SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

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SF PERUSALS

Front

by Robert Caisley

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH

FOUNDED 1830

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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FRONT premiered at Illinois Wesleyan University School of Theatre in April of 1995. The production was directed by Lori Adams, with scenic design by Curtis C. Trout, lighting design by Kenneth P. Johnson and costume design by Laura Wetli. The choreography was by Jean MacFarland Kerr and the production stage manager was Brendan Komala. The cast was as follows:

FLAG SOLDIER / AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER / GERMAN PILOT . . . . . Jason Borkowski

SIR CHARLES / MR. BRIGGS / BELA'S SOLDIER . . . . . Drew Battles

LUCY / J.C. SMUTS / HEADMASTER. . . . . .Mara Hesed

OWEN / ALISTER / BRIAN / ANGIE'S SOLDER / A BUS DRIVER . . . Duke Novak

NELLY / SCHOOLCHILD / A SISTER . . . . . Mary DeLano

JUDITH . . . . . Meredith Siemsen

FRANK / FRIKKER

JOHN. . . . . Lindsay Ann Venerable

ANGIE / A MOTHER. . . . . Heather Lane

MR. MANN / A MAN . . . . . Gregg Bush

MRS. BRIGGS . . . . . .Nicole LeVoy

PHOTOGRAPHER / BELA . . . . . .Lauren Hansen

JOAN / A STUDENT . . . . . .Jennifer Nelson

MRS. HILYARD / SCHOOLCHILD . . . . . Megan Spangler

SCHOOLCHILD / A BODY / A YOUNG GIRL. . . . . Anna Adams Stark

SCHOOLCHILD / A LITTLE BOY . . . . . Nathan Adam Stark

MIRA . . . . . .Jill Czamowski

SHEILA / AN OLD WOMAN . . . . . Melanie Keller

FOREMAN / VIV / A YOUNG WOMAN . . . . . Vonessa Haag

FRONT in its current version was produced by the University of Idaho Department of Theatre in October of 2002. It was directed by the author, with scenic design by Eric Dahlen, lighting design by Rick Wolf-Spencer, and costumes by Michelle Wood. The production stage manager by Tony Marsters. The cast was as follows:

JUDITH . . . . . .Alicia Bickley
FRANK/FRIKKER . . . . . Mike Baron
ANGIE . . . . . Jamie Young
TOM . . . . . .Connor Sweeney
JOAN/A STUDENT . . . . . Isabella Whitfield
BRIAN/ANGIE'S SOLDIER . . . . . Daniel Haley
ALISTER/OWEN/PHOTOGRAPHER/SCHOOLCHILD . . . Michel Moissant
J.C. SMUTS/LUCY . . . . . Kate Parker
MR. MANN/BUS DRIVER . . . . . .Krys Wood
MRS. BRIGGS/MRS. HILYARD/AN OLD WOMAN . . . . . .Courtney Ransom
MR. BRIGGS/HEADMASTER KYME . . . . . David Blair
SIR CHARLES/AUSSIE SOLDIER/A MAN . . . . . Ryan Childers
NELLY/MIRA . . . . . Jenny Davis
MRS. HILYARD/AN OLD WOMAN . . . . . .Courtney Ransom
VIV/FOREMAN/A YOUNG WOMAN . . . . . .Amy Burton
BELA/SCHOOLCHILD . . . . . Jeanne Johnson
SHEILA/A MOTHER/SCHOOLCHILD . . . . . .Christen Atwood
FLAG SOLDIER/GERMAN PILOT/BELA'S SOLDIER . . . . David Hathaway
ENSEMBLE . . . . . .Jessica Haley, Laura Yasinitsky, Jonathan Dickey, Jenny Davis, Jeanne Johnson, Christen Atwood

CHARACTERS

JUDITH GENTLY
FRANK - her husband
ANGIE - her teenage daughter
TOM - her young son
SIR CHARLES - an M.P.
LUCY - his wife
OWEN - his son
NELLY - his daughter
JOAN JUSTICE
BRIAN - her son
J.C. SMUTS - an ARP Controller
MR. MANN - a local warden
MRS. HILYARD - an older woman
MRS. BRIGGS
MR. BRIGGS - her husband
ALISTER - her son
FRAKKER - a weapons manufacturer
FOREMAN - his employee
A PHOTOGRAPHER
MIRA - a young girl
MR. KYME - a schoolmaster
SHEILA
BELA
VIV
A BODY
A MOTHER
A YOUNG WOMAN
A SISTER
AN OLD WOMAN
SCHOOLCHILD
AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER
A MAN
A STUDENT
ANGIE'S SOLDIER
GERMAN PILOT
BUS DRIVER

A NOTE ON DOUBLING

FRONT was originally written for a cast of 7F and 4M, with doubling as follows; however, the play can and should be cast in a variety of ways, to meet the needs of any production. Here is just one possibility:

JUDITH, A YOUNG GIRL

FRANK, FRAKKER

ANGIE, A BODY, A MOTHER

TOM, MR. MANN, AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER, A MAN

JOAN JUSTICE, A STUDENT

BRIAN, ALISTER, OWEN, ANGIE'S SOLDIER, GERMAN PILOT, BUS DRIVER

J.C. SMUTS, PHOTOGRAPHER, HEADMASTER KYME*

MRS. BRIGGS, SHEILA, A YOUNG WOMAN

MR. BRIGGS, SIR CHARLES, BELA'S SOLDIER

NELLY, MIRA, VIV, A SISTER

LUCY, MRS. HILYARD, SCHOOLCHILD, BELA, AN OLD WOMAN

** These roles were originally played by a woman.*

SETTING

The story moves between various locations, in and around London; however, no attempt should be made to define each location fully. I envision the entire set as a bombed-out section of the city, piles of rubble and debris strewn widely about, the nightly bombardment having relocated pieces of furniture and architectural fragments in wholly unexpected places. A doorway that leads to nothing. A kitchen table perched atop a pile of shattered boards and brick. The action amidst the chaos; the characters forced to make room for the scene about the take place. Everything used in the play—chairs, tables, props, articles of clothing—can be found hidden in the debris.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

The title of each scene (except Scene 10) should be announced by a member of the company.

