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Clifford Rean, *When the Joy Bells are Ringing*, 1918

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DELIVER THE GOODS!

=====

A Drama of the Great Conflict – and AFTER!

A Story of Selfishness and Sacrifice.

Forces.
An Argument for Justice and Reward For our Fighting

A Plea for Patriotic Reason – An appeal For Our Future
Great Prosperity – AFTER The Great Victory Is Secured.

By An Ordinary Englishman.

THE FATHER = Head of A Great Manufacturing Firm =

“So my son you shall take the reins. As they have bullied and beaten me – so you shall beat them down and break them. The Works shall close for weeks, months – even years until our bitter punishment is complete”!

THE SON = A British Army Captain – Returned from France=

Father, you are as great an enemy to The State as the loudest shrieking fanatic whom in his selfish greed howls for Revenge and Revolution! Punish whom? The Workers? Who are the true Workers? I will tell you that! Those brave Giants who are coming across the seas in their tens of thousands daily! Would you punish them? Make way and let THEM punish the idle drones – the slackers when they come. Revenge may be your policy my

father – it isn't mine. Patriotism! TRUE Patriotism is my aim. Our Works shall open – our Gates flung wide for that fine blood that bled for us. Come with me – and over our Temple of Industry you shall help me to raise our banner.

“Welcome! Thrice welcome Loyal True Sons of Britain who fought so well for Her! Your Prosperity is your Right! Your future is OUR future! Our Prosperity we will gladly share with you. One united effort all men of our glorious land = DELIVER THE GOODS”.
(THE TWO MEN CLASP HANDS.)

The Story is told by =

KENYON ROSS, Head of the Firm.

PETER ROSS, Afterwards Captain Ross, V. C., His Son.

JOHN WILLIAMS, A Shipping-Clerk with Ideas and Side Lines.

IVOR HICKMAN, A Working Lad – who heard the Call.

MARY HASLEWOOD, Betrothed to John Williams.

HANNAH WILLIAMS, Her Aunt – and John's Mother.

CINDERELLA WELLS, A Charity Girl from Somerset.

VESTA MARIE WOOD, From Birmingham.

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1.

SCENE 1. 1915.

(INTERIOR OF JOHN WILLIAMS' DAIRY ===== IN A
LITTLE TOWN IN SOUTH WALES.)

A SPOTLESSLY CLEAN INTERIOR OF A MODEL
MODERN DAIRY. MILK PANS – CHURNS – BUTTER
CHURNS – CHEESE PRESS AND OTHER DAIRY
UTENSILS SET ABOUT. THERE ARE WINDOWS AT
BACK OF SCENE AND DOWN R.C. TO R. DOOR L.C.
AND DOOR DOWN L. (THE DAIRY IS SITUATED ON
THE HIGH ROAD LEADING INTO A PROSPEROUS
BUSY LITTLE TOWN.) A VERY PRETTY ROADSIDE IS
SEEN OUTSIDE THE WINDOWS – AND THE ROAD IS
SEEN WINDING DOWN TO A TYPICAL WELSH TOWN.
IN THE DISTANCE – ON THE RIGHT A COLLIERY –
AND IN THE NEAR DISTANCE L.C. ROSS'S WORKS. IT
IS A BEAUTIFUL SUMMER'S AFTERNOON – AND
THERE IS AN ATMOSPHERE OF PROSPERITY AND
PEACE.

CINDERELLA WELLS (A NEATLY ATTIRED GIRL OF
ABOUT 20) IS DISCOVERED BUSY AT THE BUTTER
TABLE. SHE APPEARS TO BE VERY FLURRIED AND
ILL AT EASE. HANNAH WILLIAMS (A WOMAN OF 60
YEARS) APPEARS AT DOOR L.C. SHE IS LOADED
WITH PARCELS AND LOOKS VERY HOT AND ANGRY.

HAN. You Cinderella Wells – You! Look you I have just come in from Cardiff. Well! Don't gape – help me with the parcels – whatever! (CINDERELLA GOES TO HER AID.)

CIN. I went down to the Station. You did not come by the 1-52.

2.

HAN. Are there not others? Did you think I had run away from house and home and would never come? There ARE other Trains – Did you go to see? Indeed you did not! (GLARES.)

CIN. There was my work.

HAN. Well I don't know. There is the hour – (SHE POINTS OUT TO CHURCH CLOCK.) Three! Three hours beyond the hour you should be finished. I regret I took you from the Reformatory Miss Cinderella Wells.

CIN. (HUMBLY) I will leave you if you wish ma'am.

HAN. Insolence from you – in my days if I dared – Independence! Mutiny! There's coming out in her true colours she is!

CIN. I hate to think that I am in the way.

HAN. Your work is in the way. Why don't you strive to push it out of your way by doing it? What have you done since sunrise I would like to know.

CIN. I am afraid ALL that I have done is quite beyond my memory.

HAN. Yes yes! Some things doubtless you would like to forget. (CIN. FLUSHES AND TURNS AWAY.) What time is sunrise now?

CIN. Three o'clock.

HAN. You got up with the sun?

CIN. (SMILES WEARILY) Your son John attends to that. He raps loudly at my bedroom wall – fiercely so it seems – and there is no sleeping.

HAN. There is no right you should be sleeping. The cows – the pigs – the hens all want attention. And then the house – would you have me live in dust and idleness? The parlour – the kitchens – the

breakfast room and then the dairy – all made sweet and spotless as a pin. All these have been done? (CIN. NODS.) The Brasses! How I like to see them shine – they remind me of the virtues! – and the laundry – my son John’s fine linen – and his socks to darn – (SHARPLY) – you saw to this? Then your morning round with milk and eggs – five miles or so – good healthy exercise! The Kitchen garden – manured in parts and weeded. My Sunday shawl – tis torn – you saw that? Yes! And the parlour curtains faded with the sun – you dipped them with the Dorothy Dye? And John’s Cardigan Jacket – yes yes – no no! You have not darned it – no whatever? Oh! how you have lazed away the day.

3.

CIN. I walked down to the Station to see the 12-6 train in. Young Mr. Peter Ross came in by that. He’s back from Switzerland today.

HAN. No business of yours.

CIN. He’s looking bronzed and strong.

HAN. What is that to you? (CIN. SIGHS.)

CIN. He has been very ill.

HAN. Or perhaps trying to dodge the army?

CIN. (WARMLY) Oh! I don’t think that. Other ---- MEN I know are doing – are doing that.

HAN. (HARSHLY) If you mean my John -- ?

CIN. I said other – MEN.

HAN. Did John come in to dinner – it is half-holiday in Cardiff?

CIN. Oh yes ma’am he had his dinner. Hasn’t he a splendid appetite! Five cups of tea – and then he went off to a meeting down by Ross Works.

HAN. My splendid boy! And my niece Mary of course she went with him.

CIN. No, Mr. Ross looked in and she went out – oh dear! Oh! dear! Of course I should not tell you that ---!

HAN. Indeed! Indeed! And why not whatever.

CIN. Because you try to crush her love of freedom – her joyous fresh young spirit – as completely – as ruthlessly as you have crushed mine – during my twelve years of servitude in this prim and proper household.

HAN. Oh! Such spirit!

CIN. (PICKING UP THE NUMEROUS PARCELS AND GOING L.) Mr. John will tell you spirit is a fine thing Mrs. Williams –

HAN. His spirit perhaps – certainly not yours.

(JOHN WILLIAMS – A YOUNG MAN OF THE AGITATOR ORDER – WELL-DRESSED – ENTERS DOOR C. HE LOOKS VERY FLUSHED AND EXCITED.)

4.

JOHN. (BRIGHTLY) So you're back old lady from your trip to town.

HAN. (ANXIOUSLY) How hot and flushed you are! You're overdoing it John.

JOHN. Hot --- and happy Mother – (LAUGHS.) My blood's at boiling point. I'll give in to that. It's been a splendid meeting outside the Valley Works! I'll get 'em Mother – never doubt.

HAN. Ross's workmen John?

JOHN. Babies! Sheep – lambs – trashy bloodless frozen mutton! A packet of tacks and I'm going to be the hammer.

HAN. No opposition John?

JOHN. Some lout ventured I should be in the army –

HAN. Should you John? NOT MY JOHN –

JOHN. Oh! We're not discussing that. (UNEASILY WALKS ABOUT,)

HAN. I didn't mean to worry you whatever – of course they'll never make my son a soldier?

JOHN. Don't be so unpleasant.

HAN. Let Ross's men alone John. They earn good pay and Ross is a good master.

JOHN. He was my good master a half-a-dozen years ago. I should have been a partner if his brat Peter hadn't grown industrious and put me in the street. Today I am a shipping clerk in Cardiff and the strongest bitterest enemy the firm of Ross have got.

HAN. What do Ross's workmen want for?

JOHN. (SMILES GRIMLY) Nothing – that's my trouble. But I've been down to create an appetite for much.

HAN. Will you do any good John, God's Good John, I mean?

JOHN. (PEEVISHLY) Even my own mother doubts me. Have I done no good? Have I not been a model son to you, my model mother? Who got you the American organ for our chapel?

5.

HAN. You John – you – at least you got up the sale of work and the evening concert.

JOHN. Who bought up – secretly I must admit – Ross's rat-hole cottages – patched 'em – thatched 'em and made 'em fit for human flesh and blood?

HAN. And raised the rent to double! Splendid splendid John!

JOHN. Business – just good business – and the work of the Lord. I'm getting on old lady! I'll be on the Council shortly and then the town will buzz. We starved to buy that row of hovels. I want more than one row of workers' homes. Two three – three and thirty rows – a town! My town! I could tell you heaps that I have done – whatever – I will – in good time, in good time.

HAN. (UNEASILY) Tell me of the meeting.

JOHN. (SMILES – REFLECTIVELY) Well, I don't know. I had 'em! Had 'em in my hands and held 'em! Soft contented clay! (TIGHTENS HIS FIST.) Ice! – until my words of restless fire made their stagnant cold blood bubble! Then I twisted them – this way – that way! Oh! so easily!

HAN. Clever clever John!

JOHN. I've heard that Peter Ross is back. Come home for the fireworks. Come home to flatten me! They've patched up that wheezy chest of his in Switzerland – got him ready for the army so I'm told – packed the precious pup in cotton wool and sent him to his father! And before he goes to butcher Germans he's got to break the shipping clerk from Cardiff. (LAUGHS.) Oh! Oh! Not likely! He will never do it mother.

HAN. Isn't it ungodly John. All your thoughts of revenge?

JOHN. Revenge? Because I have a memory? Because I just hit back? Because I drag Old Ross and Son down from their giddy height? I level up! Some day I'll reach their level – beat 'em – pass 'em – push 'em underneath – push 'em down – always, always down. That is not revenge – it's human nature mother – and it's good.

(HE WALKS UP TO THE WINDOW R.C. EXALTING. A DISTANT BAND IS HEARD PLAYING THROUGH THE VILLAGE.)

6.

HAN. I hear music John – can it be the fair?

JOHN. The Fair! (HE GRINS.) You may call it fair – I call it damned dishonest. It's a recruiting band out to dope good Christians with thoughts of blood and conquest – why don't they play The Dead March and say the end is but a grave?

(IN THE DISTANCE LOUD CHEERS.)

HAN. The children seem to like it John?

JOHN. (QUIETLY) Yes --- They are children – a penny box of soldiers is a pretty toy.

(A STONE IS HURLED THROUGH THE DAIRY WINDOW.
A CRASH OF GLASS.)

HAN. (SCREAMS OUT) What is that whatever?

JOHN. A stone – and hurled at me – by one of Ross’s Baa-lambs – the beast who said I should be in the army. (WIPES HIS FOREHEAD NERVOUSLY.) Oh! The rat! I don’t like this mother.

HAN. Never heed them boy. (SHE CHANGES THE TICKETS OF THE PRICES OF NEW LAID EGGS FROM ‘5 A SHILLING’ TO ‘4 A SHILLING’ AND “BEST BUTTER – 1/8 PER LB.” TO “1/10 PER LB.”) – but they must pay for the window.

JOHN. Where is Mary mother?

HAN. Out.

JOHN. Out? (HE STARES ODDLY.) Out?

HAN. Out walking – so I understand – with young Peter Ross.

JOHN. Dear God!

HAN. Sometimes I fear you’ll lose your pretty cousin John.

7.

JOHN. Lose her! Stop that! If I lost Mary I should lose the fire that sets my tongue aflame! The Hope that helped me starve to buy the cottages – the salt of life – my soul – all that is good – sincere – complete in me. Mother - I should crack up if I lost her – break!

(THE BAND APPEARS TO BE NEARER.)

(MARY HASLEWOOD, A PRETTY GIRL ABOUT 24 AND VESTA MARIE WOOD, A YOUNG LADY WITH VERY “FUTURIST” IDEAS OF DRESS ARE SEEN AT DOOR L.C. WAVING BACK TO THE SOLDIER.)

JOHN. (ASIDE TO HIS MOTHER) Mary is here – not with Peter Ross!
How I am relieved.

MARY. Home John? Do not the soldiers interest you? “Men of Harlech”!
That melody should impart a tingle to your blood. (JOHN GIVES
AN UNEASY LAUGH.) This is John Williams – Cousin John (TO
VESTA.) Miss Vesta Marie Wood from Birmingham – she is
staying here with Aunty over Sunday.

(JOHN BOWS AWKWARDLY AND APPEARS VERY ILL
AT EASE. VESTA GIVES HIM A VERY BEWITCHING
SMILE. HE LOOKS DOWN SHYLY.)

VESTA. Not a word – not a teeny-weeny little word. Oh! Isn’t he a good
young man! Pull yourself together Johnny Morgan. (MARY
LAUGHS HEARTILY – JOHN LOOKS UP ANGRILY.) And can
you be the fiery giant whom I saw breathing smoke and flames
and red-hot revolution only half-an-hour ago!

MARY. John is rather timid with the ladies. And we have been official
sweethearts as long as I can remember -

JOHN. Yes Mary – (HIS EYES SHINING) – we ARE sweethearts – as
long as we can remember -

8.

VESTA. Oh! He is decidedly waking up! Does he ever kiss you Mary?
Would you like to kiss me John. Do – dearie! I should love it – you
look as saintly as a stained glass window. Lovie-umps? Mary
won’t object ---?

HAN. (INDIGNANTLY) Cheeky Godless creature! She shan’t stay in my
house.

MARY. Oh Aunty! Miss Wood is only teasing John.

VESTA. (SMILING) Oh! Aunty Williams – judge me not too harshly! John
to me – (SHE GIVES JOHN A SWEET SMILE) – is quite beyond

reproach. Faultless! Perfect! As pure as your golden butter – and as full of righteousness as those eggs are full of meat. You'll forgive me Mr. Williams? Yes? (JOHN OFFERS HIS HAND AND SMILES.) What a tender smile! Your hand is very cold John. (SHE STROKES IT) but --- your heart? Aren't you REALLY – just a tin of Colman's? Umphs? (ALL LAUGH EXCEPT HANNAH.)

JOHN. (TURNS TO MARY – JEALOUSLY) Where have you been Mary?

MARY. ((SURPRISED – THEN REPLIES COLDLY) Picking buttercups and daisies. (JOHN FROWNS) Am I to suffer just another cross examination? I have dared to walk as far as Aberdare with Mr. Ross.

JOHN. (QUITE TAKEN ABACK) With --- Ross? (SHE NODS) WHY --- Ross?

MARY. He is --- very entertaining – he comes from a broader world than ours --- He seems – human! Manly – that's it! That's how I remember him – a MAN!

JOHN. Our girl Wells shall make some tea and after – I want you to come with me to Cardiff – just we alone. There's a good opera company at the theatre –

MARY. I'm playing golf with Mr. Ross John – after tea.

JOHN. Playing what! That nonsense. (SAVAGELY.) You're not! I say you're not!

MARY. (COLDLY) Aren't you just forgetting? We may have been sweethearts – boy and girl sweethearts John – but we are not yet man and wife. (SHE WALKS UP.) I don't think we shall ever be – (JOHN MAKES A MOVE TOWARDS HER – THEN SINKS DOWN AT TABLE – THE PICTURE OF DESPAIR.) There – (TENDERLY) I didn't mean to hurt you –

JOHN. (SEIZING ONE OF HER HANDS) Don't do it Mary. Don't try to hurt me. Something snaps inside me when you talk like that – (A SLIGHT PAUSE. HE LOOKS UP AT HER.) You WILL come to Cardiff?

MARY. (FIRMLY) No. I've given Mr. Ross my word and you wouldn't have me break it?

JOHN. I would! (RISING PASSIONATELY) Break anything with him! Don't break me – my heart – my life or I'll break him! Sure! Sure as God I'll do it! (HE WORKS HIMSELF UP INTO A VOICELESS FRENZY THEN WITH AN EFFORT CONQUERS HIMSELF.) At least you won't go out till I've seen you again? I'm damp and hot – when I have had a wash I'll be cool and collected. (HE GOES L.) And you'll forgive my temper and my rudeness – (MARY SMILES BACK) – and you won't go out – till I come back?

MARY. No John I won't go out.

(HE EXITS L. DOOR.)

HAN. (BITTERLY) Don't you see what you are doing? You are breaking my boy's heart.

(SHE EXITS AFTER HIM.)

VESTA. (SOFTLY) Goodbye-ee! (TO MARY.) Awful wretched rotten for you Mary. He loves you – REALLY loves you – in his way.

MARY. Yes. --- It troubles me a deal.

VESTA. Troubles you?

MARY. Oh! --- (SHE UTTERS A CRY OF PENT-UP PROTEST) I'm in chains here. My life has been lived in chains. I do not love him – I feel I never shall!

VESTA. He's so strong – big – healthy – so good looking. Oh! Isn't it a pity?

MARY. (SHARPLY) What's a pity? --- Just say what you're thinking --- ?

VESTA. That he isn't --- a REAL --- MAN.

MARY. (STARING IN FRONT OF HER) How --- why ---?

(IVOR HICKMAN, A WELSH COLLIER LAD IS SEEN AT BACK – IN HIS COLLIERY GARB. HE LOOKS IN CASUALLY – BUT INSTANTLY RECOGNISES VESTA. BECOMES VERY INTERESTED.) (BUS.)

VESTA. Have I got to tell you that? Contrast him with Peter Ross and then you get the answer. Mary I'm not blind – he's the man who's won your love and truthfully you can't deny it. (MARY TURNS AWAY CONFUSED. VESTA SIGHS.) It's a lovely feeling – love! It gets me all dithery. Mary – I have got MY secret. (LOOKS AROUND – IVOR DISAPPEARS FOR THE MOMENT.) I met a man! My man last summer! It was at Llandudno – and he WAS a man! Not much of him – but real prime cut. He said he was a diamond merchant – but I didn't believe him. I said I was well connected and he blushed! A Diamond Merchant Dearie! I wonder if his precious stones were black? (BUS AT BACK.) We never met again. (SHE SIGHS HEAVILY.) I picture him – My Hero! A Brave Soldier Lad – out THERE! He said his name was Ivor – that is Welsh? (MARY NODS) But I just dream of him in kilts! My bare-kneed Soldier Beau!

IVOR. (ADVANCING) Honey! My Sweetness! My Pound of Lovely Loaf!

VESTA. (UTTERS A PIERCING SCREAM) Look! Look! There is a Lulu!

MARY. Vesta dear – a WHAT?

VESTA. A Lulu! No no I mean a Zulu! I've never seen 'em quite like that. (IN MOCK HORROR.)

IVOR. Luscious Lady of Llandudno – it's your Baby-Beau!

VESTA. That silver voice!

IVOR. Ah! Ha!

VESTA. His nose WAS tilted and his figure small.

IVOR. My Pot of Tickler's Plum and Apple!

