

INT. DINER - DAY

Max sits at a booth, ordering from NANCE (female, 20s). She's been working since sunrise and is over it.

NANCE
Whatcha like?

MAX
Double cheeseburger and onion
rings?

NANCE
That a question?

MAX
I... no.

NANCE
(winks)
Just busting your balls, kid. Sweet
tea?

MAX
Sure.

Fred sits.

NANCE
You?

FRED
Whatever he ordered, and coffee.

Nance walks away, a bell DINGS somewhere in the back.

The surrounding customers make Fred nervous. Several of them stare, but that's probably just in his head.

INT. DINER - DAY - LATER

Max's plate is empty, Fred still finishing up.

FRED
Good?

MAX
Yeah, it was fine.

Max absently rubs his black eye, it hurts.

FRED

So, when we going to talk about
that?

Max's hand jerks away.

MAX

What?

FRED

Your mom said you're suspended for
a week? Must have been some fight.

Max stares out the window.

FRED (CONT'D)

Max--

Nance is suddenly there to clear away the plates.

NANCE

Anything else? Blackberry
cobbler...?

The tension is thicker than any cobbler. She senses it.

Max uses the distraction to get up.

MAX

Bathroom.

FRED

(to Nance)

Sorry.

NANCE

(leaving the bill)

Boys'll be boys. Y'all just do your
thing at the register.

Fred stands, gets in line.

LONNY (male, early 30s), military clothing and haircut, on
edge, slides into line behind him.

A sign with an American flag reads "Half off for our
Veterans. Thank you for your service."

Fred, noticing it, grimaces and starts to push down his
sleeves. Before he can...

Lonny taps Fred's tattoo.

LONNY
Hey man, where'd you serve?

Fred ignores him. Waits his turn as Nance handles the customers in front of him.

LONNY (CONT'D)
Pal, talking to you.

SOUNDS OF WAR coming in low, Fred tries to reign them in as he steps up to the register.

FRED
(doesn't turn)
Iraq, then Afganistan.

LONNY
Yeah? I was eighty-second airborne infantry, three-two-five, Blue Falcons. In Bagram.

NANCE
(taps the sign)
Half off for vets.

FRED
No no, that's fine.

Lonny's hand drops on Fred's shoulder.

The sounds peak, then ebb.

LONNY
Where were you?

FRED
All over.

Fred hands over two twenties.

LONNY
All over? What the shit's that mean?

Fred ignores him.

As Nance rings up the register...

NANCE
Lonny, shut the hell up.

LONNY
(raising his voice)
Maybe you just want a cheap meal.
(MORE)

LONNY (CONT'D)

You serve at all? Huh? Stolen Valor
sound familiar?

Everyone is watching them now.

Stepping forward, Lonny shoves Fred against the counter.

LONNY (CONT'D)

(to the other patrons)
Stolen valor! This guy right here!

Fred's jaw clenches. He doesn't respond. Or turn.

LONNY (CONT'D)

You make me sick! I served! I was
there!

He shoves Fred again, harder.

Fred's breath is coming in fast, panicked, a RINGING sound
rising into his ears. A panic attack is setting in.

MAX (O.C.)

Hey!

Max tries to get between them.

MAX (CONT'D)

Hey, that's my dad! Cut it out!

Lonny reaches to shove Fred again. Max deflects his arm.

Max is elbowed to the side. HARD.

LONNY

Shit, kid!

Fred tries to stand in the way, Lonny HITS him in the chest,
Fred stumbles, knocks over a newspaper display.

LONNY (CONT'D)

This fucking guy!

Fred tries to get up, stumbles. PANTING, he can't breath.

Max, livid, points his finger down at Lonny's face.

MAX

Five years! I was eight when he
came home! He won a bunch of medals
that he hides in a trunk! He was a
hero...

Realizing everyone is staring, Max trails off.

Fred already has his feet back, goes right out the door, doesn't look back.

LONNY

Well, hell-- He could have just said something.

EXT. DINER - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Fred leans against the hood of the car, trying to get a pill out of the new prescription bottle.

His hands shake.

The SOUNDS OF WAR rumble. LAUGHTER, GUNFIRE, AIRPLANES.

Fred closes his eyes, crunching up the pill dry.

A DOOR SWINGS CLOSED.

Max is out of the diner and across the parking lot.

SOUNDS OF WAR diminish.

Car door slams as Max gets in.

INT. JEEP - TWO-LANE HIGHWAY - DAY

They ride in silence, radio off.

MAX

Why didn't you say anything?!

Fred watches the road.

MAX (CONT'D)

You could have stood up for yourself!

Exasperated, Max stares out the window.

FRED

It was just words, Max. Words can't hurt you unless you let them.

MAX

That's bullshit, and you know it!

FRED

Max--

MAX
Psycho-babble bullshit!

FRED
Hey! Tone it down!

Long moment.

FRED (CONT'D)
What did they say to you, the kids
at school? Was it about me?

MAX
(stares out the window)
If you don't have to talk, why
should I?

On a whim, Fred reaches across, pops open the glove box.
Inside is a stag handled hunting knife in a leather sheath.
Fred hands it to Max.

FRED
Here. What is it?

MAX
(duh)
It's a knife.

FRED
And what do you use it for?

MAX
This is dumb.

Fred waits.

FRED
Come on, Max.

MAX
(exasperated)
All kinds of stuff, cutting things.
Stabbing things.

FRED
Right. It's for cutting rope or
gutting a deer. Whittling a stick
or defending yourself. Point is,
sometimes it's a tool and sometimes
it's a weapon.

Max turns it over in his hands.

FRED (CONT'D)

Here's the thing. You never take it out of the sheath without knowing what you're using it for.

Max grips the handle, but doesn't un-sheath the knife.

FRED (CONT'D)

We're like that knife, you and me. We're too sharp. So, we don't come out of the sheath unless we know why.

MAX

Ok.

Nodding, Max goes to put the knife back.

FRED

No, it's yours. Was going to give it to you on your birthday anyway.

MAX

Kind of a crap present when you put it like that.

Fred GUFFAWS.

FRED

Yeah, got me there. Here, give it back then.

MAX

No, it's mine now.

Max clenches the knife as they drive.

FRED

Is that how you found my medals? Snooping for birthday presents?

MAX

(almost a smile)
Maybe.