



“Winnie”

A One Man Play

Conceived by George Merner

Devised and written by Patrick Young

Based on the life and writings of

WINSTON CHURCHILL

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Acknowledgements

"Winnie" was first produced by the Charlottetown Festival, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, in association with Chartwell Theatre Productions Limited, opening in July 1979. Raymond Clarke directed. Set and Lighting Design were by Peter McKinnon, Costumes by Werner Russold, Libby Severin, and Mary McCready, Makeup Design by Bill Morgan, and Stage Management by Pat Thomas and Ellen Smith. The role of WINNIE was played by George Merner.

The text that follows has been revised since the first production.

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*

The works of Winston Churchill have been adapted by permission of his Estate. The author is also indebted for reports of his conversation and correspondence to: Violet Bonham Carter, Sarah Churchill, Lord Moran, and especially the editors of the multi-volume official biography Winston S. Churchill, Randolph S. Churchill and Martin Gilbert.

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Dedicated to the memory of
George Merner and Raymond Clarke;
their inspiration is on every page.

Patrick Young

Toronto, December 2017

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ACT I, SCENE 1

"Into the Past"

Evening. A brick and flagstone patio part way down the hill behind Chartwell, overlooking the gardens, and the hills of Kent. WINNIE, ancient, speaks to the audience as if to an old friend come to visit in his garden.

NARRATIVE:

The sun is almost set....

I bought Chartwell for this view. I built that wall with my own hands. Every brick. But that was ... thirty years ago. More -- I think. Now I have not the necessary clarity of thought. I have no ambition. I try only ... not to make an ass of myself!

And I find ... my thoughts ... I'm forever getting stuck down in the past. I can remember those years -- !

There are things, of course, I should prefer to forget! But so many, so many that ... My first charge in the desert as a young cavalry officer under the command of Lord -- Lord -- (*gives up in frustration*)

I am not afraid to die, you know!

At least, I don't think I am. No! -- I am prepared to meet my Maker. The real question is whether my Maker is prepared for the great ordeal of meeting me!

If only ...

I feel very lonely without ... a war -- !

I only want to be ... myself ... again....

(*getting up with difficulty*) You must excuse me. I must go in. I promised Clemmie a game of ... of bezique before --

(Lights rise on a group of tin soldiers across the stage. Forgetting us, he stares, then crosses and begins to play with them)

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Bang! Bang-bang-bang.... BOOM! (blows cigar smoke over the "battlefield," and so on)

(His mind jumps to his early childhood)

DIALOGUE:

(to his mother) Thank you thank you for the beautiful presents these soldiers and flags and castle they are so nice it is so kind of you! And dear Papa too -- send him my love and a great many kisses! I have been playing with the soldiers at making encampments; it is great fun:

Colonel Fitzgibbon, SIR! Lord Kitchener's orders are to bivouac on the banks of the Ni --

Kitchener -- ! *(the name is the missing link from before)*

(to himself) Kitchener, Eisenhower, Haig and Blood. No. No -- Kitchener, French, Rommel -- damn. Right war, wrong names! Kitchener ...

-- and the Khalifa! "I commanded the second troop. We trotted fast over the desert and soon began to breast the unknown slopes of the ridge." ...

(He chuckles; he has found his way back)

NARRATIVE:

(to the audience) My collection of soldiers was entirely responsible for my being embarked on a military career. I had ultimately nearly fifteen hundred. They were all of one size, all British, and organized as an infantry division with a cavalry brigade. My brother Jack commanded the hostile army.

The day came when my father himself paid a formal visit of inspection. All the troops were arranged in the correct formation of attack. He spent twenty minutes studying the scene -- which was really impressive. At the end he asked me if I would like to go into the army. I thought it would be splendid to command an army....

I thought it would be splendid! --

*

(The gears change: suddenly he is revisiting his youth)

There is nothing like the dawn! I commanded the second troop: we trotted fast over the desert and soon began to breast the unknown slopes of the ridge. The quarter of an hour before the curtain is lifted upon an unknowable situation is an intense

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experience of war. Was the ridge held by the enemy or not? Were we riding through the gloom into thousands of ferocious savages? Every step might be deadly; yet there was no time for overmuch precaution. It was already half light as we climbed the slope. What should we find at the summit?

We have reached the crest line. We rein in our horses. All is quiet. The dawn is growing fast --

But wait! What is this shimmering in the distant plain? What are these dark markings beneath the shimmer? They are there! These enormous black smears are thousands of men; the shimmering is the glinting of their weapons. Above them dance a multitude of gorgeous flags, and beyond them on the horizon spreads the vast mud city, its gleaming minarets and domes. We see for ourselves what the crusaders saw!

This is an hour to live!

"Right wheel into line," sounds the trumpet, and all the sixteen troops swing round. almost immediately the regiment breaks into a gallop, and the 21st Lancers are committed to their first charge in war!

Increasing our speed to the very fastest gallop, we curved inwards like the horns of the moon. (One really had not time to be frightened!) The collision was now very near. I had the impression of scattered Dervishes running to and fro in all directions. Straight before me a man threw himself on the ground, and I saw the gleam of his curved sword as he drew it back for a hamstring cut. I raised my pistol and fired. So close were we that the pistol itself actually struck him. Man and sword disappeared below and behind me. On my left, ten yards away, was an Arab horseman in chainmail hangings. I fired at him. He turned aside. I pulled my horse into a walk and looked round again....

Where was my troop? Within a hundred yards of me I could not see a single officer or man. Then for the first time that morning I experienced a sudden sensation of fear. I felt myself absolutely alone. I thought the Dervishes would devour me like wolves. What a fool I was to loiter like this in the midst of the enemy! I crouched over the saddle, spurred my horse into a gallop and drew clear of the melee.

Two or three hundred yards away I found my troop already faced about and partly formed up. Three or four men were missing. Six men and nine or ten horses were bleeding from spear thrusts or sword cuts. I asked my second sergeant if he had enjoyed himself. "Well, I don't exactly say I enjoyed it, Sir; but I think I'll get more used to it next time."

But now from the direction of the enemy there came a succession of grisly apparitions: horses spouting blood, struggling on three legs, men staggering on foot, men bleeding from terrible wounds,

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fishhook spears stuck right through them, arms and faces cut to pieces, bowels protruding, men gasping, crying, collapsing, expiring....

I thought it would be splendid to command an army....

*

(His mind slides back to his starting point)

(to the audience) My father spent twenty minutes studying the scene. At the end he asked me if I would like to go into the army. I said "Yes!" at once; and immediately was taken at my word. The toy soldiers turned the current of my life.

For years I thought my father, with his experience and flair, had discerned in me the qualities of military genius. I was told later that he had only come to the conclusion that I was not clever enough to be called to the Bar!

Cross-fade to ...

