



After Sefton

A chamber opera for Robert Ely

Libretto by Peter Scott-Presland

Music by Robert Ely

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After Sefton

Cast

Corporal Robert Duggan, 35, a cornet player, Royal Marine Band. In the present (2001), when he talks to the audience, he is early sixties.

Bandsman Adam Fraser, 19, Royal Green Jackets flute, a cheerful Jack-the-Lad

Major Wilder, RMP SIB, impassive, nearing retirement

Sergeant Trossley, 35, a trombone player, close friend of Duggan

Staging

Open

Instrumentation

Evocation of brass band – flute, cornet, trombone?

Scene One

[DUGGAN and WILDER. WILDER standing, DUGGAN seated at a table. WILDER has a letter in his hand. Both in uniform.]

WILDER: *[showing him the letter]* Is this your handwriting?

DUGGAN: Yes...

WILDER: "I miss you so much. I live for the times
We can snatch together."
What does that mean?

DUGGAN: We were friends.

WILDER: Good friends?

DUGGAN: Yes...

WILDER: Intimate friends?

DUGGAN: I suppose so

WILDER: Sharing-a-bed, doing-the-dirty friends?

DUGGAN: No!
Where did you get that letter?

WILDER: It's not the only one.
There were several in his locker.

DUGGAN: *[to himself]*
Of all the stupid –

WILDER: What did you say?

DUGGAN: Nothing

WILDER: Let's start again.
Where did you meet him?

[Lights change. DUGGAN steps out to the audience.]

DUGGAN: It was the Pig and Whistle
Saturday lunch time.
I don't know if you remember it.
In a mews in Belgravia.
White wash walls, beer garden
Jam-packed on a nice warm day
Or spilling on the street.
It was one of those pubs
Only gay one day a week.
Like the Markham in the King's Road.

[FRASER wanders in, obviously new, beer in hand]

DUGGAN: He had the bluest eyes

[FRASER sees him, smiles.]

DUGGAN: I was on holiday
I'd had a couple, I was bold
Portsmouth was a world away
Anyone who saw me in the Pig and Whistle
From the Commando -
Well, what was *he* doing there anyway?
I was careful.
I never went to the gay pub in Portsmouth

[He approaches FRASER]

Looking for someone?

FRASER: *[smiling]* Maybe

DUGGAN: Anyone in particular?

FRASER: That depends

DUGGAN: He was so relaxed
At ease within his skin
I never would have guessed

FRASER: Is it always this busy?

DUGGAN: Later it will be dead
They'll all move on to the Kings Road
To the Markham
Or to Habitat for coffee, cake – and cruising

[This last is hesitant, it's very daring.]

DUGGAN: *[To audience]* I don't know why I said that
I don't know how I dared.
Adam gave me confidence
He looked so self-assured
It must have rubbed off onto me
Some of it

FRASER: Where's Habitat? I don't know London well

DUGGAN: First-time visitor?

FRASER: Not a visitor, but not been here long

DUGGAN: Habitat's in the Kings Road too

FRASER: Seems everything's in the Kings Road
Everything you could want

DUGGAN: It is on a Saturday afternoon

FRASER: Will you be in the King's Road?

DUGGAN: I could be

[To AUDIENCE] I was falling
Falling deep into his eyes
I started to get hard
I hoped it didn't show
Through my track suit bottoms

FRASER: *[seeing the erection, with amusement]* If I persuaded you?

DUGGAN: *[to audience]* He already had

[Lights change. Sitting at a table with coffees. This can be the same table as the interrogation, plus a cloth and a flower in a vase.]

FRASER: What do you do?

DUGGAN: *[confused]* Do?

FRASER: For a living?
What did you think I meant?

DUGGAN: *[Confused, not sure whether to tell the truth]*
I'm from Portsmouth

FRASER: Navy?

DUGGAN: Sort of –

[To audience] How could I be so open?
It went against all my instincts

FRASER: I'm a bandsman
Royal Green Jackets

DUGGAN: Not so loud!

FRASER: It's no big deal these days

DUGGAN: How long have you been in the Black Mafia?

FRASER: You know the Royals then?

DUGGAN: How long?

FRASER: Nine months.

