

# THE FARAWAY NEARBY

## A Day with Juan, pt. 1 and pt. 2

A Full Length Play in Two Acts

This play was originally developed at Nosotros' New Play Festival, Ricardo Montalban Theatre in Hollywood, California and then read at the Texas State University Department of Theatre and Dance's Black and Latino Playwrights Conference where it was directed by Luis Munoz.

Revised draft: September 9, 2016

### Characters: (in order of appearance)

Juan Sandoval.....31 years old, former Lt. in Vietnam  
Evelyn Ross.....genteel, mid-twenties, but mature beyond her years  
Frank.....in his early sixties, although he looks younger under

a certain light.

Phun Loan.....a Vietnamese-American woman in her early thirties, lovely and almost delicate but with no nonsense about it.

Act I: Time: Summer, 1974  
Place: Concepcion, (La Chona), Texas, population 120.

Act II: Time: Thirty two years later, Spring 2006  
Place: Udonthani, Thailand, population 330,000.

## ACT I

*THE RADIO IS ON A NEWCAST ABOUT THE PRESENT*

*RELEASE OF AMERICAN P.O.W.S IN VIETNAM AS THE LIGHTS COME UP ON JUAN SANDOVAL, THIRTY ONE. HE IS UNROLLING A SMALL TAPESTRY ON THE FLOOR. HE WEARS A VERY FINE KIMINO OVER ARMY PANTS AND IS BARE CHESTED. HIS HAIR IS LONG AND SHAGGY AND HIS BEARD IS THE SAME. BECAUSE HE MISSED OUT ON HIS HIPPIE DAYS AS A FORMER LT. SERVING IN VIETNAM, HE IS NOW MAKING UP FOR LOST TIME, HAIR WISE. A VARIETY OF MUSIC, FROM COUNTRY TO ROCK IS HEARD THAT WAS POPULAR IN 1974. HE STOPS FOR A MOMENT TO LISTEN TO THE RADIO BROADCAST AND THEN CHANGES THE STATION. THERE'S A KNOCK ON THE DOOR AT FIRST JUAN DOESN'T EVEN HEAR IT. AFTER A MOMENT,*

*THERE'S ANOTHER KNOCK. HE'S STILL NOT CONVINCED IT'S EVEN POSSIBLE. HE LOWERS THE MUSIC A LITTLE AND LISTENS, HOLDING HIS SAMURAI SWORD CLOSE TO HIM, READY TO USE IT IF HE HAS TO.*

EVERLYN: Hello! (More knocks.) Mr. Sandoval? Your brother said you're always home. JUAN: (barely audible) Like it's his fucking business.

EVERLYN: Please answer the door. I'm just happy to hear—you made it back. (pause) Please. I won't take too much of your time.

*HE HAS TO TAKE A PEEK. HE CANNOT BELIEVE HE HAS TO TAKE A PEEK. HE CANNOT FIGURE OUT WHO IN THE WORLD THIS COULD BE.*

JUAN: Who the hell are you?

EVELYN: My name is Evelyn Ross. I have something of yours.

*HE TAKES ANOTHER PEEK.*

EVELYN: I know you're in there. I just saw you through the window.

JUAN: I don't even know who you are! Go away.

EVELYN: What's that? I didn't hear what you said. Mr. Sandoval. . .(pause) is that you?

JUAN: I'm trying to sleep.

EVELYN: I'm sorry. I don't want to disturb you. This won't take but a minute.

JUAN: You need to get off of my property right now. It's posted. No trespassing.

EVELYN: I have something of yours that's all. I picked it up in Vietnam.

*NOW HE'S REALLY CONFUSED. HE TAKES ANOTHER LOOK OUT THE CURTAIN.*

EVELYN: I thought you might like this back.

*SHE FLASHES HIS DOG TAGS AT HIM*

JUAN: I'm going to give you ten seconds to get your ass off my property, you hear me? (to himself) "I picked this up in Vietnam." Right.

EVELYN: We have the same birthday. I just noticed that. (pause)

Look. . .I'm sorry to have disturbed you. I will leave your dog tags on the floor here. I just thought you might like to have them back. That's all.

