SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

This sample is an excerpt - an appetiser, if you will - from a full Samuel French title.

This sample is just for you to try out, and it can't be used for performance, downloaded, printed or distributed in any way.

Take it for a whirl and see if it tickles your fancy!

For more information about licensing this or other shows, or to browse thousands more plays and theatre books to buy please visit our website.

www.samuelfrench.co.uk
or, in the US www.samuelfrench.com

SF PERUSALS

Private Peaceful

BY MICHAEL MORPURGO
ADAPTED BY SIMON READE

A PLAY FOR ONE ACTOR

SERVING THEATRE
SF
SINCE 1830

WWW.SAMUELFRENCH.CO.UK
WWW.SAMUELFRENCH.COM

Copyright © 2015 Simon Reade and Michael Morpurgo
All Rights Reserved

PRIVATE PEACEFUL is fully protected under the copyright laws of the British Commonwealth, including Canada, the United States of America, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including professional and amateur stage productions, recitation, lecturing, public reading, motion picture, radio broadcasting, television and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved.

ISBN 978-0-573-14202-4

www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk www.samuelfrench.com

FOR AMATEUR PRODUCTION ENQUIRIES

UNITED KINGDOM AND WORLD
EXCLUDING NORTH AMERICA
plays@SamuelFrench-London.co.uk
020 7255 4302/01

UNITED STATES AND CANADA
info@SamuelFrench.com
1-866-598-8449

Each title is subject to availability from Samuel French, depending upon country of performance.

CAUTION: Professional and amateur producers are hereby warned that PRIVATE PEACEFUL is subject to a licensing fee. Publication of this play does not imply availability for performance. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised to apply to the appropriate agent before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre. A licensing fee must be paid whether the title is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged.

The professional rights in this play are controlled by Berlin Associates, 7 Tyers Gate, London SE1 3HX.

No one shall make any changes in this title for the purpose of production. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher. No one shall upload this title, or part of this title, to any social media websites.

The right of Simon Reade and Michael Morpurgo to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

For
Paul Chequer, Alexander Campbell, Finn Hanlon,
Mark Quartley, Leon Williams, Andy Daniel
and William Troughton

With thanks to
Mark Leipacher and Alison Reid

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Throughout Tommo is telling his own story. When someone else speaks in his story, that character appears in (brackets). When a word or a phrase is optional, it also appears in (brackets).

Indications of where we are and rare stage directions are in [square brackets].

FX indicates the sound effects to Tommo's story, those that are real or those he hears in his head. NB whenever there is gunfire and shelling these should not drown out the words.

The style of the production is to tell the story as simply as possible, with the set and prop requirements pared down to the military clothes the performer stands up in, and the bed Tommo lies in - which is turned on its side to make the trench, for example.

The rest of Tommo's world is created by engaging the audience's imagination.

Simon Reade

1.

Ypres. 1916. No-man's-land.

24th June. A barn, a prison. A bed.

Private Peaceful – **TOMMO**, *nearly 18 – looks at his watch.*

[BARN]

Five past ten.

I have the whole night ahead of me. I shan't sleep. I won't dream it away.

I want to remember everything, just as it was, just as it happened. I've had nearly eighteen years of yesterdays and tomorrows, and tonight I must remember as many of them as I can.

Tonight, more than any other night of my life, I want to feel alive!

[ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL]

Charlie's leading me by the hand because he knows I don't want to go. I've never worn a collar before and it's choking me. My boots are strange and heavy on my feet. My heart's heavy too. I'm dreading it.

Big Joe doesn't have to go and I don't think that's fair at all. He's much older than me, even a bit older than Charlie. But Big Joe stays at home with Mother, and sits up in his tree singing *Oranges and Lemons*. He's always laughing. I wish I could be happy like him. I wish I

could be at home like him. I don't want to go with Charlie. I DON'T WANT TO GO TO SCHOOL.

Charlie sees my eyes full of tears and knows how it is. He's three years older than me, so he's done everything, knows everything.

(CHARLIE) Do you want a piggyback, Tommo?

I hop up and cling (on) tight around Charlie's neck, trying not to whimper.

(CHARLIE) First day's the worst, Tommo. It's not so bad. Honest.

Whenever Charlie says "honest", I know it's not true.

FX Bell.

[OUTSIDE SCHOOL]

We line up in two silent rows, about twenty children in each. I recognise some of them from Sunday school. Charlie's no longer beside me. He's in the other line, and he's winking at me. I blink back. I can't wink with one eye. Charlie laughs.

(MR. MUNNINGS) Fall into line!

– Mr. Munnings: he of the raging temper Charlie's told me so much about. Mr. Munnings is pointing right at me and all the other children have turned to look.

Ah! A new boy. A new boy to add to my trials and tribulations. Name boy?

TOMMO Tommo, sir. Thomas Peaceful.

(MR MUNNINGS) First a Charlie Peaceful, and now a Thomas Peaceful. Was not one Peaceful enough? Understand this, Thomas Peaceful, that here I am your lord and master. You do what I say when I say it. You do not cheat, you do not lie, you do not blaspheme. These are my commandments. Do I make myself clear?

TOMMO Yes sir.

Charlie and the bigguns follow Mr. Munnings into one classroom. And then I'm taken with the tiddlers into Miss Hopkins's.

NB Miss Hopkins could be Miss McCallister, with a Scots' accent.

[CLASSROOM]

(MISS HOPKINS) *(posh accent)* Thomas, you will be sitting here –

– Miss Hopkins is very proper –

– Sitting there, next to Molly. And your bootlaces are undone. Tie them up before you trip.

TOMMO I can't Miss.

