

More or Less (eng.)

See also Plus ou moins (fr.)

Summary

In Vietnam in the early sixties, Brad, a GI, and Lois, an army nurse, buddies, are preparing to return home after a two-year hitch. It appears that Brad had saved Lois' life at the beginning of their service. Lois feels that she ought to do something to reward Brad, but love and marriage are out of the question. Brad feels there is no question of reward in any case. Then he tells Lois in confidence a secret of his life that he had not revealed.

Cast

Bradley Dickens

Lois Grant

Walter Grant

MORE OR LESS text of Act I only:

ACT I

Vietnam, 1966 BRADLEY DICKENS, G.I. and LOIS GRANT, army nurse, both in similar battle fatigues. Battle zone canteen, sparsely furnished. Beaten-up fridge, small table center stage (at 45° angle to public), two or more straight chairs or stools, calendar on wall. Sounds of occasional gunfire and explosions in the distance. LOIS enters, goes to consult the calendar. BRAD enters and goes to the fridge and opens it, peering inside.

LOIS

Nine more days.

BRAD

After today. (peering) Only three more beers.

LOIS (going to table)

After today. (She sits down)

BRAD (taking out two bottles)

Didn't think we'd make it out of this hell-hole. (Brings the bottles to the table) Of course, anything could happen in nine days!

LOIS

If it hadn't been for you, Brad!

BRAD (looking around)

Where's that damned opener! Liked those cans better. (Goes to the fridge, taking the small object from the top and brandishing it.) Right where it's supposed to be! (Brings it to the table, giving it to LOIS and sits down. LOIS laughs)

LOIS

For once!

(She opens her bottle, hands the opener to BRAD and holds her bottle high in an admiring toast. BRAD opens his bottle and sips.)

LOIS

I'll never forget that nightmare! Two years ago today! (She takes her first sip) Way back at the beginning. We'd just gotten in. Nobody knew anybody. That sergeant was just starting to assign us to our quarters...

BRAD

Shit!

LOIS

Last we ever saw of him! Poor devil! (She takes another sip)

BRAD (ironical)

Enough to make a guy stop and think.

LOIS

Those gooks were everywhere! All at once! Out of the blue!

BRAD

Out of the trees! Like a gang of crazy monkeys!

LOIS

Well, anyway, they came from all directions, didn't they? All the men scattered like scared rabbits! Me, too! I'll never figure out how I ended up way up on those rocks!

BRAD (laughing)

Faster than the speed of light!

LOIS (putting her hand on his)

And you! After all that and here you're trying to get another hitch! You must be crazy, Brad. I hope it's not because of me.

BRAD

Yeah... Maybe. Maybe a little bit.... No, not you and me.

LOIS

They wouldn't let you, anyway.

BRAD

I can still try to get sent back right away.

LOIS

You've done your part, God knows... And I wouldn't be here!

BRAD

Come on! You like to make it all fantastic! I've told you...

LOIS (suddenly flaring up)

Hey! You saved my fucking life, Brad! And you know it!

BRAD (calm)

Just one more beer.

LOIS

The supply sergeant said there'd be more coming.

BRAD

That was yesterday.

LOIS

Should get here today. Cans besides!

BRAD

Fucking gooks probably ambushed it!

LOIS

They're thirsty, too, when you stop and think about it.

BRAD

If you stop and think about things, you can drop dead.

LOIS

Most of us can't be like you, Brad. (she shakes her head) That first day!

BRAD

That's different. I remember. I just saw red.

LOIS

How could I ever forget that scene! You were blasting away like a whole army! God!

BRAD

You got to understand, Lois! Like I've told you. That was NOT a big bravery deal! Just blind mad, that's all! None of us knew each other. I didn't know you and you didn't know me!

LOIS

We all knew who was on whose team!

BRAD (reminiscing)

Right! I saw all of you: two blacks and one white dead and you way up there and the gooks all around!

LOIS

You didn't give a shit about any of them! Where in hell did you come from, anyway? Like a madman from hell! You know, you're big, but you looked ten times bigger! You came out of nowhere, with your AK blasting away. Waving it around like some kind of flaming sword!

BRAD

I swear, Lois, I didn't know what the fuck I was doing!

LOIS

The hell you didn't! You were blasting away in all directions. They didn't know what hit them! And in the middle of it all, you were yelling at me, "Run for it, white boy! Run for it!"

BRAD

White boy! That's what you always say! I never said "White boy!" I don't talk like that!

LOIS

Well you did then! And did I ever run!

BRAD

Sometimes you say things and you don't know what you're saying. I didn't even know you were a fucking broad!

LOIS

Forget it, Brad. You could have called me mother fucker! The message was clear. I just goddam RAN!

BRAD

You couldn't have helped anyway. No gun. No ammo. The three guys were dead.

LOIS

Not very brave, though. Brave army nurse. Pretty yellow even for a white boy.

BRAD

They faded pretty fast. I didn't get many of 'em. Just disappeared into the woodwork. We got used to that, after, though, didn't we?!

