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

THE BUTTERFLY LION

By Michael Morpurgo

Adapted for the stage by Anna Ledwich

SAMUEL FRENCH

samuelfrench.co.uk

Copyright © 2019 by Michael Morpurgo
Adapted for the stage by Anna Ledwich
All Rights Reserved

THE BUTTERFLY LION 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 978-0-573-11682-7

www.samuelfrench.co.uk
www.samuelfrench.com

For Amateur Production Enquiries

United Kingdom and World
excluding north america
plays@samuelfrench.co.uk
020 7255 4302/01

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

CAUTION: Professional and amateur producers are hereby warned that *THE BUTTERFLY LION* 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 Curtis Brown, Haymarket House, 28-29 Haymarket, London SW1Y 4SP and 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 Anna Ledwich 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.

THINKING ABOUT PERFORMING A SHOW?

There are thousands of plays and musicals available to perform from Samuel French right now, and applying for a licence is easier and more affordable than you might think

---

From classic plays to brand new musicals, from monologues to epic dramas, there are shows for everyone.

Plays and musicals are protected by copyright law, so if you want to perform them, the first thing you'll need is a licence. This simple process helps support the playwright by ensuring they get paid for their work and means that you'll have the documents you need to stage the show in public.

Not all our shows are available to perform all the time, so it's important to check and apply for a licence before you start rehearsals or commit to doing the show.

LEARN MORE & FIND THOUSANDS OF SHOWS

Browse our full range of plays and musicals, and find out more about how to license a show

www.samuelfrench.co.uk/perform

Talk to the friendly experts in our Licensing team for advice on choosing a show and help with licensing

plays@samuelfrench.co.uk 020 7387 9373

Acting Editions

BORN TO PERFORM

Playscripts designed from the ground up to work the way you do in rehearsal, performance and study

---

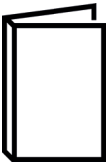
Larger, clearer text for easier reading

Wider margins for notes

Performance features such as character and props lists, sound and lighting cues, and more

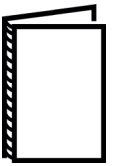
---

+ CHOOSE A SIZE AND STYLE TO SUIT YOU



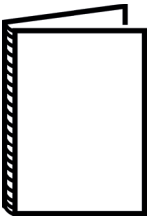
STANDARD EDITION

Our regular paperback book at our regular size



SPIRAL-BOUND EDITION

The same size as the Standard Edition, but with a sturdy, easy-to-fold, easy-to-hold spiral-bound spine



LARGE EDITION

A4 size and spiral bound, with larger text and a blank page for notes opposite every page of text – perfect for technical and directing use

LEARN MORE **samuelfrench.co.uk/actingeditions**

Other plays by MICHAEL MORPURGO
published and licensed by Samuel French

Private Peaceful – One Actor and Ensemble
(adapted by Simon Reade)

FIND PERFECT PLAYS TO PERFORM AT
www.samuelfrench.co.uk/perform

MUSIC USE NOTE

Licensees are solely responsible for obtaining formal written permission from copyright owners to use copyrighted music in the performance of this play and are strongly cautioned to do so. If no such permission is obtained by the licensee, then the licensee must use only original music that the licensee owns and controls. Licensees are solely responsible and liable for all music clearances and shall indemnify the copyright owners of the play(s) and their licensing agent, Samuel French, against any costs, expenses, losses and liabilities arising from the use of music by licensees. Please contact the appropriate music licensing authority in your territory for the rights to any incidental music.

USE OF COPYRIGHT MUSIC

A licence issued by Samuel French Ltd to perform this play does not include permission to use the incidental music specified in this copy. Where the place of performance is already licensed by the PERFORMING RIGHT SOCIETY (PRS) a return of the music used must be made to them. If the place of performance is not so licensed then application should be made to the PRS, 2 Pancras Square, London, N1C 4AG (www.prsformusic.com).A separate and additional licence from PHONOGRAPHIC PERFORMANCE LTD, 1 Upper James Street, London W1F 9DE (www.ppluk.com) is needed whenever commercial recordings are used.

