

IN THE MOUTH OF THE WOLF

by Michael Morpurgo

Adapted by Simon Reade

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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ISBN 978-0-573-00082-9

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Extract from 'My family fought for peace, not for Brexit' – Michael Morpurgo, *Guardian*, 7/5/2018 printed with permission by Philippa Perry, Show Me The Rabbit literary agency: author representation, management & PR.

IN THE MOUTH OF THE WOLF was first produced as A Built By Barn Production at Barn Theatre, Cirencester, on 28th March 2025. The performance was directed by Philip Wilson, with set and costume design by Yoav Segal, lighting design by Ryan Day, sound design and music composition by Ella Wahlström, and accent and dialect coaching by Jan Haydn Rowles and Zoe Littleton. The Casting Director was Anthony Houghton and the Fight Director was Charlotte Price. The cast was as follows:

FRANCIS..... John Hastings
PIETER..... Shaun McCourt
NAN..... Helena Antoniou

FOREWORD

This is a story I grew up with in my childhood. It's basically the legend of our family, an extraordinary story of two brothers, Pieter and Francis. Pieter was an actor who had a clear view of the world where you have to stand up to tyrants and you have to defeat them. He went off and he was killed a year after joining the RAF; he was twenty-one. My mother kept his photograph on the wall of our house. He was, I think, her favourite brother. Because they were very, very close to each other in age. I saw my mother grieving. Every time it was his birthday. And every time it was November 11th and Remembrance Sunday, she'd be putting poppies by. I was just very aware that this grief lasted all her life and to some extent never left her. And that taught me a lot.

I always felt very connected to that war, not through history books, but through these two brothers. Having an uncle who faced the dilemma of do you fight, or do you stand on your principles and say war is wrong? A man who changed his mind in such an extraordinary way because his younger brother was killed had a profound impact on me.

Francis didn't put on a uniform. He didn't march up and down. He actually went and fought his war up close and personal with German occupiers in France. He felt things very, very strongly and so when he was a soldier, when he was a secret agent, he did that also with this enormous commitment. He was cool and he was calm, and people followed him because he was a pretty wonderful leader. He had massive responsibility on his shoulders, so I've got enormous admiration for him. I was lucky enough in later life to get to know him very well.

This is essentially a story about families and how these events affected them during a time of war. And there is relevance about the story because of what is happening today. Families are suffering because of conflict in Europe and Gaza. The echoes in it touch us more deeply because we are preoccupied with this now, whereas we weren't before. And that's dreadful. But it does give more power to the story, and I feel it's the right time for the play.

Michael Morpurgo, 2025

NOTE FROM THE ADAPTER

In the Mouth of the Wolf is based on Michael Morpurgo's true World War Two story about his uncles Francis and Pieter Cammaerts. Additionally, it also incorporates Francis's own words. Any additional material is imagined in good faith.

The staging can be simple, not least so that scenes can transform seamlessly in the blink of an eye. (Scene numbers and divisions are largely there for rehearsal ease only.) A bare stage without furniture creates an infinity of possibilities. Travelling in cars, aeroplanes, or on a motorbike can be achieved with a spotlit face, a flapping scarf, helmet and goggles, sound. Expressionist shafts of lighting, haze, moonlight, and an atmospheric soundscape will create the shifting moods, the changing landscapes – all set beneath a star-cloth, against a shifting sky cyclorama, on a bomb-blasted floorcloth. It could be that the design channels the black-and-white style of French *film noir* or British World War Two feature films. Above all, the character-driven play will be performed in such a way to maximise our experience of bearing witness to the motion of history, and to the emotion of the story.

Simon Reade, 2025

CHARACTERS

In the Mouth of the Wolf can be performed with up to thirty actors – or with as few as three:

FRANCIS CAMMAERTS – codename ‘Roger’, a.k.a. ‘Big Feet’/‘Grands Pieds’

NAN – Francis’s wife Nancy Cammaerts

PIETER CAMMAERTS – Francis’s brother, actor then RAF navigator

Between them, the actors who play **NAN** and **PIETER** can also play:

EAMONN ANDREWS – the Irish television presenter and personality

KIPPE – Pieter’s and Francis’s sister (and mother of Michael Morpurgo)