ACT I, SCENE 2

"Growing Up"

The same. WINNIE picks up the thread with renewed confidence.

NARRATIVE:

Although little had been said in my hearing, one could not grow up in my father's house without understanding that there had been a Great Political Disaster. I knew that he had once been Chancellor of the Exchequer, and that that was a very fine thing to be. Of course I was his vehement partisan. It was my dream that I might grow up in time to come to his aid....

A curly moustache. In those days he had a great, curly moustache....

(He slips back to his childhood)

DIALOGUE:

(to his father) I have been out riding with a gentleman who thinks that Gladstone is a brute, and thinks that "the one with the curly moustache ought to be Premier!" And the driver of the Electric Railway said that Lord Randolph Churchill should be Prime Minister!

I should be very proud if you would write to me at school, Papa. Everbody wants your autograph. But I can only say I will try -- and I should like you to sign your name in full at the end of your letter!

I only want a scribble as I know that you are very busy indeed.

But I suppose ... you are too busy to write....

(And now he returns to the present)

NARRATIVE:

I feel I did not at the time appreciate how much he thought and cared for me. More than ever do I regret that we did not live long enough in company to know each other....

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My first picture of my mother is in a riding habit, fitting like a skin and often beautifully spotted with mud. She and my father hunted continually on their large horses; and sometimes there were great scares because one or the other did not come back for many hours after they were expected.

My mother always seemed to me a fairy princess: a radiant being possessed of limitless riches and power. She shone for me like the Evening Star. I loved her dearly -- but at a distance....

DIALOGUE:

(to his mother) Please do do do do do come down to see me tomorrow -- I have been disappointed so many times about your coming! Please come my own Mummy, I have not seen you for so long! Do come down tomorrow!...

NARRATIVE:

She shone for me like ... my star! I had faith in my star: that is, that I was intended to do something in the world!

My nurse was my confidante. Mrs. Everest it was who looked after me and tended all my wants. It was to her I poured out my many troubles. And such troubles they were! --

*

It was in Ireland at "The Little Lodge" I was first menaced with Education. The approach of a sinister figure described as "the Governess" was announced. Her arrival was fixed for a certain day; in order to prepare for this day, Mrs. Everest produced a book called Reading Without Tears. It certainly did not justify its title in my case!

Our preparations were by no means completed when the fateful hour struck and the Governess was due to arrive. I did what so many oppressed peoples have done in similar circumstances: I took to the woods! Hours passed before I was retrieved and handed over.

We toiled each day, not only at letters but at words, and also at what was much worse -- figures! Letters after all had only got to be known, and when they stood together in a certain way one recognized their formation and that it meant a certain sound or word which one uttered when pressed sufficiently. But the figures were tied into all sorts of tangles and did things to one another which it was extremely difficult to forecast with complete accuracy. The Governess apparently attached enormous importance to the answer being exact. If it was not right it was wrong -- it was not any use being "nearly right!" These complications cast a steadily gathering shadow over my daily life.

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My mother took no part in these impositions, but she gave me to understand that she approved of them, and she sided with the governess almost always.

*

But now a much worse peril began to threaten. I was to go to school! I was now seven years old, and I was what grown-up people in their off-hand way call "a troublesome boy" ...

(He returns to his boyhood)

DIALOGUE:

(to himself) That Boy -- That Boy -- That Boy! I suppose I shall go on being treated as "That Boy" until I am fifty years old!

(quoting his report card) "General Conduct Very Bad. Rather Greedy at Meals. Is a constant trouble to everyone and is always in some scrape or other. Has very good abilities but no ambition." -- Gna-gna gna-gna gna-gna gna-gna gna-gna GNA!

(quoting his mother) "Dearest Winston, you make me very unhappy. I had built up such hopes about you -- but you work in such a fitful inharmonious way that you are bound to come out last. And there is your brother Jack, on the other hand, who comes out at the head of his class every week! Your father is very angry with you..."

(quoting his father) "So! More of this slovenly happy-go-lucky harum-scarum style of work for which you have always been distinguished at your different schools! Always behindhand, never advancing in your class, incessant complaints of total want of application -- With all the abilities you foolishly think yourself to possess and which some of your relations claim for you, you are certain to become a mere social wastrel!!"

Mrs. Everest? ... Mrs. Everest?!

(quoting Mrs. Everest) "My poor sweet old precious lamb, how I am longing for a hug. I do hope you will try and work well dearest this term -- and disappoint some of your relations who prophecy a future of profligacy for you."

Et tu, Mrs. Everest?

(to all of them) I am very sorry that you are displeased with me. I am very sorry to have been so stupid and careless. I am very sorry. I am very sorry. I am very sorry --

I never can do anything right!

(rallying -- and also, bit by bit, growing older) I have won the Fencing! A very fine cup. I was far and away first -- absolutely untouched in the finals! And I swotted up a thousand lines of Shakespeare for the Shakespeare Prize. I beat some twenty boys who were much older than I!

I have just been in the deuce of a row! Five of us went out for a walk a week ago and discovered the ruins of a large factory, into which we climbed. Everything was in ruin and decay, but some windows yet remained unbroken. We facilitated the progress of time with regard to these! The Headmaster, having made inquiries, discovered two of the five. I was found, with my usual luck, to be one of those two!

I'm "stoney." If you could replenish the Exchequer it would indeed be tara-ra-boom-de-ay!

*

(He comes back to the present, picking up the thread where he left off)

NARRATIVE:

For seven years -- through all of my teens -- I was destined to journey through the inhospitable regions of examinations. These examinations were a great trial to me. The subjects which were dearest to the examiners were almost invariably those I fancied least. I would have liked to have been examined in history, poetry, and writing essays. The examiners, on the other hand, were partial to Latin and Mathematics. And their will prevailed! Moreover, the questions which they asked on both these subjects were almost invariably those to which I was unable to suggest a satisfactory answer. I should have liked to be asked to say what I knew. They always tried to ask what I did not know. When I would have willingly displayed my knowledge, they sought to expose my ignorance. This sort of treatment had only one result: I did not do well in examinations!

This was especially true of my entrance examination to Harrow. I was placed in the bottom form -- !

However, by being in the lowest form I gained an immense advantage over the clever boys. They all went on to learn Latin and Greek and splendid things like that. But I was taught -- English! As I remained in the bottom form three times as long as anyone else, I learned three times as much of it. I learned it thoroughly. Thus I got into my bones the essential structure of the ordinary British sentence -- which is a noble thing.

Naturally, I am biased in favour of boys learning English. I would make them all learn English, and then I would let the clever ones learn Latin as an honour, and Greek as a treat. But

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the only thing I would whip them for is not knowing English. I would whip them hard for that!

*

It took me three tries to pass into Sandhurst!