VESTA. His income was enormous – but not quite so large as his lies.

IVOR. Saccharine! Gem of a starry night! I'm really – REALLY – your little diamond merchant – but I pack 'em up in sacks.

(HANNAH HAS COME OUT L. SHE GAZES AT IVOR IN DISGUST.)

11.

VESTA. You really are my own gold-mounted! Peel off that Brunswick black that I may know you.

HAN. You Ivor Hickman! Look you! Be out of my Dairy with your filthy black!

IVOR. Crystal Candy I am going! But I will come back! Your dear command?

VESTA. Wash your face!

IVOR. And when I am pure as Driven Snowflakes --?

VESTA. Join the Army.

IVOR. If the Horse Guards should say nay?

VESTA. Join the Gordon Highlanders – buzz about my honey and get yourself in kilts.

IVOR. The sun may shine today – but a gale may blow tomorrow?

HAN. You Ivor – mind my butter! Will you go whatever?

IVOR. I would tarry Aunty Hannah but you hath an evil optic! My precious bit of fluff anon I'll hold thee – (HANNAH MAKES A MOVE TOWARDS HIM) Goodbye-EE!

(HE DARTS OFF L.C. THE GIRLS LAUGH HEARTILY.)

VESTA. Isn't he some nut?

(KENYON ROSS IS SEEN PASSING THE WINDOW R.C.
HE KNOCKS AT DOOR. ENTERS – BOWS GRAVELY TO
THE LADIES.)

KEN. Good afternoon Mrs. Williams. Good afternoon young ladies.
(THEN TO HANNAH.) I should be obliged if I can see your son.

HAN. (NERVOUSLY) Indeed sir – I hope there's nothing wrong?

KEN. (EVADING HER QUESTION) If you will excuse me --?

MARY. Aunty – if we may go?

12.

KEN. No no young ladies – you must not make my call here an
intrusion. Women have been wonderful during the sad crisis that
has fallen on our country – and even here I feel that you may do a
little good --- please stay.

(JOHN WILLIAMS ENTERS DOOR L. - STARTS WHEN
HE SEES KENYON ROSS – MARY AND THE OTHERS
ARE WATCHING HIM CLOSELY. HE PULLS HIMSELF
TOGETHER. KENYON TURNS TO HIM WITH A KINDLY
SMILE.)

My business is with you John.

JOHN. Mother – Mary – (DISMISSING THEM.)

KEN. No no – I beg! We are neighbours John and I always thought that
we were friends. Am I to understand that we cannot remain so?
(JOHN SHRUGS HIS SHOULDERS.) It seems a grievous pity. Be
candid – let me know your grievance.

JOHN. (IN HARD TONES) I don't like you Mr. Ross.

KEN. (SMILES) Well come come – that's my loss sir not yours. You left
my employ six years ago – my son came into my business – and
– you don't regard that as a wrong?

JOHN. You hold it is a right. You had the best of me down there –

KEN. Blood is thicker than water John. You made way for my son.

JOHN. After you had steamed my brains – after I had put you on a firm foundation –

KEN. I appreciate your modesty – but are you hardly fair?

JOHN. I'm straight and honest – just! Do you understand me?

KEN. Precisely. – I accept your own opinion – if it will allow us to get on. Now please understand me Mr. Williams – (A STERN NOTE IS IN HIS VOICE NOW) Your meetings outside the Valley Works have got to be stopped.

JOHN. Who says so – the Police?

KEN. I say so, They concern me most.

13.

JOHN. I'm breaking no law. I just tell the truth down there. The truth that jabs and bites.

HAN. Go easy John my boy.

MARY. Are you sure John – it is all truth you tell.

JOHN. Don't interfere. I know my way.

KEN. Very well. I'll bring a little of my truth to your door. I've been a fair employer to my men – at least I've tried to understand their lives. Your mad wretched eloquence has brought them to a state of thinly veiled revolt, and these conditions can't continue. You strike at me John Williams! You force my hand. I must hit you back.

JOHN. (LAUGHS SCORNFULLY) I'm waiting for it! He who fights expects hard knocks – Well? ---

KEN. You are my tenant ---?

JOHN. --- Was your tenant.

KEN. If we can't be peaceful neighbours – the town becomes too small to contain us. One of us must go. It's going to be you.

JOHN. (LAUGHING SCORNFULLY) Oh! Oh! Our rooster's crowing loudly.

KEN. I've anticipated your defiance. I've sold the dairy to a new firm in Cardiff – so we part.

MARY. Oh! Mr. Ross – John will be more reasonable –

HAN. The Dairy! The Dairy! You are not serious sir whatever. We are so prosperous here.

KEN. Your on does not appreciate his present sound position. Even now matters may be mended. I might – cancel the sale?

JOHN. He can't! He won't! The money's paid – The purchase is concluded!

KEN. (QUICKLY) How do YOU know THAT?

JOHN. Because MY agent paid your price – because the Dairy's mine.

(KENYON ROSS STANDS SPEECHLESS WITH SURPRISE.)

14.

Hits you on the raw Ross – don't it? Reddens your white knuckles? It's mine – yours – Mary's – Ours! Each stone – each brick – each sheet of glass – each flower that blossoms in the garden. Bought and paid for sir by me – so --- get out! (THE MOTHER AND THE TWO GIRLS UTTER A CRY OF PROTEST) Now out! I hate you as I hate your son. You came here to dictate to me – to crush me! Now go back beaten! broke! Humiliated – as you and yours deserve.

KEN. (BOWS) The score is yours John – you've played your sly cards very well. I admit I am surprised. I appreciate your victory! Even now I don't see why we can't be friends. I like strong men – and I despise a weakling. (HE BOWS TO THE LADIES AND IS GOING.) We can be friends – if you don't come down the Valley – if you leave my men alone.

JOHN. Leave them alone! They are my clay! I mould them – (HE EXTENDS HIS HAND) - Here! - and I shan't let them go. My work is here --!

KEN. (HARSHLY) It's not! Your work's out there – across the sea – fighting with the manhood of the Nation --- and soon you'll HAVE to go!

JOHN. (SNEERS) Have to! So then that's the next trick you will play?

KEN. You won't go willingly perhaps but you WILL go just the same. (TURNS TO APOLOGISE TO HANNAH AND THE GIRLS) Ladies I will not pain you further. I had hoped if Headstrong John had not listened to me – he might have been advised by you. (GOING L.C.)

JOHN. (STANDS WITH FOLDED ARMS – LAUGHING BACK AT KEN.) So you are going to put me in the Army Mr. Ross?

KEN. That I did not say. The Government will soon be doing that.

JOHN. Let them fight out there who like it. You've put me out! I'll put you out. MY fight is with YOU – at HOME!

(KENYON ROSS EXITS L.C. JOHN TURNS IN TRIUMPH TO MARY AND HIS MOTHER.)

Well -- (HE WAITS FOR APPROVAL – THEY ARE SILENT.) Aren't you all surprised? (HE EXTENDS HIS HANDS PROUDLY.) Ours Mother – Mary's – mine – our little nest! I've schemed and slaved and starved for it and today I've cut

15.

my harvest! (HE RUBS HIS HANDS TOGETHER.) It's good! It's good! It's real! Well Mary dear! He got just what he asked for?

MARY. I thought he took it rather well. (JOHN STARES HARD AT HER.) What did he mean about you going in the army?

JOHN. A London Rag is howling for conscription – wish 'em Joy! They'll never get it.

MARY. Are you sure of that? I should have thought that Mr. Ross would have known more about this thing than you?

JOHN. (CROSSING DOWN L. WITH AN ANGRY STRIDE) WELL – they won't get ME.

(PETER ROSS IS SEEN AT DOOR L.C. HE STANDS IN A LANGUID ATTITUDE. HE IS EXTREMELY WELL-DRESSED.)

PETER. Anyone at home you people? (SEES JOHN – WHO SCOWLS.)
Hallo! Jack! How goes it? Jaw-ache John or have you been
backing horses? Those naughty threepenny-bits will slip through
your pockets! And how is MRS. Williams? Butter going up? 4
Eggs for a Bob! Aren't THEY rising? We shall have to cut 'Em out!

HAN. (ANGRILY) They're rising with the price of glass.

PETER. Someone been digging holes in windows.

MARY. Well won't you come -- RIGHT in Mr. Ross?

PETER. Overjoyed! What a sunny place you've got here – and isn't it a
real good sunny day! Well Jack old sport buck up. Play you a
game of Snooker at the "Bull"?

JOHN. I never enter Public Houses.

PETER. My Hat! What? – (STARES AT HIM – THEN GRINS.) I thought I
heard you saying Jack they wouldn't "get" you. Were you referring
to "The Red Lion" or "The Bull".

JOHN. As a matter of fact I was referring to the Army – if it interests you.

PETER. Really does. I got my commission through this morning.

16.

VESTA. Topping Mr. Ross – that is real fine.

PETER. Hallo Ginger! I thought I heard your squeaker. (GRINS.)

HAN. This war is a dreadful business Mr. Ross.

PETER. Not a mothers' meeting is it? I'm betting that we break the
blighters before the coming Spring.

JOHN. We ---? (WITH A SNEER.)

PETER. Well – just the mob out there – and YOU Jack and me – YOU.
You're coming in of course?

JOHN. Are – YOU?

PETER. I'm in – they've made me a member. They've patched up my Air Tubes over there in Switzerland and the doctors say I'm fit.

JOHN. Well the army won't get me! That's settled.

MARY. (INDIGNANTLY) Oh! John you don't mean that.

PETER. Got a definite reason?

JOHN. I have got my conscience.

PETER. (GASPS. A MERRY GRIN STEALS OVER HIS FACE.) Mildred! – that's a joke!

HAN. A man can have a conscience Mr. Ross.

PETER. A man can have the measles – but a conscience! That won't keep him home to pat the butter! Don't try that junk Jack – tisn't worthy of you – come out with the crush.

HAN. You are fit and strong – my John has his "football knee".

PETER. (TO JOHN) Your what? Ye Gods and little apples.

HAN. It's half-past three – (TO JOHN) You're forgetting your appointment with the doctor.

JOHN. I'll be going mother. Mary – Miss Wood – Mother – I just want a word alone with Mr. Ross. (THE GIRLS CROSS TO L.)

PETER. (TO MARY) I'm going North for training in the morning. You'll not disappoint me on the links this afternoon?

17.

MARY. (BRIGHTLY) I'll be there.

(THEY EXIT L. HANNAH GIVES HER SON AN APPEALING LOOK AS SHE EXITS. PETER QUIETLY STROLLS UP C.)

JOHN. Stop You! Peter Ross! Don't you slink away!

PETER. (TURNS, FACES HIM) Say my lady bird – you'll get me cross.

JOHN. Mary won't go out today – at least she won't with you.

PETER. That sounds rude. Have you ever seen me in a temper?

JOHN. Damn your temper!

PETER. (QUIETLY) They use that word in public houses.

JOHN. Well we'll use it here and more. What's your hellish game with Mary?

PETER. (RESTRAINING HIS TEMPER) Golf this afternoon.

JOHN. It's not – what's been your game with her on other afternoons?

PETER. I don't want to punch you John because your King and Country needs you ---

JOHN. Mary's not your class – what is a simple country girl to you? Something to pass your lazy hours away – something to amuse – something damn you to deceive – to flatter – lie to and destroy!

PETER. (HARSHLY) Stop that! (HE DROPS HIS STICK – AND STEPS FORWARD BLAZING WITH PASSION) My god! You lout! You dare!

(CINDERELLA WELLS IS SEEN PASSING THE DOOR AT BACK WITH EGG BASKET. SHE HEARS PETER'S ANGRY VOICE - STOPS AND LISTENS.)

(THE TWO MEN FACE EACH OTHER – A PAINFUL SILENCE.)

You mean that? ALL that! That I meant harm to her?

18.

JOHN. (AWED) I – don't --- know.

PETER. I thought I knew you. I thought you decent. I gave you credit for thought and deed – you don't deserve. Now I know your narrow mind – your little heart – your puny soul. (JOHN BLAZES UP. PETER CONTINUES VERY FIRMLY AND QUIETLY) You'll just take all back – all you meant and said – all of it – each ounce of gutter thought.

JOHN. I shan't! I can't! I won't! I think it – SO --- you may strike.

PETER. (MASTERING HIMSELF WITH A GREAT EFFORT) Honest? You – honestly believe I meant to do her --- Oh!

JOHN. (PASSIONATELY) We've grown up here as boy and girl – as man and maid – sweethearts until you came and dazzled her with London ways. You don't pretend – to LOVE her?

PETER. I don't --- pretend. I won't tell you that I do. It would be low and coarse to discuss the matter with you – now. Today I'm going to tell her what I do think – (VERY QUIETLY) – before I go out there to fight for HER – for you – for your old mother and all the girls and little 'uns at home.

JOHN. You won't say a word to Mary. (HARSHLY)

PETER. (SHARPLY) Who says that?

JOHN. I say that! – and if you have an ounce of decency you'll agree. Mary and I are getting married a month along from Sunday – so do you think you have a right to tell her of your love?

(CINDERELLA UTTERS A LOW CRY OF PROTEST FROM THE BACK.)

PETER. If this is true --?

JOHN. True – Gospel truth – God's own truth – as I hope to --!

PETER. I have no right.

JOHN. You'll get away – and you won't come back – and you won't hang around in that accursed khaki to turn her simple head ---?

PETER. (SMILES PITYINGLY AT HIM) Don't you EVER think of big things as well as the little things that crawl?

JOHN. (UNEASILY) I don't understand.

PETER. You don't. Your world is just a narrow strip of soulless thought that bears no fruit – or knows no finer feeling. (HE PICKS UP HIS GLOVES AND STICK) And she is going to marry YOU –! John?

JOHN. (GLEEFULLY) Yes it's all settled – all the deposits have been paid. (PETER IS GOING UP SLOWLY) I'll admit I am a little sorry if you're sweet on her –

PETER. (LOOKS BACK) A LITTLE sorry? I'm tons and acres sorry John for Mary.

JOHN. Well I'll be getting off to see my doctor, I don't like this chat about conscription and I want to see just how I stand. (PETER EYES HIM WITH CONTEMPT) Better luck Ross in the Army. (OFFERS HIS HAND.)

PETER. (LOOKS AT IT.) You see I DON'T pretend John. I wish I could – I can't.

(JOHN GIVES HIM A HARD LOOK, SHRUGS HIS SHOULDERS AND EXITS L.)

(GOING L.C. PETER ENCOUNTERS CIN.)

Hallo! little woman how's the luck?

CIN. I'm puzzled sir – a little bit afraid – Is it very wrong to tell the truth?

PETER. All according Matey – I'd lie like the Kaiser to save a pal some tears.

CIN. I must speak out – it can't be wrong to speak – if I only hurt myself a lump – and make you and Miss Mary very happy.

PETER. You've set yourself a handful.

CIN. I'm not ungrateful to John Williams and his mother – I'm not a sneak – a spy! For all that they have given me – I have given strength – gratitude and tears. But I've got to hit him the back – I got to tell you that he lied –

PETER. Hold on --

20.

CIN. He lied – lied on his chapel oath to trick you --- lied to get you over there without a word to Mary of your love. Lied to break her heart and yours –

PETER. You're telling me she is not pledged to him – that they are not getting married --?

CIN. To him! She loathes him as she hates the chains that hold her here – hates them as I hate them – though she can break her bondage – while I - ? (SHE SINKS DOWN SOBBING L.)

Peter. Buck up little soldier – not like you to yield a trench.

CIN. I'm a girl without a name – a girl without a mother and a father – a girl from the reformatory – a girl with a big soft heart to love with Cold Charity my lover.

PETER. I'd be honoured little matey if you'll book me up your pal.

CIN. That's it – I AM! – real Gospel! I am your pal and I'm hitting him to prove it. (LOOKS AROUND.) Mary's eating out her soul for you. (HE STARTS.) Real honest! I found this in her bedroom – isn't that enough. (GIVES HIM A PHOTO.)

PETER. My chiv!

CIN. And all the bits of writing round it – it – is herself – her heart – her love.

PETER. Dear Lord! You've pushed a big hot sun out of a chilly foggy day – Oh! – kid what you have done for me – what can I do for you?

CIN. You're going over there to France. Not because you're forced to go - but just because your blood tells you – you must!

PETER. Righto!

CIN. Some of you will make the flowers grow redder – some of you will fall and not come back. I've given you your comfort – give me just a golden moment in return.

PETER. If that can be done?

CIN. You won't laugh – you are not that sort – just look at me with those kind eyes as you are looking now. I'm awful lonely Mr. Ross – no mother to whom I can take a cracking heart for patching up. I ---- (SHE STOPS AND STARES AT HIM AFRAID) – I want you to be MY sweetheart for a second – I want to

21.

remember that a clean brave gentleman like you --- Oh!

(SHE TURNS AWAY AS IF ASHAMED OF HER DARING. HE COMES GENTLY BEHIND HER – PLACES HIS TWO HANDS ON HER SHOULDERS AND TURNS HER TOWARDS HIM.)

PETER. Look up little Sister – I beg your pardon – little Sweetheart – for a second – don't be lonely any longer – count me your just, your solid faithful pal. (HE KISSES HER HANDS GALLANTLY. SHE IS ABOUT TO TURN AWAY.) I suppose a chap's a fool when he sees the Gates of Heaven – not to kiss the little Angel doing Sentry-Go !? (HE KISSES HER. SHE BREAKS AWAY WITH A JOYFUL SIGH.)

CIN. I'll pray for you out there – each night and morning – twice on Sundays and Good Fridays – and if (GOING L.) I bring her to you now you make her promise to be true till you come back?

PETER. Lay odds I'll do my best.

CIN. Good-bye – God bless you Soldier Ross.

PETER. Cheero – little sunbeam – till Peace breaks out – So long.

(SHE EXITS L. SHE HAS LEFT HER BASKET AT DOOR L.C. PETER WALKS ABOUT WHISTLING AND LOOKING

AT THE PHOTO. IVOR HICKMAN, VERY MUSH
WASHED – DRESSED UP COMES BUSTLING
THROUGH DOOR L.C. AND NEARLY FALLS INTO THE
EGG BASKET.)

IVOR. (SEES PETER.) Beg pardon – sorry! I'll look round again. I'm waiting for my girl.

PETER. (LAUGHS.) So am I.

IVOR. Well I can't be mooning on your beat – I'll find a better 'Ole. What about these Eggs?

PETER. They're marked up 4 a shilling.

IVOR. Some smartness you! I'll look back. (DISAPPEARS.)

22.

(MARY COMES OUT L. FOLLOWED BY CINDERS WHO
CROSSES QUIETLY UP TO DOOR L.C. SMILES BACK
ENCOURAGINGLY TO PETER.)

MARY. I thought that you had gone and were coming back for me at 5?

PETER. Five minutes ago I thought that I was going and never coming back. But --- the world's turned round since then --- I have something to tell you.

(CINDERS EXITS SLOWLY – LOOKING BACK
THROUGH WINDOW R.)

MARY. Is it very pressing?

PETER. I hope things will be very pressing before I go – I hope I shall press you.

MARY. (SMILES) Oh! you're making fun.

PETER. Well it's not quite fun to me! --- Tomorrow I am going North – I had my training before my recent illness hit me – and now that I fit and well – another month will see me over there in France.

MARY. Must you go away? Oh! I don't mean that. Here in our little world we don't seem to realise the great war calamity.

PETER. (FIDGETING) Mr. --- sit down please.

MARY. (SMILES) May I stand. I want to look at you.

PETER. You make me awfully nervous.

MARY. (LAUGHING) Nervous? Good gracious! Of what?

PETER. I can't quite sort that out. Just tell me right away – you don't belong to John?

