAVID *[Holding up hand meaning stop]* Wrong! *[THANH shocked. She is sure she is correct]*
THANH *[THANH shocked. She is sure she is correct]* Wrong, my lord?
DAVID *[Placing cheap ridiculous wig on head or stuffing cushion under shirt]* Thy shopkeeper art a woman, woman!
THANH *[THANH relieved that it's not a major mistake, stifles a laugh then retreats and re-enters clearing throat]* Good morrow, mistress. Tis a fine new day methinks.
DAVID *[Speaking Greek]* Ti thellis? *[What do you want?]* *[THANH stunned. DAVID repeats the question a little annoyed]* Ti thellis?
THANH *[Confused. She wasn't expecting this]* My lord?
DAVID *[As himself]* Ha! *[Gotcha!]* This country's a melting-pot of nationality and language. Be prepared.
THANH *[Recovering. Very clever]* For mine own part, it was all Gleek *[sic]* to me.
[Shakespeare – almost]
DAVID *[Impressed. Touche]* With just enough of learning to misquote. *[Byron]* Now, pray continue.
THANH Prithee mistress, I desire thy finest vegetives and fruit.
[DAVID now speaks as a Greek woman, part-owner of the greengrocery]
DAVID *[As Greek woman]* What a you want?
THANH *[Pointing]* There. Leather-coats.
DAVID Leather coats? Them is apples. How many you want?
THANH Three scarlet crofton.
[DAVID mimes counting three apples and handing them to her. She holds basket and mimes accepting them]
DAVID One, two ... three. Something else?
THANH And violet buds for my sallet *[salad]*. *[Violet buds were part of an Elizabethan salad]*
DAVID *[Never heard of them]* Violet buds? Sallet?
THANH Then love-apples. *[Points to tomatoes]* Prithee, two firm and ripe.
DAVID *[Thinks customer is mad. Mimes placing them in her bag]* Two tomatoes.
THANH And *[Pointing]* whortleberries, brambles and apricocks.
DAVID What you are talking about? *[Pointing where she pointed]* This here is a blueberries.
THANH Nay, whortleberries.
DAVID *[Pointing]* This black-a-berries ...

Shakespeare in Saigon 20

THANH Nay brambles and *[Pointing]* there, apricocks.
DAVID *[Under breath]* Bloody idiot. *[Shaking head. As wife calling to husband Con offstage]* Hey Con. We got any apricocks? *[Pause. Louder]* A-pri-cocks? *[Pause. To THANH]* He say they same as apricots.
THANH Prithee of each one handful.
[THANH again proffers open bag and DAVID mimes placing fruit therein]
DAVID That's a ten dollar. *[Or appropriate relevant tender]*
THANH Dost thou have vegetives from Sir Walter Raleigh?
DAVID *[Mangled Greek pronunciation]* Wall-ter Rill-ee?
THANH *[Pointing]* Yes, there.
DAVID *[Exasperated]* Them is potatoes!
THANH Prithee thee, five, Walter Raleighs.
[DAVID groans, shakes head. More mimed passing of goods which should not take long]
DAVID That everything, lady?
THANH Nay, mistress, I pray thee, peppercorns.
DAVID *[Pointing]* There. Next to the *[Sarcastic]* apricocks!
THANH *[Helping herself]* I maketh for my lord and master, *[Proud of her proposed recipe]* poached partridge and peppercorns.
DAVID Fifteen a dollar. *[Or equivalent amount in local currency]*
THANH *[Mimes paying]* Ten ... fifteen.
DAVID *[Taking money]* And you be careful with the part-a-ridge. It can give you the runs.
THANH *[Does not understand]* Mistress?
DAVID The runs. *[Grabs stomach and groans]* Ohhhh.
THANH *[Understands]* Ah, shitty shitty bang bang. *[Bows]* Good morrow, mistress.

