

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

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**Episode 2**

**Scene One**

**Archie:** So my cousin Walter joined up and off he went. By October 1914 people were saying it might not be a quick war after all.

I tried to find out what was happening by listening to what people were saying and reading my father's newspaper and it seemed to me like it wasn't going too well...

**Sergeant:** Fix bayonets!

Keep together lads...Move in a line...Keep moving forward...

**Archie:** There were battles in France and Belgium...Mons and Ypres. The newspaper didn't say we lost them...

**Sergeant:** Stretcher bearer...

**Archie:** ...but they didn't say we won them either. My sister Mabel said...

**Mabel:** It won't be over by Christmas. It's going to go on for years this war. Years and years probably.

Edward: I hope not Mabel. I really hope not. Things are difficult enough at Claxton's as it is. We might even have to close down.

Agnes: Don't be silly, Edward. Claxton's has been making jam in this town for fifty years. It's not going to close down just because there's a war.

Edward: Well we can't carry on like this, Agnes. Every day men are leaving the factory to volunteer. How are we supposed to keep the place going if everyone's running off playing at being soldiers? Who's going to do the work? I tell you if they can't get this war polished off by Christmas there'll be no more jam coming out of Claxton's in the New Year.

Mabel: It won't be finished by Christmas.

Archie: How do you know that?

Mabel: Maude Thompson at school said so.

Archie: How does she know?

Mabel: Her brother's in the army and he says so. Maude's brother says the Germans are really well armed and they've got more soldiers than us and it's going to us take years and years to beat them. Maude's brother's come home because he got wounded.

Archie: Did he? What happened to him?

Mabel: He got his arm blown off.

Agnes: Mabel!

Mabel: In an explosion. In a battle.

Agnes: Mabel, please.

Mabel: Maude's brother said it was terrible. They got stuck in trenches for weeks somewhere in Belgium and then the Germans pounded them with shells and every time they tried to get out of their trenches to attack they got shot at with machine guns.

Agnes: Mabel. Please!

Mabel: Maude's brother said the mud's so deep that a man could drown in it and you don't get any sleep for about a month and there're rats the size of dogs...

Agnes: Enough! We don't want to hear about such things while we're having our breakfast. Edward, tell her.

Edward: Perhaps we should change the subject eh, Mabel? Ah that sounds like the post. Bring it in will you Mabel please.

Mabel: I'm only saying what...

Edward: ....Maude's brother said. Yes I know!

Mabel: It's a postcard...Look – it's a postcard from Walter.

Archie: From Walter? I want to see it. Did he get my letter? Read it to me.

Edward: Steady on, Archie. Read it yourself. Read it out loud if you like. I'm sure we'd all like to hear what he's got to say.

Archie: *Dear Aunt Agnes and Uncle Edward*  
*Just a note to say that everything's fine here. I'm with a good bunch of lads from home. We're quite safe and snug at the moment. The food is nice and our sergeant is a good fellow. Say hello to Mabel and Archie for me. And thank Archie for writing to me. I enjoyed reading his letter and I will write one for him when I get a moment.*  
*Best regards to you all.*  
*Walter.*  
*PS. I'm sure we're going to win this war very quick and we'll all be home soon.*

He got my letter. He's writing to me!

Agnes: See...Mabel. Walter's fine. Sounds like he's having quite a nice time.

Mabel: If he's telling the truth.

Archie: Course he's telling the truth. Why would he lie?

Mabel: Think about it Archie. Work it out for yourself.

**Archie: I did think about it. Thought about it all that day and I decided that Mabel was wrong. Walter would never tell a lie. He wasn't that sort of person. He wasn't the sort of person to tell lies.**

### **Scene Two**

**Archie:** **Next day at school I got into trouble with our teacher Mr Turner. Got into trouble for asking a question.**

**Teacher:** Good morning, class 4...

Sit down...quietly! Some of you will have noticed that there is an empty chair in class 4 this morning. Thomas Metcalf is not with us because yesterday his family received news that his brother Frederick has been killed fighting in France. Frederick was a pupil at this school only six years ago. Just six years ago Frederick sat in this very classroom. He was a good pupil. Worked hard. Did his best. A credit to his family and to this school. Now I want you all to take a few moments to think about Frederick Metcalf and the great sacrifice that he has made.

**Archie:** **I thought for a little while about Frederick Metcalf and his great sacrifice and then I put my hand up...**

**Teacher:** Yes? Dobson? You have a question?

**Archie:** Yes, sir. Please sir why are we having this war?

**Teacher:** What?

**Archie:** I don't really understand what the war is about? Why exactly are we fighting the Germans?

**Teacher:** Archie Dobson - it is not for you to ask why we are fighting the Germans. We're fighting them because...they are the

enemy and that's all a boy of your age needs to understand!  
Understand?

