

Archie Dobson's War – drama script

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Episode Three

Scene One

Archie: January 2nd 1917 was the day my father went to war. He stood by the front door in his uniform and said...

Edward: Right. This is it then.

Agnes: Mabel come down. It's time.

Mabel: Not coming down.

Agnes: You have to say goodbye.

Mabel: Don't want to say goodbye.

Agnes: Mabel please...

Edward: Don't make her, Agnes. I understand. She's finding it difficult. We're all finding it difficult.

Archie: Then my mother started to cry and my father hugged her and said something in her ear and then he turned to me and said...

Edward: You'll have to be very grown up now, Archie. Have to be the man of the house for a bit now. Promise me you'll look after your mother and your sister for me.

Archie: Yes, father.

Archie: I wanted him to pick me up and hug me like he used to do when I was little but he didn't. He just smiled at me and shook my hand. I think he did it to make me feel grown up but it didn't. Made me feel sad. Then he just turned and walked out of the door.

Mabel: Wait! Wait!

Archie: Mabel caught up with him outside in the street. I watched him put down his kit bag and pick her up in his arms and I felt a bit jealous. Then he was gone. It was strange because when my cousin Walter went off to war in 1914 he had crowds and brass bands and a big parade. On January 2nd 1917 my father just walked down to the station...by himself...in the rain.

At first it didn't sink in that Father had gone. Every day at tea time we kept thinking that he was going to come home from work. Just walk in the door. But he didn't. Then after about a week Mother decided she wasn't going to just sit there waiting. She was going to do something.

Agnes: Right, children. You'll have to look after yourselves after school 'cause I'm going out.

Archie: Where are you going?

Agnes: I'm going to Little Burside.

Archie: You're going to see Aunt Kathleen? Can I come?

Agnes: No. I'm not going to the village. I'm going to Burside Hall.

Archie: You're going to the Big House?

Agnes: Yes.

Archie: Where Lizzie used to work?

Agnes: Yes. They've turned part of it into a military hospital. A hospital for soldiers. They need helpers. I went over last week to see them and I'm starting this morning. You two will have to look after yourselves later on.

Mabel: What are you going to do in a hospital? You're not a nurse or a doctor.

Agnes: No, but there are all sorts of jobs to be done at the new hospital, Mabel. Making tea, helping in the stores, talking to the patients, reading to them, writing letters for them.

Archie: Why do you need to read to the patients and write their letters?

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

Agnes: They need all the helpers they can get actually. You could come along too Mabel.

Mabel: No thanks.

Archie: Are some of them blind? Is that why you have to write their letters..?

Agnes: Yes, some of them are blind. You should think about volunteering Mabel.

Archie: Are they blind because they've been shot?

Mabel: Shot...or gassed. They're using poisoned gas now Archie.

Archie: I know that. Does gas make you go blind?

Mabel: Yes. It can make you go blind and -

Agnes: That's enough Mabel.

Archie: Can I volunteer? Can I volunteer at the hospital?

Agnes: I suppose you could. They have boy scouts helping out. Boys of about your age. You can come up with me on Saturday if you want.

Archie: I will. See Mabel. I'm going up to the hospital with mother. I'm going to be a volunteer.

Mabel: Good for you Archie. Hope you have a lovely time.

Archie: So next Saturday I went to the hospital at Little Burside with mother. It was alright at first. There were hundreds of men lying in beds and on stretchers, sitting in wheelchairs or hobbling about on sticks and crutches. I took them mugs of tea and helped to push their wheelchairs and fetched things for them. The men were really friendly and I felt like was doing something useful. And then a nurse told me to fetch a trolley from a room at the end of a corridor...

Archie con'td: **Soon as I went in I could see this room was different. About twenty men were lying in beds. They'd all been gassed. You could hear them lying there struggling to breathe. It was sad to see men like that. Sad and frightening. That night I had a dream...**

...I was standing in a trench...and beside me was my father...

Sergeant: Can you see anything, Dobson?

Edward: Not sure Sar'nt. There's a cloud in no man's land.

Sergeant: Cloud? What sort of cloud?

Edward: I don't know, Sar'nt. I'm not sure. I think it's moving towards us.

Archie: I climbed up the side of the trench. I could see a yellow cloud moving towards us.

Sergeant: It's gas. Shout Dobson. Make a noise. Gas boys! Gas!

Sergeant: Get your masks on. Dobson put your mask on quick...now!

Archie: **I watched Father put on his mask...**

Sergeant: All masks on?

Archie: No I haven't I haven't got one.

Sergeant: Make sure they're nice and tight.

Archie: What about me? I haven't got a mask. They haven't given me one.

Sergeant: Here comes the gas, boys.

Archie: Father. Father! I haven't got a mask!

