

At rise: Dawn breaks over the horizon. The trench starts from center stage and extends from both wings. The surface is from the start of the trench to the backdrop. Mortar shells have indebted large divots in the ground. Barbed wire rests haphazardly on the surface. Two machine gun nests, one on stage left and the other on stage right, are unmanned. Gunfire patters in the distance. The backdrop is NML. Grass barely grows between dead horses, broken vehicles, and fallen soldiers. Beyond the NML, the German front line lies.

Waiting.

DAVID KEITH (20s) and PHILIP SAMSON (late teens) enter stage right. David smokes a cigarette. Philip stretches. Both have their rifles slung over their shoulder. "1914" illuminates the backwall.

PHILIP

Fuck me, man. It's bloody October already.

DAVID

Aye, the chill of Autumn has set over this cursed France.

PHILIP

And here we are.

DAVID

Here we are.

Philip walks stage center. Sits on the step up and leans against the trench. David steps to machine gun nest stage right.

PHILIP

Wake me when the war is over.

DAVID

Enjoy your quick nap.

David leans against the machine gun. Philip closes his eyes. A mortar explodes far away.

PHILIP

A nap?

DAVID

Hmm?

PHILIP
You think this will all just be a
nap.

DAVID
A wink.

PHILIP
Really?

Philip laughs.

PHILIP
David, you're beautiful.

DAVID
You and my mother agree on
something.

PHILIP
A nap... We'll be lucky if this is
but a winter's slumber.

DAVID
Oh, c'mon! The king will be
leading the infantry across the
Rhine by the time you have your
morning coffee. Speaking of which,
has Niall gotten any?

PHILIP
No. Supplies are hitting the 18th
division before us lousy 71sts.

*THE MAJOR (50s) enters stage right. David stands to
attention.*

MAJOR
Enjoying the sweet sounds of war,
are we, Private?

*Philip quickly stands to attention. His helmet and rifle fall
off. He bends down and picks them up.*

PHILIP
Apologies, sir.

MAJOR
Are the barracks insufficient for
you?

PHILIP
No sir, they're quite sufficient.

MAJOR

Really? Private, you have my
permission to be honest.

Philip looks over at David. David winces.

MAJOR

Well?

Philip takes his rifle off his shoulder. Leans it against the trench.

PHILIP

Major, the trenches are quite
dirty...

DAVID

Dear God, man.

PHILIP

And the beds, they are not even
beds. Just simple racks. When it
rains, everything floods. We
seemingly just wait here until the
Germans do something then we
react. Why don't we push? I'm
quite bored, and my bedmate Rooney
is sick.

Major takes out a cigarette.

MAJOR

Anything else, lad?

PHILIP

Well, since you're here, my boots
have holes in them. The dirt and
water keep getting in. We don't
have enough wood for fires
anymore, and when we do, we get
shelled on. I miss my mother. My
sister is soon to be married.

MAJOR

Lucky her.

Major puffs on his cigarette.

MAJOR

Glad you got it out of your
system. Now, please, return to
watching the German front.

MAJOR exits stage left. Philip scoffs. Looks over at David.

PHILIP
Unbelievable!

David chuckles.

PHILIP
I mean, our own Major! Caring that
little for his own men!
Ridiculous.

DAVID
The horror! What a concept!

PHILIP
Right? I mean it's like he doesn't
care if we live or die.

DAVID
Outrageous!

PHILIP
Thank you, I-

Philip marches up to David stage right.

PHILIP
I sense sarcasm.

DAVID
DO YOU NOW?!

David bursts out into laughter. In the distance, birds sing.

PHILIP
What are you on about?

DAVID
What am I on- listen, Philip,
Phil, Philly, my boy. When, in the
history of humanity, has a
military leader cared for his
subordinates?

Pause. Philip backs away.

PHILIP
Jesus did.

DAVID
"Jesus did." I said a military
leader.

PHILIP

Jesus wasn't? Tell that to the
Romans.

DAVID

Oh, because when I think of Jesus
Christ, the first thing, THE FIRST
THING, that comes to my head is,
"Gee, what a military genius. That
Battle of the Five Loaves was
exhilarating."

PHILIP

Okay, well, the Major should care
for us.

DAVID

Yes, and the Germans should
surrender their arms and give us
all a bloody hand job while
they're at it.

PHILIP

Is it too much to ask?

David walks center stage. Offers Philip a cigarette.

DAVID

No, my friend, it's not. I wish I
had your spirit.

Philip takes the cigarette.

DAVID

Let's man our posts.

Philip walks to the machine gun post stage left, David goes to his post stage right. Major enters from stage right. NURSE AMY (early 20s) walks behind him. They walk center stage.

MAJOR

And welcome, dear Nurse AMY, to
Watchpoint 617. Easternmost
location along the Allied front.
Our bastion of British hope.

NURSE AMY

Thank you, sir.

Philip and David snap their heads around. They both stare at Nurse Amy. She tries to wipe the dirt and mud off her white skirt.

MAJOR

Yes, indeed. Our heroes are
willing and ready for service. We
plan on not keeping you busy.

Major laughs hard. Nurse Amy winces. Turns around. Locks eyes with David. He quickly turns around. Grips on his machine gun.

NURSE AMY

Hello, sir!

David doesn't move. Philip hides a smile.

MAJOR

Ah, Private David Keith, the Nurse
has greeted you.

DAVID

HIHELLOHOWAREYOUGOODDOINGDANDYPEAC
HES.

Philip bursts out laughing. Major fumes. Nurse Amy rolls her eyes.

NURSE AMY

Proud to see our men serving,
Major.

MAJOR

Boys, Nurse Amy, these are boys
here.

NURSE AMY

And yet, you have them front of
the line.

PHILIP

Excellent point!

Nurse Amy turns around.

NURSE AMY

And who might you be, sir?

Philip stands confidently.

PHILIP

Philip Samson, madam. Birmingham,
England is where I call home. How
do you do, Nurse Amy was it?

NURSE AMY

Yes. Charmed. I'm from Rochester.

PHILIP

I think my dad owns a summer place
near Rochester. Quaint and
beautiful, it was.

MAJOR

As you can see, dear Nurse, the
soldiers here on the front line
are quite a sight to behold.

David coughs. Grips on the machine gun. Shakes.

MAJOR

For the most part.

NURSE AMY

Wonderful. Are these two men a
good place to start with my work?

DAVID

WORK?

MAJOR

Yes, Private David. The dear Nurse
here will be setting up a medical
station here at our front. She has
been kind enough to offer her
services and that of fellow
medical professionals.

PHILIP

Wonderful!

In the distance, mortars launch. Lines streak across the backwall.

DAVID

Fucking SHIT! Mortars! Incoming!

David and Philip drop out of the machine gun turrets. They brace against the trench. Major cowers center stage. Nurse Amy follows Philip.

NURSE AMY

What's going on?

Philip pulls her down.

PHILIP

Watch your head, miss.

DAVID
COVER YOUR EARS!

Nurse Amy covers her ears. BAM! A mortar lands nearby. The ground shakes. Dirt flies over the trench line.

BAM! BAM! Two more mortars explode in the distance. A whistle blares. BAM! BAM! Nurse Amy grabs onto Philip. David crawls back to the machine turret. Major folds into the fetal position.