[THANH exits to DR and DAVID, groaning/moaning, removes wig/whatever and collapses on settee. THANH immediately to his side]
DAVID *[Miserable]* Depart woman, thy lesson is o'er.
THANH *[Wants his approval]* Doest I well, sir?
DAVID Yes, yes. Now prithee begone.
THANH Nay, sir.
DAVID *[Angry]* Aye, sir. I am sickly ... *[Looks at her]* and of thee.
THANH But thou promised me the post office.
DAVID *[Groaning]* Post office?
THANH Fruit and vegetives *and* the post office. *[Pause. Minor scold]* Keepeth thou thy word, my lord.
DAVID *[Groaning, gives in reluctantly]* Oh all right. But thou must Mistress Quickly be. *[a pun on move it]*
THANH *[Helping him return to shop counter]* Aye, my lord. I must sendeth thee my letter. *[She takes out envelope and returns DR ready to enter Post Office]*
DAVID *[Mumbling]* Bloody nuisance. *[Pause]* Well get on with it.
THANH *[Doesn't want to make the same mistake twice]* Your pardon, my lord, but art thou now mistress or master?
DAVID Master! An ageing, ailing male, a much piss-ed off bloke. Now prithee begin. *[THANH enters but is stopped in her tracks]* Not there. *[Rude. Pointing]* There. Can't you read? "Queue here!" *[THANH reads imaginary sign then moves upstage to the right place to queue. Pause as DAVID fiddles with nothing. He keeps her waiting tidying his imaginary table. Finally he calls]* Next! *[THANH approaches counter]*

Shakespeare in Saigon 21

THANH Prithee, sir, one stamp for mine letter.
DAVID Anything else?
THANH Sir?
DAVID I've got all this junk to sell. Wotcha want?
THANH *[Confused]* Junk, sir?
DAVID Aye. *[Indicating imaginary goods on counter]* Street directory. Key chain. Mouse pad.
THANH Nay, sir. Prithee one stamp.
DAVID *[Indicating more imaginary goods on counter]* How about a toothbrush in the colour of your favourite football team? *[THANH is shaking her head throughout this spiel]* A CD of the world's most unheard of vocalist? A calligraphy set for the illiterate?
THANH *[Persistent]* Nay, sir. Prithee one stamp.
DAVID One stamp? Is that all?
THANH Aye, sir.
DAVID But look here. *[Indicating]* A map of South America which doubles as a poncho. Great when it's chilly in Chile.
THANH Nay, sir.
DAVID *[Indicating vast array of imaginary goods]* Today's post office is an emporium, a repository for any and all things useless. Look. *[Indicates imaginary items]* Mobile phone charger for left-handed, unmarried Norwegians. Corkscrew for lapsed Catholics. Winnie the Pooh books with *real* fake honey.
THANH *[Stands up for herself]* I pray thee, sir, one stamp for thy letter.
DAVID My letter? Surely tis thine?
THANH *[Annoyed/frustrated that she's made a mistake]* Forgive me, sir. Tis mine indeed.
DAVID *[Grinning]* So, how can I help? *[She stares at him. He backs off with apology]* One stamp it is. *[He mimes handing it over and she mimes paying. Annoyed she turns and leaves]* Hey, just a minute! *[She stops. He holds out imaginary change]* Your change. *[THANH is humiliated that she has to return to counter and collect her money. She does then returns DR but stops at door of PO as DAVID calls with American accent]* Have a nice day!
THANH *[Angry, finger-pointing]* Sir, thou art a cretinous, clapper-clawed codpiece!
DAVID *[Laughing moves to settee]* Oh well-said, mistress. I love thy wit.
THANH *[Moving to him still angry]* A measley, onion-eyed lewdster!
DAVID *[More laughter from DAVID]* I like it! More! Insult me again!
THANH *[THANH is not finished. In close]* Thou flap-mouthed, bat-fowling, fen-sucked pignut!
DAVID Yes! *[Howls of laughter from DAVID as the furious THANH exits upstage. Suddenly, without delay, she returns and stands upstage. DAVID is still chortling. He senses she is there and turns to look at her]* Go on, another insult, I beg thee. More. *[Faces front, still amused]*
THANH *[Soft]* I cannot, my lord.
DAVID *[Enjoying the moment]* I love it when thou speakest dirty.
THANH *[Pause. Sincere. Still soft]* I knowest I love thee. *[Quickly exits]*
DAVID *[She is gone. DAVID still laughing when the penny drops. Takes him a second to take it all in]* *[Laughing has suddenly stopped]* What? *[Turns to see her gone]* Hey! *[Getting up]* Woman! Come back. *[Louder]* Mistress! *[DAVID in shock. Hand through hair. He repeats her last sentence]* 'I knowest I love thee'. What the hell was that all about? *[Sits in disbelief]* Steady, Dave. She's young enough to be your granddaughter. *[Staggered. Repeats her line]* 'I knowest I love thee'.