MARY. To John! Oh! --- (THEN BITTERLY) I don't belong to anybody. I'm just set down in this little town – caged in like a hapless bird – ever beating at the bars of my narrow hateful prison – desperate to get out.

PETER. I want to taske you out – if God wills that I am spared. I want to take you to a world of bigger things – I want to make you happy – honest! To give all that's good and best of me to you.

MARY. You – mean – you – want – ME?

23.

(DISTANT BAND HEARD.)

PETER. I DO mean that. And I want you to wait until the God of War is dead and a Glorious Victorious Peace shall come, then if the luck is chummy I will come and take you to me dear for keeps.

MARY. Oh! (JOYOUSLY.) – if you mean all this!!

PETER. You understand I do. I can't write pretty poetry – or sing tenor songs – but I can ride a horse and use a rifle – play a game of snooker and just love a real girl. I can do that best of all!

MARY. Don't you know how happy you have made me – I'm not ashamed to say it. You've opened wide my prison gates and

released my poor starved heart. I glory in your love for me! I glory in your strength! Your courage – your sincerity – your pride.

PETER. You'll wait till the boys come marching home – for me and happy days?

MARY. I'll wait all my days! I feel God will be good to us and send you safely home.

(PETER TAKES HER IN HIS ARMS – IVOR WEARING A SOLDIER'S KHAKI HAT AND BELT AND BAYONET LOOKS IN.)

IVOR. (SEEING THE LOVERS) The end of a perfect day. (THEY TURN ROUND QUICKLY.)

PETER. I'll break your neck young Ivor.

IVOR. Sorry Mr. Peter I am sure. (GRINS) Glad to see you've clicked. I wish I could tell the tale like you can tell it.

(VESTA FOLLOWED BY HANNAH COMES OUT L.)

VESTA. You!

24.

IVOR. Me! Himself! Myself! The Goods! Vesta Matchless Mine! I've done the trick! I've become a member!

WESTA. You mean you've joined the army?

IVOR. Right! These are the best that they can do for me at the present. Oh! My Plum and Apple! Let me clasp you to my breast.

VESTA. Get back! I'm firm! Not till you have transferred and got into your kilts!

(THE RECRUITING BAND IS HEARD NEARER.)

(JOHN WILLIAMS ENTERS FLUSHED AND ANGRY – HE
TURNS AT DOOR AND CALLS BACK)

JOHN. Damn your insults! I'll go when I please.

HAN. You've been up to the doctor's John?

JOHN. (WHO HAS NOT NOTICED MARY AND PETER R.) Yes – his
report of me was ready – here! (HE TAKES OUT SEALED
ENVELOPE. SEES MARY AND PETER.) What are you doing
here? Come away from her before I kill you! You said that you
would go away! Liar! This is how you keep your word.

PETER. Stop that! The lie was yours! You tricked me with the lie that Mary
was pledged to you –

MARY. (ANGRILY) Who gave you that right?

JOHN. My right! The right that I still claim and I will hold it. He's leaving
you today – to me! To me! And while he's absent I will fight to
hold you – as I'll fight his father and his class.

PETER. Not so fast! You may have to go out there – there's a man's work
waiting for you.

HAN. My John! My John! They'll never take him!

JOHN. Take me! Take me! They'll take me dead – Don't you fear that
Mother I shall never go. (SUDDENLY REMEMBERS THE
DOCTOR'S REPORT IN HIS HAND.

25.

FEVERISHLY TEARS THE ENVELOPE OPEN. A TENSE
PAUSE – THEN HE SHRIEKS OUT IN TRIUMPH) I beat you –
beat you Peter Ross! They can't have me! The doctor's say so!
My heart is weak! You hear! You hear! I am exempt!

(THE EXCITEMENT IS TOO MUCH FOR HIM. HE FALLS
HEAVILY AT HIS MOTHER'S FEET. THE RECRUITING

BAND PLAYING "THE MEN OF HARLECH" ARE SEEN
PASSING THE DAIRY DOOR.)

ACT TWO.

SCENE 1.

(VESTA MARIE'S LODGINGS IN BIRMINGHAM. A COSY BUT PLAINLY FURNISHED ROOM. A TEA TABLE SET R. DOORS R. AND L. VESTA DISCOVERED L. READING EVENING PAPER – BY LIGHT OF LAMP ON TABLE L.)

VESTA. “No Winter Racing.” “Tea and Butter Queues.” “Italy’s Great Recovery.” Ah! That’s more cheerful for a lonely little War Fiancée!

“The news from the Italian Front is more reassuring every hour. Most gallantly has Britain responded to her brave Ally’s pressing need – the comforting roar of the British Artillery!” – Good old British Artillery! God bless those splendid boys with the big guns with a punch! (CONTINUES) “The comforting roar of the British Artillery is heard on – (A LOUD RAT-TAT-TAT AT DOOR L.) Ugh! (SHE DROPS THE PAPER AND SPRINGS UP.) I’ll give that postman butter beans! Does he want to wreck my nerves. (RISES – CALLS OFF) Bring it right up to me Mrs. Chatter – if it happens to be a post-card – AFTER you have read it dear of course. It will be from him! My him! My chunky little Welsh Boy arrayed in Scottish shorts! Well Mrs. Chatters is it “I am well” (MARY HASLEWOOD ENTERS) Mary! Sweetness! Delicious Pal! T’is you. Give me a bunny hug. Oh! It’s good to see you.

(THROWS HER ARMS AROUND HER NECK AND GIVES HER A REAL WELCOME.)

MARY. (SMILES) It's just the welcome I expected.

VESTA. Well it's just the welcome you have got. Take off that coat! You've come to stop! Don't answer you have come to stop! What can I get you dear for tea?

27.

A chop! Do you like tin tomatoes! A nice thick steak or would you care for something solid – if you would I'll recommend War Bread. Now DO sit down we are not going to eat YOU anyway.

MARY. Well I would like a cup of tea.

VESTA. Bless her Welsh blue eyes – she shall have a couple. I'll just stick the kettle on the fire and then I want all the news. And my spare bedroom! Can't you picture it you lump of cuddle! Well it's just snuggled up to me – and God bless you for coming – it's enough to freeze you these cold nights. (GOING R.) two little war fiancées snuggled up so cosy –

(EXITS LAUGHING DOOR R.)

MARY. Free! Free! I can breathe freedom here! Everything seems greater – wider – bigger – away from him! I have broken down the chains that held me near John Williams! I glory in my new found liberty! I've run away from home! (SHE HUGS HER HANDS AND LAUGHS.)

(VESTA ENTERS WIPING HER HANDS.)

VESTA. Did you hear that tap of mine? It's like Niagra Falls. I've put the kettle on. Have I blacked my face? Now – come – don't you see I'm bursting – what is all the news?

MARY. I've run away from home.

VESTA. Oh! That's a dead stead cert. I knew that frosty cousin wouldn't let you come to Brum.

MARY. 15 months since Peter went over there to France.

VESTA. 15 months since Ivor fell into kilts.

MARY. I've had 80 letters from him.

VESTA. I've had 29 and sent out 90 parcels.

28.

MARY. Aren't those letters just rays from God's own sunshine! What does dear Ivor write to you –

VESTA. All Charles Service ever thought of – and don't send "Plum and Apple". Why have you come to Brum – just to see me scrumptious – just to have a fling? To feel your feet.

MARY. I've come to get a situation –

VESTA. What! You? A situation?

MARY. And put a hundred miles or so between my unhappy heart and John.

VESTA. Won't he give you any peace?

MARY. Peace! I have never known the meaning of that word while I have been at home. There can be no peace between John and I until I consent to marry him – and would there be real peace even then. Oh! The whole thing is too hateful to think of for a moment.

VESTA. John is doing pretty well down there?

MARY. So well he has become more arrogant than ever. Everything he touches seems to turn to gold. Yes, John is doing VERY well rest assured of that.

VESTA. Well – aren't you very glad?

MARY. Glad? Oh! Vesta – how can you say that? Why should I be glad when in my heart I know – every pound he's hoarding up has been gained at the expense of some brave fellow's blood who has made the great sacrifice over there. Or by the cruel privation of helpless children – uncomplaining noble women who may not be gathering the harvest of vital essential work. This cruel war has brought un-dreamt of prosperity to many – but think – think of the awful price the silent sufferers of the war are paying day by day.

(WHISTLE OF KETTLE HEARD OFF R.)

VESTA. There's my kettle boiling Luvvy. A cup of Lipton's Un-controlled and you'll be as chirpy as a sparrow. I'll find you a situation sweetness- and I'll find you a home. Until Capt. Peter comes home with the lads – you're going to find your peace with me.

29.

(SHE EXITS QUICKLY R.)

MARY. Dear God – why is there war? The wolves devour the lamb – and Wrong for a while will triumph over Right – and so this Tragedy of Blood must be. Brave men must give their lives and women shed their tears! It is the awful price of this Grim Conflict! (SHE DASHES HER TEARS ASIDE) Has my heart grown afraid. No, no! Even as the day may die in darkness – so shall tomorrow's morning come in all its golden splendour.

(MUSIC. THE LIGHTS ARE SLOWLY LOWERED – AND SHE SINKS GRADUALLY TO SLEEP. THE BACK OF THE ROOM FADES AWAY AND A GRIM WINTER LANDSCAPE OF THE FRONT IN FLANDERS IS DISCLOSED. IN THE FOREGROUND IS SEEN A DEEP SHELL CRATER. DISTANT GUNS ARE HEARD – SEARCHLIGHTS SCAN THE SKY. THE SOUNDS OF BATTLE ARE SLOWLY DYING AWAY. IVOR HICKMAN A "SCOTCH" TOMMY IS SEEN LYING UNCONSCIOUS. HE GRADUALLY RECOVERS – PROPS HIMSELF UP – AND WITH BLINKING ASTONISHED EYES LOOKS ABOUT HIM.)

IVOR. Has the last train gone for Aberdare? (OR LOCAL TOWN.) Any you fellows got a match? (A PAUSE.) There ain't none of you fellows here. I'm just surrounded by myself – and I'm feeling very

lonely. I remember going over the top! I recollect that wild rush forward with our pack – and – and – twice one are two – and twice two are four – and – that’s all I can remember! I must have got an awful clout! (TRIES TO RISE) Oh! Good afternoon (HE GIVES A GROAN OF PAIN.) I’ve copped alright! Punctured in my little grey home in the vest and no error about it. But I can’t stop here! That’s all stuff and nonsense! It may look alright on picture postcards – but I’m ravenous enough to go a slice of “Plum and Apple”.

(A GERMAN SOLDIER IS SEEN CRAWLING ROUND L. IVOR SITS UP CAUTIOUSLY.)

30.

I feel I’m not alone! I feel a little stranger is dropping in to enquire about my general health! (PICKS UP HIS RIFLE.) I know there’s not an odd in it – but it looks the goods!

(RISES SUDDENLY AND CONFRONTS THE GERMAN EXACTLY THE SAME TIME AS THE GERMAN COVERS IVOR.)

BOTH. (TOGETHER) Hands up! (THEY BOTH BRING THEIR RIFLES DOWN AND IVOR LAUGHS.)

IVOR. Well I never did – if we ain’t travelling in the same kind of pastry.

FRITZ. Hands up.

IVOR. Sit down Fritz – you’re getting feverish. Sit down! Any more of your mob round the corner?

FRITZ. Tousands and tousands more.

IVOR. Oh! Fritz you are a one! (GIVES HIM A GENTLE DIG.) Ask ‘em in. Have you got a pack of cards.

FRITZ. Ach! You are my prisoner.

IVOR. Aren't you a comic? Bless him! Not Fritz you well-done ruffian you're MY prisoner. I'm taking you home to frighten our bald parrot. Well old sport – how goes it?

FRITZ. Rotten! I'm feds up!

IVOR. You're lucky. I haven't had a munch since Tuesday afternoon.

FRITZ. I mean – I vant the war to finish.

IVOR. So it will old Love Bird – when we have finished you.

FRITZ. Neffer! Neffer!

IVOR. Have it your own way Brother Hun – but we're rather having ours.

FRITZ. And after ze war is ofer! Ach! You make vey for us ofer dere – to Londons in our tousands ve vill come!

31.

IVOR. No Fritz! Sweetheart – No! Not really. There may be a few tender hearts with fatheads attached across the water who might like to see you swarming in again in Gentle England – but we boys at the front will have the final word – and we say – “Out out! Mr. Penny Bazaar! Out out damned spot! Never never again.” (FIRING STARTS AGAIN.) your mob are getting nasty.

FRITZ. Come! I vaste mine dime mit you. You are wounded and mine prisoner and you come mit me.

IVOR. Help me up old darling – gently does it – Oh! Be matey Fritz or I won't let you shave me – if they ever let you in – careful! Got you! (SUDDENLY SEIZES HIM AND THROWS HIM.)

FRITZ. Kamerad! Kamerad! Ze filthy drick you do on me!

IVOR. Dry up Fritz – another howl and I'll tighten your collar! I've waited for you three whole days – three of my dearest pals “Gone West” through you “Strassburg Saus”! Oh! You won't keep still – must you really have it?

(THEY STRUGGLE – THE GERMAN SUDDENLY
THROWS HIM AND ENDEAVOURS TO CHOKE HIM.)

FRITZ. I haf you! Ach! I haf you!

(IVOR SUDDENLY KICKS OUT – THE GERMAN IS THROWN – AND IVOR IS ON HIM. A SHORT STRUGGLE AND FRITZ IS NO MORE.)

IVOR. One more black spot erased from “The Book of all that’s Decent Anything worth the taking Fritz”. (SHOTS.) I’m spotted sure – (TEARS OPEN THE GERMAN’S TUNIC. FINDS SAUSAGE – BITES – THROWS IT DOWN IN DISGUST. FINDS PACKET. QUICK EXAMINATION.) Sweetness! What a capture – you’re no common Fritz old thing – this junk will be worth a ton of clear fine Sundays to our Head over there! If I can only get! I’ve got to try! (RISES. SHOTS RING OUT – HE FALLS.) Vesta Sweetness! No more kisses! No more parcels – no more “plum and apple” – no more home! Oh! Sweet God – no more home ---

32.

(HE FALLS BACK. THE FIRING CONTINUES. A SEARCHLIGHT IS SEEKING OUT THE CRATER. CAPT. PETER ROSS WHO IS CRAWLING ALONG TOWARDS IT – CROUCHES DOWN.)

PETER. Close by the poor lad was located. Are you here Private Hickman? Don’t shout my lad if you are dead – but if you’re alive and frisky let’s have a pally chuckle. (FLASH OF LIGHT.) I’m afraid these pigs have twigged me. If the boy is here – alive – I’d like to get him back. (STUMBLES OVER IVOR.) Hi -- ! Found! My hat! (IVOR GROANS.) Push your chin out Cockbird you’re not for a cross and a pail of tear-drops – not by miles. Tut! Tut! Sonny – let’s see your nice white teeth! Grin your savage grin and say your convalescent’s Good-bye-ee! (IVOR RISES AND GRINS.) Ah I thought that would fetch you.

IVOR. Captain Ross! I’m awful glad they haven’t downed you.

PETER. Righto my Cock Robin – I’ve come to take you in.

IVOR. I'm done sir – got it awful.

PETER. You're too dashed particular. Let me have you up – and we'll be a'moving.

IVOR. 'Fraid it ain't no use sir – rather you got back. Take this with you sir – the O.C. will be pleased.

PETER. Love junk to the birdie! Snakes! (HE IS LOOKING AT PACKET BY THE LIGHT OF HIS FLASH LAMP.) Where did you get this?

IVOR. He came over – I had to put him out.

PETER. What a blunder we've been making – this stuff puts all matters straight. It shows they've shifted their accursed "Heavies" from the wood – before dawn the whole ridge will be ours. Stewed Tripe! What a capture! Hickman D.C.M. – we've got to up and hustle.

IVOR. It can't be done sir – leave me here.

PETER. (ANGRILY) Demme! Don't insult me! Confound you where's your manners. Take a swig of Mother's Comfort and get up on your stilts. (IVOR DRINKS FROM HIS WATER BOTTLE.) Grateful and Comforting? What? What? Ready? No? Oh! you're a lot too cosy – Up-si-daisy.

33.

(HELPS HIM TO RISE. A SHOT RINGS OUT. THE CAPTAIN STAGGERS)

I've got it Cock – Just like a red hot poker! You've got to get back with that real stuff – no fooling Hickman – cut the soft stuff out! Those plans are worth a whole division and I only count as one! Sainly Scotch and Soda they're coming over – Cock-bird – crawl as you have never crawled before – back to our line! Fly as only Dicky-Birds can fly. Go! Hickman I'm your officer! I command you – you'll earn your V.C. with that – Chuck me out of the question – so long and good luck.

(HICKMAN SEIZES PETER'S TWO HANDS, PRESSES THEM TO HIS LIPS AND STAGGERS OFF R.)

Good boy! S'elp me bob! He'll beat 'em! (SHOTS.) So – (LOOKING OFF L.) So my Brother Huns you are coming on to gather up the pieces! I'll try to make you five the less to make the world more fragrant.

(HE RISES AND FIRES HIS REVOLVER AT THE ADVANCING GERMANS. HE STAGGERS – PUTS HIS HANDS TO HIS FACE – STAGGERS ROUND FACING AUDIENCE.)

(IN THE DISTANCE A SCOTCH BAND IS PLAYING "WEE MACGREGOR" MARCH.)

They are playing the boys back – the relief is in. England My England! Mary! My Mary! Always always think of me.

(HE FALLS. THE VISION DIES AWAY. MARY AWAKENS WITH A SCREAM. VESTA ENTERS R. WITH TEA-THINGS. THE BAND CONTINUES.)

34.

VESTA. What's the matter Luvvy?

MARY. That music! Don't you hear that music! "They are playing the boys back – the relief is in"! He said those words! I saw him fall! I saw my Peter fall!

VESTA. You're dreaming girl alive! There's a Scotch band playing down to New St. Station – there's some boys home here on leave.

MARY. Oh! That dream - that awful cruel REAL dream! (RAT-TAT AT DOOR.)

VESTA. That's real enough! What a saucy knock! Just in time to mess our tea up nicely. Wait here. (GOING L.) I'll have a peep. (LOOKING THROUGH KEYHOLE. SUDDENLY CALLS OUT) Mrs. Chatters close that door! Close it! Close it! Ker-lose! Oh! you've done it now, Mary! The worst has happened! Your Aunt Hannah's here.

MARY. The worst --- ?

VESTA. I mean that she has come to take you back. Do you want to miss her? Up with you to my bedroom – you'll find a candle on the shelf – and a new "Charles Service" novel on my bed.

MARY. Not a word to Aunt I am here.

VESTA. No – a thousand you are not! (MARY EXITS R. KNOCK AT THE DOOR.) Come in sweetness! Oh! Do come in.

(HANNAH WILLIAMS - "DRESSED UP" FOR HER LONG JOURNEY – FUSSES IN.)

HAN. I'm so glad to find you girl whatever! That niece of mine – that wilful Mary – she is here?

VESTA. How you DO surprise me!

HAN. Tell me girl! Indeed to goodness tell me ---

VESTA. Do have a cup of tea.

HAN. She is not here – Oh! that awful journey – and that awful fare – and she is not here? I will have a cup of tea.

35.

VESTA. One or TWO pieces Mrs. Williams?

HAN. One at home and two when I am visiting –

VESTA. One piece Mrs. Williams. Fancy you've got back.

HAN. Your tongue is smarter than your gown young lady. Are you not so prosperous?

VESTA. So prosperous I'm ashamed.

HAN. Yes yes – so – whatever.

VESTA. I'm engaged to a soldier Mrs. Williams. I make the shots – he fires them. They pay my boy seven shillings weekly – they pay me four pounds five.

HAN. A power of money – yes indeed.