NURSE AMY
Our father, who art in heaven,
protect us this day-

BAM! BAM! BAM! Three mortars explode extremely close. Whistles blare in the distance. David stands. Grabs onto his machine gun.

DAVID
Umm, I think the Germans are
getting some nasty ideas. Right
about now.

MAJOR
Open fire!

Philip and David shoot. Lights flash around their weapons. From the German's side, they open fire as well. Bullets kick up the dirt around Philip. Nurse Amy stands. Grabs Major. Shakes him.

NURSE AMY
Where do we go for cover?

Mortars explode nearby. Major screams.

PHILIP
Good heavens, they're everywhere.

DAVID
Like INSECTS! SQUASH THEM ALL.

Nurse Amy lifts Major off the ground. They exit stage left in a hurry. Philip and David continue their onslaught.

PHILIP
Left side, David, LEFT SIDE!

Philip and David pull their fire left.

DAVID
There's a lot of them.

PHILIP
Running low on ammo.

DAVID
You load up. I'll keep the fire
going.

Philip's machine gun clicks. He leans down and grabs a large ammo box from below the machine gun. David steadies his fire.

PHILIP
Alrighty, loading!

Philip begins to load the machine gun.

PHILIP
This might be an odd time to ask
this, but do you know why we're
fighting?

DAVID
I thought we were friends!

PHILIP
No, not us, David. The Germans!

Philip slides the ammo ring into his machine gun. David kneels down below his machine gun. Starts to load his gun.

DAVID
Because the leader of Austria-Hungary was executed.

PHILIP
By a Serbian, David.

DAVID
Well, yes. Then Russia joined and
Germany joined.

PHILIP
And England and France?

Philip pulls the machine gun left. Opens fire.

PHILIP
Did we just feel left out?

DAVID
Germany invaded Belgium. Then
France, I think.

PHILIP

I thought France invaded Germany.
And why are we involved?

DAVID

To defend Belgium and France. We
can't have a German Europe.

PHILIP

Why not? I find Germany quite
lovely this time of year.

David loads his ammo into his machine gun. Opens fire.

DAVID

Yes, the mountains and valleys are
quite charming, but total control
of one continent is not a good
thing.

PHILIP

I guess.

They both pull their machine guns right.

PHILIP

Wait, hang on a sec, doesn't our
England do just that?

DAVID

I mean, not exactly.

PHILIP

We have several countries under
total control. Why can't Germany
have a few? Who even likes France?

DAVID

I'm indifferent to the French.
However, they do make some fine
food.

PHILIP

As does Germany. Oh!

They pull their guns left. A few mortars explode nearby.

PHILIP

If Germany takes France, maybe the
cuisines will combine! German
sausage with French Hors
d'oeuvres.

DAVID

But the Germans are going to kill
all the French.

PHILIP

This might sound harsh, but is
that such a bad thing?

DAVID

Philip! How dare you?

PHILIP

Honestly, David, didn't us England
try to do the same thing like
forty times? Wipe out France?
Maybe Germany can do what we
couldn't.

DAVID

Well, I follow my King and Queen.
What they say, I do. If they say
shoot the Germans, I will shoot
the Germans. They tell me to fire
on the French folks, I'm going to
fire on the French folks. If His
Majesty orders his army to strip
nude and thrust into a bloody
volcano, I'm the first in line!

Machine gun fire stops. Philip scans the horizon.

PHILIP

And if they say nothing at all?
What will you do then?

DAVID

I'll... go home.

Silence. Nurse Amy enters from stage right.

NURSE AMY

Is it over?

PHILIP

Yes, the Germans have offered
their full surrender and are now
retreating back to Berlin.

DAVID

Ignore my stupid friend over
there, the boy has a few holes in
his brain.

PHILIP

I take insult to that, David.

NURSE AMY

WOULD YOU TWO SHUT IT?! IS THE
SHOOTING DONE?!

Philip leaves his machine turret. Walks stage center.

PHILIP

Now, no need to raise your voice.

DAVID

Though it is quite charming,
there's no reason to let out your
frustration at us like that.

NURSE AMY

If this is how half of our boys
act over here, Germany will be
sipping earl grey tea in the River
Thames by December.

PHILIP

Well, I take GREAT insult to that,
Nurse. And yes, the shooting is
done for now.

DAVID

How's the Major? He seemed...
shaky.

NURSE AMY

Your fearless leader is currently
hurling his guts out.

DAVID

Right, doesn't sound to fearless,
now does he?

PHILIP

How can we help you today?

NURSE AMY

Shouldn't you boys be watching the
German front?

PHILIP

We are! Right now they're...

Philip and David look back towards the German front.

PHILIP
Picking up their dead.

DAVID
Quite a lot of 'em. Gonna take a
while.

NURSE AMY
Wait, what?!

Nurse Amy steps up to the trench wall. Peers over the edge.

NURSE AMY
Well, what're you two doing?! Open
fire!!

PHILIP
What? Why?

NURSE AMY
They're exposed! No cover!
Occupied. Easy pickings.

DAVID
And to think I once found you
beautiful...

PHILIP
That's barbaric.

NURSE AMY
Is this not war?
PHILIP
Yes, but who likes war?

DAVID
I'm not a big fan of the Germans,
like my friend over here, but
they're picking up the dead.

Silence.

PHILIP
And no one has given an order.

Nurse Amy looks at both of them. Slides down the trench wall. Sobs.

NURSE AMY
What the bloody hell is wrong with
me?

Philip and David walk to her. Philip taps her awkwardly on the head. David gives a very uncomfortable massage. Nurse Amy laughs.

Lights down. End of Act 1

Scene transition to Act 2.

Lights up on Act 2. "1915" illuminates the back wall.

David and Philip clean their rifles in a dank bunker. Two small lights hang from the ceiling. Beds stretch along the stage left to right. At stage center is the doorway to the trench. David sits on his bed off stage right, Philip sits off stage left. Suppressed gunfire lightly hangs over the scene.

PHILIP

I think mine's clean.

DAVID

Then check it.

Philip points the barrel right at his face. David screams. Grabs the rifle away from Philip.

DAVID

What on Earth are you thinking?

PHILIP

What? Checking if the barrel is clean.

DAVID

Yes, yeah, I- you pointed the barrel right at your face?

PHILIP

I did. Got a good look in it, too. Clean as your mother's behind.

DAVID

You bloody donkey! It could've gone off! Blown your face to bits like poor Fred.

PHILIP

Poor Fred.

DAVID

You could've killed yourself!

PHILIP

Had the safety on. Plus, there's
no bullets in there.

Philip grabs his rifle back. Pulls the bolt back. No shell comes out. Pulls it again. Again. Again. Clicks the trigger. Multiple times. Aims it all over the room. David ducks.

PHILIP

See? I could point this rifle
straight into the eyes of God with
no doubt in my mind.

DAVID

There's still a chance. You don't
know if there's a loose shell
still in there. Some plaque got
jammed or a bullet's unfired.

PHILIP

Okay, based on the slimmest of
chances of possibly bodily harm?

DAVID

Yes! Looking out for a friend.

PHILIP

You do realize we're currently in
a war. The chances of death are
much higher if I lift my head two
inches too high. March left
instead of right. Eat maggot
infested bread instead of maggot
infested fruit.

DAVID

Well, apologies for being
concerned. I'm SORRY I'm trying to
protect you from ending up like
poor Fred.

