

**Characters:**

Maddax: Early 20's. Bartender. College Student.

Bobby: Patron. Middle 30's. Not drunk, but feeling it. VietNam veteran.

**Setting:**

Small neighborhood tavern / Time: Late Summer Saturday Evening of 1980

*(Lights: Bobby at bar. Maddax doing bartender things. It's closing time)*

Maddax: Drink it up, Bobby. Gotta' close it up.

Bobby: Up your nose, Maddax. And I could use another beer.

Maddax: No seriously.

Bobby: Me, too.

Maddax: You're a funny guy.

Bobby: Smell that?

Maddax: What?

Bobby: They're baking bread up the street.

*(Maddax stops working)*

Bobby: You've never smelled that?

Maddax: All I usually smell is beer. When I clean the john, it's piss and vomit.

Bobby: They always bake later on Saturday nights.

Maddax: Why?

Bobby: How the hell do I know? Maybe they hafta go to church in the morning. What difference does it make? It just smells good. Smell it.

Maddax: Bobby?

Bobby: What?

Maddax: You're right. It does smell good.

*(Maddax starts sweeping)*

Bobby: I used to bake bread.

Maddax: I thought you did construction?

Bobby: I used to bake bread. In Nam. Smelled just like that.

Maddax: You were a cook in Nam?

Bobby: No. My ma used to send me short loaves packed in dry ice. Don't ask me how they got to me. Cost my ma a fortune. Not often, but when I did, I'd build a little oven out of mud bricks and bake bread. Other guys loved me. Fucking animals loved me. Had to beat 'em all off with sticks.

Maddax: How long you in Nam, Bobby?

Bobby: Why?

Maddax: I dunno. Just curious.

Bobby: Two tours. Twenty-seven months.

Maddax: See action?

Bobby: Do you mean, did I kill anyone? People always ask that first. They never ask if I saved anyone or did I screw any yellow women or is the moon the same size outside of DaNang as it is here.

Maddax: Well, did ya'?

Bobby: What?

Maddax: Screw any yellow women?

Bobby: Only during the monsoon season. Women would screw upside down for a piece of my freshly baked bread.

Maddax: *(Laughs)* I'm serious.

Bobby: So am I. Nothing much else to do during the rains. Either get high or screw yellow women. I didn't like drugs so I mainlined women.

Maddax: I'll get you another beer, but don't tell anyone. 'Kay? And we leave at 2:30. No argument.

Bobby: I never argued with a superior in Nam.

*(Maddax returns behind bar. Puts a beer in front of Bobby. Bobby takes a long drink)*

Bobby: Not much beer in Nam. If you found one, it was warm.

Maddax: What'd you drink?

Bobby: Rice wine. Barrels of rice wine. It was shit but it made you forget yesterday.

Maddax: Soldiers make it?

Bobby: No. Villagers. We were too busy either killing Charlie or not getting killed ourselves. Nasty stuff.

Maddax: So you did see action.

Bobby: Yes, Maddax. I saw action.

Maddax: A lot?

Bobby: I lost count. If that's what you mean.

Maddax: You okay talking about this, Bobby? I mean, we can just drink and leave...if that's what you want.

Bobby: It's fine. *(beat)* I don't remember the last time I talked Nam with anybody. When I first got back, my old lady used to ask me about it all the time. I told her to stop asking or I'd hit her.

Maddax: What happened?

Bobby: I hit her. Nobody else has asked for awhile.

*(Maddax pulls a stool and sits down across the bar from Bobby)*

Maddax: They stopped draft registration two weeks before my 18th birthday.

Bobby: Really.

Maddax: No number. No nothing. Course the war was pretty much over by then.

Bobby: War's never over, Maddax. Don't they teach you shitting anything in college?

Maddax: You know what I mean.

Bobby: Do you know what I mean?

Maddax: No. I guess I don't.

*(Pause)*

Maddax: Was it bad?

Bobby: Let me give you an example...I was on perimeter duty one night. There was a PING with me.

Maddax: A what?

Bobby: A PING. That's a newbie with a bald haircut. On a quiet night, you could almost hear the new hairs busting out of his skull.

Maddax: You kidding me?

Bobby: Maddax...let's get one thing straight. You asked. Whatever I tell you is the truth. It was dark most of the time when people died. That's when Charlie came...at night. They were like goddamn vampire bats or something.

Maddax: Sorry.

Bobby: When people died in Nam, it didn't really matter. In blackness, it all sounds alike. Come morning, we counted who was who. *(Takes another long drink from his beer)* Oh...and one more thing, Maddax...

Maddax: What's that?

Bobby: If you repeat any of this, I will hurt you. Understand? Not one word to another person.

Maddax: Okay, Bobby.

Bobby: No. Do you understand? I WILL hurt you.

Maddax: I understand.

Bobby: Get me another beer. (*Maddax gets another beer. Another long drink. Bobby breathes in/exhales a couple of deep breaths*) So the PING and I are out on night perimeter and the kid is all excited...starts talking about how he's never seen a dead body before. Says the only time he's ever seen a real dead person was at a family funeral and the body's all perfect and wearing a fucking suit and tie. I keep telling him to shut-up, like how in the hell are we supposed to hear Charlie with all this yakking, and he asks for the fifth time if I've ever seen action. Kind of like how you asked me. He says one more time that he's waited since Boot Camp to get a chance to see someone messed up. I finally look him in the eye and tell him I shot a kid last week. He was a "booby"...one of the village kids Charlie paid to go into camp and set a booby trap. I caught him setting a trip wire. I guess he figured if everyone was sniffing and waiting for bread, no one would notice the wire. Some of his brains ended up on my oven.

