**BLOOD SO CHEAP**

(a drama in two acts)

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*"A man who is good for anything ought not to calculate*

*the chance of living or dying; he ought only to consider*

*whether he is doing right or wrong." Socrates*

**CHARACTERS**

Private Otto Schutz A young Austrian, newly conscripted to the German army.

Private Max Schwannbeck A young soldier a few years older than Otto.

Standartenführer Winkler A middle aged S.S. officer.

Sergeant Bielek A hardened platoon leader (30-40s).

Fräulein Inge Gluck The Colonel's secretary (30s)

Nadia A Russian woman partisan (20-40s)

**SET**

The action largely takes place in the Colonel's office and Otto's cell. An area of stage may be left bare for outdoor action.

EXCERPT

**ACT ONE (Scene Five)**

*Otto stands bare headed in front of Winkler. Fräulein Gluck is busy filing.*

Winkler You shot above their heads? You have the temerity to stand there and tell me you shot above their heads! What sort of degenerate animal are you?

Otto I'm not . . .

Winkler Don't answer back. (pause) Well?

Otto I'm a soldier, sir. Fighting soldiers. I don't shoot innocent civilians.

Winkler Innocent? Don't delude yourself, Schutz. In this cesspit of a country, there are no innocents. There is only them and us. Do you understand? Them and us. Russians aren't people - they're a conglomeration of wild beasts. They have no right to exist except in the service of the Reich. In case you hadn't noticed, Schutz, we're surrounded by a hostile civilian population.

Otto Two hundred women and children, sir?

Winkler Terror is the only way to smash resistance. That’s why we use it. (pause) Unfortunately, over time, people become immune to small doses. Yes. We shoot women - and children too. Would you let those children grow up to avenge their parents? Scruples of any sort whatsoever are a crime against the front-line soldier who bears the consequences of partisan reprisals. (pause) Well?

Otto I've asked to be an orderly, sir? I'd be very good in the kitchens.

Winkler What you wish, or do not wish, is of supreme irrelevance, Schutz. Damn it, man! The Mongelstürm is threatening to engulf us all. There are Jewish Bolshevist commisars in every dacha, and you have the affrontery to shoot above their heads. I find it hard not to machine-gun the whole damn lot of them. Fräulein Gluck.

Inge (rising from desk) Yes, Standartenführer.

Winkler Read out the document received from B Platoon this morning.

Inge Yes, Standartenführer. (she extracts a page from her out-tray)

Winkler (to Otto) Listen carefully, Schutz. It was found yesterday on a dead partisan - a girl, barely fifteen years old.

Inge (reads) Hunting a German is similar to hunting partridges. One creeps up to a partridge whilst it is singing, and hides when it looks around. The same applies to a German sentry. Armed with a hatchet, one creeps up to him in the dark . . .

Winkler (to Inge) Enough. How does it feel to be a partridge, Schutz? It certainly ruffles my feathers.

Otto I still think . . .

Winkler It’s not your place to think. You have no right to think. (picks up another piece of paper and hands it to him) Read this. (Otto does so) All of them deserters or cowards in the face of the enemy. All shot. It's not a long list, Schutz. General Wengler would like to keep it that way.

Otto Why am I reading this, sir?

Winkler Don't be naive, man. (pause) Well? What have you to say for yourself?

Otto (pause) Nothing.

Winkler Nothing?

Otto You wouldn’t understand.

Winkler I wouldn’t understand? You've got a nerve. (pause) You hardly excelled at school, did you, Schutz? Couldn't even pass your first grades, according to the records. I'd be humbler if I were you.

Otto I don't pretend to be clever, sir.

Winkler Look at me. (Otto is too nervous to obey) Look at me, Schutz! (Otto looks up at him) What do you see? (no reply) Well?

Otto A man, sir.

Winkler (explodes) A man? Stand to attention, you miserable pile of dog shit! And cage your eyes when you address rank. (Otto does so) I am Standartenführer Winkler of the 4th S.S. Panzer Grenadier Division 'Polizei'. My word is law. I issue orders, they are obeyed. I receive orders, I obey them. The chain of command, Schutz. Without it there is chaos. Understood? (shouts) Face down on the floor! (he kicks Otto, who drops onto the floor) Fräulein Gluck.

Inge Yes, Standartenführer.