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

If you have obtained performance rights to this title, please refer to your licensing agreement for important billing and credit requirements.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MICHAEL MORPURGO

Michael Morpurgo began writing stories in the early '70s, in response to the children in his class at the primary school where he taught in Kent. One of the UK's best-loved authors and storytellers, Michael was appointed Children's Laureate in 2003. He has written over one hundred and thirty books, including *The Butterfly Lion*, *Kensuke's Kingdom*, *Why the Whales Came*, *The Mozart Question*, *Shadow* and *War Horse*, which was adapted for a hugely successful stage production by the National Theatre and then, in 2011, for a film directed by Steven Spielberg. His book *Private Peaceful* has been adapted for the stage by Simon Reade and made into a film directed by Pat O'Connor. *Running Wild* was adapted for the stage by Samuel Adamson and premiered by Chichester Festival Youth Theatre in 2015, winning the UK Theatre Award for Best Show for Children and Young People, and was later produced at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre and on a UK tour.

Michael was awarded the OBE for his writing in 2006. His books have been translated into many languages including Chinese, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Hebrew and Japanese. His latest novel *Boy Giant* was published in September 2019 by HarperCollins. An animated adaptation of his book *Mimi and the Mountain Dragon*, narrated through a classical music score composed by Rachel Portman, premiered at Christmas 2019 on BBC One.

In 1976, Michael and his wife, Clare, started the charity Farms for City Children. The charity runs three farms around the country, in Gloucestershire, Pembrokeshire and North Devon. Each farm offers children and teachers from urban primary schools the chance to live and work in the countryside for a week, and gain hands-on experience.

michaelmorpurgo.com

ABOUT THE ADAPTER

ANNA LEDWICH

Anna began her directing career at Theatre503 where she directed a number of world premieres before being made an Associate Director. She was awarded the Michael and Morvern Heller Director's Bursary at Chichester Festival Theatre where she assisted directors such as Richard Eyre and Rupert Goold. In 2012 Anna was made co-Artistic Director of Theatre on the Fly at Chichester Festival Theatre.

Her adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*, performed by the Chichester Festival Youth Theatre, premiered in 2017; and her play *Crossing Lines*, a promenade performance by Chichester Festival Youth Theatre, premiered in 2019.

Anna received the Gate Theatre/Headlong New Directions Award for her adaptation of Frank Wedekind's *Lulu,* and returned to the Gate the following year to adapt and direct Arthur Schnitzler's *Dream Story*.

She was nominated for the 2015 Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliate Theatre for her production of *Four Minutes Twelve Seconds* at Hampstead Theatre Downstairs, which subsequently transferred to Trafalgar Studios.

Her production of *Dry Powder* at Hampstead Theatre was nominated for the 2018 Olivier Award for Best Comedy.

Further credits as a director include: *Deluge*, *The Argument*, *Labyrinth*, *Kiss Me*, *No One Will Tell Me How To Start a Revolution*, *Wilderness* (Hampstead); *The Stick House* (Bristol Old Vic/Temple Meads Station); *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Guildford Shakespeare Company); *Cookies* (Theatre Royal Haymarket); *Roundelay* (Southwark Playhouse); *Lovely And Misfit* (Trafalgar Studios).

ADAPTER'S NOTE

The play is intentionally slippery. And in that vein, the playing of it encourages a fluid staging, actors playing multiple roles and a deftness of touch. Hyper-naturalism is not a friend here.

Props and furniture can be minimal and/or representational. The animals can be represented by puppets, or a combination of actor and puppet. Music and hymns are suggested in the text to underpin the emotional and physical journey for the characters. The choice of hymn or song is up to the theatre maker.

An ellipsis (...) a thought left hanging or incomplete

A dash (–) an interruption by the next character

A forward slash (/) the next character begins speaking and overlaps the previous speaker

FIRST PERFORMANCE

The world premiere performance of this adaptation of *The Butterfly Lion* was first performed in the Minerva Theatre, Chichester on 5 October 2019 with the following cast:

MICHAEL / MONSIEUR MERLOT	Jonathan Dryden Taylor
OLD MILLIE	Nicola Sloane
ISOBEL / NANNY MASON / BUTCHER	Allison McKenzie
JAMES / OLD WHITE LION	Kevin Mathurin
GEORGE / MR COOK / COLONEL	Guy Lewis
MILLIE	Claudia Jolly
BERTIE	Adam Buchanan
ENGLISH TEACHER / BROWNING / OLD WHITE LION	James Charlton
LATIN TEACHER / NICHOLSON / CAFÉ OWNER	Rachel Hosker
SPORTY / JACK THE DOG / WHITE LION CUB / OLD WHITE LION	Lucas Button
MISS TULIPS / NURSE JONES	Charleen Qwaye
YOUNG MILLIE	Ellie Bradbury / Matilda Shapland
YOUNG BERTIE	Archie Elliot / Alex Webb
YOUNG MICHAEL	Ruari Finnegan / Anthony Harvey
NATHANIEL / BANNISTER / SOLDIER	Rudi Millard
DEAKIN	Sebastian Bessant
BASHER BEAUMONT / SOLDIER	Jack Taylor
WHITBY	Hugo Talbot

Other parts played by the members of the company.