LOIS

You got enough of them to get you that medal! Not the last one you got, but the most fantastic!

BRAD (after a pause)

What's it all matter, Lois?

LOIS

I know what you mean. (She sips) Like my own life... anybody's life... what's it worth? Like; I mean, you saved my life. I've told you over and over again. That's worth everything to me, God knows!

BRAD

Stop it, Lois!

LOIS

No, but I mean, how do I pay you back for it? You got a medal. Thanks a lot. But I got a LIFE! I don't mean pay money. I mean how do I make it up to you?

(They look at each other for a moment. Then LOIS looks away)

LOIS

I know; Brad.

BRAD

I know, too, Lois. It's just... when I put my arm around you to help you... you were beat, and then I realized I had my arm around a broad!

LOIS

And I knew I had a man's arm around me. But anybody whose life has been saved... How do you even up the score? I buy you a beer and say, "Thanks." I should be your slave for the rest of my life!

BRAD (laughing)

Hey! That's not a bad idea! Talk about paybacks! That would make you a real white slave, besides!

LOIS

I'm serious, Brad. I'm not just thinking of you and me and all that. Your hero appears and saves your life without thinking about his own. That's courage!

BRAD

You keep saying that courage thing, Lois. It was just a snap reaction. That's all. I just got crazy mad.

LOIS

Whatever. So how am I supposed to think about how much my life is worth? Ten cents or a million dollars? And don't say you can't put a price tag on it. You've got to give it some value. Sometimes you feel as though your life isn't worth two cents.

BRAD

That's no lie.

LOIS

Come off it, Brad. You're not going to come back here because I can't give you what you think you want most.

BRAD

Lois, you know what I want most. But there's no way.

LOIS

Brad, I'm sorry. I've tried. You know that. I really respect you and I admire you. We all do, but especially me.

BRAD

That's not the same; is it?

LOIS

No, it isn't. But you can't MAKE yourself love somebody... We've said it all before, haven't we?

BRAD

Yeah. I know that you even said you'd sleep with me. But that's not the same, either.

LOIS

I thought maybe that was one way to repay you for saving my life. But it wouldn't have.

BRAD

Anyway, I'm not talking about repayment, not saying OK I saved your life, so you lie down and pay up. Jesus! Is that the kind of guy you think I am?

LOIS

No, of course not, Brad! You know that! It's just that, when you're feeling high, you say your life is certainly worth plenty more than ten cents, but you never really put a ceiling on it!

BRAD

There's only one way. A life for a life. Even a woman's virtue wouldn't pay up. You could only pay up by saving the guy's life. Look, even the next couple of days there might be one of those attacks and there'd be a chance to save mine. You're a nurse. You've probably saved a lot of guys in the infirmary—if you can call it that. Could be mine one of these days. That would even it up, wouldn't it?

LOIS

I'd be saying my life was as valuable as yours.

BRAD

Your life is worth more than mine and everyone else's, Lois.

LOIS (putting her hand on his)

I know, I know, Brad... But I mean would you think I was as much of a hero as you were? I don't think so.

BRAD

You're selling yourself short, Lois. Look, I've told you over and over again. I... was... no... HERO. Right? I was just plain mad. I told you that even my mother warned me that my mean temper flare-ups would get me into more than just trouble.

LOIS

It got ME OUT of trouble, though, didn't it? It wasn't you that got into trouble. It was me and you didn't get me into it, but out of it!

BRAD

But I wasn't in control of it, Lois. Those times, it's something I don't control at all. It's really a kind of weakness, I guess. Or a fucking curse!

LOIS

Blessèd are the weak.

BRAD

Talking about what a life is worth, Lois...there's something you don't know about me that I want you to know before we get out of here. The real reason I want to get back here...

LOIS

Not because of my not...

BRAD

No, Lois. That's why I've got to tell you. I wouldn't want you to think you were responsible for... for anything... you know?

LOIS

I do feel that I should love you, Brad. I want you to know that. Everything is for it. We understand each other, too. I owe you my life. But... it just doesn't happen.

BRAD

You can't make yourself love somebody, Lois. It's got to just... happen, that's all. I know that. I know it, but that doesn't make me happy!

LOIS

I can't imagine why you would want to come back for more of this horrible war, then.

BRAD

It's some bad trouble that a flare-up got me into, Lois. Bad trouble. You could blow my cover, of course.

LOIS

Just between us, then? Count on me Brad. We may not be lovers, but we're friends. Maybe that's closer. Something bad...

BRAD

Murder.

LOIS

Murder.

BRAD

You see, just before I got into the army... You know, I told you, I enlisted because I knew they were going to draft me? That was only part of it. This sudden blow-up thing. Well, I'd had it lots, but this time it was like with the gooks. I just saw red. Yeah, just like the bulls in the bull fights; But the red flag wasn't a piece of cloth or a gook. It was a broad... I killed her.

LOIS

Killed her! Not just like that! I mean, you didn't mean to. It was like an accident or something.