Winkler My stopwatch. (Winkler puts his foot on Otto's back) We’ll see what sort of stuff you're made of. (Fräulein Gluck gives Winkler the stopwatch) Good. (smelling her appreciatively) Hmm.

Inge A consignment from France. Gerde got it for me.

Winkler (smelling with his eyes closed) Mimosa from Provence. It's spring there now. Outdoor cafes at Cannes. Exquisite wine. The people are almost civilised. (to Otto) How many tarts have you had, Schutz?

Otto Tarts, sir?

Winkler Whores. Doxies How many?

Otto None, sir.

Winkler No little fiancée back home?

Otto No sir.

Winkler No women at all?

Otto No, sir.

Winkler (grasping him by the hair) And men, Schutz? Have you had any men?

Otto Sir! God forbid, sir.

Winkler (ironic) God forbid, indeed. (lets go of Otto's hair) You're a rare specimen, Schutz. We should have you pickled in formalin. Quite naked and pickled. A pure, Austrian mountain boy, barely out of lederhosen. (pause) I love Austria. Do you know the Saltzkammergut? Happy, happy summers. (looks up at Hitler's portrait) Austria gave us our Führer. What greater gift can there be? He was a soldier too. He suffered fear and hunger. (quotes) “I know the little man and feel with him in his trouble. I know what war really is. I know where the shoe pinches.” (overcome with sudden emotion) His modesty, his humility. And yet, he chooses to compare himself with . . . us. To throw his lot in with us. (kicks Otto) You’d betray a man like that!

Otto Sir, I . . .

Winkler Silence animal! Listen to me! You'll do thirty press ups in one minute. Fräulein Gluck. I want you to count them. (sets the stop watch then give it to Inge) Let’s see how badly you want to live, Schutz. If you manage thirty, I won't have you shot. I'll give you a damn good thrashing on your bare buttocks instead.

Otto Sir . . .

Winkler Silence! Onto your hands, Schutz. Up onto your hands. (Otto gets into position) (to Inge) Set the watch to zero.

Inge Yes, Standartenführer.

Winkler Three, two, one, go! (Otto starts vigorous press ups) That's more like it. A bit of hard graft. A bit of pain. A bit of discipline. We'll sweat those ideas out of you. How does it feel, Schutz, to be fighting for your life? You're within inches of your execrable little life. Keep those arms rigid! No bending at the knees or you'll feel my boot in your bollocks. Discipline. There's no reasoning. You do it. And you do it at the double. No action, no pastime, no existence is beyond discipline.

Inge Twenty seconds left.

Winkler Twenty seconds and we'll know whether you live or die, Schutz. Look at you. Just like the rest of us. Pumping away for dear life.

Inge (counting down) Ten, nine, eight, seven . . .

Winkler So close to life, you can smell it.

Inge . . . three, two, one.

Winkler Stop! (Otto collapses. To Inge) Well? (Otto rolls onto his back and looks up at Inge) How did our young Tyrolean hero do?

Inge (looks at Otto, then replies) Thirty, Standartenführer.

Winkler (ironic) Really? (grabs Otto by the hair) Did you hear what Fräulein Gluck said?

Otto (scarcely able to breathe) Yes, sir.

Winkler Did you count thirty? (Otto hesitates) Did you?

Otto Yes, sir. I counted thirty, sir.

Winkler Ha! You’re a liar, Schutz. You’re lying to save your own miserable hide. (to Otto) Now do you understand the power of terror? (sniffs the air) The little saint has shat his pants. (pause) It was twenty five press-ups, Schutz. (to Inge) Oh, I don’t blame you, Fräulein Gluck. In the heat of the moment, numbers can be quite confusing. (to Otto) Stand to attention!

Otto (does so) Yes, sir.

Winkler (pause) What shall we do with him, Fräulein? You decide. An early birthday present.

Inge (She looks at Otto) If I say yes, you'll have him shot?

Winkler Tomorrow at dawn.

Inge He should die, of course. There's no doubt about that. (stops for a second and looks into Otto's eyes) But there's something about him. His physique. It’s so clean, so . . .

Winkler Yes. It's a fine young body.

Inge (aside to Winkler) Hans, I can imagine our son with eyes like that, and his face, his shoulders . . . Let's celebrate with an act of mercy.

Winkler (laughs) Thank God this war isn't run by women.

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