CREATIVE & PRODUCTION TEAM

Director	Dale Rooks
Designer	Simon Higlett
Lighting Designer	Johanna Town
Music	Tom Brady
Sound Designer	Gregory Clarke
Video Designer	Simon Wainwright
Puppetry	Nick Barnes
Movement Director	Kane Husbands
Additional Music	Luyanda Lennox Jezile
Casting Director	Charlotte Sutton CDG
Associate Director	Jon Pashley
Costume Supervisor	Karen Large
Props Supervisor	Lizzie Frankl
Hair, Wigs & Make-up Supervisor	Matt George
Production Manager	Cath Bates
Company Stage Manager	Lou Bann
Deputy Stage Manager	Andrew Reed
Assistant Stage Manager	Eleanor Butcher
Head Chaperone	Janette McAlpine
Chaperones	Jenny Beadle, Mia Cunningham-Stockdale, Emily McAlpine, Becky Stuckey

FOR CHICHESTER FESTIVAL THEATRE

Chairman	Sir William Castell
Executive Director	Kathy Bourne
Artistic Director	Daniel Evans

CHARACTERS

in order of appearance

MICHAEL – (50s/early 60s)
NATHANIEL – (12)

YOUNG MICHAEL – (10)

BASHER – (12)
WHITBY – (12)
BANNISTER – (12)
DEAKIN – (12)

SPORTS TEACHER
ENGLISH TEACHER
LATIN TEACHER

OLD MILLIE – (60s)

YOUNG BERTIE – (10)
JAMES – (40s)
GEORGE – (30s)
ISOBEL – (30s)

MONSIEUR MERLOT

YOUNG MILLIE – (10)
MISS TULIPS
NANNY MASON

MILLIE – (ages 18 – 40)
BERTIE – (ages 18 – 40)

MAJOR
BROWNING
NICHOLSON
STRETCHER BEARER 1
STRETCHER BEARER 2
MATRON
DOCTOR

WOUNDED SOLDIER 1
WOUNDED SOLDIER 2
NURSE JONES

CAFE OWNER
VILLAGE BUTCHER
CUSTOMER 1
CUSTOMER 2

COLONEL
SERGEANT TATE

REPORTER 1
REPORTER 2
PHOTOGRAPHER

MR COOK

JACK – (dog)

ELEPHANT
HYENA
GIRAFFE
ZEBRA

LIONESS
WHITE LION CUB
WHITE LION

For Leo

ACT ONE

A private school in England. Present day.

The sound of boys singing a hymn or school anthem. Their voices are pure.

A school chapel.

MICHAEL *(50s/early 60s) stands reading a plaque.*

NATHANIEL *(12) appears.*

NATHANIEL Sir?

Sir?

MICHAEL *(startled)* Yes?

Sorry – miles away...

NATHANIEL I was sent to –

MICHAEL Yes, of course.

NATHANIEL I was sent by Mr Cook –

MICHAEL Yes, of course –

NATHANIEL Everyone is waiting.

MICHAEL Waiting? I suppose they are.

You see that plaque? *(Reading)* "And the lion shall lie down with the lamb..."

The only old boy to win a V.C.

I used to –

NATHANIEL I know, sir –

MICHAEL Here. Many years ago.

NATHANIEL Yes. Old Boy.

MICHAEL Old? I suppose I am now –

NATHANIEL Um –

MICHAEL Believe it or not, I was like you once. Young.

NATHANIEL Yes, sir.

MICHAEL Do they still serve you semolina pudding?

NATHANIEL What's that?

MICHAEL Stodge masquerading as sweets... God, I hated it.

Is the whole school waiting?

NATHANIEL Yes.

MICHAEL Even the teachers?

NATHANIEL You're famous.

MICHAEL Am I?

NATHANIEL Er – you write stories?

MICHAEL I make stuff up. You shouldn't trust me – I'm unreliable.

NATHANIEL Right –

MICHAEL That line between the real and the imagined – very thin.

NATHANIEL OK.

MICHAEL Have you read any of my books?

NATHANIEL I think I saw the film...

MICHAEL Load of old codswallop.

They didn't think I'd amount to much, you know.

NATHANIEL Uh –

MICHAEL This place.

NATHANIEL Oh.

MICHAEL Sorry. Being back here, it's a little...