The style of the play shifts quite abruptly in places, where we go from the satirically broad, almost vaudevillian presentations of the air raid wardens, Smuts and Mann, to the more realistic scenes involving Judith and her family.

Front is not a work of historical scholarship, but a work of dramatic fiction. There are scenes in the play that make use of specific facts and authentic details that exist in the historical record. However, the play also contains some historical inconsistencies. For example: there are a few scenes that depict or refer to American military personnel, and examine the attitudes of Londoners toward the Americans. The Blitz, however, occupies only a slice of WWII from September 7th of 1940 to May 10th of 1941. There was not a significant U.S. military presence in London until later in the war. I have taken liberties with the historical timeline, therefore, in order to create drama in some instances, and for comic effect in others.

The author is greatly indebted to two impressive historical volumes that provided invaluable information in helping flavor the play with authentic detail: Leonard Mosley's *Backs to the Wall*, (Random House, New York, 1971) and Tom Harrisson's *Living Through the Blitz*, (William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., and The Trustees of the Mass-Observation Archive at the University of Sussex, 1976). They are "must-reads" for anyone undertaking a production of *Front*. I have provided citations throughout the text summarized in what I hope are helpful notes at the end of the play.

SCRIPT NOTE

The play was originally written in three acts, allowing for two intermissions, which fell after what is here Act One, Scene 4, and then again after Act One, Scene 9. But two intermissions felt terribly old-fashioned, so before we opened, we decided on the two act structure indicated here. Producers should feel free to do whichever they prefer.

In some productions, Mrs. Hilyard's speech on page 47 has been cut in its entirety.

The first scene of Act Two, *Interview with the Dead*, has, on occasion, been produced as a stand-alone piece under the title *A Night in April*. It has also, in one production, been cut. It is a scene which is, after all, entirely unnecessary to the rest of the action. But I do feel it's important, and I encourage it to be part of every subsequent production.

— RC

SCENE BREAKDOWN

ACT 1

Scene 1:
The Empire's Last Gasp

Scene 2:
Jerusalem

Scene 3:
The First Day of the Blitz: September 7, 1940

Scene 4:
The Women Say Goodbye

Scene 5:
An English Education

Scene 6:
Bits-n-Pieces

Scene 7:
A Sacrifice for the War Effort, Part I

Scene 8:
The Women Speak Out Against the Government

Scene 9:
A Sacrifice for the War Effort, Part II

ACT 2

Scene 1:
Interview with the Dead

Scene 2:
Judith and Joan

Scene 3:
Dads

Scene 4:
A Public Demonstration

Scene 5:
Making Adjustments

Scene 6:
Do You Love Your Country?

Scene 7:
Judith Beheading Holofernes

Scene 8:
Mrs. Justice Can't Speak

Scene 9:
Judith Has a Vision of the End of the War

For my mother and father
Hilary and Bill
For their endless encouragement

And for my grandmother
Hilda Crewdson
Who shared with me her experiences of the war
And ultimately inspired this play

ACT ONE

(As the audience enters, a **SOLDIER** *from the past, dressed in rags, is waving a flag. He stands in a bright light, darkness and fog all around him. We hear only the sound of the flag flapping through the air.)*

Scene 1:
The Empire's Last Gasp

*(An aristocratic family (***SIR CHARLES***,* **LUCY***,* **OWEN***, and* **NELLY***) is out for an evening stroll. London's skyline is suggested in the background. We discern familiar pieces of architecture. Behind, the* **SOLDIER** *continues to wave the flag.)*

SIR CHARLES. Come along, my dainties, let us take in those spots that history has made great. *(He indicates with his walking stick.)* Wren's City churches—bloody-big-beautiful-baroque—

LUCY. Charles!

SIR CHARLES. Sorry, my dear—this city moves me.

OWEN. I'm hot!

NELLY. I'm bored, we've looked at everything.

SIR CHARLES. Look again! London Bridge. The Tower—strong shadow out across the water. Westminster. There, the Cathedral—stone walls and steeple, bursting upwards, up to Heaven.

LUCY. It's lovely.

SIR CHARLES. Years in the making, my dainties. Whole families in the trade—fathers handing down the knowledge to their sons, then to their sons. Owen, the men that toiled to raise those flying buttresses...

(A second family has entered: **JUDITH** *and* **FRANK**, *typically working class. They set up deck chairs and begin to bask in the fading sun.* **FRANK** *has his trousers rolled up, a knotted hanky on his head. He swigs from a bottle of stout. The children,* **TOM** *and* **ANGIE** *begin to play in the sand.)*

JUDITH. Thank you, Frank.

FRANK. For what?

JUDITH. For this—I love it here, the sun, the sea...

FRANK. Well, don't thank me, thank Hitler—

*(***TOM** *throws sand at his sister.)*

TOM. Thank you, Adolf.

JUDITH. Don't throw sand at your sister.

FRANK. Southend, with the wife and the kiddies. 'S a bleeding miracle! We haven't been on holiday in four years, Ju. You haven't had a new dress in five. As long as they're worried about old Adolf, I've got a job. Here's lookin' at you, Adolf. *(He takes a swig of stout.)* I'll have you a new dress in no time, Judy.

JUDITH. I don't want a new dress—

FRANK. Well, you're having one—no arguments. If anything good comes out of this war, it'll be a new wardrobe for you.

JUDITH. I just want this. This.

(And now, back with the Aristocrats across the stage…)

SIR CHARLES. Gather round, children. Your father has wisdom to impart.

OWEN. I wish he had some ice cream.

LUCY. Pay attention, Owen. Daddy's speaking.

SIR CHARLES. *(clearing his throat)* London, do you see how it shines?

OWEN. Like money!

SIR CHARLES. *(He looks at his children.)*Long ago, it was thought, giants roamed these parts.

LUCY. Don't frighten the children, dear.

OWEN. Giants.

SIR CHARLES. Big bones unearthed—

LUCY. Daddy's only playing games, Nelly.

SIR CHARLES. Am I? Thigh bones five times the size of any man living. Think of that, lad.

OWEN. Giants.

