



KHAKI CHUMS

The Christmas Day Truce Musical

By Lawrence Thelen



KHAKI CHUMS

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For my daughters
Julia and Johanna



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SYNOPSIS Based on the unofficial WWI Christmas Day truce, British and German soldiers set aside their weapons to sing carols, share stories, and exchange gifts, only to resume the war by morning.

TIME The late-night hours of Christmas Day, 1914
PLACE A battlefield; Flanders, Belgium

CHARACTERS*

British Soldiers

DANNY O'NEILL
CAPTAIN RHYS
ARCHIE
IAN
DUNCAN
KENZIE (*plays concertina or accordion*)

German Soldiers

BAMEY LUNTZ
HAUPTMANN WELLER
MEINHARD
HANZ
KARL
TERRELL (*plays guitar*)

SONGS† Silent Night
 O Come Little Children
 Masters in This Hall
 O Tannenbaum
 Hark the Herald
 God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen
 O Come All Ye Faithful
 The First Noel
 Danny Boy

* Additional actors may be added, and a mixed cast of men and women can be used, if preferred.

† All songs are in the public domain. See the additional Music Note at the end of the script regarding the score for this show.

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ACT ONE

A battlefield in Flanders, Belgium; the late-night hours of Christmas Day, 1914. The hazy, cold night sky is filled with stars. It is silent except for the occasional, very distant sound of gunfire, which continues throughout the opening scene.

At rise, DANNY O'NEILL, a young British soldier, runs on from R with a rifle in hand, a canteen strapped to his belt, and a haversack over one shoulder. He is filthy, having lived in the muddy trenches for weeks on end. Exhausted from running, he stops DC to catch his breath. Without the energy to go on, he sits on the ground.

MAJOR RHYS. *(Off.)* O'Neill! Danny O'Neill! Where the hell are you? *(After a moment MAJOR RHYS enters UR, sees Danny and, after looking around to ensure his own safety, rushes to him.)* What are you doing here, boy? You're right in the line of fire. Get back in the trenches. *(Major Rhys turns to go. Danny doesn't move.)* O'Neill, do you hear me? *(Slight pause.)* What's wrong with you, boy?

DANNY. I'm not going back.

RHYS. You're sitting in the middle of a battlefield, chum. What's more, I'm stupid enough to be out here with you. We both could get ourselves killed.

DANNY. Go back, Major. I'm fine.

RHYS. You're not fine, you're cracking up. Stop mucking about. Come on, let's get out of here.

DANNY. I can't live in a trench no more, Major.

RHYS. Nobody's asking you to rent a flat. But right now it's your only safe haven. You can't sit in the middle of no-man's land between two warring trenches and expect to get home anytime soon. Come on.

DANNY. But it's Christmas, sir.

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RHYS. Yes, and it may be our last if we don't get the hell out of here.

DANNY. Do you think we ought to be killing men on Christmas, sir?

RHYS. I try not to think about it at all, regardless of the day. Nevertheless, that's our job. Come on, let's get back to our side before it's too late.

(Lightening a bit.) Come along, boy. Come back to the trenches with me and I'll give you a nip from a brand-new bottle of scotch I just got.

DANNY. I don't think we should be killing men on Christmas, sir.

RHYS. Either we kill them or they kill us. That's what war is. Christmas isn't going to stop that. *(Distant gunfire.)* And right now, they have a much better chance at killing us, so let's get the hell out of here. Come on.

They'll be no scarpers in my troop. *(Major Rhys starts to go. Danny doesn't move.)* O'Neill!

DANNY. No, sir, I'm not going back to the trench.

RHYS. Suit yourself, private. Let 'em kill you. Go ahead and sacrifice yourself. But they're not going to get me. *(Major Rhys scrambles up stage. Before he exits he turns back to Danny.)* Hey, O'Neill.

DANNY. Yes, sir?

RHYS. Merry Christmas. *(He scrambles off UR.)*

DANNY. Merry Christmas, sir. *(Danny sits silently under the star-filled sky. He looks to the stars for help, holding back tears. Then, finding an inner strength, he stops and kneels to pray. The cold night sky grows warmer. When done, Danny, almost inaudibly at first, begins to sing a cappella.)*

SILENT NIGHT

SILENT NIGHT

HOLY NIGHT

ALL IS CALM

ALL IS BRIGHT

(A second voice from off stage is heard singing along with Danny.)

ROUND YON VIRGIN

MOTHER AND...

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(Danny picks up his rifle and yells toward the voice off L.)

DANNY. Hey! Who's there?! Hold it! Don't move! All right, move. Come out slowly. *(After a moment a young German soldier by the name of BAMEY LUNTZ enters from L. His gun is drawn. He enters slowly then stops. The two men stare at one another.)*

BAMEY. Are you going to shoot me?

DANNY. I don't think so.

BAMEY. Why don't you put your gun down then?

DANNY. Why don't you put down yours?

BAMEY. I asked you first. *(After a moment both men slowly lower their rifles.)*

DANNY. What were you doing over there?

BAMEY. I heard the singing. It was nice.

DANNY. Thanks.

BAMEY. We sing the same song at Christmastime in Germany.

DANNY. Do you?

BAMEY. Only in German. "Stille Nacht."

DANNY. I'm sorry?

BAMEY. "Silent Night."

DANNY. Oh. Well...it looks like we have something in common. *(Bamey begins to sing SILENT NIGHT a cappella in German.)*

BAMEY. STILLE NACHT
 HEILIGE NACHT
 ALLES SCHLÄFT
 EINSAM WACHT

BAMEY & DANNY. *(The two soldiers sing in harmony together.)*

NUR DAS TRAUTE HOCHHEILIGE PAAR /
 ROUND YON VIRGIN MOTHER AND CHILD
HOLDER KNABE IM LOCKIGEN HAAR /
 HOLY INFANT SO TENDER AND MILD
SCHLAF IN HIMMLISCHER RUH /
 SLEEP IN HEAVENLY PEACE
SLEEP IN HEAVENLY PEACE /
 SLEEP IN HEAVENLY PEACE

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BAMEY. (*Approaching Danny with hand extended.*) How do you do?