*YOU HEAR HER PLACE SOMETHING ON THE PORCH AND THEN BEGIN TO WALK AWAY. MUCH TO HIS OWN SURPRISE HE OPENS THE DOOR.*

JUAN: Hold on!

*HE BENDS DOWN TO GET THE DOG TAGS.*

JUAN: What in the hell? Is this some kind of sick joke?

EVELYN: No. I took a trip to Vietnam a few months ago.

JUAN: Right, I took a vacation to hell over Christmas.

EVELYN: My husband is missing. He's been missing in action for five years. So I went to Vietnam in search of anything I could find out about him.

*HE LOOKS AT HER. SHE'S LOOKING AT HIS SWORD. EVELYN IS IN HER MID- TWENTIES. THERE IS A GENTEEL ELEGANCE ABOUT HER. SHE IS MATURE BEYOND HER YEARS.*

JUAN: Take a picture, it'll last longer.<sup>[L] [SEP]</sup> EVELYN: I'm sorry. I've never see anything. . .like that.<sup>[L] [SEP]</sup> JUAN: I make'em.

Custom.<sup>[L] [SEP]</sup> EVELYN: It's amazingly beautiful.<sup>[L] [SEP]</sup> JUAN: So what do you want? Are you from around here or what?<sup>[L] [SEP]</sup> EVELYN: Is it alright if I come in.for just a moment. It's pretty hot out here.

JUAN: I don't let anyone- -just stop by. Sorry.<sup>[L] [SEP]</sup> EVELYN: No, I'm from Idaho.<sup>[L] [SEP]</sup> JUAN: Ida what?<sup>[L] [SEP]</sup> EVELYN: Idaho. I'm not

used to this kind of heat. That's all. [L] [SEP] JUAN: Well its even hotter in Viet Nam. And you say you went there. . . EVELYN: It was unbelievable. I have never experienced anything like that.

*HE GIVES THE DOGTAGS A REAL LOOKING OVER.* I found twenty of them. [L] [SEP] JUAN: What? [L] [SEP] EVELYN: Dog tags.

JUAN: Twenty dog tags? Now I know you're pulling my leg. [L] [SEP] EVELYN: A street peddler was selling them in Hanoi. I paid a quarter for each one. I've

been returning them since I got back last year. JUAN: Been what? [L] [SEP] EVELYN: Everyone else has been dead. JUAN: So what's to return then?

EVELYN: Pardon me?

JUAN: I didn't ask you for these. . . did I?

You're the first one that's. . .been- - -

EVELYN: The families have been really grateful to get them back. For some. ..it's all they'll ever get back. Could I ask you for a glass of water? I'm about to die of thirst.

*GESTURES FOR HER TO ENTER. JUAN'S PLACE IS SURPRISINGLY SPARSE. HER ATTENTION GOES TO THE SMALL RUG ON THE FLOOR. THE "RITUAL" HE WAS PREPARING.*

JUAN: I don't want you to stay. . .too long. I have. ..an appointment. EVELYN: Oh. Alright. Of course. [L] [SEP] *HE GOES AND GRABS HER WATER.* [L] [SEP] JUAN: And if you think I'm going to thank you for them.

EVELYN: No. That's not why I'm doing it.

JUAN: So you like driving to nowhere places and knocking on people's doors that didn't invite you?

EVELYN: Look. . .I'm sorry. I'm obviously intruding. You've got the tags. That's all I wanted.

JUAN: You said your husband was. . .

EVELYN: In Vietnam. He's been missing since 1971. (beat) So if I take this road back, the one I drove up on, if I take it back to the main road. . . .

JUAN: No wonder.<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>EVELYN: No wonder. . . what?

JUAN: You think you're doing something for other people but really. . .you're just doing it for yourself.

EVELYN: Doing what. ..I'm sorry? JUAN: Running around returning these.

EVELYN: I just know how hard it is. It's a horrible thing not to know anything about someone I love very much. I know what its like to be waiting. And hoping. And because I don't know what happened to him. . . .

JUAN: So the people, when you return the dog tags, do they know where their sons or husbands ended up? When you drop by like this?

EVELYN: Yes. In most cases, they've buried them. I don't just drop by uninvited. I call first. I've been calling you for two weeks, but you're line has been temporarily disconnected.

JUAN: I'm not paying my bills anymore.

