

BUNKERS

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CHARACTERS:

- i Private Daniel Wagner (Male, early 20s)
- i Private Peter Barber (Male, early 20s)
- i Private Anthony Schumann (Male, early 20s)

The lights go up to a living area in a bunker. There are four chairs around a table at Center Stage, upon which there are three bottles (one of champagne, one of bourbon whiskey, and one of dark rum) in a bucket with ice and a scoop, a bottle of stout, a bag of sugar, a bottle of water, three lowball glasses, four wine flutes, and two pilsner glasses.

Three men, those being PRIVATE PETER BARBER, PRIVATE DANIEL WAGNER, and PRIVATE ANTHONY SCHUMANN, enter in military uniform. SCHUMANN takes the champagne bottle and WAGNER grabs the bourbon as BARBER sits in one of the chairs.

WAGNER: Dammit, Schumann.

SCHUMANN: What?

WAGNER: Champagne isn't a drink for grieving.

SCHUMANN: I'm making a Black Velvet.

SCHUMANN grabs a pilsner and pours some champagne in, about half full. He then takes the stout and pours it on top. WAGNER scoops some ice and puts it in a lowball glass before pouring in some bourbon.

WAGNER: A Black Velvet?

SCHUMANN: It was named for the black armbands worn during times of grieving.

BARBER: I'll have one.

WAGNER: I'm good with bourbon.

SCHUMANN makes another drink for BARBER as WAGNER silently sips his bourbon.

SCHUMANN: Here you are, Pete.

BARBER: Thanks, Tony.

BARBER takes a sip.

Whoa. This is good. Hey, Daniel.

WAGNER: It's Wagner.

BARBER: What's wrong with Daniel?

WAGNER: Nothing. It's just you'll need to get used to it when I get promoted.

SCHUMANN: And what about us?

WAGNER: I use your last names as well, Schumann.

SCHUMANN: But if we're promoted too, then what's the problem with calling you Daniel?

WAGNER: Just call me Wagner, okay?

SCHUMANN: Fine.

BARBER: Anywho, do you want a sip of this?

WAGNER: I'm good.

BARBER: Are you sure you don't want any?

WAGNER: Yes, Barber. I'm sure. I've got my own drink already.

A moment of silence.

SCHUMANN: You holding up alright, Pete?

BARBER: Oh, yeah. I'm alright. How about you?

SCHUMANN: I'm about as happy as I can be. I was just wondering since you and Lenny were pretty close and all.

WAGNER: We were all close to Private Eastman.

SCHUMANN: I know, it's just that Pete didn't take the news all that well at first. Much worse than you did, at least.

WAGNER: That doesn't mean anything.

SCHUMANN: It means that we should at least check up on him sometimes.

WAGNER: Any more than either of us?

SCHUMANN: That's not what I mean, Wagner. It's just that-

BARBER: Alright, let's calm down. We all miss Leonard. We can agree on

that, right? So let's try not to be at each other's throats on the day of his funeral. This isn't what he would want.

Silence overtakes the room again.

WAGNER: Hey, Schumann.

SCHUMANN: Yeah?

WAGNER: Do you want a cigarette?

SCHUMANN: No, I don't smoke.

WAGNER: Barber?

BARBER: I don't smoke either, Wagner.

WAGNER: Alright then.

WAGNER takes out a cigarette and lights it. He takes a puff and another sip of bourbon.

WAGNER: You know, they're actually talking about giving me a higher rank. Once we get out of Kosovo, they're wanting to get me to Corporal. Maybe I'll be a Sergeant when they call for me next.

BARBER: That's great to hear.

SCHUMANN: It's a bit weird though. What with you wanting to stay in the military and all.

WAGNER: Well then why are you here?

SCHUMANN: What do you mean?

WAGNER: This isn't Vietnam. You weren't drafted or anything. You came here on your own. So tell me, why?

SCHUMANN: Honestly, I just need the tuition money.

WAGNER: Tuition money? You're doing this for college?

SCHUMANN: Well, of course. Why'd you join?

WAGNER: To serve my country. I thought that much was obvious.

SCHUMANN: I didn't think that there were still people who thought like that. This isn't the 1940s, you know.

WAGNER: So you don't think people can be proud of their country in the 1990s?

A silence.

SCHUMANN: So Peter. Why'd you enlist?

BARBER: To be honest, Leonard talked me into it. He was a lot like Wagner. He wanted to serve the nation and keep his countrymen safe. He wanted to fight for those who couldn't. He was willing to give up his life to do so.

SCHUMANN: Yeah. He was.

BARBER: And he did. But now that he's gone, I don't know why I'm still here.

WAGNER: I beg your pardon?

BARBER: I mean, I only enlisted because Leonard was here as well. Since he's gone, why bother?

WAGNER: Because you have a duty to your country. You need to finish it from where he left off.

BARBER: And you can't? The other troops in this regiment can't?

WAGNER: We're all working to do this, dammit. At least stay this war out.

A brief silence.