DANNY. Are we supposed to be doing this?

BAMEY. Why not?

DANNY. You're the enemy.

BAMEY. No, I'm not. You are.

DANNY. Fair enough. (*Shaking hands.*) Danny O'Neill.

BAMEY. Bamey Luntz. So, why are you standing out here in no man's land singing Christmas carols? Aren't you supposed to be shooting someone?

DANNY. I needed a break.

BAMEY. From the war? (*Danny does not respond.*) From the trenches?

DANNY. From everything. What are *you* doing out here?

BAMEY. Seeing what you're doing out here. It's not often you hear singing coming from the battlefield.

DANNY. Well, it's Christmas, that's all. It seemed appropriate at the time.

BAMEY. Aren't you afraid you might get killed out here?

DANNY. Aren't you?

BAMEY. Ja, very much. But it sounded like a cry for peace. So, I took the chance.

DANNY. I just don't want to fight anymore. People die every day, you know? They don't need our help doing it. (*Slight pause.*) What is this, a truce?

BAMEY. Do you want it to be a truce?

DANNY. Sure. In honor of Christmas.

BAMEY. All right then – it's a Christmas Day truce. (*They shake hands. Pause.*)

DANNY. Now what do we do?

BAMEY. I don't know – this was your idea.

DANNY. (*Sitting.*) Have a seat. I'm not going to kill you.

BAMEY. (*Sitting with Danny.*) That's good. Because I've got a lot to live for.

DANNY. Do you now?

BAMEY. My wife gave birth a couple of weeks ago.

DANNY. Congratulations.

BAMEY. Thanks. A little boy. She named him Bamey.

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DANNY. After you?

BAMEY. (*Nodding.*) She said in her letter, “In case you’re killed on the battlefield, I still want to have a Bamey around the house.” It wasn’t as reassuring as I think she meant it to be. She sent me a photograph. (*He pulls a photo from his pocket and hands it to Danny.*)

DANNY. Wow. You have a family.

BAMEY. (*Surprised by it himself.*) I do, don’t I?

DANNY. You’re a lucky man.

BAMEY. Except that they’re back in Hamburg and I’m spending Christmas here with you.

DANNY. It could be worse.

BAMEY. Could it?

DANNY. You could be a landowner [dead].

BAMEY. Good point. And you?

DANNY. What? Do I have a family?

BAMEY. Ja.

DANNY. No. (*Slight pause.*) I mean, I’m not married, if that’s what you’re asking. When’ll you get to see your son? Soon?

BAMEY. Not for some time, I suspect. They don’t give furloughs for delivery. And this war doesn’t seem to have any end in sight.

DANNY. Well, it can’t last forever.

BAMEY. I suppose not. But there could always be another.

DANNY. Another war after this one? Ha! Not bloody likely. (*US in the shadows Major Rhys, IAN, and ARCHIE have entered with rifles drawn.*)

RHYS. All right, hold it right there! Don’t move. Good God, O’Neill. What the hell’s going on here? Did you capture this man?

DANNY. No, sir. We’re just talking.

RHYS. Talking? Why?

DANNY. I don’t know. It seemed like the right thing to do.

RHYS. Where’s your rifle?

DANNY. It’s right here, sir.

RHYS. Well, why aren’t you pointing it at him?!

DANNY. Well...

RHYS. *He’s the enemy!*

BAMEY. If I may...?

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RHYS. *(To Bamey.)* No, you may not. Now, you – stand over there. *(Rhys, Ian and Archie slowly begin to move toward the two men.)* War, O'Neill. It's really very simple. You kill the men in gray and you save the men in khaki. Have you got that?

DANNY. Strictly speaking, Major, khaki is the fabric, not the color. So, technically, we're all wearing khaki.

RHYS. Fine. Beige. Save the men in beige. *(HAUPTMANN WELLER enters from UL with KARL, HANZ, MEINHARD and TERRELL. They have their rifles drawn.)*

WELLER. *(Pointing his gun at Rhys.)* Halt! Beweg dich nicht! Wir haben dich umgeben! [Stop! Don't move! We have you surrounded!]

RHYS. *(Defeated.)* Oh, bloody hell.

WELLER. Sprechen sie Deutsch?

RHYS. No. Sprechen sie English?

WELLER. Ja, ja, we speak English. Damn foreigners. I wish they'd learn the language before invading a country! *(To Bamey.)* All right, Luntz, get over here.

BAMEY. Hauptmann...

WELLER. Grab your gun, dummkopf.

BAMEY. Hauptmann Weller, we're not fighting. We're just talking.

WELLER. Talking? What, do you plan on talking him to death?

BAMEY. Hauptmann...

WELLER. *He's the enemy!*

DANNY. If I may...

RHYS. Stay out of it, O'Neill.

BAMEY. It's Christmas, sir.

WELLER. So, it's Christmas. So what?

BAMEY. So, we've sort of declared a little truce in honor of the holiday.

WELLER. A truce?

RHYS. A truce?

BAMEY. Yes, sir. A truce.

WELLER. Even Pope Benedict couldn't secure a truce over Christmas. Who gave you permission to call one?

BAMEY. No one, sir.

WELLER. Precisely. Privates don't go around declaring ceasefires

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whenever they like. With that kind of logic we'd never have war again. Is that what you want, Luntz? Is it?!

BAMEY. Well, actually, sir...

WELLER. Be quiet, Luntz. I'm trying to think.

DANNY. *(Taking Bamey's photograph and showing it to Rhys.)* Major Rhys, look. His wife just had a baby. Surely, he means no harm. He'd like to get home to his family just as you'd like to get home to yours.

RHYS. This is highly unusual, O'Neill.

DANNY. That's what makes it so special, sir.

WELLER. You've really mucked things up tonight, Luntz.

BAMEY. Sorry, sir. But it's Christmas. Don't you think we ought to take a break from killing to honor the living? *(Weller stares at him.)* It just seems like the right thing to do. Don't you think?