ÉMILE CAMMAERTS – Francis’s and Pieter’s Belgian father, professor, poet

ALAN WHITEHORN – schoolmaster

LEWIS – a schoolboy

HARRY RÉE – Francis’s friend and mentor

INTELLIGENCE OFFICER

HEADMASTER

TRIBUNAL CHAIR

TRADE UNIONIST

FARMHAND – a conscientious objector

MR. POTTER – codename for Major Selwyn Jepson, Military Intelligence Officer (and writer of thrillers)

SERGEANT – SOE training

INSTRUCTOR – SOE training

PILOT

AUGUSTE FLOIRAS – codename ‘Albert’, a.k.a. ‘Le Pianiste’, radio operator

GERMAN SOLDIER

SS OFFICER

CHRISTINE GRANVILLE – the alias of SOE agent codename ‘Pauline’, the Polish Countess (by marriage) Krystyna Skarbeck

MILICE – an unrepentant collaborator

MONSIEUR DUMAS – farmer

PAUL HÉRAUD – codename ‘Dumont’, freedom fighter *extraordinaire*

CLAUDE RENOIR – grandson of the painter, nephew of the film maker

ANOTHER GERMAN SOLDIER

ANOTHER MILICE

SCHENK – a Gestapo prison officer

GENERAL BUTLER – United States Army

MADAME FLOIRAS – Auguste’s wife

JURY FOREMAN
MICHAEL MORPURGO

The suggested ‘doubling’ is as follows: Characters in (brackets) may be pre-recorded voices or be present in the shadows.

PIETER

EAMONN ANDREWS	ALAN WHITEHORN	(INTELLIGENCE OFFICER)
(TRIBUNAL CHAIR)	FARMHAND	MR. POTTER
(INSTRUCTOR)	AUGUSTE	MILICE
MONSIEUR DUMAS	CLAUDE RENOIR	SCHENK
GENERAL BUTLER	(MICHAEL MORPURGO)	

NAN

KIPPE	ÉMILE CAMMAERTS	LEWIS
HARRY RÉE	HEADMASTER	(TRADE UNIONIST)
SERGEANT	PILOT	GERMAN SOLDIER
(SS OFFICER)	CHRISTINE	PAUL HÉRAUD
ANOTHER GERMAN SOLDIER)	(ANOTHER MILICE)	MADAME FLOIRAS
(JURY FOREMAN)		

STAGING NOTES

Joanna (Jay) Cammaerts, Nan’s and Francis’s daughter, writes:

“To catch Francis’s voice, it is important to understand that at heart, Francis was not an Englishman, he was a European. His first and most powerful influence was his Belgian father – Francis and his five siblings were home-schooled until they were eight years old. Francis didn’t do much small talk. Speech had always to be purposeful to be of interest to him. He didn’t use English slang words or phrases either, probably because his father wouldn’t have been familiar with them. Francis had a powerful physical presence, even when he was silent. Being six-foot-three wasn’t a bad thing either, as Nan was known to say when the subject came up.”

THANKS

With thanks to: Christopher Bianchi, Jonathan Broadbent; Aioffe Kennan; Anthony Houghton, Iwan Lewis, Liam McMullan; Jay Cammaerts; Michael & Clare Morpurgo; Marc Berlin & Julia Wyatt; Alison Reid; Helena Antoniou, John Hastings, Shaun McCourt, Yoav Segal and Philip Wilson.

NOTE ON SONGS

The following recordings were used in the original production. Please see the Music and Third-Party Materials Use Note on page iii.

“Frankie & Johnny”

- Louis Armstrong
- Bunny Berigan & His Orchestra (1932)
- Jimmie Rodgers (1929)

For Joanna (Jay) Cammaerts

PART ONE

*(A medley of the songs we will hear in the show plays before the curtain rises.)**

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Scene One This Is Your Life

(BBC Television Theatre, Shepherd's Bush. 1958. A sparse Green Room backstage – a suspended black box with cut-out letters illuminated from within by a red lightbulb:)

(‘Recording in progress.’)

*(We hear, offstage, the climax of the 1958 transmission of BBC Television’s This is Your Life, which, like pretty much everything in this story, really did happen [though we’ll be fluid with time and years throughout.] Hosted by the amiable Dubliner **EAMONN ANDREWS.**)*

EAMONN ANDREWS. *(Offstage.)* Francis Cammaerts – D.S.O., Légion d’Honneur – husband, father, headmaster and war hero of the French Resistance – This – Is – Your – Life!

