

SCRIPTS – SILENT NIGHT, 2014.

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SILENT NIGHT

FIRST WRITTEN 2008

REDRAFTED 2014

REHEARSAL DRAFT: AUGUST 2014

Book and lyrics: Helen Newall

Original music and adaptations: Matt Baker

Projections: Helen Newall

CHARACTERS:

Alice Blakely – a Cheshire lady, a nurse

Joe Blakely – her younger brother

Walter Nightingale – her sweetheart and a captain in the Cheshire Regiment

VOICES:

Princip Gavrilo – the Serbian assassin of Franz Ferdinand

A sergeant in the Cheshires

Captain Jones

Private Tasker

A Major

French Boy

A vicar

A Belgian nurse

A Belgian farmer

SILENT NIGHT

PART 1: MANOEUVRES

Simple set. Ovals

SCENE 1: SARAJEVO

VOICE	He is standing outside Moritz Schiller's café, heavy with failure.
VOICE	Gavrilo Princip.
VOICE	A young man.
VOICE	A revolutionary
VOICE	A disappointed dreamer
VOICE	The most dangerous kind
VOICE	Standing in Sarajevo in 1914.
VOICE	There is a breeze from the river
VOICE	And petals fall from the oleanders like snow
VOICE	But the city is hot and full of people.
VOICE	They are waiting to see an important man in an automobile
VOICE	Gavrilo Princip thinks they are sycophantic fools.
VOICE	Why are you still here, Princip?
VOICE	There were six of you. How could you all fail?
VOICE	Your chance is lost.
VOICE	The route was changed: he's long gone by now.
VOICE	But then the motorcar you thought was gone turns into the street and stops by Schiller's Café
VOICE	Then it begins to turn and the engine stalls.

VOICE	The hood of the car is rolled down and you can see men in the car shouting at the driver,
VOICE	but you can't hear anything anymore: you can only see their mouths moving.
VOICE	And then you see him: the one on whose behalf they are all shouting.
VOICE	Franz Ferdinand
VOICE	He's smiling at his wife, and she at him.
VOICE	But they're nervous.
VOICE	The black plume in her hat flutters in the breeze.
VOICE	The buttons on his uniform glint in the sun.
VOICE	She has dark roses on her lap.
VOICE	You are so close you could call their names and they would turn and see you.
VOICE	Call their names...
VOICE	This is the moment...
VOICE	And then, in the shimmer of the heat, in this dream of summer, even time stalls.
VOICE	There is only this moment.
VOICE	Like a held breath.
VOICE	One last moment of another world.
VOICE	He hears birdsong.
VOICE	And then the car rolls backwards.
VOICE	Everything is drifting away.
VOICE	You're losing your chance.

VOICE And he walks to the car

VOICE And lifts his pistol.

*Two gun shots.
The group around PRINCIP open their hands and
blow white petals into the air.*

VOICE And everything changes.

PRINCIP stares at the gun in his hands.

SONG: There's a Long, Long Trail

Nights are growing very lonely,
Days are very long;
I'm a-growing weary only
List'ning for your song.
Old remembrances are thronging
Thro' my memory.
Till it seems the world is full of dreams
Just to call you back to me.

Chorus:
There's a long, long trail a-winding
Into the land of my dreams,
Where the nightingales are singing
And a white moon beams:
There's a long, long night of waiting
Until my dreams all come true;
Till the day when I'll be going down
That long, long trail with you.

SCENE 2: TEA BY THE RIVER

Parasols and picnics.

VOICE Such a long, long hot summer.

VOICE A golden summer.

VOICE The summer, when far away, a Bosnian Serb shot an
Austrian archduke.

VOICE But it was a long, long way away.

VOICE It barely rippled the waters of the River Dee.

VOICE And it was a lovely summer for strolling in the Meadows.

VOICE Skylarks and sweethearts

.
ALICE Dear Walter Nightingale

.
WALTER Dearest Alice Blakely.

WALTER offers violets to ALICE.

ALICE Violets! How very lovely.

WALTER Will you marry me, Alice Blakely?

ALICE Walter!...

WALTER I'm... sorry.

ALICE ...Please don't be...

WALTER I've embarrassed you. Forgive me...

ALICE Walter, I can't...

WALTER But...

ALICE Don't be hurt. I couldn't bear it if you were hurt.

WALTER It's... it's a flesh wound.

ALICE I want to carry on at the Infirmary for just a little while longer. And you have to agree that nursing is such a useful thing for a woman for when she is at last wife and has children.

WALTER Children!

ALICE I do want to be Mrs Nightingale.

WALTER Sister Nightingale!

ALICE Don't tease: you know very well that if we were to be married I should have to leave my post immediately.

WALTER I know.

ALICE Be patient.

WALTER If only I were your patient, Sister Blakely.

ALICE I don't pander to malingerers, Walter!

WALTER So I may ask you again?

ALICE Perhaps.

WALTER When?

ALICE This time next year.

WALTER I shall be here this time next year, Alice Blakely, and I shall bring you violets and under the skylarks I shall ask you to be my wife and if you say no I shall die.

VOICE And it is so very sunny that anything seems possible.

VOICE And they listen to the military bands playing in the bandstand on the Groves.

VOICE And then they take a rowing boat out onto the Dee.

ALICE Don't splash river water all over my new dress, Walter!

WALTER This is why I'm an army man not a naval officer.

ALICE Shall we land and find a picnic spot and have some tea?

WALTER How about here?

JOE How lovely!

ALICE Joe!

JOE Mind if I fall in beside you Captain Nightingale, sir? (*salutes*)

WALTER I'm off duty, Joe: call me Walter.

ALICE unpacks a teapot and cups from a basket. They spread a cloth and take tea.

ALICE I thought you were going walking in Wales for the day with William Maynard.

JOE I was but he had to meet his mater instead so I thought I'd pester you. Good to see you, Walter. How's Londonderry?

WALTER All quiet for once.

JOE And how long is your leave?

WALTER As a matter of fact, I've been called back early.

ALICE Walter?

WALTER I meant to tell you: I just didn't want to spoil the afternoon.

ALICE Is it this Serbian thing the papers are full of?

JOE Are the top brass taking it seriously?

WALTER It will come to nothing. There's a Precautionary Period been announced, that's all.

JOE Sounds terrific: what does it mean?

WALTER We are to prepare for immediate mobilisation.

ALICE Walter! That's not nothing.

JOE So there is going to be a war?

WALTER It will blow over. It usually does.

ALICE And if it doesn't?

WALTER It'll be a tin-pot little Balkan affair like all the other Balkan wars: it'll snuff out as soon as it's begun.

JOE At least something exciting's happening to you. I'll be stuck inside an office for most of August.

ALICE You are an incorrigible dreamer, Joseph Blakely.

Pours tea.

WALTER I thought you were with the Territorials. You must have a little bit of excitement every so often.

JOE It's a lark at weekends and summer camps, but my weekdays are a hell of arithmetic and inky ledgers.

ALICE If you work hard/

JOE /I could one day become an actuary in my late father's firm...

WALTER Some chaps would give their eye-teeth to be in an office.

ALICE Sugar?

WALTER Thank you. One lump.

ALICE Joe often doesn't realise just how lucky he is.

JOE I do! I just can't countenance a lifetime of sums and dust.

ALICE It was good enough for father.

JOE But I'm not him.

WALTER What would you rather do?

ALICE You'll laugh.

JOE Alice, don't be tiresome.

WALTER Sounds extremely mysterious.

ALICE It is extremely mysterious: my little brother wants to run away and join the circus!

THOMAS I do not.

ALICE Thomas can make coins disappear. Especially silver coins that don't belong to him.

WALTER And how exactly do you do that?

ALICE He's sworn to secrecy. But he might show you.

JOE Do you have a coin?

WALTER I do...

ALICE Careful, Walter: you won't see that again!

JOE demonstrates his coin tricks.

WALTER Bravo! You should go on the stage.

ALICE Mother wouldn't hear of it.

JOE I might need to: they've let William Maynard go from our place.

THOMAS spins coin back. WALTER catches it.

ALICE They're letting people go?

JOE Business has been slow lately.

WALTER It's all this talk of a war in Europe. It unsettles people.

ALICE But a war in Europe wouldn't affect us here, would it?

WALTER Probably not.

JOE Just our luck.

ALICE Poor William Maynard.

JOE Don't worry about Maynard: he's pleased as punch.

ALICE But what will he do now?

JOE He's already taken the King's shilling.

ALICE He's joined the army?

JOE He's nearly eighteen and he's as tall as a tree.

ALICE I thought you had to be nineteen.

WALTER You do.

JOE Apparently, he put a slip of paper in his shoe with 19

written on it and when they asked if he was over nineteen he said that he was. Quite a good ruse, don't you think, Walter?

WALTER I'm pretending you didn't tell me this.

JOE I'm thinking of keeping him company!

ALICE You can't.

JOE Why not? I'm older than Maynard and I'm already in the Territorials.

ALICE What will the clerks in the office do?

JOE I've had quite enough of being ordered about by little men with big moustaches.

WALTER And of course, there's none of that in the armed forces.

JOE Do you know where the Cheshires are right now, Walter - besides the ones in Ireland with you? I'll wager they're not in some dusty Chester office.

WALTER The Second Battalion's out in India.