PHILIP

Poor Fred.

David stands on his bed.

DAVID

If that is my crime, I happily
accept a court martial and public
execution in the township.

PHILIP

Sit down, you idiot.

DAVID

Ah, idiot? I save your life and
you resort to name-calling. You
bastard.

PHILIP

Weasel.

DAVID

Oaf.

PHILIP

Non-winner.

DAVID

Maggot-wait what did you say?

PHILIP

Non-winner.

DAVID

Did you forget the word "loser"?

PHILIP

No, I feel that non-winner cuts
deeper than loser.

DAVID

...No! It does not.

PHILIP

Agree to disagree.

DAVID

How can non-winner cut deeper,
it's not a word!

Nurse Amy enters down into the bunker stage center. Her hair is a mess. Her outfit is soaked a dark crimson. Blood.

PHILIP

It's quite simple. Non-winner
implies that it's a part of you.
Never being able to win is in your
blood. Your bones. You can stop
being a loser, you can never stop
being a non-winner.

Nurse Amy leans against the doorway.

NURSE AMY
Help.

She collapses. Philip and David drop their rifles. Rush over to her. David checks her pulse.

DAVID
Breathing!

PHILIP
Get her to a bed. Now!

Philip leans down. Picks Nurse Amy up. Wraps her left arm around his shoulders. David grabs her right arm.

PHILIP
Take her to Fred's bed.

DAVID
Poor Fred.

They drag her over to Fred's bed stage right. Slowly, Philip and David lower her into the bed.

DAVID
Got any water?

Philip nods. Walks stage left and grabs a canteen under his bed. David puts a blanket over Nurse Amy.

NURSE AMY
Hell.

DAVID
Hey, shhhh, rest.

Philip brings his canteen over to Nurse Amy. Lifts it gently to her mouth.

PHILIP
Take it easy.

Gently pours some water into Nurse Amy's mouth. She gulps it down.

PHILIP
Better?

Nurse Amy barely nods.

DAVID
There's a lot of blood here,
Nurse. Were you hit?

NURSE AMY
It's not mine.

PHILIP
Aye, some stupid idiot out here
wasting perfectly good blood?

David and Nurse Amy glare at him. Philip slouches.

PHILIP
Not a good time, I see.

NURSE AMY
Stupid boy wanted to get a look at
the German front. Just got off the
truck. Sniper blew half his head
off in one shot.

DAVID
Fuck me, man.

Major enters stage center. His war attire is faded and dirty. David and Philip stand to attention

DAVID & PHILIP
Sir!

Major nods at them.

MAJOR
Privates. Nurse Amy.

NURSE AMY
I'd stand to give you a respectful
salute, but I can't feel my legs.

MAJOR
Ah, that explains why you ran off
from the young lad's bedside.

NURSE AMY
That sounds like an accusation.

Nurse Amy sits up. David reaches for her. She waves him off.

NURSE AMY
Say what you want to say, Major.

Silence.

MAJOR

The rest of the medical staff were
asking me to bring you back.
There's more wounded coming in
from the failed push this morning.

PHILIP

Push? What push?

DAVID

18th Calvary. Just in from
England.

MAJOR

And now just into the grave. Most
of them. Some poor blokes are
still alive. Unlike like poor
Fred.

PHILIP

Poor Fred.

NURSE AMY

I can't watch another child die
today. Maybe tomorrow.

PHILIP

Tomorrow's a much better day on
the calendar.

Everyone glares at him.

PHILIP

Just trying to ease tension!

DAVID

Sir, the Nurse came in here barely
conscious.

MAJOR

She has a duty.

DAVID

Well, yes, but sir, she's not in
the state to help those boys to
her best abilities.

PHILIP

You can question a lot, like
David's intellect, but you cannot
question Nurse Amy's ability.

NURSE AMY

Is it my birthday?

PHILIP
Sir, if you need someone to
help...

Philip triumphantly steps forward.

PHILIP
I will help.

MAJOR
Private, I'd rather leave our
dying boys in the care of an
imaginary stuffed rabbit before
you. Nurse Amy here, tired or not,
will be returning with me.

DAVID
Can you give her a half an hour?
Maybe?

NURSE AMY
I'm fine, let me go.

*She tries to stand. Her knees buckle. David catches her.
Nurse Amy sobs into the pillow.*

PHILIP
Now look at you, Major. Made the
poor woman cry.

MAJOR
Apologies, I-I meant no harm.

DAVID
Yeah? Well, you harmed.

MAJOR
Okay, okay, I'll stay here with
you lot until she feels better.
How does that sound?

Philip walks over to Major. Shakes his hand violently.

PHILIP
Thank you, sir! Many thanks.
You're a kind and honorable man
despite your hapless remark about
my ability.

*Philip walks back to his bed. David sits on the ground next
to Nurse Amy. Rubs her back. Major finds a stool near the
entrance and sits. Philip resumes cleaning his rifle. Hums.*

DAVID

Any news from the other fronts,
Major?

MAJOR

Nothing positive, I'm afraid.

PHILIP

What about the negatives?

MAJOR

You... want to hear about that?

PHILIP

Sure, it will fill the time.

MAJOR

Well, rationing is only somewhat effective. Our boys are dying at an exponential rate, yet we are seeing no movements along the line. Some French divisions are whispering about desertion. And morale is low after Fred's death.

PHILIP

Poor Fred.

DAVID

Splendid news, Major.

MAJOR

We were to push forward next week, but the tanks broke down behind our lines. Then, they were shelled on. So, we are waiting again for new tanks.

NURSE AMY

And we are low on most medical supplies.

MAJOR

Ah, I did not know that.

PHILIP

And even so, the spirit of British victory remains as prevalent as ever. Hip hip!

Silence.

PHILIP

Oh, you poor saps, you forgot the rest! I say, "Hip hip," and you say "Hoo-ray!" Let's try again. Hip hip!

NURSE AMY

Shut your bloody trap, Philip.

DAVID

See what I deal with, Major? This talkative toy leads our machine gun group.

PHILIP

A group that consists of you and myself. So, that speaks more of you than me.

DAVID

Even so, you never cease to confuse me.

PHILIP

Apologies. My shaking optimism scares these men more than any mortar ever could.

NURSE AMY

Why?

Pause.

NURSE AMY

Why be optimistic?

PHILIP

Remember when the lass here was so adamant we gun down Germans as they buried their dead? That woman who drank the elixir of our nobles? I'm surprised the union jack is not stapled on your forehead.

DAVID

Get off it, Philip.

PHILIP

My dear boy, Nurse, and commanding officer, you must remain optimistic because it's the only way to stay human.

MAJOR

What?

PHILIP

Sir, sometimes it's best to close your senses. We're not made for war. Humans. Not... this kind of war. Maybe throwing stones or swords.

DAVID

The Devil invented the rifle, I'm sure of that. He came down, made gunpowder, and whispered in the mind of some poor chap.

PHILIP

A worthy proposition!

NURSE AMY

I take it back. Major, I'll come with you now.

PHILIP

I must keep my spirits high because I'm only surrounded by darkness. If I open my eye, my heart, ever so slightly, the floodgates of hell will pour in. So, I close them. Because what else am I supposed to do? Become a hollowed ghast and take life with a numbness?