WELLER. Well, of course it's the right thing to do, you idiot. That's what makes it so infuriating. I could have had four prisoners and probably a medal. But no, you're skipping around like Cupid handing out ceasefires!

BAMEY. Sorry, sir.

RHYS. *(To Weller.)* Well, I'll agree to it if you will.

WELLER. Well, of course you will – you're outnumbered.

DANNY. *(Crossing to Weller.)* Captain...

WELLER. Hold your ground, soldier. We haven't agreed on anything yet.

DANNY. I was just going to show you the picture.

WELLER. I've seen that picture, private. Many times. Look at the people in it. You see them? That's who we're fighting for.

DANNY. *(Crossing to Weller.)* But look at their smiles, Captain. Look at the baby. I think he'd like us to take a break too. Don't you? *(Pause.)*

WELLER. *(To Rhys.)* Well, Major, it seems we've reached a stalemate.

RHYS. It appears so.

WELLER. *(Slight pause – resigned to the fact.)* All right. Put your guns down, men.

RHYS. *(To Ian and Archie.)* Go ahead. *(All soldiers lower their guns.)*

DANNY. Thank you, sir.

BAMEY. Thank you, sir.

WELLER. At ease, men. We might as well take a break and celebrate Christmas as long as we're all here.

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HANZ. With the enemy, sir?

WELLER. Do you have a better suggestion?

HANZ. No, sir.

TERRELL. Should I fetch my guitar then, sir?

WELLER. Your guitar?

TERRELL. I just thought we might want to share a hymn or two – in honor of the holiday.

WELLER. *(With a sigh.)* Oh, all right. Go ahead, private. *(Terrell runs off.)*

MEINHARD. *(To Weller.)* Excuse me for asking, sir, but are we really going to celebrate Christmas...here?

WELLER. Ja, it appears so.

MEINHARD. On the battlefield?

WELLER. Ja. Right here.

MEINHARD. With all due respect, sir, we've less here than what Mary and Joseph had.

HANZ. Not even a manger.

WELLER. Would you rather spend the rest of Christmas sitting in that muddy trench instead? *(The three Germans quickly change their tune, speaking almost on top of one another: "Oh no, sir, not me!" "This is a fine place." "I hate that muddy trench." "Christmas alfresco!" To Rhys.)* I suppose it can't hurt to take a break for a bit, though I don't recall any mention in the officer's manual about what to do in the case of a spontaneous ceasefire.

RHYS. No. No basic training ever covered this.

TERRELL. *(Reentering.)* I hope you don't mind if I tune, sir? The cold air makes the strings go slack.

WELLER. Go ahead, private. Anything's got to sound better than gunfire. *(Terrell sits and quietly tunes his guitar.)*

RHYS. Captain, if a temporary truce has really been called – or more likely, a Christmas party – do you mind if I fetch the rest of my men?

WELLER. As long as you're not plotting an ambush.

RHYS. Ian, go get the others, will you?

WELLER. Hanz, you'd better go with him.

HANZ. *(Worried.)* Alone, sir?

WELLER. *(With a sigh.)* Karl, tag along. *(Ian, Hanz and Karl exit R.)*

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DANNY. *(Taking the picture to Archie.)* Archie, did you see the baby? It's a boy.

ARCHIE. Beautiful. I've got a boy at home me-self.

RHYS. I've got two.

MEINHARD. So do I.

TERRELL. I bid three hearts. *(Laughter. Terrell begins playing his guitar.)*

IHR KINDERLEIN KOMMET / O COME LITTLE CHILDREN

WELLER. I've got two daughters at home and I wouldn't trade them for all your boys combined.

ARCHIE. Say, what's that you're playing there, chap? That's nice.

TERRELL. Well, you're all talking about children... This here's an old German kinder carol.

DANNY. I've heard that before. Me mum used to sing it to me when I was a boy.

BAMEY. So did mine. *(He sits next to Terrell and sings.)*

IHR KINDERLEIN, KOMMET, O KOMMET DOCH ALL
ZUR KRIPPE HER KOMMET IN BETHLEHEMS STALL
UND SEHT, WAS IN DIESER HOCHHEILIGEN NACHT
DER VATER IM HIMMEL FÜR FREUDE UNS MACHT

BAMEY, MEINHARD & TERRELL.

O SEHT IN DER KRIPPE IM NÄCHTLICHEN STALL
SEHT HIER BEI DES LICHTLEINS HELL GLÄNZENDEM
STRAHL

(Ian, Karl and Hanz reenter R with DUNCAN and KENZIE.)

DEN REINLICHE WINDELN, DAS HIMMLISCHE KIND
VIEL SCHOONER UND HOLDER ALS ENGEL ES SIND

(Key change. Danny joins the singing, and Kenzie joins in on his concertina. Other soldiers join in variously until by the end all, except

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Duncan, are singing. During this, the soldiers tentatively mingle – meeting each other, shaking hands, etc.)

BAMEY, DANNY & OTHERS.

O COME, LITTLE CHILDREN, OH COME ONE AND ALL
TO BETHLEHEM'S STABLE IN BETHLEHEM'S STALL
AND SEE WITH REJOICING THIS GLORIOUS SIGHT
OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN HAS SENT US THIS NIGHT

BAMEY. DER VATER IM HIMMEL FÜR FREUDE UNS NACHT

WELLER. Gut gemacht, Luntz. [Well done, Luntz.]

BAMEY. Danke, Hauptmann. [Thank you, Captain.]

DANNY. *(To the newcomers.)* So, we're having ourselves a little get-together tonight, chums. A little ceasefire. Taking a little break to get to know the other side before we go back to killing them.

DUNCAN. Is this true, Major?

RHYS. It is, Duncan. O'Neill negotiated a little Christmas truce, and I think it may prove good for the soul. *(The soldiers gather around.)*

HANZ. So, what's life like in a British trench?