VESTA. Indeed it is – FOR ME! But what of him. 7/- for the Soldier! £4-50-0 for me. Add the sums together - £4-12-0. £2 of my wages each week go into the bank for him. £2-7-0 weekly for the soldier! I've become the Government! I've given my brave boy a rise.

HAN. You have a Godly conscience.

VESTA. I am a Conscientious Objector! I object to Germans. DO have another cup of tea? No – are you REALLY sure. What time does your train go back – I'm sure you will be late – (HANNAH RISES – AND GASPS) And I am SO pleased to see you.

HAN. But I am waiting for my niece – our Mary. If she is not here I am sure that she will come. And I want to see this amazing City. Such Shops! Such gowns! Such boots! Oh! The awful highness of those boots whatever – such prosperity I did not see before. (RAT-TAT-TAT AT DOOR L.) There is John.

VESTA. (STARTING) John! Sakes alive woman what is he doing here?

HAN. He's come to find his cousin Mary – and to take her back.

(JOHN WILLIAMS ENTERS DOOR L.)

JOHN. You found her Mother? I've grave news for Mary.

36.

HAN. The girl's not here John. All our money wasted.

JOHN. I'm not sure. (TO VESTA) Well young woman - what have you to say.

VESTA. Nothing very much. This is not a mansion. Sitting room – one bedroom and a scullery. So if she's here and wants to see you – she can answer for herself. (GOES TO DOOR) Mary your cousin

John is here and brings you news. Are you here and are you at home to him. (A PAUSE) She does not answer – and that's my bedroom so I'll be obliged if you'll get out.

(MUSIC. MARY ENTERS SLOWLY THROUGH DOOR R.)

JOHN. (GLEEFULLY) Ah!

HAN. (TO VESTA) Oh! You brazen little sinner!

MARY. Well cousin John – what have you to say to me? (HE GLANCES TOWARDS VESTA) You wish to speak to me alone? (HE BOWS)

VESTA. (TO MARY) Certainly my sweetness – if you want me to evaporate. Come along Mrs. Williams – have five minutes of real reckless riot! Come and see the shops.

(SHE BUSTLES HER OUT L.)

MARY. (LOOKING ENQUIRINGLY AT JOHN) Yes? – Why have you come?

JOHN. To take you back – to give you the home – the care – the protection you will need –

MARY. If you persist in this – I am going out.

JOHN. I don't want to be brutal – I love you too well to give you a moment's pain. I have news – grave bitter news for you. You need me Mary sorely – (THROWS TELEGRAM ON TABLE) I am here.

MARY. What is this to me? A Telegram! (LOOKS AT ENVELOPE) Addressed to Kenyon Ross –

37.

JOHN. He knew that I was coming here to find you. I begged that I should convey its contents to you personally.

MARY. It concerns ME – so I gather - ?

JOHN. (GRAVELY) Yes ---

(SHE OPENS IT – STARES AT IT – UTTERS A GREAT CRY OF PAIN AND FALLS SOBBING BESIDE CHAIR R. JOHN PICKS UP THE TELEGRAM.)

JOHN. “His Majesty regrets to inform you Captain Peter Ross –“

MARY. No! No! Stop that! I cannot bear it! I know! I know! My dream – I saw him fall. Peter! Peter! Lost to me!

JOHN. Mary I implore you –

MARY. (RISING – TRYING TO PASS HIM) Let me out! I’m stifled – choking here! The streets – the lights – the crowds – oh! My pain! My awful pain!

JOHN. Hear me – reason – listen. Your tears can’t bring him back. You’re coming home with me – for your sake I demand this! I’m going to be your comforter – your shield –

MARY. Pity! Pity! In this hour be kind –

JOHN. The son is now beyond your aid – dead to your love – the father needs your help – and you CAN help him if you will – through me.

MARY. You! His savage enemy!

JOHN. I want to be his friend – I want you to appreciate my own sincerity! Kenyon Ross is tottering on the brink of commercial ruin. His son’s death has robbed him of his fine audacity – his nerve. He has been compelled to throw his weak hand on the table - £2,000 to-morrow morning will be worth £50,000 to him six months hence –

MARY. (HARDLY HEEDING HIM) Brave broken proud old man! £2,000!

JOHN. (EAGERLY) I have £2,000! Ten times £2,000! I sold the cottage last Spring – every precious pound I thrust into Cardiff shipping! I saw my chance! Seized it – held it! Got right in. Lord! The sea’s been liquid gold to me! The sparkling

tide of fortune came flowing to my door. They cried for ships! More ships and more ships! Up went our rates! We made OUR terms! This war has been my harvest!

MARY. Don't! Don't! Are men so base! Can such things be? You even make me doubt Our Great Creator! Harvest! S you reap your guilty harvest! Each wretched pound a soldier's blood - a child's privation – or a mother's tears! Harvest? Your real harvest is not yet. That God will see you reap!

JOHN. Are you going to save that beaten man – Kenyon Ross is crying for your aid! You loved the son – save the broken wreck – HIS father! My cheque is ready in the morning – for him. £2,000! If you will share the home I have prepared for you?

MARY. Are you so mean- so low – so base – so small? Have you no respect – no tender pity – no higher feeling for a broken-hearted woman in her bitter hour? This hour is sacred – you defile it – leave this house! Leave me to my tears – my anguish! - my memories of that great heart whom I shall always love.

(SHE WALKS PROUDLY TO DOOR R. – AS SHE PASSES INTO THE OTHER ROOM – SHE TOTTERS – FALLS. HEX'S TO DOOR R. HEARS SOMEONE COMING L. QUICKLY CLOSES DOOR R. VESTA RUSHES IN L.)

VESTA. You'd better come to your Mamma John! She's broken out! She's buying up the town.

JOHN. She'll find her way back.

VESTA. Where is Mary?

JOHN. Out – she went to look for you.

VESTA. Out!!! (RAPID KNOCKING AT DOOR L.) Here's Mamma with her parcels – now you'll have a shock!

(THE DOOR IS BURST OPEN AND IVOR HICKMAN – DIRTY AND RADIANT FROM THE FRONT – (HE HAS HIS FULL EQUIPMENT ON) RUSHES ON.)

39.

IVOR. Sweetness! (HOLDS OUT HIS ARMS TO VESTA.)

VESTA. (HARDLY CREDITING HER EYES) Gladness!

IVOR. Scrumptious! Cuddle up! (THEY WILDLY EMBRACE.)

VESTA. Pinch me! Nip me awful! Let me know I am not dreaming! This really is your kilt and not a yard of Turkey Red. Ivor! My wee Scotch Lad from Tonypandy! I'm in Paradise!

IVOR. Seven days' leave my Butter Scotch every minute's precious. They tell me Miss Mary's here I want to find her right away.

VESTA. She's out!

IVOR. We'll go and find her.

VESTA. I will you WON'T. Do you think I'd trust you out in Birmingham with those clothes! She's gone to find her Aunty – I'll find her right enough – stir from here Harry Lauder if you dare.

(SHE EXITS. IVOR EXECUTES A WILD DANCE OF JOY.)

IVOR. Such news! Such news! She'll be crazed with joy when she hears it. Oh! What a welcome Ivor boy! What a home-coming is mine! It's worth all the fighting – all the mud. (SUDDENLY SEES JOHN.) John! Here! Then Mary's not a mile away I'm betting. I've got such news for your pretty cousin and such news for you. Captain Peter has been posted dead! I've proofs the best of proofs – THE CAPTAIN IS ALIVE!

JOHN. (STAGGERED) What!

IVOR. Truth! The Blessed Gospel! Isn't it spiffing! Isn't it hot? Where's Mary John – where's Mary? I'll bet she's heard the bad news – now she's going to hear the good.

JOHN. (CONFUSED – RECOVERS HIMSELF) Yes – yes – she must know it. She's out shopping with the others – you'll come with Ivor boy whatever – we'll find them in the town. We'll make a night of it together – You Mary Vesta Mother

40.

- Me! Wine – real Champagne! The best the city offers – Come Ivor! I'll take you in charge – Quickly! Quickly! We are going out.

IVOR. Wine John You! Has the world turned topsy-turvy – You putting your hand down – you buying a bottle! I could eat a dozen Gerhuns but you make me afraid!

JOHN. We're going out! We're going to make things buzz! Come on you young fool – let's get out of this – we're wasting time – hurry! Hurry! (PUSHING HIM TOWARDS DOOR.)

IVOR. But Mary! She comes first before the wine! I've got to tell her God's own message – I can't go out till I have seen her – (MARY COMES OUT R.) Look John our luck is in you rascal – Mary! Mary's here.

MARY. Ivor!

IVOR. Such news Mary! Oh such glorious tidings --- !

JOHN. Silence! Silence!

IVOR. (C. JOHN TRIES TO HOLD HIM BACK) For you – for you -- !

MARY. For me --- !

IVOR. Captain Peter Ross! –

MARY. Captain Peter Ross!

IVOR. Is Alive! Alive! ALIVE!

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SCENE II.

(THE EXTERIOR OF JOHN WILLIAMS' DAIRY IN A SOUTH WALES VILLAGE. SUMMER, 19--?THE DAIRY – A PICTURESQUE LOW-ROOFED BUILDING – IS SET R. A TYPICAL WELSH LANDSCAPE AT BACK – A CHESTNUT TREE SET R.C. WELL DOWN STAGE. AN INN SET UP AND DOWN STAGE L.)

(CINDERELLA IS DISCOVERED C. – LOOKING DOWN INTO THE VALLEY. A TRAIN WHISTLE IS HEARD. MRS. WILLIAMS – IN HER "SUNDAY BEST" BUSTLES OUT OF DAIRY DOOR R.)

HAN. Is the train in Cinderella? Are they coming up?

CIN. I can see the Engine smoke just down by the Pit head Station.
Yes – the train is drawing in.

HAN. And they'll be here! Back from their honeymoon in Weston. My John and his wife! Mary! My John's wife! (GLEEFULLY) And she wasn't going to marry him whatever! But she did! John is an avalanche! A Mountain torrent! – sweeping all before him – not to be denied. So he conquered stubborn Mary! So he had his way! (LOUD CHEERS.)

CIN. You can hear the cheering Mrs. Williams?

HAN. I can! I can! It's Heaven's music! Where are the false prophets now! So they would hiss and hoot him through the town if he dared to marry Captain Ross's promised wife! (CHEERS AGAIN) Don't sound like it girl whatever? My John's on the Council! A few may hate him but they fear him – a few may cross him – but he bends them to his will. My John's the wealthiest – sharpest – most respected BIG man of the town.

(CHEERS LOUDER AND IVOR HICKMAN (IN FULL UNIFORM AND EQUIPMENT) ENTERS WITH VESTA. MRS. WILLIAMS THROWS HER ARMS AROUND IVOR'S NECK – MISTAKING HIM FOR JOHN.)

42.

HAN. Welcome! Welcome back my darling boy!

IVOR. Steady on old lady – I've never seen you quite so fond of me as this before!

VESTA. I'm surprised at you Mrs. Williams! You said you hated khaki and considered kilts indecent.

IVOR. She said that?

HAN. Not John! Not Mary! I thought it was my John and Mary back from their honeymoon.

IVOR. Their honey-what? You mean to say she's married that saintly blighter John!

HAN. Yes indeed whatever! In spite of your wicked falsehood that you brought back six months that Capt. Peter Ross is still alive.

IVOR. He is alive! (STAGGERED)

HAN. He's dead buried and forgotten – somewhere over there in France. We read it in the Sunday Papers – it's official.

IVOR. Official! Oh! What a body-blow! Then the story that they told me – that he is a prisoner over there in Germany – isn't true.

VESTA. It's awful Ivor Sweetness – awful. But I never thought that Mary would throw herself away like this!

HAN. Throw herself away indeed! My son's a man of money –

VESTA. Money doesn't always make the love-birds sing. I prefer the tiny seeds of love when I walk in the matrimonial cage.

IVOR. Coming in to have a glass of milk my priceless precious! The walk up from the valley's made my throat as dry as sad John's sermons.

HAN. No milk today whatever – we are closed.

IVOR. But my mouth's open – No Milk! I was hoping you would say that. No Milk! Vesta darling then it's beer.

VESTA. Beer indeed!

IVOR. No beer in pints!

(A FAINT BOOING IS HEARD.)

43.

CIN. Here's John and Mary coming from the station Mrs. Williams.

IVOR. Cinders! Hiding yourself away as ever. Haven't you got a kiss –

VESTA. (QUICKLY) Ivor! Laddie –

IVOR. I beg your pardon – Welcome – for a real Welsh boy in Scottish shorts?
(SEARCHING FOR LETTER.)

CIN. Yes indeed. (SMILES) We are also all so very proud of you –

VESTA. Don't turn his silly head dear. I wish he'd get into trousers and give me a little peace.

IVOR. (LOOKING UP – GRINS) Eh? Got it! Here's a letter for you Cinders. They asked me at the letter-office if I'd bring it up for you.

HAN. (SHARPLY) A letter for you Cinderella. Who on earth would write to you.

CIN. Not many folk on earth Mrs. Williams – (SHE SMILES) – Perhaps someone has given me a thought in Heaven.

IVOR. Aren't you going to open it?

CIN. (SADLY) P'raps it doesn't matter. The postmark is London East and that's very much on earth. (SHE PUTS IT IN HER POCKET.)

HAN. (HEARING BOOING OFF) What's that? (SHARPLY.)

CIN. Some of the men from the colliery are not taking too kindly to John. Hardly the welcome you expected for the bride and bridegroom Mrs. Williams. –

(ANGRY CRIES NEARER. CIN. EXITS INTO DAIRY R.)

HAN. They dare! They dare! My boy on the Council! My boy who got the organ for the chapel! The sugar and potatoes for the market –

IVOR. And bunches of “Bradburys” for his pocket!

(JOHN AND MARY (DRESSED FOR JOURNEY) ENTER R.C. HE IS VERY ANGRY – MARY COMES DOWN R. SILENT AND ASHAMED.)

HAN. My boy!

44.

JOHN. Don't heed them Mother! I'll break those low beasts in – as I've tamed Ross's lambs. (TO VESTA) A good day to you Miss Vesta – have you no welcome for my bride? (MARY LOOKS AT VESTA – SMILING SADLY) Back again Young Ivor – you're lucky with your leave.

IVOR. Oh! YES! I'm extra lucky I am thinking – lucky I'm alive! You haven't done so dusty Mr. Homebird – they tell me you hare cornered everything down here – potatoes – sugar tea and milk – Captain Ross's sweetheart and nearly all the money.

JOHN. (ANGRILY) My business.

IVOR. Yes – and it's been my business to fight for chaps like you.

JOHN. And a precious lot you've got for all your fighting.

IVOR. I've got peace of conscience – self-satisfaction in the daytime Master Williams – and healthy sleep at nights.

VESTA. Sweetness you are getting ratty – darling – I think you'd better lubricate your throat. Good day Mary. We shall be seeing you again.

MARY. (QUIETLY) Good day Vesta. (NOT LOOKING AT HER.)

VESTA. I'm awful sorry for you Mary.

MARY. Sorry? (TO JOHN WHO IS TALKING ASIDE TO HIS MOTHER – BITTERLY) Sorry for me! Do you hear that John.

IVOR. (TO JOHN) And if you feel like putting your hand down – I know a score of real deserving cases. Mothers without sons – children without fathers – Fine tonic for your conscience Mr. Profiteer when it becomes too hot.

(VESTA AND IVOR EXIT INTO THE INN. HANNAH CALLS
OFF INTO DAIRY R.)

HAN. Cinderella! Don't stand mooning with that letter there whatever. Serve dinner there immediately. Set out the new glass and the silverware from Cardiff. Ah Mary you will appreciate the home that's waiting for you over there. Look right behind you – down the Valley – John has built that house for you – “The Nest beside the Fall”. My John has made a lady of you! Pictures! Oh! such pictures – including my enlargement and his father's William Williams – A grand piano up from London – GERMAN too! Carpets – rugs – fine silks –

MARY. Stop! Stop! I cannot bear much more.

45.

JOHN. You can! In time you'll grow to care for me. I've schemed – I've slaved – I've fooled – fought and beat my rivals – all – all – for you – (ADVANCING – SHE SHRINKS BACK) – my WIFE.

HAN. And to-night John brings his pretty bride to the home of his father! And your bedroom John and Mary! I've moved in some of your furniture – snowy sheets of delicate white linen – curtains of the finest Swiss Embroidered Lace – ah! You must see your bedroom John and Mary.

MARY. (QUIETLY) BEDROOMS Aunt Hannah.

HAN. Bedrooms? – and you a bride! What new fangled London manners! Never in my time ---

MARY. I have my private bedroom until I am a bride in heart as well as name. That is my definite understanding with your son and it will be respected or I shall leave your house. (EXITS R.)

HAN. (GASPING) John!! –

JOHN. (IRRITABLY) Well Well Mother well?

HAN. Fine linen – cut glass – silverplate and grand piano – but you haven't got her heart! Where is your Victory?

JOHN. (GOING R.) Where? Where? I ask myself. I have not got her heart, sometimes I think I have no God! But I have got my patience and my power and I will break her down.

(THEY EXIT R. INTO DAIRY. A PAUSE – AND CAPTAIN PETER ROSS ENTERS QUIETLY R.C. HE COMES DOWN TO TREE R.C. HE SITS ON SEAT SMILING AND IS TRACING “HER” NAME WITH HIS STICK IN THE DUST.)

PETER. Home! Is here a sweeter word than home? War! Awful War! Can man think of war when all here is – PEACE! She'll be waiting for me - ! The glory of that thought out THERE! Underneath the stars – surrounded by the vastness of Man's Tragic Mystery – War! I have thought of home and Mary and over my whole being there has come a wondrous calm. And faint hearts wonder why men dare the Great Adventure? (HE LAUGHS OUTRIGHT.) Home and Mary waiting for me! Surely little men with little minds THEY are worth the price. (HE RISES.) I'll go inside and come suddenly behind her – (GOING R. STOPS.) I won't. No, she shall find me waiting for her here – here where I first found her – all those dark cruel months ago.

46.

(HE WALKS BACK TO TREE AND LIGHTS HIS PIPE. IVOR AND VESTA COME OUT FROM INN. IVOR SLIGHTLY INTOXICATED.)

VESTA. I'm ashamed of you! Disgusted!

IVOR. (IN AN INJURED TONE) Sweetness! I still maintain the blighter gave me bad measure! Imperial Pints! The first pint was a washout! The second was beyond all praise – the third – the fourth – and did I have a fifth? (SUDDENLY SEES PETER WHO IS SMILING.) Did I have a – have a – have a --- (HORRORSTRUCK HE STARES AT PETER AND THEN COMES UP TO THE SALUTE – HIS KNEES KNOCKING TOGETHER.) Vesta! (RETREATING) I had fifty-fifths! I'm seeing things! Visioning visions – there's a barrage of bogies over there. (VESTA SEES PETER, SCREAMS) You see them Vesta! Good! Then you have had five quarts.

PETER. What's the matter Ivor? Too much Cadbury's Cocoa?

IVOR. He's speaking to me! Spirits! Spirits! I have never taken spirits – only “Over the Top” Rum!

PETER. You want a soda sonny. Well little girl – and what have you to say.

VESTA. I beg your pardon Mr. Apparition – but are you really alive?

PETER. Well - upon my soul! So that's the explanation! Alive! Well don't I look alive? (WITH MOCK SEVERITY) Private Hickman two paces forward. (LAUGHING) Now give me a Tonypandy grip!

(IVOR OBEYS AND AS HE SLOWLY REALISES PETER IS ALIVE – A BROAD GRIN STEALS OVER HIS FACE.)

IVOR. It's you Sir! Just YOU! Big-hearted breathing living YOU!