It begins to rain.

Are you sure they don't serve you semolina pudding? Raspberry jam? I swear I could smell it when I walked past your dining hall...

NATHANIEL That was probably the –

MICHAEL God, a smell can really catapult you right back – I can picture, instantly, where I was sitting in that dining hall – I'm talking almost fifty years ago – who I was sitting next to, who I was avoiding – Basher Beaumont, absolute brute of a child, I lived every waking moment of my life in dread of him – and feeling the most intense loneliness –

NATHANIEL Sir, I was told to bring you to the hall –

MICHAEL I wonder what became of him –

NATHANIEL I was told to be quick –

MICHAEL At your age you think time is like a tarmacked road, don't you? Long and straight –

NATHANIEL No. I'm just always late –

MICHAEL Don't worry – er –

NATHANIEL Nathaniel.

MICHAEL The older I've got, Nathaniel, the more time is like... what's it like? An elastic band. It stretches and warps, then snaps back suddenly.

Is that rain?

NATHANIEL Er – I don't know –

MICHAEL Did you know that buildings hold memories?

NATHANIEL Sir, I'm going to get in trouble if I / don't –

MICHAEL Like this chapel, for example. They're held in the bricks and foundations. And these memories aren't politely lined up waiting to be pulled from the shelf like library

books – gosh it's really pelting down, isn't it? Exactly like when...

NATHANIEL When...what?

MICHAEL The butterflies.

NATHANIEL Sorry?

MICHAEL You have to be in the right place at the right time.

NATHANIEL I don't –

MICHAEL I didn't make it up... It did happen.

NATHANIEL Sir?

MICHAEL She was right.

NATHANIEL Who was?

MICHAEL Some memories need a little care taken over them, Nathaniel. You need to make promises to them. That you won't forget –

Otherwise, they'll ambush you –

Rub jam in your hair –

BASHER *(offstage)* Morpurgo! You weasel!

MICHAEL *is immediately on alert.*

MICHAEL *(to* **NATHANIEL***)* What did you say?

YOUNG MICHAEL *(ten) sprints into the space and hides, cowering.*

FOUR BOYS, DEAKIN, WHITBY, BANNISTER *and* **BASHER** *(all twelve) stampede in. A whirlwind of bodies.* **NATHANIEL** *disappears.* **MICHAEL** *watches them in fascinated horror.*

1968.

The bullies grab **YOUNG MICHAEL***, and push him about "Get him, hold his arms, etc, etc ..."*

A steady, almost tribal beat seems to underscore their actions.

BASHER Thought you'd escape?

DEAKIN Look, he's crying!

BANNISTER "I want my mummy!"

WHITBY Waa! Waaa!

BASHER Empty his pockets.

DEAKIN Pennies and gumdrops.

BANNISTER Hand it all over!

WHITBY Waaa! Waaa!

A sports whistle blows. A **SPORTS TEACHER** *appears.*

SPORTY Alright you little thugs, leave the new boy alone.

The **BOYS** *snap into line immediately – a well-drilled regiment.*

And SQUAT! LUNGE! SIDE-STEP! TACKLE!

The **BOYS** *execute each move obediently and vigourously* **YOUNG MICHAEL** *clearly struggles with it.*

SHOULDER! ANKLE-TAP! DROP-KICK! BLITZ DEFENCE!

Running and running and RUNNING and RUNNING –

YOUNG MICHAEL *is breathless and lags behind.*

Morpurgo! Faster! Lift your feet!

YOUNG MICHAEL But sir, I have blisters –

BASHER "But sir, I have blisters –"

SPORTY Last one in cleans the showers.

YOUNG MICHAEL But –

SPORTY And the latrines!

The whistle blows.

LATIN TEACHER *appears. The* **BOYS** *obediently congregate.*

LATIN Repeat! Promitto –

BOYS Promitto!

LATIN Promittis –

BOYS Promittis!

LATIN Promittit –

BOYS Promittit!

LATIN Promittimus –

BOYS Promittimus!

LATIN *(impatiently)* Morpurgo. The second person plural, future perfect indicative.

All eyes are on **YOUNG MICHAEL.**

YOUNG MICHAEL Promit...mi...mento?

The **BOYS** *giggle.*

LATIN C minus

ENGLISH TEACHER *appears with a book and a marked spelling test.*

ENGLISH C minus.

YOUNG MICHAEL C minus?

ENGLISH When did the word *isolate* have two s's? And *yore* is very different to *you're* and *there* is completely different to *their* and as for *whether, weather* and *wether* – are you listening, boy? What am I saying?

