

WHEN I AM KING

Written by

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Extract of first 15 pages

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This play is an ensemble piece, intended to be performed by a maximum of 5 Actors.

The set can be as minimum or as full as desired. Due to the number of quick scene changes though, a minimum set is ideal. Various props and set pieces can be used in multiple purposes.

The cast are divided as follows:

WILLIAM..... Actor One

JACK  
SOLDIER 3..... Actor Two

CHARLIE  
BYSTANDER  
SOLDIER 4  
GERMAN SOLDIER..... Actor Three

MOTHER  
WOMAN ON BUS  
BYSTANDER..... Actor Four

FATHER

RECRUITMENT OFFICER

DRILL SERGEANT  
SERGEANT  
CORPORAL..... Actor Five

Various voices are prerecorded or performed by actors off-stage.

In memory of Jack Pettit. Shot down in a bombing raid at the Gulf of Cattaro, August 23rd, 1918. May your equilibrium be forever peaceful.

ACT ONE

November 17th 1916

Northern France.

We hear a quiet rumble. It's far away. Like a distant thunder storm.

We soon hear that the quiet rumble is a series of explosions. Explosions that are slowly becoming louder. Getting nearer.

The storm approaches.

It is almost upon us.

The sound is unmistakable. We hear explosions all around us. Shells whizzing through the air and impacting on wet mud, exploding on impact, sending the ground high in the air, then falling back down like a thick, hard rain. Guns are followed, machine guns, sending bullets ripping through the air. Now we hear voices. Distant at first but fast approaching.

Shouts. Yells. Cries.

All in pain. All in anger. All in fear.

Finally, three voices are heard amongst us. They belong to British soldiers.

SOLDIER 1

I found one 'ere, Serge!

SOLDIER 2

Hold ya fire, he's unarmed, we might be able to get some details from him.

SOLDIER 1

Right-o. Okay, Gerry. What battalion are you from?

Silence

SOLDIER 1 (CONT'D)

'Ere, I asked you a question. Sprekensie English?

No reply

SOLDIER 2

Let me try. Do... you...  
sprekensie... English?

SERGEANT

What's the problem here?

SOLDIER 1

I think we've got a German  
deserter, Serge. He ain't even got  
a gun on him.

SERGEANT

We haven't got time for this. If he  
isn't going to say anything then  
shoot him. We need to keep pressing  
on.

SOLDIER 1

Right, you heard the Serge. Where  
are you from?

Silence still

SOLDIER 2

Look at him. He's just standing  
there. It's like he's asleep.

SOLDIER 1

I'm going to count to five and if  
you don't say anything then we've  
got no choice but to shoot. One...  
Two...

The voices fade as the surrounding noise grows ever louder.  
It soon becomes the only sound we hear. The explosions begin  
to sound like white noise until all we hear is a loud pitch  
ding.

Suddenly, all sound is ripped away.

All we hear is the ringing in our ears against the absolute  
silence.

All we see is WILLIAM. He is standing alone. He looks out,  
blankly.

He looks to his left.

Then to his right.

Then out ahead again.

WILLIAM

The B-43 Omnibus weighs in at just  
over 4 tonnes.

(MORE)

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Designed by Frank Searle, it has a length of 22 Feet and 6 Inches by a width of 6 Feet 11 Inches and can carry up to Twenty passengers. Owned by the London General Omnibus Company, the first B-Type bus was built in 1910 which replaced the X-Type bus and by October 25th 1911, the motorised bus replaced all Horse-drawn busses.

He pauses.

He looks to his left.

Then to his right.

Then out ahead again.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

There are many different types of busses the London General Omnibus Company use. Such as the Daimler B-Type and the M-Type De Dions. My favourite is the B-43 for 3 reasons. It was the first motorised bus I ever travelled on, I know exactly how it works. I know how to drive it and they're not as smelly as horses. I know that's four reasons, but as I'm never allowed to drive the bus I won't count that as a full reason. There are actually 5 reasons why I prefer the B-43 over buses such as the Daimler, but I won't go into specifics right now. The two main routes for the B-43 are number Eight, which does the Willesden to Old Ford round and the number Twenty-Five that goes from Victoria to Seven Kings. I prefer route Eight because it is an even number. Although I live in Islington, which is on route 30, but the B-43 doesn't usually work on that route and I also don't like the number 30. Or the number 9 for that matter. My brother, Jack, says I should get a job on the busses when I finish school this year. Which I'd like to do because I know a lot about busses, although they don't teach busses in school which I think is a rotten shame because you can learn quite a bit from them. Especially the B-43.