MAJOR

That's your mission.

PHILIP

Our mission is to win, Major, not lose our humanity. We can win and stay civilized.

NURSE AMY

Honestly, Philip, have you seen one thing that resembles "civilized" since you've been here?

Philip leans backwards.

PHILIP

Yes. When I close my eyes.
Long pause. The silence is broken by the sounds of shelling. Major stands.

MAJOR
Well, I go, the bell invites me.
Nurse?

David helps Nurse Amy stand.

DAVID
Take it somewhat easy, please?

NURSE AMY
Okay.

Nurse Amy walks center stage. Glares at Philip.

NURSE AMY
Why?

PHILIP
Hmm?

NURSE AMY
Why do you choose to be like this?

PHILIP
It's not a choice, Nurse Amy.

Nurse Amy chuckles. Walks upstage to Major. They exit out of the bunker upstage center. David leans under his table. Grabs his helmet. The shelling gets worse.

DAVID
Not right to send her out alone.

PHILIP
She has our firm standing leader
to guide her.

DAVID
That's what worries me.

Philip lays down on his bed. David grabs his rifle.

PHILIP
What on earth are you thinking?

DAVID
I'll guide her.

PHILIP
In this weather?

Mortars land nearby. The bunker shakes.

DAVID

I am not a coward.

PHILIP

What do you believe is the difference between cowardice and cleverness?

DAVID

Cause you're so clever laying on your bed.

PHILIP

Yes. Because I might survive until the morning.

DAVID

Cowardice. Our lives became forfeit the moment we boarded the ships to France.

PHILIP

Call me a coward. Call me a wild and insane spirit. But I wish to keep my body in one piece. I'd rather not have my mother receive me in a box filled with little bits of me like cubed cheese.

DAVID

But you'd be a hero.

PHILIP

A hero who was trying to walk a little lady to her tent where she gets to witness unimaginable horrors and possibly get shelled on. Back home that might get me years in the brig!

David walks over to Philip. Rips Philip's blanket off of him.

DAVID

We're not home.

Shelling intensifies.

DAVID

Get up. We're leaving.

Philip nods. Reaches under his bed and gets his helmet. Puts it on. Grabs his rifle.

PHILIP
Okay.

Philip and David exit out of the bunker upstage center. The shelling continues. The light bulbs flicker. Flicker. Flicker. Then, they're out. Darkness.

Lights down. End of Act 2.

Scene transition to Act 3.

Lights up on Act 3. "1916" illuminates in the back wall.

The stage has transformed into the medical tent. Three beds line up on stage right, three beds line up on stage left. A middle post sits stage center. Nurse Amy leans against it. David lays on a bed stage right, a white cloth wrapped around his forehead. Philip lays on a bed stage left. His shirt is open and white cloth wraps around his upper torso. Upstage from him, Major sleeps under the covers of a blanket. No one knows he is there.

Nurse Amy pulls a cigarette out of her coat pocket. Philip and David lean up.

PHILIP DAVID

Nurse? What you got there?

NURSE AMY
Glad I got both your attention.
First one to tell me what happened
gets this.

PHILIP
I don't know what you mean.

NURSE AMY
Bollocks. You two show up to my
station knocking on death's door
in the middle of the night.

DAVID
On death's door is a bit of
stretch.

PHILIP
I'd say we were a few blocks from
Death's house.

DAVID
Besides, nothing happened. We took
some flak from the artillery.

NURSE AMY
Besides, I don't believe you.
There was barely a mortar fired
last night. Even the Germans took
the night off.

Silence.

NURSE AMY

Dear God, have I found something
that will actually shut you both
up?

PHILIP

Congratulations, now I think blood
is starting to seep through my
bandages.

NURSE AMY

Nah, it's just a little artillery
flak, like you said.

DAVID

It was mustard gas!

Pause. Philip glares at David. Nurse Amy steps back in shock. David extends his hand. Gestures to Nurse Amy.

DAVID

I'd like my cigarette now.

PHILIP

Aye, Christ on a cross.

Nurse Amy walks stage right. Hands David the cigarette.

DAVID

Thank you. Now do you have a light
or do I need to reveal something
else for that privilege?

Nurse Amy pulls out a matchbox from her pocket. Lights up a match. Lights David's cigarette.

NURSE AMY

We weren't told.

PHILIP

That was on purpose. The Major
didn't want it out.

NURSE AMY

Why?

PHILIP

Well, ma'am, want to take any
guesses?

NURSE AMY

Can one of you just give me a straight answer for once in your fucking lives? These aren't funny jokes.

DAVID

I'm laughing.

NURSE AMY

You haven't let out as much as a sound until I pulled a cigarette from my pocket.

DAVID

Laughing on the inside.

PHILIP

Nurse Amy, why do you think only us two came to your medical office? Have you heard any reports of massive amounts of gassed soldiers at other tents?

NURSE AMY

No.

PHILIP

Why?

Silence.

NURSE AMY

Oh my god.

PHILIP

So, the only two survivors come in and hooray, here we are.

DAVID

Thank you for the cigarette.

PHILIP

Was it worth it?

DAVID

Of course.

NURSE AMY

And the Major?

DAVID

Guess the news that an entire
squadron was nearly wiped out
wouldn't sit well with his
officials.

NURSE AMY

And you sound very calm for all of
this?

DAVID

Pardon?

NURSE AMY

You watched how many people die,
and you're describing it like
yesterday's weather.

PHILIP

They're both as consequential.

Silence. Nurse Amy gathers her medical belongings across the stage.

DAVID

I'm sorry, nurse.

NURSE AMY

Do you believe this will ever end?

PHILIP

There is only a finite amount of
people on this planet.

DAVID

The ground will be nothing but
bones, but by then I think the two
sides will have worked out an
agreement.

Nurse Amy chuckles.

NURSE AMY

They'll write the peace agreement
while stepping over mortar shells.

PHILIP

With the blood of some poor
private as ink.

DAVID

Under a canopy made of broken tank
parts.

NURSE AMY
But there will be peace!

ALL
Peace!!

Major sits up from his bed.

MAJOR
Peace!

Philip and David scream. Major screams back. Then, he falls back asleep.

NURSE AMY
Oh, I forgot to that he was here.

PHILIP
The whole time?!

NURSE AMY
What, you think he snuck in under
the edge of the tent?

DAVID
Holy hell.

NURSE AMY
He came in two nights ago. Wakes
up every now and then to eat. Goes
back to sleep. I checked him for
wounds, but he seems fine. Guess
he's tired.

PHILIP
Get in line, Major.

David finishes his cigarette.

DAVID
Speaking of, I'm going to try and
get some sleep.

David lays down flat. Covers himself in the blanket.

PHILIP
What bedtime story would you like?

DAVID
The one where you piss off.

PHILIP
Ah, a lovely tale.

Nurse Amy chuckles. Philip looks down at his bandages.

PHILIP
Uh, nurse? I think I'm bleeding
through my bandages again.

He opens his shirt more. Red seeps through the cloth. Nurse Amy nods. Grabs a basket of fresh bandages. Walks stage left to Philip. Sits next to him.

NURSE AMY
Can you remove your shirt?

PHILIP
I prefer a few dates, but if you
insist.

Philip takes his shirt slowly off. Nurse Amy helps. He winces in pain. Finally, the shirt is removed. Nurse Amy tosses it to the side. Starts to remove the bandages. Philip winces.