YOUNG MICHAEL Something about the weather?

ENGLISH Less daydreaming and more application, Morpurgo. You won't amount to much if you don't get your head out of the clouds.

He places the book on **YOUNG MICHAEL***'s head.*

Perhaps some time in the corner will focus your mind.

YOUNG MICHAEL *miserably stands still as the other* **BOYS** *whoop and swirl around him.*

BASHER You'll never escape.

WHITBY Squat, lunge, tackle –

BASHER You'll never escape.

BANNISTER Prommit-mimento –

BASHER Try as you might.

DEAKIN Clean the latrines.

BASHER You're stuck here, you're stuck here –

ALL You're stuck here! YOU'RE STUCK HERE!

BASHER *grabs* **YOUNG MICHAEL** *in a headlock. He smears raspberry jam on* **YOUNG MICHAEL***'s face.*

BASHER Morpurgo! There's something on your face!

The **LATIN TEACHER** *appears.*

LATIN Boys! Dormitories. Now!

The **BOYS** *scamper off. The* **LATIN TEACHER** *hands* **YOUNG MICHAEL** *a letter.*

Letter for you, Morpurgo. And wash your face, for goodness sake!

YOUNG MICHAEL *opens the letter.* **OLDER MICHAEL** *knows what it says.*

MICHAEL "Dearest Michael. I hope you received your parcel safely. I was so surprised that socks, shortbread and peppermint could weigh so much!! Hopefully they have let you keep it in your room. Are you making friends? I hope so."

YOUNG MICHAEL "Be happy. Lots of love, Mummy."

MICHAEL Be happy. Such a simple instruction.

__YOUNG MICHAEL__ begins to sob. __MICHAEL__ *watches helplessly.*

BASHER Morpurgo! You cry baby!

The __BOYS__ appear and flock towards __YOUNG MICHAEL__ threateningly...but something happens.

Time bends.

They slow down, almost moving in slow motion. __YOUNG MICHAEL__ *watches their approach with mounting horror.*

MICHAEL Time. Stretches and warps and snaps back suddenly. In an instant, an impulse becomes a thought, becomes a possibility, becomes a plan –

YOUNG MICHAEL I can't do it –

MICHAEL You can't stay here.

YOUNG MICHAEL I can't do it –

MICHAEL You can't stomach it – the Latin, the stew, the rugby, detentions, the cross-country runs, the chilblains, the squeaky beds, the semolina pudding with raspberry jam –

That's it. No more jibes and shouting and bruised shins and swollen earlobes –

YOUNG MICHAEL "Dear Mummy, Thank you for the peppermint. Just letting you know that I'm running away from school –" – no. "Dear Mummy, surprise! I will be on the next train home from Wiltshire –" – no. "Mummy. I shall die if I stay here a minute longer –"

MICHAEL What are you waiting for? Run!

A crack of thunder. The gang of __BOYS__ disappear.

And in my memory I'm running. I'm actually running. I've planned it perfectly. I'm a genius. It's a Sunday. They'll never miss me. Until supper and then – ha ha!

YOUNG MICHAEL Ha ha!

MICHAEL It'll be too late. I'll be walking in the front door of my parents' house in London. They'll greet me with hugs and crumpets and a warm bath and promises that they'll never ever ever send me back to this –

A crack of thunder. **YOUNG MICHAEL** *runs.*

And I'm running –

YOUNG MICHAEL Yes!!

MICHAEL I'm actually running. I hurdle the fence at the bottom of the school park, I run through the woods, to the road beyond. I'm a compass, an arrow, first the road, then the train station, then London. LONDON! In my memory I'm lithe, like a cheetah, wings at my ankles, lungs like bellows, I'm –

Crack of thunder. It begins to rain.

The reality.

YOUNG MICHAEL *shivers under a tree.* **MICHAEL** *shivers next to him. They are dripping wet.*

What sort of rain jacket isn't waterproof?

YOUNG MICHAEL It's not my fault.

MICHAEL Which way now?

The sound of a car swoops past them. They duck to avoid being seen.

YOUNG MICHAEL Is it them?

MICHAEL Have they discovered that you've gone? You can't go back!

YOUNG MICHAEL I can't go back.

MICHAEL There'll be canings and beatings and detention and / Basher Beaumont –

YOUNG MICHAEL *(simultaneous)* Basher Beaumont

MICHAEL Right. The road is a bad idea. Too dangerous. Think, Michael –

YOUNG MICHAEL Think!