Shakespeare in Saigon 22

FX *Phone rings interrupting his thoughts. Without thinking he goes to phone and hits speaker-phone. Ringing stops when he hits button* Mother is about to speak on tape

DAVID Hello Mother.

MOTHER David, I'm dying. I can feel it in my bones. *[Pause]* Did you hear what I said?

DAVID *[Not sarcastic, almost human, thinking of THANH]* That's nice.

MOTHER I hope you've been to see the undertaker. I know my time is up.

DAVID Life certainly can be strange.

MOTHER There comes a time when a person knows ... *[Surprised]* what did you say?

DAVID *[Actually listens to her]* I'm sorry. What did you say?

MOTHER *[Why is he being human?]* Have you been drinking?

DAVID I fear, mistress, I may be drunk on love.

MOTHER *[Angry]* You've still got that mail-order bride. You gorbellied, folly-fallen maggot-pie!

DAVID *[Suddenly pleased]* That's what *she* said.

MOTHER She's a gold-digger. She only wants your money.

DAVID No gold here, Mother.

MOTHER Then it's obviously sex. I suppose you're popping those Niagara *[sic]* pills.

DAVID Not guilty, m'lud. The young lady's best friends and mine remain steadfastly distant.

MOTHER How can you be so stupid?

FX *Mother stops speaking*

DAVID *[Shaking head]* Well you know what the great man told us, Mother. "Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind." "Good-night, sweet ladies, good-night." *[Hits off button and Mother is gone]*
[DAVID thinks aloud. What is happening in the relationship? What does he feel for THANH? More importantly, what does she feel for him?]

DAVID You're wrong, David; hopelessly so. You're clutching at cupid's straws. Look at you. You're a mess. Someone says, 'Hi' and you wet yourself. *[Still can't understand as he repeats her comment]* 'I knowest I love thee'.
It's my hearing. What she really said was, 'I goest to make tea.' *[Frustrated]* Or maybe in Vietnamese she said, 'You're a gentleman, an *honourable* boring old fart'.

But what if she really *does* fancy me? *[Touching his hair, feeling his face]* I'm not the plainest man alive. *[Boosting his case]* And older men make better lovers.
[Suddenly panics] Oh god, what if I have to prove it? *[Looks at crutch]* Is there life beneath the verandah? Can I remember basic plumbing? Do I need Viagaras for my Niagaras?

FX *Elizabethan music begins softly*

DAVID *[Feeling face]* I need a shave. *[Feels hair]* And a transplant. *[Feels/pats stomach]* And a corset. *[Heading to bathroom]* God, where is my youth?
[Blackout. Music swells and plays for about 15 seconds. THANH has been shopping and wears a change of clothes. DAVID is at his best – well ...]

SCENE 5 – the next morning

FX *Door knocking*

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[Lights up next morning. Room is empty]
DAVID *[Calling from bathroom]* Pray enter.
THANH *[Enters excited with bulging shopping bag]* Good morrow my lord.
DAVID *[Calling]* I am without attending to my ablutions. Pray be seated.
THANH I cannot my lord. I bring thee great news.
DAVID *[Nervous]* Oh? Pray tell.
THANH Nay my lord. I must look upon thy countenance. *[TRANH could tidy flat]*
DAVID *[Uncertain]* Really?
THANH Prithee make haste, sir. My heart it beats apace.
[Pause. DAVID is nervous. Suddenly he enters and freezes perhaps striking a pose a la a male model. His hair has been transformed – badly. In a hopeless attempt to look younger he has gelled his hair – to make it look cool, groovy or trendy when in fact it looks ridiculous. THANH is suddenly speechless]
DAVID Good morrow, mistress. *[Pause. She stares. He realizes some explanation is required]* Ah, I feel ... much younger today.
THANH Thy appearance is ... *[Awkward pause]*
DAVID *[Moving at last. Realises his folly]* Indeed how my achievements mock me! *[Changing subject]* I see thou hast to market been.
THANH *[Back on track]* Oh my lord, tis truth indeed. I hath bought *[Indicates bag]* these goods yet speaking only our beloved Elizabethan English.
DAVID Congratulations. And that is thy good news?
THANH It was my first test of what thou hast taught me.
DAVID *[He wants to know more]* I see.
THANH The market stall-holder sold me the finest love apples and the filthiest Walter Raleighs.
DAVID Did he?
THANH But he chargeth me too much, my lord and thus I told him so. I cursed him as thou hath taught me.
DAVID *[Surely not]* Thou cursed him?
THANH Thou wouldst have been so proud, my lord. Watch. *[Demonstrates her fury]* “A pox upon thy house, sir, and upon thy children and thy children’s children.”
[Pause. She awaits his praise]
DAVID *[Not sure how to behave]* Excellent. A fine curse. *[Pause]* And that is thy news?
THANH *[But the best is yet to come]* The entire village bore witness to my speech, sir. But I have saved the best till last.
DAVID *[Confused, shattered, embarrassed or all three]* There is more?
THANH As I left the market I declared the sting of my wrath. *[Demonstrates again]* “May thou forever kiss the coarseness of thy mother-in-law’s foul-smelling arse!”

