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SF PERUSALS

A Voyage Round My Father

A Play

John Mortimer

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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A VOYAGE ROUND MY FATHER

First presented at Greenwich Theatre in 1970. This version presented by MICHAEL CODRON LTD on 4th August 1971 at the Haymarket Theatre with the following cast of characters:

Father	Alec Guinness
Son	Jeremy Brett
Mother	Leueen MacGrath
Elizabeth	Nicola Pagett
Son, as a boy	Jason Kemp
Headmaster **George** **Ham**	Jack May
Boustead **Sparks** **Mr Morrow**	Mark Kingston
Matron **Miss Cox** **Doris** **Social Worker**	Phyllida Law
Mrs Reigate **Miss Baker** **First ATS** **Witness**	Rhoda Lewis
Ringer Lean **Thong** **Film Director**	Andrew Sachs
Japhet **First Judge** **Second Judge** **Cameraman** **Doctor**	Richard Fraser
Second ATS	Tilly Tremayne
Reigate	Jeremy Burring
Iris	Melanie Wallace
Three Children	Jason Kemp, Jeremy Burring, Melanie Wallace
Ushers and Film Technicians	Richard Manuel Keith Watson

The play directed by RONALD EYRE
Setting by VOYTEK

ACT I

There is a trellis up C *wider at the top than the base, sweeping from the floor until it is out of sight in the flies; a bench, a ladder and a table with three chairs. Otherwise the stage is bare*

As the CURTAIN *rises, the Son (grown up) is sitting at the table reading his diary. The Father enters*

Father Roses—not much of a show of roses.
Son (*grown up*) Not bad.
Father Onions—hardly a bumper crop would you say?
Son (*grown up*) I suppose not.

The Father, a man in his sixties, wearing a darned tweed suit, and carrying a clouded malacca walking-stick is, with blind eyes, inspecting his garden

Father Earwigs at the dahlias. You remember, when you were a boy, you remember our great slaughter of earwigs?
Son I remember.
Father You see the dahlias?
Son Yes.
Father Describe them for me. Paint me the picture . . .
Son Well, they're red—and yellow. And blowsy . . .
Father (*puzzled*) Blowsy?
Son They look sort of middle-aged—over-ripe.
Father Earwig traps in place, are they?
Son Yes. They're in place.
Father When you were a boy, we often bagged a hundred earwigs in a single foray! Do you remember?
Son I remember.

The Son moves away from the Father and speaks to the audience

My father wasn't always blind. The three of us lived in a small house surrounded, as if for protection, by an enormous garden . . .

The Mother enters

Father Where's the boy got to?
Mother Disappeared apparently.
Father He's running wild.
Son He was driven to the station, where he caught a train to London and the Law Courts, to his work as a barrister in a great hearse-like motor which he would no more have thought of replacing every year than he

would have accepted a different kind of suit or a new gardening hat. As soon as possible he returned to the safety of the dahlias, and the ritual of the evening earwig hunt. Visitors were rare and, if spotted, my father would move deeper into the foliage until the danger was past. Those were the days when my father could see—before I went away to school. When it was always a hot afternoon and a girl called Iris taught me to whistle.

The Son, as a boy, and a small girl called Iris run on

Iris Stick out your lips. Stick them out far. Go on. Farther. Much farther. Now blow. Not too hard. Blow gently. Gently. Don't laugh. Take it serious. Blow!

There is the sound of a whistle

Son What was that?
Iris What do you mean—what was that?
Son Someone whistled.
Iris It was you.
Son Me?
Iris It was you whistling!
Son I can do it! I know how to do it!
Iris Well, you've learnt something . . .
Father The boy's running wild again.
Mother Oh, I don't think so.
Father Oh, yes, he is. And a good thing, too. When I was a boy in Africa, they sent me off—all by myself—to a small hotel up country to run wild for three months. I took my birthday cake with me and kept it under my bed. I well remember—(*he laughs*)—when my birthday came round I took the cake out, sat on my bed, and ate it. That was my celebration!
Mother He'll soon be going away to school . . .
Father What did you say?
Mother He'll be going away to school. We can't expect him to stay here —for ever . . .

