

Mission Improbable: Vietnam: A Blanche Murningham Mystery

Nancy Nau Sullivan

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In Nancy Nau Sullivan's cozy mystery novel *Mission Improbable: Vietnam*, two women in search of their families' stories forge a sisterhood—and consider the human impacts of wars.

Jean's mother was Vietnamese, but Jean doesn't remember her. In the chaos of Saigon's fall, she was sent to live with her father, an American soldier. Now an adult, Jean teams up with Blanche, who has a knack for sleuthing, and whose own father was marked missing in action during the war. Jean hopes to learn new information about her family on a trip to Ho Chi Minh City.

In Vietnam, a colorful ex-pat and veteran who owns a bar connects the women to his Vietnamese colleagues. Through this secondary cast, the women listen to unearthed memories and stories of resilience and scars. They learn that people often survived because of the unexpected kindness of others; they come to further understand the complications of wars. Here, enemies are not always as they seem, and individuals can make life-giving choices. The women look to make peace with the tragedies of their pasts. Still, expressions of needing to face the future without thoughts of revenge are too pat.

The women's friendship is empathetic and convivial, though Jean knows more about Blanche than she lets on. The Vietnamese cast assumes more limited roles, buoying the women with their hospitality, wisdom, and consoling actions. Their dialogue includes broken English that leads to stereotyping, though. Still, Blanche and Jean's fondness for new gastronomy, multilayered remnants of French architecture, and Vietnam's contemporary bustle is sincere and invigorating. And as the truth about their intertwined histories is revealed, Vietnam takes on increasing significance to both of them.

In the cozy mystery novel *Mission Improbable: Vietnam*, two women reckon with their losses—and other people's sacrifices—during an upbeat adventure abroad.

KAREN RIGBY (July / August 2022)

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