[THANH is thrilled with her triumph and awaits the approval of DAVID. He both looks and feels stupid. He’s made a huge miscalculation. He thought THANH had romantic feelings for me when nothing could be further than the truth. But she wants an immediate crit on her first foray into the Sassenach streets. She awaits his approval]
DAVID *[Stunned silence before summoning up false courage]* That is most wondrous. Thou hast spoken with the voice of angels.
THANH *[THANH thrilled and places bag aside and bows]* I thank thee, my lord. Thou art a most excellent teacher.
DAVID *[Turns away to exit]* Prithee thee, excuse me. I have my fantasies to ablute.

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THANH But stay, my lord. *[He stops]* I have yet to speak of my great news.
DAVID *[He turns. Dramatic pause]* That was not thy great news?
THANH *[Beaming]* Nay my lord. I speak roundly *[plainly]* of something most wondrous. Tis news to make heaven seem even the happier.
DAVID Goodness. That sounds ... wondrous.
THANH *[Pause. Big announcement]* My lord, *[Pause]* I am in love.
DAVID *[Stunned]* Say again?
THANH I have my heart betrothed and can no longer keep from telling thee so.
DAVID *[Still uncertain. Is the on-again, off-again romance on again? Softly]* Jesus.
THANH This matter hath troubled me greatly but now I feel my heart new opened and love I fain would pledge.
DAVID *[Hesitant. Takes deep breath]* Then pledge, pray pledge.
THANH *[Goes and kneels beside him]* It is thee, my lord, who hath released my heart's desire. It is thee, gracious sire, who hath given me courage and skill to love. I pray thee, grant me thy blessing and tell me thy heart soars as does mine.
DAVID It does. *[She looks up for confirmation. He nods]* It soars. It soars.
THANH *[Stands, takes his hand and kisses it]* I have this day expressed my love to the man I love. *[Pause. The penny drops for DAVID]*
DAVID The man thou dost love?
THANH *[Beaming]* Aye, my lord. He speaketh little English yet when I spoke what thou hath taught me, he knew my love for him was grand.
DAVID That's nice. *[Pause]* Verily?
THANH Aye, sir. Verily. And this is what I spoke. *[Repeats what she said to her true love] When I saw you I fell in love, and you smiled because you knew.*
DAVID *[Pause. She wants his approval]* And doth thy Romeo have a name?
THANH He is called Huu, my lord.
DAVID Who?
THANH Aye sir and I hath told him of thy great kindness and he wisheth to make thy acquaintance.
DAVID How kind but I'm busy today.
THANH His family will be honoured to welcome thee, sir.
DAVID His family?
THANH They wish to honour the great man who helped their son find true love.
DAVID Nonsense. *[She is hurt]* I mean I goeth not to social events. *[She will not take NO for an answer]* And I hath nothing to wear. *[Indicates himself]* Methinks I am a scruff.
THANH *[Delighted]* I knoweth that, my lord.
DAVID *[Angry]* Thou knoweth?
THANH *[Busies herself at her shopping bag]* And therefore hath made provision. Here is cloth from the market to maketh thee trossers and a gabardine.
DAVID Nay mistress. Thou shalt do no such thing.
THANH I have begun already, my lord.
DAVID Begun already?
THANH *[Approaches with tape measure]* I need thy final measure and thereby complete thy suit. *[She moves behind him placing measure around his waist. She is business-like, he upset]*
DAVID Hey! *[He mutters]* What doest thou, mistress?
THANH *[Reads tape, makes note and indicates his stomach]* Quite fulsome, my lord – too much ale. *[He goes to protest but stops as she measures his arm]*

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DAVID Stop this nonsense! I protest!
[She makes another note then kneels beside him]

THANH If thou please, my lord? *[She holds out end of tape]*

DAVID What?