At Sandhurst I had a new start. We had now to learn fresh things and we all started equal. Tactics, Fortification, Topography, Military Law and Military Administration formed the whole curriculum. In addition were Drill, Gymnastics and Riding. One was very tired at the end of the day!

It did seem such a pity that it all had to be make-believe, and that the age of wars between civilized nations had come to an end forever. Fancy being nineteen in 1793, with more than twenty years of war against Napoleon in front of one!

I had entered Sandhurst 92nd in a class of 103. The fact that an ill-disposed observer might attribute a certain lack of distinction to such a rank was not lost upon my father; he took it as final proof that I would never amount to anything. In the ensuing months it seemed that nothing would satisfy him. He was even more irascible than usual, and on several occasions -- for no reason that I could fathom! -- flew into a perfect fury with me.

At length the day came for the reports to be sent out to our parents at the end of my first term. I waited with no little fear and trembling to hear my results from Papa. At last his letter came. My Father wrote to me: "You may be quite pleased to have come out -- eighth!"

*

A year later -- just after my graduation -- he ...

I had never realized how ill Papa had been! --

DIALOGUE:

(to his mother) Syphilis!?!

(reading a letter from her) "My darling Winnie, Now you will understand why I haven't had the heart to write to you. Mentally he is a thousand times worse. One never knows what he may do and it is dreadful being with strangers. You cannot imagine anything more distracting and desperate than to watch it and see him as he is and to think of him as he was. It would do incalculable harm if the real truth got out, and is a dreadful thing for all of us...."

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NARRATIVE:

My father died on January the 24th in the early morning.

I was twenty years old. He was forty-six. His end was quite painless. Indeed he had long been in a stupour. All my dreams of comradeship with him, of entering Parliament at his side and in his support --

DIALOGUE:

(back to his mother, now as a young man) I find, Mamma, that I am getting into a state of mental stagnation -- quite in accordance with the spirit of the Army! From this "Slough of Despond" I try to raise myself by reading and rereading Papa's speeches -- many of which I almost know by heart.

You cannot imagine how much I wish to pursue his aims and vindicate his memory. If I live, I intend to stand for Parliament.

-- Not that I have any intention of stopping a bullet! I cannot believe the Gods would create so potent a being as myself for so prosaic an ending!

No, Mamma -- the more I see of soldiering the more I like it, but the more I feel convinced that it is not my m,tier. I have faith in my star: that is, that I am intended to do something in the world....

Well, we shall see, my dearest Mamma -- !

Cross-fade to ...

ACT I, SCENE 3

"The Young Politician"

As the scene begins, WINNIE is in the past and on the hustings.

DIALOGUE:

(to a crowd of potential voters) In the election of 1900 -- I do not deny it! -- I said some stupid things. I said them because I belonged to a stupid party which I left because I did not want to go on saying stupid things! That is why I am now a Liberal -- and proud of it!

I am glad that this Tory Parliament is about to be dissolved. Seven years of dodge and dole and dawdle. Seven years of tinker, tax and trifle. Seven years of shuffle, shout and sham. I say to you, people of Manchester, do not allow yourselves to be taken in again!

NARRATIVE:

Well, surely a man is allowed to change his mind!

I won my first election as a Conservative, true. It was in 1900 at the ripe age of twenty-six, when my books on -- and adventures in! -- the South African War had already brought me my first taste of fame. I, at least, attached great importance to everything I said, and I was so untutored as to suppose that all I had to do was think out what was right and express it fearlessly. I soon became anxious to make the Conservative Party follow Liberal courses.

It declined.

A young man's conscience is a serious thing: I crossed the floor of the House.

Of course there was a scandal. I might well have lost everything. But over me beat the invisible wings: --

Within two years the Liberals won, for the first time in decades, a record majority in the House, and soon after that came the accession to the Premiership of Herbert Asquith -- not the least of whose exemplary qualifications was that he was very impressed with me. My star, it seemed, was rising -- and I was riding on

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the crest of a wave!...

*

DIALOGUE:

(to Clemmie at their first encounter) Miss Clementine Hozier? Delighted to meet you. Uh ... my mother speaks of you so often....

How old are you? ... Twenty-two. Twenty-two -- and I am thirty-three already! Younger than anyone else who counts, though.

My father died when he was forty-six....

Curse ruthless time! Curse our mortality! How cruelly short is the allotted span for all we must cram into it! When one considers the immensity of possible human accomplishment, how niggardly is the share of years doled out to us! While we can, we give our all -- but how little is our all, cut off remorselessly before its prime! We are all worms.

-- But I do believe that I am a glowworm!

NARRATIVE:

The same year I met Miss Hozier, I entered the Cabinet as President of the Board of Trade; in two years more I was Home Secretary. My days were full of prison reforms, of miners' strikes, of social security systems -- was it wonderful that I should have thought I had arrived? But luckily life is not quite so easy as all that. Otherwise we should get to the end too quickly!...

DIALOGUE:

(composing his first letter to Clemmie) My dear Miss Clementine Hozier: I seize this fleeting hour of leisure to write and tell you how much I liked our long talk on Sunday at my mother's house, and what a comfort and pleasure it was to me to meet a girl with so much ... intellectual quality and such ... strong reserves of noble sentiment. I hope we shall meet again and come to ... know each other better and like each other more. Write therefore and tell me what your plans are and how your days are occupied. Meanwhile I will let you know from time to time how I am getting on here in the storm; and we may lay the foundations of a frank and clear-eyed friendship which I certainly should value and cherish with ... cherish with ... with many serious feelings of respect!...

*

(to Asquith at Parliament) Why thank you! Thank you, Prime Minister. Do have a cigar....

Yes, very healthy indeed -- seven pounds, six ounces! And Clementine came through it all splendidly. So now in our little menagerie, the Pug, which is me, and the pretty Kat, which is Clemmie, have been joined by a Puppy-Kitten! ...

But of course she is pretty! She is beautiful. She is the prettiest child ever seen!...

Like her mother? Why, no. She is the image of me!

*

(to Clemmie again) A year ago today my lovely white pussy-cat came to me, and I hope and pray you may find on this September morning no cause however vague or secret for regret. The bells of this city are ringing now and they recall to my mind the chimes which saluted our wedding and the crowds of people. A year has gone -- and if it has not brought you all the glowing and perfect joy which fancy paints, still it has brought a clear bright light of happiness and some great things. My precious and beloved Clemmie, my earnest desire is to enter still more completely into your dear heart and nature and to curl myself up in your darling arms. I feel so safe with you and I do not keep the slightest disguise. You have been so sweet and good to me that I cannot say how grateful I feel to you for your dear nature and matchless beauty. Do not please disdain the caresses of your devoted Pug.