Maddax: What'd the PING say?

Bobby: Nothing. He finally shut-up.

*(At this point, Maddax gets a beer for himself)*

Bobby: Oh. And one other thing.

Maddax: What's that?

Bobby: The PING never got a chance to see a real dead person. He was killed by a sniper two nights later. Took a shot in the neck and bled to death. He was pretty messed up himself.

Maddax: Jesus Christ, Bobby.

Bobby: Jesus wasn't in Nam. Or if he was, I only saw him once or twice.

Maddax: What does that mean?

Bobby: I died over there, Maddax. I did. They even called my ma and told her. But I came back.

Maddax: How?

Bobby: We were gone on patrol for nine days once. Longest nine days of my life. While we were gone, our barracks were hit by mortar. My tent was hit. All they could find was one of my boots. For some dumb ass reason, I had left my dog tags in my camp boots and they thought I had exploded or something. They even notified my Ma. My CO said it must have been the fastest death notification in Nam history. Ma said I almost gave her a heart attack when I called to tell her I was like Jesus Christ himself, coming back from the dead. And you know what pissed me off more than anything else?

Maddax: No.

Bobby: Dumb shits didn't even KNOW I was on patrol. Didn't even KNOW I couldn't have been sleeping in that tent. For Christ's sake, no one had even smelled any new bread and they still didn't even realize it. Makes a soldier think about things...know what I mean?

Maddax: Like what things?

Bobby: Like maybe no one was in charge, Maddax. Like maybe we was just there killing people for the sheer hell of it. Like maybe we was just put there cause we were bad people or something. Christ, I saw one guy with a collection of Viet Cong ears on a necklace like it was a K-Mart Blue Light special or something. He'd wait till they started rotting off or got bugs then he'd start throwing the ears in a campfire one by one, and start another one. He liked it. He'd cut off the ears of dead VC's after flash fire raids and he liked doing it. Christ, the damn PING who got sniped couldn't wait to see something like that....

Maddax: Bobby....

Bobby: Shut-up. Just shut-up and listen. Do you know I was a driver in a Dragon Wagon most of the time in Nam? They were like souped-up semis with double Howitzers. We were on patrol one time and we got

hit by mortar fire...the engine was shooting out flames and my damn door wouldn't open. My partner riding shotgun was hurt, so I went out the fucking window, over the top of the cab, and opened his door to get him out. But I didn't quite make it, Maddax. The engine blew and tossed the two of us at least thirty feet. When I got up the ringing in my ears sounded like Times Square at midnight on New Year's Eve. I looked down and I could see I was still holding on to something, but I just couldn't quite see it right...I just couldn't see it right...

Maddax: What was it, Bobby?

Bobby: It was my shotgun's arm. All I was hanging onto was my shotgun's arm. The rest of him was about ten feet away. Christ, I didn't know what to do. I was so stupid I walked over and tried to put it back where it belonged. Do you know how stupid I felt later doing that?

Maddax: Bobby...you were probably in shock....

Bobby: DO YOU KNOW HOW STUPID I FELT DOING SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

Maddax: Bobby...listen to me. It's over. The war is over.

Bobby: NO! NO! IT IS NEVER OVER! *(At this point Bobby reaches over the bar, grabs Maddax, and pulls him over the bar to his side. They land on the floor. Bobby is on top of Maddax or at least has him immobilized. Maddax is helpless during this exchange)*

Bobby: Some days it was so hot there even your freckles got sunburned. Your hair felt like it was on fire. Mosquitoes were like little silver needles, Maddax. You swatted them in your sleep. *(As he speaks, Bobby mimics the hand actions with Maddax)* I had to choke a Vietnamese woman once to keep her quiet during a patrol. She kept crying, "Tôimuônembé...Tôimuônembé." I told her to shut-up but she just kept saying it over and over..."Tôimuônembé...Tôimuônembé." We knew Charlie was close and we needed her to be quiet. QUIET. All I wanted her to do was be quiet so I put my hand over her mouth and I put my arm behind her head and squeezed. But I squeezed too hard and too long. I SQUEEZED TOO HARD.

Maddax: BOBBY...FOR THE LOVE OF GOD.

*(Bobby suddenly stops and really looks at Maddax. He releases*

*his grip and rolls to one side. Maddax sits up and slides on his rump away from him, rubbing his neck)*

Bobby: I found out later what she was saying. I found out later that "Tôimuônembé" means "I want my baby." All she wanted was her baby, Maddax. All she wanted was her baby and I killed her.

Maddax: How many guys were on patrol with you, Bobby?

Bobby: I don't know...seven, maybe eight...

Maddax: You did what you had to do, Bobby. Do you hear me? You did what you had to do.

Bobby: I see her all the time. I see her face. She wanted her baby. She just...wanted her baby.

*(Maddax stands. He tugs on Bobby's arm until Bobby sits up)*

Maddax: Get up, Bobby. It's over now. It's over.

*(Bobby gets to his feet and sits back down onto the bar stool)*

Bobby: It's never over, Maddax. There will be other wars. Who knows where. But there will be. There will always be war. Always has been. *(Bobby drinks the can empty)* I'm almost glad I'm getting too old. I don't think I could do that again. *(Bobby stands and walks to the door)* Don't make me hurt you, Maddax. Please don't make me hurt you.

Maddax: I promise, Bobby. Not a word.

Bobby: Do me one more favor?

Maddax: What's that?

Bobby: Next Saturday....smell the bread. Just smell the shitting bread and realize how lucky you really are.

Maddax: Okay.

*(Bobby leaves. Maddax begins picking up whatever was knocked over)*

**-LIGHTS-**