DUGGAN: You have a lot to learn.
Take my advice, be very careful.
People are still thrown out
For being gay

FRASER: They all know in my platoon

DUGGAN: It only takes a quarrel
For one to turn against you
Or one to blackmail you
Into having sex.
Or one new squaddie
Not so understanding.

[FRASER laughs. DUGGAN seizes his arm.]

DUGGAN: I'm serious. Take care.
Protect your back.
Never keep a diary
Never save a letter
Burn it if there's anything suggestive –
If you tear it up
They can piece it together.

FRASER: Is that what you do?

DUGGAN: I never get letters

FRASER: That's sad.
Have you never had a boyfriend?

DUGGAN: No. I loved a boy at school, but –
No.

FRASER: I had a boyfriend
But when I joined the army, he left me.
He was a pacifist and a bit of a hippy.
Now he's married to a florist.
[Pause]
I miss having a boyfriend

DUGGAN: Want another coffee?

[FRASER shakes his head. Pause.]

Want to come to Hyde Park with me?
[low] We could go in the bushes.

FRASER: Are you crazy? Who was going on about risks?

Let's go to your hotel.

DUGGAN: They know me there

FRASER: *[Leans forward and kisses his hand before DUGGAN can withdraw]*

Let's go to another hotel.

[Lights change. DUGGAN to the front, alone.]

DUGGAN: It was hopeless. I was helpless
In the gaze of those melting eyes
In the feel of those moist red lips.

[Lights change. WILDER again.]

WILDER: When was this?

DUGGAN: Mrs Thatcher just got in.
Nineteen seventy nine.
Summer.

WILDER: And nothing passed between you?

DUGGAN: Nothing. I'm not homosexual.

DUGGAN: *[to AUDIENCE]* I felt dreadful saying that.
Like pissing on his grave.

WILDER: So you're not queer.

DUGGAN: No

WILDER: Just happened to be in a haunt of queers

DUGGAN: I'm not queer

WILDER: Maybe you just help them out
When they're short-handed.

DUGGAN: It wasn't a gay pub.

WILDER: On a Saturday it was. *[Pause. Another letter]*
This is dated nineteen eighty-one
Two years later.

DUGGAN: We kept in touch.

WILDER: Where are his letters?

DUGGAN: What?

WILDER: His letters to you, where are they?
We searched your barracks – nothing
A bit one-sided, was it?
Older man, younger man
Taking you for a ride?

DUGGAN: I never keep letters
They don't seem important.

WILDER: *[Another letter]* This one's dated Christmas
Nineteen-eighty.

[Reads] "My dearest Adam
I'm sitting alone in my room
Writing this. Grannie is downstairs
Making pigs in blankets for tomorrow
I don't know why.
We have far too much food anyway
For the two of us.
Tradition I suppose.
We have to have pigs in blankets.

I keep wanting to tell her
About our little secret
But I don't think she could stand it
At her age. I'm all she has.
It would kill her.

'Our little secret'.
What little secret? *[Pause]*

DUGGAN: I thought I was going to be posted

To Northern Ireland
It would be really dangerous.
There's been so many bombs.

WILDER: *[Carries on reading]*
'I'm only here for five days
But already it seems an age.
I know we'll be together
On my next leave in February
I can't tell you how much
My heart swells with longing.
Oh my dearest sweet boy
Without you, my life has
No interest at all
No flavour at all
All the joy and colour has gone."

"My dearest sweet boy"
Is that what you call a friend?
Even a very good friend?
This is a love letter, admit it

DUGGAN: No.

WILDER: Of course it bloody well is!
Why do you go on denying it?
There are others.
There are many, many others.

[Pulls a fistful out of the bag. Reads lines from different letters at random]

"My dearest darling".
"My one and only joy"
"Your skin is like the softest silk"
"You are the light of my life"
"Last night when we lay together"
What the bloody hell are you playing at?

[Lights change again. DUGGAN to audience.]

DUGGAN: "Last night, when we lay together..."
I remember where I wrote that.

Paddington Station.
My skin was still glowing
I could feel your kisses on my back.
I blushed as I wrote it.
I was sure everyone could tell.
How could anyone know so much happiness?
It had to show in my face, in my eyes...

[FRASER enters to him. He is stripped to the waist.]

FRASER: ... in a cheap knocking shop?

DUGGAN: Well it was, wasn't it?
You could take a room by the hour.