*

(A change in gears: having established a stable home life, his attention moves on)

(to Clemmie) Do you know I would greatly like to have some practice in the handling of large forces? I have much confidence in my judgment on things, but in nothing do I seem to feel the truth more than in tactical combinations. If Asquith were to move me from the Home Office, there is no doubt in my mind where I should go....

*

(to Clemmie arriving back from the House) Clemmie! -- No, Clemmie, I don't want tea. I don't want tea, I don't want anything -- anything in the world! This is a big thing -- the biggest thing that has ever come my way -- the chance I should have chosen before all others. I shall pour into it everything I've got!

Asquith has just made me -- First Lord of the Admiralty!

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NARRATIVE:

I took up my new post with enthusiasm. From dawn to midnight day after day one's whole mind is absorbed by the fascination and novelty of the problems which come crowding forward. And all the time there was the sense of power to act, to form, to organize.

I shall never forget my feelings on the day the Enchantress approached Portland Harbour and I saw for the first time the fleet drawing out of the haze. Who could fail to work for such a service?

Who could fail -- when the very darkness seemed loaded with the menace of approaching war?

A quick transition to ...

ACT I, SCENE 4

"Into War"

WINNIE continues ...

NARRATIVE:

The Cabinet on Friday afternoon July 24th, 1914, sat long resolving the Irish problem.

The discussion had reached its inconclusive end, and the Cabinet was about to separate, when the quiet grave tones of Sir Edward Grey's voice were heard reading a document which had just been brought to him from the Foreign Office. It was the Austrian note to Serbia. The note was clearly an ultimatum, but it was an ultimatum such as had never been penned in modern times. As the reading proceeded it seemed absolutely impossible that any State in the world could accept it, or that any acceptance, however abject, would satisfy the aggressor....

DIALOGUE:

(dictating a cable) Admiralty to His Majesty's Ships, 27 July 1914, SECRET: European political situation makes war between Triple alliance and Triple Entente Powers by no means impossible. This is not the warning telegram. Measure is purely precautionary.

*

(reporting to the King) Sir: Your Majesty's patrol flotillas have been raised to full strength and are moving in succession to their war stations. The aircraft are collected at and around the estuary of the Thames to guard against airship attack. All vulnerable points such as oil tanks and magazines were last night guarded against aerial attack and sabotage. A variety of other precautions and measures have been taken with which I will not trouble Your Majesty....

*

(to Clemmie, at home) Everything tends towards catastrophe and collapse. I am interested, geared up, and happy. The preparations have a hideous fascination for me. Ah, Clemmie. Is it not horrible to be built like that? I pray to God to forgive me for

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such fearful moods of levity.

Those two black swans on St. James' Park lake have a darling cygnet -- grey, fluffy, precious and unique. I watched them this evening for some time as a relief from all the plans and schemes.

Everything is ready as it has never been before. The sailors are thrilled and confident. And we are awake to the tips of our fingers.

But war is the Unknown and the Unexpected!...

NARRATIVE:

Sunday evening brought the German invasion of Luxembourg, their ultimatum to Belgium, and the hour of decision for the British Cabinet. On Monday an ultimatum was despatched in turn to Germany that expired at midnight -- eleven o'clock PM Greenwich Mean Time. The House was informed. The nation cheered, and waited....

DIALOGUE:

(in his office, dictating another cable) Admiralty to all His Majesty's Ships and Naval Establishments, 4 August 1914, 11 PM:
COMMENCE HOSTILITIES AGAINST GERMANY!

This is an hour to live!

Rapid cross-fade to ...

ACT I, SCENE 5

"The Dardanelles"

WINNIE turns again to the audience....

NARRATIVE:

When the old year closed, a complete deadlock existed between the great combatants in the West by land and by sea. The German fleet remained sheltered in its fortified harbours, and the British Admiralty had discovered no way of drawing it out. The trench lines ran continuously from the alps to the sea, and there was no possibility of manoeuvre. The great armies lay glaring at each other at close quarters without any true idea of what to do next.

But in the East, the entry to the war by Turkey on the German side presented a chance to circle the flank of the major conflict and attack the enemy through his own back door.

This was the one -- and only -- naval opportunity of ending the war both by land and by sea. The object: to take Constantinople by forcing the passage of the Dardanelles!

*

At nine minutes to ten on the morning of February 19th, 1915, the British and French fleets I had ordered to the Dardanelles began the bombardment of the outer forts. Within ten days, the whole of the outer defences of the Dardanelles were destroyed.

The success of this first bombardment of the straits reverberated through Europe and beyond. The vision of victory had lighted the mental scene. The immense significance of the Dardanelles and of the city which lay beyond had possessed all minds.

Everyone's blood was up. There was a virile readiness to do and dare....

DIALOGUE:

(to Clemmie, at home) Do you know what this will mean, Clemmie? Do you know what this will mean? -- Nothing less than the surrender of everything Turkish in Europe!

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Ah, Kat! I know this war is smashing and shattering the lives of thousands every moment, and yet -- I cannot help it -- I enjoy every second I live!

*

NARRATIVE:

But while the attention of so many States, great and small, was rivetted upon the Dardanelles, the naval operations which had produced these great effects began to falter and to flag. The progress of Admiral Carden's attack became continually slower....

DIALOGUE:

(in the Admiralty Office, to an aide) Look at this! Just look at this sentence in this latest report: "Minesweeping operations last night unsatisfactory owing to heavy fire from the enemy, no casualties." No casualties! No casualties, and yet the man is in a dither. What in Heaven's name is he dilly-dallying around about? It makes me squirm!

Take a telegram:

Your last telegram gives the impression you have been brought to a standstill both by night and by day. I do not understand why minesweeping should be interfered with by fire which causes no casualties. Two or three hundred casualties would be a moderate price to pay for sweeping up as far as the Narrows. This work has to be done whatever the loss of life and small craft, and the sooner it is done, the better. Time is precious. Your attack must succeed before the Turks have a chance to recover their balance!

Add this:

As you know, the War Office is sending an army to back you up. Lord Kitchener has just dispatched Sir Ian Hamilton to take command. Take him fully into your confidence and let there be the most cordial cooperation. But do not -- I repeat, do not! -- delay your own operations on this account!

There! That should put some starch into him!

NARRATIVE:

Admiral Carden had an immediate nervous breakdown. I have observed that I often seem to have that effect on people!

The enthusiasm of his replacement, Admiral de Robeck, was short-lived: after one minor set-back, he flatly refused to push any further without the army to hold his hand. Then the Admiralty

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Board threatened to resign en masse if I overruled him! For the first time since the War began, "No" had descended on our counsels....

DIALOGUE:

(in the office) They've lost their nerve. I tell you they have lost their nerve!

Napoleon said: "We are defeated at sea because our Admirals have learned, where I know not, that war can be made without running risks."

Hell and damnation, I wish I were there!!