SIR CHARLES. Years back. In this city. And I say, who else could have built this up? Look at it—look!

St. Bartholomew the Great, St. Paul's—triumphant, rising up to greet the gods. The Thames, reined in, pouring life into the city. Commerce, profit. The Palace, all in white. There's wonder. There's might.

(exclusively to his son) Oh, lad, I know this city, and it knows me. It's in my blood, my bones. Up from the banks and shoals of gravel it came—deposits on a river bed—then reared up, year after year. The fortress, eh? The stronghold. Hub of the Empire. We were giants once—it only stands to reason we'd inherit the earth. And we did, lad... once. Once there was so much. *(sotto voce)* But the times, the times are changing...

OWEN. I'm sweaty!

SIR CHARLES. You're English, boy. You've no need to sweat.

LUCY. It is frightfully warm, Charles.

SIR CHARLES. Warm? I've known heat! Down in the thick of it. Your brother and I fending off the savages on the plantation—evil black eyes they had. Frightfully warm, Lucy? Try India, in full regimental attire. Never a button undone, never a cuff rolled up. But we never complained, no, why?

OWEN & NELLY. Because you were English.

SIR CHARLES. And you have to fight, bloody-well fight for what you deserve. The summer cottage at Bath, Steadhall the driver, the right to eat and speak and be free, the right to dominate the world—this city's the heart of it all. You must know it, and love it, my dainties—all its treasures, all its mysteries, all its private parts.

(He gives **LUCY** *a salacious wink and swats her behind.)*

LUCY. Charles!

SIR CHARLES. I defended the Crown.

OWEN. I would. I'd have a gun with a knife—they'd never see me coming.

SIR CHARLES. That's the spirit, son. Do or die!

(We hear the sound of distant guns firing.)

FRANK. Christ, not a moment's peace, eh? *(gets out of his deck chair, moves downstage, shouting out across the water)* Do you bloody-well mind? I'm on holiday, you know? The first holiday we've had for four bloody years. If Parliament's been lounging around, why can't we?

JUDITH. What are they firing at?

FRANK. Imaginary foes. They're just practicing. Blasting across the estuary, setting good people's nerves on end. Give it a rest, will you!

JUDITH. Be quiet, Frank. You're almost making as much noise as the Navy.

FRANK. Well, it's a bloody nuisance. I'm not up that bleedin' factory at four o'clock every morning, sweating the best years of my life away, just to have my nice holiday afternoon with the wife and kiddies spoiled by the BANG BANG BANG of the bloody Royal Navy.

(During this last speech he has shuffled downstage to where the children have been playing in the sand. He has inadvertently walked all over their sand castles.)

ANGIE. Look what you've done. You smashed my city to bits.

TOM. Thank you, Adolf.

JUDITH. Frank.

ANGIE. Your big feet are all over the place, dad.

FRANK. I'm sorry, Angie. I wasn't thinking.

JUDITH. Come and sit down, Frank, before you hurt yourself.

FRANK. Angie.

ANGIE. Go away, so I can clean up your mess.

FRANK. *(crossing back to his chair)* I said I was sorry.

JUDITH. Let's just enjoy the sunshine while it lasts.

(During this last exchange, **OWEN** *has been playing soldier with* **SIR CHARLES**. **LUCY** *and* **NELLY** *are simply loving the little display.)*

LUCY. Left, right, left. Mommy's little soldier.

NELLY. He looks silly.

OWEN. Shut up or I'll kill you.

LUCY. Nelly, don't laugh at your brother, he looks very brave.

NELLY. He's not doing it right.

SIR CHARLES. Now, now, Owen, straighten that back. An Englishman never slouches. That's how you distinguish the enemy—no backbone.

LUCY. Oh, Charles!

SIR CHARLES. Believe me, I've seen some savages in my time, and all of them had sloppy posture. Chin up, lad. Chest, Chest! You should've seen the Huns fighting in The Last Big One. All crooked and bent—looked like old women, they did. *(to* **OWEN***)* About face! What's your name, soldier?

OWEN. Private First Class Owen Cannon, the third, sir.

SIR CHARLES. No, no, nothing lower than a Brigadier in this family, lad. No sense in getting too mucked-up in the fray—

OWEN. But I want to fight. I want to see the whites of their eyeballs.

NELLY. You can't even see the blackboard at school.

LUCY. Nelly, that's quite enough. Our little boy is perfect, and someday he'll make his father proud.

SIR CHARLES. I dare say he'll never have the chance to fight a war again. For England is forever strong. We are good and just, we have no enemies in the world—and the Lord God is on our side.

NELLY. Is God English?

SIR CHARLES. No, my dainty, but he'd like to be. No, lad. Regrettably, there's no fighting left for you to do.

LUCY. Regrettably?

SIR CHARLES. Wartime escapades, the compatriot spirit, one and all for England, that sort of thing. Builds character.

LUCY. Well, we'll have to find something else for him to do.

SIR CHARLES. There you are! *(a moment, then)* C'mon, children, back to the Rolls. Steadhall's coming round the bend.

NELLY. Can you hear that noise, Daddy?

LUCY. What, dear?

NELLY. Out there—

SIR CHARLES. Let's not keep the driver waiting.

OWEN. I can hear it because I'm a soldier, and I'm ready for anything. Look at me.

*(***OWEN** *assumes a militant pose.)*

SIR CHARLES. Splendid. I feel very safe with you about. To the car!

NELLY. I've got to tinkle.

SIR CHARLES. What?

LUCY. She has to go.

SIR CHARLES. I know what it is—can't she hold it?

NELLY. It hurts.

OWEN. She's going a different color.

LUCY. She's going to wet herself.

SIR CHARLES. That's not very dignified. I marched through the Congo, my bladder full to bursting, but never would I piss up a rubber tree with the regiment watching.

LUCY. There's no regiment watching. Let her go in the river.

SIR CHARLES. I will not have her pissing in the Thames.

LUCY. She's just a little girl!

SIR CHARLES. Putrefy the waters of England's Blessed artery? I'll not hear of it.

LUCY. She's in agony.

SIR CHARLES. Hold your breath, Nelly.

*(***OWEN** *comes on with a soldier's helmet.)*

OWEN. Look what I found. She can piss in this.