DANNY. Oh, pretty much the same as yours, I suspect, except with more vowels and fewer consonants. *(Laughter.)*

BAMEY. What do you do for entertainment over there?

IAN. We play cards. Sometimes a game of chess, if things are quiet. The usual things. And you?

BAMEY. Pretty much the same. Sometimes in the back trench we might get a game of football going. But mostly we spend our time shooting rats. *(Laughter.)*

ARCHIE. We've got rats, too. Big ones.

BAMEY. Ja. They're big, and ugly, and I'm pretty sure they speak French! *(Laughter. Danny approaches Kurt.)*

DANNY. Say, what kind of a gun have you got there, chap?

KURT. It's a German Mauser.

DANNY. *(To the other British soldiers.)* Take a dekko at this, chaps.

KURT. It's good for penetrating right through your helmet, or even your bones.

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DANNY. Nice.

KURT. What do you use?

DANNY. We all carry bolt-action rifles, like the one Duncan's got. Duncan, come show them your rifle.

DUNCAN. They can see it from here.

DANNY. They're capable of firing ten or more rounds in a minute. So, you'd better keep on your toes around us.

ARCHIE. What sort of grenades do you have?

BAMEY. *(Pulling one from his haversack.)* We've got these. We call them oyster shells. They explode on impact.

IAN. Well, be careful with it then! Don't drop it!

ARCHIE. Ours aren't that fancy. Our jam tins have a fuse you have to light by hand. But once it's lit, the dynamite inside shoots out all kinds of metal.

HANZ. We've got shrapnel grenades too. Our kugelhandgranate has a friction-ignited time fuse.

IAN. Are those the ones that give off the black powder?

HANZ. Ja. Why?

IAN. Had a friend of mine catch one in his bare hand. Blew it right off.

HANZ. Ja, they're very effective.

BAMEY. And, of course, we've all got Lugers.

DANNY. We've got pistols too – we're not gypsies, you know?

MEINHARD. *(To Kenzie.)* And what's your weapon of choice?

KENZIE. *(Showing his concertina.)* My squeezebox.

MEINHARD. Yeah, I've heard you play. That could kill a man on the spot. *(Laughter.)*

BAMEY. We've also got a rather crude crossbow slingshot for launching grenades. Kurt made it.

DANNY. I'd like to see that.

BAMEY. May I, Hauptmann?

WELLER. As long as you don't give away too many secrets.

BAMEY. Come on. It's just over here. *(Bamey leads Archie, Ian, Hanz, Kurt and Danny stage L to exit.)*

KURT. With a good wind behind us we can land a shell right in your trench.

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DANNY. Some Christmas gifts we don't need. (*The others exit L. Danny turns to Duncan.*) Hey, Duncan, you want to join us?

DUNCAN. That's all right. I'll wait here.

DANNY. Suit yourself. (*Danny exits L. Duncan approaches Rhys.*)

DUNCAN. Major?

RHYS. Duncan?

DUNCAN. If I may, sir... Do you think we ought to be doing this?

RHYS. Doing what?

DUNCAN. Fraternizing with the enemy.

RHYS. We've already fraternized with each other – who else *is* there to fraternize with?

DUNCAN. I just mean, it doesn't seem like something the hirer-ups would approve of.

RHYS. No, you're probably right. They probably wouldn't. But since they're not here I'm not going to worry about it.

DUNCAN. But what about the Colonel, sir, and the General?

RHYS. If the brass-hats don't like it they can come tell us so.

DUNCAN. Major, with all due respect, this goes against everything war is supposed to be.

RHYS. Yes, isn't it wonderful?

DUNCAN. I just don't feel right about it, sir.

RHYS. Let me ask you something, lad. Are you a Christian?

DUNCAN. No, sir, Catholic. (*Rhys rolls his eyes.*)

RHYS. And you celebrate Christmas this time every year, don't you?

DUNCAN. Yes, sir. But not with strangers.

RHYS. A lot of those boys are Catholic too, you know? No stranger than you.

DUNCAN. But they're the enemy, sir. They're Germans.

RHYS. Yes. They're also men, private – just like you and me. They sound a little different, but inside we're all the same. We all want the same things in life.

DUNCAN. If we all wanted the same things in life we wouldn't be at war with one another, would we?

RHYS. Confound it, Duncan! Don't bring logic into this – you'll ruin the whole party! Now listen to me. We're going to celebrate Christmas. All of

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us. Together. You included. And we're not going to tell any of those hirer-ups about this. Have you got that?

DUNCAN. Yes, sir.

RHYS. And, what's more, you're going to enjoy yourself! Do you hear me?

DUNCAN. Yes, sir.

RHYS. Good. Dismissed. *(The focus shifts to Kenzie, who approaches Terrell.)*

KENZIE. *(Referring to his concertina.)* I had a bloody hell of a time trying to smuggle this box in my haversack. How'd you ever get a guitar over here?

TERRELL. It was a friend of mine's in the trenches. He brought it in a duffle.

KENZIE. Oh, yeah? Where is he now? *(Terrell says nothing.)* Oh. Sorry. You play quite well.

TERRELL. Thanks. You too.

KENZIE. Do you know this one? *(Kenzie begins playing MASTERS IN THIS HALL on his concertina, teaching the tune to Terrell who is unfamiliar with it. This serves as underscoring for the following scene. Weller approaches Rhys.)*

WELLER. Major, what would you say to a friendly game of football? Brits against Krauts.

RHYS. Football?

WELLER. Ja. Do you and your men play?

RHYS. Do we? Like a championship team.

WELLER. Good. Do you have a ball?

RHYS. No.

WELLER. Oh.

RHYS. Do you?

WELLER. No.

RHYS. Oh.

WELLER. We *had* one, but it became the victim of a stray bullet and died a slow, agonizing death.

MEINHARD. We could make one, Hauptmann.

WELLER. What's that?

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MEINHARD. We could make a ball. I've got a paper bag here and a bit of string. We could fill it with some clothes or some such stuff, tie it up tight, and we'd have ourselves a ball. Or at least something to kick around besides each other.