PETER. Absolutely! (LAUGHS) I'm the fellow!

(IVOR TURNS AWAY AND BRUSHES ASIDE HIS HAPPY TEARS.)

VESTA. Alive! Mr. Ross Alive – we heard –

47.

PETER. I've had a bad time Kiddy. Fritz caught me – locked me in his birdcage and he's none too generous with the seed. But he didn't have me long – since then kind hearts and skilful surgery have worked wonders – and now the best intelligence big-hearted little Welshman.

IVOR. You don't know! You haven't heard! Tell the Captain Vesta all about it.

VESTA. (ADVANCING TO DO SO – RETREATS) Ivor I'm surprised at you. I thought that you were brave.

IVOR. (ADVANCING.) You want the news sir! (A PAUSE.) – I have to play in a billiard handicap down at "Hearts of Oak".

VESTA. So we'll be going Mr. Ross – good afternoon.

PETER. You'll stop just where you are.

IVOR. So we'll be hopping Captain. My leave is up – my train has gone.

PETER. You needn't trouble much about your leave. There's wondrous rumours floating through the valleys – and if they're true – the world is going to be a brighter better world – so soon.

IVOR. A brighter world – when matches will be cheaper and we can chuck the sugar-cards. You'll excuse sir I'm sure – I promised mother I would whitewash our spare bedroom – someone else will tell you all the news sir – (SEIZES VESTA) We're going to the Band of Hope!

(THEY EXIT QUICKLY L.)

PETER. (LAUGHING) I've never seen him quite like that before. Shell shock or sherbet! – (TURNS WITH A LAUGH AS CINDERELLA ENTERS FROM THE DAIRY.) Hallo! Little Sweetheart for a second! (SHE STARES AT HIM AMAZED) What's the trouble Cindy-Lockjaw – or is your sweet mouth full of toffee! (SHE DOES NOT ANSWER) Hang it all! I know my mug's been knocked about considerably but I thought the surgeon Johnnies had fixed me up alright. Aren't you pleased to see me little woman?

CIN. (A PAUSE) – No Mr. Ross I'm not.

PETER. Well – Anyhow- you're pretty candid. I begin to feel a little in the way – sort of butting in where I'm not wanted. Got the brokers in – in – THERE?

CIN. Not the brokers –Just the breaker – breaker of two human hearts.

48.

PETER. Sounds like Master Johnnie. Whose heart has he been breaking? (HE AVANCES TOWARDS DAIRY.)

CIN. (STOPPING HIM – DESPERATELY) – you are not going in.

PETER. Some sort of joke al this – There's nothing serious behind it –

CIN. I just want you to go away – right away – without a word to her or John –

PETER. Steady – steady Cindy. Let me get you correctly – You mean that she's been ill – IS very very ill. Is that why the others wouldn't tell me?

CIN. I mean I know you love her – as I love her – as I love you too. I'm not ashamed to say it! I rejoice – I glory in it – and you'll do just as I tell you Mr. Ross – You'll go away – just right away.

PETER. Wonderful little pal.

CIN. I knew a little boy like you in the lonely loveless school where Mrs. Williams found me. He was a generous noble unselfish little soul – that boy was my hero and my God! And when I left the school behind, I looked about me in my new narrow life to find his equal and his kind – and then you came – just as I pictured him – a man! Oh! Mr. Sweetheart for a second I want to save you such a lot of pain – please PLEASE go away.

PETER. I've only come to fetch her Cindy. I saw a new bright house some fellow's built out there on the hillside – and when my ship comes home I'm going to buy it for her. In the German prison I'd build up my fairy castles of her future home and I wrote to her about it.

CIN. You WROTE to her about it? When did you write?

PETER. Mostly every week – when I could get the letters out. John answered them – answered ALL of them – I'm remembering how he told me she was very ailing –

CIN. He told you – THAT! Go on –

PETER. He was doing all that could be done for Mary. A Specialist had seen her – her nerves had broken down – wrecked through her anxiety for me. She got better in a while – sent parcels to the prison – though she could not write.

CIN. She sent you nothing. He sent you the parcels and the lies.

PETER. Cindy I am very patient with you. I won't have she'd forgotten me. You mean John's been a real good fellow – sent me along the soft stuff and the comforts because he hadn't got the heart to tell me how very ill she'd been --? I'm sorry I've misjudged John. Cindy tell me all.

49.

CIN. Misjudged him! All! Yes I will tell you all! It's only just and right that you should know it. He lied and lied to you and her. He told you she was ailing – he told her you were DEAD! She believed it – we ALL believed it and – and then – and then – oh! No! No! Let me get away – (HE SEIZES HER ARM.)

PETER. Cindy – little pal –

CIN. I can't! I can't! It tears my heart to tell you! I feel the awful pain you MUST feel when the truth is told! If I thought that you could break her chains – and live! If I thought that you would strike him down – Kill him! Kill him! Wicked lying hypocrite – all – all that he deserves.

PETER. You've got to tell me now! I demand it! Why are you afraid! The terror in your eyes is pitiful – absurd. Tell me – am I afraid?

CIN. You won't go in? you're promising me you won't go in? You're too big – too fine – too proud to let that brute enjoy his triumph! Oh! --- I MUST TELL YOU ---

PETER. ----- Yes ----Yes -----(A TENSE PAUSE) ----- Yes!

CIN. He kept his word --- he's cheated – beaten you – with his money and his lies! He --- he married her a week ago!

(SHE SHRINKS AWAY FROM HIM AFRAID. PETER STANDS SPEECHLESS WITH SURPRISE.)

PETER. OH! ----- He MARRIED HER! Lies! Lies! Clumsy hellish fiction! She'd NEVER marry HIM! (HE LOOKS AT CIN. LAUGHS HARSHLY.) My little pal! And so you prove your sincerity! How dare you tell me such a wretched story?

CIN. She was the only one who ever spoke a gentle word to me in that heartless soulless home. I want to save her reason – I do not want her heart to break. Oh! You can do no good! She thinks you dead. Let her still believe it!

PETER. (ADVANCES – SHE CLINGS TO HIM) I'm going in. Take your hands away – I'm going in.

CIN. Not unless you're heartless – not unless – Pity! Pity!

(SHE UTTERS A GREAT CRY OF PAIN AND FALLS SOBBING AT HIS FEET. MARY HAS COME OUT OF DAIRY R.)

50.

MARY. Who is here -- ? (SEES PETER – SHE REGARDS HIM FEARFULLY – DOUBTFULLY) ----Peter!

(SHE SWAYS – RECOVERS. CIN. SHRINKS AWAY FROM PETER AND GOES TO MARY. SHE SPEAKS IN A FAR WAY VOICE)

He told me you were never coming back! Oh! My heart! --- I want to speak - my breath is short – I feel that I am stifled – (THEN GENTLY) Peter – I want to speak to you -

CIN. I have told him Mary.

MARY. That was right. Told him I have married John --?

PETER. She told me – that!

MARY. It's true dear – true. You won't look at me like that. They're not the gentle eyes I knew – I have never seen you look like that before and I am afraid! Afraid – for him the Church decrees I call husband! (PETER STEPS FORWARD – A TENSE HARD LOOK IS ON HIS FACE. MARY SCREAMS) Cinders – go to John – warn him of his danger. This man will kill him – and if he did - ? the killing would be just and right.

PETER. (TO CIN.) Stop there. There's no danger for him – yet! I hold him guilty for the lie – he'll have to defend it! Where is your defence. I had gone under over there! So he had convinced you – the soldier dead – but were the memories of me only worthless dust!

MARY. Memories – sleeping waking memories. Oh! Peter he has cheated us – yet what has he won.

PETER. What have I lost? That is decided by your vital explanation. Oh! I had such faith – such hopes – and you surrendered – married him so quickly –

MARY. Why?

PETER. Yes why?

MARY. Some day I will tell you that.

PETER. If you would save him from my violence – tell me now.

MARY. (BITTERLY) Where is your faith. Ask my neighbours for the story – tis idle gossip on the mountain side. I married John! Did he come empty-handed after his foul lie was told? Was his prosperity no passport to my vain – greedy soul? The house he had set out for me – nothing – just a sham? All the comforts he could pay for – luxuries –

and power that I had never known. Ask the neighbours Peter! Ask the neighbours how this liar's sordid offerings tempted me!

PETER. Such things broke down the memories – you're lying now to save him from my fury –

MARY. I'm telling you the story that the neighbours tell and they hate me as they hate him when they tell it. If I had forgotten you – if all my memories of you had died – I'd send you away – believing such a story – but my stricken soul cries out for common justice and I'll tell you the truth –

PETER. What can you tell? Let me blot the whole thing out – I'll go away – tell me no more!

MARY. There is the truth!

PETER. The Truth?

MARY. If there is any truth on earth? I'll tell you the truth because my heart will break if you only heed the lie. I'll tell you what the neighbours cannot tell you. Your father's works were crumbling up – your blood – your sire stood on the edge of ruin. John knew it! Such priceless information! Oh! It was a clever card to play. The son was dead – YOU! I could not drag you from the soldier's tomb. Would I save the father? £2,000 were needed --- John could find £2,000 ---

PETER. His blood-guilty money! My father took his money.

MARY. Did your father know. The money came from me – invested in the works. It was the price! My price! The price John Williams paid to lead me to the House of God! I sold him the right to place his wedding ring upon my finger – no more! NO MORE! My body and my soul were not for sale.

(PETER TURNS AWAY ASHAMED. SHE COMES GENTLY TO HIS SIDE.)

Peter? (HE PRESSES HER HAND.)

CIN. He's coming out. (PETER SWINGS ROUND ANGRILY.)

MARY. No! - for my sake. If the neighbours think I broke my vows to you – let me keep my vows to him – and God.

(JOHN COMES OUT R. HE STARTS GUILTILY WHEN HE SEES PETER, THEN SMILES – TRYING TO BRAZEN IT OUT.)

52.

JOHN. Just a trip across the water Ross to look us up. We're flourishing.
(MARY APPEALS SILENTLY TO PETER.)

PETER. (STERNLY) Come here! (JOHN STARTS.) I shan't soil my hands on you. Your skin is safe. Come here! (JOHN SLOWLY CROSSES TO C.)

JOHN. (WITH FORCED DEFIANCE) Well – Captain – well?

PETER. Is all well with you. Hold that spotless woman sacred. Never by word or deed forget – I hold her love – she only wears your ring.

JOHN. (PASSIONATELY) you dare! I'll use my power – my whip to-day! (TO MARY) There is your house until I find you better. Hear me and obey – go in!

PETER. Stop there Mary – you heard his lies – now hear my truth. I'm going to break you as you've broken her poor life and mine. I'll break your greedy pocket! Therein lies all that's complete and real in you – your god! Your heart! Your mind – your poor mean little soul!

JOHN. (LAUGHS) When the war is over Peter?

PETER. Yes John – if I'm spared.

(DISTANT EXCITED CRIES HEARD FROM THE VALLEY.
HANNAH COMES OUT R.)

HAN. The men are out! They're surging up the mountain side – there's more trouble down at Ross's. (STARTS WHEN SHE SEES PETER.)

JOHN. You'll find your hands full Capt. Ross without bothering about me. (CHEERS DISTANT) War abroad and war at home!

(CHURCH BELLS ARE RINGING IN THE VALLEY.)

PETER. Are you sure of that? Church bells do not ring for war! Have you no imagination? Can't you see the writing on the wall – do you not see your profiteering race is nearly run?

53.

(IVOR AND VESTA RUSH ON EXCITEDLY R.C.)

IVOR. Captain! Captain! Have you heard the news! They're across the Rhine! Our flag is floating over German soil! Peace has been declared!

VESTA. Mary, Cinders – it's Peace! It's Peace!

MARY. Peace! – there is no peace on earth for me.

PETER. Peace out there! You're hearing it John Williams! The Best Peace won by the Best Blood! But it's war for you at home. I'm going to fight you here! You're going to disgorge your guilty thousands! I'm taking off my coat to it! I'll crush you. I'm going to fight you to the bitter end!

(LOUD CHEERS FROM THE MEN STREAMING UP FROM THE VALLEY – THE BELLS RING OUT.

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ACT THREE

(AFTER THE WAR.)

SIX MONTHS LATER.

SCENE 1.

(A ROOM IN KENYON ROSS'S HOUSE. (SET IN 2.) A WELL-FURNISHED SEMI-OFFICE. EVENING. KENYON ROSS IS DISCOVERED SEATED AT TABLE DESK R.C. PHONE RINGS.)

KEN. Yes Evans?— I'm rather busy – a lady? Mrs. Williams – Mary Williams. Ask her to wait in the library a few moments. I am expecting a trunk call through from Middlesboro' – ring me directly it comes through. Don't go out – you have heard of no disturbances in the town. None! That's much more encouraging – in spite of the acute distress I think the men will quieten down and eventually see reason – unless as you say – that brute Williams gets at them again. (HE IS ABOUT TO HANG RECEIVER UP.) Mrs. Williams! Dear me – I had almost forgotten – kindly send her up.

(MUSIC. – HE ARRANGES A FEW PAPERS ON HIS DESK.
BELL OFF L.)

Please come in.

(MARY WILLIAMS ENTERS L.)

MARY. It is very good of you to see me Mr. Ross.

KEN. It is very good of you to come. You are always welcome Mrs. Williams –

MARY. Mary –

KEN. Mary –

MARY. Thank you.

KEN. --- And --- Can I assist you --- ?

55.

MARY. My --- husband received your cheque for £2,000 this morning. I have brought it back.

KEN. With all appreciation of your kindly thought – I must decline to use it in our business.

MARY. Is that just to me or kind?

KEN. I am following the wishes of our board – I may also add the wishes of my son.

MARY. The money is my own. I have a right to invest it as I please.

KEN. We reserve our right to decline it. Frankly we have no desire to rob you. The works have been closed two months – it may be two, six – twelve months – two years perhaps before they reopen.

MARY. You are not serious Mr. Ross – think of the terrible distress down there in the valley – the women and the children starve.

KEN. Sincerely – I am very very sorry – in fairness to me – did they ever give a passing thought to me. The men have their Union - their Union's funds – and incidentally I may add their energetic leader.

MARY. John Williams – my husband.

KEN. A clever man – a great disturbing force I reluctantly acknowledge - -

MARY. And a force to fight and break. Where is your fighter? Have you no convincing case to put before the man -- ?

KEN. Our case was the honest work we offer. They made their terms – we refused them - and they refused our work.

MARY. Criminal! The men - the women and the children suffer – YOU suffer – if your works are closed –

KEN. I grant you that. The war ended six months ago. Many works have closed.

MARY. Your son supports your harsh decision?

KEN. My son is abroad. He has not been advised of the present situation.

MARY. If he were here. Oh! Mr. Ross – I'm speaking for the mothers and the little ones –

KEN. I'm speaking for my board of directors – men who have lost tens of thousands through the selfish conduct of the men during the late fearful war. We are not whining – we admit – accept our hiding --- and the works are closed.

MARY. So I fail – good night.

KEN. (RISING) Good night.

56.

MARY. (GOING L. – HESITATES) You know there is a meeting at the Institute to-night. (HE BOWS.) My husband is to address the men.

KEN. We have that information.

MARY. Oh! Have you no blood – no answer to his devilish eloquence?

KEN. The best. We've closed the works. (PHONE RINGS.) A moment Mrs. Williams --- Yes! (ANSWERING PHONE) The trunk call from Middlesboro'? No? (A LOOK OF ANNOYANCE) - Who? NO! NO! --- Wait Evans – Mary – your husband honours me – he is waiting below. (SHE STARTS.) Is it your wish he should know of your visit here?

MARY. A matter of indifference to me.

KEN. (ON PHONE) Evans – I will see John Williams – now. (TO MARY) you are a brave fine woman Mary Williams. I only wish your husband was worthy of his wife.

(JOHN WILLIAMS ENTERS L. VERY SURPRISED TO SEE MARY.)

JOHN. Mary! What are you doing here? I'm fighting him not you – I don't want your interference.

KEN. Do you wish to see me Mr. Williams – or have you come here for your wife. (THE TWO MEN FACE EACH OTHER. JOHN FALTERS.)

JOHN. I beg your pardon Mr. Ross. I – I didn't think you'd see me.

KEN. The unexpected generally occurs.

MARY. Shall I go?

JOHN. My business here with Ross is quickly settled. (TO KEN.) Well – things are bad for you – rotten for the workers and their women ---

KEN. And very good for you.

JOHN. I'm talking to the men to-night – you'll admit I hold them? There's mischief made enough and I want this strife to end. I've come to ask you – flatly, - where are you hiding your son?

KEN. (HOTLY) You dare to say this thing!

JOHN. He's been away a month or two – I'll give him credit that he's fighting me somewhere – fighting in the dark and I don't like it. There's rumours he was seen in Bristol yesterday – that he has sneaked home to-night - (PETER HAS ENTERED QUIETLY L.) That he is here -- ?

57.

PETER. Rumour tells no lie. (THEY START.) Sit down Mary – please.

JOHN. (SAVAGELY) I am glad that you have come.

PETER. (SMILES) Do you always look like that when you are “looking glad”?

JOHN. (BLUSTERING) I suppose you know I'm speaking at the Institute?

PETER. Yes. I'm worrying about it. I hope you won't be late.

JOHN. Don't get my blood up Peter Ross!

PETER. The great war couldn't do it John – so I'm sure I shan't succeed.

JOHN. I'm sick of all this trouble – I've made my money –

PETER. (QUIETLY) Through the war --

JOHN. And I want to enjoy it – to settle down in comfort – with my wife (MARY AND PETER EXCHANGE LOOKS – JOHN REGARDS THEM JEALOUSLY. TO KENYON ROSS) - I'll admit – here – you've always treated your men fairly – and – well, and I'll tell 'em this – my way – at the meeting – if he – (INDICATES PETER) throws up the fight against me and clears out.

PETER. Clear out? From here – to WHERE?

JOHN. From here --- to --- anywhere you like – that matters little to me so long as you're quick in the going – away from her – my wife.

PETER. Why?

JOHN. Because she loves you – Wanton! (MARY UTTERS A CRY.)

PETER. Cut that out!

JOHN. (HOTLY) I WILL speak! Loves you! Hates me the man who led her to the House of God. I have no peace – her tears are my tyranny – my defeat!

MARY. Oh! Have you no respect for me.

JOHN. I only hold her as a prisoner – what is my life?

PETER. The hollow wretched life – your own villainy has made it.

JOHN. And so you've got to go! Find residence elsewhere – and then you'll get your men – willing and contented. I want to bring these things about because I respect your father – a strong clever decent man – but I hate – his son.

PETER. What do you want from me – what undertaking.

JOHN. Just your word you won't come back.

58.

PETER. Oh! You value just my word?

JOHN. You're his son – a gentleman – you'll keep it – I can trust you.

PETER. You're not a gentleman – you're not a man. I don't trust you. I've come back to fight you as I promised – and you know I'll keep my word.

JOHN. (TO MARY, ROUGHLY) Get back home – I've got you and I'll hold you. Seek to see him any time or anyhow – (THEN TO PETER) – Seek to see my wife – and I'll swing for either of you.

PETER. I shall not try to see Mary – so long as you respect her – but when she wants me or my aid – you and all your trickery will not keep me from her side.

JOHN. (TO MARY) Home! You heard me!

PETER. You brute! You fool!

JOHN. And you understand I'm speaking at the meeting - ?

PETER. I should hurry Mr. Williams or you'll be late.

JOHN. To-night I'll have the men like blazing fire – and when they have broken you – pauperised you – smashed your works – your home – driven you

out of the valley – penniless – disgraced --! Then I shall have her Peter Ross – then I shall demand from her a husband’s rights. (HE POINTS ANGRILY L. MARY EXITS FOLLOWED BY JOHN.)