*

NARRATIVE:

The army was late! -- and deficient in numbers.

When the amphibious attack on the Gallipoli Peninsula finally began, the Turks were more than ready for it. The fighting was hard, the gains meagre, the losses tremendous....

DIALOGUE:

(to his wife) Clemmie, I'm at my wits' end. Lord Kitchener's mind is a complete enigma to me.

The latest reports from the Naval division are begging for reinforcement. They say it's just like France again -- no one can move an inch. The landing grounds are still heaped with British corpses, some of our men have been fighting for a week without sleep -- and with all this, do you know that the War Office didn't even send along the normal reserves, let alone reinforcements?! I don't understand!

The one thing that has kept me from going mad is the Prime Minister. He may stay in the background, but I can sense his support all the way. Yet I still can't get a commitment out of Kitchener! He has dug in his heels and he won't budge. "No more units available," he says. Oh no! -- they're all in France, stopping bullets and eating barbed wire!

If he had just had the army there on time in the first place --! Damn it, Clemmie, there's nothing I can do!

NARRATIVE:

The newspapers offered a somewhat different assessment of the situation. To them Lord Kitchener remained a war hero and could do no wrong. Upon me fell almost exclusively the fierce war-time censures of press and public. They said the disaster in the

"WINNIE" - 20

Dardanelles was the result of entrusting strategy to a dangerous amateur -- me. They said that, like my father before me, I was utterly untrustworthy. They said it was time my colleagues in the cabinet took some action -- !

*

I spent the morning of May 17th, 1915, preparing a statement for Parliament -- expecting a severe challenge but also to be successful. That afternoon, my arguments well martialled, I looked in on Prime Minister Asquith on my way to the House. I presented him with my plans for the debate. "No," he said, "This won't do. I have decided to form a National Government by a Coalition with the Tories, and a very large reconstruction will be required. What are we to do for you? Will you take some office in the new Government or would you prefer a command in France?"

(And suddenly he is there, in the Prime Minister's office)

DIALOGUE:

(to Asquith) What are we to do for you? WHAT ARE WE TO DO FOR YOU!?!

Coalition is something I have always worked for, Prime Minister, but I wanted it in a different way. I wanted us to go to the Tories when we were strong -- not in misfortune to be made an honest woman of!

What makes me so anxious is that a new first Lord might order the abandonment of the whole Dardanelles operation -- and then on my head for all time would be the blood of the thirty thousand brave men who have fallen!

If I have erred, it has been in seeking to attempt an initiative without being sure that all the means and powers to make it successful were at my disposal. God knows I have tried -- but even my best efforts have not been proof against the ugly situation others have produced! Because of National Security I cannot publicly defend myself. My naval lords and advisors cannot say anything. My Tory friends who are coming into the Government do not know except what they have read in the newspapers. --

But you do. You alone know the whole situation and that it is my duty and mine alone to carry this burden safely; and that I can do it. I can only look to you. Let me stand or fall by the Dardanelles -- but do not take it from my hands....

All right. I accept your decision. I shall not look back. I am grateful to you for your kindness to me and belief in my vision of things.

Count on me absolutely -- if I am of any use. If not ... some employment in the field....

"WINNIE" - 21

*

On my head for all time....

(arriving home) I'm finished, Clemmie.... No, I'm done. It's been taken from me.

I'd go out to the Front at once -- but these soldiers are so stuffy, they wouldn't like my being given anything of a command.

No, I'm finished. All alone among the enemy.

I have lost my star....

The lights fade slowly to black.

- INTERMISSION -

ACT II, SCENE 1

"The Hand of Fate"

Lights up on an empty stage. Then WINNIE, reliving the past, enters abruptly in a rage. Although he is speaking to Clemmie, it appears at first that he is addressing us.

DIALOGUE:

Idiots!

Bloody god-forsaken slow-witted idiots!!

Is it not damnable that I should be denied all real scope to serve this country in this tremendous hour? I writhe hourly not to be able to get my teeth effectively into the enemy.

What fools they are! They could get more out of me now in two years of war than in a hundred afterwards!

Clemmie, my dear, I am learning to hate!

*

(Recovering himself somewhat, his mind returns to the present)

NARRATIVE:

When the British Government determined to abandon the campaign at the Dardanelles and all the hopes that had been placed upon it, I thought it necessary to quit their counsels and betook myself to the Armies.

One afternoon when I had been about a month in the line with the Company, I had just sat myself down in our tiny sand-bagged shelter to write some letters home when an Orderly presented himself at the entrance, saluted very smartly and told me:

"The Corps Commander wishes to see Major Churchill at four o'clock. A car will be waiting at the crossroads at 3:15."

I did not much like the prospect of traipsing across three miles of muddy fields, the greater part under the observation of the

enemy in daylight, and then toiling back all the way in the evening. However, the order brooked no question, and in a rather sulky mood I prepared to set out on my trudge.

After toiling and sweating my way through the slush, I at last reached the rendezvous -- a shattered inn at these exceptionally unhealthy crossroads. There was no motorcar! I waited impatiently for nearly an hour. Presently there appeared a staff officer on foot:

"Are you Major Churchill?"

"I am."

"There was a mistake about sending the car for you. It went to the wrong place, and now it is too late for you to see the General. You can rejoin the unit."

"Thank you very much! Would it be troubling you too much to know the nature of the business on which the General required to bring me out of the line?"

"Oh, it was nothing in particular. He thought as he was coming up this way he would like to have a talk with you, that's all. But perhaps another time."

I was indignant! It was now nearly dark, and I had to begin another long, sliding, slippery, splashing waddle back to the trenches. I lost my way in the dark. Tired out and very thirsty, I put my head into the nearest Company Mess for a drink:

"Hello, you're in luck today."

"I haven't seen much of it. I've been made a fool of."

"Well, you're in luck all the same -- as you will see when you get back to your Company."

I did not understand their allusions at all, but splashed out again into the rain and mud, and ten minutes later arrived at my own Company. A Sergeant saluted:

"We have shifted your kit to another dugout, Sir."

"Why?"

"Yours has been blown up, Sir."

"Any harm done?"

"Your kit's alright, Sir, but your man was killed. Better not go in there, Sir, it's an awful mess."

"When did it happen?"

"WINNIE" - 24

"About five minutes after you left, Sir. A whizzbang came in through the roof and blew his head off."

As I walked to my new abode, I reflected how thoughtful it had been of the General to wish to see me again. And then upon this quaint reflection there came the strong sensation that a hand had been stretched out to move me in the nick of time from a fatal spot.

But whether it was the General's hand or not, I cannot tell -- !

*

DIALOGUE:

(in the dugout, composing a letter to Clemmie) Oh my darling, I love you more each month that passes, and feel the need of you and all your beauty. My precious charming Clemmie -- you have seen me very weak and foolish and mentally infirm in these last weeks. I too sometimes feel the longing for rest and peace.