WELLER. All right, Müller, I'm game. *(To Rhys.)* Major?

RHYS. Sure. Give it a shot. Oh, perhaps that's a poor choice of words.

MEINHARD. All right, then. *(To Duncan.)* Hey, Tommy! Give me a hand, will you? *(Duncan looks to Rhys.)*

RHYS. Go ahead, lad. You may learn something. *(Meinhard and Duncan set about constructing a ball by stuffing a paper bag with handkerchiefs, gloves, and whatever else they can procure from the soldiers' haversacks. Archie, Ian, Kurt, Hanz, Danny and Bamey reenter from L.)*

ARCHIE. Blimey, Major! You should see all the different ways they have of killing us. It's quite impressive.

RHYS. Well, that's terrific.

ARCHIE. Stuff they haven't even used yet. They've got machine guns, and flamethrowers, and poison gases...

RHYS. Yes, we get the picture. Thank you.

ARCHIE. You could die so many different ways, you'd never even know you were dead. *(Pause.)*

RHYS. I don't know what that means.

ARCHIE. I'm just saying...

RHYS. Yes, you certainly are. Listen, private, perhaps we can save this conversation for another time. Yes?

ARCHIE. *(Smiling.)* Yes, sir.

RHYS. Thank you.

KENZIE. *(To Terrell.)* That's right. You've got it. You blokes should hear this guy. He's good. Listen to this.

MASTERS IN THIS HALL

(Kenzie and Terrell play through the first verse. The second verse becomes a specialty for Terrell who displays some extraordinary guitar playing. As the third verse begins, A soldier begins to dance and Archie start to sing. Key change.)

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ARCHIE. MASTERS IN THIS HALL
HEAR YE NEWS TODAY
BROUGHT FROM OVER SEA
AND EVER I YOU PRAY
NOWELL! NOWELL! NOWELL!
NOWELL SING WE CLEAR
HOLPEN ARE ALL FOLK ON EARTH
BORN THE SON OF GOD SO DEAR

ARCHIE + SOME. NOWELL! NOWELL! NOWELL!
NOWELL SING WE LOUD
GOD TODAY HATH POOR FOLK RAISED
AND CAST A-DOWN THE PROUD

(The jig becomes so infectious that on the fourth verse several soldiers join in while the entire group sings. Key change.)

ALL SOLDIERS. MASTERS IN THIS HALL
HEAR YE NEWS TODAY
BROUGHT FROM OVER SEA
AND EVER I YOU PRAY
NOWELL! NOWELL! NOWELL!
NOWELL SING WE CLEAR
HOLPEN ARE ALL FOLK ON EARTH
BORN THE SON OF GOD SO DEAR
NOWELL! NOWELL! NOWELL!
NOWELL SING WE LOUD
GOD TODAY HATH POOR FOLK RAISED
AND CAST A-DOWN THE PROUD

(The men laugh and break off into groups to chat. Weller and Rhys are together.)

WELLER. I must confess, Major – though it took me by surprise – this is turning out to be quite a pleasant respite.

RHYS. It is indeed.

KHAKI CHUMS

WELLER. Sometimes you forget there are actual men in that other trench.

RHYS. Yes, it's always nice to meet the soldiers you've been trying to kill for the past month.

WELLER. Frankly, I don't understand how we all ended up here in the first place.

RHYS. It's a quandary, isn't it?

WELLER. Prince Ferdinand is shot and all of Europe runs amok.

RHYS. And now we find ourselves in the middle of a war.

WELLER. The Great War.

RHYS. The war to end all wars. Well, I'll reserve judgment until I see it for myself.

WELLER. How is it that peace can be so elusive? Why is it so difficult to talk to your neighbor; live side by side, yet retain your own independence?

RHYS. They see no stock in "live and let live."

WELLER. No, it's die and let die.

RHYS. It seems like an awful waste of blood, and life, and young men's futures just to settle a political dispute.

WELLER. I think if the politicians want to fight each other, they ought to come out here and do it themselves.

RHYS. Hear, hear.

WELLER. They're cowards, each and every one of them.

RHYS. I have a theory about that.

WELLER. Do you?

RHYS. I do.

WELLER. Well then, by all means...

RHYS. I think it all boils down to one ugly trait.

WELLER. And what's that?

RHYS. Ego.

WELLER. (*Considering it.*) Ego.

RHYS. Swelled heads and stuffed shirts. Had the leaders of Austria simply dealt with that single, lone assassin, this whole war could have been averted.

WELLER. Yes...

RHYS. But their egos got the best of them, and instead of tackling the problem at hand, Austria took the opportunity instead to invade Serbia!

KHAKI CHUMS

And what's that?

WELLER. Ego!

RHYS. Ego! And when ego abuts ego, nobody wins.

WELLER. Thus, we find ourselves living in muddy Flemish trenches trying to kill one another on Christmas Day.

RHYS. It's all a bit absurd, isn't it?

WELLER. It's downright stupid.

RHYS. Egos shouldn't be allowed to make decisions, people should; sane, rational people. If it were left up to us, I truly believe another shot would never be fired.

WELLER. Truer words were never spoken. *(They shake hands. The focus shifts to soldiers talking about what they lack this night.)*

BAMEY. And we have no eggnog either. We always used to have eggnog on Christmas – spiked with a little cognac if the missus wasn't looking. *(Laughter.)*

KURT. And no mistletoe.

DANNY. That's not such a bad thing. There's not a one of you I'd kiss, even if I were desperate. *(Laughter.)*

ARCHIE. And we have no Christmas tree neither.

DANNY. I do miss that. Me mum would never let us go without a Christmas tree. She'd scrimp and save all year to make sure we had one, God love her.

IAN. I want a Christmas tree!

TERRELL. Me too.

HANZ. We've got one.

DANNY. A Christmas tree?

HANZ. Ja. The Kaiser sent out thousands of them to the front-line trenches. May I, Hauptmann?

WELLER. Go ahead, private. *(Hanz exits L.)* Unfortunately, we used all the candles they sent us for heat instead of decorations.