MICHAEL Quickly. Cut across the ditch, avoid the traffic, head cross-country, due north –

YOUNG MICHAEL Or north-west –

MICHAEL Follow the sun –

YOUNG MICHAEL But it's raining –

MICHAEL You're a compass, you're an arrow, you're –

A dog starts barking. **YOUNG MICHAEL** *jumps in fright.*

A stern voice cuts through the rain.

OLD MILLIE Who are you?

In the gloom, the figure of a woman appears. **OLD MILLIE** *(60s). She is wiry and carries a stick.*

What do you want?

She has a big dog on a leash. **JACK** *strains and growls at* **YOUNG MICHAEL**. *She doesn't see* **MICHAEL.**

I said. Who. Are you?

She comes closer to **YOUNG MICHAEL.** *She sees how young he is.*

Lost are you?

I'll bet you weren't counting on the rain.

The dog growls again.

The dog says you're on private property.

YOUNG MICHAEL I am?

OLD MILLIE Yes, you are. Didn't you notice?

YOUNG MICHAEL What?

OLD MILLIE The wall? That great stonking gate?

YOUNG MICHAEL *(nervously eyeing the dog)* Uh –

OLD MILLIE Run away from that school, did you?

YOUNG MICHAEL How did you –

OLD MILLIE I have eyes. Uniform.

JACK *barks.*

Jack! *(Softening)* Well, if it's anything like it used to be, I can't say I blame you.

YOUNG MICHAEL Oh.

OLD MILLIE They're not still feeding you semolina pudding and raspberry jam are they?

YOUNG MICHAEL Yes!

OLD MILLIE I can do better than semolina pudding. Right. We can't just stand here in the rain, can we? You'd better come inside. We'll give you some tea.

YOUNG MICHAEL *stands rooted to the spot.*

Come on! He won't bite. Neither will I.

The dog growls.

Jack! Be friendly. It's not often that we have visitors. *(To* **YOUNG MICHAEL***)* Come on.

MICHAEL I don't know why, but I never thought for one moment of running off –

YOUNG MICHAEL Is this your house?

OLD MILLIE You must be a new boy. Everybody knows this house.

YOUNG MICHAEL But it's –

MICHAEL Huge. As huge as my school. It looked as if it had grown out of the ground –

OLD MILLIE *(to* **YOUNG MICHAEL***)* Mind that wisteria root.

MICHAEL Smothered in creeper, there was hardly a brick or a stone to be seen.

And chimneys, dozens of them, pointing up through the clouds –

YOUNG MICHAEL *stumbles.*

OLD MILLIE Watch yourself –

MICHAEL Why did I go with her so readily? I've often wondered that –

OLD MILLIE Here. Take your wet things off.

MICHAEL I think it was because she expected me to –

OLD MILLIE Sit your self there by the stove.

MICHAEL Willed me to –

OLD MILLIE We'll have you dry in no time.

MICHAEL There was something in her eyes.

OLD MILLIE The kitchen's always the warmest place. Scones?

MILLIE*'s kitchen. Kettle whistling, fire crackling.*

YOUNG MICHAEL *sits, keeping an eye on* **JACK***, who watches him steadily.* **OLD MILLIE** *prepares tea and scones.*

I always have scones on a Sunday afternoon. And tea. Alright for you?

YOUNG MICHAEL Yes. Thank you.

OLD MILLIE Do you have a name?

YOUNG MICHAEL Michael.

OLD MILLIE You know, Michael, you'll be the first young man I've had in this house since Bertie. Two or three? What am I thinking. Growing boy like you. Three.

MICHAEL Those scones! So sweet and crumbly.

OLD MILLIE Nice to see a boy eat so well. Nice to have the company.

MICHAEL I can taste the butter now.

OLD MILLIE Oh, and I'm Millie.

MICHAEL So many details of that afternoon remain etched in my memory. The smell of the fire. The watchful snoring of Jack. The rattle of the kettle on the wood-stove, the rain –

OLD MILLIE Look at that. Sun's come out.

MICHAEL And Millie. Her eyes. So dark, so piercing.

OLD MILLIE Always does, you know.

MICHAEL As if she was searching for something. Something in me –

OLD MILLIE It may be difficult to remember sometimes, but there's always sun behind the clouds. And the clouds do go in the end, honestly.

MICHAEL Maybe she willed me to see it –

OLD MILLIE *looks out of the window.*

OLD MILLIE Ooh look, a perfect rainbow.

MICHAEL That moment when the rain stopped and the sun burst through the clouds and lit the hillside directly opposite the kitchen window –

YOUNG MICHAEL *(seeing the shadow)* What is that?