THANH Wilt thou place the measure at thy codpiece?
[Stunned, DAVID takes the measure then holds end of tape inside his trousers. THANH kneels and measures his inside leg distance at his ankle]

DAVID This is an outrage! *[She takes measure, stands and makes note]* I wilt not allow thy business to unfold.

THANH *[Smiling busying herself with materials]* Methinks the gentleman protesteth too much.

DAVID *[Tries a new tack to get out of the visit]* Look, there is no need for this. I've done nothing to deserve thy fussing.

THANH On the contrary, my lord, thou hast done everything.

DAVID I'm a recluse, a shut-in. I'm anti-social, delight in being miserable and hath no need of garments new.

THANH Thou wilt be resplendent, sir.

DAVID *[Anger building]* Bugger resplendent; I desire above all else to be alone.

THANH Thou canst not mean that, my lord.

DAVID *[Explodes]* Damn thee mistress. If I choose to be as happy as a bastard on fathers' day that's my choice. Sticketh thy inside-leg measurement up thy fundament and closeth the door behind thee. *[Pointing]* Out damned spot! out I say!
[Pause. Silence. THANH is distressed. DAVID ashamed]

THANH *[Picking up things, starts to exit]* Forgive me, my lord.

DAVID *[Pause then goes after her. Contrite]* No wait. Don't go. *[She keeps going]* Thank!
[Louder] Prithree stop!
[She stops and turns to face him. He moves to her]
[Humble] It is I who must beg forgiveness.

THANH *[She shakes her head]* Nay sir.

DAVID *[He nods]* Yea sir.
[He kneels, holds her hand and bows his head. Does he cry?]

THANH *[She places hand under his chin and lifts his face]* There is nothing to forgive.

DAVID I must explain.
[He kisses her hand and she helps him stand]

THANH *[She indicates settee]* Come, my lord. *[Mimics DAVID]* Move thy bloomin' arse! *[She mimics what he previously said to her]* David, sit!
[They enjoy the joke but these are heavy times as they return to the settee]

DAVID Thou art young and hath little understanding.

THANH I can but try, my lord.

DAVID Life is rich in adversity. We suffer slings and arrows but how we respond depends on many things not least of which is age. It is harder to survive when one is ancient and I am old.

THANH Methinks young at heart, my lord.

DAVID *[Puts finger to his lips. She understands and lets him explain]* I was a good teacher where my passion for poetry invaded my classroom. Students spake, 'Oh sir, I found my love for literature from thy lessons'.

THANH I too can say that.

DAVID From my work I took great comfort but my personal life brought only pain. My wife, where is she now?

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THANH She hath gone, my lord.
DAVID Aye and to another woman.
THANH *[Shocked]* Woman, my lord?
DAVID My savings – gone. *[Shaking head]* And my adviser’s Swiss bank account groweth fatter by the hour.
THANH But thou hast love, my lord, and children.
DAVID Children! What children?
THANH *[Pointing to photo]* Thou hast grandchildren.
DAVID My son is involved with drugs and may well be dead. My daughter’s religion demands no contact with non-believers so my grand-children hath never heard of me. And my mother ... *[Despairs]*
THANH *[Sympathetic tries to comfort him]* My lord.
DAVID *[Brushes her aside]* And all this now, at the *end* of my life. Why not the beginning or middle? If so, I *might* recover. Now, tis too late.
THANH Nay sir. And I know of one who loves thee still.
DAVID My retirement dream, bursting with joyous expectation – now but dust. *[Imagines]* I was to stroll the streets of Dickensian London; wander by lakes fringed with Wordsworth’s daffodils; explore Top Withens and Hardy country. By the Avon I would worship with Will.
THANH And still so, my lord.
DAVID Then the book within me; a sparkling text inspiring teachers to inspire students; how to fall in love with *the* most beautiful language. *[Shrugs in despair]* The dream is no more and I am undone.
THANH *[Worried]* Nay, sir, nay.
DAVID *[Giving advice]* If ever thou suffer misfortune, do so when young. Look at me. Was ever so pathetic a figure seen? I wear the grotesque robe of self-pity, Behold, I am dressed to die but worse, *worse*, I am too old to care. *[He collapses in despair]*
THANH *[Goes to him]* Prithee, my lord, lift up thy heart.
DAVID *[Recovering]* Look at thee; healthy, young, the world at thy feet. The young hath time and scope to dream. The old hath death.
THANH I beg thee, sir, desist from thy sadness.
DAVID And thou hast family. Grand-parents to love and care for thee; thy young man and his family. Mine hath absconded and I am undone. Pray forget me. Flee. Liveth thy life, thou who hath everything and youth.
THANH *[Long pause]* Twas not always so, my lord.
DAVID *[Despairs, hates himself]* I hath no courage. I cannot even end my own misery.
THANH *[Removing photos from her bag or pocked]* I hath ... keepsakes.
DAVID *[Deeply sad]* I am undone. *[Pause. Slow to recover. Looks at her holding photos]* What?
THANH *[See holds out a photo]* My family, sire.
DAVID *[Taking photo]* See, family; healthy, strong and young. *Young!*
THANH *[Soft, indicates]* My father, my lord.
DAVID A *young* man, healthy, professional - with a future.
THANH He was murdered, my lord.
DAVID *[Doesn’t hear her last comment. Looking around]* This room reeks of failure. *[Pause. DAVID is still wrapped up in his own misfortune. It takes him a moment or so to understand what she has said]*

