

**Archie Dobson's War – drama script**

Written by Rob John

**Episode One**

**Scene One**

*Interior. The Dobson's dining room. May 1914.*

Mabel: I don't care what you say. I am not going to Little Burside and that's final.

Archie: **That's my sister, Mabel Dobson. She's twelve years old and when she says something's final it usually is.**

Edward: Come on, Mabel. It's only one day. They're your cousins. Don't you think it'd be nice to see your cousins?

Archie: **My father. Edward Dobson. He's head foreman at Claxton's jam factory here in Glaveston. He's in charge of over a hundred people in that factory but even he can't tell our Mabel what to do.**

Mabel: No, father, I do not think it'd be nice to see my cousins. I don't like them. I'm not going.

Edward: Alright please yourself.

Archie: **Told you.**

Agnes: Mabel. Listen please...

**Archie: My mother. Agnes Dobson. She'll probably plead with Mabel and say things like 'do it for me'.**

Agnes: Listen, Mabel. Aunt Kathleen is my sister. I don't get to see her very often. Walter and Lizzie are your cousins. Come to Little Burside, Mabel. Please? Do it for me?

**Archie: See? You don't have to be a mind reader to see what's coming next in this family.**

Mabel: I don't like Little Burside. I hate the countryside. Hate the mud and the cow stink and I hate their pokey little house and I hate drinking tea from their horrible cracked cups and...

Edward: Archie wants to go to Little Burside. Don't you Archie?

**Archie: That's me he's talking about. Archie Dobson. 10 last birthday. February 16th 1914.**

Archie: Yes, father, I like Little Burside. I like the country. I like Walter and Lizzie too.

Agnes: See Mabel, Archie wants to go. He wants to see his cousins.

Mabel: I can't think why. Lizzie's so boring and Walter's just a stupid boy.

Archie: Walter's not a boy. He's eighteen and he's not stupid either. He's funny and he's clever and he can lift two sacks of spuds in each hand and he's taught his dog to do tricks and you can't do that if you're stupid.

Mabel: He's a farm labourer, Archie. Like his Dad.

Archie: So? Nothing wrong with that. I wouldn't mind working on a farm. I like farms and I like Walter. I wish I had a brother. Wish Walter was my brother.

Mabel: Well good for you Archie. You go and see your very clever cousin. I'm staying at home.

**Archie: Then my mother went very still. She looked really sad...like she was about to cry...and that changed everything. See, people think Mabel's always cross and harsh but it's not true. Least it's not always true. There's another side to Mabel which people don't always see. Like just now. Mabel looked at mother and went and held her hand and she said...**

Mabel: I'm sorry mother...I'm sorry. When are we supposed to be going to Little Burside?

Agnes: Sunday.

Mabel: I suppose I could go. I suppose it wouldn't be too bad.

Edward: We can go on the new bus! They just started a new service last week. A petrol driven motor bus. No more horse trams for us. It goes at nearly twenty miles an hour!

Mabel: I suppose I could go. It's only one day after all.

**Archie:**

**So that was it. It was all agreed. On the following Sunday we were all off to the country on the motor bus to see our cousins. I was so excited. I couldn't wait to see Walter.**

**Scene Two**

*Exterior. The Carter's farm.*

Walter: On Sunday? I can't. I'm going out.

Kathleen: No, Walter, you are not going out. Not on Sunday. The Dobsons are coming and you have to be here. I told you.

Walter: An' I told you Ma. I can't. I'm going out.

Lizzie: He's going to see that girl.

Kathleen: What girl?

Lizzie: That girl Annie. She's a maid up at the Burside Hall. Sunday's her day off isn't it Walter. That's who he's seeing.

Walter: Quiet, Lizzie. Don't listen to her Ma. I ain't seeing that girl.

Lizzie: I seen you with her.

Walter: I don't even know anyone called Annie. Honest Ma, I ain't seeing Annie.

Kathleen: Yes well you're not seeing anyone this Sunday. Your cousins are coming.

Walter: But I'm busy on Sunday.

Lizzie: If I've got to spend the whole day talking to Mabel the least he can do is be here too. Tell him Ma. It's not fair if he's allowed to go out.

