

BLOOD BROTHERS

By

Paul Knauer

FADE IN:

EXT. CABIN - DAY

A small cabin sits alone in the woods. Tiny puffs of smoke waft from a roof vent, evaporate into the cold sky above.

The front door swings open as BUTCH, male, 78, limps out, onto the porch. He's a crusty sort, large, but fading. He carries a roll of duct tape and a round metal cake pan.

Butch rounds the corner of the cabin and disappears from view as he climbs a ladder, works on the roof.

The sound of DUCT TAPE TEARING echoes through the woods, followed by the TINK of metal on metal.

The roll of tape drops to the ground and a length of string drops into view, dangles in front of a cabin window.

INT. CABIN - DAY

One room. Rustic. Small kitchen. Gas heater in the corner. Most of the space is taken by a round table in the middle, surrounded by five chairs.

Butch, back inside, slides the window open, grabs the end of the string and ties it to a nail on the inside of the sill. He closes the window, turns for the tiny kitchen.

Taking a small bottle from his pocket, he pours its contents into one of several liquor bottles that line the counter.

Butch caps the larger bottle, shakes it hard. He tosses the small bottle in the trash and sets the larger one on top of the fridge, away from the others.

THUNK. A car door closes outside.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

WALTER, male, 78, weak, even for his age, shuffles toward the cabin. Butch meets him halfway.

BUTCH  
You look like shit.

WALTER  
Can't argue.

BUTCH  
That's a first.  
(regarding the car)  
Kinda surprised they're letting you  
drive.

WALTER  
They're not.

They walk to the cabin.

BUTCH  
Helluva thing -- what I heard. They  
sure?

WALTER  
Saw the pictures myself. More spots  
than a Dalmatian with measles.

BUTCH  
So, it's true? You're --

WALTER  
-- Dead man walking? Pretty much.

BUTCH  
They say how long?

WALTER  
Three months. Maybe.

BUTCH  
Shit, Walter.

INT. CABIN - DAY

Walter warms his hands by the gas heater, while Butch digs  
through a box in the corner.

BUTCH  
Leon and Frank coming?

WALTER  
Shouldn't be far behind.

Butch pulls a book from the box, sets it aside.

BUTCH  
Good. We'll have a full house.

Walter looks out the window as a van pulls to a stop outside.  
A large, colorful logo on the side reads: SUNRISE VALLEY  
RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

WALTER  
They got the valley part right.

BUTCH  
Who's driving? I hope it's not that  
bitch, Gina.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Butch stands in the doorway of the cabin as GINA, female, 40s, approaches. She pushes LEON, male, 78, in a wheelchair, while also dragging his oxygen tank behind.

BUTCH  
(cheerful)  
Hi, Gina!

GINA  
(less cheerful)  
Hello, Butch.

Leon adjusts the oxygen tube in his nose, makes eye contact with Butch, taps his chest twice. Butch, reciprocating the action, taps his own chest.

Behind Leon, FRANK, male, 78, strides from the van.

FRANK  
Let's get this party started.

GINA  
No alcohol, Frank.

He breezes past, straight into the cabin.

Butch stops Gina.

BUTCH  
(about Leon)  
I got him.

GINA  
His medicine's in the bag. If he  
has to go to the --

BUTCH  
-- We're good here. Ain't that  
right, Leon?

Leon shoos Gina away.

She relents, hands Butch the oxygen tank.

GINA  
 Alright, just keep an eye on his  
 oxygen.

Butch nods. Gina turns, heads for the van.

GINA  
 Frank's having a good day today.  
 But, if he gets agitated or  
 confused, give me a call.

Butch rolls his eyes to Leon as she climbs into the van.

GINA  
 I'll be back at eight.

She starts the van, rolls down the window as she backs out.

GINA  
 No alcohol! You hear me?

BUTCH  
 Yes, ma'am. No alcohol.

SMASH CUT:

INT. CABIN - DAY

Butch sets a bottle of liquor on the table, slips a shot  
 glass to each of his now-seated friends and one to the empty  
 chair between them.

He pours each a drink, including the empty seat. He grabs the  
 book and tosses it on the table. It's a yearbook.

BUTCH  
 Welcome to the 60th reunion, class  
 of '58.

FRANK  
 To the best looking class in  
 Lawrence High history.

WALTER  
 Not counting Butch!

The men laugh, drink. Butch tops them off.

He looks at the empty chair, taps his chest, as before. The  
 other men do the same.

BUTCH  
 To Jerry, God rest his soul.

They all drink.

BUTCH  
Goddamn yellow bastards.

WALTER  
You can't say stuff like that  
anymore.