Archie: Yes, sir. Sorry, sir.

### **Scene Three**

**Archie: Christmas came and went in Glaveston. It was a funny kind of Christmas. Felt strange eating nice food and opening presents when so many people were away fighting. Didn't seem quite right. On Christmas day I thought a lot about Walter. Wondered what he'd be doing. Wondered what it'd feel like being in a war on Christmas Day. A week later my letter came and I found out.**

Walter: January 2nd 1915. France.

Dear Archie,

Thank you for writing to me. I enjoyed your letter. Hope all's well with you and the family. Well, Christmas is over and what a strange time it was...

On Christmas Eve when darkness came the guns fell silent and it felt like the whole war had just stopped...

For about half an hour we just sat in our trench in silence. And then we heard a German soldier singing...

We didn't understand the words but we all knew the tune. It was 'Silent Night'. They had the same carol as us. We all knew the words...

Then a German shouted out...

German soldier: Happy Christmas, Tommy!

Walter: That's what they call us...Tommy. And someone in our trench shouted back:

English soldier: Happy Christmas, Fritz.

Walter: That's what we call them...Fritz. And then we just sat there all night. Thinking about Christmas. Thinking about home. In the morning when it got light someone shouted out that the Germans were coming. We got up and aimed our rifles at the enemy trenches and saw a German soldier climbing out of his trench and walking towards us. He was waving his hands in the air and shouting...

German soldier: Happy Christmas, Tommy! No war today. See I have no gun.

Walter: So we put our guns down and watched and then more Germans started to come out of their trenches and the next thing I knew one of our chaps climbed up out of our trench and started walking towards the Germans. We all climbed up and met in the middle of No Man's Land and we shook hands with the Germans...

German Soldier: Here Tommy. Christmas present for you. Good German sausage. You try. Very good, no?

English soldier: Danke schoen, Fritz. And here's a present for you. Christmas pudding. All the way from London.

German: Thank you. You want brandy?

English: Yeah. I'll have a drop of that.

Walter: Then this German feller came up and handed something to me.

German: Here, Tommy. This is button. German button from my coat. For you. You keep.

Walter: I took a pair of wire cutters and cut a button off my coat as well...

Walter: Here you are Fritz. British button for you. We swap.

German: Yes, swap. Thank you.

Walter: Then someone found a football...

...and for a few minutes we all kicked it around messing about like kids in a playground...like we were all pals. They were just like us Archie. Just men...like us. Then our sergeant said the fun was over and we had to go back to our trenches. So that's what we did.

German soldier: Auf Wiedersehen, Tommy!

British soldier: Goodbye, Fritz! Take care!

Walter: Then the next day...Boxing Day...

...we started trying to kill each other again. Strange Christmas eh Archie? Anyway. Got to stop now. Give my regards to Uncle Edward, Auntie Agnes and Mabel. I'll come and see you all when I get some leave.

Your cousin Walter.

P.S. I'm keeping that German button for you Archie.

Souvenir of the war.

#### **Scene Four**

**Archie:** All through the next spring the war rumbled on but it didn't seem to be quite so special any more. People still talked about it but not like they did at the beginning. At the beginning everybody was excited but now the war was just...the war and life went on. Walter was in the army, I got in the football team and Father was starting to get worried. Sometimes I could hear him arguing with Mother...

**Edward:** I can't run that factory without men, Agnes.

**Agnes:** Yes, well there's a war going on out there in case you hadn't heard.

**Edward:** What do they expect? Am I supposed to make jam all by myself?

**Agnes:** There's more important things than jam, Edward.

**Edward:** Yes but what if the factory closes? How are we supposed to make ends meet if Claxton's has to close? You don't think about things like that, do you?

Agnes: All I know is that jam or no jam we're the lucky ones. Men are getting killed Edward. Every day. Dozens of families in this town have lost their boys already. We should be grateful that Archie's so young because even if Claxton's does close we'll still have him. We'll still be the lucky ones.

Edward: Yes. Yes, I know.

**Archie: Cousin Lizzie got her job in the big house and mother joined a knitting circle here in Glaveston. They used to meet up three or four times a week and knit socks and scarves for soldiers.**

Agnes: You should come with us, Mabel. You're good at knitting.

Stall holder: That'll be sixpence please. Shall I put the spuds in a box for you, Mrs Dobson? Get them sent round later?

