



WHEN YOU'RE READY – VOL. ONE
BY
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Extract

A SMITH SCRIPT

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WHEN YOU'RE READY – VOLUME ONE

Compiled by Valerie Goodwin

Author's note

These short speeches have been written for use in examinations and auditions expressly for students aged between 13 and 18. They are all original and have never appeared in print before. In some cases, they are adapted from the author's own recently published plays, but these too have been especially extended or rewritten for this collection.

The intention was to provide a resource for use by today's Drama student, and to offer a range of accents, dialects, moods, themes, emotions and historical periods, as well as being non gender specific in several of the speeches.

The author is a Drama teacher herself and has 25 years' experience to call on.

It is hoped that as well as being useful for solo work the pieces will also spark devised work, character studies, hot seating, further research and stimulation.

The speeches are all between approximately 600- 900 words in length, and some work together to tell a story from several perspectives.

The students may well recognise the fictional or historical characters drawn on; again, hopefully this will lead to an interest in the source material.

Katie MacDonald, Mary King's Close, Edinburgh.

In Edinburgh in the 17th century a million people were crammed into one mile of buildings perched atop the volcanic rock, stretching from Holy Rood palace at the lower end of the Royal Mile with the older Castle at the other. A ramshackle and teetering assortment of dwellings; narrow closes, wynds and tenement buildings which teemed with families eight to a room, were teeming with vermin and rats too.

All the crowded buildings were taller at the Royal Mile side and the cobbled streets all led downhill to the North.

When the Royal Mile frontages were demolished and new buildings were erected, the lower levels, cellars and buildings behind the Royal Mile were often time capsules of the past.

The closes and wynds sloped down to the lake (the Nor' loch) that was used as sewer -and water supply and morgue.

This 'loch' was drained in modern times and is now Princes Street Gardens, below the castle.

In the 17th century Mary Kings Close was one of many hundreds of closes and wynds.

Swarming with approx. 450 people, living in a warren of tiny dwellings precariously stacked in tenement buildings seven storeys high.

The cry of 'plague' went up, and the inhabitants were bricked up alive in Mary Kings Close, and left to die, the healthy along with the sick; all either died of plague or starvation.

Nowadays underground tours are run, as the close was preserved when the upper levels were demolished for the building of the town council offices.

Now, in the Council's cellars and accessed by a locked back entrance, one enters a secret time capsule- the undisturbed and unrenovated Mary Kings Close- the most haunted place in this most haunted of cities.

The cobbled street, the original house doors, the uneven floors, the winding stairways, and the stained walls have provided many ghostly sightings, including that of a young girl .

Over the years this one room has filled up with gifts and offerings and tokens to comfort, to make contact with, to recognise the sad spirit of the wee girl forever weeping in this tiny smoke darkened room.

Would ye take a look at this? They say it's a gift. Tae cheer me up, y'know. It has writing on, and it's paper, but shiny paper, but not metal. And do you smell? It's a sweet smell. I'd like to taste it. They all bring me something. The room's full o'them. What for? Whyd'they think of gi'ing me yon foolishness, I canna say.

Look here- a wee doll. Now, yon is indeed a welcome gift.. I never had a poppit myself'. But this yin, it has hair too. Not real hair, but.....what would it be? And what is this it's made of? Nae wax, or wood, or china.....soft....though. But nae wax. Nae cloth. Smells a wee bit like almonds. And her eyes- they can open and close, see? And she says: Mama. How may she speak?

I call her Annie. That was ma sister's name. She had blue eyes, not brown like this .

This wee frock, the dolly has- they wear clothes like it. Short skirts, showing their legs. And trews, the girls wear! And this – d'ye see? To fasten it-wee metal teeth, nae buttons. Ah, it's all different now.

I have quite a few dollies, and I called them all names, after the folk that were here back then. Ye dinna know what it was like then. Smoky smell, that hid other smells; but warm, for we'd all crowd close together under that wool blanket.

There were eight of us lived here, in this wee room. Our room was on the 3rd landing; how we wished we'd a window! The folk on the seventh floor, they'd the best of it. They could see the castle from their window, they said. And they could throw their slops oot, nae carry them doon, like we'd to. Gardy loo, and oot they'd go.

The folk nowadays, how d'they manage? Their coats and their shoon- their hands sae clean. Sae many on them.

We had nae money fer soap.

And now they come here, and look. And some of them say, ah the life, what a terrible life for them, all crammed in, and nae heat, save this wee fire. And fer water they'd to fetch it, from the Nor' loch, and the same place fer emptying the slops, nae wonder they were all sick!

What else could we? They look all wonderment, like –they have some different arrangements, be the looks on. They're all spick and span, and plump as piglets. Their pink cheeks all shining. And their hair smells ..like flowers. I

never saw such clean folk, not even the rich ones living outwith Holyrood, the palace.

I'd go down there, or up to Arthurs Seat; and the gorse smelt, like butter. And the sky, and the heather. I miss the birds' cries; and in the Spring, after the snow melted, there'd be wee white flowers, like snow again. We would nae stay in the room, only to sleep; we'd be off earning our food in the day. And I'd find some scraps, the stall keepers would nae miss an apple, mebbe. If they caught you though, ye'd to run, fer if they caught ye-whipping, if ye was lucky.

Father would drink the whisky, chance he'd get some. Whisky 'd keep the cold out.

Let the bairns ha'e a nip. We wouldnae see Father too often; now where would he be?

We'd all to work hard to bring food to the rest.

Then the sickness came, and the bricks- we tried to say, let us oot-but they didnae want to get our sickness; that was a bad time.

Mother went first. Then I did my best, but, nae good. All gone.

Here's some folk now, come to see- this is where Katie is, leave a wee toy or ...some food, she'll mebbe, not grieve. How should I not cry, and my whole family gone?

Sometimes, they can see me, aye; well enough; standing here, watching them.

Can *you* see me?