FRASER: But we had all night.
And the next day. And night.

DUGGAN: I'd never let anyone do that before.

FRASER: It slipped in like it was fated

DUGGAN: It hurt at first

FRASER: But I held you, and licked you
And kissed the hairs
On the nape of your neck
Till you were relaxed

DUGGAN: And we were one
That's how it seemed
We became a single person
I loved you so much

FRASER: I loved you too
My angel

DUGGAN: My life

FRASER: I never want to be parted
I can't stand much more of this -
The furtiveness, the fear

DUGGAN: The fear is my fault

FRASER: We will conquer fear

[They are kissing passionately between lines.]

DUGGAN: It doesn't have to be for long
This life of longing,
I can be out in a year.
I will be thirty-six
We can have over forty years together

FRASER: No, fifty

DUGGAN: More than half a lifetime

FRASER: I can be out in two years

DUGGAN: Two years? I'll be thirty-seven!
How can I stand the wait?

FRASER: Be patient, darling.
You'll get a job as a music teacher
Find us both a flat to share
Somewhere nice.

DUGGAN: Somewhere nice?
Anywhere with you is nice.
Anywhere without you is a hell
A hell of loneliness and longing

FRASER: I can join an orchestra or band
Perhaps the BBC

DUGGAN: I'm sure you're good enough

FRASER: Maybe you can too –
It would be good to play together

DUGGAN: We're playing together now! *[kiss]*

FRASER: Not like that – be serious!

DUGGAN: Oh, I am, I am
You don't know how serious I am.
I couldn't get an orchestra
I'm nowhere near as good as you.

FRASER: Here... *[He goes to take a ring off his finger]*
This was my Grandad's.

*[Grabs DUGGAN's hand, tries to put the ring on his marriage finger.
DUGGAN reacts as if it was red hot.]*

DUGGAN: No. People will ask.
I'll have to explain it.
I'll have to lie.

FRASER: I never want to lie.

DUGGAN: You're different. I'm too old.

FRASER: All right, Grandpa.

*[He puts the ring back on his finger, takes a chain with a cross on it from around
his neck, puts it round DUGGAN's.]*

You can explain this.
Say you won it in a church raffle.

DUGGAN: That sounds ridiculous

FRASER: OK, say you got it for being shagged rotten
By a member of the Black Mafia.
Tell them it's the wages of sin
And sin pays very well.

DUGGAN: Now you're being stupid

FRASER: *[Serious]* It was from my mum.
She gave it me before she died.
I want you to feel me against your skin
Every moment of the day.

[Lights change. WILDER again, offstage in shadow.]

WILDER: The postmark is Paddington.
 Dated Fourth of June
 Nineteen-eighty two

DUGGAN: I remember that so well.
 He slipped out of the room
 With one last look
 We smiled. *[FRASER goes]*

I sat there on the rumpled bed
And looked around the faded peeling walls
With patterns of forget-me-nots.
I wondered when we'd meet again
No more leave till autumn
Military bands are always busy
In the summer.
Parks, bandstands, end of the pier.
Kids with ice creams
Playing soldiers
Older codgers dozing
On the benches.
A nice little earner,
Sweating in the sun

I wrote down all my feelings
White hot from my heart

WILDER: "I can feel your tongue in my mouth
 Your teeth nibbling at my neck..."

DUGGAN: I had a fancy writing case
 A gift from the platoon
 For my thirtieth.
 It felt good to take out
 The Parker Platignum pen,
 To hear it scratching
 On the Basildon Bond
 The words shaping under the nib
 Strong and sure with love

WILDER: "In the mirror I can see the marks

On my shoulders where you held me.
Your muscles were so firm
The biceps under the skin,
Under a skin so soft."

DUGGAN: I couldn't bear to dress

WILDER: "The marks will fade,
The red will fade
Under my clothes
Even while I go about
The business of the world
I do not want to put my singlet on
While I can see the marks
And feel your presence."

Well? Well? *[Pause]*

DUGGAN: Eventually I forced myself to dress
Paid the bill,
Popped it in the station letter box
At Waterloo
On the way to Platform Five,
And Portsmouth.
[Exploding] All right. Have it your way.
I only wanted to keep his name
From publicity,
Protect his family.
[Collapsing]
What does it matter now he's dead?