Kathleen: Don't worry he's not going anywhere.

Walter: But, Ma, I've already made arrangements.

Lizzie: Yeah with that Annie.

Walter: Lizzie -

Kathleen: Joe, tell him he's staying in on Sunday.

Joe: Course he's staying in on Sunday. We're all staying in on Sunday. Haven't you heard? The royal family's paying us a visit.

Kathleen: Don't start Joe.

Joe: Well that's what it feels like. You been dusting and polishing all week like the king himself was expected. It's only your sister and her kids. Just cos she married a foreman in a jam factory that don't make them special. Just cos...

Kathleen: Stop it please. Everyone. My sister and her family are coming on Sunday. Just be here and be nice to them. That is all I ask...please?

Joe: Yeah. Sorry. Of course. I'll be here. And I'll be nice. And so will Walter. Won't you, Walter. You'll be here on Sunday and you'll play with your little cousin Archie. Alright?

Walter:                    Alright.

Kathleen:                Promise?

Walter:                    Promise.

Kathleen:                Lizzie?

Lizzie:                    I'll be here.

Kathleen:                And you'll be nice to Mabel.

Lizzie:                    I promise.

Kathleen:                Thank you. Now are you going to feed those chickens Lizzie or just stare at 'em all day.

Lizzie:                    I'm doing it. Look I'm doing it.

Kathleen:                Good. Right Joe help me carry this washing in.

Joe:                        Right you are.

Lizzie:                    Walter?

Walter:                    What.

Lizzie:                    D'you think Annie could get me a job in Burside Hall. D'you think you could ask her next time you see her?

Walter:                    Don't know what you're talking about. Don't know any Annie at the big house.

Lizzie: She's pretty.

Walter: You think so?

Lizzie: Yeah.

Walter: So do I.

### **Scene Three**

**Archie: Next Sunday we went to Little Burside on the new bus. We had a nice day. The sun shone, Mabel behaved herself and we had tea with sandwiches and cake but the best bit of our whole day was when me and Walter went out on the field with his dog Patch.**

*Exterior. A field outside the Carter's cottage.*

Archie: Down Patch! Down! See Walter. He did it. He did what I told him.

Walter: I think he likes you Archie.

Archie: I like him too. Wish I had a dog. Wish I lived in the country then I could have one.

Walter: You want to live in the country do you Archie?

Archie: I do. Wish I worked on a farm like you. Maybe I'll do that when I grow up.



Walter: Nah. You don't want to do that.

Archie: I might. I think I'd like it.

Walter: You wouldn't. It's hard work is farming. Freezing cold in the winter and blistering hot the summer. You're either shivering or sweating in this job.

Archie: But it's interesting though isn't it? Growing things and looking after animals. I wouldn't mind doing that.

Walter: You would.

Archie: Why?

Walter: It's boring Archie. Nothing ever changes. It's the same routine over and over again. You plough, you sow and then you harvest and as soon as you've harvested you're ready to start ploughing again and so it goes on season after season year after year. I'm bored Archie. And that's why I'm packing it in.

Archie: Packing it in? I thought you liked being a farmer.

Walter: I hate it Archie. I only do it cos that's all the work there is round here. But I ain't doing it for ever.

Archie: What're you going to do instead then?

Walter: Don't know yet but something'll turn up. You wait. You'll see.

Archie: Oh. Right.

**Archie:**                   **Me and Walter walked back towards the house. In the garden Mabel and Lizzie were sitting on a bench in the sunshine talking. Looked like Mabel was doing most of the talking...as usual.**

Mabel:                    So you're going to get a job up at Burside Hall are you Lizzie?

Lizzie:                    Yes. Walter's girlfriend's going to get me one. Going to be a housemaid.

Mabel:                    You're going to be a servant?

Lizzie:                    No! I'm going to be a housemaid.

Mabel:                    A housemaid is a servant. You'll be serving people. Rich people. That's what housemaids do. They serve rich people.

Lizzie:                    So? What's wrong with that?

Mabel:                    I'd never do that. I'd never take orders from people and do what they told me. Anyway when I'm older I'm going to be rich and have servants of my own.