Archie: And then...I woke up. The worst dream I ever had.

Scene Two

Archie: On the 24th of May two letters came to our house. The first one was from my father.

Edward: Dear Agnes, Mabel and Archie,
Just a note to tell you that all is well. We're in France at last and today the sun has been shining.

Archie: He seemed to be alright in the letter. In the letter he seemed quite jolly but I wasn't sure. I'd learned that people don't always say what they mean.

Edward: It feels good to have finished all the training and to be finally making a start.

Archie: Making a start on what? See what I mean? Sometimes you have to guess what people mean.

Officer: Stand at ease, men. I just want to say a few words about the push tomorrow morning.

Edward: **The weather is very mild and it's starting to feel like summer.**

Officer: When you hear the whistle and it's time to go over the top you will walk towards the enemy lines...

Edward: **At the moment I'm sitting in a trench and I can hear birds singing.**

Officer: You are to stick together and follow your sergeants.

Edward: **At the edge of the field poppies and marigolds are growing...**

Officer: Do not be tempted to run. A steady walk is the best way to proceed.

Edward: **Sometimes it's hard to believe that a war is going on.**

Officer: We do not expect any trouble from the enemy tomorrow...

Edward: **Thank you for the parcel you sent.**

Officer: ...because our guns have been shelling their lines for the last three days and we think that most of them have run away.

Edward: **I have already eaten most of the chocolate and have shared the cake with some pals.**

Officer: But you will of course attack with fixed bayonets...just in case.

Edward: Everyone said I was a lucky man to have a wife who could make such good cake.

Officer: Try to get some sleep tonight men. Tomorrow is going to be a busy day.

Edward: I've got to go and get some sleep now.

Officer: Good luck, men.

Edward: All for now. I expect I'll get some leave soon. I'm longing to see you.

Officer: And I'll see you all on the other side of no man's land tomorrow night.

Edward: Your loving husband and father, Edward.

Archie: The second letter that arrived that morning was addressed to Master A Dobson. It was from Walter. He'd written a letter specially for me. In his letter he sounded a bit strange. A bit sad. He didn't sound like the Walter I'd remembered. He said he was writing because...

Walter:there's going to be a big push and I'm not sure I'll have time for writing after that.

Archie: I wondered why he was telling me that. Then he said...

Walter:next time you go to Little Burside please say hello to dear old Patch for me. Maybe you could take him for a walk. He likes you. I'm sorry I haven't been much good

at keeping in touch. It's been so long since we talked
you've probably forgotten all about me. I hope not.

Anyway, all the best, Archie

Your cousin and pal

Walter.

Archie: Turns out I wasn't the only one who got a letter from
Walter that day.

Walter: Dear Ma and Pa, just a note to say that tomorrow there's
going to be a bit of a push and...
Dear Lizzie, hope you're well and enjoying all that extra
money. Just writing to say that...
Dear Annie, hope all's well with you and that you haven't
forgotten all about me. Just wanted to tell you that
tomorrow there's going to be a...

Scene Three

Archie: The morning after the letters came from Father and Walter I looked out of the kitchen window and saw my Uncle Joe walking up our street. It was a strange thing to see because Uncle Joe never ever came to Glaveston and here he was walking up our street and...knocking on our front door. I knew as soon as I opened the door. As soon as I saw Uncle Joe's face I knew what had happened.

Joe: Hello, Archie. Is your mother there?

Agnes: Joe? What are you doing here?

Joe: It's Walter, Agnes. We've lost him.

Agnes: He's...

Joe: Yes. Killed in action. Got the news this morning. Kath says can you come. She wants you at Little Burside.

Archie: Nobody spoke on the motorbus. We sat there me, Mabel, Mother and Uncle Joe and nobody said a single word all the way to Little Burside. I kept glancing at Uncle Joe and his face looked like it was made out of stone.

Scene Four

Archie: Aunt Kath was sitting in the kitchen when we got to Little Burside. She didn't say hello or give mother a hug like she usually did. She saw us coming in and just started talking like we'd been there all the time.

Kathleen: I knew it Agnes. I knew something was going to happen. All last week things didn't feel right. I knew something bad was coming.

Agnes: I'll make some tea.

Kathleen: No more tea. I've had enough tea. Why does everyone always make tea when something bad happens? It's like they all think tea will make things better. Well it won't. Nothing will ever make this better.

Agnes: I'm so sorry, Kath.

Kathleen: You'd better pray this thing finishes before Archie gets old enough. How old are you now Archie?

Archie: Twelve.

Agnes: He's still a boy.

Kathleen: So was Walter.

Agnes: Yes. I know.

Kathleen: Just a boy. He had everything ahead of him.

Agnes: I know.