Agnes: No thank you. They can go in the shopping basket. Archie can carry them can't you Archie.

Mabel: I'm not knitting socks, mother. Why would I want to do that?

Agnes: It's for the war. We're trying to do our bit for the war. Keep up Archie.

Archie: It's heavy.

Agnes: Don't make a fuss. Everyone's got to do something, Mabel. Women can't go and fight but there're lots of things we can do.

Mabel: I don't see why women can't go and fight. I'd be good at fighting I would.

Archie: Yeah I bet the Germans'd surrender tomorrow if they heard you'd joined up.

Agnes: Just come and knit some socks, love. It's fun.

Mabel: How can knitting be fun?

Agnes: There's about ten of us and we have a nice cup of tea and a good old chat while we knit. It's nice. Makes you feel like you're doing something. Feels like you're helping the war.

Mabel: I don't want to help the war. It's a stupid war. I don't even know why we're having it in the first place.

Agnes: It doesn't matter why we're having the war. Our boys are out fighting and we're doing something for them.

Mabel: By knitting socks and scarves.

Agnes: Yes. Alright knitting socks and scarves perhaps isn't as important as making guns and building ships but at least it's something. We're all in this together Mabel.

Mabel: I'm not. I'm not 'in it together'. Wasn't my idea to have a war. The war's got nothing to do with me.

**Archie: In a way Mabel was right. Sometimes the war felt like it was happening a long way away. Sometimes it felt that the war had nothing to do with us...nothing to do with real life. And then the Zeppelin came to Glaveston and**

**everything changed. It was just getting dark and I was indoors doing some homework when my father said from the window...**

Edward: Quick everyone - outside. Now!

Archie: Father what is it?

Edward: Zeppelin. German airship.

**Archie: I'd seen them in photographs. Huge grey cigar-shaped balloons. And they float across from Germany and they drop bombs on you when you're asleep. I used to get nightmares about them. But until now I'd never seen one in real life.**

Archie: What's it doing, father?

Edward: Bombing raid.

Archie: Are there men inside it? Real Germans?

Edward: Yes.

Mabel: It's going right over our house. What if they drop their bombs on us?

Edward: They're not interested in us. They're heading for London.

**Archie: We stood and watched as the Zeppelin flew over Glaveston and on towards London, and then:**

Mabel: It's all gone shiny!

Edward: Searchlights have found it. See. Like huge torches shining on it...

Archie: Can they shoot it down?

Edward: That's what they're trying to do. Hear the guns? It's very high up. Hard to hit from the ground.

**Archie: Then finally the Zeppelin vanished into the clouds and everything went quiet.**

Edward: Looks like that's it. Come on back inside

**Archie: I went back indoors but I couldn't concentrate on my homework because I was thinking about that Zeppelin. Then suddenly...**

Edward: Quick. Everyone. Cupboard under the stairs. Now!

Archie: What is it!

Mabel: What's going on!

**Archie: We hid in the cupboard under the stairs and I was scared. We didn't know what was happening at first...but it turned out the Zeppelin never got as far as London. It must have been hit or got into trouble because it started dumping its bombs...and the bombs were landing right near us...There were explosions and we could feel the whole house shaking and hear the windows rattling each time a bomb landed...Then it was over. The Zeppelin had gone. But when I went to bed**

that night everything seemed different. The Germans had rattled the windows of our little house in Glaveston and suddenly the war didn't seem so far away any more.

**Scene Five**

**Archie:** In the summer of 1915 Walter came home on leave. Me and Mabel went over to Little Burside to see him. I was so excited the night before I could hardly sleep.

**cont'd:** Everything at Little Burside was exactly the same. The house, Uncle Joe, Aunt Kath, the dog. Nothing had changed...except Walter. He was sitting in the garden when we got there and he looked tired and older. When he saw us he didn't smile. He just nodded and said...

**Walter:** You've grown, Archie.

**Archie:** Have I?

**Walter:** And you Mabel. You both seem...taller.

**Mabel:** How's things Walter?

**Walter:** Fine.

**Archie:** What's it like fighting in a war. Do you get scared? What's it like when a big whizz-bang lands. Is it really loud?

**Walter:** Yes it's loud.

Archie: Can you feel the ground move? Does everything shudder under your feet?

Mabel: Leave him alone, Archie.

Archie: No but I want to know things. Have you been in a really big battle Walter? Proper battles?

Mabel: Archie, leave him.

Archie: I'm only asking. You don't mind me asking, do you, Walter?

Walter: I've got to go.

Archie: Go? Go where?

Walter: Billy Mason's house.

Archie: Who's Billy Mason?