The Father gets a step-ladder and starts to walk up it, singing to himself

Father (*singing*) "She was as bee—eautiful as a butterfly
And as proud as a queen
Was pretty little Polly Perkins of Paddington Green.
I'm a broken-hearted milkman,
In grief I'm arrayed,
Through the keeping of the company
Of a young servant maid."

Son (*grown up*) One day he bought a step-ladder for pruning the apple trees. He hit his head on the branch of a tree and the retinas left the balls of his eyes.

Sudden, total Black-out in which we hear the Son's voice

That's the way I looked to my father from childhood upwards. That's how my wife and his grandchildren looked. My father was blind but we never mentioned it.

The Lights fade up slowly to reveal the Father and Mother sitting round a breakfast table. The Father is clearly totally blind, the Mother is helping him cut up his toast

Son (*grown up*) He had a great disinclination to mention anything unpleasant. What was that? Courage, cowardice, indifference or caring too completely? Why didn't he blaspheme, beat his head against the pitch black sitting-room walls? Why didn't he curse God? He had a great capacity for rage—but never at the universe.

The Son (*grown up*) *goes*

The family eat in silence until the Father suddenly bursts out

Father My egg! It's bloody runny! It's in a nauseating condition! What do you want to do? Choke me to death? (*Shouts*) Have you all gone *mad?* Am I totally surrounded by *cretins?*

Another silence while they go on eating

(*Singing*) In six months she married,
That hard-hearted girl,
But it wasn't to a Viscount,
It wasn't to an Earl
It wasn't to a Baronite,
But a shade or two WUS!
'Twas to the bow-legged conductor
Of a twopenny bus!"

Mother Marmalade?
Father Thank you.

Silence

The evolution of the horse was certainly a most tortuous process. None of your six-day nonsense! Six days' labour wouldn't evolve one primitive earthworm. Is the boy still here?

Mother Please, dear. Don't be tactless.
Father I thought he'd gone away to school.
Mother *Pas devant le garçon.*
Father What?
Mother He doesn't like it mentioned.
Father Well, either he's going away or he's not. I'm entitled to know. If he's here this evening he can help me out with the earwigs.
Mother Mr Lean's going to drive him. *A trois heures et demi.*
Father Half past three, eh?
Mother Yes, dear. Mr Lean's going to drive him.

Father (*to Son*) You'll learn to construct an equilateral triangle and the Latin word for parsley. Totally useless information . . .

Mother We really ought not to discourage the boy. (*To Son*) You'll find the French very useful.

Father What on earth for?

Mother Going to France.

Father What's he want to go to France for? There's plenty to do in the garden. The coffee's frozen! (*He drinks*) It's like arctic mud!

Mother Shall I make you some fresh?

Father No. I like it. All education's perfectly useless. But it fills in the *time?* The boy can't sit around here all day until he gets old enough for marriage. He can't sit around—doing the crossword.

Mother (*laughing*) Married! Plenty of time to think of that when he's learned to keep his bedroom tidy. The headmaster seemed rather charming.

Father No-one ever got a word of sense out of a schoolmaster! If they *knew* anything they'd be out doing it. (*To the Son*) That'll be your misfortune for the next few years. To be constantly rubbing up against second-rate minds.

Mother At the start of each term apparently the new boys are given a little speech of welcome.

Father Ignore that! Particularly if they offer you advice on the subject of life. At a pinch you may take their word on equilateral hexagons—but remember! Life's a closed book to schoolmasters.

Mother We'll label your trunk this afternoon.

Father You won't expect any advice from me, I hope? All advice's perfectly useless . . .

Mother I've still got to mark your hockey stick.

Father You're alone in the world, remember. No-one can tell you what to do about it.

The Son, as a boy, starts to cry

What's the matter with the boy?

Mother (*apparently incredulous*) He's not crying!

Father (*coming out with some advice at last*) Say the word "rats". No-one can cry when they're saying the word "rats". It has to do with the muscles of the face.

Son (*trying to stop himself crying*) Rats.