*SHE STARTS TO LEAVE.*

EVELYN: So. . .anyway. I'm sorry to have disturbed you.

JUAN: The mind is like this cup, if you do not empty yourself, how can you expect to be filled?

EVELYN: I'm sorry?<sup>[[SEP]]</sup>JUAN: Where are you going?<sup>[[SEP]]</sup>EVELYN: I'm obviously intruding. . . . JUAN: That's funny. . .<sup>[[SEP]]</sup>*HE WALKS TO THE DOOR AND CLOSES IT.*

I was thinking the opposite. One door closes so another door opens. No mistakes, right?

*SHE DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO RESPOND. JUAN ATTEMPTS TO DRAW TAP WATER INTO HIS MUG.*

JUAN: Oh shit. I keep forgetting. (to Evelyn) No utilities.

*HE LOOKS AROUND AND FINDS A MILK JUG. POURS SOME WATER INTO THE MUG THEN WALKS OVER TO EVELYN. SHE HESITATES TO TAKE IT.*

This comes from the well. It's better for you.. There might not be a lot of people in La Chona, but if you go door to door, you'll see how many old folks are still standing. We got a couple of hundred year olds living here. And why do you think?

*HE TOASTS HER WITH THE MUG. THEN TAKES A DRINK OUT OF IT. HE REFILLS IT AND OFFERS IT TO HER AGAIN. THIS TIME SHE TAKES IT. SHE IS VERY THIRSTY, SHE DRINKS EVERY DROP OF IT.*

There's more.

*HE REFILLS IT FOR HER. THEY STARE AT EACH OTHER FOR A MOMENT.*

EVELYN: What?

JUAN: What?

*HE HANDS THE MUG TO HER. AGAIN SHE FINISHES IT OFF. THIS TIME SHE ADMIRES THE MUG BEFORE HANDING JUAN THE EMPTY CUP.*

JUAN: My family makes them EVELYN: Are those hand painted?

JUAN: In laid. By hand. On my mother's side, since the turn of the century. You want some more?

EVELYN: No, thank you. I really have to go, Mr. Sando-- JUAN: Call me Juan.

EVELYN: I really don't drop by on people without calling first. But since I happened to be nearby.

JUAN: Nobody happens to just be nearby La Chona, Texas unless they're planning on

it.<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>EVELYN: I'm sorry, La—what?<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>JUAN: And you came all the way from. . .what did you say?<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>EVELYN: Idaho. Stanley, Idaho. What is La Cho---I thought this was Concepcion. JUAN: La Chona, for short---it's the same thing.<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>EVELYN: It was wrong to just drop by, I'm sorry.<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>JUAN: What if I told you were summoned here?<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>*EVELYN DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO MAKE OF THAT.*<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>There's that story about the Zen monk who is going



to die. Do you know that one? *SHE SHAKES HER HEAD.*

He's an elder, maybe a hundred years old. He's on his death bed when he opens his eyes and says, "Where are my shoes?!" His compadre tells him, "Where do you think you're going? Are you crazy in the head? You're dying old man. Even the doctor has told you so. At the most you got a few minutes.. The elder says, "That's why I'm asking you for my shoes. I want to go to the cemetery." Well, you'll be there soon enough, his compadre says. "Yeah, but I don't want you or anyone else to drag me there." We won't have to drag you, you're a bag of bones, light as a feather, the wind could blow you there, ese. But the old man, bien terco doesn't drop it. "I'm gonna walk there by myself. I will meet death there, by myself. I've never leaned on nobody and I'm not going to start now. " But he didn't want to be carried there, right. . . by his good for nothing relatives. So he gets up, finds his own shoes and walks to the damn cemetery. When he gets there. . .he digs his own grave . .with his bare hands. And then he lays down in it and dies. (beat) That's exactly what I'm going to do, durangama! Like Buddha says! Make yourself available to the beyond! But death is never like the movies. If you go there, welcoming the beyond, the beyond welcomes you first. And then what happens after that, is that the beyond keeps echoing you. . . it goes on echoing you. . .for all time. That's why you're here. To echo me. (beat) You want some more water? The facilities are out there if you---

EVELYN: No, thanks. I'm fine. I really have to get going.<sup>[SEP]</sup>JUAN: Let me thank you now. You can't succeed at seppuku without a compatriot.