DANNY. That's all right, we'll make our own decorations.

BAMEY. That's right. What have you guys got? *(Duncan pulls Danny aside, as the others look for decorations.)*

DUNCAN. What do you think you're doing?

DANNY. I'm celebrating Christmas. What's it to you?

KHAKI CHUMS

DUNCAN. With these blokes?

DANNY. Yes, with these blokes. Why?

DUNCAN. You know, yesterday you were aiming your gun at these chaps.

DANNY. That was yesterday.

DUNCAN. And what do you reckon you'll be doing tomorrow?

DANNY. Going home, if I'm lucky.

DUNCAN. No such luck, paddy-boy. This war isn't close to over. I'll tell you what you'll be doing: you'll be putting these very same blokes right back between your crosshairs, lining them up, and pulling the trigger. That's what you'll be doing.

DANNY. Maybe not.

DUNCAN. Don't be so naïve.

DANNY. Maybe they'll be shooting us instead.

DUNCAN. Then why in the world are you making friends with them tonight?

DANNY. Because it's Christmas.

DUNCAN. Christmas never saved anyone.

DANNY. Christmas saved everyone.

DUNCAN. What have they ever done for us? Nothing. Get your head out of the sand. This is war, O'Neill, not some sort of fairytale. And the goal in war is to kill as many of the enemy as possible – as quickly as you can. No trial, no judgment – they're all guilty, and they all deserve to die.

DANNY. Not tonight they don't. *(Hanz reenters from L with a ragged and weathered four-foot-tall Christmas tree.)*

HANZ. Here you go, Khakis. One genuine German Christmas tree – signed, sealed and delivered. *(The soldiers all stare at the tree in disbelief. There is a bit of laughter. Terrell begins picking out O TANNENBAUM on his guitar.)*

ARCHIE. What the hell is that?

HANZ. It's a Christmas tree!

ARCHIE. That's not a tree.

IAN. It's barely a twig.

HANZ. That's all they sent us.

ARCHIE. It's not even as tall as I am.

KHAKI CHUMS

HANZ. You can't expect us to have a giant Christmas tree sticking right up out of our trench, can you? We might just as well say, "Here we are! Come shoot us!"

RHYS. I think it's fine. We're having a little Christmas. It seems only right we'd have a little Christmas tree.

DANNY. You're right, Major. I think we can make it work. Blimey, Bamey, what do you say?

BAMEY. Sure. We'll decorate it with odds and ends, and it'll look just great. Come on, soldiers, let's give it a try. *(With glee, all soldiers – except Duncan – decorate their tree with whatever items they have available in their haversacks.)*

O TANNENBAUM / O CHRISTMAS TREE

TERRELL. O TANNENBAUM, O TANNENBAUM
ALL GERMANS. WIE TRUE SIND DEINE BLÄTTER
O TANNENBAUM, O TANNENBAUM
WIE TRUE SIND DEINE BLÄTTER

(Kenzie joins in on his concertina.)

ALL SOLDIERS. YOUR BOUGHS SO GREEN IN SUMMERTIME
STAY BRAVELY GREEN IN WINTERTIME
O CHRISTMAS TREE, O CHRISTMAS TREE
HOW LOVELY ARE THY BRANCHES

(As the song comes to an end, Danny places his helmet atop the tree.)

RHYS. Well done, men.

WELLER. Hey, Müller, how's that football coming along?

MEINHARD. Oh right. Almost there, sir. It's just needs a little more paunch around the waist.

WELLER. It'd be nice to get a game in before the sun comes up.

MEINHARD. Yes, sir. We're working on it. *(To the others.)* Hey, Khakis, we need more padding to fill out this ball. What have you got?

IAN. I'm all out.

KHAKI CHUMS

KURT. You've already taken my gloves and muffs.

DUNCAN. Here's something we can use. *(Duncan pulls a pair of long johns from Danny's haversack. Laughter from the others.)*

DANNY. Not on your life, Duncan. That's my last pair of dry underwear. I'll wrestle you to the ground if you take those from me!

DUNCAN. What, are these the one's your mommy packed you?
(Laughter.)

DANNY. You leave my mother out of this.

DUNCAN. Oh, you're a mommy's boy, is that it? *(Laughter quickly dissolves as, Danny rushes Duncan and a fight breaks out. Ad-libs all around. The fight concludes with Danny punching Duncan in the face, who falls to the ground. Ian rushes to help Duncan while Bamey restrains Danny.)*

RHYS. He's on our side, O'Neill! Beige, remember?! Beige! *(Duncan gets to his feet.)*

DUNCAN. Some truce. Now we're fighting each other. *(The crowd disperses. Bamey pulls Danny aside to calm him.)*

BAMEY. Are you all right?

DANNY. I suppose.

BAMEY. What got under your skin?

DANNY. He's not the friendliest bloke, you know? We've never really seen eye-to-eye.

BAMEY. Still, it seemed a rather routine stunt – not one worth fighting over.

DANNY. It doesn't matter. It's over now.

BAMEY. What's going on with you, Danny?

DANNY. *(Defensive.)* Nothing.

BAMEY. You can tell me – I'm a stranger. Who am I going to tell? And if I *do* tell someone, you can always shoot me.

DANNY. Nothing's going on with me. Why?

BAMEY. It just seems like you've got something weighing you down, that's all.

DANNY. Don't we all? We're in the middle of a war, for God's sakes. Your son is a hundred miles away – doesn't that weigh you down?

BAMEY. Sometimes. But I've got faith that I'm going to meet him

KHAKI CHUMS

someday, and that takes the weight off. You'll get home to your family too. You'll see.

DANNY. I'm not sure you and I share the same faith. *(The focus shifts to Weller who approaches Rhys.)*

WELLER. Major, if your men are going to kill each other, let me know so the rest of us can go home.

RHYS. Don't you find that living in close quarters with one another occasionally leads to a fight among people?