JOE You see: one minute Maynard's cycling round on an errand bicycle; the next he's sailing for an outpost of the Empire to do glorious things. I've a mind to join the Regulars.

ALICE Whatever would mother say?

JOE The pay's bound to be better by half. She'd be thrilled to bits.

ALICE And what if there is a war?

JOE Then there'll be a whole heap of excitement. It's an exciting life, isn't it, Walter?

WALTER It's very different from office life.

JOE No more dust and ink: honest sweat and blood for King and country. It's a proper Boys' Own adventure!

ALICE Don't be ridiculous, Joseph.

JOE The blooming war will be over if I'm not careful.

ALICE You can't!

JOE If there's to be a war, I don't want to miss it, Alice.

ALICE Don't be ridiculous, Joseph/

WALTER But there won't be a war.
They've said all this before about the Prussians and it
came to nothing. It'll be another storm in a teacup.

ALICE More tea, Walter?

SCENE 4: POLITICS

They sift through old newspapers, letters, photographs

VOICE Two pistol shots in Sarajevo.

VOICE An Austrian archduke and his wife are killed

VOICE And the sound of the shots that kill them echoes across Europe.

VOICE Austria is outraged and asks for Germany's support.

VOICE Germany gives it.

VOICE And Austria declares war on Serbia.

VOICE Russia does not want a war.

VOICE The Grand Council advises against it.

VOICE Even Rasputin advises against it.

VOICE But the Tzar is adamant, and in support of Serbia, he puts Russian military forces on a war footing.

VOICE Germany warns Russia not to mobilise.

VOICE Which, of course, Russia ignores.

VOICE And so Germany declares war on Russia.

VOICE And because France is Russia's ally, Germany demands an assurance of France's neutrality.

VOICE Which France will not give

VOICE and seizing a chance to get back the long lost territories of Alsace-Lorraine, she mobilises.

VOICE So Germany declares war on France.

VOICE And marches for the French borders,

VOICE As fast as possible,

VOICE via Belgium,

VOICE which is neutral.

VOICE The Germans demand unimpeded passage through to the French border.

VOICE Belgium refuses.

VOICE (*Waves newspaper like a flag*) Gallant little Belgium!

VOICE And the British Government?

VOICE Britain warns the Germans to respect Belgium's neutrality.

VOICE But they step over the line.

VOICE The British Government sends Germany an ultimatum,

VOICE Which is ignored,

VOICE And as of 11pm, on 4th August 1914, Britain is at war.

WALTER (*Opens envelope with cable inside*) And the 1st Battalion of the Cheshire Regiment is with the British Expeditionary Forces.

VOICE And the lamps are going out all over Europe

SONG: A Pop at the Boche

Patter There's a little spot of bother in some far and distant land
And the King has called us boys to do our part and lend a
hand
So we're laying down our ploughshares and we're taking up
the sword And we're marching with the Cheshires for old
England.

Chorus We're going to take a little pop at the Boche
We're off to see the world, we're going to have some fun.
We're going to take a bit of a pop at the Hun
And show 'em how to fire a great big gun, bang bang.

SCENE 5: AT LAST THINGS ARE HAPPENING

ALICE Joe!

JOE You're home early.

ALICE Did you see the crowds? I've never seen Chester so full of
people.

JOE That's because something is happening at last.

ALICE There's no need to be so enthusiastic about this, Joe.

JOE I'm not. It's just that it feels... momentous.

ALICE I tried to post a letter to Walter on my way home but there
were so many people in the square I gave up. But I did
manage to get us a Chronicle.

Gives him the newspaper which he opens

ALICE Did I tell you Walter got his orders? I got a letter this
morning. Apparently he's drowning in paperwork, so
despite what you think, there's plenty of office-work in the
army. (*Reads*) "there are endless forms to be filled in for
wagons, ammunition, rifles, iron rations, bicycles, bully beef,
tents and tins of maconochie." What's maconochie?

JOE I've no idea.

ALICE Anyway, he sounds quite busy with it all. So.

JOE So. Lots of people are getting married.

ALICE More fool them: it'll all be over by Christmas.

JOE (*Holds up newspaper*) The Chronicle says: "While the British Fleet sails, British food supplies will be quite secure!"

ALICE Huh! They've not tried getting bread. And there's not a single sausage to be had anywhere in Chester. The stores are besieged.

WALTER (*With a clipboard*) Some say this is a just and unavoidable war! I say this is an administrative nightmare of a war, but we rehearsed mobilisation earlier this summer so we'll be ready in no time at all.

JOE The police have been knocking on doors.

ALICE That's because Lord Kitchener has called on every available National Reserve Man to serve his country.

VOICE On 9th August two batteries of the Cheshire Brigade Royal Field Artillery march out of Chester. She goes to see them and she thinks of Walter in Ireland.

WALTER Mobilisation 1st Cheshires, Londerry, complete on the 10th August. By the right, quick march!

VOICE It is quite a touching send off.

VOICE It rains quite hard

VOICE But it doesn't dampen anybody's spirits.

VOICE And the city folk wave flags for them.

WALTER Eyes right!

ALICE They were magnificent

WALTER Embarkation for France is on the 14th August in Belfast

JOE They're taking horses in the street.

ALICE Mother, Tom and I were in a cab one minute and the next, the horse was taken and we had to get out and walk.

WALTER We've requisitioned as many good Irish horses as we can get.

ALICE The cabby was crying, poor thing.

JOE Fancy that: a grown man crying.

SCENE 6: THE CALL

VOICE And then Lord Kitchener calls for 100,000 men.

VOICE Your King and Country need you: a call to arms.

VOICE Come along boys! Enlist today!

VOICE Be ready! Join now!

VOICE Fall in! Answer now in your country's hour of need.

ALICE Where on earth will they all come from?

JOE I, Thomas Arthur Blakely, do make Oath

ALICE Joe!

JOE ...that I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs, and Successors, and that I will, as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs, and Successors, in Person, Crown and Dignity, against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and of the Generals and Officers set over me. So help me God.

ALICE Joe... What have you done?

JOE I've joined the Regulars, that's what I've done. I'll be out there before you know it.

SCENE 7: ALICE'S LAMENT

JOE I came to say goodbye.

Frostily, ALICE turns a page of the newspaper

JOE I have to go to the barracks.

ALICE (*Starchily reading paper*) Apparently, Hoole Bank is becoming a Red Cross Hospital. Mr Hayes is paying for it all from his own pocket.

JOE People are trying to do what they can to help.

ALICE And is this what you can do?

JOE Yes. ... The newspapers are saying...

ALICE I know what they're saying: the Kaiser and his armies will be utterly crushed by Christmas.

JOE So I'd best get up there to do my bit before it's too late.

ALICE And do you honestly believe that: that it will be over by Christmas?

JOE Yes.

ALICE You're still a boy.

JOE I didn't shoot an archduke. I didn't invade somebody else's country. I didn't make this war. But I can play my part to help finish it. We have to stand up for what is right.

ALICE I'm not sure I know what right is anymore.

JOE You didn't seem to mind about Walter going...

ALICE I did mind. I still mind. I mind very much. And I couldn't bear it if... if... anything happened to either of you.

JOE I'll be careful.

ALICE But the Germans won't be careful, will they?

JOE Don't cry....

ALICE You've broken mother's heart.

JOE Alice. Please don't be... I'll write... I will write, I promise.

SCENE 8: TRAINING

WALTER Dear Joe. The French are a decent lot: you'll like them. They greet us with songs and cheers and flowers. I feel quite the hero before I've even fired a shot. It seems too sunny for there to be a war on.

JOE There's a rumour some of us will get drafted into a battalion to go to France sooner rather than later. Alice writes often.

WALTER And to me.

JOE She's very fond of you, you know.

WALTER And I of her. In fact, when this war is over...

JOE (*sings*) When this ruddy war is over.... It hasn't even begun for me yet. I'm sending you a photograph. All the other boys are getting them done: don't I look quite the military man?

WALTER You look quite serious and grown up, Joe. Not the idiot we know and love!

JOE Careful Walter! I can, quite ruthlessly, bayonet a bag o' straw to death.

WALTER You are a card, Joseph Blakely.

JOE Post scriptum. Pardon the scrawl but just heard we are despatched. At last! No official information as to where, but God knows, this is a glorious enterprise and I will endure! For King and country, I will endure!

WALTER Do let me know where!

JOE Birkenhead!

SONG: Pack up your Troubles

Private Perks is a funny little codger
With a smile a funny smile.
Five feet none, he's an artful little dodger
With a smile a funny smile.
Flush or broke he'll have his little joke,
He can't be suppress'd.
All the other fellows have to grin
When he gets this off his chest, Hi!

Chorus Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag,
And smile, smile, smile,
While you've a lucifer to light your fag,
Smile, boys, that's the style.
What's the use of worrying?
It never was worth while, so
Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag,
And smile, smile, smile.

SCENE 9: THE CHESHIRES AT MONS

VOICE (FEMALE) They march to this war down hot straight French roads,
each man carrying 150lbs on his back, and the sun beating
down till their tunics are wringing with sweat and their feet
burn.

SERG Left right left right. Come on, Cheshire lads: pick your feet
up!

WALTER We'll take the ten minutes rest at the hour, sergeant.

VOICE The land is green and fresh and the roads overhanging
with pear trees and along the way people offer wine and
coffee.