(MISS HOPKINS) Can't is not a word we use in my class, Thomas Peaceful. We shall just have to teach you how to tie your bootlaces. That's what we're all here for, Thomas: to learn. You show him, Molly. Molly's the oldest girl in my class, Thomas. She'll help you.

Molly doesn't look up at me while she's tying them – but I wish she would. She has chestnut brown hair the same colour as Father's old horse – and shining – and I want to reach out and touch it. Then at last she looks up at me. I have a friend.

FX School yard kids playing.

[SCHOOL YARD]

In playtime, in the school yard, I want to go over and talk to Molly, but I can't because she's surrounded by a gaggle of giggling girls. They keep looking over their shoulders and laughing at me. I look for Charlie, but he's playing conkers with the bigguns. So I decide to undo my bootlaces and try doing them up again like Molly. I try again and again. It's untidy, it's loose – but

I can do it! From across the schoolyard Molly sees, and smiles.

At home I never wear boots, except for church. Father always wore his great hobnail boots, the boots he died in.

[IN THE WOOD]

In the woods, Father was chopping away at a tree nearby, grunting and groaning at every stroke. At first I think he's just groaning a bit louder. But then the sound seems to be coming from somewhere high up in the branches.

I look up: the great tree is swaying and creaking when all the other trees are standing still, silent. I stand and stare.

FX Tree falling like a roar of thunder.

(FATHER) Run, Tommo! Run!

Silence. The tree has fallen.

When I came to, I see him at once, see the soles of his boots with their worn (out) nails. One arm is outstretched towards me, his finger points at me. His eyes are open, but I know they're not seeing me. He's not breathing. When I shout at him, when I shake him, he doesn't wake up.

FX Solemn harmonium hymn.

[CHURCH]

In the church we're sat side by side at the front, Mother, Big Joe, Charlie and me. We've never in our lives sat in the front row before. It's where the Colonel always sits. The coffin rests on trestles, Father inside in his Sunday suit. A swallow swoops over our heads all through the prayers and the hymns, flitting from window to window, to belfry, to altar, looking for a

way out. And I know for certain it is Father trying to escape. I know because he told us more than once that in his next life he'd like to be a bird, so he could fly free wherever he wanted.

The Colonel gets up into the pulpit:

(COLONEL) *(thumb tucked behind jacket lapel)* James Peaceful was a good man, one of the best workers I have known, the salt of the earth, always cheerful as he went about his work. The Peaceful family has been employed by my family for five generations. (And) In all his thirty years as a forester on my estate James Peaceful was a credit to his family and village.

While the Colonel's droning on I'm thinking of all the rude things Father used to say about him –

(FATHER) – Silly old fart, mad old duffer –

– and how Mother always said that –

(MOTHER) – He may well be a "silly old fart", but it's the Colonel who pays the wages and owns the roof over our heads, so you all show him respect.

[GRAVEYARD]

The earth thumps down on the coffin as we leave the graveside. He was trying to save me. If only I had run, he wouldn't now be lying dead.

All I've ever thought is that I killed my own father.

2.

TOMMO *looks at his watch*

[BARN]

Twenty to eleven.

He spoons his food unenthusiastically.

I don't want to eat. Stew, potatoes. I usually like stew, but I've no appetite. Not now.

Big Joe ate more than all the rest of us put together – potato pie, cheese and pickle, stew and dumplings, bread and butter pudding – whatever Mother cooked, he'd stuff it in and scoff it down. Anything Charlie and I didn't like we'd shuffle (it) onto his plate when Mother wasn't looking.

Mother told us when we were older that Big Joe nearly died just after he was born. Meningitis, the Doctor told her at the hospital, brain damage. She was told he wouldn't live or even if he did, he'd be of no use to anyone.

It was Big Joe who got me into my first fight.

FX School yard playtime kids.

[SCHOOL YARD]

It was playtime. Big Joe had come up to school to see Charlie and me. He stood and watched us from outside the gate, bright-eyed with excitement. I ran over to him. He opened his cupped hands just enough for me to see a slowworm curled inside.

TOMMO That's lovely, Joe.

Then Big Joe wandered off, walking down the lane, humming:

(BIG JOE) *(humming) Oranges and Lemons etc.*

Someone taps me hard on my shoulder.

(JIMMY PARSONS) *(sneering)* Who's got a loony for a brother?

TOMMO What did you say, Jimmy Parsons?

(JIMMY PARSONS) *(chanting)* Your brother's a loony, your brother's a loony.

So I go for him, fists flailing, screaming – but I don't land a single punch. Then Jimmy Parsons hits me full in the face and sends me sprawling. He puts the boot in, kicking and kicking –

– then, suddenly, he stops.

I look up. Charlie's grabbing him round the neck and pulling him to the ground. They're rolling over and over, punching each other and blaspheming. The whole school has gathered round to watch now, shouting and egging them on. "Go on , Charlie!"

That's when Mr Munnings comes running out, roaring.

(MR MUNNINGS) What the blazes!

He pulls them apart and drags them off inside the school.

Luckily for me, Mr Munnings never even notices me, bleeding.

They both get the cane, six strokes each.

Molly comes over, takes me by the hand and leads me towards the pump. She soaks her handkerchief under it and dabs my nose and my hands and my knee – the blood is everywhere. The water is cold and soothing, and her hands are soft.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

Please visit our website to buy the full script, apply for a license to perform this show (if it's available), or to explore hundreds of similar titles.

www.samuelfrench.co.uk
or, in the US www.samuelfrench.com

To be the first to know about new books, licensing releases, and enjoy other theatre-related larks, do follow us on our spangley social media channels.



Samuel French London



SamuelFrenchLtd

SF **PERUSALS**