WILDER: It matters to those left behind.
We must make examples
Of rotten apples
For other rotten apples
Still lurking in the basket

DUGGAN: For the sake of his family
They must remember him
As they saw him, at his best.
Why should they be told?
Why should he be held up to scorn?

"Adam Fraser, martyr to the IRA
And screaming pansy."

WILDER: Conduct prejudicial
To good order and discipline.
Don't worry, we can't try
A soldier once he's dead.

DUGGAN: You would though, wouldn't you?
If you could.
Drag his name through the mud

WILDER: I don't think so
Wouldn't do the army any good.
Putting wrong ideas in people's heads
We might get all the wrong type of recruits
For all the wrong reasons.

DUGGAN: *[To himself]* I joined the Royal Marines
Because the men were more handsome
And the uniforms more sexy.

WILDER: Try telling that to your Court Marshall.
Can't see that going down very well.

DUGGAN: Court Marshall?

WILDER: Your discharge hearing then.

DUGGAN: And Adam's name?

WILDER: Corporal, the hearing's confidential,
We're not monsters.
You can be represented

DUGGAN: I don't need to be represented
My life is over now.

WILDER: As you wish.

[Lights fade. DUGGAN to audience.]

DUGGAN: There was no internet of course
Not back then in nineteen eighty-two.
Hard to remember now a time without it.
There were letters
Only letters

[TROSSLEY rushes in, a jovial man who likes his beer. Old friend of DUGGAN.]

TROSSLEY: I stopped by in the Lodge
And got the platoon letters

DUGGAN: *[eager]* Anything for me?

TROSSLEY: *[Teasing]* Eager beaver, aren't we?
Expecting something

DUGGAN: Might be

TROSSLEY: Meet someone on leave, did we?

DUGGAN: None of your business

TROSSLEY: You did!

DUGGAN: Give it here.

TROSSLEY: Give what where?

DUGGAN: My letter. I know you've got a letter

TROSSLEY: Might have

DUGGAN: Don't be such a prick. Give it here

TROSSLEY: Language. *[He reaches in his bag. While he does so:]*
I think there may be something here.
I seem to remember -

DUGGAN: Stop dragging it out.

TROSSLEY: Isn't this exciting? I feel like Santa Claus

DUGGAN: Get on with it!

TROSSLEY: You must be really in love.

[He finds the letter and holds it out; snatches it away when DUGGAN goes to grab it.]

TROSSLEY: What's her name?

DUGGAN: What?

TROSSLEY: A fair exchange; one letter – one name

DUGGAN: If you must know, it's my sister.

TROSSLEY: Is that all? Why so much excitement?

DUGGAN: She's expecting a baby

[TROSSLEY unconvinced]

It could be any day now.

TROSSLEY: If the baby had arrived she would have called

DUGGAN: She's in the Hebrides

TROSSLEY: They have phones

DUGGAN: The Outer Hebrides

TROSSLEY: *[Sighs]* Well, if you won't, you won't.
Here you are, uncle.
You're no fun.

[He exits. DUGGAN tears open the letter. FRASER appears in a spotlight opposite side of the stage.]

DUGGAN: My dearest dearest darling
My sweet hot man

FRASER: *[Joining in]*
My sweet hot man

BOTH: Even thinking of you as I write
I get excited.
My cock is hard
My Y-fronts wet with pre-cum

BOTH: I go back over in my mind
Our last weekend
Every moment -
The lagers from the off-licence
The takeaway pizzas

I never wanted to get out of bed
The whole weekend

FRASER: Darling, I'm worried for you

DUGGAN: I'm worried for you

FRASER: If you're sent to the Falklands

DUGGAN: If you're sent to Northern Ireland

FRASER: The rumour is, they'll send in the Marines
If it goes on any longer.
Those Argies are much tougher
Than people think.

DUGGAN: Danger every street corner
Snipers, unexploded bombs

FRASER: It could go on for months. Years
We could all be dragged in.

BOTH: If anything would happen to you,
What would I do then?