WALTER Non, merci.

VOICE And when they do stop, men collapse back onto their
packs and sleep where they fall. Like dead men.

WALTER Time to move out, sergeant.

SERG Captain wants us moving again: on your feet! On your feet!

OLD-HAND	I was just back in Cheshire swimming in the Dee, serg.
SERGEANT	You were dreaming, boyo: but you're here with me, you lucky lad!
VOICE (F)	Fields give way to factories. They cross the Belgian border. The sun still burns and still they march.
OLD-HAND	I'd give anything to wade waist deep in water right now.
VOICE	And then at last, in a thin yellow dusk, they trudge into a town called Dour: a busy little place full of clanging tramways and factories and smoking chimneys and mountainous black slagheaps.
SERG	Platoon halt!
WALTER	(<i>Maps</i>) We're just short of Mons.
OLD-HAND	Never heard of it, sir.
WALTER	Well it's home for the time being. We're billeted over there in that factory.
OLD-HAND	By the picturesque slag-heap, sir?
WALTER	That's the one, private.
VOICE (F)	And then the Dragoon Guards on horses trot through. And none thought that they could lose this war seeing those glossy horses and their smart finely turned out riders.
WALTER	Get some rest, men. It's the last night before our war begins.

SCENE 10: IT BEGINS

SERG	Shake yourselves, lads.
VOICE	A busy army morning: the horses are groomed and fretting at their bits.

SERG	Look lively, lads!
VOICE	And it's a sort of organised chaos of men and shaving mirrors and motor vehicles and messages.
MESSENGER	Another wire here, sir.
WALTER	Another one!
SERG	There is a war on, sir!
VOICE	Men are stamping their feet against the chill: the dew has made everything damp. But it will be warm.
WALTER	The Manchesters are relieving us: we're moving out.
SERG	You heard the Captain: Fall in!
OLD-HAND	This isn't a war, Serg, it's a sight seeing trip.
SERG	Look lively, Cheshire lads; and welcome to Cook's Tours: Quick march!
VOICE (F)	They leave behind the factories, and march through fields, the land rising and falling so they never know what's over the next crest, but there's still no sign of any war.
SERG	Keep those feet moving.
VOICE	And all the while, the sun is climbing and men are sweating. In the town behind us bells begin tolling.
OLD-HAND	It's Sunday, sir.
WALTER	So it is.
VOICE	Scurrying between the platoons, there are families dressed in church best black going down the lanes.
SERG	Cyclist, sir!
VOICE	And he's rides down the hill ahead of them and pedalling hell for leather towards them.
WALTER	It's Tasker. What the devil's got into him?

SERG	Spit it out, Tasker.
TASKER	Enemy ahead, sir. Just over the next rise.
WALTER	Prepare to engage.
SERG	Extend to the right. And advance.
VOICE	They reach the top of the bank and crouch by a thorn hedge just in time to see the Dragoons wheel into formation.
OLD-HAND	The Hun isn't going to like this.
VOICE	The horses rear and are held, then suddenly they leap into a gallop, their riders drawing swords. It cheers the men to see it.
WALTER	I can't see the enemy. What have you got?
SERG	<i>(Field glasses)</i> Nothing.
VOICE	And all the while, it feels like a game: like they're on manoeuvres.
OLD-HAND	Something on the far hill, sir.
SERG	Heads down!
VOICE	The Dragoons wheel their horses towards the far hill, in a cloud of dust, looking every inch a fighting force. And then the guns start.
SERG	Machine guns.
WALTER	<i>(Field glasses)</i> Dear God.
VOICE	Men tumble from horses. Horses flounder and roll, and scream and bleed. A few stagger upright and bolt to a copse of thin trees, and the men still mounted turn their horses and follow.
WALTER	This isn't a battle; it's a massacre.
SERG	Sir?

WALTER	Take us forward.
SERG	Advance!
VOICE	And then they see infantry emerging like grey ghosts from the thickets: dense formations of them.
WALTER	Prepare to engage.
SERG	Two rounds battery fire. On my command!
WALTER	Fire.
SERG	Let 'em have it, boys.
VOICE	And they bang the bolts on the Lee Enfield rifles up and down till their hands ache and the barrels are red hot. Fifteen rounds a minute.
SERG	Repeat!
WALTER	Someone's hit here!
VOICE	Sometimes they cry out, sometimes there is just a sigh and stillness. He can still see their open mouths, their surprised dead eyes.
SERG	Repeat!
VOICE	The Germans take heavy losses. But they keep coming and the Cheshires keep mowing them down, till the field is strewn with horses and cavalry men and German infantry.
WALTER	Where's the ammunition mule?
OLD-HAND	No sign, sir.
SERG	Well, look for it.
OLD-HAND	Sir! It's nowhere.
SERG	Who's got any bullets left?
OLD-HAND	I know where there's some.

VOICE	And he crawls under the shooting to the dead and the dying and pulls through their pockets.
SERG	What are you doing, you bloody madman?
OLD-HAND	They can't use them anymore.
VOICE	And he's stuffing handfuls of clips into his tunic to bring back.
CYCLIST	Message sir. We're to retire.
WALTER	Sergeant! Pull us back!
SERG	Retire! Individually to the right.
WALTER	There are bullets whizzing above our heads, cracking into the stones and splintering the hedge. I crawl to the sunken road.
WALTER	Where's the rest of the Battalion?
SERG	(<i>Field glasses</i>) Captain Jones is retiring on our left, sir!
VOICE	A Major gallops up the lane through the swarm of bullets.
MAJOR	Who said to retire? Where the bloody hell did that order come from?
WALTER	With the runner, sir.
SERG	Advance! And look sharp about it.
MAJOR	No use now, sergeant. Bring them back in.
SERG	Retire!
OLD-HAND	Make your bloody mind up.
VOICE	And the Major gallops off into the afternoon sunshine.
SERG	Where's the rest of the British?
WALTER	The Cheshires seem to be the only ones here.
VOICE	A noise overhead.

WALTER	Heads down! Get down! Down!
VOICE	And then suddenly low, there's a biplane above them and they shift their aim to fire at it.
WALTER	Cease fire:
SERG	Hold your fire!
WALTER	It's a Farman: it's one of ours!
OLD-HAND	I've never seen one of them before, sir.
SERG	Bloody useless new fangled things. What's the use of something you can see coming for miles?
WALTER	It's turning.
VOICE	It shimmers in the heat and they see the explosions of sudden white smoke on the hill below before they hear the thud of the guns.
SERG	It's drawing their fire, sir.
WALTER	Time to move out while they're busy.
SERG	Moving out!
VOICE	They have to leave the wounded. They lie bleeding and pleading for them to take them. And they couldn't take them. They find a railway line and a French soldier, no more than a boy, clutching a bugle. He's in red trousers and a blue jerkin from another kind of war.
SERG	Where are your company, lad?
WALTER	Ou sont les Français?
BOY	J'en sais pas.
WALTER	He's bleeding. Give him some water...
VOICE	But the boy is too dazed to drink.

WALTER (*Field glasses*) Hell. They've flanked us! I think the rest of Corps have moved back. We must be behind their lines.

SERG Held them off for a good while, though, didn't we, sir?

WALTER We did, but we're in a bit of a pickle now.

A shot rings out.

VOICE And then the French boy falls at their feet with a bullet between his eyes

WALTER Sweet Jesus! Take cover.

VOICE And the Sunday bells are ringing again, wildy and loudly, and this time, it's a warning.

WALTER Time to go!

VOICE They scatter into a wilderness of lanes and thickets and dead men and flies and Sunday bells and dying horses.

SERG I think we're lost, sir.

WALTER Yes, we've been damn well left behind by a retreat we didn't know was happening.

More gun fire.

WALTER Good luck, Sergeant!

SERG Sir!

SCENE 11: ANGELS AT MONS / CAROL: It Came Upon A Midnight Clear

VOICE He hears afterwards that there were angels above Mons and that the Germans fled. He doesn't see any Germans fleeing. And the sun is as hot as a summer holiday. And the noise of the enemy's artillery doesn't stop.

VOICE (*sings*) Yet in the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;

WALTER We were by a farm, you see, when they caught up with us. They fired on us and Jones and Hogan fell... I

rolled into a small twist of hay in time to see Crookes take a bullet. Didn't kill him.

VOICE (sings) Beneath the angel strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;

WALTER We were vastly outnumbered. It was pitiable. I think Sergeant Raynor surrendered when he thought he was the last man standing. The Germans handed out smokes. I could hear Raynor talking to Crookes. I had half a mind then to surrender too.

VOICES (sing) And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring;

WALTER Maybe the sergeant knew, because he looked around and waved his hand as if at a fly, but I knew he was telling me to hold tight.

VOICE (sings) Oh hush the noise, ye men of strife
And hear the angels sing.

WALTER I watched them dig graves for Captain Jones and Drummer Hogan. The guns were still thudding, and there was rifle fire far away and the skylarks still singing. And dusk came. And when it was dark and the others had gone, I walked over the fields, stumbling over dead men till dawn.

SCENE 12: MISSING

ALICE is given an envelope. The soldier salutes her and leaves. She holds it for a long time and then slowly opens it. And reads it.

ALICE ...Missing...

SCENE 13: BERKENDAEL

WALTER is helped by a Belgian. Darkness. A lamp.