LUCY. Language!

SIR CHARLES. Thank god, there's a man in charge.

(We begin to hear an air-raid siren sounding the 'alert'. **NELLY** *has begun to cry.)*

Well done, Owen. Take your sister behind a shrub or something.

OWEN. What's that noise?

SIR CHARLES. It's your sister, making a nuisance of herself.

OWEN. No, it's different.

SIR CHARLES. That's got to change, I tell you. No daughter of mine—

LUCY. Nelly, love, be quiet.

OWEN. What is it, Daddy?

SIR CHARLES. She must be taught to be stronger—

OWEN. It's getting closer.

SIR CHARLES. The future of the Empire depends on them. Quick march, Owen, before it starts running down her leg. We'll rendezvous back at the car. Come along, dear. The breeze off the river is vivifying, isn't it?

LUCY. I hope so—

SIR CHARLES. Owen, my boy. You're in charge of this operation. Lucy!

LUCY. One last gasp, Nelly.

*(***NELLY** *draws one deep breath. The scene slows down almost to a tableau.* **SIR CHARLES** *and* **LUCY** *heading off,* **NELLY** *squatting at center with* **OWEN** *holding the soldier's helmet under her. Across the stage* **FRANK** *leaps up out of his chair as another volley of shells rings out.)*

JUDITH. Frank.

FRANK. Right, that's it, you buggers. Two can play at that game. Come on, Tom, give me a hand. The flattest pebbles you can find.

*(***TOM** *starts to gather flat pebbles. He walks right through* **ANGIE***'s castle, crushing it down again.)*

ANGIE. Mum, look what he did.

JUDITH. Tom. Clumsy.

ANGIE. What's the use—the boys always smash things down.

JUDITH. Watch where you're throwing stones. People might be swimming out there.

FRANK. Swim at your own risk—there's a sign right there!

JUDITH. Frank!

ANGIE. It's ruined. All that work for nothing. It was a beautiful sand castle and now it's a heap with a boy's footprint right in the middle.

JUDITH. Sorry, love.

FRANK. Let's give 'em hell, Tom. B-b-b-bombs away!

*(***FRANK** *and* **TOM** *start throwing rocks out across the water.)*

Look at 'em skip, lad. Here's the secret. The flatter the rock, the more it'll skip. And it's all in the wrist. Watch. The b-b-b-bouncing b-b-b-bomb! 'Ave a go!

*(***TOM** *throws one out across the water. They count the skips.* **JUDITH** *stands behind watching on with* **ANGIE***, they are also softly counting under their breath.)*

FRANK & TOM. 1, 2, 3, 4—

FRANK. Not bad. 'Ave another go.

FRANK & TOM. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7—

FRANK. Now you've got the knack. Now that's a secret, eh? The wrist. My dad taught me how, and I taught you. Now, you can't go passing it around at school. What's it say on those posters all over London? "Loose Lips Sink Ships." C'mon let's try for ten.

(They keep trying for ten, as **SIR CHARLES** *and* **LUCY** *becomes isolated in light.)*

SIR CHARLES. One night, as we lay in our beds in Africa, we heard the horses stir, footsteps outside the tent in the wet mud, and each man took up arms and was ready to fight. Frozen with fear—almost pissing our britches—

LUCY. Almost.

SIR CHARLES. But ready to fight, nonetheless—to fight without question. No matter the cost.

(And they are off. **OWEN** *stands at center, holding the soldier's helmet under his sister.* **NELLY** *is crying. We hear* **FRANK** *and* **TOM** *counting, almost reaching their record of ten skips on the water, but not quite. The practice shelling subsides. The sound of sirens. The* **SOLDIER** *in the distance, waving the flag.)*

OWEN. I can hear it getting closer. It's getting closer, Nell.

*(***NELLY** *stops crying, she's done going to the toilet in the helmet. They stop and listen.)*

JUDITH. They've stopped.

FRANK. Maybe they ran out of imaginary enemies.

ANGIE. No they haven't, I can still hear it.

*(***ANGIE** *moves downstage beside her brother.* **FRANK** *moves upstage beside* **JUDITH***; they exchange a look—they don't hear anything.)*

JUDITH. What, Angie?

TOM. Me too.

(A moment, then…)

FRANK. What—

ANGIE. Listen.

(She holds her breath so she can detect the faintest of sounds.)

FRANK. I can't hear a thing.

ANGIE. Sssh! *(beat)* No, it's gone. But it's still out there.

(A moment of silence, then the lights begin to fade. In the darkness we hear the voice of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain: the historic announcement of England's Declaration of War on Germany. **JUDITH** *and* **FRANK** *begin to pack up their belongings throughout the speech, they look at each other, at the children.* **TOM** *continues to play,* **ANGIE** *helps her mother. They come together at center as though heading for home.* **TOM** *runs up to his mother, hands her an envelope.* **JUDITH** *comes down to the apron of the stage to read it; it is almost formal, an announcement. She says the / as "slash".)*

JUDITH. "Dear Sir or Madam: In the event of an emergency, arrangements have been made for the evacuation of all school children from the London area to safe places in the country. It is our hope that your child/children will participate in this program. Upon the receipt of further instructions from your city council, he/she/they should report to their school bringing with him/her/them hat, raincoat, haversack containing night-clothes, towel, soap, tooth brush, tooth paste, and he/she/they should wear a string with a card attached round his/her/their neck/necks giving in legible block capitals his/her/their full name, age, school, home address and next of kin."[1] *(Pause. She slowly folds the form, places it back in the envelope, looks out across the audience.)* You're not having them. You are not taking my children.

(The 'all-clear' warbles out.)

Scene 2:
Jerusalem

(With the 'all-clear', the full company appears to crowd the stage, in choir-like fashion, facing the audience.)

ALL. *(sing Blake's* Jerusalem*)*[2]

AND DID THOSE FEET IN ANCIENT TIMES,
WALK UPON ENGLAND'S MOUNTAINS GREEN.
AND DID THE HOLY LAMB OF GOD,
ON ENGLAND'S PLEASANT PASTURES SEEN.
AND DID THE COUNTENANCE DIVINE,
SHINE FORTH UPON OUR CLOUDED HILLS.
AND WAS JERUSALEM BUILDED HERE,
AMONGST THESE DARK SATANIC MILLS.

