

THE TUNNEL

A Short Play in Two Acts

by

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THE TUNNEL

SCENE ONE

1989. A dimly lit tunnel, nothing but a hanging lamp and a few digging tools in view. EGON (early 30's) and JAN (mid-30's) dig away at the tunnel wall. They are filthy from their efforts, physically worn down.

EGON

What'll you do when you get out?

JAN

Dig.

EGON

I should think we'd be done with it by...

EGON

Dig, Egon. Just pick up your goddamn shovel, and dig. We've been at it for hours, and you keep stopping to sniff the flowers.

EGON

I was just imagining...

JAN

Always imagining. Never thinking. Never doing. Take a look around, E. I don't see any flowers. I don't see any fucking flowers.

EGON

I'm sorry, Jan.

JAN

Just dig, Egon. Just dig.

EGON

(pause)

I'm gonna go to a cafe.

(Jan tosses his shovel and wipes his brow.)

EGON

I'll walk right into a fancy one, right on the boulevard, and order a pitcher of beer.

JAN

Well, good for you.

EGON

Then I'll send it back. I'll ask to see the menu again, and the waitress -tall, busty brunette - well, she'll engage me in a conversation about all the different choices - how an ale is an afternoon beer, and you can't compare a stout to a lager.

*(Jan lights a
cigarette.)*

JAN

And?

EGON

Nothing. I'll leave the café without ordering a thing. I'll just smile and say, "Thank you for your time, gorgeous, but I'm no longer in the mood."

JAN

That's it?

(Egon nods)

That's what you'll do on your first day of freedom?

(Egon nods again)

Man, you're crazier than I thought.

EGON

(smiling)

And you?

JAN

New York.

EGON

New York?

JAN

Never heard of it? Pass me the trowel.

*(Jan stubs out his
cigarette. Egon passes
the trowel.)*

JAN

And the pick.

*(Egon passes the pick.
Jan inspects it.)*

JAN

Dammit, Egon! How many times have I told you not to use the pick on the rock?! Use it in the dirt, I said, *not on the rock!* You're dulling the blade!

EGON

But I didn't...

JAN

Then what the hell is this?!

(Jan shows the blade)

JAN

I couldn't slit a throat with this edge! And we'll be down in this pit for days now because *you can't follow simple orders!*

EGON

I'm sorry, Jan. I...Did I really...ruin it?

JAN

No, Egon...Dammit, no...Look, when you asked me to do this, when you told me the plan and asked me to come in, what'd I say?

EGON

You said no.

JAN

Well, I said no at first because you're an idiot, and no one wants an idiot for a partner. But then I agreed. And do you remember what I said?

EGON

You said you were in charge.

JAN

That's right, E. And what did you say?

EGON

I said, "Yes, Jan, you are in charge of this operation!"

JAN

And why did you agree?

EGON

Because I wanted you to come...

JAN

Because you couldn't do it alone. Because, as usual, you needed a list to clean your ass-tear here, wipe there. Ever since we were kids, for as long as I can remember, I've been cleaning up your shit.

EGON

I got us the...

JAN

Your friend at the planning office got us the map! You never even thought to ask him. You knew he was working on the underground, and you didn't even...Christ, he just gave it to you!

EGON

Well...what about the shovels?

JAN

You stole them.

EGON

I did not!

JAN

Now you're a thief *and* a liar.

EGON

But I didn't steal...!

JAN

Alright. Alright. Just shut up about the shovels, would you? I don't fucking care.

EGON

Jan...Why do you always...?

JAN

What is it now?

EGON

I...I did everything you told me, Jan. I got us good shovels. And...and I got us the map...I did everything you said, and it's *nothing* to you...It's all just *nothing*.

(Jan lights another cigarette.)

JAN

...Look, Egon..., I don't mean to hurt your feelings, but you're too fucking soft. I mean, do you remember when you were young, and the kids would hassle you?

EGON

I remember that you let them.

JAN

I thought I was helping you. I thought, if I defend him, he'll never be able to stand up to those kids. And if he can't stand up to a bunch of schoolboys, then what'll become of him when he's grown? I just wanted you to fight back. And every time you gave them your money, or took a punch, or...called out my name for help...I hated that you were my brother.

EGON

...You hated me.

JAN

I hated that I shared your blood. It used to scare me, you know? I used to wonder if I had your softness, too. Like it was a virus...

EGON

I never hated you. Even when you let them...

JAN

Because you needed me.

(Pause; the men return to work.)

EGON

What'll you do in New York?

JAN

Start fresh.

EGON

It's a long way. You don't even have a passport...

JAN

How do you know?

EGON

I didn't...Well, I thought...Alright... So, what'll you do for work?

JAN

Write about this place, just like I've been doing for the past six years, only now I won't have to hide it. I'm gonna tell everyone the truth about what goes on inside. 'Cause this isn't a life, E. It's a slow and painful death. And I'd rather be dead than live another day behind the wire.

EGON

To delay action is the same as death.

JAN

Says the man who won't take a chance. He can't tie his shoes, but he quotes the leader.