BELGE Voila Monsieur. Berkendael.

He hammers on the door.

NURSE	Qui est là?
BELGE	Mademoiselle. C'est Capiau.
NURSE	(<i>Starts</i>) Monsieur Capiau. Venez! Vite! (<i>They bundle Walter inside</i>)
BELGE	Bon chance, monsieur!
WALTER	Merci.
NURSE	Soldat?
WALTER	Croix Rouge?
NURSE	Bien sur. Je vous en pries...
WALTER	Mademoiselle... English?...
NURSE	Ah... English Soldier?
WALTER	1 st Battalion of the Cheshire Regiment...
NURSE	Are you injured?
WALTER	Just tired.
NURSE	What's your name?
WALTER	Captain Nightingale. Walter Nightingale
NURSE	So, Monsieur Rossignol.
WALTER	Rossignol?
NURSE	This is your name while you are here. You have a flesh wound I must clean...
	<i>She cleans and bandages a wound on his forehead.</i>
WALTER	A flesh wound? More hurt pride than anything... Your English is very good.
NURSE	The Matron here is English. I will inform her/

WALTER	No!
NURSE	You're not our first fugitive. Our first secret soldiers were Cheshire soldiers, just like you.
WALTER	When?
NURSE	A few weeks ago.
WALTER	Do you recall their names?
NURSE	I think... maybe ... Bogaire...
WALTER	Bogaire? Ah! Lieutenant-Colonel Boger? Well I'll be...
NURSE	His leg was very bad. He had an operation here. His friend was in a better condition... Monsieur Meachin.
WALTER	Sergeant Major Meachin! Sly old dog... How did they do it?
NURSE	They escaped from a hospital, and lived in woods and fields, till Monsieur Capiou brought them here.
WALTER	He's a good man.
NURSE	There are many Belgians like him who want to help the Allies.
WALTER	Are they still here?
NURSE	The matron organised identity papers and friends to take them over the border into Holland.
WALTER	If she were caught... If either of you were caught/
NURSE	They would shoot us as spies.
WALTER	You're very brave.
NURSE	She shows me how. When the Germans marched into Brussels, I wept and trembled with fear. But she said that I must not give way to my emotion; that my life no longer belonged to myself alone but to my duty as a nurse.
WALTER	What's her name?

NURSE She is Edith Cavell. She is British: do you know her?

WALTER shakes his head.

NURSE You'll meet her in the morning. Lie down now while it's quiet. It will soon be dawn. You must sleep now.

A dawn chorus begins....

SCENE 14: DREAM

WALTER I've almost forgotten what silence sounds like.

ALICE Shhhh!

WALTER And birdsong.

ALICE And we walked in the meadows

JOE In a golden summer

WALTER Alice?

ALICE Shhh! You're dreaming.

JOE And far away, a Bosnian Serb shoots an Austrian archduke.

ALICE But it's a long, long way away.

WALTER It will all blow over.

JOE It barely ripples the waters of the River Dee.

ALICE Remember the heat?

VOICE He remembers the heat.
He lies in a cell remembering Schiller's café and the weight of the pistol in his hand, and then the moment: Two shots. And then archduke cries out to his wife: Don't die, he says.
And he remembers the vivid red wet stain spreading out over her white dress. And everything changed.

WALTER

It's so long ago now, it may as well be a dream.

SONG: Long, Long Trail

Nights are growing very lonely,
Days are very long;
I'm a-growing weary only
List'ning for your song.
Old remembrances are thronging
Thro' my memory.
Till it seems the world is full of dreams
Just to call you back to me.

Chorus

There's a long, long trail a-winding
Into the land of my dreams,
Where the nightingales are singing
And a white moon beams:
There's a long, long night of waiting
Until my dreams all come true;
Till the day when I'll be going down
That long, long trail with you.

All night long I hear you calling,
Calling sweet and low;
Seem to hear your footsteps falling,
Ev'ry where I go.
Tho' the road between us stretches
Many a weary mile.
I forget that you're not with me yet,
When I think I see you smile.

Chorus

There's a long, long trail a-winding
Into the land of my dreams,
Where the nightingales are singing
And a white moon beams:
There's a long, long night of waiting
Until my dreams all come true;
Till the day when I'll be going down
That long, long trail with you.

<END OF PART ONE>

PART 2: TRENCHES

SONG: to the tune of Long, Long Trail

Nights are growing very lonely
Sitting on a mine
I am growing weary
Only strolling down the line
All the trench is full of water
Through it I must go
Though I'm getting wet, I'm not downhearted yet
Even if relief is slow.

There's a long, long trench a-winding
Into the land of the mines
Where the sausages are falling
And those dud five-nines
There are long, long nights of watching
Not unprofanely expressed
Till the day that I'll be going down
That long, long trench to rest.

All the trench is round us falling
Dig for all your life
On patrol we go out crawling
Armed with bomb and knife
In the day we go out sniping,
There we lie and wait;
If we see a Hun, at him we point a gun,
And put a bullet through his pate.

There's a long, long trench a-winding
Into the land of the mines
Where the sausages are falling
And those dud five-nines
There are long, long nights of watching
Not unprofanely expressed
Till the day that I'll be going down
That long, long trench to rest.

Trench Version by Lieutenant E.M. Sidebotham
Lieutenant L.V.J. Pogson
2nd Lieutenant J.E. Taylor
1st Battalion Cheshire Regiment

SCENE 1: YPRES

VOICE He took a London Bus to the Front.

OLD-HAND 2 Not Battersea, boys, you're getting off in Berlin.

SERG 2 Bailleul: bus terminates here. Everybody off and fall in!

VOICE They march out from the town on cobbled roads that turn into tracks, past canvas hospitals, till at dusk the tracks became duck boards crisscrossing a wet mud-marsh of shell holes where the pack mules and the horses sank to their girths, where the landscape was a dull mud graveyard of fallen trees and rough white wooden crosses.

SERG Unknown soldiers.

VOICE And coming the other way: a line of ragged wet tramps stuttering and stumbling and coughing.

JOE Bloody hell! It's the army.

RAGGED SOLDIER You don't want to take that road, lads: don't you know there's a war on up there?

JOE Are we downhearted?

ALL No!

RAGGED Well you soon bloody well will be.

VOICE And ahead of them, in the thickening air, flashes of light in the darkness, and distant thunder rolling over the marshes.

OLD-HAND 2 They're having fun again.

JOE Fun?

VOICE And when every nerve in his body tells him to run the other way, they trudge on towards the roaring storm and the trenches.

SERG 2 Now this part could get exciting: we're crossing a bare skyline so keep your wits about you.

Whistling of falling shell

JOE A shell!

VOICE And he dives to the ground, splashing into the wet.

Huge explosion.

VOICE And all the others, the hardened trench rats, don't so much as flinch as thirty yards ahead, there is a huge fountain of mud and a rattling spatter of shrapnel.

SERG 2 You can get up now, son: it obviously didn't have your number on it.

OLD-HAND 2 Lucky it's not Friday, sergeant!

SERG 2 Oh yes indeed, Blakely: round here, we say it's very unlucky to die on a Friday.

JOE I'll bear that in mind. Sir.

VOICE And then the first trench: it zigzags into the dark, and it's waist deep in water.

SERG 2 Lift your packs and keep moving.

OLD HAND 2 And keep your eyes peeled for submarines.

VOICE They wallow deeper and deeper into the cold black slime with the star shells bursting overhead.

VOICE And everything is caught for a moment in the brilliant magnesium light.

VOICE Every shell shattered tree

VOICE Every flash of water.

VOICE Every outstretched hand.

VOICE Every dead face.

OLD HAND 2 Fritz's welcome home fireworks, that is.

VOICE The German artillery must have seen them because they send

over a shower of bullets.

SERG 2 Keep moving! And keep your head down, Blakely. Don't want to lose you before we've had our shilling's worth.

SONG; DUKE OF YORK

Oh the Grand old Duke of York He
had ten thousand men
He marched 'em out of the frontline trench And
he marched them in again.

And when they were stood they had rum And
when they were sat they had bread
But when they put their heads 'bove the parapets They
were dead they were dead they were dead.

SCENE 2: TRENCHES

SERG 2 Those of you new to this little nuisance will know darkness is your friend: during daylight hours, keep your heads down and don't put so much as a finger over the parapet.

OLD-HAND 2 Put that match out!

SERG 2 The Alleymen are on higher ground than us: they can look down over us. And we don't want a goodnight kiss from Fritz's snipers, do we Blakely.

JOE No! Sir!

VOICE The trenches are eight feet deep and they have names

VOICE They stroll down Lovers Lane

VOICE And sniff the latrines off Lavender Walk

VOICE There's Sparrow Trench

VOICE Idiots Corner

VOICE Rats Alley

VOICE Chaos Trench

VOICE	Gangrene Alley
VOICE	And Stockport Road.
VOICE	And out beyond the parapet, beyond the wire, below the rolling thunder
SERG 2	No Man's Land...
VOICE	The leaves did not fall from the trees in No Man's Land, they were blasted away by shells.
OLD HAND 2	And the boys we have lost lie out there:
VOICE	The three months dead and the dying from last night's trench raid.
VOICE	And above them all, the living and the unburied dead, the falling shells make a strange whistling sound.
JOE	It will haunt me that sound.
OLD HAND 2	You bet your last shilling it will. But only in dreams, boy. Only in dreams.
VOICE	They are nocturnal digging creatures. In the dark they slither out over the top and burrow and dig and crawl like worms and lay out the wire. In the dark, they move up and down the line. And then in the half light of dawn and dusk 2 Stand to arms!
VOICE	And they stand, bayonets fixed, waiting and listening for an attack which never comes.
SERG 2	Stand down and clean rifles.
VOICE	And in the daylight, they clean and oil the bolts and the sweet complicated machinery of the Lee Enfield rifles.
JOE	Only clean things here.
SERG 2	Because your lives depend upon 'em. Now get that cloth pulled through.
JOE	Sir!
VOICE	And they nurse the rifles and wait, for someone somewhere

else to decide what they should do: and the rats eat their fingers and their food; and the water rots their feet.