The Father, Mother and Son (as a boy) go

(*Grown up*) Mr Ringer Lean was an ex-jockey who drove my father's antique Morris Oxford. He treated it as though it were a nervous stallion.

Ringer Lean enters, carrying a school trunk on his shoulder

Ringer Car's gone lame. Going don't suit her. Shit scared are you? Being sent away . . .

The Son (as a boy) comes on to the stage. He is wearing school uniform, carrying a suitcase and looking extremely depressed

Son (*grown up*) I was to be prepared for life. Complete with football boots, gym shoes, house shoes, shirts grey, shirts white, Bulldog Drummond, mint humbugs, boxing gloves, sponge bags, and my seating plans for all the London theatres . . .

The Son (as a boy) puts down the trunk and rests on it

Ringer They sent me away when I was your age. Newmarket Heath. Bound as a stable lad. Bloody terrified I was, at your age . . .

Son Were you?

Ringer Yes. They shouldn't send you away. You're going to develop too tall for a jockey.

Son I don't think they want me to be a jockey . . .

Ringer Broke a few bones, I did, when they sent me away. Ribs fractured. Collar-bone smashed. Pelvis pounded to pieces. Bad mounts. Bad Governors. Hey! When a Governor gets after you, you know what? . . .

Son What?

Ringer Get up the hay loft, and pull the ladder up after you. Because they can't climb. Oh, yes. Recall that. Governors can't climb. Often I've hid up the lay loft one, two, three hours sometimes. Till the Governor got a winner, and change of heart. I've slept up there often. All right if the rats don't nip you.

Son Thanks.

Ringer Only bit of advice I got to give you—never avoid a mount. There was this lad at our stable—he avoided a half-broken two-year-old. Nasty tempered one with a duff eye. Well, this lad was shit scared to ride it, you know what he did?

Son No . . .

Ringer Nobbled himself with a blunt razor blade. Severed a tendon and then gangrene. Poor lad had to kiss his leg good-bye.

Son It's not really a stable . . .

Ringer So never try and nobble yourself. That's my advice. Or sterilize the blade. Hold it in a flame. Kills the germs on it!

Son It's more a school than a stable . . .

Ringer Oh well, wherever there's lads, I expect it's much the same . . .

Son (*grown up*) My father had warned me—but this was far worse than I'd expected.

The Lights change

The Staff and Headmaster enter

Headmaster Now, new boys. Stand up now. Let me look at you. Some day, some long distant day, you will be one-yearers, and then two-yearers, and then three-yearers. You will go away, and you will write letters, and I shall try hard to remember you. Then you'll be old boys.

Old Cliffhangers. O.C.'s you shall become, and the fruit of your loins shall attend the School by the Water. Leave the room the boy who laughed. The fruit of your loins shall return and stand here, even as you stand here. And we shall teach them. We shall give them sound advice. So that hungry generations of boys shall learn not to eat peas with their knives, or butter their hair, or clean their finger-nails with bus tickets. You shall be taught to wash, to bowl straight and wipe your dirty noses. When you are in the sixth form you shall see something of golf. You will look on the staff as your friends. At all times you will call us by nicknames. I am Noah. My wife is Mrs Noah. You are the animals. My son Lance is Shem. Mr Pearce and Mr Box are Ham and Japhet. Matey is Matey. Mr Bingo Ollard is Mr Bingo Ollard. These mysteries have I expounded to you, oh litter of runts.

The Lights change as the Headmaster, Matey, and Japhet leave. Two boys move the bench into position. The Son (as a boy) brings on a blackboard. Ham starts drawing a right-angled triangle on it

Son (*grown up, to the audience*) The masters who taught us still suffered from shell shock and battle fatigue. Some had shrapnel lodged in their bodies and the classroom would turn, only too easily, into another Paschendale.

The Son (as a boy) and another boy of his own age, named Reigate, sit on the bench in front of Ham's blackboard, watching him complete his drawing of Pythagoras' theorem

Ham The square on the longest side of a right-angled bloody triangle is—is what, boy?

Son (*standing up*) I don't know . . .