Lizzie:                    You're going to marry some rich fellow are you?

Mabel:                    No. No I'm not. I'm not getting married at all. I'm going to find a way to make a lot of money all by myself. You don't need some man to make you rich.

Lizzie:                    Oh. So how're you going to get rich then?

Mabel:                    Don't know haven't decided yet.

Lizzie: Oh.

Archie: So when are you going to pack in farming then Walter?

Walter: Soon Archie. Very soon. There's got to be something more exciting than this. There's going to be an adventure in my life Archie. I know it. I can feel it in my bones. My adventure's somewhere out there waiting for me. Just got to find out where it is.

#### **Scene Four**

*Military drum beats throughout this passage*

**Archie: I never knew there was going to be a war. Nobody told me a war was coming. You started hearing things that summer...bits and pieces...but nothing that made any sense to me.**

Newspaper vendor: Read all about it! Read all about it! Archduke Ferdinand shot and killed in Sarajevo. Archduke Ferdinand shot and killed in Sarajevo. Read all about it! Read all about it.

**Archie: I didn't know what it meant. Archduke Ferdinand? Sarajevo? They were just names of foreign people in places far away.**

Newspaper V: Read all about it! Austria-Hungary sends troops to the Serbian frontier. Russian army on the move! Read all about it!

**Archie:** **Didn't bother me. Russians, Austrians, Hungarians (sic) moving their armies about. Had nothing to do with us here in Britain.**

Newspaper V: Read all about it! Austria Hungary declares war on Serbia!  
Read all about it!

**Archie:** **I didn't even know where Serbia was.**

Newspaper V: Read all about it! Germany declares war on France. Read all about it!

**Archie:** **So what? I spent the summer holiday of 1914 working on my football skills. I was planning to get into the school team the next term so I had to practise didn't I?**

Newspaper V: Read all about it! Britain sends warning to Germany. Read all about it!

**Archie:** **My biggest worry was not getting picked for the team. Last thing on my mind was war. And then one day...one morning....we were having breakfast...and I was just putting some butter on a piece of toast when my father started reading to us from his newspaper. War had been declared. He read us the words that Mr Asquith the Prime Minister had said in parliament the day before.**

Edward: "With the utmost reluctance and with infinite regret, his majesty's government have been compelled to put this country in a state of war..."

**Archie:** **And that was it. There was going to be a war. I thought people would be scared and worried but it wasn't like that. People seemed pleased. Next day father read out more from his paper...**

**Edward:** "In London crowds enthusiastically gathered outside Buckingham Palace...when it became known that war had been declared... The news was received with tremendous cheering, which grew into a deafening roar when King George, Queen Mary and the Prince of Wales appeared on the balcony."

**Archie:** **Mabel wasn't impressed.**

**Mabel:** That's just stupid.

**Archie:** **She didn't understand what all the fuss was about.**

**Mabel:** What are they cheering for? Why would people cheer when there's going to be a war?

**Archie:** **But I knew why they were cheering cos deep down inside I felt a bit excited too.**

**Scene Five**

Edward: It won't amount to anything. It's just a storm in a teacup.

**Archie: That's what my Dad said as were walking home from church next Sunday.**

Edward: It'll all be over by Christmas.

Mabel: Why were so many people in church? We don't usually have that many.

Agnes: It's because of the war Mabel.

Mabel: People want to go to church because there's a war?

Agnes: Yes.

Mabel: Why?

Agnes: I don't know. They just do. Perhaps they want to say a prayer.

Archie: Father why are we having a war? I don't understand.

Edward: It's complicated, Archie. Very complicated.

Archie: Explain it to me then.

Edward: Another time perhaps.

Archie: Will it really be over by Christmas?

Edward: Yes of course it will.

Mabel: What are they praying for?

Agnes: Who?

Mabel: All these people who came to church today. What are they praying for? Are they praying that we win and the Germans lose?

Agnes: I don't know Mabel. How do I know what they're praying for?

Mabel: Do they think God's on our side?

Archie: How do you know it'll be over by Christmas?

Edward: Because...because it just a storm in a teacup.

Mabel: Is God on our side mother?