SERG 2 Welcome to earth shattering shelling

VOICE And earth shattering terror

VOICE And earth shattering boredom.

JOE writes in a journal

OLD HAND 2 Don't let the serg see you writing that.

JOE Why not?

OLD HAND 2 Not permitted. Like photography. (*And he winks and takes a photograph of Joe.*)

SERG walks through. They hide journal and camera.

JOE (*Writing journal*) It's easy to be brave at home.

VOICE At home it's easy to hate the enemy.

JOE (*writing journal*) But here, my enemy shares the mud and the bitter cold.

VOICE (*Reading journal years later*) He understands the water filled holes that drown the wounded and the exhausted.

JOE My enemy understands better than the folk at home the deaths that fly in the shattered metal shards of shells.

VOICE All of them, friend and foe, see the faltering light of the falling flares

JOE My enemy and I die randomly, unexpectedly.

VOICE We know the sudden stupid deaths seen down the sights of a sniper's rifle.

JOE We don't fight: we sit in the mud and watch each other.

VOICE It's what we have in common. It binds us.

JOE When the rain falls, it falls on him too.

SERG 2 (*Sees journal*) It's raining cats and dogs, Blakely! (*but turns blind eye*)

OLD-HAND 2 (*Takes another photo of the serg*) Katzen und dachshunds, eh Fritz!

JOE We don't look like soldiers anymore, serg: we're all mudlarks!

VOICE Hell doesn't burn and it isn't hot.

VOICE Hell is endless autumn rain.

VOICE It pours till there can be no more rain to fall and still it falls, filling every pock and shell hole and ditch and trench;

VOICE it runs from the sandbags and the parapets, drips from their cloth caps, mufflers, great coats, rifles, into trenches already deep with thick brown water.

VOICE This is a war where they wade, waist deep, and pick the lice from the seams in their clothes.

VOICE They pull mules and drowned men and ambulance wagons out of the mud.

VOICE They fight with spades and bailing pales, not rifles.

JOE And the rain falls

VOICE And falls.

SERG 2 Never mind, lad, soon be Christmas.

JOE And it'll all be over by Christmas, won't it, Serg!

OLD HAND 2 Why, only this very morning I saw Fritz waving a white flag and packing his suitcases!

JOE And they'll send us all back home.

OLD-HAND 2 Home? Bah! We'll all be sad to leave Wipers. Fritz included.

JOE This isn't Wipers, is it? For a moment there I thought I was in Venice.

OLD-HAND 2 Venice o' the North. Just south of Wipers.

JOE A right regular home from home.

SONG: Home Sweet Home

Mid Pleasures and palaces though I may roam, Be it
ever so humble, there's no place like home; A charm
from the sky seems to hallow us there,
Which, seek thro' the world, is ne'er met with elsewhere.
Home.

Home! Sweet, sweet home!
There's no place like home.
There's no place like home.

SCENE: 3 ALICE & WALTER

*A soldier hands Alice another envelope. He salutes. With
hesitant trembling hands, she opens it. She reads it and then
she crumples and weeps.*

ALICE Walter...

And then WALTER is with her, holding her.

WALTER Shhhhhhhh. It's alright. I'm here. I'm here...

ALICE When they sent the second telegram... I thought... and I couldn't
open it. Because I thought... as long as I held it without opening
it, then I wouldn't know the worst and that what I thought was in it
wouldn't actually be true...

WALTER But it wasn't bad news, in the end, was it.

ALICE I know that now.

WALTER Oh Alice.

ALICE Are they sending you back?

WALTER I must go back. I want to go back. Do what I can. Some of my
men are still out there.

ALICE When do you have to go?

WALTER A few weeks.

ALICE Walter...

WALTER What? What is it?

ALICE Ask me again.

WALTER Ask you what?

ALICE Out in the Meadows, by the river. You asked me...

WALTER Alice...

ALICE Ask me.

WALTER Is this wise?

ALICE Of course it isn't.

WALTER But...

ALICE But what? Have you changed your mind?

WALTER What if... I didn't come back...

ALICE Neither of us has any idea what the future holds in any circumstance. This is just a little more... extreme...

WALTER Alice. Alice Blakely... would you do me the honour of becoming my wife?

ALICE When? Because it must be before you go back.

WALTER Is that a yes, then?

ALICE Yes yes yes yes yes.

WALTER And what about your nursing? The matrons won't like a Mrs Nightingale on their wards.

ALICE Some of the nurses at the Infirmary are leaving England. They're going to the front to work in the field hospitals.

WALTER You're not thinking of doing the same?

ALICE I need to do something.

WALTER You knit socks.

ALICE Something more than that.

WALTER Socks are very important to soldiers.

ALICE The women of the Empire are knitting so many pairs that the hosiery companies are having to let people go.

WALTER Scarves, then.

ALICE I want to do my part, Walter.

WALTER Alice, no/

ALICE I'm going to a field hospital.

WALTER It's too dangerous.

ALICE You're out there. When you were missing, I hoped against hope that you'd been found and that nobody knew you'd been found because you were lying in a hospital and you'd forgotten your name with a concussion or something, but most of all I hoped that someone somewhere was looking after you...

WALTER They dressed my head wound. They helped me get to the coast.

ALICE You see? I could do that for someone else's sweetheart, someone else's son. I could do that.

WALTER I couldn't bear it if anything...

ALICE And I couldn't bear it if anything happened to you... But I can't wait at home anymore. I have to do something. So, I went to a meeting. In Liverpool. There was a doctor there, Dr Inglis, speaking about the service that nurses can do abroad.

WALTER And did he speak about the dangers for nurses at the Front?

ALICE She did mention that.

WALTER	She?
ALICE	Dr Inglis is a woman.
WALTER	I see...
ALICE	This is a service that I give with all my heart.
WALTER	When do you leave?
ALICE	After Christmas.
WALTER	Funny.
ALICE	What's funny?
WALTER	I'll be out there somewhere trying to kill people. And you'll be out there somewhere trying to save them.
ALICE	It will end soon, won't it? They said Christmas, but...
WALTER	I don't know.
ALICE	How could the death of one Duke bring us to this?
WALTER	I don't know anymore.
ALICE	I have to be back at the infirmary...
WALTER	Are you on duty, Sister Blakely?
ALICE	Some of us are carol singing on the convalescent wards. To cheer the injured men back from the Front.
WALTER	They'll like that.
ALICE	Will you come with me?
WALTER	Yes. Yes, I will.

SONG: In the Bleak Midwinter.

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan, Earth
stood hard as iron, water like a stone; Snow had
fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow, In the bleak
midwinter, long ago.

Angels and archangels may have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim thronged the air;
But his mother only, in her maiden bliss,
Worshipped the beloved with a kiss.

What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb; if I
were a Wise Man, I would do my part; Yet what
I can I give him: give my heart.

SCENE 4: EARTH HARD AS IRON

VOICE And then the rain stops. And the water seeps away a little. And
the cold creeps in: a bitter cold that numbs their feet, till every
step in the clumsy boots is an agony. And their fingers fumble
at daily tasks. Breath tumbles out in white fogs. That's how they
know they're still alive: they can see that they're still breathing.

WALTER Dearest Alice. Yesterday, I was walking through the lines to
rejoin my Company, and I met a boy with a stutter, a beggar
with a cough and a man snoring with his eyes open.
And Alice, I saw Joe...

VOICE And then the cold deepens again and cuts like a jackknife, and
the flashes of water all turn to ice.

SCENE 5: REUNION

WALTER Joseph Blakely!

JOE Just my luck.

JOE has a hacking cough and is rough!

WALTER Pleased to see you too.

JOE (*Salutes*) Sir!

WALTER What brings you here?

JOE Got a gold edged invitation, sir. RSVP.

WALTER You certainly ran away to a circus, didn't you?

JOE And what a bloody good circus, it is too.

THOMAS I bet you can't wait to be an actuary.

JOE Got any fags?

WALTER You're too young to smoke.

JOE Nothing else to do.

WALTER It's bad for your lungs.

JOE Snipers are bad for my lungs. Fags keep my fingers warm.

WALTER Have you written to Alice?

JOE I thought she might still be angry with me.

WALTER You should write.

JOE Not much to say

WALTER We got married...

JOE Oh

WALTER I was back in Blighty... After Mons. And it seemed the right thing to do. I expect she's written ...?

JOE No...

WALTER Write to her, Joe. This is a silly time to have a rift.

OLD HAND 2 dashes in, with bits of grubby paper.

OLD-HAND 2 I've got the odds, Blakely...