Is it "Forty and finished?"

Sometimes I think I would not mind stopping living very much.

Two days ago I was walking up to the trenches when a shell arrived with a tremendous bang. It did not make me jump a bit. I thought: "Twenty yards more to the left and no more tangles to unravel, no more anxieties to face, no more hatred and injustices to encounter; a good ending to a chequered life, a final gift -- unvalued -- to an ungrateful country; an impoverishment of the war-making power of Britain which no one would ever know or measure or mourn."

But I am not going to give in or tire at all. I am going on fighting to the very end in any station open to me! ...

I must reopen my letter to tell you that quite a good mouse has paid me a visit just now. I have been watching the little beast reconnoitering the floor of this cave with the utmost skill, daring, and composure -- !

And lights cross-fade gently to ...

ACT II, SCENE 2

"A New Life"

During the following, WINNIE, donning his favourite broad-brimmed hat, sets up his easel and stool and prepares to paint.

NARRATIVE:

When I left the Admiralty, the change left me gasping. Like a sea-beast fished up from the depths, or a diver too suddenly hoisted, my veins threatened to burst from the fall in pressure. At a moment when every fibre of my being was inflamed to action, I was forced to remain a spectator of the tragedy, placed cruelly in a front seat. Then it was that the Muse of Painting came to my rescue and said, "Are these toys any good to you? They amuse some people."

Having experimented with children's paints, I bought a complete outfit for painting in oils!

The next step was to begin. But what a step to take! The palette gleamed with beads of colour; fair and white rose the canvas; the empty brush hung poised, heavy with destiny, irresolute in the air. But after all the sky on this occasion was unquestionably blue, and a pale blue at that. There could be no doubt that blue paint mixed with white should be put on the top part of the canvas. One really does not need to have had an artist's training to see that! So very gingerly I mixed a little blue paint on the palette with a very small brush, and then with infinite precaution made a mark about as big as a bean upon the affronted snow-white shield.

Suddenly out of nowhere there arrived none other than the gifted wife of the artist, Sir John Lavery. "Painting!?" she said. "But what are you hesitating about? Let me have a brush -- the big one!" Splash into the turpentine, wallop into the blue and white, frantic flourish on the pallette -- clean no longer -- and then several large, fierce strokes and slashes of blue on the absolutely cowering canvas. Anyone could see that it could not hit back! No evil fate, however, avenged the jaunty violence. The canvas grinned in helplessness before me. The spell was broken. The sickly inhibitions rolled away. I seized the largest brush and fell upon my victim with berserk fury!

I have never felt any awe of a canvas since.

One is quite astonished to find how many things there are in the landscape one never noticed before. So many colours on the hillside, such brilliant reflections in the pool, such lovely lights gilding or silvering surface or outline: the whole world is open with all its treasures. Obviously then, armed with a paint-box, one cannot be bored, one cannot be left at a loose end, one cannot "have several days on one's hands." Good gracious! What there is to admire and how little time there is to see it in! For the first time one begins to envy Methuselah.

The colours are lovely to look at and delicious to squeeze out. I must say I like bright colours and am genuinely sorry for the poor browns....

(Still at his easel, he moves into the past)

DIALOGUE:

(to his wife) Clemmie, I have not done one scrap of work or thought about anything! This is the first time such a thing has happened to me. I am evidently growing up at last!

Thompson, who on every occasion carries my equipment, has begun to complain that painting is becoming every day less like an enthusiasm and more like a disease!

-- Damn! A big beastly cloud has just come over the mountains and threatens to spoil my sunshine! Isn't it cruel? And these tiresome stupid inhabitants actually say they want rain -- ! It is too much.

*

(His mind moves on to other glimpses of a steadily enriching home life)

(sneaking up on the nursery) Shhhh! -- the children....

Roar! Roar-r-r-r-r!

Now what do you suppose that was?

Well, yes it was -- very like a bear. But I have it on good authority that the bark of this particular bear is very much worse than his bite!

Roar!

*

(to the little ones) Shhh! Diana is at her examinations! --

"WINNIE" - 27

They look very difficult. I am certainly glad I do not have to write them!

*

(with a friend) Yes, F.E., my memoirs of the Great War are coming well: I have written a great part of the first volume. It is most exhilarating to feel that one is writing for half a crown a word!

*

(to his wife) Clemmie, I am seriously considering the introduction of a bill that would abolish New Years' Resolutions. My old friend F.E. has gone absolutely pussyfoot for a year! -- He drinks nothing but cider and ginger pop and looks quite ten years younger!

-- Not for Pig!

*

(with Clemmie or another friend) I think this summer I have played my last games of polo. -- Yes; after all I am not much short of 50. But I have been playing the game since 1896. 1896!

Still, it is dreadful giving it up forever....

*

(to a weeping toddler) Now, now, Mary. Puggy will get well....

(He has a sudden inspiration)

Oh what is the matter with poor Puggy-wug?
Pet him and kiss him and give him a hug.
Run and fetch him a suitable drug,
Wrap him up tenderly all in a rug --
That is the way to cure Puggy-wug!

Now we must chant it together so as to cheer Puggy up and lend him moral support in his battle:

Oh what is the matter with poor Puggy-wug?
Pet him and kiss him a give him a hug -- Yes, good! --
Run and fetch him a suitable drug,
Wrap him up tenderly all in a rug --
That is the way to cure Puggy-wug!

(It becomes a game of ring-around-a-rosie)

Oh what is the matter with poor Puggy-wug!
Pet him and kiss him and give him a hug!
Run and fetch him a suitable drug!

"WINNIE" - 28

Wrap him up tenderly all in a rug!
That is the way to cure Puggy-wug!!!

Laughter, as we cross-fade to ...

ACT II, SCENE 3

"Three Strikes and - ?!"

Now WINNIE steps out of the past to talk to us again.

NARRATIVE:

Three days before the election contest opened in 1922 I was struck down by appendicitis! My wife and a few friends had to begin the battle in my constituency, Dundee, and keep it going as best they could without me....

DIALOGUE:

(reading a letter from Clemmie) "My darling: The situation here is an anxious one. I shall be broken-hearted if you don't get in. The idea against you seems to be that you are a "War-Monger," but I am exhibiting you as a Cherub Peace-Maker with little fluffy wings round your chubby face." -- !

NARRATIVE:

I was beaten by over ten thousand votes!

It was in this election that the Liberal Party fell apart, and threw its remaining weight behind -- of all people -- the Socialists! May history forgive them; I could not. In the twinkling of an eye, I found myself without an office, without a seat, without a party -- and without an appendix!

I went on to a second defeat at West Leicester, and was beaten again at Westminster -- Three defeats in under two years! ...