NURSE AMY
You're a strong boy, you can
handle it.

PHILIP
If you say so.

NURSE AMY
So, how have things been on the
front?

PHILIP
Peachy. Except for the constant
looming mortar attacks and lack of
food. And socks. Oh, what I'd do
for a pair of warm socks.

NURSE AMY
Ha. I feel that. Heard the supply
trucks keep getting shelled.
Imagine that.

PHILIP
I've grown to learn that those
pesky Germans, I don't think they
like us.

NURSE AMY
No clothes, no food, no medical equipment. Barely enough bandages.

PHILIP
Sorry for hogging the supply.

NURSE AMY
Forgiven. Hell, we don't even get any mail.

PHILIP
Oh! A special man back at the homefront?

Nurse Amy presses into Philip's side. Philip cries.

NURSE AMY
Ooops. Must have slipped.

PHILIP
I take the hint.

NURSE AMY
Good.

She throws the dirty bloody bandages on the ground. Pulls out a long wrap of fresh cloth.

PHILIP
Is he handsome like me?

NURSE AMY
Sure, I guess my father is handsome.

PHILIP
Ah! A fun twist on the Oedipus tale!

NURSE AMY
I can do you so much bodily harm to you right now.

They laugh.

NURSE AMY
You got anyone special back home? Besides family.

PHILIP
I do, in fact.

NURSE AMY

Really?

PHILIP

You act too surprised.

NURSE AMY

No, it's just you haven't spoken
of her. David over there goes on a
fit whenever that Ada Thorne
writes.

PHILIP

Our beloved David would go mental
if a woman simply breathed in his
direction.

NURSE AMY

Well, that makes me feel warm and
fuzzy inside.

PHILIP

You're a good woman, though.

NURSE AMY

Thank you.

Nurse Amy finishes wrapping Philip.

NURSE AMY

Tell me about your special girl!

Philip chuckles.

PHILIP

What do you want to know?

NURSE AMY

Is she pretty?

PHILIP

Yes.

NURSE AMY

Does she live near you? Same age?

PHILIP

Yeah, more or less.

NURSE AMY

What is she like?

*Nurse Amy moves stage center. Empties the bloody bandages
into a large basket.*

PHILIP

Charming, dashing, funny, loves to
ride horses, at university
studying law.

NURSE AMY

Oh my, that's impressive!

PHILIP

Yes, very much so.

NURSE AMY

You're a lucky man!

Philip shrugs.

NURSE AMY

What does she write about?

PHILIP

Oh, the usual. School, updates
from the neighborhood, the intense
passion for me.

NURSE AMY

Ha. She sounds lovely.

PHILIP

He most certainly is.

Silence. Nurse Amy turns to Philip. He grins.

NURSE AMY

Pardon?

PHILIP

Did I say something?

NURSE AMY

Your... writer...

PHILIP

Henry.

NURSE AMY

Oh! Oh.

Philip laughs.

PHILIP

Ah, the little secret pops out!
She'll never look at me the same
again.

NURSE AMY
No, I just... never knew.

PHILIP
Yes, well, there you go.

Nurse Amy walks to Philip. Sits beside him.

PHILIP
Do you still like me?

Nurse Amy laughs.

NURSE AMY
Yes, of course. I don't judge you
for being you.

PHILIP
Thank you. Most do judge, and
honestly, I understand.

Nurse Amy looks back to David, then to Major.

NURSE AMY
Your secret is safe with me.

PHILIP
Oh, it's not much of a secret.
David knows. I'm pretty sure the
Major does, too.

He jabs Major.

PHILIP
Am I a homosexual?

Major snores loudly.

PHILIP
I don't speak sleep.

NURSE AMY
So, everyone but me knew?

PHILIP
Sure.

NURSE AMY
"Sure"?

PHILIP

Our inner desires aren't usually discussed on the front. It doesn't go, "Hello, did you hear about the adjacent division being overrun by Germans, also I'm gay, and we're out of rations."

NURSE AMY

Oh.

PHILIP

Besides, we're soldiers. Do you really think me being a homosexual deters David or anyone else from me? We kill. We mow down Germans. We bury friends. We pray in our trench. We hunt for rats. When I told David, he shrugged. He just asked me to hand him another round of ammunition because the Germans were launching a counterattack. Not a great time to tell him, but I thought it was my last moment. Later, he hugged me. Maybe we're different. Maybe when I go home and tell everyone I'll be shunned to the streets. But here, on the war front, we're not men, women, hetero or homo, human or beast. We are just either alive or dead.

Major stirs in his sleep.

MAJOR

Would you stop yapping?

Philip chuckles.

PHILIP

Apologies.

Nurse Amy walks over to Philip. Gives him a large hug. Sobs. Major turns over.

MAJOR

Oh, bloody hell, not you too!
Can't a man get some sleep?

David wakes up. Rubs his eyes.

DAVID

What's going on?

MAJOR

Little Philip over here won't stop talking, and now the Nurse is crying.

DAVID

Philip, what did you tell her?

Philip shrugs.

PHILIP

I guess I have that effect on women.

MAJOR

I thought you were a homosexual.

Philip laughs.

PHILIP

I thought you were asleep.

NURSE AMY

And I will stand for no ill-will towards Philip. He's a braver-

DAVID

Nurse, NURSE!

Nurse Amy turns to David.

DAVID

No one's slinging arrows.

Silence. Major stands. Drags his blanket over to a bed behind David.

MAJOR

Maybe it'll be quieter over here.

DAVID

Don't you have a war to run?

Major flops on the bed.

MAJOR

Even the Germans need some rest.
Nurse Amy walks to David.

NURSE AMY

How is your eye?

DAVID

It hurts.

NURSE AMY

How would you describe the pain?

DAVID

It really hurts.

NURSE AMY

I don't have any more pain
medicine. But, here.

She unwraps the bloody bandage from David's head. Places a soft kiss on his forehead. David is gobsmacked. Philip smiles.

PHILIP

Bloody hell.

Nurse Amy takes a clean cloth from her pockets. Places it gently on David's forehead. Leans him down slowly.

NURSE AMY

Better?

David nods.

DAVID

Much.

NURSE AMY

Good. Now, get some rest. And if
you behave, you might even get a
story next time.

Philip chuckles. David turns over upstage. Holds the cloth to his head. Philip lays down. Closes his eyes. Nurse Amy gathers her things: bloody bandages, a few rusty medical tools, and some clean cloth. She places them all in the same basket. Walks stage center to the center post. Eyes Philip, then David.

Silence. For just a moment, there is no war.

Nurse Amy sighs. Turns out the light.

End of Act 3.

Scene transition to Act 4.

Lights up on Act 4. "1917" illuminates the backwall.

Winter has fallen. David and Philip dig a large hole in the ground. The entire stage is covered in snow. The backdrop is pure white. A heavy snow falls with gusts of wind. David and Philip each wear an extra layer of clothes. On stage center right, a large pile of snow sits. On stage left, a mass of bodies. Mangled. Bloody. Dirty.

Philip grabs one of the bodies off the ground.

PHILIP

Little help with Gertrude?

David stops shoveling. Grabs the feet of Gertrude. Philip takes the shoulders. They gingerly waddle over to the snow mound.