Ham (*suddenly yelling*) Straff you, boy. Bomb and howitzer and straff the living daylights out of you. God bomb you to hell! (*He throws books at the Son*) Get your tin hat on. It's coming over now! It's equal to the square. . . . What square, you unfortunate cretin? On the other two sides. Right-angled bloody triangle! Straff you, boy! Bomb and howitzer you! God bomb you to hell! All right. All right. War's over. . . . Armistice day. Demob. I suppose you want compensation?

The boys pick up the books

Son If you like, sir.

Ham How many books did I throw?

Son Six, sir. Not counting the duster.

Ham Threepence a book and say a penny the duster. Is that fair?

Son I'd say so, sir.

Ham Is that one-and-six?

Son I think it's one and sevenpence, sir.
(*Grown up*) From Ham I learnt the healing power of money . . .

Father enters as Ham and the boys go, Ham taking the blackboard

Father I am writing to you from outside the President's Court at the start of a Divorce Case. Like all divorce cases, this one is concerned with sex, which you will find to be a subject filled with comic relief. Pearson Dupray, K.C., who is agin me in this case is not a foeman worthy of my steel. He will no doubt fumble his cross-examination and may even fail to prove my adultery—although God knows—I have had inclination and opportunity to spare.

Japhet, strumming a ukelele, appears up stage

Japhet "Hallelujah I'm a bum
Hallelujah Bum again
Hallelujah give us a hand out . . .
To revive us again . . ."

Father Like you, I shall today be rubbing up against a second-rate mind . . .

Son (*grown up*) Japhet, the second master, did his unsuccessful best to impart polish.

Japhet (*sings*) "Hallelujah—I'm a bum . . ."
Do you know what a bum is?

Son Yes, sir.

Japhet Good.

"Hallelujah. Bum again—
Hallelujah, give us a hand out . . ."

Now look. Nobody is going to laugh if you just use two simple chords. You see. Like this—and this. That's all. Just two simple chords. Always. For every tune. You take my tip, and look as if you know what you're doing. Nobody's going to laugh. Oh, by the way, you don't tie that tie of yours properly. Remind me to teach you to tie your tie, will you? Yes, you take my advice and sing in the back of your nose—so it sounds as if you've crossed the States by railroad. (*He starts to sing through his nose to the ukelele*)

"Oh, why don't you work
Like other men do?
How the heck can I work
If there's no work to do . . . ?
Hallelujah. I'm a bum!"

You see. Just two simple chords, and don't get ambitious.

Son No, I won't, sir.

Japhet And do remember about that tie. It's really very easy, you know. Right over left, over left over right, over all, up the back and down the front, and that way you get the big knot. The way *He* wears it.

Son He?

Japhet The King, of course.

Son Oh, yes, sir—of course.

Japhet The King and I—we've got a lot in common.

Son Yes, sir.

Japhet Same tie—same trouble.

Son What trouble's that, sir?
Japhet Woman trouble. Deep, deep trouble. Just like the jolly old King . . .

Japhet exits with his ukelele. The Son takes a letter out of his pocket and reads it

Son (*grown up*) I knew what he was talking about. He was talking about Lydia, a pale little red-headed girl who smelt vaguely of moth balls and who made our beds. The King and Japhet were both tussling with the problems from which my father made his living.
Father You will be pleased to hear that I won Jimpson *v.* Jimpson, the wife being found guilty of infidelity in the front of a Daimler parked in Hampstead Garden Suburb. A vital part of the evidence consisted of footprints on the dashboard . . .

Reigate comes in, bored, his hands in his pockets, and wanders near the Son. The Son, reading the letter, does not notice him

The co-respondent was condemned in costs. My final speech lasted two hours and I made several jokes. At home we have been pricking out Korean chrysanthemums and making marmalade. Unusually large plague of earwigs this summer. Ever your loving father . . .
Reigate (*to the Son*) Do you get many letters from home?

The Father and Mother get up and the Mother leads the Father out

The Son puts the letter hurriedly back in the envelope

Son Hullo, Reigate. Once a week, I expect.
Reigate Keep the envelopes.
Son For the stamps?
Reigate To put the fish in, on Sunday nights. The fish is disgusting. Put it in envelopes and post it down the bogs.
Son Why in envelopes?
Reigate Well, you just can't put bits of fish, not straight in your pocket. (*He pauses*) Is your mother slim?
Son Fairly slim.