(The familiar ‘waaah-wah-wah-WAH!’ theme tune plays out to applause. Brief silence. After a few moments an electric bell blasts, the red-lit box switches off, and six-foot-three **FRANCIS CAMMAERTS** bursts through the door – Nordic-looking, moustache, early forties – holding his red leather-bound This is Your Life folder. Followed swiftly by his wife **NANCY ‘NAN’ CAMMAERTS** – well presented, similar age.)*

NAN. What’s wrong, Francis?

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(**FRANCIS** *says nothing, hands her the folder.*)

(**EAMONN ANDREWS** *swans in [as if with entourage in tow], grinning, mid-thirties:*)

EAMONN ANDREWS. Mr Cammaerts: I hope we did you proud, sir.

FRANCIS. Well, I wasn't expecting that.

EAMONN ANDREWS. Nobody does. That's the secret of *This is Your Life* – you take your subject by surprise. But then you'd know all about that.

FRANCIS. (*Shaking head.*) You skirted over all my important work in education since the war.

EAMONN ANDREWS. Less is more!

FRANCIS. Why me? I'm not rich and famous.

EAMONN ANDREWS. (*Confidentially.*) Talking of which, I'll let you in on another little secret: we've got Richard Burton lined up soon –

NAN. The movie star?

EAMONN ANDREWS. (*Nodding.*) – if Liz Taylor agrees.

FRANCIS. You turned all the attention onto me.

EAMONN ANDREWS. That's the nature of television stardom. And you have a very telegenic personality, Mr Cammaerts, if I may say so.

FRANCIS. But I'm no 'star.'

EAMONN ANDREWS. Try telling that to the executives! You'll be gobbled up by all the publicity, I'd like to bet.

FRANCIS. (*To himself.*) *In bocca al lupo.*

EAMONN ANDREWS. I beg your pardon?

NAN. (*Translating.*) Into the mouth of the wolf.

EAMONN ANDREWS. Yes. I suppose it is a bit like that.
(*Shaking FRANCIS's hand.*) Good to know you, sir.
(*Shaking NAN's hand.*) Mrs Cammaerts.

(*And EAMONN ANDREWS flashes them his dazzling, lopsided grin one more time before he sashays off as smoothly as he appeared.*)

FRANCIS. I'm not the hero. I'm anything but. It's those who aren't here who were the true heroes.

NAN. I'm here.

FRANCIS. I'm sorry, Nan, of course you are. And you've held my hand, guided me in all things, as ever.

NAN. Through thick and thin.

FRANCIS. Yes. But I want to try to honour every one of them. Now more than ever.

NAN. I can help you.

FRANCIS. They are all dead, Nan.

NAN. Tell me about them.

FRANCIS. Backstage in the Green Room of the BBC Television Theatre? Anyway, you know all about them.

NAN. Do I? Until tonight, you've hardly spoken about the war.

FRANCIS. You won't know them if you can't see them.

NAN. I'll see them.

FRANCIS. How?

NAN. In my mind's eye.

FRANCIS. Where to begin?

(*A cacophonous soundscape of FRANCIS's life, of what we're about to see: school children, marching, radio broadcasts of*

*Churchill, Hitler, air raid sirens, alarm bells,
aeroplanes, firestorms, radio interference,
bombing raids and so on, to a climax, then
suddenly –)*

(Silence.)

(Then an owl hoots...)

Scene Two

Dark Night

(...An owl hoots.)

(Cammaerts's home, Radlett, Herts., c. 1924.)

(In the dark, FRANCIS, eight, sleeps with a blanket.)

(His younger brother PIETER, six, creeps into Francis's bedroom. Outside stars twinkle.)

PIETER. *(Whispers.)* Francis?

FRANCIS. Hm?

PIETER. You awake?

FRANCIS. Fast asleep.

PIETER. Oh.

(PIETER starts to retreat, then realises he's being mocked:)

If you're asleep, then how are you awake enough to say that you're asleep?

(FRANCIS has been rumbled.)

FRANCIS. *Touché.*

(PIETER snuggles up with FRANCIS beneath the blanket. FRANCIS pulls himself up on one elbow.)

