

`Nam

A Play in One Act
By
Kesser Frankiel

Cast of Characters

JOHN TUFGORE: 50 year old grizzled Vietnam veteran. Dressed in full military camouflage gear with a helmet and an M16. Has grey hair and a strong build. He has black stripes painted under his eyes.

DR. BRIGHTON: 30 year old therapist. Dressed in slacks, a button down shirt, and a vest. Is wearing a large watch and is holding a bright blue notepad. He has a voice recorder hanging around his neck.

Scene

An abandoned hut in the jungle of Vietnam.

Time

Evening. 1972

ACT 1SCENE 1

SETTING: A jungle in Vietnam. On stage right there is a tall tree with knots that vaguely resemble eyes. Peeking out from the sides of the tree are several guns and a machetes. Starting from center stage and extending to stage left is a thatch hut. Inside the hut are a couple wicker baskets and chairs. In the middle of the hut is a stove or a firepit. The walls of the hut partition the "outside"-as represented by the tree- from the inside - with the chairs and stove. There are ambient jungle noises playing in the background. The sound of blowing wind is interspersed with the cries of crickets, cicadas, and the occasional howling monkey.

AT RISE: TUFFGORE and BRIGHTON enter stage right. TUFFGORE is looking around slowly as he sneaks forward in a crouch. He sweeps his gun left and right across an invisible treeline. BRIGHTON walks nonchalantly behind TUFFGORE. BRIGHTON has his notebook open and occasionally writes down a note as TUFFGORE advances.

TUFFGORE

(in a low, ominous voice)...and the trees. The trees were the most dangerous thing in the jungle. More dangerous than the rivers, with the gators and the sharks, and more dangerous than the mud, with the pit-traps and the spikes. The trees were tall, menacing obelisks of destruction. Bristling with weapons, armed to their wooden teeth...

(AMBIENT NOISE:OFF)

BRIGHTON

The trees had weapons?

TUFFGORE

Oh yeah. Soviet Kalashnikovs. Fully automatic. Gas-Operated. Rotating Bolts. Rounds as thick and as long as your little finger. 600 rounds per minute of pure death.

BRIGHTON

And teeth?

TUFFGORE

Teeth?*(short pause)* Yeah. Machetes for teeth. Sharp and silent. They could cut a man to ribbons.

BRIGHTON

Hmm. *(Takes a note)* Go on.

TUFGORE

(beat) Where was I?

BRIGHTON

The trees.

(AMBIENT NOISE: ON)

TUFGORE

Ah, right. The trees. Well the trees were the most dangerous thing in the jungle. That is, except for the huts.

(BRIGHTON looks over at the hut to the side)

BRIGHTON

The huts?

(TUFGORE slowly walks downstage, towards the audience, letting his gun drift to his side. His speech slowly builds in intensity and he looks off with a far-away stare. The ambient noise changes from just animals to the distant screams of a woman, child, and a man. Just as TUFGORE reaches 'dying breaths' there is a single, faded, gunshot and the ambient noise stops.)

TUFGORE

The huts. The abandoned huts we would find in the jungle. There was no way to know what unspeakable dangers lay within. We stood outside the lifeless thatch dwelling. We had no idea what we might find inside. Would it be empty? Would we find rotting corpses? Landmines? booby-traps? An ambush? A cowering woman and her children clutching their husband and father. The man bleeding out from a wound in his chest, his shaking hands gripping his weapon? Ready to defend his home and family with his dying breaths?

(Long beat. TUFGORE stares at the opening of the hut. BRIGHTON writes furiously in his notebook.)

Maybe we'd find some snacks.

BRIGHTON

(As he writes.) (Excitedly) Did that ever happen? Did you ever find a family like that?

(TUFFGORE snaps out of his daze.)

TUFFGORE

What? A family? Huh?... Oh. *(beat)* No, the hut was empty.

BRIGHTON

(Nonplussed, almost disappointed) Oh.

(TUFFGORE and BRIGHTON march into the hut and look around. TUFFGORE keeps his gun up.)

(AMBIENT NOISE:ON)

TUFFGORE

We entered the hut, guns ready, muscles tight, nerves on end. You could cut the tension in that room with a garrote wire. Every closed door was a trap waiting to be sprung, every basket was an IED waiting to blow...

(TUFFGORE nervously opens baskets, jumping back as he lifts the lid. BRIGHTON sighs and sits on a chair, closing his notebook and resting his chin on his hand.)

(AMBIENT NOISE: OFF)

BRIGHTON

(in a bored voice) Did you find anything?

(TUFFGORE moves a chair next to the firepit/stove and lights it. He sits down on the chair with his gun loose at his side. He warms his hands over the stove.)