(MORE)

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

For example, did you know that the B-43 bus can reach a top speed of Twenty Miles Per Hour?

WILLIAM'S brother, JACK, joins.

JACK

Twenty? That's quite something, isn't it now?

WILLIAM

Although they never reach that speed. If they did, the wheels would fall off because of the cobbles.

JACK

That wouldn't be good for anyone.

WILLIAM

Not unless they made the wheels more sturdy. Or the roads less cobbled.

JACK

Less cobbled? Then we'd be riding around on muddy roads.

WILLIAM

I don't understand why they have a top speed if it can't be reached on the route they are made for. It seems to be a bit of a waste.

JACK

A waste of what?

WILLIAM

A waste of speed.

JACK

If it's never driven at that speed then it's not missed, so it can't be a waste.

WILLIAM

It's a shame they can't use the unused speed for something else.

JACK

It's not something that can be transferred. Speed is something that only exists when you reach it.

WILLIAM

So before you reach it, it doesn't exist?

JACK  
That's right.

WILLIAM  
So how can they say the B-43 can do  
Twenty Miles per hour if it doesn't  
exist?

Silence

WILLIAM (CONT'D)  
Jack?

JACK  
How was school today?

WILLIAM  
It was the same as every other day.

JACK  
Did you get to teach the class yet?

WILLIAM  
Mr Wilkins says I shouldn't be  
allowed to teach. He said he can't  
understand how I can be the son of  
a teacher. I tried explaining to  
him how children are created but he  
just shouted at me.

JACK  
Bloody hell, I hope you didn't go  
into detail.

WILLIAM  
I didn't have a chance. Mr Wilkins  
just shouted at me then resumed  
teaching the class.

JACK  
Dad won't like that.

WILLIAM  
Mr Wilkins said that Father should  
be ashamed of himself. Although I  
don't know what Father has done.

JACK  
(Takes a moment, then)  
Didn't you draw anything new?

WILLIAM  
I drew the tree that sits outside  
the classroom.

JACK  
You've drawn that old thing about  
ten times now.

WILLIAM

Twelve. Although today there was a fat squirrel sitting on a branch, which I didn't like. Mr Wilkins told me off for drawing again, but only because he thought I hadn't started writing about Charles Dickens but I'd already finished.

JACK

How come you finished so quickly?

WILLIAM

I just wrote what I'd already read. I can remember everything I see and everything I hear.

JACK

Good for you.

WILLIAM

I then recited my Twelve times table to Mr York, but he told me to stop when I reached Thirty but I could have gone on.

JACK

I bet you could.

WILLIAM

I also managed to hide from Matthew Pettit so he couldn't push me.

JACK

You shouldn't hide from him. Next time you see him, bop him on the nose. He'll not push you again.

WILLIAM

I don't think I *can* bop. I've never bopped before.

JACK

Well there's a first time for everything. Come on, do as I do. Clench your fists.

WILLIAM

I don't want to.

JACK

Trust me, if he pushes you again, you will. Now hold your arms up, like this.

JACK holds his arms up with his fists clenched.



WILLIAM

Violence never solves anything.

JACK

Oh and you think forty-two times twelve will?

WILLIAM

Five-hundred and Four.

JACK

Really? Right. Anyway when Matthew Pettit is within reach. Bop him. Right on the nose.

WILLIAM

I'd rather not. School is over in Three months anyway, I'm sure I'll be able to avoid him until then.

JACK

You've got to stand up for yourself, Bill. You can't let people walk all over you. You're nearly Fifteen now.

WILLIAM

I prefer to be called 'William', not Bill.

JACK

There, well done.

WILLIAM

What for?

JACK

You stood up for yourself.

WILLIAM

I don't think that's the same.

JACK

Of course it is.

WILLIAM

But I didn't 'bop' you.

JACK

And aren't I the better for it! With fists like yours, Matthew Pettit had better watch out. Come on, I'll race you to the front door, first one home gets the bigger plate!

JACK runs off ahead of WILLIAM

During the next, the FATHER, MOTHER and JACK, set up a dinner table and chairs.