MICHAEL And the clouds cast a strange shadow over the hill, so it seemed, a shadow in the shape of a –

OLD MILLIE You'd better get back to school after you've had your tea, hadn't you?

YOUNG MICHAEL But –

OLD MILLIE You'll only be in trouble otherwise.

MICHAEL But, the –

OLD MILLIE Mustn't run off, you know. You've got to stick it out, do what's got to be done, no matter what. My Bertie taught me that, bless him. Or maybe I taught him. I can't remember now.

YOUNG MICHAEL *is mesmerised by the shadow.*

You remind me of him. That uniform. That look –

MICHAEL That shadow is still there, but now blue and shimmering in the sunlight. As if it's breathing, as if it is alive –

OLD MILLIE You're not seeing things. It's not magic. He's real enough.

YOUNG MICHAEL I'm sorry?

OLD MILLIE On the hill. He's our lion, Bertie's and mine. He's our butterfly lion.

MICHAEL Butterfly –?

YOUNG MICHAEL What do you mean?

What's a butterfly lion?

OLD MILLIE *gives him a long look. The atmosphere in the room seems to change.*

OLD MILLIE Would you like to know?

YOUNG MICHAEL *(unsure)* Yes...

OLD MILLIE Would you really like to know?

MICHAEL Suddenly I wasn't hungry any more –

YOUNG MICHAEL Yes. Please!

MICHAEL All I wanted now was to hear her story –

OLD MILLIE Have you ever been to Africa, Michael?

MICHAEL Yes! That was how she began –

YOUNG MICHAEL Africa! No.

MICHAEL That is, if I remember rightly –

OLD MILLIE Ah. Well. Drink up. You're going. We're both going.

A burst of voices fills the air – a South African song, rhythmic, thrilling.

MICHAEL *disappears.*

A farm in South Africa. 1904.

YOUNG BERTIE *(10) zooms across the kitchen, pausing only to pick up a scone from* **YOUNG MICHAEL***'s plate. Before* **YOUNG MICHAEL** *can object,* **YOUNG BERTIE** *is off, scaling a tree with the dexterity of a monkey.*

YOUNG BERTIE *pulls out a pair of binoculars and eagerly peers through them.*

A waterhole.

Animals! Elephants, hyena, giraffes, zebra – they interact with each other, with the waterhole, eating, preening, drinking, fighting, all jostling for prominence.

YOUNG BERTIE Father! FATHER! There are hippos at the water hole!

BERTIE*'s father,* **JAMES** *(40s) and a worker* **GEORGE** *(30s) appear. They carry supplies – food packs, water canteens, camping equipment – preparation for a departure. The day is hot and dry.*

What is the word for hippo, again?

OLD MILLIE Izimvubu.

YOUNG BERTIE Two! I can see two izimvubu at the waterhole – A mother and her baby!

OLD MILLIE *(to* **YOUNG MICHAEL***)* You know what they say about the hippo, don't you?

YOUNG MICHAEL No.

OLD MILLIE The worst-tempered creature on the earth –

YOUNG BERTIE And (one-two-three-four) FIVE zebra!

OLD MILLIE Idube.

YOUNG BERTIE Idube!

JAMES Bertie! Stop shouting.

YOUNG BERTIE But –

JAMES Your mother is resting. *(To* **GEORGE***)* Is that everything?

GEORGE Enough for five weeks this time, Mr. Andrews.

YOUNG BERTIE You're going for five weeks?

JAMES Bertie get down from that tree, please. George, fetch the rifles, we should get going before the sun is too high.

GEORGE *exits.*

YOUNG BERTIE But five weeks is such a long time.

JAMES The time will pass quickly. If you focus on your studies –

YOUNG BERTIE But you only just came back –

JAMES *turns on* **YOUNG BERTIE** *exasperatedly.*

JAMES Have you noticed any rain, Bertie?

YOUNG BERTIE No –

JAMES How dry the land is getting? How withered the grass on the veld?

YOUNG BERTIE Yes –

ISOBEL *(30s),* **JAMES***'s wife appears. She looks tired and thin, but puts on a brave face.*

JAMES No rain means no food. No food for our cattle –

YOUNG BERTIE I know / but –

JAMES It also means no water in the rivers, only mud in the water holes. Have you seen any wildebeest or impala by that waterhole of yours lately?

ISOBEL James –

JAMES No, he needs to understand. *(To* **BERTIE***)* Have you?

YOUNG BERTIE No –

JAMES So, no wildebeest and no impala means no food for the lions and leopards.