Pause

Reigate Is your father good at golf?
Son Pretty good.
Reigate My mother's slim as a bluebell.
Son Well, mine's quite slim too, really. She goes to cocktail parties.
Reigate As slim as a bluebell! With yellow eyes.
Son Yellow?
Reigate Like a panther.
Son Oh, I see.
Reigate Very small feet. High heels, of course. Does your mother wear high heels?

Son Whenever she goes to cocktail parties. She wears them then.

Reigate My mother wears high heels. *Even at breakfast.* Of course she's slim as a bluebell . . .

Son (*grown up*) But November the eleventh brought embarrassing revelations. We were able to see those from whose loins, as Noah would say, we had actually sprung.

The Son (*as a boy*) *and Reigate part and move to opposite sides of the stage. On his side, the Son is met by the Mother and the Father, come down for the Armistice Day service. Reigate is met by his Mother, a short, dumpy woman in a hat. Ham, Japhet, and the Matron enter. The Matron has a tray of poppies, the other grown-ups have umbrellas. Finally the Headmaster enters*

Headmaster Let us pray . . .

The parents and the boys form a congregation. Mrs Reigate closes her eyes in an attitude of devotion. The Father blows his nose loudly. Reigate stares across at him. The Son (*as a boy*) *looks at his Father in an agony of embarrassment, and then continues a close, and somewhat surprised study of Reigate's Mother*

Oh Lord, inasmuch as we are paraded now on Lower School Field on this, the Armistice Day, November the eleventh, nineteteen hundred and thirty-six, help us to remember those O.C.'s who fell upon alien soil in the late Great Match. Grant us their spirit, we beseech Thee, that we may go "over the top" to our Common Entrance and our Football Fixtures, armed with the "cold steel" of Thy Holy Word. Give us, if Thy will be done, the Great Opportunity to shed our Blood for our Country and our Beloved School, and fill us with that feeling of Sportsmanship which led our fathers to fix bayonets and play until the last whistle blew. We will now sing the concluding hymn on your hymn sheets: "God of our Fathers, known of old."

Reigate's Mother is singing in a rich patriotic contralto. The Father is singing, and his mouth seems to be moving in a different time from the rest of the congregation. Gradually what he is singing becomes painfully clear over and above the reverberation of the hymn

Father (*singing*) ". . . bee-eautiful as a butterfly
And as proud as a queen
Was pretty little Polly Perkins
Of Paddington Green."

Both the Father's song and the hymn come to an end at the same time

All Amen.

The Headmaster is saying good-bye, shaking parents' hands

Headmaster How do you do, Mrs Reigate? How very nice to see you again.

The Headmaster and the parents go

Son (*grown up*) Our parents, it was obvious, needed a quick coating of romance.
(*As a boy*) She didn't look much like a panther.
Reigate Who?
Son And your mother wasn't exactly a bluebell, either.
Reigate My mother? You've never seen my mother.
Son Of course I have.
Reigate Oh, don't be so simple. That good, honest woman isn't my *real* mother.
Son (*puzzled*) Noah called her "Mrs Reigate". I heard him distinctly.
Reigate Noah only knows what's good for him to know. That was no more my mother than you are.
Son Who was she then?
Reigate Just the dear, good, old soul who promised to look after me.
Son When?
Reigate When they smuggled me out of Russia, after the revolution. They smuggled me out in a wickerwork trunk. I was ten days and nights on the rack in the carriage of the Siberian Railway. Then we got to Paris . . .
Son I thought Siberia . . .
Reigate They tried to shoot us in Paris. Me and my brother. But we got away, across the frozen river.
Son I understood Siberia was in the other direction.
Reigate And escaped to England. This honest chemist and wife took care of us. Swear you won't tell anyone?
Son All right.
Reigate By the blood of my father?
Son If you like. I just heard from my parents, actually. Something pretty sensational.
Reigate Oh, yes?
Son I think they're probably—getting divorced.
Reigate (*interested*) Honestly?
Son Honestly.
Reigate Why? Are they unfaithful?
Son Oh, always. And I told you. My mother goes to cocktail parties . . .
Reigate (*admiringly*) You'll be having a broken home, then?
Son (*casually*) Oh, yes. I expect I will . . .