What's all this then, little brother?

PIETER. I don't like the dark.

FRANCIS. You're not afraid, are you, Piet?

PIETER. Might be. Why, aren't you?

FRANCIS. Me? Course not!

(He is. They both are.)

Listen.

PIETER. Can't hear anything.

FRANCIS. Listen harder.

*(The wind in the trees; the snaffle of hedgehogs
in the leaves; the owl.)*

Peaceful, isn't it?

PIETER. It's as loud as day!

FRANCIS. It's a deep silence out here in Hertfordshire.

PIETER. Like Papa's forests in the Ardennes. Alive and kicking.

FRANCIS. The world never sleeps, Piet. The universe is wide awake. Look at the stars.

(The sky twinkles with galaxies.)

PIETER. Beautiful.

FRANCIS. Millions of suns – light years away. And probably all burnt out by now. Dead.

PIETER. No! Really?

FRANCIS. Look – that bright one, larger than the others? That's Sirius: the Dog Star.

PIETER. Woof!

FRANCIS. I'm not joking...it's Sirius!

PIETER. Very funny. Why's it so bright?

FRANCIS. I suppose because it's one of the closest. It belongs to Orion, the Great Hunter. Look! There he is.

PIETER. Where?

FRANCIS. Can you see those three stars close together?

PIETER. Oh, yes!

FRANCIS. That's his belt.

PIETER. What about those fainter stars behind?

FRANCIS. His sword.

PIETER. What's that other bright star called?

FRANCIS. That's the Pole Star. Sailors navigate the oceans by it because it's always above the North Pole. Know that one, Piet, and you'll never get lost.

PIETER. How do you know all this?

FRANCIS. I'm a genius.

PIETER. No, really, how?

FRANCIS. Papa taught me.

(PIETER yawns.)

PIETER. Nighty, night, Francis.

FRANCIS. Night, night, Pieter.

FRANCIS & PIETER. Hope the bedbugs don't bite...

(Lights fade. Dawn chorus...)

Scene Three Dream Days

(...Dawn chorus, the next day. In the garden.)

*(The laughter and excitement of children –
FRANCIS, PIETER and their sister KIPPE.)*

*(They sing a quick burst of ‘You spotted snakes
with double tongue’ from Mendelssohn’s ‘A
Midsummer Night’s Dream.’)*

*(FRANCIS stands tall, arms outstretched,
a ‘tree’.)*

FRANCIS. Why am I always the ‘tree’?

KIPPE. Because the play’s set in a wood outside Athens
and you’re the tallest.

PIETER. I can be Bottom – and let me play the lion, too!

KIPPE. No, Pieter, you can play the log – that Bottom sits on.

PIETER. That your fat bottom sits on!

FRANCIS. Pieter’s the best actor, better than any of us.

KIPPE. But he’s the youngest. And we need something to
sit on.

FRANCIS. *(Peacemaker.)* You’ll make a fine log, Pieter.

PIETER. And you will make a fine tree.

KIPPE. *(As Theseus.)* “Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
draws on apace. Four happy days bring in
Another moon...”

(An owl hoots...)

Scene Four Ardennes Forest

(...An owl hoots. The dappled, moonlit Forest of Ardennes; some weeks later.)

ÉMILE. *(Almost quoting 'As You Like It.')* Well, this is the Forest of Ardennes...

FRANCIS. I love the holidays we spend here, Papa.

ÉMILE. It's where I grew up, Francis. Here. In Belgium. At the heart of Europe.

FRANCIS. We're Europeans, aren't we, Papa?

ÉMILE We are.

FRANCIS. And we're British.

ÉMILE. We are. English.

FRANCIS. I love being here with you Papa, just me and you, all to myself –

(PIETER, off, shrieks 'En garde!')

ÉMILE. And Pieter.

(PIETER dashes on with a stick, using it as a sword, fighting off imaginary foes.)

Who are you fighting this time, Pieter?

PIETER. Wolves.

FRANCIS. Wolves? No need to fight them. Just face them head on, look brave, and clap your hands. They'll soon lose interest.

PIETER. *(Wary of the imaginary wolves.)* I don't think so. They're coming up close, they're baring their teeth, they want to eat me up, tear the whole family to pieces! I have to fight them.