*HE POINTS TOWARDS THE RITUAL DISPLAY ON THE FLOOR.*

EVERLYN: I've already taken up way too much of your time.<sup>[L]</sup><sup>[SEP]</sup>*SHE WALKS TOWARDS THE DOOR. HE GETS THERE BEFORE SHE CAN.* JUAN: This will just take a moment, please? I could really use your help. *SHE HESITATES.*

I just need a witness, that's all. *Seppuku* is a very formal ceremony. There's etiquette and considerable preparation. And its nothing without a witness. And that's where you come in, the *kaishaku*. The assistant. There's generally a close friend of the condemned present, so we're going to assume you're a closer friend than we know right now. Why else would you be here? I mean you did come knocking, right?

*HE LOCKS THE DOOR. SHE PANICS.*<sup>[L]</sup><sup>[SEP]</sup>This is only a formality, to secure the environment. We don't want any more interruptions, so we can start.

*SHE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO BUT QUICKLY LOOKS AROUND FOR A POSSIBLE ESCAPE.*

I've gone over it many times, everything will work the way its suppose to,

*HE GESTURES TOWARDS THE SWORD.*<sup>[L]</sup><sup>[SEP]</sup>--so that it takes the least amount of effort on both our parts.

*EVERLYN GETS UP QUICKLY.*

EVERLYN: I need you to open the door.

JUAN: You'll be able to do that yourself. Bushido respects others.

I'm not going to hurt you. If that's what you're thinking.

EVELYN: No. I just have to go. I really do.

JUAN: And you will. I promise.

*EVELYN STARTS PACING BACK AND FORTH LIKE AN ANXIOUS TRAPPED ANIMAL WHILE JUAN WATCHES HER, IRRITATED.*

JUAN: So you got ants in your pants or what? Can you sit down for a moment? I need to...to concentrate.

*SHE IGNORES HIM. SHE CONTINUES TO PACE.*

EVELYN: I'm diabetic.

JUAN: And that means you can't sit or what?

EVELYN: I had my insulin today. . .but I can't be here long without it.

JUAN: You won't be here long. So if it's alright to ask. . .what did they tell you. . about your husband?

EVELYN: What do you mean?

JUAN: What did the military report to you? (beat) Can you please sit down?

*SHE HESITATES, BUT FINALLY SITS.*

EVELYN: They said his plane went down.

JUAN: Do you have his dog tags? Your husband's?

EVELYN: No. All that made it back were miniscule fragments of bone and a tooth they couldn't positively identify.

JUAN: So he was buried with full military honors?

EVELYN: The government came up with a coffin, but it was empty. Except for the bone and tooth.

JUAN: Symbolic remains, like it matters.<sup>[[L]]</sup><sup>[[SEP]]</sup>EVELYN: That's why I know he walked away from the crash.<sup>[[L]]</sup><sup>[[SEP]]</sup>JUAN: That happened a lot.<sup>[[L]]</sup><sup>[[SEP]]</sup>EVELYN: What?<sup>[[L]]</sup><sup>[[SEP]]</sup>JUAN: Soldiers walking away from the crash. Maybe not walking. . .but- - -

EVELYN: See that's what my heart tells me. And still the government ignores the facts. If they think burying his empty coffin makes it alright to stop the negotiations, they are badly mistaken. The whole thing is starting to be a closed book. And I know in my heart that he's still alive. I feel him very much alive. And now that all the known POWs have been released, they're closing the case on everyone else.

*SHE STARTS TO CRY QUIETLY.*

EVELYN: I'm sorry. I really have to get going.

*HE ONCE AGAIN BEATS HER TO THE DOOR.*

JUAN: The warrior protects and defends because he realizes the value of others. I'd prefer the whole thing to go peacefully, if it can. It doesn't have to take long.

*GESTURES FOR HER TO SIT. SHE DOES. HE WALKS UP TO HIS RITUAL SPACE.*

JUAN: As you can see, the location of an official *seppuku* ceremony is very important. And even more important than that is. . .the state of mind that goes with it. After the condemned empties himself. . .the assistant cuts his head off. I mean that's how it's done traditionally

*EVELYN PANICS AND STARTS WALKING AROUND THE ROOM TRYING TO FIND A WAY OUT. HE BLOCKS THE ONLY DOORWAY BESIDES THE FRONT DOOR.*

JUAN: I'm sorry. . .is something wrong?