EGON

I'm here with you, aren't I? I got the map. *I'm digging too...*

JAN

Yeah, well you'd better. 'Cause we're in it, now. We don't finish the tunnel by dawn, we're fucked.

EGON

I'm getting out either way. Not going back.

JAN

What makes you so sure?

(Egon slaps his brother playfully)

EGON

Cause' I've got the world's best partner! The master planner! The man who can do anything he wants, *be anything*

EGON (CONT'D)

he wants, say anything he wants, and not have to worry for a thing.

JAN

You flatter me.

EGON

I'm serious. When was the last time you met with trouble? When was the last time you *did* something, or *wrote* something, or...*took* something, and had to answer for it?

(Jan snickers)

EGON

Ha! See?! 'Cause it's never happened. Probably never will. God, I admire you. Brains like a sponge and a nose like a rat. Never stick around too long, you always said. Just do your business, and walk away.

JAN

(pause)

Something wrong, E.? You don't sound like yourself.

EGON

Who do I sound like?

JAN

...*Me*.

EGON

Guess I'm just excited.

JAN

Oh yeah?

EGON

Oh *hell* yeah. And you know what? I changed my mind. I'm gonna order a goddamn beer at that café. I'm gonna order four or five if I want, hell, make it an even ten! And I'm gonna get piss drunk and leave the girl a lousy tip. And do you wanna know why? Do you wanna know? Because I *can*, Jan. Because once he gets outta here, *Egon makes his own fucking choices*.

JAN

Well, good for you. Really, E. It's good to hear you talk this way.

(Egon bows his head to Jan)

EGON

I've learned from the best.

JAN

Never thought you were listening.

EGON

I always listen when you talk...Hey, do you remember your first meeting?

(Jan looks back down the tunnel, suddenly anxious.)

JAN

Watch it, E. It's bad enough we get caught. But anyone hears about Fechter's group, it's over for me.

EGON

...Do you remember?

JAN

...Best day of my life.

EGON

You came home looking so happy, so...able. I asked you why you were smiling and you looked right at me and you said,..."Because, Egon, you'll never be as happy as I am on this day. And it makes me glad that I have something over a dolt like you, that I have something you can't possibly understand"...I asked you what it was, and you said...

JAN

The system is not built *for* men, but on their backs.

EGON

It was a bone crusher, you said.

JAN

And then I told you to stay off the pile, because if you dared, you'd end up on the bottom, with your foot in your ear...

(he swallows a laugh)
and your head up your rear.

EGON

I started making plans that day.

JAN

Hm.

EGON

I decided to build something..., make a better life for me and Eva.

JAN

Bully for you, kid.

EGON

So I started following you. To and from your meetings. I'd hide out in the back and listen. I thought..., if I could understand what you knew..., then I could be as happy as you were on that day.

JAN

It work?

EGON

For a while. I started to feel...different. Like there was blood in my fingers, like I could do and say anything I pleased. I built up the courage to tell Eva. I told her about you and Fechter's group, that I had plans to build us a new life on the other side...And do you know what she said?...She said it was pointless for a man like me to try and understand you because you were a..."superior being." Can you believe she said that? The girl didn't graduate primary school, and she's using words like that...I asked her what she knew about my brother...And she told me she knew everything, because she was in love with him...

(pause, looks at Jan)

Said you'd been seeing each other for two years. Behind my back. Like I was a pile of shit.

(pause)

JAN
...Well, Egon...You've got some fucking timing.

(Egon checks his watch).

EGON
Brother...you have no idea.

END SCENE.

SCENE TWO

The Tunnel. Things are in a bit of disarray, equipment strewn about. EGON and JAN sit apart from one another. EGON has a rag to his eye. JAN smokes a cigarette.

EGON
You didn't have to do that.

JAN
It just happened.

EGON
All the same.

JAN
...I've been wanting to for a while.

EGON
Feel better?

JAN
(massaging his knuckles)
Much. How's the eye?

EGON
Bleeding.

JAN
Wasn't that hard...

EGON
Your ring sure was.

*(Jan cleans his
ring on his shirt.)*

JAN

The antidote to mental suffering is physical pain.

EGON

Lenin?

JAN

Marx...

EGON

...Do you love her?

JAN

Very much.

EGON

And does she...?

JAN

Eva's pregnant. I'll send for her when I cross over.

EGON

How?

JAN

Johann'll forge the papers.

EGON

Fucking Johann. He's the one suggested I bring you in.

JAN

Always been your problem, E. You'll trust anyone who points.

(Jan points to his right)

It's dog eat dog that side. Guys like you, you're meant for places like that.

(Jan points to his left)

Safe places. *Guarded* places. Where you work eight hours and get three squares.

EGON

I never got three squares.

JAN

'Cause you let others *cut* you. I've watched you at work. I've seen you hang back, afraid to upset the system. You're a line waiter, Egon. You get to the front, you get right back on the end...

EGON

Why'd you do it?...Why her?...Why did you have to...?

JAN

I was abolishing private property. Just like they taught us.

EGON

But she was my...

JAN

She isn't yours. People don't belong to people. Nothing belongs to anyone...

EGON

She was my wife!