Edward: Children, children. No more questions. Anybody hungry? I've heard a rumour there's leg of lamb for dinner .

**Archie: That's when we heard the music and the cheering. On the corner of the street near our house there was a crowd of people listening to a man in uniform making a speech...**

Recruiting Officer: So are you going to just stand by and let others get there before you boys? Join today boys! Your country needs you and she needs you now! How will you feel if you're the only lad in your street not in uniform? How will you feel if you're the

only one who gets left behind when all the fun starts? If you join up now you can stay together with your mates. Because you join up with your pals, you train with your pals and when the time comes you go and fight side by side with your pals. How does that sound boys?

Cont.: Sign up today boys! Who wants to sign today? That's right...form a queue boys. Plenty of room for everyone. Sign up today!

Archie: Will you have to go in the army father? Will you have to go to war?

Edward: No-one has to go to war Archie. Only people who want to. People who volunteer. Anyway they wouldn't want me. I'm 36. I'm far too old.

Archie: Oh.

Edward: And someone's got to keep Claxton's running. Someone's got to make sure people have jam on their breakfast table every morning.

Archie: Right.

Edward: And anyway it's all going to be over by Christmas. You'll see. Come on...

**Archie: As we walked down the hill towards our house my mother took my hand and she said...**



Agnes: I'm not sure this is going to be a quick war love. When I was in church I said a prayer and thanked God that you were only ten.

Archie: Wish I was older. If I was older I'd volunteer. I bet Walter does. Bet he volunteers.

Agnes: He won't. His mother'll never let him. I know my sister. She'll never let him go.

### **Scene Six**

Kathleen: You're not joining up Walter and that's final - and there's nothing more to be said.

Walter: Thanks for bringing up our dinner, Ma.

Kathleen: Walter, listen to me. You are not to volunteer. Do you understand?

Walter: Put the food on that bale will you, ma? We're starving ain't we Pa.

Joe: Could eat a horse, me. What you brought us Kath?

Kathleen: Never mind about your stomachs. I'm serious Walter. We've got to talk about this.

Walter: Not now Ma. I'm trying to build a haystack.

Kathleen: Listen to me.

Walter: No, Ma - you listen to me. I've made me mind up. I want to do this. All my life I've been waiting for an adventure. I knew that one day something'd happen. And now it has. This is it. My adventure.

Kathleen: That's foolish talk Walter. I thought you had more sense than that. A war isn't an adventure. Only a fool thinks that.

Walter: Yeah well maybe I'm a fool Ma but I'm going anyway. My mind's made up.

Walter: Oh potato pie...my favourite. Thanks Ma.

Kathleen: Say something, Joe. Tell him he's not going.

Joe: He's eighteen Kath. He's a grown man. He'll make his own mind up ....and anyway it's all going to be over by Christmas.

Kathleen: Oh yes? And how exactly do you know that?

Joe: Everyone says so. Storm in a teacup.

Kathleen: Please...listen to me...

Walter: No, Ma. You listen to me. I can't miss this. This is the most exciting thing that's ever happened. There's eight boys from Little Burside joining up. Eight of us from this village all joining together and I ain't going to be the one left behind. This is my chance to do something. Chance of a lifetime. I ain't going to miss it. Anyway it's too late.

Kathleen: Too late for what?

Walter: I already done it.

Kathleen: What?

Walter: Already joined. Went into Glaveston yesterday with the other lads. We all signed up together. Got to report for training next Friday.

Kathleen: Oh Walter -

Walter: Well don't just walk off, Ma. It'll be alright. I'll be together with the lads. We'll look after each other. Ma!

Joe: Let her go boy. She'll get used to it. Just got to give her a bit of time.

### **Scene Seven**

**Archie: Walter came round to see us on the day he went to war. Came round to say goodbye.**

Walter: Well what d'you think Archie. Proper soldier, ain't I?

Archie: Yeah. Proper soldier. You look great.

Mabel: Not that great. Your jacket doesn't even fit. The sleeves are too short.

Walter: No they're not.

Mabel: Looks like you've been given someone else's jacket Walter.  
Or maybe it's shrunk in the rain.