*SHE STARTS TO SCREAM.*

EVELYN: Help! Somebody help me!<sup>[SEP]</sup>JUAN: The closest house is a mile away. I'm not going to hurt you. EVELYN: HELP! SOMEBODY HELP ME!!! Please. . .<sup>[SEP]</sup>HE GRABS HER PRETTY QUICKLY AND COVERS HER MOUTH.

JUAN: I'm not going to hurt you. I am NOT going to hurt you. I don't want to have to tie you up and tape your mouth shut but I will , alright? . Nothing is going to happen to you. And you'll have your insulin. You have my word. You're only here to witness. That's all. That's all I'm asking. Honor for the samurai is dearer than life itself. (Pause.) So. . . can I trust that you're not going to scream if I let you go?

*SHE NODS.*

JUAN: You promise? (She nods again.) Okay, then.

*HE RELEASES HER. AFTER A MOMENT SHE SCREAMS AGAIN. HE HAS TO COVER HER MOUTH IN THE SAME WAY*

*AS BEFORE BUT THIS TIME HE BENDS HER ARM AROUND HER BACK. SHE'S IN PAIN. NOW HE'S PISSED.*

JUAN: I told you to shut the fuck up! I ASKED YOU NICELY LADY! I'm asking you to have some integrity, alright? If you say you're not going to scream. . .then you can't

scream. If I tell you I'm not going to hurt you. . .you have my fucking word, alright? I'm a samurai, goddammit! I have taken a vow of honor and I'm not going to lose it over a wimpy, waspy bitch like you, you understand me?

*SHE NODS*

JUAN: So now sit down and shut the fuck up. Not there. Over there.

*SHE DOES. SHE STARTS TO CRY.*

JUAN: Goddammit! I don't like doing that. I don't talk to ladies like that. No ma'am. I'm sorry. So please. . .don't push it. You have no idea how lucky you are that your husband DIDN'T come back.

*SHE OPENS HER MOUTH TO SAY SOMETHING.* [L] [SEP] JUAN:  
Shhheeeeen! Don't argue with me. He wouldn't be the same.  
Trust me. You'd

be the one he'd take it out on EVELYN: He wasn't like. . .

JUAN: Don't interrupt! Maybe its not my place to say what I said about your husband. What did you say his name was?

EVELYN: Frank.

JUAN: Frank. Maybe Frank was a really good guy. You're out there still looking for him. I mean you went all the way to fucking Vietnam! Shit! I'm just trying to say to you. . . not everything that's wrong. . .has to stay wrong. You have my word on that, okay? There can be an honorable way out. For everyone. Personally---I can't live in the world this way---I can't live defeated this way. I'm glad you're here to see that. You won't have to read in the paper, you know? Personally. . .my tour in Vietnam isn't something I like to. . .rehash, okay? But you bring me the fucking dog tags! I didn't lose them, lady! I threw them away! But that just goes to show you, man---you can't run away from what you've done. Ever. Why else you would be here?

*SHE'S ABOUT TO SAY SOMETHING.*

JUAN: Sheeeeeen! Please. The Japanese have a sound. . .it's an onomatopoeic sound. . .Do you know what I mean by onomatopoeic?

*SHE HESITATES TO RESPOND.*

JUAN: What?

EVERLYN: I was an English lit major.

JUAN: Me too. Before I took my commission. Wow. Good. So you know that English as a language doesn't have a single fucking nuance to it, alright? It's the language of a machine, right? Shallow. Literal. Everything describes everything else as an object if you think about it. But the Japanese. . .they're fucking brilliant! They have a word for the sound of nothing, okay? The sound that's about to transpire between us, alright? You see it in the

Japanese comic books all the time. . . “*manga!*” where there are so many words that resemble the sound they want to express. . .so they draw the sound in. . .but then they have to hire special English translators to come up with words for those sounds. But they take the time to do it, right? So there’s a Japanese word for silence and that is “s-i-n” . Sin. Yeah. . .like the bad things we do. In Spanish “sin” means ---

EVELYN: Without. Like “sin culpa.” I placed out of Spanish. Three semesters.