BARBER: Alright. I yield. But if I get discharged, you can't blame me for it.

SCHUMANN: Why are you worried about that?

BARBER: I don't know. Pretty much since the day I've been here, I've felt like my time here might come to an abrupt end.

SCHUMANN: What's that supposed to mean?

WAGNER: Hey, Schumann. Lay off the questions. It's obvious he's not comfortable with it.

SCHUMANN: Alright, alright.

BARBER grabs a lowball glass and puts some ice in, pouring some bourbon in afterward. He takes a bottle out of his suit jacket and adds some dashes before swirling the cup.

WAGNER: What's in that bottle, Barber?

BARBER: Orange bitters. Want some?

WAGNER: Sure.

WAGNER adds more bourbon to his glass and BARBER drops a few dashes of bitters into the glass. BARBER and WAGNER take a sip.

WAGNER: Not bad.

BARBER: Of course it's not bad. All I did was add some flavor.

WAGNER: Bourbon's got plenty of that, mind you.

The group becomes silent.

SCHUMANN: You know, we kinda blew it.

BARBER: What do you mean?

SCHUMANN: We all had plans together after the war, remember? We were gonna all live our lives like normal in Kentucky or whatever. I mean, except Wagner here who wanted to stay in the military. Then Lenny went and got himself blown up.

The atmosphere becomes dangerously sour.

I mean, I loved the guy, don't get me wrong, but he died in the dumbest possible way. He went out at night to go after a POW and stepped on a land mine. It was wild, man. Seeing his whole torso soar into the air. Hoo boy! No wonder they had to have a closed casket-

WAGNER: Shut your fucking mouth, Schumann!

SCHUMANN: Come on, man. I was only teasing.

WAGNER: Only teasing? You're laughing at the death of our friend. You're laughing at a mother and father having to live with the fact that they outlived their own son.

SCHUMANN: Sorry for trying to process it all. I'll admit, maybe it was stupid of me to not deliver this with tact, but I don't have that. I'm not the one trying to become Lieutenant Cliff-Face. I'm a human who has his own way of sorting things out. I was there when he drew his last breath. You know, I told you all that the last thing he said was some heroic bullshit I pulled out of my ass in the moment. You wanna know why? I didn't have the heart to tell you the truth. The actual

last words of Leonard Eastman were "It hurts!" He didn't die immediately from the explosion. I cradled that man's legless body as he cried out for his mother. But that's not what you guys want. You want folk tales, not history lessons! You'd rather hide behind the lie that he was a fearless warrior than face the fact that he's a human like you and I. So sorry I tried to deceive myself into feeling a lighter burden.

The room is deathly quiet for a few seconds.

Does that appease you, Wagner?

The silence returns as SCHUMANN pours himself a lowball of bourbon and ice. He takes a large drink.

Sweet as death.

Silence pervades.

BARBER: It's alright, Tony. Take your time. Nobody's blaming you for being a witness to that.

WAGNER: Yeah. Sorry I blew up at you.

SCHUMANN: It's alright. I'll admit that I was being a bit tone deaf.

BARBER: You know, I'm gonna miss you guys when I get out of here.

WAGNER: Come to think of it, I never asked you guys what you were planning on doing after the war. Since you seem so ready to leave, how about you start Barber?

BARBER: Alright then. To be completely honest, I'm probably going to try to become an actor.

SCHUMANN: Really, Pete? You're going to Hollywood?

BARBER: Not Hollywood. Broadway!

WAGNER: You want to go onto the stage?

BARBER: Of course. I've actually already got a few people that I went to high school with who are in the business. I can reach out to them about going back to the stage after this war and I'll be in the limelight in no time.

WAGNER: How about you, Schumann?

SCHUMANN: Medical school. I'm wanting to be a surgeon.

WAGNER: A surgeon? Do you think that's the best thing to follow up being in a war with?

BARBER: I don't see the problem.

SCHUMANN: I know, going from one form of blood and guts to another is probably a bad idea, but I've wanted to help people in that way. Granted, I'm not as willing to lay down my own life, so war doesn't really tickle my fancy as much. Don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong with that, it's just not my thing.

WAGNER: Understandable. I guess if I weren't in the war, I would go into law enforcement. I mean, it's pretty close and they'd go crazy for a veteran. But to be honest, I've always wanted to do this. My father did it, as did his father, as did his, so on and so forth to... Well, to pretty much the Revolutionary War.

SCHUMANN: That's one hell of a lineage, Wagner.

WAGNER: Yeah. It's a lot of pressure, too. If I got a dishonorable discharge, it would be a death sentence in that house.

SCHUMANN: That reminds me, Pete. Why are you so sure you're going to get discharged?

BARBER: If I told you, my discharge would be certain.

WAGNER: What, are you gonna tell us you killed someone at basic?

BARBER: What? No!

SCHUMANN: Then what is it?

BARBER: I can't tell. Some people higher up think it's worse than killing a man. It was like that back home, too.

WAGNER: Back home? What could be worse than murder?