JOE This is Captain Nightingale...

OLD HAND 2 *(Hides the papers and salutes)* Sir! Didn't see you there, sir!

WALTER	It's alright. I'm only passing through: my Company's along the line.
JOE	What are we betting on this time?
OLD-HAND 2	The push.
JOE	There's rumours again, then?
OLD-HAND 2	Going up and down the line like a bride's nightdress.
JOE	Captain Nightingale just got married.
OLD HAND 2	Oh. Pardon my French, sir. But everyone's saying we'll be over the top before Christmas. And then it'll all be over. So I'm setting out the odds on who'll go West before it is. Private Atkins is evens. Corporal Carter is 2 -1 Sergeant Smith is 5 – 1 And the General, well he's at 100 – 1 Want a punt, Sir?
WALTER	No. Thank you.
OLD-HAND 2	Suit yourself, sir: I've got to milk the company cow, anyway.
WALTER	The company cow?
OLD-HAND 2	We're the Cheshires, sir. So we got ourselves a beautiful little dun cow. Lovely milker, she is.
JOE	We found her straying after the Belgians cleared off.
OLD-HAND 2	Lowng her head off to be milked. And the Captain let us keep her what with Cheshire being a dairy county.
JOE	We're the Cheshire cats that got the cream!
WALTER	Lucky you.
JOE	Yes. Lucky us.
WALTER	Write to Alice, Joe.
JOE	I'll try.

OLD-HAND 2 Look, sir, before you go... My missis sent me some fruitcake.
Would you fancy a slice?

WALTER Why not?

There is a whistling sound overhead.

JOE Shell!

All dive for cover. Explosion.

OLD HAND 2 Oi Fritz! If you want some bloody cake, you only have to ask.

SCENE 6: CHARMED LIFE

JOE Dear Walter. I've written to Alice. But I couldn't... It's hard to know what to write. How can I tell her about all this? We've had a few... adventures since we met. Our lot got moved to the back trenches. Snipers lost us an NCO... It's good to be away from the front line...*(He looks at this, crosses it out)*
The front line is... *(crosses that out too.)*
We dug more trenches at the back whilst you lot were in the firing line. We were in water and my poor feet took it badly. So I'm in a field hospital for a bit.
Not sure when... they'll send me back to the front. *(Begins to suppress something.)*
But I'm a lucky chap: one of the chaps in the company got promoted from the ranks, and he was showing me his new revolver when it went off. Bullet missed me by inches, and went through a partition and whizzed past two Signallers. It's a marvel none of us was hit.
Still: could be worse: I... could be back... back in the firing line for Christmas... I think I'm living a charmed life.

He breaks down and cries. Hides tears.

NURSE Time to turn the lamps down.

JOE Five minutes more...

NURSE What's your first name, Private Blakely?

JOE Joseph.

NURSE And how's the frostbite doing?

JOE It's... it's... I can't...

NURSE We had a soldier in here a few days ago. I think he was frightened to tell me his frostbite felt better because he thought I'd send him back to the front. He was fifteen.

JOE I am old enough to be here.

NURSE I'm not sure any of us is old enough to be here.

He cries openly now. She hands him a handkerchief.

NURSE Shhh! Finish your letter, Joseph, and then lights out.

JOE Walter. Hope your singing isn't putting the wind up Fritz too much.
On quiet nights, you can hear them talking. Got to go now: the sister is frowning at me! Please take care of yourself, Walter. We bantered, but I always admired you. Have the best Christmas you can get. Best regards, your new brother, Joseph.

SCENE 7: CHRISTMAS EVE

VOICE Christmas Eve.

VOICE And in a message of good will, a German aeroplane drops the first ever bomb on English soil.

VOICE It's a frosty day.

VOICE A bright clear sniper's day.

VOICE Season of goodwill to all men.

VOICE Business as usual.

OLD-HAND Some of us are planning to attack the Germans tonight,

Serg.

SERG That'll shut up the Deutschland Uber Alles we've had for the past few nights.

OLD HAND	Just you wait till darkness falls, Fritz. We're going to give you a right barrage of carols.
WALTER	What gives, sergeant?
SERG	All quiet, sir. Even the sniper's tree is empty.
WALTER	See if he's moved position.
OLD HAND	He's not anywhere, I've looked, sir.
WALTER	Fine. In any case, there's a message from HQ, chaps. They think it's possible that the enemy may be contemplating an attack during Christmas or New Year. "Special Vigilance will be maintained during this period."
SERG	Find that sniper, Carter, if it's the last thing you do.
OLD HAND	Sir!
VOICE	And then a quarter moon rolls transparent in the afternoon sky.
VOICE	And afternoon fades into evening.
VOICE	And the sun dips beneath the earth.
VOICE	And nothing moves.
VOICE	The sky glows red but there's no shelling.
VOICE	Just a sunset that drifts from red to blue.
VOICE	And everything settles into a strange silence
VOICE	No shooting.
VOICE	Nothing but stillness.
VOICE	It is so still that you can almost hear the frost crystals forming on our hair and beards.
VOICE	Their breath falls in white clouds.
VOICE	And the sky is deepening to navy blue.

VOICE	Stars.
VOICE	And everything dull is turning white with the rime.
VOICE	Everything sparkling.
VOICE	And hushed.
VOICE	Everything waiting.
VOICE	Like a held breath.
OLD-HAND	Listen.
SERG	I'm listening.
OLD HAND	Can you hear it?
SERG	Hear what?
OLD HAND	It's Fritz. I can hear him talking quite plain.
SERG	Can you see anything?
OLD HAND	(<i>Periscope</i>) Not a sausage . No... wait...Get the Captain.
WALTER	What's up, Sergeant?
SERG	Something's happening, Sir.
OLD HAND	Serg!
SERG	What is it?
OLD HAND	It's dark... But I can see lights.
	<i>Others go to the parapet to look.</i>
SERG	Keep your heads down, you bloody fools! Sorry sir...
WALTER	Quite right, Sergeant.
SERG	Can't afford to lose another Captain, sir.
WALTER	Are they still there?

OLD HAND	Lots of lights now, sir.
WALTER	What kind of lights?
OLD HAND	Little lights.
WALTER	What kind of little lights, Carter?
OLD HAND	Sparkling lights... flickering. Like candles, sir.
WALTER	Where?
OLD HAND	On their parapets.
SERG	Let me have a look. (<i>Takes a peek through periscope</i>) What the deuces are they up to?
WALTER	Keep watching.
SERG	Carter!

OLD HAND is back on the periscope

WALTER	I'll send a message down the line.
OLD HAND	Sir... there's more of them. They're all along the parapet.
WALTER	Shhhh! Listen!

A mouth organ far away....

SONG: Stille Nacht

SOLO	Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht! Alles schläft, einsam wacht Nur das traute hochheilige Paar. Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar, Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh, Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh
OLD HAND	It's beautiful!
VOICE	Shhhh!
MALE VOICES	Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht! Alles schläft, einsam wacht

Nur das traute hochheilige Paar.
Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh, Schlaf in
himmlischer Ruh

ALL cheer and clap.

FRITZ Merry Christmas, Tommy!

SERG Merry Christmas yourself, Fritz!

OLD HAND Let's sing something back to them, sir.

WALTER Like what?

SONG: O Come all Ye Faithful

OLD HAND Like this:
(sings) O come all ye faithful, joyful and
triumphant, O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem

ENGLISH Come and behold him Born
the king of angels O come
let us adore him

GERMAN Adeste fidelis, laeti triumphantes
Venite, venite in Bethlehem Natum
videte, regem angelorum
Venite adoremus, venite adoremus Venite
adoremus, dominum.

ALL cheer again!

OLD HAND They've gone quiet again.

SERG What are they doing now?

OLD HAND There's silhouettes... they're climbing out onto the parapets!
Shall I shoot them sir?

WALTER No! Don't shoot.

SERG Listen!

SONG: Tipperary

GERMAN Es ist sehr weit nach Tipperary
 Es ist sehr weit zu gehn
 Es ist sehr weit nach Tipperary
 Meinen liebsten schatz zu
 sehn Leb'wohl Piccadilly
 Adieu Leicester Square
 Es ist sehr weit nach Tipperary
 Doch dahin sehnt mich sehr.

ENGLISH cheer!

OLD HAND Well done, Fritz!

FRITZ Come out, Tommy! Have a drink!

WALTER No: you come out!

FRITZ You no shoot: we no shoot.

WALTER You first.

OLD HAND They're all up on their parapets.

WALTER I'm going out! (*and goes*)

SERG What the bloody hell do you think you're doing, Sir?

WALTER I'm going to meet Fritz, that's what I'm doing.

VOICE And he stands up into the frozen air, breathing it into his
 lungs.

SERG What can you see?

WALTER It's dark. But there's something's moving! Some of them
 are coming over... Anyone here speak German?

OLD HAND I was on the ships with some blokes from Hanover, sir. I
 might have a few words in my memory.

WALTER Then come with me. Sergeant, you keep your rifle
 primed. This might be a trap.

VOICE And they climb up over the wire and walk out into the darkness...