We can't afford to lose any more cattle –

YOUNG BERTIE I'm sorry.

JAMES *sighs.*

JAMES *(softening)* No, no little man. It's not your fault.

YOUNG BERTIE Well, can I come with you? I can help protect the cattle too.

JAMES *(laughs)* It's a man's work, Bertie.

YOUNG BERTIE Please.

JAMES No. I need you here. Your mother needs you.

YOUNG BERTIE Mother – I can ride! I know how to shoot –

ISOBEL Your father is right. It is very dangerous out there. You are much safer here in the compound –

YOUNG BERTIE I can look after myself!

ISOBEL Bertie –

GEORGE *appears with rifles.*

JAMES Are the horses ready, George?

GEORGE They are.

JAMES Right. Goodbye my dear.

ISOBEL Be safe.

JAMES And you. I've left the smaller rifle by the –

ISOBEL *(quickly)* I know.

Bertie, come and say goodbye to your father.

JAMES *(gently)* Look after your mother, little man. I'm relying on you.

YOUNG BERTIE Yes, father.

JAMES And remember – don't you EVER open that gate.

YOUNG BERTIE I won't.

JAMES I mean it. There are lions out there. Elephants, hyenas. You stay put. Do you hear, Bertie?

YOUNG BERTIE Yes, father.

JAMES See you in a few weeks.

He walks briskly off –.

YOUNG BERTIE Father!

JAMES *stops.*

Goodbye.

JAMES *nods and exits. Not a man for sentimental goodbyes.*

He's never actually ever – shot one, has he?

ISOBEL What?

YOUNG BERTIE Ibhubesi. Lion.

ISOBEL *(a flash of mischief)* Once. But he missed.

YOUNG BERTIE *stares yearningly after the departing men, the sound of horses, hooves fading.*

Come inside darling. It will be too hot soon.

YOUNG BERTIE But – I thought we might visit the waterhole –

ISOBEL Bertie! What did your father / just –

YOUNG BERTIE We could take the rifle –

ISOBEL How many times must we tell you? Look what happened in / *Peter and the Wolf.*

YOUNG BERTIE *(simultaneously) Peter and the Wolf.* I know!

ISOBEL I mean, it Bertie. It's not a place for humans. Look at it. Dry. Barren. Lonely. And the dust!

She rubs her fingers together.

It gets everywhere –

YOUNG BERTIE Do you hate it very much here, mother?

YOUNG BERTIE *can see how tired and unwell she is.*

ISOBEL *catches herself.*

ISOBEL Hate? No...no. It's...it's just – not like England. You wouldn't find any lions roaming around in England, for a start.

YOUNG BERTIE Will we have lessons today?

ISOBEL Perhaps later. I'm very tired. Read a book. I'll quiz you on it. *Around The World In Eighty Days.* That's a good one.

ISOBEL *falters, suddenly faint.*

YOUNG BERTIE Are you alright, mother?

ISOBEL It's just the heat.

She disappears. **YOUNG BERTIE** *is alone.*

YOUNG MICHAEL Is she –?

OLD MILLIE Malaria. Awful disease.

She hands **YOUNG MICHAEL** *a book – Around the World in Eighty Days.*

This might cheer him up.

YOUNG MICHAEL *hands it to* **YOUNG BERTIE**. *He flicks through it with some interest but soon abandons it to climb up the tree again.*

Go on.

YOUNG MICHAEL *also scales the tree. And settles next to* **YOUNG BERTIE**. **YOUNG BERTIE** *peers intently out at the waterhole.* **YOUNG MICHAEL** *follows his gaze.*

What can you see?

YOUNG BERTIE Izimvubu –

YOUNG MICHAEL Nothing.

YOUNG BERTIE Idube –

OLD MILLIE Then look deeper. Focus your gaze.

YOUNG BERTIE Ibhubesi –

YOUNG MICHAEL Where are the lions? I thought there were lions?

OLD MILLIE Another impatient boy. Lions take the time they take.

ISOBEL *appears.*

ISOBEL Come inside, Bertie. It's late.

YOUNG BERTIE Just another minute, mother. I'm waiting for the lions.

OLD MILLIE He could spend hours up there. He was very determined – even at that age.

ISOBEL The mosquitos will eat you alive.

YOUNG BERTIE Tomorrow could we go out on the veld?

ISOBEL Bertie!

YOUNG MICHAEL Is it really that dangerous?

ISOBEL There are black mamba snakes whose bite can kill you within ten minutes –

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**