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THANH *[Handing him another photo]* And my mother also. *[Pause]* But she was raped first.

DAVID *[Stunned. Pause. Still can't take it in]* Murdered? Raped?

THANH *[Handing another photo]* My brothers and sisters. *[Pause]* All dead.

DAVID *[Shocked]* Dead? All of them?

THANH *[Nodding, THANH produces a letter, old, well folded]* My sisters hath written the tale of my family. Here, 'tis translated into the modern English.
[He takes and opens the letter and begins to read. Lighting change as THANH through DAVID relates her family's history. Use lighting to add to the pathos and danger of the tale]

DAVID Our parents were frightened when the soldiers came from the North. Our father was sent to a re-education camp and our mother feed six children on bo-bo grains. *[He is unsure]* Bo-bo?

THANH Tis hard grain for horses, my lord.

DAVID *[Continues to read]* Many people disappeared and were never seen again. The authorities were cruel and dangerous. *[Looks at THANH]* Who wrote this?

THANH In Vietnamese, sir, by my older sisters ... before they died.

DAVID *[In shock then returns to reading]* Our mother bribed officials to have our father released. But the authorities stole our home. Many people tried to escape and our parents joined them. *[Looks at her]* Escape?

THANH At least one million Vietnamese, sir, and nearly all by sea.

DAVID *[Reading]* With gold hidden in our clothes, we took only rice and water and walked for days. We could easily have been arrested. Our mother told us to be as quiet as a mouse but our baby sister, Thanh, ...
[He stops, looks at her]

THANH *[Indicating herself]* Behold the baby of the family.

DAVID *[Back to letter]* We sank up to our necks in mud. Our parents saved us. There were hundreds waiting for boats. *[Looks at THANH]* Hundreds?

THANH Our boat was old and small and we were 112 people.

DAVID *[Back reading]* We left Vietnam and prayed we would be safe. While still in the river we heard screams. An old boat sank and many people drowned. Our journey was hard. We had little food or water. The ship's engine stopped and we drifted. Then we saw another boat. We prayed for help but instead it was unspeakable horror. This boat had pirates who did terrible things.

THANH Thou mayest stop now, my lord. *[She reaches for the letter. He looks at her]*

DAVID I would like to continue ... if it is not too hard for thee.

THANH *[Quietly]* Nay, sir. Prithee continue.

DAVID *[Continues to read]* The pirates shot our father and all the men. The young boys, including our brothers, were screaming as the pirates threw them into the sea. The mothers wailed. Terrified, we crouched below and sat on our sister Thanh to hide her. We heard our mother cry out as she and the other women were raped. Some begged to be thrown overboard. *[DAVID confused, looks at THANH and asks a question]* Thrown overboard?

THANH Drowning endeth the rapes, my lord.

DAVID *[Shakes his head in disbelief then reads again]* The pirates stole our money and left the mothers to bleed to death. Our boat drifted and we lived on rain water. We fell asleep listening to our mother sobbing. She prayed for death. *[He looks at her]*

THANH I was lucky to be so young.

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DAVID And speaking of food, pray tell what awaits at thy true love's dwelling?
THANH Oh none but the finest, my lord, which surely will visit thee with
[Pause as they look at one another then speak as one with happiness]
BOTH shitty shitty bang bang.
[They exit laughing as the music swells and the lights fade to blackout]

Curtain Calls

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