OLD HAND	You haven't got a rifle, sir.
WALTER	Neither have you.
OLD HAND	If we die, sir, I'll bloody kill you.
GERMAN OFFICER	Engländer! Gehen Sie zu den Lichtern spazieren! [Walk towards the lights]
VOICE	They can just see two men carrying aloft a little tree, sparkling with candles, coming closer and closer. And behind them, in the German trench, they're singing.
GERMANS	O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum, Dein Kleid will mich was lehren: Die Hoffnung und Beständigkeit Gibt Mut und Kraft zu jeder Zeit! O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum, Dein Kleid will mich was lehren!
WALTER	Good evening.
	<i>The German bows and clicks his heels.</i>
GERMAN OFFICER	Guten Abend. Wir wollen nicht Sie heute Abend schießen.
OLD HAND	He says he does not want to shoot us tonight, sir.
WALTER	Tell him, we also want a quiet Christmas.
OLD HAND	Sie möchten ruhiges Weihnachten.
GERMAN OFFICER	Gut. Abgestimmt. Kein Schießen.
OLD HAND	He says it is agreed. No shooting.
	<i>WALTER & GERMAN OFFICER shake hands. GERMAN OFFICER offers flask.</i>
OLD HAND	Careful, sir...
GERMAN 2	Cognac. <i>(He takes swig and then offers it).</i>
WALTER	<i>(Drinks & coughs)</i> That's good. Very good. Gut.

They all laugh together...

GERMAN 2 Mein Name ist Ernest Hoffman.

WALTER Hoffman. Me: Walter Nightingale.

VOICE And then flakes of snow begin to fall, and in the dark, there is only this moment, and with the candlelight flickering on their faces, they can't see the uniforms, and they are the same. They are ordinary men, not monsters like their governments tell them. They have names. They smile shyly, and it's Christmas Eve, and they are, both of them, freezing their faces off in a frozen foreign field, far from home.

HOFFMAN Merry Christmas, Walter.

WALTER Frohe Weihnachten, Ernest Hoffman.

They salute. Germans bow, British bow in return.

FRITZ (*Calling from trench*) No more war, Englander!

TOMMY (*Calling*) Nie wieder Krieg, Fritz!

FRITZ We want to go home, Tommy.

TOMMY Uns zu, Fritz.

OLD HAND Maybe this is the end of the war, sir.

WALTER Maybe it is.

SONG: Silent Night

ALL Silent night, holy night
Son of God, love's pure light,
Radiant beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace:
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

SCENE 8: CHRISTMAS DAY IN NO MAN'S LAND

VOICE Christmas Day. A seven o'clock dawn sifts through a white haze.

WALTER Tell the men they may light fires. There's a mist that'll hide the smoke.

SERG Captain says that on account of the mist you may light fires.

VOICE They huddle around braziers, their faces burning and their feet and their backs shivering.

WALTER Happy Christmas, chaps.

OLD HAND Sir!

They clink metal mugs.

FRITZ (*Calling*) Hey! Tommy!

OLD HAND It's the neighbours again, sir!

HOFFMAN We wish to bury the dead. My officer wishes to agree a Truce.

WALTER Agreed. At midnight tonight I will fire two shots to signal the end of the Truce.

HOFFMAN Till midnight, then.

WALTER Till midnight.

They salute each other.

SERG Get yourself spades. We're digging graves.

VOICE And they all climb out over the parapets into the daylight.

OLD-HAND Dear God.

WALTER The desolation.

VOICE And now they see what was hidden in the darkness.

HOFFMAN Niemandsländ.

VOICE	A waste land scarred with shell holes
VOICE	A graveyard of the unburied dead.
VOICE	They died crawling for their trenches, crying for their loved ones, clutching faded photographs.
VOICE	They lie in streams gazing out with open eyes from under the frozen water.
VOICE	contorted and mad and unburied.
VOICE	Eyes frozen, mouths full of snow, hands clutching photographs, arms stretching out to us.
OLD-HAND	You poor bloody bastards...
VOICE	<p>They gather them for burial, and collect papers and pay-books from pockets, and each one of them has been a friend of someone here. And as they dig, a little snow falls, and settles over the bomb craters, and the dead and unburied are shrouded under a fall of white that frosts their lashes and their lips. Despite the agony, it is the first beautiful thing in a long time.</p> <p>And they bury them, snow flakes cupped in their dead hands, like white feathers. On a day marking a birth, they mark death and they bury them side by side, the English, French and German dead. They throw in soil and snow over each man, each enemy. And together they plant crosses into the broken earth.</p>

SCENE 9: SOUVENIRS

VOICE	Football!
	<i>ALL cheer as a ball is thrown across...</i>
VOICE	And about a hundred men start kicking around a ball with no sense of where a goal might be or even a score.
HOFFMAN	Nightingale! Ja?
WALTER	<p>Hey! It's Hoffman!</p> <p>I've got you a tin of bully beef.</p>

HOFFMAN	Ah! Danke. Cigar?
VOICE	And they exchange things.
WALTER	Have some plum and apple jam.
FRITZ	Have some beer, Tommy. We have plenty here.
OLD-HAND	Cigarettes and rum.
FRITZ	Sausage and sauerkraut.
WALTER	Christmas puddings
OLD-HAND	and Maconochie's stew.
FRITZ	Schnapps and cognac.
WALTER	Tea and chocolate.
FRITZ	A pickelhaube! I don't want it anymore...
OLD-HAND	Have an English jack-knife.
WALTER	Here's a badge
FRITZ	Here's a button. You want this belt.
WALTER	Gott Mit Uns.
FRITZ	God with us.
WALTER	God is obviously with both of us. Thank you. I'll wear it for the rest of the war.
FRITZ	You come from where?
WALTER	Chester.
FRITZ	Ach! Before the war I was a waiter in Birkenhead.
	<i>FRITZ shakes his hand off.</i>
FRITZ	Hey! Er ist von Chester!
VOICE	And he takes a postcard from his pocket and gives it to Walter

to send to his English wife in Liverpool.

OLD-HAND Hey! Fritz: we the Cheshire Regiment invite you to Christmas dinner.

VOICE And the Cheshires haul out a pig they'd found and killed, and men lit fires, and they roasted it and ate it in No Man's Land. Together.

They crowd around German, juggling and showing tricks.

SONG: AULD LANG SINE

SOLO Should old acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind?

VOICES Should old acquaintance be forgot, in the days of auld lang syne?

ALL For auld lang syne, my dear, for auld lang syne, we'll take a cup o' /

SCENE 10: GAVRILO PRINCIP

...interrupted by two pistol shots. (As was the Truce...)

VOICE After the shots

VOICE the crowds close in.

VOICE He swallows his cyanide and puts the pistol to his head

VOICE But the poison doesn't work.

VOICE And a man grabs at the gun.

VOICE What were you thinking?

VOICE What could you possibly hope to achieve?

VOICE You think you wanted to end something.

VOICE And look what you started.

VOICE If he hadn't done it, the Germans would have found another way to make a war.

VOICE He is a Yugoslav. He is the son of peasants: he knows what's happening in the villages and he wanted revenge. He wanted freedom from Austria.

VOICE He aimed at the archduke.

VOICE Who wanted the same reforms that he did.

VOICE Sitting in a cell he doesn't remember what he thought at that moment.

VOICE He remembers only the birdsong and petals falling like snow; a held breath: one last moment of an old world before it is shot to pieces

VOICE And, out by Schiller's Café, he didn't know the weight of it all,

VOICE the dreadful importance of the motorcar stopping in the Sarajevo summer.

VOICE He regrets nothing.

VOICE What happens now?

SONG: GOING DOWN OF THE SUN

They shall grow not old, as we who are left grow old:
 Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
 At the going down of the sun and in the morning
 We will remember them

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,
 Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain;
 As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,
 To the end, to the end, they remain.

(from Laurence Binyon *For the Fallen* 1914)

<END>

SILENT NIGHT – Adaptation for the Albion Inn

By Helen Newall

With original music and musical adaptation by Matt Baker

This adaptation, from *Silent Night* (2014), was performed as a rehearsed reading on Christmas Eve 2014 at the dinner held at The Albion Inn, Chester to commemorate the centenary of the Christmas Truce on the Western Front. After the reading, the cast and audience played football in the street outside.

Performers

Matthew Baker

Roy Clinging

David Edwards

Matthew Palmer

Helen Newall



SCENE 1: CHRISTMAS EVE

JOE Christmas Eve.

VOICE And in a message of good will, a German bi-plane drops the first
ever bomb on English soil.
In the trenches, it's a frosty day.
A bright clear sniper's day.
Season of goodwill to all men.
Business as usual.

JOE Some of us are planning to attack the Germans tonight, sir. We're
going to give 'em a right barrage of carols.

SERGEANT That'll shut up the Deutschland Uber Alles we've had for the past
few nights.

JOE Just you wait till darkness falls, Fritz.

SERGEANT Anything happening, Blakely?

JOE I'll have a look, sir.
All quiet. Even the sniper's tree is empty, sir.

SERGEANT See if he's moved position.

JOE He's not there.

NURSE gives message

SERGEANT Message from HQ:
It is thought possible that the enemy may be contemplating an
attack during Xmas or New Year. Special Vigilance will be
maintained during this period.
Find that sniper, Blakely, if it's the last thing you do.

VOICE And then a quarter moon rolls in the afternoon sky. And afternoon
fades into evening.
And the sun dips beneath the earth.
And nothing moves.
The sky glows red but there's no shelling. Just a sunset that drifts
from red to blue.
And everything settles into a strange silence
No shooting. Nothing but stillness.
It is so still that they can almost hear the frost crystals forming on
their hair and beards, and their breath falls in white clouds.