BRING ME MY BOW OF BURNING GOLD,
BRING ME MY ARROWS OF DESIRE.
BRING ME MY SPEAR: O CLOUD UNFOLD!
BRING ME MY CHARIOT OF FIRE.
I WILL NOT CEASE ALL MENTAL FIGHT,
NOR SHALL MY SWORD SLEEP IN MY HAND,
'TILL WE HAVE BUILT JERUSALEM,
IN ENGLAND'S GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND.

(The lights brighten and for the first time we see the full stage: bricks and rubble, fragments of buildings destroyed from constant bombardment from the air. The city has been razed to the ground, but one area of the stage remains distinct, a slightly raised area hidden under the fallen ash, dust and dirt. The company begins to pull various household items out from the detritus that is scattered widely about; they essentially 'set' the stage. **JUDITH** *picks up a broom and begins to sweep the raised area, revealing a planked kitchen floor amid the rubble. Dust flies up with each sweep. She begins to set up her kitchen.)*

Scene 3:
First Day of the Blitz, September 7, 1940

(Off to one side is a small sand-bagged area: the Warden's Post. The warden, **MR. MANN**, *drags a scorched arm-chair out of his post and sets it in place, dusts it off a bit.)*

MANN. Bloody, bloody, bloody, Hell's Bells. Yer blink and it's over. I just went round the pub, to fetch a bottle of best bitter and when I come back it were as flat as a pancake. *(He points upstage.)* That's where she used to be—lovely, little 127—right back there where things're all twisted and it's ashes and smoke. My missus was just making me tea. She said, "Les, I'd love a sip of beer with these sausages we got special." Famous last words, eh?

*(***JUDITH** *crosses downstage and hands* **MR. MANN** *a cup of tea.)*

JUDITH. 'Ere you are, Les—have a cuppa!

MANN. *(showing the number)* Thanks, love. Look, here's a 1, here's a 2, and here's part of a 7. *(He takes a long sip, looks about him.)* There's the garden gate, flung that way. It's still hot from the blast, so don't touch it. There's me front window flung that way. There's the postbox up in that tree. And here's me, having a cup of tea in my fav'rite chair—and that's all that's left. *(a moment, then…)* My missus, she were flung that way, and she were burnt all up her legs—and if it weren't for her shoes she was wearing I'd not have known my own wife. They were my shoes—we had the same size feet—hers were big for a woman, an' mine were small for a man. Isn't that a laugh? We shared shoes. We had three pairs between us. One for smart. One for working. And one just in case. *(He looks about him, pauses.)* I'd 'ave gone barefoot if I could 'ave kept my missus.

*(***SMUTS** *enters, clipboard in hand.)*

SMUTS. Right, Mann, you'll have to shift this out of here. It's blocking your Post, and it's hardly regulation.

MANN. It's my fav'rite chair.

SMUTS. It'll have to go.

JUDITH. Give over, he's just lost his wife.

SMUTS. House hit? Oh dear, salvage anything? Did you fill out the form? There's three copies: yellow, that's for me, blue to the Home Office, white—

JUDITH. Customer's copy!

SMUTS. Thank you, Mrs. Gently. Stand up, Mann. You hurt at all, take any shrapnel did you?

MANN. I was at the pub.

SMUTS. Drinking on duty?

MANN. On my tea break.

SMUTS. There shall have to be an inquiry.

MANN. All she wanted was a sip of beer with the sausages she got special!

SMUTS. Yes, well, I can see you're very agitated.

JUDITH. He's just lost his life.

SMUTS. Many people have lost their wives. It's a fact of war.

JUDITH. Life!

SMUTS. *(He pauses, momentarily, not catching it.)* Yes. It's not very nice, but we've all got a job to do. I've got a job to do. *(He begins to make his way downstage; he turns back to* **MR. MANN**.*)* You can keep the chair for now, but eventually you'll have to clear the pavement. Regulations.

(The lights go down on **JUDITH***'s kitchen and* **MR. MANN**. **SMUTS** *is isolated in a single spot. He reads from the papers on his clipboard.)*

SMUTS. Quiet please, I have an announcement. Air Raid Precautions (ARP) Subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defense, Sub-sub-committee of the Home Office. First: In the event of an air-raid, the long wailing alert will be given. *(imitates the 'alert' enthusiastically)* At which time, regulations state clearly that it is highly

recommended the performance be brought to a halt at an appropriate point in the action, and the patrons ushered out of the theatre to the nearest shelter. Many of you may choose to ignore the recommendations of the Home Office, and remain in your seats. *(He takes a beat, looks at the audience.)* For those of you who wish to live, please seek the nearest way out. I'm told, by the management that regardless of interruptions from Hitler's hordes, the actors are insisting they get paid, and so we're unable to refund your money. Sorry.

(beat)

Second: We are looking for volunteers. We need warden's for all areas especially in and around Bethnal Green, Twickenham, King's Cross, Telegraph Road, Chiswick and Spitalfields. *(beat)* Duties include, ensuring the blackout is effective as a form of civil defense. For those who refuse to comply with this ordinance, you are required to fill-out form BS422/6, in triplicate, yellow, blue and white copies to ARP controller, that's me, Mr. J. C. Smuts, the Home Office, and the offender, respectively. *(sotto voce)* Look 'ere, I know the blackout has proved a bother to many of your nocturnal habits, and seems to be causin' an increase in traffic accidents, but just think of what the lads at the front are putting up with by comparison. Drawing the curtains is the least you can do for the war effort. *(beat)* Warden shall also be responsible for ushering the crowds to and fro when the 'alert' is sounded. *(Again, he imitates the sound.)* There are the shelters, public and private, and not only is it your job to get them there, but keep them there until the 'all clear.' *(He imitates the sound.)* It is also crucial you provide those in your shelter with the stabilizing influence of authority. For down in those dark, cavernous bowels, such a large clot of plebians, in such tight quarters, especially the Cockneys, could become a foul stew of panic, political unrest and other...unsavory acts. *(beat)* Anyone feeling moved by a sense of duty, may contact me, J. C. Smuts,

through the Home Office. If there are any questions concerning proper air-raid procedure, please consult the pamphlets we have circulated, complete with step-by-step instructions for making the most of your air-raid experience, and one or two little Hitler jokes me and some of the lads down at the Home Office thought up. Some of them are quite good, I think. *(suddenly, quite serious)* The 'alert', the long wailing cry; the 'all clear' warbles. Remember:

"In a raid, if you must lose your head,
Just remember the things that I've said.
You'll know what to do;
There will only be two
Kinds of people—the Quick and the Dead!"[3]
Thank you.