The two boys go together

Son (*grown up, to the audience*) But when I got home, nothing had changed. My home remained imperturbably intact. And, in the bracken on the common, Iris had built me a house.

The Lights come up on another part of the stage where Iris is kneeling, building a house under the upturned garden table

Iris What do you learn at school?
Son We learn Latin.
Iris What else?
Son Greek.
Iris Say, "Good morning, what a very nice morning," in Latin.
Son I don't know how.
Iris All right. In Greek . . .
Son I can't.
Iris Why not?
Son They're not those sort of languages.
Iris What's the point of them then?
Son They train—the mind . . .
Iris How's your mum and dad?
Son Quarrelling.
Iris I never see them quarrel.
Son Oh, it's life. . . . They come back from parties, and they quarrel. Don't ask me to explain.
Iris I didn't.
Son Well—don't.
Iris I shan't.
Son It's just possible, they're not my parents. A very honest couple, but not . . .
Iris Of course they're your parents. Don't be ignorant.
Son I'm not ignorant.
Iris What do you know, then?
Son I know the second person plural future passive of rogo.
Iris What is it?
Son Rogobamini
Iris What's that mean?
Son It doesn't mean anything. It's just the future passive of rogo—that's all it is . . .
Iris (*after a pause; pointing to the house*) Why don't we get in now?
Son (*shrugs his shoulders*) What for?
Iris To be Mothers and Fathers.
Son I think I might find that a bit painful, well, what with the situation at home. Anyway, I haven't got time.
Iris Haven't you?
Son Someone's coming over to see me today.
Iris Who's that?
Son His name's Reigate, actually.
Iris Don't you want to be Mothers and Fathers . . . Tell you what. I'll let you see . . . (*she lifts up her skirt*)
Son No, thank you. Reigate's coming to stay . . .

Iris goes. Reigate comes in

Reigate You start then.
Son Bill . . .

Reigate Who is it . . . ?
Son It's me, Bill. It's Harry.

Mother enters

Reigate Harry!
Mother Where do you want us to sit?
Son In the stalls.
Reigate What comes next?
Son I can't see you, old fellow.
Reigate I can't see you, old fellow. Then what?
Son You were supposed to learn your lines!

Father enters

Mother There now, darling. Did you have a good rest?
Father What's good about a rest. "My best of rest is sleep, and that thou oft provok'st, yet grossly fearest thy death which is no more."
Mother There's going to be a little surprise.
Reigate (*to the Son; suspiciously*) Can't see much sign of divorce in this family.
Son They're putting on a show—for the visitor.
Father (*pleased*) Is something happening?
Mother It's the boy talking to Reigate.
Father To whom?
Mother To Reigate—his friend.
Father (*incredulously*) The boy has a friend? Welcome, Reigate! What's Reigate like, eh? Paint me the picture.
Mother Well, he's quite small, and . . .
Son And he's really Russian . . .
Father (*impressed*) Russian, eh? Well, that's something of an achievement. (*He pauses*) When I was at school I never minded the lessons. I just resented having to work so terribly hard at playing. They don't roast you at school nowadays, I suppose? I can't think what I'm paying all that money for if they don't roast you from time to time . . .
Mother Do you like school, Reigate?
Reigate It's all right. The Headmaster makes us call him Noah.
Son And his son is Shem.
Reigate And we have to call Mr Box and Mr Pearce Ham and Japhet. And we're the animals.
Son And Mr Bingo Ollard is Mr Bingo Ollard.
Father (*gloomily*) Didn't I warn you? Second-rate minds.
Reigate Now we're going to do something to keep you from thinking of your great unhappiness.
Mother Our unhappiness . . .
Father What did he say?
Mother They're going to put on an entertainment.
Father Oh, I like an entertainment. When's it to be?

