

# The Birthday Party

*by R. James Scott*

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**STORY OF THE PLAY**

A complex and moving play as a soldier serving in Vietnam “celebrates” a birthday by militarily defending a hill while his twin sister back home celebrates their birthday with the family and her twin’s fiancée. The surreal setting and movement of the action lead to a shocking conclusion.

About 30 minutes.

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**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(8 m, 3 w + extras)*

**STEVEN:** Observing his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday while serving in Vietnam. Nicknamed Dreggs.

**LANGSTON:** Fellow soldier, Steven's buddy.

**WATSON:** Fellow soldier.

**DILLARD:** Fellow soldier.

**LIEUTENANT BISHOP:** The commander.

**ELISE:** Steven's twin sister.

**MOM:** Elise and Steven's mother.

**MARK:** Their younger brother.

**DAD:** Their father.

**MARIE:** Steven's fiancée.

**MEDIC:** Another soldier.

**SOLDIERS:** Other Vietnamese soldiers for battle scene.

**SETTINGS**

Two suggested settings, full or partial. One is the kitchen and living area of the family's middle class home. The other is a military lookout, which will be defined by piles of sandbags, on a lonely hill in Vietnam.

## THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

*(AT RISE: We see a kitchen table and four chairs. Behind the table is a refrigerator, and just right of the table is the back of a television set with DAD in an easy chair watching. STEVEN stands alone in a yellowed spot in front of the table. He is dressed in his battle fatigues.)*

**STEVEN:** I was eleven years old in 1964. In the summer months, we played war in the back lot behind the Sinclair station. With cherry sticks for guns, and dirt clod grenades we went to battle. I died a hundred times a day. When the light grew dim, our mothers called us home for dinner, we were hungry after a long day's fighting. In 1972, I went to war for real. It was September 8, my birthday.

*(As the SPOT fades to dark, we hear the SOUND of a passing helicopter. When the right and left LIGHTS come up, we see STEVEN and LANGSTON are SR filling and stacking sand bags. SL, WATSON and DILLARD are doing the same thing.)*

**LANGSTON:** Hey, Dreggs, what do ya say we take five?

**STEVEN:** You take five every two minutes.

**LANGSTON:** What are we doin' this for? Looks like busy work to me.

**STEVEN:** Could be. I don't know, it's orders. The Lieutenant says fill the bags, so we fill the bags. The Lieutenant says stack the bags, so we stack the bags. It's orders.

**LANGSTON:** When I get out of here. I ain't never takin' another order long as I live.

**STEVEN:** There's always someone to give you orders.

**LANGSTON:** That's for damn sure. Some day, I wanna be the one giving the orders. "Private, do this; Private, do that; Private, kiss my —"

*(Enter LIEUTENANT BISHOP.)*

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**STEVEN:** Lieutenant ...

**BISHOP:** How are you boys coming over here?

**LANGSTON:** Almost done, sir.

**STEVEN:** Are you sure this is all necessary, Lieutenant?

**LANGSTON:** Yeah, how about it, Lieutenant?

**BISHOP:** You'll get more out of those bags if you alternate the layers.

**LANGSTON:** What do you mean?

**BISHOP:** Well, look. *(He puts his foot on the top bags, gives a shove, and they topple over.)* Start with a double row on the bottom, and then alternate.

**LANGSTON:** That's a lot of bags, Lieutenant.

**BISHOP:** You got anything better to do?

**STEVEN:** What's all the fuss, Lieutenant?

**LANGSTON:** Yeah, we finally gonna get some action?

**BISHOP:** Could be.

**LANGSTON:** Look, Lieutenant, seventeen days we been camped out on this ant hill, and not so much as a pop.

**STEVEN:** Doesn't bother me.

**BISHOP:** Recon reports a buildup along the river.

**LANGSTON:** So, what's that got to do with us?

**BISHOP:** Listen, numbskull, if Charlie decides to cross that river, we're all that stands between them and Hom Chi field. If they take the field, nobody's gettin' out. Now, you get over there and tell Watson and Dillard same as I told you, and keep fillin' those bags.

**LANGSTON:** Yes sir.

**BISHOP:** And keep your butt down!

**LANGSTON:** Yes sir.

*(LANGSTON crawls over the sand bags and crosses over to SL where he meets Watson and Dillard. THEY start re-stacking their bags.)*

**STEVEN:** Where are you gonna be, Lieutenant?

**BISHOP:** I'll be right here with you, so make sure you stock in plenty of ammo, and grenades.

**STEVEN:** We could sure use a fifty.

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**BISHOP:** Tell me about it. There's only four on the base and Colonel Mullis has them positioned just this side of the airstrip.

**STEVEN:** But wouldn't it make more sense to have them up here? We could cover all the way to the river.

**BISHOP:** I don't know what their thinking is, if they get past this line, it's down hill all the way.

**STEVEN:** They can set up right here and lob enough mortar rounds to take out the fifties.

**BISHOP:** Well, why don't you just run down there and tell it to the Colonel.

**STEVEN:** I can do that. *(He goes to leave.)*

**BISHOP:** Get back here. What are you thinkin'?

**STEVEN:** But you said ...

**BISHOP:** You just keep fillin' those bags. You're gonna wish they were twenty feet high before we get through this.

**STEVEN:** You really think it's gonna be that bad?

**BISHOP:** It could be.

*(LANGSTON returns.)*

**LANGSTON:** I told them, sir.

**BISHOP:** Get this built up, and string some wire.

**LANGSTON:** Yes sir.

**BISHOP:** I'll be back.

*(BISHOP leaves while LANGSTON and STEVEN continue working on the bags.)*

**LANGSTON:** What are we holdin' on to this crummy hill for anyway? I say let'em have it.

**STEVEN:** I could live with that.

**LANGSTON:** Damn right. Let'em have the whole country. There's nothin' here worth dying for.

**STEVEN:** I'm gonna let you in on a little secret, Dreggs. Nobody cares what we think.

**LANGSTON:** That's for damn sure. Stack the bags, fill the bags, restack the bags, string the wire.

**STEVEN:** Langston?

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**LANGSTON:** What?

**STEVEN:** Stack the bags.

*(The LIGHTS shift and we are in the kitchen set. MOTHER is preparing food, DAD is watching the television, and ELISE is filling the pitcher.)*

**MOM:** Why don't you get the ice out of the freezer?

**ELISE:** Mom, can't we have something better than Kool-Aid?

**MOM:** Put some lemonade with it.

*(MARK, a younger brother, enters.)*

**MARK:** Put some beer with it.

**ELISE:** Oh, that would be good.

**MOM:** There is some 7Up on the bottom shelf.

**MARK:** What ya doin', Pop?

**DAD:** The news.

**MARK:** The news? What about the news?

**DAD:** It's on.

**MARK:** So where's the cake?

**ELISE:** So you can pick at it?

**MARK:** I just wanted to see it.

**ELISE:** It's not your birthday.

**MARK:** So whose is it?

**ELISE:** You know who.

**MOM:** Mark, would you take this trash out to the dumpster?

**MARK:** Did you ever notice how every time I come into the room you give me something to do?

**ELISE:** Did you ever wonder why?

**MARK:** How about you take the trash out?

**ELISE:** Now that would defeat the purpose, wouldn't it?

**DAD:** Would you people hold it down out there?

**MOM:** Here, it will only take you a minute. *(Hands MARK the trash.)*

**MARK:** That's why she asks me; it will only take a minute. With you it would take an hour.

**ELISE:** Moron.

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