BRAD

No;;; No, this gal... I didn't just kill her, Lois. (Deliberately) I raped her and then I killed her. It was all mixed up with sex, but sex was only part of it... White.

LOIS

I see.

BRAD

It wasn't that. And she wasn't wagging her ass around or giving me the come-on. Just minding her own business. Not very brave there, was I? This flare-up just hits me and I actually see red. I must really go crazy, like off my nut, you know? You think that's it? Insanity?

LOIS

It certainly sounds like it, doesn't it!?

BRAD

No, that's just an excuse. No, I mean I'm REAL angry. But not AT somebody. It's just pure anger. Like white-hot steel. You can't explain it.

LOIS

I guess they didn't catch you. Was that in Texas?

BRAD

You got it. Sudden death back there. Especially for blacks. But that's just another excuse. I deserve it. The question is: What was HER life worth?

LOIS

Right. I know what a Texas jury would say.

BRAD

So that's why I'm trying to get another hitch.

LOIS

I understand, Brad.

BRAD (ironical)

Real brave and patriotic, that's me.

LOIS

Brad, if you hadn't been here that first day, I wouldn't be here now. (pause) It's enough to make anyone crazy. Was the life of that woman worth more than mine?

BRAD

You haven't heard the worst, though, Lois. Get this: I let a poor innocent bastard take the rap for me.

LOIS

On purpose?

BRAD

Might as well have been. I say: by default. They picked up the poor motherfucker and he couldn't prove his alibi.

LOIS

But look at it this way, Brad. If you hadn't saved somebody's life after you killed that woman, or even if you'd saved one before, you shouldn't really have to pay for killing someone.

BRAD

You can say that, Lois. I can't.

LOIS

That would mean that taking a person's life is more important than saving a person's life.

BRAD

You're talking all crazy, Lois! That would mean I could go out and save, like; three peoples' lives...

LOIS

Something like drowning or something?

BRAD

Let's say one from drowning, one from a fire in his house...

LOIS

Another person a hold-up... OK..

BRAD

So I'm a hero three times, over, say, three weeks.

LOIS

It's all in the newspapers, I suppose.

BRAD

Radio, TV, everything. So... I go out on a Saturday night and I see a guy I don't like because his tie is on crooked, so I shoot him dead.

LOIS

So you're going to ask me if you get two more free shots? It's crazy, isn't it? But it's logical in a way.

BRAD

So you take a war like here. How do you count things? I kill 100 gooks. That means I have to save 100... whatever.

LOIS

Americans.

BRAD

Can't I count any gooks I might save, sort of by mistake? But they do crazy things in a war. I warn a general that his army of 50,000 men will be killed if they down Road A instead of Road B. I've saved 50,000 men!

LOIS

So, if you kill 50,000 gooks, God will say it's OK.

BRAD

It's all crazy.

LOIS

It's certainly not worth it to go out and save peoples' lives, is it? You save 50,000 lives and you're praised with lots of sweet words and a day later you kill just one person and you get the chair.

BRAD

Not only that, though, Lois. If you kill three people you don't get any more punishment than if you kill just one.

LOIS (quietly)

How many people have you killed, Brad?

BRAD (serious)

It's not right to play games about things that are serious, Lois.

LOIS

I'm serious about what the proper way is of thanking a guy who has saved your life; And how about keeping a guy from being executed, what price to pay.

BRAD

The problems sort of get in each other's way.

LOIS

It's like my brother. He's on death row right now. I hate to think he's guilty. But he can't prove anything. It's pretty awful. I really love my big brother. He's like a father more than a big brother to me. I mean, our parents were both killed in a car accident several years back. We were sort of grown-up orphans. Still are, so I really love the guy. And yet, it's gotten so I'm not sure that he might not have done it. You see what mean?

(Each broods over his bottle. Suddenly LOIS starts up)

LOIS

Brad! You say that was in Texas? What part?

BRAD (surprised)

Lubbock.

LOIS

Lubbock! Jesus Christ! Do you know the name of the guy taking the count?

BRAD

How could I forget! Yeah! It was Walter...something. Walter... Grant. Right Walter Grant. Grant, like your name. Pretty common, I guess.

LOIS

Walter Grant!

BRAD (disturbed)

Yeah. Why? You know him?

LOIS

Know him! That's my brother, Brad! My big brother I was talkinga bout!

BRAD

Shit!

LOIS

My big brother! Brad! That means he really is innocent! I mean I never should have doubted.... Oh!

(They look at each other aghast)

LOIS

No! Jesus! For Christ sake, Brad! You don't think I'm going to ask you to turn yourself in!? You saved my life, and I repay you by asking you to take yours? No way!

(She takes her head in her hands and rocks it back and forth)

BRAD

You don't want your brother to pay for something he didn't do, do you? (pause) I never *had* a brother.

LOIS

They have an appeal in to give him life instead of...of death. He's white. He may have a chance... That gives us some time to figure things out.

BRAD

Lois... you know...it doesn't look to me as though there's much here *to* figure out.

(End of Act I)