Son This afternoon.
Mother Well, you'd better hurry up, because Mr Lean's coming to drive you back to school at six. (*She giggles gently*) Whatever will they think of . . .

The Son and Reigate exit

Father What're you laughing at?
Mother At Reigate?
Father Who on earth's Reigate?
Mother I told you, dear. The boy's friend.
Father Is this Reigate, then, something of a wit?

The Son and Reigate enter with a hamper

Mother He does come out with some killing suggestions.
Reigate (*dignified*) We're going to do a play.
Father What is it? Something out of the *Boys' Own?*
Son I wrote it.
Father You what?
Mother I'm sure Reigate helped. Didn't you, Reigate?
Son He didn't help.
Mother What are you supposed to be. Two little clowns?
Reigate Actually, we're two subalterns. Killed on the Somme, actually.

They take coats, caps and a belt from the hamper and put them them on

Father They'll soon be giving us war again. When it comes, avoid the temptation to do anything heroic. What's going on? Make it vivid.

The Boys exit and return with barbed wire which they set up

Mother They're bringing in some of your barbed wire.
Father My what?
Mother Your barbed wire.
Father Oh, put it back again, won't you. We don't want the cows everywhere.
Mother Reigate's got your greatcoat, and the Boy's wearing your old Sam Browne.
Father How killing!
Son Lights out! Curtain up!
Mother Well, we can see Reigate's artistic! He's giving a very lively performance.
Reigate Actually we're ghosts.
Father Ghosts, eh? What's happening now?
Son We're meeting after the bombardment.
Mother It's after the bombardment.
Father How very killing!
Son Bill . . .
Reigate Who is it . . . ?

Son It's me, Bill. It's Harry.
Reigate Harry! I can't see you, old fellow. It's this damn gas, everywhere. Take my hand.
Son Where are you?
Reigate Out here—by the wire. Listen.
Son What?
Reigate They've stopped straffing. I say, if ever we get back to the old country—
Son What?
Reigate —I want you to marry Helen.
Son You said you'd never let Helen marry a chap who'd funked the top board at Roehampton . . .
Reigate Never mind what I said, Harry. I saw you today on the north redoubt; you were in there, batting for England! You shall have my little sister, boy. My hand on it.
Son I can't feel your hand, Bill.
Reigate I can't see you, Harry.
Son I'm cold . . .
Reigate I'm afraid we'll never see England again.
Son What's the matter with us, Bill?
Reigate (*beginning to laugh*) We're dead, old fellow. Can't you understand? We're both of us—dead!
Father Dead! How killing!

The play over the Boys bow to the Mother and Father

Mother That was splendid! Now we must clear away all this barbed wire, but mind your hands.

The Boys exit with the hamper and costumes, and the barbed wire

Father (*serious*) Dead. You know I didn't want to be dead. I never wanted that. When your mother and I got married—at Saffron Walden, they were just about to pack me off to France. Bands. Troopships. Flowers thrown at you . . . and dead in a fortnight. I didn't want to have anything to do with it. And then, the day before I was due to sail my Old Major drew me aside and said, "You're just got married, old fellow. No particular sense in being dead!" He'd found me a post in the Inland Waterways! That's my advice to you, if they look like giving us war. Get yourself a job in the Inland Waterways . . .

Father exits. Reigate and the Boy enter

Reigate Your parents seem to be getting on quite well.
Son They pretend—for me.
Reigate And your mother didn't seem to drink very much either.
Son Not till the evenings.
Reigate You know? I'll tell you something about your father . . .
Son What?

Reigate He can't see. He's blind, isn't he?
Son (*grown up*) It was a question our family never asked. Naturally I didn't answer it.

Dance music starts

Japhet enters with a gramophone on a trolley

Japhet And—slow, slow, quick, quick, slow—and chassis—chassis! How do you expect to get through life if you can't even do the foxtrot? That's the trouble with education today. It never teaches you anything worth knowing. Do you know, there are boys here who can't even tie their ties, let alone tango . . . Come on. Sorry you're leaving?
Son Not altogether . . .
Japhet I'm leaving, too. Perhaps you heard . . . ?
Son Yes, sir, I know. Lydia left yesterday. We had to make our own beds this morning.