BARBER: Apparently, liking men-

BARBER realizes what he said.

WAGNER: What?

BARBER: Shit.

SCHUMANN: You're gay? That explains so much.

BARBER: Wow. How supportive of you!

WAGNER: Why didn't you tell us?

BARBER: What did you want me to say? "Hi! I'm Peter Barber and I'm a dirty rotten homosexual!?" That would've gotten me discharged instantly. No, I knew the rules. Don't ask, don't tell. That's what they called it. As long as I shoved myself six feet in the closet, I was fine. I could go with Leonard to the war. Maybe he felt the same about me. I didn't get my hopes up, but I wasn't happy with how it ended. If he lived, I could've at least had closure with him. I would know that I never had a chance. But now he's gone and now I'm stuck thinking "what if?". What if we could've been happy together? Not as brothers in arms, but arm in arm. I know, that's a pipe dream even if we did love each other, but maybe the times will change and it would be alright. But until then, I'm a moron that got himself dragged into war over a relationship that was probably never going to go his way.

A silence. WAGNER turns to SCHUMANN.

WAGNER: Just so we're clear, we are to never speak of this in front of anybody else. Got it?

SCHUMANN: My lips are sealed.

BARBER: Thank you.

SCHUMANN: Well, what can I say? It's hard to throw a friend under the bus.

WAGNER: Yeah. As much as we're sure you want to go back home, we're not going to be the ones to make you pack your bags.

BARBER: That means a lot to me, you know. You're both my friends.

SCHUMANN: Don't mention it, Pete.

A pause. BARBER starts to pour water into his used pilsner glass.

SCHUMANN: Had enough to drink?

BARBER: No, just rinsing this glass out. I don't think I'm gonna use it anymore for the night and I don't want it to get sticky from the booze.

SCHUMANN: I see.

Some time passes after BARBER tosses the excess water out of the glass after a rinse.

WAGNER: Come to think of it, I just realized how those bitters work so well.

BARBER: How so?

WAGNER: It just brings the bourbon one step closer to an Old Fashioned.

BARBER: Huh. I guess so.

SCHUMANN: You know what? We've got the sugar. We can make a few if need be.

BARBER: Great idea.

BARBER puts a bit of sugar into a lowball and adds a few dashes of bitters. After swirling the glass slightly, BARBER adds a few dashes of water and takes the muddler, using it to break down the sugar, bitters, and water. He then reaches for the bourbon and tries to pour, but only a few drops leave the bottle.

BARBER: Crap.

WAGNER: What is it?

BARBER: We're out of bourbon.

WAGNER: Crap.

SCHUMANN: What's the problem? We can just get more.

WAGNER: We're in the middle of a war, Schumann. We can't just stop by a supermarket and pick up a bottle of liquor.

SCHUMANN: Oh, right. Well, we've still got some rum left.

WAGNER: Don't you dare!

SCHUMANN: What's the matter with you? It's just a bottle of rum.

WAGNER: It's Eastman's bottle of rum. Dark, 94 proof, just how he liked it.

SCHUMANN: Well, he's not gonna drink it anytime soon now, is he?

WAGNER: You piece of shit! Have you no respect for the dead?

SCHUMANN: Where was this emotion during the funeral, Wagner? How come you seem angrier that we're drinking his rum than that you are that he died in the first place?!

WAGNER:

I am mad that he died! Pissed off, even! Fucking fuming! Ready to tear someone's head off! But that doesn't look good to the higher-ups. That doesn't look good to the Wagner family. They want stoic men who can torture you without even flinching. They want a man who would sooner die than admit he's hurting. Rage kills your chance of being promoted. And, when all is said and done, I don't want to be Private Daniel Wagner all my life. Worse yet, it will get you discharged. And God have mercy on the poor soul that dares to admit he failed to a Wagner. But despite that, here you are saying I have no feelings for my friend's death. You sicken me! I don't need to fall to my knees sobbing to show I'm sad. You won't accept anything else though. Just like how the army and the family won't accept anything other than emotionless stoic heroism. What do I do if I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place like this? It's a god-damned paradox! And you're keeping me trapped in it! So either let me be or give me a loaded gun so I can join Eastman!

WAGNER stops for a second before lowering his head against the table. His torso heaves with each sob.

I'll take a Black Velvet.

SCHUMANN:

No. We're drinking champagne.

WAGNER:

Didn't I already tell you? Champagne isn't a drink for grieving.

BARBER:

We're not grieving. We're celebrating.

SCHUMANN:

Why mourn that he died when we can congratulate him on a life well lived?

BARBER:

Come on, Anthony. Let's put these flutes to good use.

WAGNER gets up as SCHUMANN pours the champagne. Each man takes a flute after it is filled, leaving an empty flute on the table. WAGNER fills the fourth flute with the dark rum. All three men lift their wine glasses in a toast.

SCHUMANN:

To Lenny.

ALL:

To Lenny.

The wine glasses clink together as the lights dim.

CURTAIN