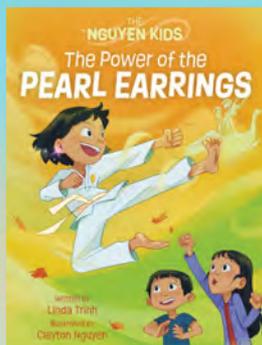


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The Nguyen kids are going on vacation! It's their first time in Vietnam and they are staying in Grandma Nội's childhood home, so they should be excited. As soon as the siblings enter the house, though, something doesn't feel right. Why is the door to the ancestors' room always closed? And why can't they connect with Grandma Nội using their gifts, the way they can at home?

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THE NGUYEN KIDS The Journey of the ANCESTORS' GIFTS

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THE
NGUYEN KIDS

The Journey of the **ANCESTORS' GIFTS**



written by
Linda Trinh
illustrated by
Clayton Nguyen

"[W]onderfully entertaining. . .
I so admire this charming series!"
—KATHERINE APPLIGATE, author of
THE ONE AND ONLY IVAN

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ANCESTORS' GIFTS



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CHAPTER 1: ANNE

Grandma Nội's House

“This is amazing,” I whisper, standing in front of the house Grandma Nội grew up in. I close my eyes to enjoy the moment.

“Move, Miss Perfect!” Liz pushes past me. The house is tall and narrow and painted light green. I am super excited to learn what Grandma Nội's life was like here in Vietnam. That may help me learn



about where my parents came from and where I come from.

An older woman, with long, straight hair, waves us inside.

Dad hurries to the door, a suitcase in each hand. “Chào Chị Ba,” he says as he greets the woman.

They speak in Vietnamese and hug and laugh. I’m glad she seems nice.

My body tingles with excitement. But once I’m inside the house, I feel a heaviness on my shoulders. It’s a bit spooky.

Jay holds Mom’s hand as they come inside last. “I don’t want you or Dad to go,” he whispers to Mom.

I try to help. “Jay, it’s only for five days. We will have fun!”

Dad puts his hands on Jay's shoulders. "We'll get you settled first. Okay, Jaco—buddy."

He was going to say Jacob. Jay asked us to stop calling him that a few months ago. I think it is harder for Dad and Mom to make the change than it is for me. They are older.

"Hello, Chì Ba," Mom says, and then adds, "Liz, Anne, Jay," as she points to each of us.

"Kids, this is your auntie, Cô Ba," Dad says.

Jay and I wave hello.

Liz goes over and hugs our auntie like Dad did.

Jay wipes his eyes. "Why can't we all be together?"

"Mom and Dad want a break. Don't be such a baby!" Liz says, still holding auntie's hand.

“I’m not a baby!” Jay snaps back.

“Liz. Not helpful,” I say firmly but gently. It is my job as the oldest sibling to take care of them both. I adjust my glasses, standing a bit straighter. I take my job very seriously.

Liz pauses but then pulls me away, “Explore time!”

She cannot sit still for long.

I touch my jade bangle around my wrist, Grandma Nội’s gift to me. She died three years ago. Dad and Mom say we Vietnamese believe the spirits of our family, our ancestors, stay with us after they pass away. We pray to them, and they bring us luck. I believe it.

Grandma Nội’s house is so different from

our house in Winnipeg. Walking deeper into it, I imagine when she lived here, over 60 years ago. Past the living room and the stairs is an area open to the sky. Wow. What happens when it rains?

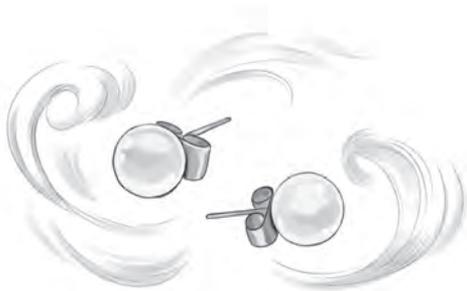
The house may be skinny, but it goes back forever! Moving through the kitchen, I imagine Grandma Nội making chả giò and bánh xèo the way she showed me. Liz races up the flight of stairs two at a time as I climb step by step, not wanting to rush. There are two more levels of rooms and then, the best part, an open rooftop area on the fourth floor. The house is cool, but there's something about it . . . I can't shake the feeling I had when I first walked in, like I'm carrying an invisible backpack.