DAVID

On three. 1...2...3!

They launch Gertrude. The body hits the top of the mound and stops.

PHILIP

Fucking hell. Give us a break, man.

Philip walks up the small mound. Tips Gertrude's body over the mound. It tumbles into a large hole. David sits on the snow.

DAVID

I thought Hell would be hotter.

PHILIP

I thought there would be less people.

Gunfire crackles in the distance. Philip leans against the snow mound. Bundles up as much as he can. David lays flat on the ground.

DAVID

When we die, where do we go?

PHILIP

Hopefully somewhere.

DAVID

Where?

PHILIP

Paradise. Land of milk and honey.
Okay good chat, we got more to
bury.

Philip stands. Stretches his back. David does not move.

DAVID

I think we all go to hell.

Philip chuckles.

PHILIP

Charming.

DAVID

I'm serious.

PHILIP

So, we go to the land of fire and
brimstone because...? Sounds like
a relief now.

DAVID

I think hell's worse than that.

David leans up.

DAVID

It's an eternal silence. An
endless stream of nothingness.
From the moment our eyes shut,
it's over. Finished, complete.
There's no more use for us. It's
just... a black screen that
envelops our eyes forever. No
sounds of agony, that would be
better. No screams, tortured
bodies, a red devil with a
pitchfork. Hell is nothing. A
forever nothing.

David looks at the pile of bodies.

DAVID

Is that where we go? Is that where they went? How many people have we killed, Philip? How many fathers, brothers, sons, friends, uncles, lovers have we sent to the eternal nothing? How many of our fathers, brothers, sons, friends, uncles, lovers are there? We fire metal tickets for the train ride to damnation. What does that make us? The reaper or just the next in line for the train? I don't want to go, Philip, I don't want to die.

David breaks down. Philip embraces him. Machine gun fires in the distance.

PHILIP

I believe you're wrong, David. I don't believe any of these dear boys are going to your eternal nothing.

DAVID

We're all murderers, Philip. What's the difference between us and... Jack the Ripper?

PHILIP

Intention.

Pause. A mortar explodes somewhere behind them. Muffled. Distant.

PHILIP

Maybe it's the naivety in me, but I don't think God sends us to Hell. A being of pure love? No. When we die, our train ticket takes us home. Like cold water on a summer day. But the Devil rules the world. Hell isn't a place we go to when we die, Hell is here. When we shut our eyes and see the emptiness behind our eyelids, that's the nothingness of salvation. Because it takes us, ever so momentarily, away from Hell. God makes us blink so we wouldn't be constantly surrounded by the agony of the Devil's work. Once we die, our eyes are shut forever, and we are returned to the green pasture of paradise, away from our world. Our hell. The dark behind our eyes replaced with pearly whites and golden roads.

DAVID

Even after all we've done?

PHILIP

Yes.

DAVID

I wish I could think like you.

Philip helps David stand. They grab a body from the pile.

DAVID

Got his legs.

PHILIP

Got the arms.

They shuffle through the snow stage right. They swing the body. Toss him up and over the pile. The body slides into the hole.

Major enters from stage left. His arms are behind his back. Examines the pile of bodies.

MAJOR

You've made good work, lads.

DAVID

Thank you, sir.

MAJOR

I appreciate your attitude. Nurse
is coming with some hot cups of
tea. Give you boys a break.

PHILIP

Oh, tea! Sounds delightful.

Silence. Major shuffles around awkwardly. David and Philip eye each other.

DAVID

Everything alright, Major?

PHILIP

You seem... lost.

MAJOR

Got a letter from the misses back
home.

PHILIP

That's lovely.

MAJOR

She's pregnant.

DAVID

That's... lovely?

PHILIP

Amazing news! Congratulations,
sir! Smashing!

DAVID

I... didn't know you went home for
R&R.

MAJOR

I haven't.

Pause.

PHILIP

Wait... what? I'm-

Philip stops. David grimaces. Philip leans back into the mound of snow.

PHILIP

Oh.

MAJOR

Yes. "Oh" is the correct response.
A miracle that a woman late into
her thirties has conceived. Even
more so is how. It WASN'T
IMMACULATE I'LL TELL YOU THAT
MUCH.

David walks over to Major. Places a hand on his shoulder.

DAVID

I'm sorry, Major.

MAJOR

I have two girls back home. My
angels. My precious girls. They're
my... god, they're everything. And
my wife, she's my anchor. I love
her. I tried, I really tried.

Major breaks down. Falls into a heap. Philip and David surround him. Philip gently rubs Major's back.

MAJOR

I guess she disagreed with me.

PHILIP

What are you going to do?

MAJOR

I don't know.

DAVID

Is she leaving you?

MAJOR

No, at least I hope not. She said
it was a momentary lapse in
judgement. Didn't think it would
lead to anything.

PHILIP

Ah, and you believe that?

Silence. A flare shoots up in the distance.

MAJOR

What else am I to do? She admitted
the wrongdoing.

DAVID

Now, this comes from no personal experience at all, but usually, not always but usually, someone might give one truth to hide ten lies.

MAJOR

You don't know her.

DAVID

Yes, I don't know her, never met her, never shared a meal or watched a horse race, but that letter speaks volumes. She's unfaithful.

MAJOR

And I should, in kind, be unfaithful to our vow?

DAVID

No, I didn't say that.

PHILIP

Also not a lot of women here on the front, besides the nurses, and I think they'd kill themselves before they went to bed with you.

Pause.

PHILIP

No offense, Major.

MAJOR

Lots taken.

PHILIP

So you'll stay with her?

MAJOR

... I don't know.

DAVID

And the child?

MAJOR

I don't know.

PHILIP

Well, you know what cheers me up
and clears my mind? Burying some
fallen soldiers. Mind giving us a
hand, Major?

Major nods. Philip picks up a dead body from the pile. Grabs the shoulders. Major grabs the left leg, David grabs the right. They waddle through the snow towards the hole. They sway the body.

PHILIP

1...2...3!

They toss the body. It clears the mound of snow and rolls into the hole.

DAVID

Goodness! With three of us, we
might get this finished before
night falls.

Nurse Amy enters stage right. She holds two warm cups of tea.

NURSE AMY

I bring reinforcements.

In the distance, a bell rings.

PHILIP

Gas. GAS!

DAVID

Masks on, NOW!

A loud siren blares. Everyone drops to the ground. Nurse Amy gingerly sets the cups of tea on the snow. Philip tightens his mask around his head. Major hyperventilates. Fumbles his mask to the ground. Mortars launch in the distance.

MAJOR

Fuck, fuck, fuck!

Nurse Amy puts her mask on. David finishes strapping his on. Philip crawls to Major. Grabs the mask off the ground.

[NOTE: DIALOGUE IS MUFFLED DUE TO GAS MASKS. UNTIL MARKED OTHERWISE]

PHILIP

Put it on, Major!

Major shakes.

MAJOR

Just let me go, I can't take it.

NURSE AMY

Give me the mask. Hold him down.

Philip and David pin Major to the ground. He kicks and screams. Nurse Amy kneels over him. Shoves the mask over his head. Tightens the straps. The earth behind them gets shelled. Machine guns open fire. Philip and David crawl to the mound of snow. Nurse Amy drags Major stage right near the bodies.

NURSE AMY

Anyone hit?

Philip pats himself.