Archie: Don't listen to her Walter. She's just being silly.

Mabel: It's not me that's being silly. I'm not the one dressing up and  
playing at soldiers.

Archie: What was it like Walter? The training. Was it tough?

Walter: It was alright for me cos I was quite fit what with all the farm  
work an' that. But some of 'em had a really bad time. Some of  
'em couldn't march to the end of the road without having a  
coughing fit. There was so much to learn though Archie. Apart  
from physical training you got to learn, marching, field craft,  
trenching, rifle drill, bayonet drill.

Archie: What's a bayonet?

Walter: It's like a long knife. Look. It fits on the end of your rifle...

Walter: ...like this...

Archie: What do you do with it?

Mabel: You stick it in people and kill them don't you Walter.

Walter: Only if they come too close. Probably won't ever happen.

Archie: Can I hold your rifle?

Walter: Yeah if you want to. Here.

Archie: Phew! It's heavy.

Walter: You get used to it. Lee Enfield 0.303. Best gun in the world.

Archie: Is it loaded?

Walter: Nah. We don't get our ammunition pouches till we get across.

Archie: Across where? Where are you going exactly?

Walter: I dunno. They don't tell you. Not exactly. Somewhere in France I suppose. I can't wait. I ain't ever been anywhere and now I'm going on a ship all the way to France. I can't wait.

Mabel: You make it sound like you're going on holiday.

Archie: I wish I was going with you, Walter. I wish I was old enough to join.

Walter: You'll have to wait a bit for your turn Archie.

Archie: Do you think this war will last long enough for me to join in?

Walter: No not this war. This one won't last long. We'll see off those Germans in a couple of months and then we'll...

Mabel: ...be home for Christmas?

Walter: Yeah. Something like that.

Archie: Do you know why we're fighting the Germans, Walter? My Dad says it's complicated.

Walter: Your Dad's right. It is complicated. Too complicated for kids to understand anyway.

Mabel: He doesn't know. You don't know, do you?

Archie: Of course he knows. Don't listen to her, Walter. She's daft.

Mabel: He's the one that's daft. 'Oooh I'm going on a big ship all the way to France. I can't wait.' It's not me that's daft.

Walter: Yeah. Well I got to go anyway. Can't be late for the big parade. You coming down to watch us leave?

Mabel: No thank you. I'll say goodbye here.

Walter: That's what my ma said. She doesn't want to come and see me off. Said she'd be too sad. Right. Bye then Mabel.

Mabel: Bye Walter. Good luck. Take care.

Archie: I'm coming Walter. I'm not going to miss this. I'll walk with you.

**Archie: So Walter and me walked down the hill towards the town square...**

Archie: I'm going to write to you, Walter.

Walter: Good lad. Thanks.

Archie: Will you write back?

Walter: Course I will.

**Archie:** And as I walked through the streets of Glaveston with my cousin Walter in his uniform I felt like the proudest boy in the whole world.

**Archie:** The square outside the town hall was full of soldiers and there were crowds of people come to see the soldiers off. Suddenly we spotted Uncle Joe and Aunt Kath.

**Walter:** Ma - I thought you weren't coming.

**Kathleen:** I changed my mind.

**Joe:** Well what do you think of him Archie? What do you think of your cousin Walter in his uniform?

**Archie:** I think he looks fine. I wish I had a uniform. Wish I was going too.

**Joe:** Me too lad. But you're too young and I'm too old so we'll both have to leave it to Walter this time.

**Archie:** I wondered what they'd say to Walter. Wondered what my mother and father would say to me if I was going off to war. In the end Uncle Joe just shook Walter's hand and said:

**Joe:** Good luck lad. You take good care of yourself now.

**Archie:** Aunt Kath didn't say anything. She just hugged Walter and held on to him like she didn't want to let him go. And then suddenly all the men were lining up and the Sergeant Major shouted out...

Sergeant Major: Company...shoulder arms!

Sergeant Major: Company...by the right...quick march!

**Archie:** **I got to the front of the crowd and I could see Walter and as he marched past me he winked at me and then they were round the corner and gone. It was the most exciting thing I'd ever seen in my whole life.**