WILLIAM

I was never good at running. I preferred to take my time so I knew where I was going, plus I didn't like walking on mud and if I ran I wouldn't have time to avoid it. Mother would always have dinner ready by the time we get through the door. I couldn't usually eat all of the food. Partially because Mother would serve carrots and I hate carrots. Almost as much as the colour Brown and the name 'Alfred'.

FATHER

What you won't eat for dinner, you'll have for breakfast.

WILLIAM

But if I don't like it for dinner I will most certainly not like it for breakfast.

FATHER

And if you don't eat it for breakfast, you know what will happen.

WILLIAM

What?

FATHER

You'll have it for dinner.

WILLIAM

Then I will certainly starve.

FATHER

Don't talk back and eat your greens.

MOTHER

Don't raise your voice at William. You know he doesn't like it.

FATHER

Don't I just. I'll add it to the list shall I?

JACK

I'll have what he doesn't eat.

FATHER

You need it, Jack. You're a busy lad.

JACK

I'm no busier than William.

FATHER

That one doesn't even know what busy is. Don't just look at your food, eat it.

MOTHER

Eat what you can and what you like, dear.

FATHER

If you keep pampering him like this he'll never grow out of it.

MOTHER

Out of what?

FATHER

Out of whatever it is he's currently in. It's not right. Jack was never like this.

JACK

No I was much worse.

FATHER

You know what I mean. There's something wrong with the boy.

MOTHER

That's exactly it, he's just a boy.

FATHER

Don't you stand up for him. He's got to fight for himself.

JACK

I've told him that already.

MOTHER

He hasn't got to fight for anyone. If he doesn't want to eat the silly carrots then he doesn't have to. To be honest, I don't like them that much either.

FATHER

So why do we have them then?

MOTHER

Because *you* insist on eating them!

FATHER

I knew it'd be my fault somehow.

JACK

It usually is.

FATHER

While you're still living under my roof you'll respect me, Jack. It doesn't matter where you work, my house, my rules.

MOTHER

We know, dear. He doesn't mean any ill towards you.

FATHER

I suppose all this extra schooling isn't making any difference?

MOTHER

He's been top of his class in everything. Jonathan Wilkins says it's only a matter of time before he teaches his first class.

FATHER

Believe me, Mr Wilkins is the last person to advocate our son. I don't know, I'm spending all this money for his extra tuition and for what?

MOTHER

He's a bright lad.

FATHER

I reckon he's been cheating.

WILLIAM

I don't cheat.

MOTHER

Of course he doesn't cheat.

FATHER

Well how else do you explain it?

WILLIAM

I remember what I read.

FATHER

Nobody can remember everything they read.

WILLIAM

I can. I remember everything I see and everything I hear.

FATHER

You don't even know how to tie your shoelaces.

WILLIAM

It's too difficult to-

FATHER

-Oh yes, of course it's too difficult. You claim to be a master of the three R's, but a simple thing like tying a shoelace and it's 'too difficult'.

JACK

It's not that important.

FATHER

You're not the one having to tie up his shoelaces all the time.

MOTHER

Neither are you. Now eat up before it goes cold.

FATHER watches WILLIAM moving his food.

FATHER

Look at him. What's he doing now? What are you doing now? Stop playing with your food and eat it.

WILLIAM

I need to keep it separate.

FATHER

You need to eat it now or you'll be wearing it.

MOTHER

Yes alright.

FATHER

It all ends up mushed together in your stomach so what's the problem?

WILLIAM

I need to keep it separate.

FATHER

What on Earth for?

MOTHER

That'll do.

FATHER

No it won't. I'm fed up with living this way.

(MORE)

FATHER (CONT'D)

You know I can't bring any of the society over here in case they find him and he goes off on one of his rants about the blessed busses or worse still, hear him screaming in his room. And why? What on Earth is there to scream about? What are you frightened of, boy? Hmm?

WILLIAM focuses on his food.

FATHER (CONT'D)

I'm talking to you. It's about time you became a man. Jack never behaved this way and neither shall you. What are you afraid of?

WILLIAM continues moving his food.

JACK

He's probably afraid of you.

FATHER

Don't be stupid. I'm trying to help him. Come on, let's sort this out now.

JACK

There's nothing to sort out.

MOTHER

Alright let's all calm down now. Jack eat up.

JACK

You've said your piece now leave him alone.