FRANK  
It's offensive.

WALTER  
Could just call them what they  
were. Viet Cong.

Leon sneers at the thought.

BUTCH  
You know what's offensive? Goddamn  
yellow bastards killing Jerry.

WALTER  
I'll drink to that.

They do.

BUTCH  
Know what else I find offensive?  
(to Walter)  
Goddamn cancer, that's what.

Frank pats Walter on the back.

Butch pours more, but stops at Leon.

BUTCH  
You okay for more?

Leon leans forward in his wheelchair, taps the table.

FRANK  
You always could outdrink us all.

He tops off Leon's glass.

Walter points to the large liquor bottle on top of the  
refrigerator.

WALTER  
When do we get the good stuff?

BUTCH  
In time, boys. In time.

LATER

Snacks litter the table. There's more than one empty bottle. The men are even more loose than before, laughing, needling each other, having a good time.

They flip through the yearbook, finally landing on the page with their senior pictures. Five fresh, young faces. The class of '58.

The laughter and fun grow louder.

Walter flips to the back, exposing the back cover.

The men go silent.

There, on the inside of the cover, in young man's handwriting: TOGETHER. ALWAYS. Directly below: FIVE SMEARED THUMB PRINTS

Frank taps his chest. Lays his hand on the table. A small scar cuts across his palm.

Each man slowly puts his hand to the center. All with matching scars.

Walter presses his thumb to his scar, then to one of the thumbprints in the yearbook.

Butch sets a bottle on the table. It's the bottle from atop the refrigerator.

BUTCH

(somber)

I believe it's time for the good stuff.

He gathers himself.

BUTCH

This reunion -- Walter's news -- got me thinking about that yearbook.

He uncaps the bottle, looks at Walter.

BUTCH

Let's face it -- the time you got left -- it's gonna be shitty. And Frank -- hell -- we're all surprised he recognizes us today. Leon. Can't talk. Can't breathe.

WALTER  
You're healthy as a horse.

BUTCH  
I'm just done, boys. Seeing you  
guys is about all I have left.  
Without that...

FRANK  
(about the bottle)  
So, that's -- ?

BUTCH  
-- What we always said we'd do.

WALTER  
We were just boys. Eighteen. No  
idea about life, death.

The idea hangs in the air, until, finally...

FRANK  
I'm in.

Leon taps his chest. He's in.

WALTER  
I can't let you guys do that.

Butch looks at Jerry's empty chair. Tears flow.

WALTER  
That wasn't your fault.

BUTCH  
I talked him into going.

FRANK  
Jerry always did what Jerry wanted  
to do. You know that.

BUTCH  
What I know is -- he's still alone.  
Rotting in some rice paddy. I left  
him behind. I'm not making the same  
mistake twice.

He taps the yearbook.

BUTCH  
Together. Always. Sealed in blood.  
(to Walter)  
You go. We go.

Frank scoots his glass to the center. Leon does the same.

Butch opens the bottle, tops their glasses, then tops his own. He scoots the bottle to Walter.

Walter hesitates. Takes the bottle.

He looks at his buddies. At the empty chair.

Walter throws the bottle across the room. SMASH! It shatters on impact. He sweeps the glasses from the table.

WALTER

I will not be the death of my best friends.

Frank pats him on the back, comforts his friend.

Butch scoots from the table.

BUTCH

You always were the best of us, Walter.

Butch casually moves to the window, unwinds the string he had tied earlier. Hiding the motion from his friends, he gives it a tug.

ON THE ROOF

The string pulls taught against the upright cake pan. The pan, taped to one side of the roof vent, falls forward, settling with a TINK over the pipe.

INSIDE

Butch turns up the gas heater, sits back at the table as Walter pulls out a deck of cards.

WALTER

I say we forget this nonsense and enjoy some cards.

The men nod somber agreement. Walter deals.

LATER

Leon spreads his cards on the table. The men groan.

WALTER

That's three in a row.

Frank rubs his forehead as he attempts to focus on the cards in his hand. Slowly his hands droop. Seconds later his head drops to the table.

Walter looks at Butch, stunned.

BUTCH

A man is nothing without his word.

Walter stands. Rocks on his heels. Drops to the floor.

Butch quickly follows.

Leon sits alone, surrounded by his dead friends.

He pulls the yearbook to him, opens to the page of senior class pictures.

He pours a shot of whiskey and holds it high, a toast to his fallen friends.

He downs the shot, tosses the glass and taps his chest.

Leon slides the oxygen tube from his nose.

He takes a deep breath.

Then another.

He slumps.

Dead.

FADE OUT.