WELLER. Ja. That's why my wife is still back in Germany. *(Danny approaches Duncan, who has been sitting to the side writing a letter.)*

DANNY. Hey, Duncan.

DUNCAN. What?

DANNY. I'm sorry.

DUNCAN. Leave it alone, O'Neill.

DANNY. Are you all right?

DUNCAN. I've survived worse.

DANNY. What are you writing?

DUNCAN. None of your business.

DANNY. Look, I said I was sorry.

DUNCAN. It never would have happened in the first place if you hadn't decided to make nice with the Germans.

DANNY. Are you angry that we're not killing one another?

DUNCAN. What good have they ever brought us?

DANNY. Peace. At least one day of it.

DUNCAN. *(Referring to his letter.)* Peace is not what the General wants. What the General wants is victory.

DANNY. Peace is victory.

DUNCAN. Not on a battlefield. Grow up, Danny. Now, leave me alone. Go back to your khaki chums, but leave me out of it. *(The focus shifts to Archie who approaches Kurt.)*

ARCHIE. Blimey. I've never seen buttons like those before.

KURT. Standard issue.

ARCHIE. They'd make a nice souvenir, wouldn't they?

KURT. Are you saying you want one of my buttons?

ARCHIE. A sort of Christmas gift. I'll give you one of mine in exchange.

KHAKI CHUMS

KURT. Those *are* pretty nice. All right. (*Kurt takes a knife from his haversack and cuts a button from his uniform.*)

ARCHIE. My, that's a rather fancy knife you've got there.

KURT. (*Concerned.*) You want my knife too?

ARCHIE. No, just admiring.

KURT. Oh, thanks. It's an Offiziersmesser.

ARCHIE. It's a what?

KURT. It's a sorta...Swiss...army knife.

ARCHIE. A Swiss army knife? Why do the Swiss army need knives – they always remain neutral.

KURT. (*Handing him the button.*) Here you go, Tommy. Merry Christmas.

ARCHIE. (*Pulling a button off his uniform and handing it to Kurt.*) Thank you, chum. And Merry Christmas to you too. (*Crossing away.*) Hey, Ian, look what I got.

IAN. Blimey. That's beautiful. I want one of them. Where'd you get it?

ARCHIE. (*Indicating Kurt.*) From the big fella.

IAN. (*Crossing to Kurt.*) Hey! What do you want for another one of those buttons?

KURT. I don't want nothing. They're not for sale. What, do you want me to freeze to death?

HANZ. Here, I'll give you one. What have you got in exchange?

IAN. (*Looking in his haversack.*) Let me take a look. Oh! Here we go. I've got this rabbit's foot.

HANZ. What am I going to do with that?

IAN. It brings good luck.

HANZ. (*Skeptical.*) You're telling me that if I carry around the partial remains of a bunny, I'll have good luck?

IAN. I haven't been killed yet, have I?

HANZ. All right. (*They exchange gifts. Danny approaches Rhys.*)

DANNY. Major, it's probably not my place to say, but I thought you should know that Duncan is writing a letter to the General.

RHYS. Yes, I know. It's a shame when war brings out the worst in men. Sometimes following the rules is not always the best path to take.

Nevertheless, I think your truce is just what our regiment needed. And I'm

KHAKI CHUMS

going to keep on celebrating Christmas until the sun comes up and the rooster crows. And so are you!

DANNY. *(Smiling.)* Yes, sir.

MEINHARD. *(Crossing to Danny and handing him a cigar.)* And Danny, my friend, this gift's for you. Thanks for the truce, kumpel. Merry Christmas.

DANNY. A cigar. Wow. Thanks.

ARCHIE. A cigar?! *(All the soldiers converge on Meinhard in hopes of getting a cigar, ad-libbing "I want one too!" "Give me one!" "One here please!" "I'll give you a farthing, if that means anything to you.")*

MEINHARD. Hey there now. Stand back, will you? Stand back! I've only got a few left! All right, then. Now, one for you, one for you... *(Meinhard passes out a cigar to all twelve of the soldiers, coming to Duncan last.)*...and even one for you. *(Duncan reluctantly takes it.)*

DANNY. All right, then. Who's got Lucifer? Archie?

ARCHIE. I do, but they're all wet.

DANNY. Dang. What about you?

IAN. Mine are wet too. Bloody mud has gotten everywhere!

DANNY. Well, somebody's got to have a match. How about you?

KURT. I've got gunpowder – but I'll have to shoot you to get the flame.

DANNY. No help. You?

HANZ. Mine were lost in the rain.

DANNY. What about you?

TERRELL. I don't smoke.

DANNY. Oh, come on, fellas. Anybody? *(To Meinhard.)* Alleyman?

MEINHARD. Sorry, kumpel. I've only got the wick. I haven't got the light. *(A sad realization comes over the group as they realize they won't be smoking tonight.)*

RHYS. It appears none of us will see the light tonight.

DANNY. *(To Meinhard.)* Well, we'll save these for another day. Thank you, chum.

BAMEY. I've a gift I'd like to share too. I received a loaf of rye bread from home the other day.

KENZIE. *(Wide-eyed.)* Rye bread.

IAN. Just what the doctor ordered.

KHAKI CHUMS

BAMEY. It's mostly fresh, although a bit oddly shaped from sitting in the sack. Please – all of you – share it with me, won't you? (*Looks to Duncan.*)
Duncan. Please? (*Duncan joins the others. Kenzie plays an introduction on his concertina and sings as Bamey passes out bread to each of the soldiers, who ad-lib "Thanks yous" as he does.*)

HARK THE HEARALD

KENZIE. HARK THE HEARLD ANGELS SING
GLORY TO THE NEWBORN KING
PEACE ON EARTH AND MERCY MILD
GOD AND SINNERS RECONCILED
ALL SOLDIERS. JOYFUL ALL YE NATIONS RISE
JOIN THE TRIUMPHS OF THE SKIES
WITH ANGELIC HOST PROCLAIM
CHRIST IS BORN IN BETHLEHEM
HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING
GLORY TO THE NEWBORN KING

(When Bamey is done, the soldiers sit together in what appears to be a momentary replica of Da Vinci's "The Last Supper." Danny represents the Jesus character and Duncan appears where Judas sits. They eat the bread, and the image evaporates.)