FATHER

Oh I've more than a piece to say to the lad. You've got to grow up otherwise this world will eat you alive-

MOTHER

-Talking of eating-

FATHER

-It's about time someone told him. He can't carry on like this. (To WILLIAM) What are you so afraid of? Well speak up. Come on, answer me.

JACK

Stop it. You're upsetting him

FATHER

I'll do more than upset him if he doesn't answer me. Don't think that behaving like this I won't give you a beating. Because I will.

JACK

No you won't.

FATHER

So help me God if you don't answer me right now you'll get the back of my hand and the buckle of my belt. And that's just for starters.

JACK

Leave him alone.

FATHER

You keep quiet or you'll get the same.

JACK

You wouldn't dare.

FATHER

(TO WILLIAM) I'm talking to you, lad.

MOTHER

Jack, now-

JACK

-I'm fed up with it. I'm fed up with you bullying William every night-

MOTHER

-Alright, Jack-

JACK

-Just because he doesn't do things the way you want him to. He's my brother and I won't put up with it anymore.

FATHER

How dare you just sit there and say nothing. What is wrong with you? Do you hear me? I said do you hear me? Don't you undermine me, boy.

FATHER launches towards WILLIAM who doesn't react.

JACK steps in-between WILLIAM and The FATHER

JACK

For God's sake, leave him alone!

FATHER pushes JACK over and raises his fist to him.

MOTHER holds FATHER back.

MOTHER

Please, no. Please. Please, for me.  
Please don't hit him, he doesn't  
mean it. He doesn't.

MOTHER holds FATHER close and all are still for a moment.

WILLIAM

I never understood what they meant  
when they said 'Eat your greens'  
because carrots aren't green.  
Beetroot isn't green either.  
Neither is potato. But I always get  
told to eat them when they tell me  
to 'eat my greens'. In fact, the  
only green food that we have are  
peas and I quite like peas.  
Although they do have a tendency to  
run around the plate sometimes and  
mix with the other foods but that's  
alright because I don't eat those.

WILLIAM is alone again.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Jack would always look out for me.  
I don't know where I'd be without  
him. When Jack left school two  
years ago, it became very difficult  
for me. Without him being there  
meant that people weren't told what  
I meant when they didn't understand  
me. Instead, they would push me or  
laugh at me. I didn't mind the  
laughing as such, but I did mind  
being pushed. Matthew Pettit would  
always push me whenever he saw me  
after school if Jack wasn't there.  
It was after my final day at  
school, however, that Matthew  
Pettit pushed me. I don't like it  
when other people touch me. I want  
to tell them to stop but I can't  
find the words to tell them so I  
scream until they stop. Matthew  
Pettit pushed me and pushed me and  
pushed me again. It was on the  
fourth time he pushed me that I  
remembered what Jack said about  
'Bopping' him on the nose. So I  
copied what Jack did and clenched  
my fists and bopped Matthew Pettit  
on the nose. Although Jack didn't  
explain how hard I should Bop  
Matthew Pettit and I mustn't have  
bopped him too hard, as he pushed  
me again so hard that I fell  
backwards.



WILLIAM falls backwards. He doesn't react to this.

I never like being pushed over. I hate the ground because it's dirty and it makes my hands dirty and my clothes too, so I'd try to keep the ground for just my shoes. I wanted to tell Matthew Pettit to go away and leave me alone, I wanted to tell him a lot of things, but I didn't know which thing to say first. I didn't know *what* to say or do, so I cried until Matthew Pettit would leave me alone and until Jack would come and meet me. On this particular day, I cried for nearly an hour. Matthew Pettit had gone, but a small crowd had gathered around me.

JACK calls WILLIAM amongst the crowd.

A couple of BYSTANDERS appear just before JACK joins.

JACK

Get out of my way, let me through. William? William! I'm coming! Get out of my way, I'm his brother!

BYSTANDER

He needs a doctor not a brother. He's a Mar. Look at 'im.

BYSTANDER 2

He needs locking up.

JACK

Clear off the lot of you!

BYSTANDER 2

I feel sorry for their mother, a Mar and a foul mouth.

JACK

I'm here William, it's okay.

JACK holds WILLIAM.

WILLIAM

It took me a while to realise Jack was there and when I did I cried even more because he was holding me and I felt like I couldn't breathe.

JACK

Come on, William, calm down.