**Willie and Peter**

Scene 1 *West Country. The long summer holiday, 1943.*

*A seven-year-old boy, played by a mature adult, is walking along a path that meanders from some distant houses into a stretch of gorse and scrub common, and beyond that to a wood. At one side of the common is a pasture field with an old wooden barn in the middle of it. He is eating a large cooking apple.*

*As he walks and dawdles and eats and screws up his face and tunelessly whistles he kicks an old cigarette packet, or throws a stick or a stone. But then he sees a long, thin puddle of muddy water in a cart or lorry track, and swerves deliberately to go splish-splosh through it, with great pleasure. Then, mouth full of apple, he starts to make aeroplane noises, extending his arms into wings, and breaking into a run.*

*This now swooping, zooming Spitfire is known to his friends as* WILLIE.

**WILLIE** Waaaaaaoom vrooooaaaaaaaaak! *(Imitating gunfire)* At-a-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat! Waaaaa-zzzzzzoooooooom! At-a-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat!

*Then* WILLIE, *at full flight, decides he has been shot down. The burning spitfire goes into a long death dive, "wings" sloping, "engine" howling.*

Aaaaaaaaoooooooooo...

**WILLIE** *staggers and crashes, with all due melodrama, sprawling on his back, finished. His run-and-dive has ended under the first ofafew outriding trees, the gradual beginning of the wood. Four or five seconds of being dead are enough for WILLIE. He takes another bite from his huge apple, staring up into the sky.*

Then be all dead. Dead, dead. Burnt to nothing. *(A tuneless whistle, then a tuneless song. He sings)*

YOU ARE MY WOODBINE

MY ONLY WOODBINE

YOU MAKE ME *(burp)* HAP-PY

WHEN SKIES ARE GREY

YOU'LL NEVER—KNOW—DEAR... *(His voice trails off)*

*Comically, a pair of sturdy, short-trousered legs are descending from the tree above him. It is* **PETER,** *played by a fairly burly adult. A bit of a bully, but none too bright.* **WILLIE's** *response is a little wary.* **PETER** *swings out along the lowest branch.*

**PETER** Hatch open! Hatch open! *(And he drops dramatically on the ground)*

**WILLIE** Hello, Peter.

**PETER** What do you think of that, then, Willie? Good, weren't it?

**WILLIE** What are you doing?

**PETER** Parachute drop. What's it look like?

**WILLIE** Yeh. Pretty good.

**PETER** You got to bend at the knees, see. When you do hit the ground. That's Rule Number One, that is.

**WILLIE** What happens if you don't?

**PETER** You break your flaming ankles.

**WILLIE** Cor! Bet that d'hurt!

**PETER** That's the first thing you gotta learn, my Uncle Arnold says. Him showed I. I be going to be a parachuter, see.

**WILLIE** I be going to be a commando.

**PETER** *has been looking avariciously at the apple.*

**PETER** Give us a bit of thik apple, Willie.

**WILLIE** *(trying to deflect his attention)* Your Uncle Arnold is a good parachuter.

**PETER** Oy. Him is. Got medals and all. Hundreds and hundreds.

**WILLIE** Do they keep their parachutes—bring 'urn home, and that— ?

**PETER** 'Course they do! *(He picks up a stone for no apparent reason, and hurls it away)* That's a good throw, that is. Near nigh half a bloody mile. *(He sniffs)* ‘Xpect him'll bring I a parachute when him d'come home.

**WILLIE** *(impressed)* Caw!

**PETER** Two or dree if I d'want 'em. They be made of silk.

**WILLIE** And summat else is—

**WILLIE** *sniggers.* **PETER** *looks at him suspiciously.*

**PETER** Was mean?
**WILLIE** Knickers is.

*The two boys hoot and giggle. Then* **PETER'S** *expression changes.*

**PETER** I said give us a bit, didn't **I?**

**WILLIE** *(reluctantly)* Him's a cooker, mind.

**PETER** Wha**—?**

**WILLIE** Cooking apple. And him yunt half sour. Honest.

**PETER** Bist thou going to give I a bit or not? *(He stands straddle-legged over* **WILLIE,** *so far only half threatening)*

**WILLIE** You can have the core.

**PETER** And you can have my fist! What do I want with the flaming core, Willie?

**WILLIE** Our dad says it's the best part of the apple.

**PETER** Your dad is a loony, then.

**WILLIE** *(passionately)* Him yunt!

**PETER** They oodn't even have him in the Army! What sort of bloke is that?

**WILLIE** *(upset)* Shut thee chops!

**PETER** Your dad ent no blinking good for nothing at all.

**WILLIE** You wait till I tell him! Him'll sort you out!

**PETER** Yeh?

**WILLIE** Yeh!

**PETER** My dad's got a stripe. *(He points to his arm)* Him's in charge of hundreds of men. Hundreds and hundreds.

*The two boys look at each other, but* WILLIE *is almost in tears, hugging the apple into this chest. Pause.* PETER *wipes his nose on the sleeve of his jersey.*

Expect him'll end up a general or summat. That's what our mam says—and her ought to know. Her cousin is a sergeant!

*Suddenly, and defiantly,* WILLIE *takes a bite out of the apple.* PETER *scowls ferociously at him. Just as* WILLIE *is about to swallow the bit of apple,* PETER *launches himself upon him with shattering force.*

**WILLIE** *(gasping)* Oof!

**PETER** *(shouting)* You greedy devil!

**WILLIE** *(gasping)* Peter—no!

*He spits the bit of apple out of his mouth.* PETER *subdues and pins the struggling, gasping, choking* WILLIE *to the ground, planting his knees hard on WILLIE's chest.*

**PETER** Give in?

**WILLIE** Get off!

**PETER** I'll spit.

**WILLIE** No! No—Pe-ter!

**PETER** *(with immense satisfaction) I* will! I'll spit! Right in the middle of your face! *(And he makes a huge frothy bubble of spit, ready to drop)*

**WILLIE** Give in! Give in!
PETER *swallows his spit.*

**PETER** Sure? You sure?

**WILLIE** The apple's all dirty any road—thou's knocked it into the dirt, loony.

**PETER** Who's a loony?

**WILLIE** You be.

PETER *tightens his grip, viciously.*

**PETER** *Who* is? Who is? Who is?

**WILLIE** Ow! Ow! Ow!

**PETER** *(grinding his teeth) Who's* a loony? Eh?

**WILLIE** *(gasping)* I be—ow! Ow!

**PETER** Who? Who's a loony? Who?

**WILLIE** Me! *(He starts to cry)* I be.

*Just to underline the point,* PETER *spits on him anyway.*

**PETER** And doosn't thee forget it, you great babby!