KEN. You’re going to the Institute to oppose him?

PETER. Hot air! Let them have it to themselves.

KEN. Hot air that’s scorching up our vitals! What have you done?

PETER. Much for little. I admit my failure as far as new capital is concerned – but new ideas! I’ve brought back baskets-full of gumption – push and go! There’s no help – I tried Barlow’s Bristol – Ainslie’s Poplar – McKenzie’s on the Clyde – Tom Yarrow’s at Middlesboro’ – called at Fordham in New York – no luck then hurried forward to Chicago. Same old story father from the bunch. Capital is nervous – capital is tight – they’re closing down. (CHEERS HEARD OFF.)

KEN. The men are in the streets – hark! They’re cheering Williams! (A CRASH OF GLASS.)

PETER. (LAUGHS) Yes and pelting us! There goes our front windows.

(IVOR HICKMAN IN WORKING CLOTHES – HIS NOSE BLEEDING AND

LOOKING VERY KNOCKED ABOUT ENTERS L.)

59.

IVOR. I beg your pardon gentlemen – they told me below I might come up.

PETER. (LAUGHING) Hallo Ivor! What’s happened to your searchlight?

IVOR. Had it rammed! The men know you are back sir – and if you don’t come and face ‘em – they’ll think you’re what I know you not to be – a coward.

PETER. I’ll come along – but what am I to tell them?

IVOR. Tell ‘em what you know about that monkey Williams – tell them of his profiteering villainy – I’ll tell them what you did for me in France! Tell ‘em if you can the works will open soon!

PETER. Open? Our works were never closed - ?

KEN. We closed two months ago.

PETER. What!!! We’ve closed down!

KEN. So our Board decided.

PETER. Our Board was mad! I came back to fight that fellow Williams – and you and your board of imbeciles have been fighting me behind my back. You’ve closed our gates! You’re breaking down the men! – heaping suffering and sorrow on their women and their little ones! Don’t you see you’ve placed a mighty weapon in their hands! They’ve got a grievance! A real just grievance – the lack of work – the poverty that bites into the soul and kills. They shut our gates two months ago! The fools – the fools – their policy was mad!

KEN. As you see things now. You were in France – you did not see how things were going on at home. Our lives were hell! We were never sure one day to the next the works would open – and the work would be done. Williams was the tyrant – he swayed the men this way – then the other – By Gad! He punished us. We were bullied – almost beaten – now we bully – now we break – now we punish them as they have punished us. You’re going to take the reins and let them feel your whip – we’ve closed down and we’ll close down for weeks – months – even years – until our power is felt and the punishment is complete.

PETER. Do you love your country? Do you want to see it totter – fall! Do you wish to see the great victory we have won for our great Empire thrown in the melting pot of bitter hate – to burn down to worthless dust and leave us to a heritage of tears.

KEN. I claim that we are just and right.

PETER. Just perhaps – not RIGHT! You are as great an enemy to the State as the loudest shrieking fanatic who howls for revenge and revolution! To-day there are no classes! There is only ONE. Duke’s Son and Cook’s Son – fought and bled out there in the

60.

trenches – and on our battlefronts class hatred died! ALL men were uplifted – we became REAL men!

KEN. (PROUDLY) My son! My son!

PETER. Are you going to kill the splendid flower of loyalty and love? Who are you going to punish? The workers! (FAINT MARCH MUSIC HEARD.) Who are the workers? I will tell you sir! Those Victorious Giants who fought for Empire Home and Justice! They are returning from across the seas in their tens of thousands every day. Would you punish them? Make way for the boys! Give them their jobs!

(THE TABLEAU OF THE ARRIVAL OF THE TRANSPORTS –
AND THE WELCOME HOME OF THE OVER-SEAS SOLDIERS
SHOWN. AS IT FADES AWAY PETER CONTINUES.)

Come Ivor – we fought side by side out there – if needs be so we'll fight
our fight to-night. I'm going to the meeting – I'm going to tackle Williams
with a creed that will ring true. Our works shall open in the morning –
our gates flung wide for those fine lads who fought that we may live!
Over our gates you shall help me raise our banner

– “Thrice welcome all loyal sons of Britain! Your prosperity is your right!
Your future is our future! Our prosperity we will gladly share with you! “

Are you ready Ivor? Let us go. One great united effort all men of our
glorious land. Man – Master alike – come toe the line! Get on with the
work!

(THEY EXIT L. TOGETHER.)

61.

SCENE II. A ROOM IN JOHN WILLIAMS' HOME – THE SAME
EVENING.

A TYPICAL WELSH INTERIOR. WELL-FURNISHED. THE
FAMILY “ENLARGEMENTS” ON THE WALL – PIANO –
BRIGHT FIREPLACE ETC. RECESSED WINDOW AT BACK.
SOME INDOOR PLANTS. DOOR R. LEADING INTO MARY'S
BEDROOM. FIREPLACE L.)

=====

(MARY DISCOVERED C. LOOKING OUT. CLOCK ON SHELF
STRIKES 8.

MARY. 8 O'clock! The lights of the Institute are twinkling in the valley.
Great crowds surge towards the doors. I hope there'll be no trouble. Not
for John – for him I do not fear – he is their king. Peter Ross may attend
the meeting. That is why he has come back. He may denounce my
husband to that angered throng - - and then --- and then - - (RAT-TAT
AT STREET DOOR. SHE STARTS NERVOUSLY.) My nerves are
shattered – gone! (COMES DOWN TO FIREPLACE L.) Aunt Hannah I
suppose. (SINKS DOWN WEARILY INTO CHAIR.) more lectures I
suppose – more “Do be good to John”.

(VESTA – NEATLY DRESSED – LOOKS INTO ROOM.)

VESTA. It's me! I hope I'm welcome chummy.

MARY. (STARTING UP – JOYFULLY) Welcome! Oh my dear! (KISSES HER)
Take your coat off – Oh! I am so glad that you have come.

VESTA. Now don't fuss about – I've had my tea – and when I've given
you the blues I'm going down to Ivor's mother.

MARY. Sit just there – tell me all the news. How's that great big Birmingham?

VESTA. Ugh!

MARY. Those lovely shops in New St.! Furs! Silks! Those high-legged boots –
pianos – gramophones.

VESTA. All cut out my dear – they're selling fish and chips.

62.

MARY. (LAUGHING) Oh! do be serious!

VESTA. Serious! Things are serious! Didn't you think they would be for a
while? All the nice things are stored away in dealers' stables – bought
from many a sad and sorry home at a knock-out price. The soldier

chaps are coming home – hoping to find a bank account and only finding the dealers in buying up the waste.

MARY. What does Master Ivor say to this?

VESTA. Thumbs up! I saw the black times coming. I knew we shouldn't always be making shells to blow up Germans – so I squeezed £200 into the bank for the boy who went out there to fight for me. (KNOCK AT STREET DOOR.)

MARY. That will be my Aunt Hannah.

VESTA. I've got to see a man about a frog! Do you mind if I hop off?

MARY. Vesta!

VESTA. I can't stand her sermons and I know she hates the sight of me.

(HANNAH WILLIAMS ENTERS C.)

HAN. AH! You're in Mary Williams. Nice smell from the kitchen. I'm so delighted that you are looking after John. I'm doing all my cooking now since that hussy Cinderella ran away.

MARY. She told you she was going.

HAN. Yes yes – but when she went – she RAN!

VESTA. I shouldn't wonder.

HAN. Hallo! Saucy-box it's you whatever! Round after that boy Ivor, I thought he had more sense.

VESTA. (SINGS) She loves me –yes she loves me –

HAN. Umph! I'm glad you're learning hymns. There'll be fine doing at the meeting - ! John will score. I hear young Ivor has gone up with Peter Ross in his motto car.

MARY. There'll be trouble Aunt – that's certain!

HAN. For that puppy Ross my dear – but not for John! (QUIET KNOCK AT DOOR.) Who's there?

63.

VESTA. Too quiet for the brokers and too late for the milk!

(MUSIC – THEY ALL LOOK TOWARDS THE DOOR L.C. AND CINDERELLA, VERY NICELY DRESSED, ENTERS.)

MARY. (AMAZED) Cinderella!

VESTA. (DITTO) Cinderella!

HAN. So you forward woman you've come back.

CIN. Not back to the dairy Mrs. Williams – I've come to see your niece.

HAN. My son's wife.

CIN. (GENTLY) I would rather say your niece.

HAN. I'll give an eye to my John's supper. That girl cannot be godly to get all those fine clothes. (SHE EXITS L. F.E.)

MARY. What is the miracle! Oh Cindy I have never seen you look quite as nice before.

CIN. Only a gown that money buys – my heart has never changed.

MARY. Dear little Cindy – no. I'm afraid we never knew your value.

CIN. Do you remember the letter Ivor brought me from the office just six months ago?

MARY. Yes dear I remember that.

CIN. Once – oh! so long ago - ! I told you of a kind good little manly boy – I knew in the orphan school. I never forgot him – I always thought he'd grow up to be a big courageous man just like Capt. Ross.

MARY. Oh Cindy! (SHE SIGHS.)

CIN. And do you know that little orphan boy grew up and kept me in his memory. He made good in this world – built up a great fortune – and like Peter Ross he went out to Flanders to fight for all the women and the little ones at home. And out there he died – leading on his men –

MARY. Brave little orphan boy!

CIN. He left behind a fortune - £30,000! He left that heap of money to a memory – to a sparrow – he left it all to me!

VESTA. Cindy!

MARY. Oh! My dear!

CIN. I would rather have had the little boy who grew up to be a man.

MARY. All that money Cindy. You're a princess not a sparrow now. Oh what will you do?

CIN. I'm going to make a fine investment. I'm going to place it in the care of that fine man – so like the orphan boy who died. I'm going to place it in the firm of Ross & Co. – to build up the house and save the little town I've known as home.

MARY. (KNEELS AT HER FEET AND KISSES HER HANDS) Oh! Cindy there are angels on the earth.

CIN. If they'll only use the money – my heart will rejoice!

VESTA. You know how pleased I am dear little Cindy. I've had money left to me but it didn't turn out to be right. I'm going up to Ivor's mother – but we'll both look back. (AT DOOR C.) Till then you lumps of sweetness (GOES OUT – PUTS HER HEAD THROUGH DOOR) Goodbye-ee! (EXITS.)

CIN. He's back at Ross House – the big man whom we love?

MARY. Yes –

CIN. He wrote to me – just one brief kindly letter – (MARY LOOKS AWAY) Oh! You're not jealous of the sparrow? He called me his dear Little Sis!

MARY. To-night I've thought you will some day marry Peter.

CIN. I never think of that. I know I never shall. In God's own time – YOU will be his wife – then I shall ask to come and look upon your happiness – and then my little life will never know a cloud. (ANGRY CRIES HEARD.) What's that? (THE TWO GIRLS LISTEN. A PAUSE – CRIES NEARER.)

MARY. (DOWN L.) I know! I know! There's been trouble at the Institute! He's out there! Facing – fighting danger! He's battling with that angry crowd! (CRIES NEARER. MARY TOTTERS.)

CIN. (GOES UP TO WINDOW.) Oh! Mary! The street below is filled with angry men! He's there! The bullies! Oh! They beat him down – surround him!

MARY. Mercy! Mercy! Heaven!

CIN. We'll go – we must!

MARY. Brave little woman – yes! Helpless women! Oh! those awful cries – come Cindy – (LOUD KNOCKING AT DOOR C. THEY HALT.) Who's there? (A TENSE PAUSE. A RAPID KNOCK.) John!

CIN. I did not see him there –

MARY. I must open it – the girl has gone – courage! Courage! Oh! My heart is almost still. (CIN. MAKES MOVEMENT TO OPEN DOOR.) Stop there! I will go! (SHE GOES UP.)

CIN. (DOWN R. HER HANDS CLUTCHED IN PRAYER.) Protect him from their anger.

MARY AND IVOR ENTER L.C. SUPPORTING PETER WHO STAGGERS IN BETWEEN THEM ALMOST UNCONSCIOUS. HE IS BLEEDING FREELY.)

IVOR. They're mad – the brutes! John Williams should hang for this night of evil!

CIN. He fought for them and they have done this thing!

IVOR. It's not our men – some bullies hired in Cardiff. He's left his mark upon the curs! How he thrashed them! Yet – if they find him here - ?

MARY. They shan't find him here. (TEARS KEY ON CORD ROUND HER NECK.) That door leads to my bedroom – take this key (TO CIN.) That room shall give him sanctuary until he is safe – until the doctor comes. Help me Ivor! Oh! Dear God! The blood! The blood! (LEADING PETER R. CINDY GOES UP L.C.) Cindy – hold that door – (LOOKING BACK L.C.) Watch my little sister watch. (THEY RE-ENTER SHORTLY) The key! (TO CIN. SHE GIVES IT TO HER.)

IVOR. (GOING L.C.) The car's broke down. I'll slip down into the valley and bring the doctor back with me with all haste.

MARY. (WHO IS LOCKING THE DOOR R. LEADING TO HER BEDROOM) Yes good lad – quickly for his life – not out through the front door – slip out through the kitchen garden – (IVOR DISAPPEARS.) They'll never find him Cindy – (PUTS KEY DOWN HER BLOUSE) No man shall pass through there while I live. I hear Aunt Hannah coming here. You go to that door – (POINTS L.C. SHOUTS – LAUGHTER – CHEERS OFF. C.) They're here!

CIN. Oh! Yes! Father of the little sparrows save that brave man from their fury! (LOUD RAPID KNOCKING AT DOOR L.C.)

MARY. Open it – open it Cindy – in there he is safe. (CINDY OPENS DOOR. MARY STANDS AT BAY R.R. HANNAH ENTERS L. DOWN STAGE. JOHN WILLIAMS VERY EXCITED AND FLUSHED WITH DRINK ENTERS C.)

JOHN. Well! Well! Who's at home. (SEES CIN.) you slut! You pauper baggage! So you have come back? Where's my wife?

HAN. John! My John! You have been drinking boy! What devils have possessed you?

66.

JOHN. Drinking? So? Yes, once in a way! It's MY night my mother! My maddening night of triumph! I've got the men! I've beaten him. They've broken him! Where's Mary? I'm going to tame her Mother! I'll crush her spirit – as they've crushed out his life. (HE LAUGHS WILDLY) She's got the key! I'm going to drag it from her! This night is my Wedding Eve! ((MARY UTTERS A CRY OF HORROR)

Han. My boy has never drank before! John your mother speaks to you – tis madness!

JOHN. Madness! Oh I like that! (TURNS BRUTALLY TO CIN.) Get out hussy! Out! No-one to-night shall stand between a husband and his wife – Out! You hear girl – out!

CIN. (BOLDLY) Ehen she bids me go and not before.

JOHN. (SEES MARY FOR THE FIRST TIME) She? So you're there! – my modest bride – sentinel of the sacred door! (HE LURCHES TOWARDS HER) –

MARY. (RECOILING IN HORROR) Don't come near me! Cindy you will go bring Ivor – the neighbours – Kenyon Ross – tell them we have a drunken savage here! Oh! My heart! My brain!

JOHN. (RAISING HIS STICK TO CIN.) Get out! You got her orders!

CIN. Mary! Mary!

(UNDECIDED – SHE FALTERS. HE STRIKES HER WITH STICK – SHE FALLS.)

MARY. Oh! you evil coward!

JOHN. (STANDING IN C. OF STAGE WITH HIS STICK HALF RAISED -)I'll tame you yet! (TURNS TO HIS MOTHER WHO IS TREMBLING L.) You – mother – out! I'm your son – I give my orders! This is my house! Brick by brick - stone by stone I raised it – to hold her here – to lash her to her bitter bargain!

HAN. Oh! John! You're ill – you're crazed – beside yourself with drink you've never known and Passion – (HE SERNLY POINTS TO DOOR R.)

MARY. Don't go ! you are his mother – he may heed you!

(HANNAH TURNS TO HIM IMPLOINGLY. HE RAISES HIS STICK AND POINTS TO DOOR. SHE EXITS TERROR-STRICKEN. JOHN FACES MARY TRIUMPHANTLY)

67.

JOHN. Well? (HE LAUGHS HARSHLY)

MARY. Let me out! Remember your sacred promise to me.

JOHN. I remember nothing – only that you are my wife. Come here!

MARY. (BOLDLY) I refuse!

JOHN. I want that key!

MARY. (STANDS PANTING WITH TERROR) You'll not get THAT! I've borne things to a breaking point – but never that! The thought of you – your mean low selfish scheming! I've looked around my home! My PRISON! Do you hear – my prison! Each luxury around me I count only as another prison bar. You bought me – bought me! With £2,000 – the money that I took from you to help the father of the man whom I shall always love!

JOHN. Hold that –

MARY. (DEFIANTLY) Always! Always! – and you want me! (SHE SHRIEKS OUT HER LOATHING.)

JOHN. I want you for that reason – I want you because you are the one bright spot in my black bartered soul – I paid the price!

MARY. Oh! Take it back! The money's here! (SHE HOLDS UP HIS CHEQUE) See I destroy it – let me out into the night – homeless – penniless but free! Free! Free! Blessed word! I don't want your house of make-believe – I want an open door! What is your home to me? I dread to hear your

footsteps – What are my days! Waiting – waiting here in terror for your knocking at the door.

JOHN. You dare! You dare! (FIGHTING HIS GREAT PASSION)

Mary. And this last indignity! To come to me in drink – in such a state as this! I've battled with your puny mind – I've listened to the scornful stabs your neighbours struck at you – through me as you have passed along – I've suffered your caresses – but this!!!! - you're heaping up the terrors of my wasted martyrdom.

JOHN. The key! The key! You shan't find me selfish – I'll feed up your vanity with all money buys! I want you – You! For whom I've beggared my fellows – sold my soul – my conscience – (ADVANCING) Mary! Wife – my mate! (HE SEIZES HER – KISSES HER – AGAIN – AGAIN.)

(CIN. HAS RECOVERED – GAZES IN HORROR AT SCENE.)

68.

MARY. (SHE STRIKES HIS FACE WITH HER CLENCHED FISTS) you beast!
You Bully! Oh! you coward!

JOHN. That blow ----!

MARY. Let --- me --- out! (SHE FACES HIM WITH BLAZING EYES.)

JOHN. I like you best with blazing eyes! Your fine teeth set – to listen to your panting breath – quick – short – through your defiance! You're worth the winning Mary – and you're WON! I've bent your stubborn spirit --- ! (A MOAN OF PAIN FROM MARY'S ROOM R. – HE STOPS – STARES AT THE DOOR) – Who's THERE?

MARY. There? There? (FENCING IT – GAINING TIME TO THINK.) you fool – who could be there -- ?(PETER HAS RECOVERD – FALLS HEAVILY AGAINST DOOR. CIN. MAKES A FRANTIC EFFORT TO REACH MARY.)

JOHN. Again! There – there – in the room that I'm denied! Someone there! Nothing now shall hold me – the key! I'll have it – even if I use my violence.

(HE STRUGGLES WITH HER FOR THE KEY WHICH IS IN HER HAND. HE SECURES IT – CIN. RAISES HERSELF UP BY THE TABLE AT BACK AND HURLS AN ORNAMENT

THROUGH THE GLASS WINDOWS AT BACK. PETER IS BEATING FURIOUSLY AT DOOR R. JOHN ADVANCES TOWARDS MARY – HE IS C. – SHE IS R.C.)

JOHN. Now – there!

MARY. (IN DESPERATION) Peter! I need you! Come out!

JOHN. Peter!!! OH! -----!

(IN JEALOUS HORROR. HE RAISED HIS HAND TO STRIKE HER – PETER HAS SMASHED OPEN THE DOOR - - HE STAGGERS OUT TO C. – CONFRONTS JOHN.)