Walter: My best pal. We were at school together. Joined up together. Been fighting together. Best pals.

Archie: Has Billy come home on leave too?

Walter: Billy's dead. I'm going to see his Mum.

Archie: Oh. How did he get killed?

Walter: You don't want to know Archie.

Archie: I do. I want to know.

Walter: Sometimes it happens very quickly. Sometimes you're talking to someone and suddenly bang...he gets hit and he's gone. It's quick. It's over and he never felt a thing. But if you're unlucky it's not like that. If you're unlucky you get hit and it takes hours, sometimes days. Billy was one of the unlucky ones.

Mabel: What will you tell his Mum, Walter?

Walter: I'll tell her it was quick. Over in a second. Billy didn't feel a thing.

Mabel: That'll be a lie then won't it.

Walter: I got to go.

Archie: Walter?

Walter: What?

Archie: Did you bring my button?

Walter: What button?

Archie: You said you'd bring me home a German button. From Christmas Day.

Walter: Oh yeah. I think I lost it. Sorry Archie.

Archie: Doesn't matter.

**Archie: As Walter walked away I started to cry. Mabel came and stood beside me and held my hand. She can be quite a**

kind person sometimes, Mabel. People don't always realise that.

Mabel: Never mind, Archie. It's only a button.

Archie: **But I wasn't crying about the button. I wasn't even thinking about the button. I was thinking about Walter sitting down in poor old Mrs Mason's kitchen telling lies. That's why I was crying.**

**Scene Six**

**Archie:**                    **January 1916. Another Christmas passed and we were still at war. But now the government had started something new. It was called conscription.**

Archie:                    So what is it, Father?

Edward:                    What's what?

Archie:                    Conscription.

Edward:                    It's when people are ordered to join the army. From now on if they army wants you they'll conscript you. That means you've got to go. From now on you don't have any choice.

Archie:                    Why are they doing it now?

Edward:                    Because they're short of men. They need more men.

Archie:                    Is that because so many have been killed? Are we running out of men?

Edward:                    No. Well partly. You see all the people who wanted to volunteer have already joined. People like Walter. So now they need more people...new people. So they've brought in conscription.

Archie:                    So will you have to go, father?

Edward:                    No, not me. The new rules say they can't conscript you if you're married. You don't have to worry about me.

Agnes: Keep up, Mabel. We don't want to be late for church.

Archie: But what if someone doesn't want to go. What if someone gets conscripted and they say 'No, I'm not going'?

Mabel: Yes what happens if someone doesn't believe in wars and they refuse to go what happens then?

Edward: Yes there are people who don't believe in wars of any sort. People who refuse to fight under any circumstances. They're called conscientious objectors.

Mabel: So what happens to them, these people?

Edward: Well if they're conscripted and they refuse to join up I expect they'll be sent to prison.

Mabel: I'm going to be a conscientious objector.

Edward: You can't be a conscientious objector, Mabel, not unless you've been conscripted.

Mabel: Yes I can. I don't believe in wars of any sort.

Agnes: You don't know what you're talking about Mabel.

Mabel: Perhaps they'll send me to prison.

Archie: Wish they would.

Agnes: Stop it both of you. And hurry up.

**Archie:** **And then this woman came up to us. A woman we'd never even seen before and she looked straight at my Dad and said...**

Woman's voice: You! Yes you. I've got something for you.

**Archie:** **The woman put something in my father's hand and said...**

Woman: You should be ashamed of yourself!

**Archie:** **...and then she walked away. My father just stood still looking down at his hand...staring at the thing he'd been given.**

Archie: What is it? Father what did she give you?

Edward: A white feather.

Archie: Why? Why did she give you that?

Edward: The feather means she thinks I'm a coward. She thinks I should have joined up. Volunteered.

Archie: You're not a coward. You couldn't go. You're too old and anyway you're needed at the factory. It's not fair. She shouldn't be allowed to go round calling people cowards. She doesn't even know you. It's not fair.

Edward: Perhaps that's what she thinks too. Perhaps she's lost someone. Her son or her husband. Perhaps she looks at me all safe and well walking to church with my family and she thinks...it's not fair. Agnes I don't really feel like going into church. You take the children in. I think I'll just go home.

Agnes: We'll all go home. Won't hurt to miss church just this once. Come on children.

**Archie: And that was it. Nobody said anything else. We all just turned round and walked home.**

### **Scene Seven**

**Archie: One day that summer cousin Lizzie came to visit us. She brought a big old sack of food from Little Burside. Potatoes, carrots, eggs, flour...**

Lizzie: Ma thought you might need a few extras. She heard there were shortages in town. We've plenty. And we've got The Women's Land Army helping on the farm now.