TUFFGORE

(in a gruff voice) Nothing but some short-lived R&R[rest and relaxation]

(BRIGHTON checks his watch and yawns. He shakes his legs like he needs to pee.)

BRIGHTON

Why 'short lived'?

TUFGORE

I'm getting to that part. Will you stop interrupting me with stupid questions?

BRIGHTON

It's my job to ask questions.

TUFGORE

I thought your job was to help me.

BRIGHTON

I help by asking questions.

TUFGORE

You haven't been very helpful so far.

BRIGHTON

We've only had two sessions. Give it some time.

(BRIGHTON checks his watch.)

I think we're really getting somewhere.

(TUFGORE glares at BRIGHTON for a moment before speaking again. BRIGHTON continues to shake his legs like he needs to pee.)

(AMBIENT NOISE: ON)

TUFGORE

Well. Let's see...(beat) A few hours later, Bobby says-

(AMBIENT NOISE: OFF)

(BRIGHTON stands up suddenly, puts down the notebook, and puts the recorder on the chair.)

BRIGHTON

Excuse me. I'm so, so, so sorry about this, but I need to go use the restroom.

(TUFGORE looks up at BRIGHTON with surprise.)

TUFGORE

How did you-[know]?[TUFGORE says this quietly, or not at all, but that is what he's trying to say before he gets cut off.]

BRIGHTON

I'll leave the recorder on if you want to keep going while I'm gone.

(AMBIENT NOISE: ON)

(beat)

I'll be right back.

*(BRIGHTON hurries off stage left.
TUGGORE watches him leave in shock.
TUGGORE waits a moment then goes on.)*

TUGGORE

... Bobby... Bobby had been gone for a couple minutes... The bugs went quiet...(AMBIENT BUGS: OFF - just howling wind) I didn't know why. I was lost in thought. Too tired to realize, too tired to think..

(Beat. BRIGHTON slowly comes in from stage right. He is wearing army fatigues over his vest. He still has his watch. BRIGHTON slowly walks towards the door of the hut as he zips up his fly.)

...and then...

(Rapid gunshots sound off. Lights flash like gunfire from behind the tree. BRIGHTON writhes like he's getting hit by bullets and he falls into the hut. TUGGORE bolts up and runs to BRIGHTON's side. TUGGORE's face is tight like he's holding back tears, he occasionally wipes his eyes. BRIGHTON begins to cough.)

BRIGHTON

(strained, as though he's in pain) Were-**cough**- Were you and Bobby close?

TUGGORE

(TUGGORE's speech gets faster and more desperate as he talks. He tries to put pressure on BRIGHTON's wounds and tries to keep him awake.)

(urgent, whispered) Don't talk! They're still out there. Stay with me, Bobby! You'll be alright. We're gonna get you out of here. We're gonna get you home. Remember Kansas? We're gonna go back to Kansas, Okay? We're gonna see Mom, and Dad, and Thomas, okay? And Father John, and Michael, and we're all gonna go to Hoolihan's, okay? We're gonna watch the Jayhawks lose every week and we're gonna take turns mowing in April, and shoveling in

December, and we're gonna go fishing, okay? You're gonna make it!

(TUGORE sinks to his knees and puts his head on BRIGHTON's chest. TUGORE is shaking. He throws his head back and covers his face with his hands.)

You're going to make it!

(BRIGHTON stirs. He sits up next to TUGORE and takes off his army gear. TUGORE is fully crying now.)

(defeated) You have to make it...

(Long Beat.) (BRIGHTON puts his hand on TUGORE's shoulder.)

(AMBIENT NOISE:OFF)

BRIGHTON

You're going to make it, John. You're going to make it. Do you know that?

(TUGORE's sobbing lessens until he stops crying.)

TUGORE

Why do you always ask such *(sob)* stupid questions?

BRIGHTON

John. *(beat)* You know that you're going to make it, right?

TUGORE

(angry. Still looking down.) What does that even mean?

BRIGHTON

It means that you know that despite the horrors of what happened, that you - YOU, John - are okay. You have people that love you, that care about you, that take care of you. They want you to know that they don't blame you for what happened. Bobby doesn't blame you. *(beat)* You have the world's forgiveness. The only person who hasn't forgiven you yet is yourself. *(beat)*

TUGORE

I suppose...

(BRIGHTON stands up. He reaches his hand down to TUGORE.)

BRIGHTON

So that means there's only one stupid question left for me to ask. *(beat)* John, do you forgive you?

(TUGORE looks up at BRIGHTON and takes his hand. He begins to stand.)

BLACKOUT.

CURTAIN.