JOHN. You - - - - ! My wife -----!

PETER. You ----- dare! Don't speak! Not one word against her – I don't want to use my hands on you. You're not worth my strength – the outcome of my passion.

JOHN. You've ruined her good name – Oh! Stop! Can she defend it - ?

69.

PETER. OH ----- ! You'll anger me beyond control! Your wife! She's NOT your wife! You bribed your way into God's sacred House! That service was a mockery! A sham! With lies you crushed her opposition to your pleadings – with money you had wrung from starving children you gained her forced consent to your unholy union! Your wife!

JOHN. The law! I stand by that.

PETER. The law of man – there is the law of decency and truth – the law of God. And as I see that law – So I'll enforce it here! Take off his ring!

MARY. He has done that. As he dragged from me the key – his ring fell from my finger. (SHE POINTS TO THE CARPET BESIDE HIM.) His ring lies there.

PETER. And now she's going out of this. I'll take no denial! She bears your name – she need not suffer the cross your false union has created. She gave me sanctuary from the violence of your bullies – I'm giving her protection from the violence of your broken word.

JOHN. You're not reckoning with your neighbours – what will they say of her – of you - ?

PETER. She need not falter before the seat of their crude judgment – stand your trial beside her – what can your neighbours say of you. To-night before our men I spared you – for her sake I did that. I did not tell them how you've fleeced and tricked them – built up your riches through their sorrow – gambled in their children's food – reaped profits heaped on profits from our soldiers' blood – will you face that charge -- ?

JOHN. I can – I will –

PETER. You can't! Tis truth! You have no heart to meet it! And while you raved of "Workers' Rights" - you knew no right! A creed of cant! You sweated girls and war-broken women in your match factory in a Gloucester village where no-one knew your name.

JOHN. Who told you this --?

PETER. I found you out! The truth comes bubbling to the surface! We're re-opening our works John in the morning. Our men will be sound – contented – prosperous – loyal! When the cancer of your evil teaching has been drawn from their lives.

JOHN. And so you beat and break me. You crush my hopes! You snatch away the phantom joy I schemed for – her!

PETER. She was never yours.

JOHN. You take her out – your mistress!

PETER. Take that back! Can you see no good because no good you've done! I offer her the open door – the right to live a good pure life away from you – no more.

70.

(HANNAH HAS ENTERED L.)

Do you call that sin? Answer that before she goes out from your house.

JOHN. I have no answer – (TURNS SEES HIS MOTHER) Mother!

HAN. (SHE HAS A NEWSPAPER IN HER HAND) There is much for you to face my son – the papers say that Morgan's Bank will not be opening in the morning ---

JOHN. (HE SNATCHES PAPER) What! They've failed --- ! My all! (HE STANDS DAZED. HE TURNS TO PETER AND LAUGHS HARSHLY) There! There! (HE HOLDS UP THE PAPER) – your victory is complete!

PETER. I see no victory there. From those ashes you can rise –

IVOR AND VESTA ENTER L.C.)

JOHN. Mother! The doctors told me that my heart was weak! I gloried in their verdict – it let me stay at home and fight my rival – make my way. (HE REELS SLIGHTLY) And now I want my heart to fight this crisis! --- It fails me when I need it! Where is my victory! (HE SINKS FOWN SLOWLY INTO CHAIR.)

(KENYON ROSS HAS ENTERED L.C.)

KEN. Peter my son – the men are coming up – they ask that you will meet them –

PETER. Yes Father - yes – just wait – (HOLDS UP HIS HAND)

JOHN. (FIGHTING FOR HIS BREATH – ENDEAVOURING TO RISE) Peter Ross – give me your hand – I want to know your strength – your manhood – I need it now – (PETER COMES DOWN TO HIS SIDE AND CLASPS HIS HAND.) Make it easier for me Peter – Mary – for my way is dark. - Mother! (SHE HOLDS HIS LEFT HAND.) --- There is Light.

(SINKS BACK PEACEFULLY. HANNAH PRESSES HIS HAND TO HER LIPS AND KNEELS BY HIS SIDE.)

71.

PETER. (GENTLY) Your son is – sleeping Mrs. Williams. His true soul has awakened – his victory is there. (HE GOES UP C. TURNS) Mary (SHE MAKES A SLIGHT MOVEMENT TOWARDS HIM) Father! Ivor - Cinders – little friends. I shall want your aid for the big task that lies before us. The Great War across the sea has not been fought in vain. Out from the Ashes of the Glorious Dead let the New World arise! (TO MARY) Your love will give me courage to go forward.

(THE LIGHTS ARE LOWERED AND THEY STAND ALONE. HE
ADVANCES TO THE FOOTLIGHTS.)

You can give me courage! Are we not brothers – sisters all! Women,
Men of British Blood. A Greater Britain is yours for the asking – See it
does not slip from your grasp. The Boys who fought for you – for me –
will be returning home across the waters. Let them find a real true
peace awaiting here. Let us toe the line and stand together! – that we
may reap the Golden Harvest from the ashes of the past. Masters –
Men! True friends! Each fighting FOR the other! Take off your coats –
the work and its reward will be waiting. United let us stand and Triumph!
DELIVER THE GOODS!

(AN ILLUMINATED TABLEAU OF PEACE AND PROSPERITY
LIGHTS UP BEHIND HIM.)

(THE CURTAIN FALLS.)

=====

“WHEN THE JOY BELLS ARE RINGING.”

BY

CLIFFORD REAN.

CHARACTERS.

Squire Wildmarsh	Of Wildmarsh Towers
James Wildmarsh	His Son
Ned Henderson	A Jewel Thief
Ben Fields, alias The Major	His Accomplice
Rev. Thomas Probyn	Minister of the Chapel
Sergeant Galligan	Of the Blankshires
Private Jerry Goslin	Of the Blankshires
Private Smith	Of the Blankshires
Eli Hagson	A Village Grocer, Deacon of the Chapel
Inspector Bulmer	Of Scotland Yard
Sally Drake	A Cockney Girl
Myrtle Probyn	The Minister's Niece.

NOTE: The Squire Doubles Private Smith.

Sergeant GALLIGAN Doubles Inspector Bulmer.

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1.

SCENE 1.

THE VILLAGE OF STAPYLMOOR.

VILLAGE BACKCLOTH .. THE MANSE L. WITH HEDGE ROUND IT
AND GATE .. THE CHAPEL R. WITH LARGE DOORS.

(ENTER ELI HAGSON FROM CHAPEL. HE LOOKS OFF L.)

ELI. Well bless my heart, if there ain't another couple at it again. The way theses soldier fellows kiss the girls in public is shocking --- seem to have nothing to do but lovemaking --- not a minute to spare to listen to the good word. Ah, they'll all be damned ... all be damned. The morals of this village is hawful.

(ENTER REV. THOMAS PROBYN AND MYRTLE FROM CHAPEL)

MYRTLE. Whatever is the matter Mr. Hagson?

ELI. Nothing, my dear ... nothing. Only every man, woman and child in this village is going to eternal damnation.

MYRTLE. Oh dear ... don't say that.

ELI. But I do say it ... everyone but me and the minister.

MYRTLE. (LAUGHING AND CROSSING TO GARDEN GATE) Oh thank you. Then I also am on the road to perdition?

ELI. (ASIDE) Aye, and going a bit faster than the rest if all I hear is true.

REV. T. There Myrtle my dear, go in and get the tea, and Mr. Hagson shall tell me what is troubling him.

MYRTLE. Very well Uncle dear. But Mr. Hagson, I shan't forgive you in a hurry for classing me among the lost ones.

(EXIT MYRTLE INTO COTTAGE L. LAUGHING.)

2.

ELI. Ah, those that bear malice in their hearts shall spend eternity in the bottomless pit.

REV. T. Now then Eli old friend, what is troubling you?

ELI. Soldiers ... Khaki soldiers ... oh the morals of this village is hawful.

REV. T. I haven't observed that they are worse than any other village. In fact I rather fancy they stand well ahead of a good many.

ELI. Soldiers ...bah .. What's the good of 'em? What do we want 'em for?

REV. T. Why, to fight for us of course.

ELI. Fight for us ... and is it you, Thomas Probyn ... a minister of the Gospel as I hears say it ...You stand up for murder and bloodshed.

REV. T. No Eli Hagson I do not. And that is why I consider our soldiers and sailors are necessary --- to hold at bay those that would bring murder and bloodshed, lust and rape, famine and death to our very doors.

ELI. Then you support the war?

REV. T. A just war --- yes.

ELI. All war is wicked.

REV. T. It is. But this war is justified. Our soldiers are fighting to guard our homes. Would you stand by and allow a thief to enter your shop, butcher your children and outrage your women folk, without striking a blow in their defence? You know you wouldn't old friend. And that is what our soldiers are doing, God bless them. And were I twenty years younger I would be amongst the first to join that gallant band of heroes who are out there --- giving the consolation of Heaven, to the souls that are thirsty for salvation --- and ministering His word of comfort to those who have made the last sacrifice for you and I.

(EXIT INTO COTTAGE.)

ELI. And have I lived to hear words of blood from this Minister that I worship under. I should be lax in my duties as the Deacon of this Chapel if I did not bring this to the notice of his congregation. Oh the morals of this village is hawful. And lack a day this Minister is the worst.

(ENTER SERGEANT GALLIGAN.)

- GALLIGAN. Whose morals are awful, old psalm smiter?
- ELI. Yours are for one.
- GALLI. Shure --- and my missus will be glad to hear that. But I shouldn't be after advising you to tell her. She's got Welch blood in her, and that's worse than Irish when it's roused. But have you seen the young squire, I'm looking for him?
- ELI. Ah, another son of Baliel.
- GALLI. Son of who? Faith ye'd better not be casting nesturions on his birth, or his father Squire William will make it hot for you.
- ELI. Hasn't he made it hot for us for twenty years, ever since we built this Chapel, to the glory of Heaven ... And isn't his son, Mr. Sidney, following in his footsteps and corrupting the morals of this village.
- GALLI. You say that again, and I'll corrupt your morals with my boot. Mr. Sidney is as fine a bhoy as ever stepped. And it's meself Sergeant Phil Galligan as has been giving him the benefit of me experiences in France to make him a credit to the British Army when his commission comes along.
- ELI. His father, the Squire, hates our Minister and the members of our Chapel.
- GALLI. Shure, and you're not what I'd call a loveable lot meself.
- ELI. And now his son is trying to corrupt the morals of our Minister's niece, Miss Myrtle.
- GALLI. It's a lie.
- ELI. Oh, no it's not. I've seen 'em myself. Not that her morals want much corrupting -- seeing what her father was.
- GALLI. Her father was a brave soldier who died in my arms in South Africa. Shure the lad had been a bit rackety in his time, but he made atonement by his death.
- ELI. Do you call it atonement, to leave his daughter penniless for our Minister to support, out of the small stipend we pays him?
- GALLI. The more shame on you and your Chapel not to pay him better. Now listen to me Eli Hagson, if I catch you, or any of your snivelling companions, spreading evil reports about Miss Myrtle and Master Sidney, it's meself as'll be after flattening the nose on your face.
- ELI. What? (IN ALARM, HOLDING UP HIS HANDS) Oh, man of blood!
- GALLI. Shure, you'll be the man of blood, if I start on you (THREATENING HIM.)

4.

(ENTER PRIVATE JERRY GOSLIN AND SALLY DRAKE, L.U.E.)

JERRY. Seconds out. Clear the ring.

SALLY. (COCKNEY) Love a duck, Sergeant, what are you going to do to the old bloke?

ELI. I call you all to witness. He was assaulting me.

GALLI. Faith, and I haven't touched you yet. But begob I will if you don't take my advice. So remember. Bah, you make my boot itch.

(EXIT SERGEANT.)

JERRY. If the Sergeant had hit him once, there would have been a funeral. Sally, we've saved his life. Kiss me (THEY EMBRACE.)

ELI. Oh dear, they're at it again. The morals of this village is awful.

JERRY. Why, what's the matter? Sally's going back to London tonight.

SALLY. Yas, and Jerry's my fiasco .. Ain't yer sonny?

JERRY. Rather. And we're making the most of our time. (EMBRACE.)

ELI. You'll have plenty of time to burn in Hell young man.

(EXIT ELI R.U.E.)

JERRY. (SHOUTING AFTER HIM) Don't be too sure old cock bird. But whichever place I go to, there's one consolation, you won't be there.

SALLY. Not 'arf, we wouldn't 'ave 'im, would we?

JERRY. No fear. Come on, sit up here. (PERCHES HER UP ON WALL OF GARDEN, AND SITS BESIDE HER) Ain't this nice?

SALLY. What ho.

JERRY. How long have we been engaged?

SALLY. Five minutes.

JERRY. Oh, it's more than that. Why, it's quite eight minutes since you said yes.

SALLY. Go on.

JERRY. Yes ... and we ain't made any arrangements yet.

SALLY. Arrangements ... what sort?

JERRY. Why – (SINGS) When we are married, what shall we do?

SALLY. I dunno. We can't be married till the war's over, can we?

JERRY. I suppose not.

SALLY. When will the war be over?

JERRY. Oh, not very long now. I'll see to that when I get out there.

SALLY. Good boy. And give a hextra one to Kaiser Bill for me.

JERRY. Extra one! I'll give him a dozen, with your compliments. And 'ere would you like his iron cross?

SALLY. What ho.

JERRY. Alright. You shall have it. But let's get back to the point. When we are married, what shall we do?

SALLY. Well, what would you like to do?

JERRY. I've got forty pounds, and I daresay I can save a bit out there. What price buying a farm?

SALLY. Now.

JERRY. Alright ... cut out the farm ... But I did so want to keep pigs and sell milk and that sort of thing.

SALLY. Well so you shall ... my old Aunt Eliza has got a nice little business near the 'Oundslow Barracks, on the main road. Sells pop and lemingade to soldiers and cycles. Oh, it pays alright, but she's getting old and wants to sell it ... That's the life for me old son. I'm sick of working in Mother's lodgin House. And 'ere there's a bit of gardin at the back where you can start your farm.

JERRY. Right O. Give her the forty pounds down now. We'll pay the balance by instalments.

SALLY. Oh Jerry Goslin.

6.

JERRY. Oh Sally Drake (EMBRACE) Here Sally, my name's Goslin and your name's Drake. What on earth will our children be? Turkeys?

(ENTER REV. THOMAS AND MYRTLE.)

REV. T. Hello young people. Are you aware you're sitting on my garden wall?

JERRY. I beg your pardon Minister. But we've got to do our spooning somewhere ... time's short.

MYRTLE. Spooning, Jerry?

SALLY. Yes Miss. Spooning. Don't you know what it is?

(MYRTLE.BOWS HER HEAD.)

REV. T. Jerry Goslin, I haven't seen you at Chapel for a long time.

JERRY. No Sir, I've been better employed.

REV. T. Eh?

JERRY. No offence Minister. But a chap's got all his life to save his soul. But when the right girl comes along, if you don't click her sharp, he gets left.

MYRTLE. Oh, I hope you haven't got left?

JERRY. No fear Miss, I've clicked. Thumbs up. She's mine.

REV. T. Eh?

JERRY. Beg your pardon Minister, but I mean this young lady and me are engaged, and when the war's over, we're going to tie the knot.

REV. T. Heaven grant the war will soon be over for your sake, and England's.

SALLY. Right O Sir, but don't you worry, my Jerry's going out next week, and you can eat yer blooming 'ead if he don't make 'em get a hustle on.

JERRY. Yes Sir. I'm going to do my bit to help finish up the job.

(EXIT JERRY AND SALLY.)

7.

REV. T. Bless their hearts. They're happy enough in their own sphere. But you, little one, my heart often misgives me for you, tied to an old man like me. Despised by all in his own station in life.

MYRTLE. Why Uncle dear, I'm happy enough with you ...

REV. T. Yes dear .. but how long can it last?

MYRTLE. What do you mean? How sad you are.

REV. T. How long will this Chapel remain for me to preach God's word?

MYRTLE. As long as you or I. Why, it is only twenty years old, and will outlast us and our grandchildren.

REV. T. If it was allowed to. But there is no blessing on it. It was conceived by fraud, built by deception.

MYRTLE. What do you mean?

REV. T. Listen child. Squire Wildmarsh and his family for years have been strong church folk, and have always hated us Decantars as they call us. Time after time a site was sought to build a Chapel. But every acre for miles around belonged to him, and it was useless. Till one day Farmer Thorn who had found salvation, swore he'd best the Squire. And got a twenty one years' lease upon this bit of land to build a public hall ... And it wasn't until the Chapel was up and built that the Squire found out the use that it would be put to.

MYRTLE. Uncle ... that was deception.

REV. T. It was, and no house built upon the quicksands of deceit shall stand. The lease expires in two years from now, and worse than all, the rent is overdue.

(SQUIRE WILDMARSH HAS ENTERED DURING THE LAST LINE.)

SQUIRE. Aye, Mister Gospel Grinder, the rent is overdue, and that's what I've come to see you about.

REV. T. So the blow has fallen. I've been expecting this.

SQUIRE. Yes, and I've been expecting my rent. Aye and for more than a twelve month past. And what's more I mean to have it on the nail, or by the Lord Harry --- out you go.

8.

REV. T. It shall be paid Sir – sooner or late.

SQUIRE. Ah, that means very late, and I'm not waiting.

REV. T. You must remember, Sir, my people are very poor.

SQUIRE. Poor --- poor --- with the best of tradesmen in the village amongst them. Those that squall hallelujah all day Sunday, and rob their neighbour for the rest of the week.

REV. T. I hope I have none such amongst my flock.

SQUIRE. What with Eli Hagson the grocer, and a few more of his kidney, who charge a hundred percent more than the market value for everything they sell – and blame it on the war, the railway, and the shippers.

(ELI ENTERS DURING THIS.)

ELI. Oh Squire.

SQUIRE. It's the truth you scoundrel and you know it – with you Religion is like your Sunday suit – to be locked up after the Sabbath and put away in the drawer until the next time you go to meeting.

REV. T. Eli, the Squire wants his rent.

ELI. Then he'll have to want.

SQUIRE. By the Lord Harry I won't --- I give you one week to settle up arrears, and if you fail --- down comes your Chapel. Bricks and stone --- slates and tiles --- and I'll build a pigsty on the site.

REV. T. May the Lord forgive you, Squire, for what you're going to do.

SQUIRE. (RAISING HIS CROP AS IF TO STRIKE) What, you old humbug!

MYRTLE. Squire!

(ENTER SIDNEY WILDMARSH.)

SIDNEY. Father.

SQUIRE. (DROPPING HIS HAND) Sid lad, these canting psalm smiters would turn an archangel into a devil.

SIDNEY. That's the trouble? --- Oh, there's Eli Hagson on the spot. I'll wager he's at the bottom of it.

ELI. Oh young Squire – don't misjudge a man of peace.

SIDNEY. A man of fiddlesticks --- there's never a quarrel or a rumpus in the village, but what you've got your finger in the pie.

ELI. (TURNING AWAY, ASIDE) And I'll have my finger in your pie young man before I've done with you --- and a darned sight deeper than you'll relish.

SIDNEY. Now Dad, what's all the fuss about?

SQUIRE. Sidney lad, these psalm smiters owe me more than a year's rent, and they sauce me when I dare to ask for it.

REV. T. No Sir --- I only told you we hadn't got it.

SQUIRE. Hadn't got it --- and why not, pray? I'll show you.

SIDNEY. No Father, you'll not. You'll come home with me. The few pounds of their rent can make little difference to your income --- Thomas Probyn here is doing good work amongst the people --- and if his religion is not ours – at least we will respect it.

REV. T. Young man, I thank you (SHAKES HIS HAND.)

SQUIRE. What --- have I lived to see my son shake hands with a Jack ranter in my own village?