JAN

(pause)

She still is. Last I checked. Or are you through with her? You know, I'm shocked at you, Egon. What did you rightly expect? She's always been too good for you, too beautiful, too smart, even without an education. And then you do me the honor of bringing me in on your...great escape. And *what?* You expect me to fall at your feet? Kiss them? Tell you I'm sorry for all the things I've done? Well, *fuck* you Egon. Because you need me here. *You need me to dig beneath that wall.* And you won't have my gratitude. I leave that weakness to the dogs.

(Jan drives his shovel into the dirt. It gives a hollow CLINK.)

JAN

What the...?

(He drives his shovel again, same CLINK. He

beats his shovel to a chorus of CLINKS).

JAN

No! No, no, no! It's...! Egon! The map, Egon! Your friend said there was a break...! Noooooo!

EGON

(calm)

What is it, Jan?

JAN

A goddamn retaining wall! We can't dig through this!

EGON

Well, can't we dig around it?

JAN

No, nit wit! That's ten feet of steel! Moron-proof!

EGON

...I...don't know what to say.

(Egon lights a cigarette.)

JAN

...You don't know...what to say? *You fucking asshole! It's your fucking map!*

EGON

Well,...then I guess I gave you the wrong one.

(Egon smokes. Jan takes a BEAT, then comes at him with the shovel.)

JAN

I'm gonna kill you! I'm gonna smash your fucking head! I'll fucking murder you!

(They struggle. A LIGHT flickers at the end of the tunnel. The faint sounds of dogs barking.)

JAN

Fuck! Oh, fuck!

*(Jan throws his
equipment in a bag. Egon
smokes).*

JAN

Egon! They're coming, E! They're coming, and
you're...smoking! Are you fucking...! They're coming, Egon! *Do
something!*

*(Egon passes Jan a
shovel calmly)*

JAN

You're insane!

EGON

We still have a few minutes. They're not in the tunnel.

JAN

But they're up there! In the warehouse! They've obviously
seen the hole, and now...!

EGON

I asked for a few extra minutes.

JAN

(beat)

You...?

EGON

I asked for some extra time.

(He checks his watch).

They're ten minutes early.

*(Egon smokes. Jan stares
ahead, then slowly
approaches Egon. Egon
offers him a cigarette
and Jan accepts. They
both smoke).*

JAN

...You set me up.

(Egon nods)

JAN
This whole thing was...The map.

(Egon nods).

JAN
The shovels.

(Egon nods).

JAN
You set me up.

EGON
So...go ahead.

JAN
What?

EGON
Kill me. You've been wanting to all day. So take that rusty shovel and bash in my stinking head. Kill me. You've made it very clear I have no reason to live.

(Jan looks down at his shovel, twirls it in his hands. They're shaking. He looks back and forth from his shovel to his brother. Jan, for the first time, is at a loss.)

JAN
(Pause)
Egon...I'm not gonna kill you.

EGON
Can't or won't?

JAN

(bitter)

Well, I thank you for the offer,...but it appears I'm no longer in the mood.

(Beat, then Jan begins to laugh absurdly).

JAN

(looking at his hands)

They're shaking.

EGON

Adrenalin.

JAN

I've never felt this...

EGON

You'll get used to it. A man can get used to almost anything.

JAN

(beat)

How'd you do it?

EGON

The map.

(Jan pulls out the map and opens it.)

EGON

Top left corner.

JAN

(reading)

1950-fucking-3.

EGON

They didn't build the retaining walls until...

JAN

1964.

I pointed...You went.

EGON

(Jan drops the map, stares ahead).

I'll go to prison.

JAN

Yes.

EGON

I won't come out.

JAN

No.

EGON

JAN

(beat)
You could have come to my door with a knife...strangled me in my...

EGON

They're giving me a visa.
(pause)
You told me once that everyone had a bargaining chip. And, brother, they wanted you bad. It almost made me jealous how...I've never been wanted by anyone that way.
(looks at Jan)
Were you really gonna take her west?

JAN

Amsterdam. She has a sister...

EGON

Ana.

JAN

Of course...And, now that I'm...?

EGON

Eva's on her own.

JAN

(nods his head)
I...Listen, I...

EGON
Hm?

JAN
I was wrong about...

EGON
No, no. You were right. I didn't fight.

JAN
But why not?...Why now?

EGON
Because I didn't have a reason.
(he looks at Jan)
Now I have a reason.

(The LIGHTS flicker. We hear barking dogs and muffled voices).

JAN
(calm)
They're in the tunnel.

EGON
Yes.

JAN
Fucking Stasi.
(he looks toward the light)
Hey! Over here, you self-righteous pricks! Tell Mielke I'm waiting! Tell Honecker, he can come and kiss my ass!
(laughing, to Egon)
Whew! I've wanted to do that for so long! And that felt good! *Man*, that felt fucking good!

EGON
Brother,...I envy you.

(Jan sits by Egon).

JAN
Tell Eva...Tell Mama I'm sorry.

(Egon nods).

JAN
When do you leave?

EGON
Tonight.

JAN
(checks his watch)
It's night already.

EGON
(checks his watch)
Been dark now for a while.

*(They light cigarettes
and smoke in silence).*

END PLAY