PHILIP

Clean as a whistle.

David stretches his arms out.

DAVID

Still moving.

Major groans.

NURSE AMY

Okay, we're all good.

The shelling intensifies. Philip bundles up.

PHILIP

Well, thank you for coming!

NURSE AMY

Apologies. I seem to have brought the bad weather.

DAVID

All because of the tea.

PHILIP

Speaking of...

They all turn center stage. The two warm teacups sit still upright.

DAVID

Magnificent.

A shell lands nearby. The shake causes the teacups to spill.

PHILIP, DAVID, & NURSE AMY
NOOO!

DAVID
Curse those bloody Germans. Curse
them to hell!

PHILIP
For but a sip, what I would give.

NURSE AMY
I can go make more, you both know
that-

PHILIP
But it will not be the same.

MAJOR
End it, JUST END IT!

*The shelling dies down. Machine guns and rifle pepper nearby.
The bell in the distance rings again. A whistle blares.
Philip pulls his mask off. Gulps for air.*

PHILIP
No gas.

*David and Nurse Amy rip their masks off. They breathe
heavily.*

[DIALOGUE IS NO LONGER MUFFLED]

DAVID
Another false alarm. Dammit, man!

He tosses his mask to the ground.

NURSE AMY
You'd rather there be actual gas?

DAVID
Maybe. Why not? Lot easier to toss
into the body hole without chunks
of flesh toppling over.

PHILIP
And gas does not knock over
precious cups of tea.

NURSE AMY
I'll get some more.

More machine gun fire. Nurse Amy stands.

NURSE AMY
We don't have any cream or sugar
left. Just plain tea work?

PHILIP
Works for me. David?

David grumbles.

PHILIP
I'll come with you.

Philip leans behind the snow mound. Grabs his rifle. Stands.

DAVID
If you have earl grey, I'll take
that.

NURSE AMY
Lucky you, that's all we have.

Shells explode nearby. Major flinches. Philip holds Nurse Amy.

PHILIP
See you in a gipee, lads. And with
tea!

Nurse Amy and Philip exit stage right. David sits up.

DAVID
You can get that mask off now,
Major.

Major flinches.

DAVID
Sir?

MAJOR
Fuck my life, man.

David laughs.

DAVID
Aye! The Major has become human!
Say it louder, my friend.

MAJOR TURNS OVER.

MAJOR
Fuck my life!

DAVID
Take the bloody mask off.

Major rips the mask off.

MAJOR
FUCK my life!

David stands.

DAVID
That's right! Tell those Germans
across the land!

Major stands. Leans toward the front line.

MAJOR
FUCK MY LIFE!

DAVID
Louder! Even louder!

MAJOR
FUUUUCK MY LIIIIIFE!

DAVID
One more!

MAJOR
(screaming)
FUUUUUUUCCCCCKKKK MYYYYYYYYY
LIIIIIIIIIIIFE!
His voice echoes. Gunfire resumes.

DAVID
How do you feel now, sir?

MAJOR
Miserable. Now with a sore throat.

DAVID
Oh.

MAJOR
Acknowledging my life is fucked
does not take away from the fact
that is fucked. However, I
appreciate your sentiment, David.

DAVID
Well, "David." No "Private" or
"lad" or... "David."

Major pulls a body from the pile onto the snow.

MAJOR
I'll get the arms.

Pause. David walks slowly stage right to Major.

DAVID
Okay.

David leans down. Grabs the body's legs. They both shuffle stage left to the mound of snow.

MAJOR
When you're ready.

DAVID
On three.
They sway the body.

DAVID
1...

Gunfire peppers in the distance. An explosion.

DAVID
2...

A mortar launches. It screeches in the sky.

MAJOR
3!

Blackout. Silence. Lights down.

End of Act 4.

Scene transition to Act 5.

Lights up on Act 5.

David, Philip, Major, and Nurse Amy stand at an empty train station. It's night, and the platform is illuminated by two large streetlights upstage. Nurse Amy wears a large purse with a summer dress. Major still has on his uniform, just now clean and hand pressed. Philip and David wear civilian clothes. They each have a military-issued duffle bag at their feet. A train whistles somewhere nearby.

"1918" illuminates on the backwall.

Philip sighs.

PHILIP

Even in a nightmare, Paris is
still beautiful.

MAJOR

That's the one thing I'll give the
French. They make a damn fine
city.

Nurse Amy laughs.

NURSE AMY

What a complement.

MAJOR

I won't give them anything else.

DAVID

Pastries? Music? Art?

PHILIP

Surely the baguettes here are much
finer than His Majesty's.

Major shrugs.

MAJOR

Didn't have one.

The others gasp.

NURSE AMY

We leave France tonight, and you
haven't had a French baguette?

DAVID

The war will end before our dear
Major eats a French delight?
Unfounded!

PHILIP

I can fetch one if you'd like,
sir.

MAJOR

Appreciated, but no. I want my
next meal to be home with my
family.

NURSE AMY

Oh. So, you are returning home.

Major takes in a deep breath.

MAJOR

Yes.

DAVID

Really?

MAJOR

I'd expect a child to not
understand. But you are children
no more. I will go home. I will
love my wife. I will love my
daughters. I...will love this
child.

PHILIP

An honorable choice, sir.

MAJOR

Not honorable. It's just my
choice. There is no honor any
longer left in the world.

NURSE AMY

No. There is honor. There is hope.
For I think we have seen the power
of hope. Just look at where it is
absent.

DAVID

What is stronger, hope or reality?

PHILIP

Certainly hope. It succeeds what
actually is, bar none.

MAJOR

Then grasp onto it with all your might. That is my final order to you three. Whatever hope you have left, even if it is but a drop, never let it go. I did, and once it leaves your hand, it doesn't come back.

Fireworks pop in the distance behind them. Everyone flinches. Philip turns around.

PHILIP

I know what that sound brings.

DAVID

Beauty or death. Take your choice.

NURSE AMY

Even as war rages on at their doorstep...

MAJOR

The bloody French.

NURSE AMY

I think it's noble.

MAJOR

It's stupid.

PHILIP

It's beautiful.

DAVID

It's nothing.

They all turn and watch the fireworks for a few moments.

PHILIP

It's best that this is my final sight of France.

NURSE AMY

Where are you heading to?

PHILIP

Home, like Major.

NURSE AMY
So am I. Maybe we'll be on the
same boat!

Major takes a cigarette out of his pocket. Lights it. Walks to a bench stage right. Sits.

PHILIP
First thing I'm doing when I get
back, I'm going for a swim.

NURSE AMY
In Birmingham? Lots of watering
holes there?

PHILIP
No, but there's a little creek
just outside the city. Used to go
there every summer. I want that
feeling back.

MAJOR
I'm going to sleep. On an actual
bed.

NURSE AMY
That's a good one. What about you
David?

David shrugs.

DAVID
I'm not going to England.

NURSE AMY
What?

PHILIP
You heading back to the front?
Miss the action?

DAVID
God no. I'm never setting foot in
this bastard country ever again.
I'm going to Spain.

MAJOR
To do what exactly?

DAVID

I don't really want to go home yet. I'm... not ready. There has to be some distance between me and the war before I see my family. My friends. The head needs time to... I don't know... breathe? I still hear them, you know.

NURSE AMY

What?