WELLER. (*Crossing to Rhys.*) It appears to be gift-giving time, Major. So, let me join in the fun. Here. Please, accept this chocolate as gratitude for this unofficial ceasefire.

RHYS. Is that real German chocolate?

WELLER. The real thing.

RHYS. I haven't had German chocolate since I was a kid. Of course, back then it wasn't such a novelty – we weren't trying to kill each other for it. Thank you, Captain. That's very nice of you. Unfortunately, I don't seem to have anything on me that's gift-worthy. Oh! Wait a minute. I just remembered something. I'll be right back. (*Rhys exits R toward his trench. The rest of the soldiers sit in a group chatting.*)

DANNY. I guess we're not all that different after all, are we?

KHAKI CHUMS

BAMEY. I think we have more in common than opposed.

ARCHIE. That's not what the P.M. would have us believe.

DANNY. Asquith calls you the enemy that must be eradicated – not men with names and faces and families waiting back home for you.

BAMEY. We were told the same thing about you.

HANZ. Gott Strafe England.

BAMEY. The Kaiser said you were bloodthirsty animals that needed to be rid from the face of the earth.

DANNY. Never drank blood a day in my life. Have you, Archie?

ARCHIE. No, sir!

DANNY. And I don't plan on starting today.

ARCHIE. They only tell us what they want us to hear, you know?

IAN. To keep us scared and in the dark.

HANZ. That's right. To do their bidding for them without questioning the outcome.

KURT. Wartime propaganda – that's all it is.

ARCHIE. The Lie Factory.

KURT. That's right.

DANNY. But we've caught on now, haven't we?

BAMEY. Yes, we have!

ARCHIE. Yes, sir. They won't be able to pull that trick on us again. We're onto them now. *(Slight pause.)*

MEINHARD. 'Course, they say history repeats itself...

DANNY. But I think we're smarter now. Don't you?

BAMEY. Absolutely.

DANNY. We can read between the lines. We won't buy into their propaganda in the future. *(Slight pause.)* Will we?

BAMEY. I certainly hope not.

ARCHIE. But you never know. Human nature is a salty stew. *(There is a slight pause, then Rhys comes bounding on carrying a bottle of scotch.)*

RHYS. All right, my khaki chums, gather 'round. Captain, here's a gift for you. I have been waiting for the perfect time to crack open this bottle and tonight seems like as good a time as any. Gentlemen, I hold in my hands the finest bottle Glenlivet ever produced: a single malt scotch whiskey aged 15 years. And I'm going to share it with each and everyone of you

KHAKI CHUMS

right here and now. Hold out your canteen caps... (*The men unscrew their canteen caps and hold them out. Rhys pours a little bit of scotch into each man's cap.*) It's not often – or even prudent, I suppose – that I share spirits with the enemy. But on this night of nights, gentlemen, it seems to me the most logical and productive thing to do. So, remember this night, chums, remember this toast; for if it's not your last, it'll be a damn good yarn to spin later in life. (*Rhys holds up his bottle to toast.*) Here's to Christmas. To everything it stands for, and the absurdity that war should enter into it at all. Here's to life, not death. To bravery, not cowardice. To love instead of hate, and mankind instead of war. Here's to you, gentlemen. May God see us all home soon. Salute.

ALL. Salute. (*They drink. Rhys begins a slow, rubato, heartfelt rendition a cappella. After a couple of lines Kenzie joins him on his concertina.*)

GOD REST YE MERRY GENTLEMEN

RHYS.

GOD REST YE MERRY GENTLEMEN
LET NOTHING YOU DISMAY
REMEMBER CHRIST OUR SAVIOR
WAS BORN ON CHRISTMAS DAY
TO SAVE US ALL FROM SATAN'S POW'R
WHEN WE WERE GONE ASTRAY
O TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY
COMFORT AND JOY
O TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY

(*Terrell joins in on his guitar, a steady beat is established, and the pace picks up. Rhys refills the men's caps.*)

NOW TO THE LORD SING PRAISES
ALL YOU WITHIN THIS PLACE
AND WITH TRUE LOVE AND BROTHERHOOD
EACH OTHER NOW EMBRACE
THIS HOLY TIDE OF CHRISTMAS
ALL OTHER DOTH DEFACE

KHAKI CHUMS

O TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY
COMFORT AND JOY
O TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY
(Spoken.) Salute!

ALL. *(Spoken.)* Salute! *(The soldiers begin to clap their hands and stomp their feet. The pace of the song picks up even more. Key change.)*

ALL SOLDIERS. GOD REST YE MERRY GENTLEMEN
LET NOTHING YOU DISMAY
REMEMBER CHRIST OUR SAVIOR
WAS BORN ON CHRISTMAS DAY
TO SAVE US ALL FROM SATAN'S POW'R
WHEN WE WERE GONE ASTRAY
O TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY
COMFORT AND JOY
O TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY

(The song takes off and launches itself into a lively and somewhat inebriated dance. All the soldiers dance together, including Duncan. They dance, stomp their feet and clap their hands, and generally have a good time together, forgetting momentarily that a war even exists. The dance comes to a rousing finish with laughter and exhaustion, leaving several soldiers sprawled on the ground. There is a glow of happiness and hope that hangs in the air which no one can deny. Then suddenly and without warning an explosion from a mortar shell goes off [which can be as simple as a lighting and sound effect]. The blast knocks several of the men to the ground. There is panic, yelling, and general ad-libs of concern as the men snap back into soldier mode: grabbing their guns, looking for the source of the attack, and scrambling back to their trenches off stage. Ian, who has sustained an injury, must be helped from the scene. A dazed German soldier staggers away in the opposite direction. The pandemonium soon fades as the soldiers disperse as quickly as cockroaches in light.)

KHAKI CHUMS

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