DIALOGUE:

(with his wife) Ah, Clemmie! What changes in a year! What gaps! What a sense of fleeting shadows!

The most precious thing I have in life is your love for me. I depend on you and rest on you. You are a rock.

"WINNIE" - 30

NARRATIVE:

It was a great relief to be returned from Epping by a majority of ten thousand at the end of the the General Election of 1924. Stanley Baldwin was the new Conservative Prime Minister....

DIALOGUE:

(to Baldwin, in the office of the P.M.) Good day, Prime Minister. Yes thank you -- a very exciting contest. Do you mind the smoke of a cigar?...

Well, yes. I am willing of course to help -- if you really want me. What do you have in mind? ...

Chancellor of the Exchequer!?!

Will I go to the Treasury?! Will the bloody duck swim?! I mean -- This fulfils my ambition: the ambition I have had since childhood to follow my father. I still have my father's robes! I shall be proud to serve you in this splendid office!

NARRATIVE:

Thus it was that after twenty years' absence I rejoined the Conservative Party. "The vicissitudes of Politics are inexhaustible." -- !

*

This was a capable, sedate Government during a period in which marked improvement and recovery were effected year by year. Nevertheless, in the general Election of 1929, the British Public swung to the Socialists.

Everybody threw the blame on me. I have noticed that they nearly always do. Perhaps it is because they think I shall be able to bear it best.

At any rate, I was 54 years old, and once again out of favour with practically everybody....

DIALOGUE:

(reliving a trip with his family) Clemmie, never in my whole life have I been welcomed with so much genuine interest and admiration as in this vast country of Canada!

Look, Randolph: lakes full of fish, hills and forests scarcely trodden by the foot of man, every kind of tree growing in primeval confusion! -- Fancy cutting them all down to make pulp for those bloody newspapers and then calling it civilization!

Clemmie, you know, I am greatly attracted to this country.

Immense developments are going forward -- there are fortunes to be made in many directions. I have made up my mind that if anyone else is made leader of the Conservative Party, I clear out of politics and see if I cannot make you and the kittens a little more comfortable before I die. Only one goal still attracts me, and if that were barred, I should quit the dreary field for pastures new -- and perhaps Canadian!

However, the time to take decisions is not yet: --

Last night we visited the Lick Observatory in San Francisco. They showed us the planet Saturn. The spectacle took my breath away! I had no conception of the perfectness and splendour of this orb.

After contemplating the heavens for some hours, one wonders why one worries about the vote in Epping -- !

*

NARRATIVE:

Late that year there descended upon the world what I have called the "Economic Blizzard." The failure of the Labour Government to face this tempest alone led to a national coalition. I was not invited to take part!

But I was neither surprised nor unhappy at being left out of it. I had had fifteen years of cabinet office. Political dramas are very exciting at the time to those engaged in the clatter and whirlpool of Politics, but I can truthfully affirm that I never felt resentment, still less pain, at being so decisively discarded in a moment of national stress. Indeed, while the Political crisis lasted, I remained painting at Cannes!

*

The years from 1931 to 1935 were personally very pleasant to me. There being as yet no salary for a lowly M.P., I earned my livelihood by dictating articles -- which had a wide circulation not only in Great Britain and the United States, but also, before Hitler's shadow fell upon them, in the most famous newspapers of sixteen European countries. And I produced in succession the various volumes of my Life of Marlborough. I lived in fact from mouth to hand!

I lived mainly at Chartwell, where I had much to amuse me. I built with my own hands a large part of two cottages and extensive kitchen-garden walls, and made all kinds of rockeries and waterworks and a large swimming pool which was filtered to limpidity and could be heated to supplement our fickle sunshine. Thus I never had a dull or idle moment from morning till midnight, and with my happy family around me dwelt at peace within my habitation --

And meditated constantly upon the European situation and the rearming of Germany -- !

An abrupt transition to ...

ACT II, SCENE 4

"A Voice in the Wilderness"

With a quick shift in gears, WINNIE continues....

NARRATIVE:

In September, 1932, Germany boycotted the Disarmament Conference....

DIALOGUE:

(in the House) I should very much regret to see any approximation in military strength between Germany and France. Those who speak of that as though it were right, or even a question of fair dealing, altogether underrate the gravity of the European situation. I would say to those who would like to see Germany on an equal footing, "Do you wish for war?!"

NARRATIVE:

I was ignored. His Majesty's Government promised Germany equal status in armaments -- on the same day that Hitler gained full dictatorial powers!

*

In 1933 the Disarmament Treaty was to come to an end. But Britain announced that nevertheless, she had no intention of resuming Air Force construction! --

DIALOGUE:

(in the House) I regretted very much to hear the Undersecretary state that we were only the fifth air power. I was sorry to hear him boast that we had not laid down a single new unit this year. All these ideas are being increasingly stultified by the march of events!

The great, dominant fact is that Germany has already, in violation of the Treaty, begun to rearm!

I dread the day when the means of threatening the heart of the British Empire should pass into the hands of the present rulers

"WINNIE" - 34

of Germany. That day may not be far distant. It may not be distant at all! With our enormous metropolis here, the greatest target in the world -- a kind of tremendous, fat, valuable cow tied up to attract the beast of prey -- we are in a position in which we have never been before!

There is not an hour to lose. I cannot conceive how, in the present state of Europe, we can delay in establishing the principle of having an Air Force at least as strong as that of any power that can get at us!

NARRATIVE:

In March, 1934, the British Government pledged at last to keep up with other powers in air strength -- with a construction programme not to be completed until 1940!

DIALOGUE:

(in the House) I stand amazed that even such a meek and meagre increase should inspire such bitter opposition in this House. Let us all remember this: Britain's hour of weakness is Europe's hour of danger!

I first assert that Germany has already created a military air force which is now nearly two thirds as strong as our own.

Second, that next year it will be equal to our own even if the Government's present proposals are carried out!

And third, that once they have got the lead we may never be able to overtake them!

*

(at home with his wife) Ah, Clemmie! I marvel at the complacency of these Ministers. I look with wonder upon our thoughtless crowds disporting themselves in the summer sunshine, and upon this unheeding House of Commons -- when all the while, across the North Sea, a terrible process is astir. To me it is invested with a ruthless, lurid tinge. It glitters and it glares....

*

(in the House again) We have just been told that 150 aircraft will be added to the British front line during the coming year. I must point out that the Germans are adding at least 100 or 150 a month!

I say we have lost air parity already!!

NARRATIVE:

They called me a scare-monger and a war-monger. They said I was

only endeavouring to make their flesh creep!

A week later a British delegation was received in Berlin. "Oh, by the way," said Hitler, "I've now achieved air parity with your country. You do have 1,045 machines, don't you?" "Oh, that's nice!" said the British delegates. "We thought we had 690." The truth was we had 453!