FRASER: I'm quite excited.
I've got my first band concert
In Regents Park, July

The Twentieth.
Selections from 'Oliver'
By Lionel Bart.
I get to do two solos –
Who Will Buy? and *Where is Love?*
The arranger thinks that little Oliver
Is worth a flute, all frail and wistful.
I'll do my best to make you proud of me
Like I am proud of you

DUGGAN: I am proud of you

BOTH: So proud etc

[The music breaks off abruptly as DUGGAN takes a lighter out of his pocket, and sets fire to the letter. He watches it burn.]

DUGGAN: I leave no traces
But the traces in my heart.

[Lights change. DUGGAN at table with his writing set. He is writing to FRASER.]

DUGGAN: My dear Angel
I am so nervous for you
Today is your big day
I know the bandstand well
In Regent's Park,
By the boating lake.
I hope it's a fine day
And no wind
To blow your music about.

FRASER: *[Over, as he shines the buttons on his uniform.]*
I put the button stick
Behind the buttons
To shine the silver.
Silvo Tarnish Guard
Metal polish wadding,
And then a cloth.
The jacket is just back
From the regimental cleaners,

So I have no need.
Nerves, I suppose,
Displacement activity.
I want it to be perfect
I want to do you proud

DUGGAN: I know you'll do me proud
I wish I could be there

FRASER: I wish you could be here

BOTH: To hear your/my solos

[A brass arrangement of Where is Love? From 'Oliver', as both spots fade to black. It continues in the dark, plaintive. Lights up abruptly. A clang of an alarm bell. TROSSLEY and DUGGAN run in.]

DUGGAN: What's happened? What is it?

TROSSLEY: Haven't you heard? IRA -
Those bastards struck again.

DUGGAN: Where?

TROSSLEY: Knightsbridge Barracks,
When the Blues and Royals
Were going for
The changing of the guard.
There's a general alert.
We must muster

DUGGAN: Any killed? How many killed?

TROSSLEY: Troopers? Three.
I don't know about horses

DUGGAN: Horses?

TROSSLEY: It's a bomb, stupid.
Household cavalry –
Changing of the guard -
Course they got some horses

I'll take a quick look
At the telly in the mess room
See if it's on the news

[Exits fast.]

DUGGAN: It was on the telly
News flash
Seven horses killed
Or put out of their misery –
The TV doesn't show that.
Or the smell of burnt horse flesh
Reeking in the nostrils;
Or the dreadful screams that horses make
When they are ripped open.
One fighting for his life.
Sefton. Nineteen years old -
Chestnut – white flash
Down the muzzle.

Severed jugular, wounded in the eye
Flayed by six inch nails.
They rushed him from Hyde Park
Back to Barracks.
Emergency operation.
Ninety minutes
No-one thought that he'd survive
The nation held its breath
And forgot the troopers killed.
We are animal lovers
Not squaddie lovers.

[TROSSLEY comes running back.]

TROSSLEY: There's been another one

DUGGAN: Where?

TROSSLEY: Regents Park

[DUGGAN collapses, speechless with horror]

TROSSLEY: At the bandstand

BOTH: Royal Green Jackets

TROSSLEY: How did you know that?

DUGGAN: *[Soft]* I have a friend –

TROSSLEY: Seven bandsmen killed

DUGGAN: *[To himself]* Maybe.... Please God....

TROSSLEY: They were playing music from *Oliver!*

[The lighting fades on the periphery slowly, until the spot is only on DUGGAN. Simultaneously, the flute plays the melody line of "Where is Love?" while the other instruments reflect the anger and adrenaline of TROSSLEY and the other (unseen) troops.]

TROSSLEY: *[spoken?]* I mean, it's less than two hours after the other one. Already three dead, and now another seven. Maybe more. All those people standing round, or sitting in deckchairs, listening to the music, then blown off their feet as bits of men and metal fly all around them. The order is we're confined to barracks, fuck it, and you can see why, though really it's just as likely there's a bomb here somewhere, as another in the Park. I just want to get down there and be with them and help somebody. *[Pause. Explodes]* I just want to KILL SOMETHING.

DUGGAN: *[sung over TROSSLEY]* He must be one of them,
The Dead.
He was at the front,
Forward for his solo.
Sweating in his shiny silver buttons
And his bright, white blanco.

[During this, the music has had a long diminuendo. After TROSSLEY's explosion, only the solo flute. Then the solo flute is cut off abruptly in mid-phrase. They stand frozen, silent. Lights return to normal state.]

TROSSLEY: Are you all right, mate?