(The lights fade.)

Scene 4:
The Women Say Goodbye

*(***JUDITH***'s kitchen.* **JUDITH** *is ironing a shirt. The wireless is on. Her husband* **FRANK** *enters with a suitcase. He stands upstage watching her iron. He moves up behind her, places his arms about her waist. She resists. He eventually persuades her to dance with him, and they continue to do so through most of the next short exchange.* **MR. & MRS. BRIGGS** *enter with their boy,* **ALISTER**. *He is dressed in a military uniform, but he carries a cricket bat. They are followed by a* **PHOTOGRAPHER** *from a newspaper. The* **BRIGGS***' stand formally, about to have their photograph taken. They speak to both the audience and the* **PHOTOGRAPHER**.*)*

MRS. BRIGGS. This is our Alister. Say hello, Alister.

ALISTER. *(almost inaudibly)* 'Ello.

MRS. BRIGGS. He's a bit shy. Takes after his dad, doesn't he?

(She elbows **MR. BRIGGS**.*)*

MR. BRIGGS. *(also quiet)* Yes, dear.

MRS. BRIGGS. Doesn't he look smart in his uniform? He looks inches taller. Doesn't he? Doesn't he? Doesn't he, Bill?

MR. BRIGGS. Yes, dear.

MRS. BRIGGS. Don't you, love?

ALISTER. Yes, Mum.

MRS. BRIGGS. Yes you do, indeed. He's havin' his picture taken for the newspaper. He's become quite a celebrity, our Alister. Haven't you, dear?

ALISTER. Yes, Mum.

MRS. BRIGGS. Because of his cricket. He's the highest scorer on the team. He's been named captain. They haven't lost a match all year, have you, love?

ALISTER. No, Mum.

MRS. BRIGGS. There was a lad from Wales who went to our school when I was a girl. He's held the record for most runs for years until our Alister came along. We're so proud of him, aren't we dear?

MR. BRIGGS. We're so proud.

MRS. BRIGGS. He's a lovely lad, and he gets good marks in school, and he wants to become a master fitter like his dad, and we're so proud of him.

PHOTOGRAPHER. Anytime you're ready missus.

MRS. BRIGGS. Ooh, right. Come along, Alister. Do a pose for the nice man.

*(***ALISTER** *looks sadly at the* **PHOTOGRAPHER** *then at his father. His dad nods.)*

MR. BRIGGS. Take guard, lad!

*(***ALISTER** *assumes the batsman's guard position. They all freeze.)*

PHOTOGRAPHER. Say cheese!

THE BRIGGS. Cheese!

(As the camera flashes, **JUDITH** *and* **FRANK** *are also captured in a split second frozen image.* **JUDITH** *is laughing as* **FRANK** *dips her.)*

PHOTOGRAPHER. Right, sonny, what was your name again?

*(***ALISTER** *is about to speak.)*

MRS. BRIGGS. Alister Briggs, with two g's. Make sure you spell it right. He's very sensitive about his name—people sometimes forget it. He's such a lovely cricketer, you should come and watch him play, you could sit with us, you could take some more pictures if you'd like, we've got a lovely spot in the school pavilion every Saturday, would you like to?

PHOTOGRAPHER. I'm very busy missus—there's lots of lads leaving today. I'm trying to get round to all of them.

MRS. BRIGGS. Isn't this because of his cricket you want his picture?

PHOTOGRAPHER. Not really. It's him shipping out, y'see.

MRS. BRIGGS. You are from the paper, aren't you?

PHOTOGRAPHER. Yeah, that's right.

MRS. BRIGGS. I think you're mistaken—

PHOTOGRAPHER. Naw, I'm supposed to cover the lads who're leaving. Y'know, at the station, mother's waving bye to their sons, wives and husbands, farewell kisses, last minute weddings—that type of thing. Nobody wants to read about sports—there's a war on, missus. It's a nice touch though, for the story. "Cricket star ships out"—can he snuff as many Gerries as he can runs for the home team? That might sell a few copies, thanks for the scoop, lady.

MRS. BRIGGS. But he's not like the rest of them. He's not just a soldier. He's a famous cricketer—

ALISTER. Mum—

MRS. BRIGGS. —Well, you are. You should hear the crowd when he's at bat. They roar. Everyone's so proud of him. He's the finest cricketer the school's ever had.

PHOTOGRAPHER. I'm sure he is.

(He exits. **MRS. BRIGGS** *licks her fingers and tries to smooth down her son's hair.)*

ALISTER. Mum. Give over. My orders said I have to be there at ten sharp—I'm going to be late.

*(***ALISTER** *begins to leave.)*

MR. BRIGGS. Son, you've forgot this.

(He turns to his father.)

ALISTER. I can't carry a cricket bat all over Europe, dad.

*(***MRS. BRIGGS** *stands, looking down at her hands.)*

MR. BRIGGS. We'll keep it in your room for you.

ALISTER. You should give it away—there's lots of lads could use a good bat—

MRS. BRIGGS. No. No one's touching that bat.

ALISTER. I'm late. Bye Dad. Bye Mum.

*(***MR. BRIGGS** *raises his hand.* **MRS. BRIGGS** *look up at her son, then slowly holds up the bat. It's an odd picture, but not comical.* **ALISTER** *crosses the stage.* **MR. & MRS. BRIGGS** *exit.)*

*(***JUDITH** *has suddenly broken away from* **FRANK** *and is ironing again. The wireless plays on. There is a long moment of silence, then finally she speaks.)*

JUDITH. For starters, I don't want one of those drippy goodbyes you see at the pictures. Every week there's women crying on men's shoulders and I told myself I wouldn't do that. I won't cry, I won't. I want a nice kiss, and a wave just before you turn the corner, that's all—a nice kiss. Doesn't have to be too passionate because I'm not sure that's what we both need before we have to say goodbye.