DAVID

Artillery. Machine guns. Tanks. Whistles. It's a never ending loop inside my brain.

PHILIP

My friend, I don't know if that music will ever leave our ears.

Nurse Amy walks to David. Embraces him. A train whistles nearby. Major looks up.

MAJOR

I believe that one is mine.

Major stands. Grabs his bags. Philip and David salute him. Nurse Amy gives a slight bow.

NURSE AMY

Thank you, sir Major.

MAJOR

I have done nothing that deserves thanks. We survived.

The train's brakes screech. Major walks to Philip. Shakes his hand. Then he shakes David's hand, then Nurse Amy's. Holds back tears.

MAJOR

I hope if we meet again, it won't be in France.

Major turns. Exits quickly stage right.

PHILIP

Off to home.

DAVID

Without a baguette.

Nurse Amy laughs.

PHILIP

How was your final day in
paradise, Nurse?

NURSE AMY

Oh, splendid. I actually took a
long walk along the river. It
didn't smell like the Thames.

DAVID

It might smell like shit, but
that's our shit.

Philip pulls a cigarette out of his pocket. Offers it to Nurse Amy.

PHILIP

Cigarette, love?

Nurse Amy shakes her head. Philip turns to David.

PHILIP

Care for a cig?

DAVID

With pleasure.

David takes the cigarette. Philip lights it. David coughs.

DAVID

What the hell is this shit?

PHILIP

Authentic French cigarette. Bought
it from some shop before the rail.

DAVID

It's disgusting.

NURSE AMY

It's a cigarette, what did you
expect?

DAVID

I prefer some decency with my
vice.

PHILIP

Who made you, Nurse, an arbiter
over our smoke? You judge from
your mountain high?

NURSE AMY
I swear you brought a dictionary
and learned a word every day.

PHILIP
Or I paid attention in class.

Nurse Amy runs to Philip. Hugs him.

NURSE AMY
Please tell me you'll write to me.

PHILIP
I've promised. And I promise
again.

Nurse Amy looks to David.

DAVID
I won't tell my girl, but I'll
write too.

NURSE AMY
I didn't know what I'd find in
France, but it sure as hell wasn't
you two.

PHILIP
What did you expect to find?

NURSE AMY
Experience.

PHILIP
You found that, of course.

DAVID
Was war all you cracked it up to
be?

NURSE AMY
I thought it would be an opera. A
somewhat beautiful dance, like a
duel. It was not.

PHILIP
Maybe to the stars it was like
that. To them were sand shifting
in the breeze. In, out, here,
there.

DAVID
Is that all we are? Sand?

PHILIP

Oh, the hubris of man. What makes sand so derivative to you? Alone it is invisible, together it is a shore.

NURSE AMY

I don't know if this war is a Sunday School lesson. Maybe there's not a hidden meaning, a grain to take home. There might just be misery for the sake of misery.

PHILIP

Perhaps.

DAVID

I just pray the misery will be over quickly for the rest of those boys.

PHILIP

And never again.

A train whistles nearby. Nurse Amy peers stage right. The train SFX approaches the station.

NURSE AMY

That's one me, lads.

Nurse Amy squeezes Philip and David into a group hug. A long hung.

PHILIP

You don't want to miss your train, love.

NURSE AMY

I don't want to miss you.

DAVID

It just shows you care, Nurse.

Philip pulls Nurse Amy apart from him.

PHILIP

See you on friendlier soil.

DAVID
Good-bye, Nurse.

Nurse Amy races in a quick hug. The train whistles louder. Nurse Amy pulls away. Darts off stage right. Philip waves her off. The train pulls away. The engine grows distant.

PHILIP
Our rose. She drifts away.

DAVID
You and your odd speaking. Is that
a Birmingham thing?

PHILIP
No, just a me thing. Helps having
an English teacher as a nanny.

David walks upstage left and sits on the bench.

DAVID
Out of all the soldiers we sent
over, how many do you think are
coming back?

PHILIP
None. All that's coming home are
corpses and ghosts.

DAVID
Which are we?

PHILIP
I'm not sure yet.

Philip walks upstage right and sits on the bench.

PHILIP
Which would you like to be?

DAVID
Ghost.

PHILIP
And what would you do, oh haunting
spirit?

DAVID
I'd haunt the damn Kaiser.

They laugh.

DAVID

I'd probably roam. Wander through
meadows. Be where it's quiet.
Soft. Never settle. I think my
feet would hop off my body if they
stopped moving for too long.

PHILIP

Would you roam the once
battlefield?

DAVID

My feet will never touch this soil
again.

PHILIP

I understand.

Philip lays down on the bench.

DAVID

Comfortable?

PHILIP

Better than the bunks.

David lays down on his bench.

PHILIP

Did you write home of your plans
to travel?

DAVID

Yes. I didn't hear back, but I
just wanted to let them know I was
alive.

PHILIP

Good.

DAVID

And you? Did you write home?

PHILIP

I did. I thought about not and
surprising them, but... didn't
feel right.

DAVID

Yes, they've already fretted
nightly for their son's safe
return. They've had enough
suspense.

Philip sits up from the bench.

PHILIP

I have an odd question, before we
set sail on our adventures.

DAVID

All of your questions are odd.

PHILIP

I like to think of them as
interesting, but I will take odd.

David chuckles. Sits up on his bench.

PHILIP

If you could go back in time to
1914, would you still enlist?

DAVID

Knowing what I know now?

PHILIP

Yes.

DAVID

Not a chance. I'd flip over the
enlisting table, set fire to the
building, and try to stop every
other boy from signing up.

PHILIP

Really?

DAVID

Are you saying you'd enlist again?

PHILIP

I'm not sure.

DAVID

You're not sure? Did four years of
nightmares not wake you up?

PHILIP

It did, but I served my country.

DAVID

In a war I still don't know why we
joined.

PHILIP

We were brave?

DAVID
For what?

PHILIP
We fought valiantly.

DAVID
We slaughtered fathers. Husbands.
Sons. Friends. Neighbors. Lovers.

PHILIP
I met you.

Pause.

PHILIP
I met the Major, Nurse Amy, you,
Fred.

DAVID
Poor Fred.

PHILIP
I'm not sure if I'd enlist, but I
am proud of what I've done.

DAVID
I envy your countless optimism. I
will never forgive myself for what
I've done.

PHILIP
I forgive you.

Philip walks stage center. A train whistles in the distance stage right. Philip takes in a deep breath.

PHILIP
I believe that one is mine.

Another train whistles from stage left. David walks stage center.

DAVID
And that one's mine.

The two of them share a smile. Philip offers his hand. David pulls him in for a hug.

PHILIP
And you have my address, and you
know how to contact me?

DAVID
Have it all in my pocket.

They break apart. The trains arrive. The trains whistle loudly.

PHILIP
I can't wait to hear about your
adventures.

DAVID
Who knows? Maybe you can join me
one day.

PHILIP
That's a promise I plan to keep,
lad.

They hug again.

DAVID
Until then?

PHILIP
Until then.

The trains whistle loud again. Philip rushes off stage right with his luggage. David watches him go. Backs away. Finally, he turns and rushes off stage left. The stage is left empty. The ambient noise grows quiet as the trains both depart. Then, silence. Lights fade on stage.

Blackout.

End of Act 5.

End of show.

Curtain call.