Archie: Mabel and I went out into the garden. Lizzie was feeding the chickens.

Mabel: You came home then.

Lizzie: Soon as I heard. Came on the train.

Mabel: You've got time off then?

Lizzie : You get three days if it's a close member of your family. Happens all the time in our factory. They call you in and give you the news. Then off you go. Three days leave. Happens every day. Yesterday it was my turn.

Mabel: I'm so sorry Lizzie.

Lizzie: I didn't always get on with him. Sometimes we quarrelled. But he was the best brother you could ever have. I can't believe he's not coming home.

Archie: Lizzie started to cry. I didn't know what to do but Mabel did. She just went up to Lizzie and held her hand and then she hugged her.

Lizzie: The letter says he didn't suffer.

Mabel: What letter?

Lizzie: Letter we had this morning. Came with the notification. From Walter's Officer. Says he was right near Walter when it

happened. Says one minute he was talking to Walter and the next minute there was a bang and Walter was dead. Letter says it was instant. Walter didn't feel a thing.

Archie: **Mabel and I looked at each other and I knew exactly what she was thinking. I decided to take Patch for a walk. He followed me down the lane wagging his tail like he was the happiest dog in the world. He had no idea what had just happened. No idea that Walter was dead. I wished I didn't know either. Sometimes it must be easier being a dog.**

Scene Five

Archie: **After Walter died Mabel changed. She didn't talk very much anymore. She'd sometimes sit through a whole meal without even saying a word. Mother kept saying...**

Agnes: Are you alright, Mabel?

Archie: **And Mabel would say...**

Mabel: I'm fine thank you, mother.

Archie: **But you could tell things weren't really fine. You could tell something was going on. And then one day Mabel just disappeared.**

Agnes: Think, Archie! She must have said something.

Archie: Didn't say anything to me. Perhaps she's with a friend.

Agnes: No. I went to Maude Thompson's house and Maude said Mabel wasn't at school today. None of the neighbours have seen her. She's gone somewhere.

Archie: I expect she'll be home in a bit. When she gets hungry. I'm sure she'll be home any minute.

Agnes: I don't think so. She's taken her things. Her clothes and books and wash things and there's a little brown suitcase missing from the cupboard under the stairs. She's gone somewhere, Archie.

Archie: What run away?

Agnes: I think so. Where would she go? Think, Archie! She must have said something.

Archie: Not to me.

Agnes: Get your coat. We're going to the police station.

Archie: Police station?

Agnes: I've got to report her missing. The police'll know what to do.

Archie: The sergeant at the police station told Mother not worry.

Police Sergeant: I'm sure she's alright, Mrs Dobson. Girls of Mabel's age are always pretending to run away. Best thing is to just go home and wait for her to turn up. You'll see...she'll change her mind and come home as soon as she gets cold or hungry.

Archie: **But he didn't know my sister. He didn't know that once Mabel decides to do something she never changes her mind. All that long night Mother sat at the kitchen window waiting for Mabel...**

Archie: I made you a boiled egg.

Agnes: Thanks, Archie. That's sweet of you. I'm not really hungry but thank you all the same.

Archie: You've got to eat, Mother. You can't stop eating.

Agnes: I'll try a bit of your egg. Looks nice.

Archie: I think it might be a bit too runny inside.

Agnes: I'm sure it'll be fine.

Archie: **Mother never did eat that egg because just as she sliced the top off it...a lorry stopped right outside our house...and a woman in a brown uniform and a big hat got out. A woman was driving the lorry!!! She came and knocked on our front door.**

WLA Volunteer: Mrs Dobson?

Agnes: Yes?

WLA: Mother of Mabel Dobson?

Agnes: Yes. What's happened to her?

WLA: Don't worry she's fine.

Agnes: Where is she?

WLA: She's here. In the back of the lorry.

Agnes: What's she doing in the back of a lorry?

WLA: She tried to join The Women's Land Army. She told us she was eighteen.

Agnes: She's fourteen.

WLA: I know. She's too young. She's not quite big enough to work on a farm yet. She's a bit upset. She didn't want to come home.

Archie: I don't understand. What was she trying to do?

Agnes: She wanted to join the Women's Land Army, Archie. Work on the farms to take the places of all the men who've gone to fight to help.

WLA: She wanted to do her bit for the war. Same as me. Same as all of us.

Archie: No...there must be a mistake. Mabel doesn't think like that.

WLA: She does now. We've told her to come back in a couple of years. We'd be happy to have her then.

Archie: Then Mabel climbed out of the back of the lorry and walked up to the front door. She didn't say hello or sorry or anything. Just went into the house and walked past

us carrying her little brown suitcase. Mother thanked the Land Army lady, the lorry drove off and that was it. Mabel was back. She didn't say anything till tea time.