FRANK. Judith—

JUDITH. And I don't want any war time promises, either. I don't want promises just because there's a war on. And I don't want you to write letters, because if you write letters I'll read them all the time and I won't get anything done and the house will fall to bits and the family will fall to bits and I won't do anything but read your letters and wait for the next letter and the next letter and it just might not come.

FRANK. *(after a slight pause)* I promise—

JUDITH. I don't want that!

FRANK. What're you doing, Ju?

JUDITH. What's it look like, I'm pressing your shirts.

FRANK. You don't have to do that.

JUDITH. Yes, I do.

FRANK. Judy—

JUDITH. It'll not take long—

FRANK. I've got a long train ride, they'll just get wrinkled. Stuffed in a suitcase for hours—

(He moves behind her, his arms about her waist.)

FRANK. C'mon, love, be with me. Let's have another little farewell dance.

JUDITH. I've got these shirts to do.

FRANK. You smell good—

JUDITH. Frank, give over—

FRANK. *(pulling her towards him)* "When we're out together dancing cheek to cheek..."

JUDITH. Stop trying to make me forget.

FRANK. Forget what—

JUDITH. You know what. This, everything, soon you'll be out that door.

(She goes back to ironing.)

FRANK. C'mon, Judy—cheek to cheek.

JUDITH. Can't you see I've got work to do? Your shirts, Frank! Your bloody shirts!

FRANK. Don't bother with them!

JUDITH. *(sharply)* I am not sending you off to war with wrinkled shirts!

*(***FRANK** *moves away from her, turns off the wireless)*

I—want you to look smart. Don't want anyone thinking you're not looked after.

*(***BRIAN***, enters at another part of the stage. He is carrying a duffel and wearing a battered old suit. He opens the bag and begins to fill it.* **JOAN** *enters after, puffing away on a cigarette.)*

JOAN. Got all your little treasure's do yer? Little photo of yer old man. Little watch with the smashed in face. "Pack up your troubles in yer old kit bag and smile, smile, smile..." You always believed that ridiculous story he told you, didn't yer, Brian?

BRIAN. Wasn't ridiculous—

JOAN. *(imitating his father)* Y'see this watch, lad? Pried it from the hand of a dead German in the First War. I stuck in the old bayonet, one, two, three, and his eyes rolled back—looked so surprised. Like he wouldn't

'ave done the same given the chance. Knee deep in mud, the bugger's weight on me, and I hear this tick, tick. Under the artillery fire, under the yells and screams for help...tick, tick. And there it was in his dirty palm. Gold.

BRIAN. Wasn't a story. He did that!

JOAN. He did lots of things—

(Pause. They look at each other.)

Still, he could tell a good story, eh? Weave a magical tale. Made you want to believe anything came out his mouth.

BRIAN. Dad never lied. He was a hero.

JOAN. You call that heroic—stealing gold from the dead?

BRIAN. He was entitled, one little souvenir—

JOAN. Pried it from the hand before he was even cold.

BRIAN. He was a good man.

JOAN. He was a lying drunk.

BRIAN. Fought for England, did what had to be done.

JOAN. Yeah, that was his problem. Always tryin' to conquer and defeat. The Germans, his own wife in bed, his fear—

BRIAN. Mum, I signed up. I'm goin', yer can't stop me.

JOAN. Yes, I can.

BRIAN. What will you do?

JOAN. I'll forget about you, that's what! Forget yer name, yer face, forget you were ever mine...his. Bloody-hell, Brian, can't you just stop being like him.

BRIAN. I'll be off.

(He starts out.)

JOAN. Wait. Where will you be. For now, at least.

BRIAN. It's supposed to be secret.

JOAN. I know you can't tell—

BRIAN. —I can't tell you. It's secret. So the enemy doesn't—

JOAN. Find out where my boy is.

*(***BRIAN** *continues to pack away his things.* **JOAN** *stands watching him. At another part of the stage,* **MRS. HILYARD** *enters and approaches* **MR. MANN**. *She has a scarf in a paper bag.)*

MRS. HILYARD. I'm sorry, Mr. Mann. I heard about Ethel. I'm so very sorry.

MANN. I think she went quick.

MRS. HILYARD. Well, that's the best way, isn't it?

MANN. I suppose so.

MRS. HILYARD. I've knit you a scarf, love. Keep you warm around the ears.

MANN. That's very nice of you, Mrs. Hilyard.

MRS. HILYARD. Well, I just keep knitting, don't I? I've got three boys at the front. Now and then I get a letter, they always say how cold it is. So I'm knitting.

MANN. Very kind.

MRS. HILYARD. That color'll suit you. Matches your uniform, too. Very smart.

(a moment as she tucks the scarf round his neck)

It's hard to let people go, isn't it? I've never been good at goodbyes.

*(***JUDITH** *finishes ironing the last shirt.)*

JUDITH. There. The last one.

MANN. She's not coming back, is she?

*(***MRS. HILYARD** *shakes her head, "No".)*

FRANK. Judith. I'm coming back. I am. That's not a promise, it's a fact. It's something I can feel—I've felt it forever. Since I was a kid, before then. It's a picture of myself coming through the other end of something, I'm not sure what, but I know it means I'll always be safe. I don't know, Judy—it sounds laughable, I know—but I feel I've been set aside for other things.

JUDITH. For me?

FRANK. Yes, and—

JUDITH. For the children—?

FRANK. —Yes, you see, that's what I'm talking about. You understand. I can't die.

JUDITH. Lots will.

FRANK. Yes, that's war. But, I won't. Even if we land on a beach with three hundred of us and three thousand of them. Even if I parachute into Berlin and land in the back seat of his Daimler beside Hitler himself. Even if I'm captured and they do dreadful things.

JUDITH. Frank—

FRANK. I've got the picture of me—Frank Gently—coming through the other end. Not a scratch on me.