The sky deepens. And fills with stars.
And everything dull turns white with frost.
Everything is sparkling and hushed.
Everything I waiting like a held breath.

JOE Listen.

SERGEANT I'm listening.

JOE Can you hear it?
It's Fritz. I can hear him talking quite plain, sir.

SERGEANT Can you see anything?

JOE (*Periscope*) Nothing. No... wait.

SERGEANT What's up?

JOE Something's happening.

SERGEANT What can you see?

JOE It's dark... But I can see lights.

He goes to the parapet to look.

SERGEANT Keep your head down, you bloody fool! What kind of lights?

JOE Little lights.

SERG What kind of little lights, Blakely?

JOE Sparkling lights... sir, like candles.

SERG Where?

JOE Along their parapets.

SERG Let me have a look. (*Takes periscope*)
What the deuces are they up to? Keep watching, Blakely, I'll send
a message down the line.

JOE (*Periscope*) Sir... there's more of them all along the parapet.

SERGEANT Shhhh! Listen!

FRITZ Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht!

Alles schläft, einsam wacht
Nur das traute hochheilige Paar.
Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh,
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh

JOE It's beautiful!

SERGEANT Shhhh!

ALL cheer and clap.

FRITZ Merry Christmas, Tommy!

SERGEANT Merry Christmas yourself, Fritz!

JOE Let's sing something back to them, sir

SERGEANT Like what?

JOE Like this:
O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem

FRITZ Natum videte, regem angelorum
Venite adoremus, venite adoremus
Venite adoremus, dominum.

ALL cheer again!

JOE They've gone quiet again.

SERGEANT What are they doing now?

JOE There's silhouettes... they're climbing out onto the parapets!

SERGEANT Let me have a look.

JOE Shall I shoot them sir?

SERGEANT No! Don't shoot.

FRITZ Es ist sehr weit nach Tipperary
Es ist sehr weit zu gehn
Es ist sehr weit nach Tipperary
Meinen liebsten schatz zu sehn
Leb'wohl Piccadilly
Adieu Leicester Square
Es ist sehr weit nach Tipperary
Doch dahin sehnt mich sehr.

ENGLISH cheer!

SERGEANT Well done, Fritz!

FRITZ Come out, Tommy! Have a drink!

SERGEANT No: you come out!

FRITZ You no shoot: we no shoot.

SERGEANT You first.

JOE They're all up on their parapets. I'm going out! (*and goes*)

SERGEANT Blakely, what the bloody hell do you think you're doing?

JOE I'm going to meet Fritz.

VOICE And he stands up into the frozen air, breathing it into his lungs.

JOE Something's moving! There's some of them coming over...

Hands rifle to NURSE

SERGEANT You! Stand sentry and keep your rifle primed. This might be a trap.
(*Climbs out after JOE*)
Wait for me, Blakely.

VOICE And they climb over the wire and walk out into the darkness...

SERGEANT How's your German, Blakely?

JOE I was on the ships in Hanover, sir. It's a bit rusty...

SERGEANT It'll do.

JOE You haven't even got your rifle, sir

SERGEANT Neither have you.

JOE If we die, sir, I'll bloody kill you.

FRITZ Engländer! Gehen Sie zu den Lichtern spazieren!

VOICE Englishman! Walk towards the lights
And they walk. And they can just see two men carrying aloft a little tree
sparkling with candles, and coming closer and closer. And behind them,
in the German trench, they're singing.

FRITZ O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum,
Dein Kleid will mich was lehren:
Die Hoffnung und Beständigkeit
Gibt Mut und Kraft zu jeder Zeit!
O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum,
Dein Kleid will mich was lehren!

SERGEANT Good evening.

The Germans bow and click their heels.

FRITZ Guten Abend. Wir wollen nicht Sie heute Abend schießen.

JOE He says he does not want to shoot you tonight, sir.

SERGEANT Tell him, we also want a quiet Christmas.

JOE Sie möchten ruhiges Weihnachten.

FRITZ Gut. Abgestimmt. Kein Schießen.

JOE He says it is agreed. No shooting.

SERG & FRITZ shake hands. FRITZ offers flask.

JOE Careful, sir...

FRITZ It's cognac. Look. (*He takes swig and then offers it*).

SERGEANT That's good. Very good. Gut.

JOE drinks. Splutters. They laugh together...

FRITZ Mein Name ist Ernest Hoffman.

JOE Hoffman. Me: Joseph Blakely.

VOICE And snow begins to fall, and in the dark, there is only this moment. And with the candlelight flickering on their faces, they can't see the uniforms, and they are the same. They are ordinary men, not monsters like their governments tell them. They have names. They smile shyly, and it's Christmas Eve, and they are all freezing cold in a foreign field, far from home.

FRITZ Merry Christmas, Joseph Blakely.

JOE Merry Christmas, Ernest Hoffman.

They salute. Germans bow, British bow in return.

FRITZ No more war, Englander!

SERGEANT No more war, Fritz!

FRITZ We want to go home, Tommy.

SERGEANT Us too, Fritz.

JOE Maybe this is the end of the war, sir.

ALL Silent night, holy night
 Son of God, love's pure light,
 Radiant beams from thy holy face,
 With the dawn of redeeming grace:
 Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
 Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

SCENE 2: CHRISTMAS DAY IN NO MAN'S LAND

VOICE Christmas Day, and a seven o'clock dawn sifts through a white haze.

SERGEANT On account of the mist you may light fires.

JOE Thank you, sir.

VOICE No need to tell them twice. They huddle around braziers, their faces
 burning and their feet and backs shivering.

JOE Happy Christmas one and all.

FRITZ (*Calling*) Hey! Tommy!

JOE Sir! It's the neighbours again!

HOFFMAN We wish to bury the dead. My officer wishes to agree a Truce.

SERGEANT Agreed. At midnight tonight I will fire two shots to signal the end of the
 Truce.

HOFFMAN Till midnight, then.

SERGEANT Till midnight.

They salute each other.

SERGEANT Get yourself spades. We're digging graves.

VOICE And they climb out over the parapets into the daylight.

SERGEANT Dear God.

JOE	The desolation.
VOICE	And now we see what was hidden in the darkness.
JOE	No Man's Land
FRITZ	Niemandsländ.
VOICE	A waste land scarred with shell holes. A graveyard of the unburied dead. They lie in streams gazing out from under the frozen water. They died crawling for their trenches, crying for their loved ones, clutching faded photographs. Eyes frozen, mouths full of snow, arms stretching to us.
JOE	Poor bloody bastards...
SERGEANT	Gather them for burial. And collect papers and pay-books from their pockets. We'll need to send them home.
VOICE	And every one of them has been a friend of someone here. And as they dig, a little snow falls, and settles over the bomb craters, and the dead and unburied are shrouded under a fall of white that frosts their lashes and their lips. The first beautiful thing in a long time.
ALL	And we bury them, snow flakes cupped in their dead hands, like white feathers. On a day marking a birth, we mark death and we bury them side by side, the English, French and German dead. We throw in soil and snow over each man, my enemy and me. And together we plant crosses in the broken earth.
SERGEANT	The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.
FRITZ	Der Herr ist mein Hirte, mir wird nichts mangeln.
SERGEANT	He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
FRITZ	Er weidet mich auf einer grünen
SERGEANT	He leadeth me beside the still waters.
FRITZ	Aue und führet mich zum frischen Wasser.

SCENE 3: SOUVENIRS

JOE Football!

ALL cheer as a rubber ball is thrown across...

VOICE And about a hundred men start kicking around a rubber ball with no sense of where a goal might be or even a score.

FRITZ Blakely! Ja?

JOE Hey! Serg! It's Hoffman!
I've got you a tin of bully beef.

FRITZ Ah! Danke. Cigar?

VOICE And they exchange things.

SERGEANT Have some plum and apple jam.

FRITZ Have some beer, Tommy. We have plenty here.

JOE Cigarettes and rum.

FRITZ Sausage and sauerkraut.

SERGEANT Christmas puddings and Maconochie's stew.

FRITZ Schnapps and cognac.

JOE Tea and chocolate.

FRITZ A pickelhaube! I don't want it anymore...

JOE Jack-knives.

FRITZ Caps are exchanged

SERGEANT Badges

FRITZ Buttons

JOE And a belt with a buckle that says Gott Mit Uns.

FRITZ God with us.

JOE God is obviously with both of us. I'll wear it for the rest of my war.

SERGEANT Hey! Fritz: we the Cheshire Regiment invite you to Christmas dinner.

VOICE And the Cheshires haul out a dead pig they've found and men light

fires, and they roast it and eat it in No Man's Land. And it's cold, but they feel warm, and snow falls.

SERGEANT This is going to sound such a tall story when we tell it back in the billets.

JOE You're not going to believe this, but this is the strangest thing that ever happened. Merry Christmas Fritz!

ALL Should old acquaintance be forgot,
 and never brought to mind?
 Should old acquaintance be forgot,
 in the days of auld lang syne?

 For auld lang syne, my dear,
 for auld lang syne,
 we'll take a cup o' kindness yet,
 for the sake of auld lang syne.

FRITZ and JOE throw a football between them, then invite the audience to play football outside.