DUGGAN: It's the shock, it's awful.

TROSSLEY: You look half-dead yourself.

DUGGAN: I'll be alright.

TROSSLEY: How well did you know him?
This friend?

DUGGAN: Hardly at all.
More an acquaintance.

TROSSLEY: Doesn't look like it.
You look like you lost a brother

DUGGAN: No, just a guy I met a few times
At the Union Jack Club
Opposite the station.

TROSSLEY: You sure you're OK?
You look like you seen a ghost

DUGGAN: Fifteen years in the army,
Two tours in Northern Ireland,
But you never get used to it,
The sudden death, the blood, the danger
I'll be all right

TROSSLEY: You sure?

DUGGAN: I'm sure.

TROSSLEY: *[doubtful]* If you say so....

DUGGAN: I'll be fine.
It's awful, but it goes with the job.
Right?

TROSSLEY: Right. *[Pause]*
I'll get us both some tea.

[Exits.]

DUGGAN: I denied Adam.
I denied him three times
I am Judas and Peter both
I am so ashamed

[WILDER appears]

WILDER: We found many things of interest
When we cleared his lockers

DUGGAN: We?

WILDER: His officers had to sign for all his things
There were copies of *Gay News*
And a membership card -
Campaign for Homosexual Equality

[FRASER enters]

FRASER: Everybody knew
All my mates knew.
They would have covered for us
But they didn't have the keys.
That bastard RSM, he had a master key.

DUGGAN: I told you
I warned you

WILDER: What did you say? Who are you talking to?

FRASER: I always thought the RSM was gay,
The way he looked at me.

DUGGAN: Why did you keep things like these?

FRASER: You kept my chain

DUGGAN: *[Fingering the chain]* This didn't need explaining

WILDER: *[Seizing on it]* What are you fingering that for?

DUGGAN: I'm nervous. You'd be nervous.

WILDER: Was it his? Did he give it to you?

DUGGAN: Who?

WILDER: Don't be simple. Fraser.
Did Fraser give it to you?

DUGGAN: No

FRASER: Say yes, say yes.

DUGGAN: It was a present from my mother

WILDER: Really?

FRASER: What difference does it make?
Nothing you can do will bring me back.

WILDER: When did your mother give it to you?
[Consults his notes] She died in nineteen sixty.
You were thirteen.
Not the obvious present for a boy.

DUGGAN: She was religious. She hoped I'd be priest.

FRASER: Stop this.
What's the point?
Are you ashamed of me?

DUGGAN: No – I –

FRASER: Then stop being ashamed of yourself

WILDER: We found a wedding ring on his hand
When we found his hand.
Did you give that to him?

DUGGAN: No, his grandad –

FRASER: You can say it. *[A pause. DUGGAN struggles.]*

DUGGAN: He tried to give it to me,
But I wouldn't have it.
I'm ashamed to say I turned him down.

[WILDER is obviously disappointed.]

And so he gave me this instead.

WILDER: Give it here.

DUGGAN: I haven't taken it off all year.

WILDER: It's evidence

DUGGAN: Fuck you

WILDER: Don't make things worse

DUGGAN: I'll give you a statement,
What more do you want?

WILDER: You can have it back later.
I'll give you that ring too,
If you help us.

You can make my job easier.

I'm not a bad bloke.
I've known a few of your sort.
You're not bad blokes either,
But we got to keep up morale
And you are bad for discipline.
We can't have all the lads
Watching their arses
All the time.

FRASER: Say something. You must.
For my sake.
If you don't, I'll never speak to you again.
You don't deserve me
And you won't deserve my memory.

[DUGGAN takes a deep breath, and goes for it.]

DUGGAN: Do you seriously think
I lusted for those beefy arses
In the barracks.
All those sweaty stinking bum holes
All those rough clumsy hands?
When I had the love – the *love* –
Of the most beautiful boy in the world?

Would Romeo go with any old slapper
When he had the love of Juliet?

FRASER: Whoa! I'm not the female to your male

DUGGAN: Sorry, but I'm new to this.
I don't have the words

FRASER: I will give you the words

People think it's all about sex

DUGGAN: People think it's all about sex

FRASER: But it's more than that

DUGGAN: It's more than that

BOTH: It's quiet confidence and company
It's sharing lives together
It's living with and for each other

[FRASER leaves over the next lines, his voice fading away]

It's being an item
Wanting to proclaim that we're an item

DUGGAN: And yes there's sex as well
The sex was fan-fucking-tastic.