JUDITH. *(sotto voce)* Prr—

FRANK. What?

JUDITH. Promise me...

FRANK. I didn't think you wanted promises—

JUDITH. Frank, promise—

FRANK. No. I'll prove it. *(beat)* I won't even say goodbye. That's how sure I am.

*(***FRANK** *begins to gather his things.)*

BRIAN. Mum, just say goodbye. Please.

*(***JOAN** *says nothing.* **BRIAN** *turns to leave. A moment, then...)*

JOAN. Brian.

(He turns back to her.)

Upstairs, I've got a little cigar box tucked in the top drawer of my dresser. There's a picture on the lid—yer dad in his uniform, lookin' smart and young—and inside there's a ribbon with a silver button—the medal he got for killing well—and a letter...it says how regretful they were when they told me he'd died somewhere, not quite sure where, but in the service of his country. And that's all I've got, so don't tell me to just say goodbye, because it's more than that. It's everything...good, bad...gone in a blink. I will not say goodbye that easy again.

(They share an awkward embrace and almost immediately other women crowd the stage; **FRANK** *turns to* **JUDITH***; she is about to embrace him…)*

JUDITH. Frank!

*(***FRANK** *motions for her to stop. She does.* **BRIAN** *and* **FRANK** *meet at center and begin to walk out, into the auditorium and out of the theatre. As they go,* **FRANK***'s children run to him to say goodbye.)*

TOM. Dad!

FRANK. *(to* **TOM***)* Take care of Mum and Sis—they're goin' to need a man about. And don't forget the secret I taught you.

TOM. I won't.

FRANK. *(to* **ANGIE***)* And you. Stay away from the airmen.

(They hold one another. The women have gathered downstage, watching the men leave. **JUDITH** *still has one of her husband's shirts,* **JOAN** *is smoking away.* **ANGIE** *is watching the men leave and the other women.* **MRS. BRIGGS** *clutches her son's cricket bat.* **MRS. HILYARD** *and the other* **WOMEN** *join them.* **FRANK** *and* **BRIAN** *turn back right before they disappear. They look down at the* **WOMEN** *waving back to them.*

FRANK. Look at that. Ever see anything like that? *(beat)* All those women. Look how they're watching us.

(The **PHOTOGRAPHER** *quickly approaches* **BRIAN** *and* **FRANK.***)*

PHOTOGRAPHER. D'you mind? One last snap—the two of you.

*(***FRANK** *and* **BRIAN** *assume a pose.)*

What's your name, fellas?

BRIAN. Brian Justice.

FRANK. Frank Gently.

PHOTOGRAPHER. An' d'you know where you're off to?

FRANK. Yeah—

BOTH. To win the war!

(They share a laugh.)

PHOTOGRAPHER. Say cheese.

BOTH. Cheese!

(The camera flashes and the **WOMEN** *all move into photographic images; the lights continue to flash as though someone is snapping a series of snapshots. Slow, stylized movements with the voices of the women behind.* **BRIAN** *and* **FRANK** *are off.)*

WOMEN. Give 'em hell, lads.

Keep warm.

Write soon, yer bugger.

I want something nice, something foreign.

Don't do anything silly.

Hurry home.

I love you.

I love you.

Give 'em one for me, love.

I want long letters, with lots and lots of I Love You's.

You just keep your hands off them German girls. I'll not take a traitor back into my bed.

I love you.

I hate this. Goodbye.

Bye, love.

Don't catch cold.

I'll knit something. A balaclava.

I want a postcard from everywhere you stop.

I want a photo of you when you get your uniform, ducky.

Look at them.

They look lovely, don't they? Strong and tall.

He's a beautiful cricket player. He's the finest player they've ever had.

Did he look back?

Did he wave?

Did he?

He's gone.

That's it, they've gone.

I can't see him anymore.

I can't see—

Is he ever coming back?

They'll be back.

They always do...

...that's their problem.

(laughter, then...)

I'll miss him.
I've only been married a week.
Where's yours off to?
It's a secret...so the enemy can't find him.
I'm afraid.
There's ironing to do.
Work to be done.
Can't let things fall apart just because the men have gone.
They're all gone.
It's so quiet, suddenly.
No.
Don't be silly.
Yes.
Listen.

(They fall silent.)

There's something...missing.

(Long pause. Slowly the women stop waving and begin to leave. **MRS. BRIGGS** *is left,* **JUDITH** *is beside her,* **JOAN** *a little further upstage.)*

MRS. BRIGGS. *(speaking to no one)* The first time up to bat. Dressed all in white. So white, it hurt your eyes to look at him—but you couldn't help it. He made you watch him. He looked brand new. I swear, my boy shined.

(Slow fade to black, and almost as an echo of **MRS. BRIGGS***' words, there is a bloom of light upstage. In it we see the* **SOLDIER** *from the past waving the flag, and* **ALISTER** *dressed in his cricket whites, at bat. He shines.)*

Scene 5:
An English Education

(**J.C. SMUTS** *enters with clipboard in hand. He addresses the audience.)*

SMUTS. Quiet please, I have another announcement. Air Raid Precautions (ARP) Subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defense, Sub-sub-committee of the Home Office. *(beat)* With the increase in severity and frequency of blitzes, all those parents whose children are still in the London area, and all those who wisely sent them away last September, but then foolishly brought them back, are urged to evacuate their little ones without further delay. Parents should contact the nearest town hall or Citizens' Advice Bureau for further assistance and information. Don't delay! It's not always the neighbor's house that gets hit. You could be next.[4]

Don't be silly Mrs. Mummy,

Get your kiddies to the country.

Bring 'em down to Elm Road Station,

For a safe evacuation.

Thank you.

(He is about to leave, but then as an afterthought…)

Oh, if your kiddies are at home, they still have to go to school. The board of education will not tolerate truancy, even in times of adversity.

(A school bell rings out.)

We don't want them turning into little monsters just because there's a war on.

(A classroom, many empty desks. **HEADMASTER KYME** *walks back and forth before the children, cane in hand. One of the* **SCHOOLCHILDREN** *is standing up in front of the class, at attention, a look of panic across his face.)*

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