*

DIALOGUE:

(at home, with his wife) Clemmie darling, have you seen the newspapers this week? --

"We owe Churchill a deep apology for having in the past ignored his warnings...."

"We urge the government to make Churchill the creator of the Air Parity he so earnestly seeks...."

I do believe the light is finally dawning! And with an election round the corner, even the Prime Minister is starting to pay it some heed! I am being deluged with invitations to speak and congratulations on the recovery of my political stock. And have you heard what's happening in Germany?! -- I had a letter from Randolph; listen to this:

(reading) "There is an uproar over here every time you make a pronouncement. Any magazine or newspaper carrying an article of yours is banned. Hitler expresses himself as very alarmed at the idea of your being in the cabinet -- he says it would be most unfriendly!"

Apparently he thinks it a foregone conclusion!

NARRATIVE:

The result of the general election was a triumph for Prime Minister Baldwin!...

DIALOGUE:

(to Clemmie again) It seems, my darling Kat, that the pendulum is finally swinging my way! What I very much wish, of course -- what I very much wish -- is to return to the Admiralty!

NARRATIVE:

For six days I waited at Chartwell for a letter or a telephone call....

But it did not come.

"WINNIE" - 36

There was much mocking in the press, and a rather clever rhyme became popular among Conservative backbenchers:

"Did you dare, Father Churchill, did you dare to expect
A summons to council again,
In the face of the feeling that haunts the elect
That they scoffed at your warnings in vain?
You're polite to the small and you're rude to the great;
Your opinions are bolder and surer
Than is seemly today in an office of state --
You've even insulted the Führer!"

*

(He settles himself once more at his easel)

DIALOGUE:

Clemmie, I was reading today what Marlborough wrote in 1708:

"When one has done one's best, the only thing is to await
the result with patience. Most things are settled by
Destiny." -- !

Slow cross-fade to ...

ACT II, SCENE 5

"The Path to Power"

Leaving his easel, WINNIE returns to the present and addresses us.

NARRATIVE:

By the month of August, 1939, Austria and Czechoslovakia had disappeared from the map, Poland was threatened, and Russia, despite my warnings, had been driven into the arms of Hitler. No one now could doubt that the storm was about to break. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain called Parliament back from its summer recess....

DIALOGUE:

(looking out his office window) My God, look at them. There must be scores of them; -- every one with a sandwich board saying, "WE WANT CHURCHILL!" And those huge posters with "WHAT PRICE CHURCHILL?" in giant letters? You can hardly miss them -- they're all over the city!

How delightfully irritated the Führer will be when he hears about this!

-- For me? Thank you. *(reads a message)* They've started! Warsaw and Cracow are being bombed now!

NARRATIVE:

Poland was attacked by Germany at dawn on September 1st. On the morning of September 3rd, the Prime Minister made a broadcast to the nation: Great Britain was at war!

*

That afternoon I was called to Downing Street....

DIALOGUE:

(arriving home) Clemmie -- they have given me a job again. I am First Lord of the Admiralty!

"WINNIE" - 38

NARRATIVE:

From the Admiralty Office the signal went out: "Winston is back!"

I lost no time in visiting the Fleet where it lay in its war station at Scapa Flow. After a long day, I stood on the deck of a destroyer looking out over the Fleet, while on every side rose the purple hills of Scotland in all their splendour. My thoughts went back a quarter of a century to that other September when I had visited an Admiral and his Captains in this very bay....

DIALOGUE:

(on a ship in Scapa Flow) It has been a strange day -- like suddenly resuming a previous incarnation. The perfect discipline, style and bearing; the ceremonial routine -- all are unchanged. But the men that fill the uniforms and posts are all different: they were young lieutenants or even midshipmen in those far-off days when last I ...

The ones I knew are dead -- or long retired. Only the ships have survived.

And me.

And the danger....

*

NARRATIVE:

To the astonishment of the whole world, France and Britain remained impassive while Poland was in a few weeks destroyed by the whole might of the German war-machine. Hitler had no reason to complain of this!

But there was profound perturbation at home. The currents of passion mounted even in the breasts of those who had been slothful and purblind in the years before the war. One speaker after another from both sides of the House attacked the Government and especially its Chief with unusual bitterness and vehemence. Then one day from the benches behind the Government, Mr. Amery rose, and quoted amid ringing cheers Cromwell's terrible words to the Long Parliament:

"You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!"

*

At dawn on the following day, the Germans struck their long awaited blow. Holland and Belgium were both invaded. The whole

movement of the German Army upon the Low Countries and France had begun!

At eleven o'clock I was summoned to Downing Street; and there I found Lord Halifax as well. Mr. Chamberlain told us it was clear that he could no longer command enough support to be equal to this emergency. The question, therefore, was whom he should advise the King to send for after his own resignation had been accepted. He looked at us both across the table -- !

I have had many important interviews in my public life, and this was certainly the most important. Usually I talk a great deal, but on this occasion for once I was silent.

A very long pause ensued....

(Pause)

At last Halifax spoke. He said that his position as a peer, with no place in the House of Commons, would make it difficult for him to discharge the duties of Prime Minister in a war like this. He spoke for some minutes. It slowly became clear that the duty would fall upon me -- had in fact fallen upon me.

I was summoned to Buckingham Palace at six o'clock. His Majesty received me most graciously. He looked at me searchingly and quizzically for some moments, and then said: "I suppose you don't know why I've sent for you?"

"Sir, I simply couldn't imagine why."

He laughed and said, "I want you to form a Government!"

*

I cannot conceal that as I went to bed at about 3:00 a.m., I was conscious of a profound sense of relief. At last I had the authority to give directions over the whole scene. I felt as if I were walking with Destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial. Eleven years in the political wilderness had freed me from ordinary party antagonisms. My warnings over the past six years had been so numerous, so detailed, and were now so terribly vindicated, that no one could gainsay me. I could not be reproached either for making the war or for want of preparation for it. I thought I knew a great deal about it all, and I was sure I should not fail.

Therefore, although impatient for the morning, I slept soundly and had no need for cheering dreams. Facts are better than dreams....

*

(WINNIE relives, in Parliament, his own finest hour)

"WINNIE" - 40

DIALOGUE:

I would say to the House, as I said to those who have joined this Government, I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.

We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering. You ask what is our policy? I will say: it is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: Victory -- victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival.

We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender; and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and liberation of the old.

If we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say: "This was their finest hour!"

WINNIE is making the "V for Victory" sign as the lights fade.

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When they rise again, we find him exactly as he was when he first started to excuse himself for a game of bezique with Clemmie almost two hours ago. He smiles to himself, nods to his "guest," and stumps off the stage.

- FINIS -