

American Tet

by

Lydia Stryk

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Characters.

Elaine Krombacher

Jim Krombacher

Nuh Mai

Amy Krombacher

Danny Krombacher

Dao, a little girl

Angela Gomez

A waiter

Setting. The backyard and a separate garden area of the Krombacher family home. And a Chinese restaurant.

Time. American Tet takes place in the spring of 2004, the first anniversary of the Iraq War—a moment in time in the ongoing conflagration.

Author's Note. Read at your own risk. It's not a pretty play. But it's not a pretty world.

SAMPLE SCENE

Scene

The bugle call, Reveille, is heard. Lights up on the Krombacher backyard. Two reclining deckchairs. ELAINE and JIM KROMBACHER are lying back in their chairs. The scene begins with an almost languid feel. They hardly look at each other.

ELAINE: Carmen's girl is in pretty bad shape. They're saying.

She took the brunt of it. Face blown off.

JIM: *(shaking his head)* Whoosh.

ELAINE: That's what they're saying.

JIM: Anyone seen her?

ELAINE: Carmen's flying over.

Lost a leg.

JIM: Oh boy.

ELAINE: Pelvis shattered. And her arm.

JIM: Those'll heal.

ELAINE: But her face.

JIM: She's alive.

ELAINE: Who are you without your face?

(a pause)

JIM : A damn pretty girl, Angela.

ELAINE: She was . . .

JIM: Sweet smile.

ELAINE: Carmen said god might strike her down, but she wishes Angie'd just died. She wishes she'd just gone up in smoke. Without ever knowing it. One moment you're all here. The next you're all gone. Carmen said that's what she wishes.

JIM: I guess.

ELAINE: Sal's kid went like that. Just last week, in fact. Stepping out of a tank. Next thing. He's a pile of ash. Burned into the sand. Like some snow angel.

(a pause)

You can't live without a face.

JIM: Skin and bone and all the other stuff that makes a face a face. You know what I'm saying? That stuff. They probably get from some corpse. Some fresh blown up girl. Some shot-up Iraqi. Someone who died with her face on her.

ELAINE: You can't just take someone's face.

JIM: The hell you can't.

ELAINE: She saved the others. By taking the brunt. They're okay. Burns, mostly. Bones broken.

I don't think we should tell Danny.

JIM: Why not?

ELAINE: They were close for a while.

JIM: He's seen a thing or two, by now.

ELAINE: Carmen was so proud of that girl.

JIM: That girl's a hero.

ELAINE: She's got no face, for god's sake.

(silent for a while)

Carmen spoke to the nurse. In Ramstein, Germany. Turns out she and Carmen went to high school together. They weren't close or anything. But they knew each other. Funny small world. She told Carmen she better get right over. Angie's in agony. They've got her completely sedated, of course. But she screams out anyway. The agony is in her mind.

JIM: This nurse told her that?

ELAINE: What should she have done? Jim? Lied?

JIM: She'll pull through. She's come this far. That girl is a survivor. She'll get a fake leg. They work like the real thing now practically. She'll learn to walk again.

ELAINE: She can see, thank god. She's got one eye. But she can't hear.

JIM: No?

ELAINE: They don't think so. But of course, she can't speak. Without a mouth, so . . .

JIM: It's just the shock. The boom. Her hearing'll come back.

ELAINE: Carmen asked me to water the plants. And feed the cat. I could bring her—

JIM: --The hell with that. That cat stays there.

ELAINE: I feel sick to my stomach, Jim. Danny—

JIM: He's all right. He'll be just fine.

ELAINE: I think we should make the party out here.

JIM: So we'll make it out here.

ELAINE: Three weeks is all we've got.

JIM: Elaine, don't start.

ELAINE: I'm not.

JIM: Three weeks is 21 days. Twenty-one days is all you get.

ELAINE: Your first leave . . .

JIM: I was horny . . . !

ELAINE: I didn't mind . . .

JIM: I'll say. Did we ever get out of bed?

ELAINE: But the second leave. You went crazy. You even hit me.

(a pause)

JIM: Where's Amy?

ELAINE: In her room. Why?

JIM: Don't let me alone with that girl, you hear me?

ELAINE: Why not?

JIM: She's talking nonsense. She's talking rot.

(Elaine looks at Jim, studying him.)

ELAINE: I don't know what drugs you were on. Over there in Vietnam.

(She looks at him. She waits.)

Or was it the weather, hon? Huh? The food?

(JIM says nothing. And ELAINE is clearly used to this. She shrugs.)

ELAINE: *(forcefully, thoughtfully)* But when you came home, you weren't Jim. Where did he go?

JIM: MIA. Never came back.

ELAINE: No.

End of scene.

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