Agnes: Well that's very kind of her but tell your mother we've got plenty here. No shortages in this house!

Archie: What's The Women's Land Army?

Lizzie: It's women who've volunteered to work on farms. Women who're taking the places of farm workers who've gone off to fight.

- Archie: Can women do the same farm work that men do? Ploughing and harvesting? Can they do all that?
- Mabel: Course they can. Women can do anything if they want to. So how's life in Burside Hall, Lizzie? You enjoying being a housemaid are you?
- Lizzie: Not much. They really work you hard. You have to start at five in the morning and on some days you're still working at ten at night. The mistress is always shouting at you: 'Lizzie put more coal on the fire'.
- Lizzie: And you have to say. Yes Ma'am. And she'll say 'Hurry girl. It's freezing in here.' and you have to say 'Yes ma'am. Sorry Ma'am.'
- Mabel: Doesn't sound much fun.
- Lizzie: It's not. Anyway I'm not going to be doing it for much longer though. I'm leaving.
- Mabel: Leaving? Why? What're you going to do?
- Lizzie: Going to be a munitionette.
- Archie: A what? What's one of them?
- Lizzie: I'm going to work in the munitions factory, Archie...making shells and bombs and stuff like that for the war. Do something a bit more useful than serving tea and lighting fires.
- Mabel: You're going to go and work in a factory?

Lizzie: Yes.

Mabel: But I don't understand. You've always wanted to work up at the big house -

Lizzie: Yeah, well a girl can change her mind, can't she? Anyway it's a good job. They can't get enough men to do it so they're taking on women. I can't wait. There's three girls from the Big House going. We're all going together.

Mabel: What'll they do in Burside Hall if all their servants go off to make bombs?

Lizzie: They'll manage. People like that always manage. Anyway everything's changing up there. They're going to turn part of the Hall into a hospital for wounded soldiers.

Mabel: Are they?

Lizzie: That's what they say.

Mabel: Oh.

Lizzie: You get four pounds a week in the munitions factory. Imagine four pounds a week. I'll be rich! And anyway, I want to do something. Something for the war.

Mabel: Oh not you too. Everybody wants to do something for the war. The whole world's gone war mad.

Lizzie: Don't you want to help with the war, Mabel?

Mabel: No. I don't believe in it.

Lizzie: Well I want to help. I think a lot about Walter, see. He's out there doing his best. Didn't seem right me just serving tea and fetching coal up at the big house. Didn't seem enough. I wanted to help.

Archie: How is Walter? Is he alright? I wrote him a letter ages ago but he never wrote back. When's he coming home?

Lizzie: He came home.

Archie: What?

Lizzie: Last month. Had some leave. Then he went back.

Archie: He didn't come and see us.

Lizzie: Didn't see anyone. Hardly saw him leave the cottage the whole time he was home. Ma says he hardly even spoke.

Archie: Oh.

Lizzie: And now there's this new battle starting – on the Somme. I hate to think what he's going through. That's why I'm going to make shells and bombs. Going to do it for Walter.

### **Scene Eight**

**Archie: Next morning, Mother said...**

Agnes: Archie and Mabel you'd better come downstairs. Your father's just had some bad news.

**Archie: My father was sitting at the kitchen table holding a letter. And I thought...it's Walter. No please don't let it be Walter. But it wasn't Walter. In a way it was worse.**

Edward: I've got to join the army. I've been called up. Conscripted.

Archie: But you said they couldn't make married men!

Mabel: You said you were too old!

Edward: They've changed the rules. Married men have got to go now. And it seems I'm not too old. I have to go.

Archie: It must be a mistake. They must have got it wrong.

Edward: It's no mistake. I knew it could happen. Looks like it's my turn.

Archie: I don't want you to go. I want you to stay here.

Edward: Don't worry Archie. I'll come back.

Mabel: How do you know that? How do you know you'll come back? You'll go away and we'll never see you again. Stupid war. Stupid, stupid war. I hate it!

Agnes: Mabel!

Edward: Leave her, Agnes. She's just upset. It's been a shock. She'll get used to the idea. We'll all get used to the idea. And

anyway it won't last much longer now. Probably be over by the time I get there.

Archie: Don't say that father! Don't say things like that. I'm not a child any more.

Newspaper vendor: Read all about it. Heavy fighting on the Somme. Troops making satisfactory progress. Heavy fighting. Enemy offering stubborn resistance. Read all about it! Read all about it!!  
Read all about it!!!

Archie: Stop it! Shut up!

Archie: I'm not a child any more!