Mabel: You probably think I'm mad don't you.

Agnes: No. Of course not.

Mabel: I wanted to take Walter's place. I couldn't take his place in the army but I thought maybe I could go and take his place on a farm somewhere. Thought maybe I could do what he used to do. That probably doesn't make any sense. I'm sorry.

Agnes: It makes perfect sense, love. We're very proud of you. Aren't we, Archie?

Archie: I nodded and put a great big piece of bread and jam in my mouth. I thought if I tried to speak I might end up crying.

Scene Six

Archie: **By the summer of 1918 people started to say we were winning the war. Started to say it might be over soon. I didn't dare believe it...**

Newspaper Vendor: Read all about it. Allied forces advance on The Marne. Read all about it!

Archie: **...and every night Mother, Mabel and I said a prayer for Father. A prayer that he'd be safe for another day...**

Agnes: One day at a time...

Archie: **...said mother.**

Agnes: We'll pray for one day at a time.

Archie: **But as the summer went on the news started to get better...**

Newspaper V: Allied forces advance again. German troops on the retreat. . Thousands taken prisoner. Read all about it!

Archie: **...and better...**

Newspaper V: Huge German losses on The Marne. German troops deserting. Read all about it!

Archie: **...when the autumn came we finally started to believe that the end was in sight...**

Scene Seven

Archie: ...and then in November it finally happened.

Archie: So is it really over Mother? Is that the end of it?

Agnes: Yes Archie that's the end. It finished yesterday - at 11 o'clock in the morning. The eleventh hour of the eleventh day on the eleventh month of the year.

Archie: So will Father come home now?

Agnes: Yes he'll come home.

Archie: When?

Agnes: Soon. He'll be home soon. They'll all be coming home now.

Archie: I can't wait. I can't wait to see him.

Agnes: They say there were millions of people on the streets of London yesterday. Big Ben was rung for the first time in four years. They lit bonfires in Trafalgar Square and people were dancing in the streets and hugging each other.

Archie: I wish I'd been there.

Agnes: There's going to be a big party here in Glaveston on Saturday.

Archie: Is there?

Agnes: Yes. They're going to build a huge bonfire and there'll be fireworks and a parade with marching and flags and a big brass band. Shall we go?

Archie: Can we? I'd love to see all that. Did we win the war?

Agnes: Yes, we've won Archie.

Archie: Then we should go to the parade. Everyone'll want to go to the parade.

Mabel: Not everyone, Archie. Some people won't feel like celebrating.

Agnes: No. So what do you think Mabel? Do you want to go to the parade on Saturday?

Mabel: I think we should go to Little Burside on Saturday. Go and see Aunt Kath and Uncle Joe and Lizzie. I think we should be with them.

Agnes: You'll miss all the fun.

Mabel: I know.

Agnes: What do you think, Archie?

Archie: I thought about it for a minute. Thought about the parade...the flags and the fireworks and the brass band and the bonfire...and then I thought about that other parade...when Walter winked at me as he marched out of Glaveston on that September morning in 1914.

Agnes: Archie?

Archie: We should go to Little Burside.

Scene Eight

Archie: I always thought that when the war finished all the soldiers would come home straight away. I thought the army would say ‘right that’s it boys...fighting’s over...off you go.’ Father had written to say he was alright and for the next few days I kept expecting him to turn up. I spent hours looking out of the kitchen window thinking he’d walk down the street. But he didn’t come...

Archie: Why doesn’t he come Mother?

Agnes: You’ll have to be patient Archie. They can’t just send them home all at once.

Archie: Why can’t they?

Agnes: It’s complicated. There are thousands and thousands of them. They can’t just all come home on the same day. You’ll just have to be patient.

Archie: Weeks and weeks went past. Still my Father didn’t come home and I was starting to wonder if I’d ever see him again.

Then on the last Sunday before Christmas we were walking home from church and we came round the corner into our street and standing outside our house

was a soldier. For a moment we all stopped in our tracks, stood still and stared. And it was him.

Mabel: It's Father!

Archie: Mabel got to him first...then mother and one by one he took them in his arms and hugged them and then he looked at me. He was different. Thinner and older but he was still my Father. First thing he said to me was...

Edward: Didn't have my keys with me. Couldn't get in.

Archie: I went up to him...put my hand out but he didn't want to shake hands.

Edward: Not this time, Archie.

Archie: Instead he picked me up in his arms. Picked me right up off the ground and hugged me. I'm fourteen years old...I'm being picked up off the street and hugged by my father like I'm a tiny little kid...but I don't care...I don't care who's looking...

Edward: Good to see you, Archie.

Archie: ...because my Pa's come home and now the war is really over.