WILDER: Careful, lad!

DUGGAN: I'm through with being careful
We had sex you can't imagine
And more of it than seemed possible
We fucked each other to exhaustion
And then we fucked again.
And nothing you can say or do
Can take away the memory
Of one single moment of our happiness.

WILDER: Are you prepared to sign a statement
To that effect?

DUGGAN: Why? Why should I make your job easy?

WILDER: It makes your life easier too

DUGGAN: My life can never be easier.

WILDER: And what about the boy? His reputation?
His family?
If you confess, and say you led him on

DUGGAN: That's not true

WILDER: Which is more important?
Truth or reputation?
Truth or family feelings?

[A long pause. DUGGAN strips the insignia and the medal ribbon bar from his uniform. Hands it to WILDER.]

DUGGAN: What do you think?

WILDER: Thank you

DUGGAN: But only in my own words.

WILDER: Agreed.
You can write it in the cell.

[He gives DUGGAN some paper. Salutes him. DUGGAN refuses to salute back. WILDER smartly about-turns and exits. Lights fade. In the darkness, music redolent of the Last Post – it will need to be longer.] Over it a funeral oration:

PRIEST: *[Offstage]* Adam paid the ultimate price for serving his country by giving his life. His sacrifice, and that of all the other soldiers who died, allows us to live the life we lead in freedom. It takes a special kind of person to face the possibility of war and death, especially a death that will save the lives of people you have never even met. John 15:13 says, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." Just as Jesus sacrificed his life so that we may be free, so too did Adam.

"The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart," says Psalm 34. Remembering our lost loved ones can be painful, especially if the grief is still fresh. But if you pour your hurt

out to the Lord you can feel His comforting embrace upon you.

[The lights come up again. FRASER is in an open coffin on a trestle. DUGGAN is now in civvies, a sober suit. He has a white poppy in his button hole and is also wearing a pink triangle. He moves forward to the music, to look down at Adam's face. Very slowly he bends over and kisses him long and passionately. He stands up straight. Salutes him. Takes the triangle off and lays it in the coffin. Turns and marches to the edge of the stage. Lights fade on the coffin, leaving a single spot for DUGGAN.]

DUGGAN: That was nearly twenty years ago.
 Twenty years I had to fight.
 No pension, no medals, nothing left.
 I couldn't get a job.
 No school would have me,
 Not with my dishonourable discharge.
 I couldn't keep it quiet.
 And then there was Section Twenty-Eight.

 Four years it took to get a job
 Nightshift cleaner.
 Lowest of the low.

 All those years they fobbed me off
 The MoD. Excuses, evasions.
 Nothing changed.
 Three hundred soldiers went in 1999,
 Kicked out for the old old story
 "Conduct prejudicial to good discipline".
 It took the European Court
 Of Human Rights to bring
 Sanity and compassion.

 Regent's Park's forgotten now.
 There's a plaque but otherwise
 You'd never know.
 Find it on the internet,
 Hundreds of photos
 Of the Hyde Park horses
 And bloody Sefton,
 But almost nothing of the bandstand.

Nasty bit of work, that Sefton.
Always biting jockeys.
He had a handler's fingers off –
That's why they called him Sharky.
Hopeless for a soldier's horse –
Kept trying to pass him off
On other regiments.
But still a hero, as he lived
Through sheer bloody-mindedness.
Unlike Adam.

I don't regret being cashiered
In spite of all the hurt.
It outed me, it took me to the place
I wanted, but could never dare to go.
Until then I could never show my sorrow
I couldn't mourn
The partner I had lost –
My life partner, for such a little while,
For such a shortened life.
A soldier faces to the front
To look life in the eyes
Both friend and foe.
It will not do,
Always looking back
Over your shoulder,
Living in terror of discovery.
I hadn't any feelings
I was only half a man
Until I was cashiered.
So thank you, Major Wilder,
And thank you,
Oh my darling.
Adam, my love, thank you.

[DUGGAN produces a Pink Triangle wreath.]

Thank you, thank you.

[Goes to lay the wreath]

THE END