The music stops

Japhet Yes. Lydia's left. I've resigned. So has the poor old King.
Son Him as well . . . ?
Japhet He broadcast this afternoon. We all heard him on Noah's radiogram. The King has given up everything for love. I told you we had a lot in common. Take my advice. Don't give up everything for love . . .
Son No, I won't, sir.
Japhet It's just not on—that's all. Just simply not on . . .
Son You coming to Noah's talk, sir? It's for all of us leavers.
Japhet The one where he tells you the facts of life . . . ?
Son Yes, sir. I think that's the one.
Japhet No. I shall stay away. I've heard quite enough about *them* to be going on with . . .

The Headmaster appears, wearing a tweed jacket with leather patches and smoking a pipe. Reigate comes in and sits on the floor gazing up at him respectfully. Japhet packs up his gramophone and goes. The Son moves away

Headmaster You are the leavers! In a month or two you will go on to Great Public Schools, away from this cosy little establishment.

The Son arrives and stands and knocks

Come in, you're disturbing everybody. Shut the door, boy. Most terrible draught. Ah now, before I forget, Mrs Noah and I will be pleased to see you all to tea on Sunday. A trifling matter of anchovy paste sandwiches! Do you hear that, eh, Reigate? All boys to come with clean finger-nails, no boy to put butter on his hair.
Reigate Please, sir?
Headmaster Yes, Reigate.

Reigate Why aren't we to put butter on our hair?

Headmaster Ah! Good question. I'm glad you asked me that! We had that trouble with the native regiments. They used to lick their hair down with butter. It went rancid in the hot weather. Unpleasant odour on parade. There's no law against a drop of water on the comb. Now, what was I going to tell you? Ah! I was warning you about dreams. You'll have them. Oh, certainly you'll have them. And in the morning you may say to yourselves, "You rotter! To have a dream like that!" Well, you can't help it. That's all. You simply can't help them. Not dreams. Of course, if you're awake you can do something about it. You can change into a pair of shorts and go for a run across country. Or you can get into a bath, and turn on the cold tap. You can always do that. Your housemaster will understand. He'll understand if you should've been up to a French lesson, or Matins or some such thing. Simply say, "Sir, I had to have a bath", or go for a run, or whatever it is. Just say to Mr Raffles, or Humphrey Stiggler, or Percy Parr, just say, Mr Raffles or Mr Parr, dependant on which school you're at of course, that, sir, is what I felt the need to do. He'll understand perfectly. Now, another thing! When sleeping, always lie on the right side. Not on the face, for obvious reasons. Not on the left side. Stops the heart. Not on the back, brings on dreams. Just the right side—all the time. Now, to the most serious problem you're likely to run up against. Friends. You may find that a boy from another class, or a house even, comes up to you and says, "Let's be friends", or even offers you a slice of cake. That's a simple one, a perfectly simple one to deal with. You just say very loudly, "I'm going straight to tell the housemaster". Straight away. No hesitation about it. Remember, the only real drawback to our Great Public School system is unsolicited cake—have you got that very clear? Go straight and tell the housemaster.

Son (*grown up*) It wasn't until later that I realized that the Headmaster had been trying to advise us on a subject which my father used to often bring up unexpectedly, in the middle of tea.

Father Sex! It's been greatly overrated by the poets. I never had many mistresses with thighs like white marble.

Mother Would you like your biscuit now, dear?

Son (*grown up*) Now what did he mean? Did he mean that he'd had many mistresses without especially marmoreal thighs—or few mistresses of any sort?

Father "Change in a trice
The lilies and languors of virtue
For the raptures and roses of vice!"
Where's my bloody biscuit?

Mother I put it in your saucer.

Father "From their lips have thy lips taken fever?"
"Is the breath of them hot in thy hair . . . ?"

Son (*grown up, to the audience*) What did he know of the sharp uncertainties of love?

Father (*suddenly laughing*) "Is the breath of them hot in thy hair?" How

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