Heading back downstairs, I notice a closed door on the second floor. Super strange! It's the only closed door in the whole house. What could be in there? Makes me so curious!



My first trip to Vietnam has been fun, touring around the big city on the back of a motorbike and eating street food, and it's been great to get away from all the school and ballet drama back home. I look around and I just know this will be the best part of the whole trip!

I break into a smile. This is going to be super-exciting week—finding out all the secrets of the house!



CHAPTER 2: LIZ

This Is the Life!

I leap into a bedroom on the third floor. Dad already put our bags in here. Anne follows.

I touch my pearl earrings, Grandma Nội's gift to me. Suddenly, an icy-cold feeling shoots down my back. Weird! I shiver a bit but shake it off.

"Cousin Hanh said Grandma Nội shared this room with her sister," I say to Miss Perfect.

There are two mattresses on the floor, a desk, and a dresser. Did Grandma Nội sleep here, giggling with her sister, like me and Anne do?

Anne's looking out a window. "Grandma told me once she and her sister Chị Tư used to ride their bikes up and down the lane, wearing their áo dài tunics. This must be the lane," Anne says.

"And our auntie downstairs, that's Grandma's sister's daughter?" I ask. I know Dad told us, but it's sooooo confusing.

"Yes. Cô Ba is Dad's cousin. Her mom lived in this house and now she does," Anne says and opens her suitcase. She starts to unpack her perfectly rolled clothes and neatly organized books. Boring!

I drop down onto one of the mattresses. “Aah. This is the life!” I roll over on my stomach, my fave position. “Can we get the Wi-Fi password? Messaging to do!” I got the contact info from some of our second cousins that I met last week. We went to a beach resort together. They can practice English. And I can practice Vietnamese. You can never have too many friends.

“I’ll ask Dad for it,” Anne replies.

I nod. My sister is good to have around . . . sometimes.

“You should unpack.”

Ugh, Miss Perfect is also soooo bossy. She’s 12 and going into grade seven. That’s only two years older than me.

I jump up. I take out my friendship-bracelet-making kit and put it on the dresser. I made a ton of bracelets for family when we were at the beach resort, and I can't wait to make more. Family. Fun. Feeling like I belong. I love making these bracelets!

“Okay, done unpacking! Hey, let's look around outside.”

Anne laughs. “Take Jay. I'll go see what Mom and Dad need before they leave.”



Jay and I walk around the neighborhood. It took us an hour to get to this town from Ho Chi Minh City where we spent our first week in Vietnam.

Dusty roads. Bikes and motorbikes everywhere. Are there no traffic lights? Horns honking. People chattering and laughing. Dogs barking. So much going on.

“Jay, we’re good. Miss Perfect is annoying, but she’ll do all the hard stuff for us.” I put my arm across his shoulders.

We walk a few blocks to the park Cô Ba told us about. There’s a metal play structure at one end and a big green field.

“I miss Grandpa Nội,” Jay says.

I nod. I have to remember he is the baby of the family. He’s only turning nine next month and going into grade four.

“Me too. And Auntie Hai, Hanh, and Hao! But

you and me can hang out. Make new friends. Have fun!” I say.

He nods, but his face is still tense.

I see four kids about our age playing soccer in the field. I wave to them. No one waves back. Huh!



Possibly they didn't see me.

Okay, so I have things to do this week. Cheer-Up-Jay Plan. And Make-New-Friends-in-Town Plan.

Let the adventure begin!