REV. T. Your son Sir is a gentleman --- I regret I cannot say it of the father.

(EXIT INTO COTTAGE.)

SQUIRE. Well I'll be ---

SIDNEY. Father – there is a lady present.

SQUIRE. Lady – (LOOKS AT MYRTLE) Oh, another of the brood. But by the Lord Harry I'll have no more of them --- They'll pay my rent before the week is out, or I'll sweep the whole tribe, lock, stock, and barrel, out of the village. And as for you my lad, don't interfere in my concerns or it will be the worse for you. Remember I'm your father.

(EXIT SQUIRE L.U.E. ELI RETIRES UPSTAGE RUBBING HIS HANDS, HAVING ENJOYED THE SCENE. LIGHTS GO DOWN.)

SIDNEY. Myrtle dear, I am sorry you should have been a witness to this scene. I am afraid my father's views often get the better of his judgement.

MYRTLE. Your father is a hard man dear.

SIDNEY. Oh no he's not --- he's the best old fellow in the world. But he's a staunch old Tory, with strong views on the Church and state, and crown. And if your uncle and his flock would only try to pacify him instead of argue, they would find they had no better friend.

MYRTLE. You don't know how these quarrels upset me dear, and make me despair.

SIDNEY. Despair- of what dear?

MYRTLE. That he will ever be reconciled to the fact that you and I ---

SIDNEY. (TAKING HER IN HIS ARMS) My darling.

ELI. (AT BACK) That's what I wanted --- I've seen it with my own eyes --- now to torture the Squire nearer his own door than he thinks.

(EXIT AT BACK L.U.E.)

MYRTLE. But your father is so bitter against my uncle, that I am afraid he will never be brought to acknowledge me as his daughter.

SIDNEY. Oh yes he will --- The old man in spite of all his brusqueness loves me --- and for the sake of his memory of my dear dead Mother, he will be proud of the woman I have given my love, and whom I made my wife.

MYRTLE. I am afraid --- afraid of him.

SIDNEY. Why --- I have known him all my life, and do not fear him --- behind those harsh words, and iron determination that the world knows him by, there is a heart of gold. And when the day comes, as it will soon, when I wear His Majesty's uniform, and stand before him with you by my side, and say "Father, this is the girl I love, this is my wife", he will welcome you with open arms.

MYRTLE. But if he should learn our secret before that?

SIDNEY. How could he --- it is known only to you and I --- I shall not betray it before the time is ripe -- and you -- --

MYRTLE. Can't you trust me? But there are so many ways -- so many things might happen.

SIDNEY. Nothing can happen whilst you and I keep our secret, dear.

MYRTLE. Who can tell --- suppose someone should discover --- suppose he should learn it from a stranger.

SIDNEY. Then his rage would be terrible --- When I tell him myself I know he will welcome you to his house and love you --- But should it come to his ears in some other way --- should he learn that you and I were man and wife, he would never forgive me for the deception.

MYRTLE. Darling, you know that you can trust me not to reveal our secret.

SIDNEY. I know dear. But to make everything more certain, swear by the ring I gave you, that was my mother's, that you will never reveal to a living soul the story of our marriage, until I give you leave to speak.

MYRTLE. Willingly dear. I swear, no matter what may happen, I will never reveal the secret of our marriage until you bid me speak.

SIDNEY. And please Heaven that will not be long. – Before the week is out my commission will arrive, and then I can face my father without fear of his anger.

MYRTLE. You don't know how I have hated all this deception.

SIDNEY. And so have I – but courage little wife – a week at the most will see it ended. Then I can take you by the hand before the world, and proudly acknowledge you as my wife. (HE TAKES HER IN HIS ARMS AND KISSES HER.)

(AT THIS MOMENT ENTER SQUIRE AND ELI.)

ELI. (POINTING TO THEM) Now Squire, will you call me a liar again? Did I tell you the truth?

SQUIRE. Out of my way, you canting humbug. (COMING FORWARD) Sidney, what does this mean?

SIDNEY. Father.

SQUIRE. Your father, yes. But little did I think or ever dream that I should see my son embrace a woman of her class. (BANGING AT VICARAGE DOOR) Come out, you old rat, and see what has happened through me allowing a parcel of humbugs like you dwelling on my land.

(ENTER REV. THOMAS DURING THIS SPEECH, ALSO SERGEANT JERRY AND SALLY AT BACK.)

- REV. T. Why what's the matter Sir? What has happened to enrage you like this?
- SQUIRE. What has happened --- as if you didn't know --- as if it wasn't a plot of you and your darned flock to humbug me through my son and that trollop of a niece of yours.
- SIDNEY. Father, how dare you.
- SQUIRE. Silence --- Don't you dare to interfere until I've done with this old hypocrite and his brood.
- REV. T. (WITH DIGNITY) If you will explain the reason of your anger I may perhaps be able to answer you. But till you do I am in ignorance.
- SQUIRE. You lie --- you know as well as I do that you and your lot have set this shameless baggage here to trap my boy --- and well I know the reason --- you think that rather than face the scandal I shall forego my rent --- and let you keep your wretched Chapel, but you don't know me -- and I'm determined -- pay up your rent tomorrow morning, or out you get at once.
- REV. T. No Sir --- I will pay the rent tonight.
- SQUIRE. What?
- REV. T. I have been debating on my little store of private money and find I have enough. (HANDING HIM CHEQUE). If my followers cannot pay you --- I will -- - and with the Lord's help this Chapel shall endure until the lease is up.
- SIDNEY. Father, do you mean to say you'll take this old man's savings, and leave him penniless?
- SQUIRE. Take it --- of course I do. And as for you, come home with me --- And you shall give me your word, never to see or speak to that baggage again.
- SIDNEY. (TURNING TO MYRTLE) Never --- You have no right to demand such a promise from me.
- SQUIRE. Have I not --- Well, right or no right, that promise you shall make.
- SIDNEY. No Sir I shall not --- I am of age, and shall associate with whom I choose. And in no case wold I make you a promise that I could not keep.
- SQUIRE. What -- what do you mean?
- SIDNEY. That she is the girl I love, and I shall not allow your anger, or any man to come between us.
- SQUIRE. (WILD WITH ANGER) You love her -- are you mad -- you my son dare to tell me that you love the spawn of these psalmsingers and Jack ranterers --- you dare -----

SIDNEY. Yes Sir I dare --- and what is more ---

SQUIRE. No more --- I'll hear no more, leave that girl's side and come with me, or by the Lord Harry I'll disown you on the spot.

SIDNEY. Father, think what you are saying?

SQUIRE. No need to think – I am your father and demand obedience Do you hear me -- - leave that woman now and forever I say --- Nay I command it.

SIDNEY. I shall not obey --- (PLACING HIS ARM ROUND MYRTLE.)

SQUIRE. Then by the Lord, from this moment you are no son of mine --- Out of my sight --- work for yourself --- fend for yourself, but never dare to come to me for help --- Toil or starve as you deserve, and live to curse the woman who has come between you and your future.

SIDNEY. My future, Sir, is for me to make --- and since you close your heart against me, and refuse to own me as your son --- I will carve it for myself.

SQUIRE. Do so and be damned, and pretty hard you'll find it without my aid – and one thing is certain, the commission that has been procured for you is useless now --- You cannot enter the Army without a shilling to your name.

SIDNEY. There Sir you are wrong --- and I will prove it --- Sergeant GALLIGAN, you've known me long enough --- you know I'm fit.

SERGEANT. (COMING FORWARD) Yes Sir.

SIDNEY. Then have you room for me amongst the rank and file?

SERGEANT. Room --- Faith I'd like a hundred more of the same pattern.

SQUIRE. You young fool --- What are you doing --- Do you mean to say you're going to join up as a private?

SIDNEY. Yes Sir I am --- Since you have shut the front door in my face, I'm going in by the back.

SQUIRE. By Heaven you shan't.

SIDNEY. You shall not stop me – If I cannot serve my King and Country as an Officer and a Gentleman --- at least, it is left me to serve them as an Englishman.

END OF SCENE 1.

SCENE 2.

NED HENDERSON'S LODGINGS IN LONDON.

(A MEAN ROOM IN IG WITH DOOR FLAT L. PRACTICAL SLIDING WINDOW FLAT R. PLAIN TABLE AND TWO CHAIRS. HOUSETOP BACKING TO WINDOW.)

(BEN FIELDS DISCOVERED .. A BROKEN DOWN SWELL KNOWN AS THE MAJOR.)

MAJOR. (BUS WITH SPIRIT FLASK) Not a drop – not a drain, God bless my soul. A nice predicament for a gentleman of education to find himself reduced to --- and what's more I daren't go out --- I'm sure that worthy laddie across the road is watching the place --- I must put Ned on his guard when he comes back. (A KNOCK AT DOOR.) Ah – come in – come in, enter the baronical portal whoever you may be.

(ENTER SALLY DRAKE.)

SALLY. Lor, Major, sitting all alone in the dark?

MAJOR. Yes my dear – I have always had a great affection for the twilight – a little habit I learnt when I was soldiering in Indi-Ha.

SALLY. What a funny gent you are.

MAJOR. I fail to see why I should raise hilarity?

SALLY. How grand you talk – just like the Quack Doctor down the cut.

MAJOR. My girl --- comparisons are odious.

SALLY. Go on, who smells --- Oh I know, it's the scent on my handkerchief that my young man gave me in the country.

MAJOR. Well, to what am I indebted for the honour of this visit?

SALLY. Oh, I was forgetting – I've got something for you, but first you'd better have a light. (SHE LIGHTS CANDLE ON TABLE.)

MAJOR. Beware – illuminants are expensive in the present state of the exchequer.

SALLY. I was talking about the light --- not something to drink.

- MAJOR. Something to drink --- oh blessed thought.
- SALLY. (HANDING BIT OF PAPER) Well Muvver sent you up this with her compliments.
- MAJOR. I know --- I know --- the villain --- the little Willy.
- SALLY. Yus, and she says as she must ask you to pay it, or leave on Saturday.
- MAJOR. Enough --- it shall be settled with despatch, as soon as my colleague returns. (READS) Apartments. Apartments. (LOOKS ROUND) Ye Gods – six shillings. Three bottles of Black and White, Sixteen and Six. Twenty five quarts of Beer – what a thirst my colleague has – Seventeen and Six. Food – A pair of kippers and a hard road bloater – sixpence. Fourpence for kippers, come, come, you're sticking it on – absolutely profiteering – I must write to the food controller about it.
- SALLY. Unnecessary luxuries are going up in price. You know there's a war on.
- MAJOR. No, is there? You quite surprise me --- and what's the Laundry – three halfpence – Ah, I always was particular about my linen. (SHOOTS DOWN VERY FRAYED CUFFS, ONE FALLS OFF) Total in all Two Pounds and Seven pence halfpenny.
- SALLY. You are a funny man, you know.
- MAJOR. My dear young lady, do you know that is the second time you have made that remark?
- SALLY. Yes, and your friend is funny too ---
- MAJOR. I have failed to observe anything of the comedian or buffoon about my esteemed colleague.
- SALLY. Why, you've been here three weeks, and you've never been outside all that time – and your friend, he only goes out at night.
- MAJOR. Ah, a young person of observation, I perceive --- No my dear young lady, I never go out of doors --- you see the fresh air is bad, ah, for my complexion.
- SALLY. Go on, you don't say so. Was it the fresh air that made your nose go that funny colour?
- MAJOR. No, certainly not. The cause of my proboscis having developed a somewhat rich tawny shade.
- SALLY. Like fruity old port.
- MAJOR. An excellent simile – Well the cause that it assumed that shade was the privations I endured at the battle of Candalabra.

SALLY. (IN WONDER) Go on – Candalabra – where's that?

MAJOR. Candalabra my dear young lady was a great battle in the Circanaster War --- where I covered myself with glory, and was mentioned in despatches.

SALLY. What, was you in the divorce court --- or a murderer?

MAJOR. Certainly not – what do you mean?

SALLY. Didn't you say you was mentioned in the Sunday Despatch --- They only writes about divorces and murder in that, and I love it. But I say, if you've been out in so many battles, why don't you join up in this war?

MAJOR. Ah, why --- why.

SALLY. Yus, why?

MAJOR. Ah, a secret --- A secret my dear young lady that must never pass my lips --- if I tell you ----

SALLY. I'll be as dumb as an oyster – see that wet etc. (BUS.)

MAJOR. The war office is jealous of me.

SALLY. No.

MAJOR. Fact, I assure you. Had I been in command of the British Army, I repeat had I been in command of the war it would have been over long ago. But the hidden hand has kept me back.

SALLY. Oh I know --- something to do with the pictures.

MAJOR. Something to do with the pictures. (IN DISGUST.)

SALLY. Yus. The clutching hand, and the shielding shadder. – Hellow 'ere comes your friend.

(ENTER NED HENDERSON QUICKLY DOOR L.)

SALLY. I'll ask him about Muvver's bill.

NED. (VERY AGITATED) What the devil are you doing here?

SALLY. 'Ere's Muvver's bill, and she says if you don't pay it, you've got to get out on Saturday.

NED. Oh alright I'll settle it presently. Now then get out.

SALLY. Oh alright. Why don't you learn some manners like your friend the count?

NED. Oh get out.

SALLY. Call yourself a gentleman --- you're a bloomin' 'Un.

(EXIT SALLY.)

MAJOR. Well Ned old sport, have you got the dough?

NED. Yes --- curse it --- sixty jimmy's.

MAJOR. What, sixty pounds for a beautiful lot of sparklers like that?

NED. That's all the old fence would tip up for 'em – damn him, I'd like to wring his neck.

MAJOR. Well, it can't be helped – but you didn't forget your old pal the MAJOR, Ned – cooped up here like a little dicky bird in a gilded cage.

NED. No, there you are. (HANDS HIM BOTTLE OF WHISKEY.)

MAJOR. Ah, that's the feller. (TAKES A LONG DRINK.) I've wanted that all day.

NED. And you'll want it a darned side more when you've heard my news.

MAJOR. Why, what do you mean?

NED. Make the most of that dope, It's likely to be the last you'll taste for a good ten years – they've run us down.

MAJOR. What, the cops?

NED. Yes – Inspector Arkwright spotted me in Houndsditch and stuck to me like a shadow – I led him a pretty dance around the town, and it was over two hours before I shook him off.

MAJOR. Then he didn't follow you here?

NED. What do you take me for? – No, I did the double on him half a mile away – but it won't be long before he spots this crib.

MAJOR. Damn it old pard, you've got the brains – what's to be done?

NED. Clear out of here at once.

MAJOR. But where can we go?

NED. By tomorrow every mark in London will be on our track, now that they know we're not out of the country. There's only one place where we shall be safe.

MAJOR. Yes Ned – where's that?

NED. The army.

MAJOR. What?

NED. Don't you see you fool, that's the last place they'd look for us – And with a bit of luck, we may be safe over in France, or in Galipoly, before they dream we're out of London.

MAJOR. But the army Ned – me in the army?

NED. Why not – there are just as big fools in it as you.

MAJOR. Oh Ned, I couldn't.

NED. Oh alright, if you prefer ten years in Dartmoor, for stealing Lady Merton's jewels, that's your own look out – For my part I'm clearing out of this at once – and joining up as soon as the recruiting office is open in the morning. (WHILE HE HAS BEEN SAYING THIS, HE HAS CROSSED TO WINDOW, LOOKS OUT, SUDDENLY DUCKS DOWN.) Damn.

MAJOR. What is it now?

NED. The game's up Major my boy – we're booked.

MAJOR. What?

NED. There's Arkwright across the road talking to another fellow and pointing to this house.

MAJOR. Gad, so there is – The little chap that's been watching this place all day – Quick, let's do a bunko by the back way. (AT DOOR.)

NED. Do you think Arkwright is such a fool as to leave that unguarded?

MAJOR. Then what's to be done?

NED. There's only one chance left, and a darned desperate one – wait till it's darker and try the roof. (THE SOUND OF A DISTANT BOOM.) Hallo, what's that?

MAJOR. What's what?

NED. (TWO MORE.) Hark, there it is again – don't you hear it man?

MAJOR. What is it Ned – what is it?

(SEVERAL MORE EXPLOSIONS, COMING RAPIDLY NEARER.)

NED. Zeppelins you fool.

MAJOR. Zepps – I'm off. (RUNNING TO DOOR.)

NED. (STOPPING HIM AND SWINGING HIM ROUND) You'll stay where you are or I'll brain you.

(DURING THE FOLLOWING THERE ARE RAPID EXPLOSIONS GETTING NEARER VERY QUICKLY, AND SHOUTS AND NOISE OUTSIDE.)

MAJOR. But Ned, don't you understand we're on the top floor, and if they hit this house, they'll get us first.

NED. Well if they do, they do. – I'd sooner die than face a ten-year stretch – I'm staying here – it's giving us the one chance in a million, and by Gawd I'm going to take it.

MAJOR. Ned – Ned – don't be a fool. (BOMB.) Oh Lord. (DIVES UNDER TABLE.)

NED. (DRAGGING HIM OUT) Come out you fool. Don't you realise that in the confusion Arkwright may leave his post, and if he does –

MAJOR. Well?

NED. Well, if he does, it's out of the window both of us onto the leads below, and swarm down the drainpipes.

(NED STANDS BESIDE WINDOW WATCHING OUT OF THE CORNER.)

MAJOR. Oh Ned, Ned – they're getting nearer.

NED. Shut up you coward, I'm waiting for our opportunity.

(SUDDENLY THERE IS A BRIGHT FLASH AT THE WINDOW WITH A TERRIFIC EXPLOSION AND GLASS CRASH. EVERY POSSIBLE NOISE EFFECT. THEN THE SOUND OF SHRIEKS AND FALLING MASONRY. NED STAGGERS BACK WITH HIS HAND TO HIS FACE, STUNNED FOR THE MOMENT. RED FLICKER LIME FLOODS THROUGH WINDOW NOW TILL END. NED TAKES HIS HAND FROM HIS FACE, IT IS COVERED WITH BLOOD, WHICH HE

WIPES AWAY DURING THE FOLLOWING. HE LOOKS OUT OF WINDOW, STAGGERS BACK AT SIGHT, THE SOUNDS OF THE EXPLOSIONS BECOMES MORE FAINT, UNTIL THEY DIE AWAY IN THE DISTANCE.)

NED. Oh my God. (THEN LOOKS OUT AGAIN) Major – Major, you fool, where are you?

MAJOR. (WHO HAS BEEN COWERING OVER L.) Oh Ned --- Ned, are you still alive?

NED. Of course I am. Come quick, the danger's passed – look out here.

MAJOR. (KEEPING WELL AWAY) What is it?

NED. The whole street is a wreck and burning fast. God what a sight.

MAJOR. And Arkwright?

NED. Gawd only knows – blown to glory I suppose – quick out with you.

(CATCHES HOLD OF HIM AND FORCES HIM OUT THROUGH WINDOW, PROTESTING.)

MAJOR. Ned – Ned, what are you doing?

NED. (GETTING THROUGH WINDOW AFTER HIM) Taking that one chance in a million. The Zepps have done the trick and given us a start. It's top speed to the recruiting office, and the tecks will have run darned quick if they even hope to catch us.

(EXIT NED THROUGH WINDOW, SLIGHT PAUSE. KNOCK AT DOOR. ENTER SALLY.)

SALLY. Major – Major, are you alright? (LOOKS ROUND.) Well I'm blowed. (GOES TO DOOR AND CALLS) Muvver, Muvver!

VOICE. (OFF) Well?

SALLY. Oh it's hawful, the two poor gents is blown to hattoms.

VOICE. Rubbish – the 'ouse ain't 'it.

21.

SALLY. (LOOKING OUT OF WINDOW) Lor lummy there they are arunning down the street – stop thief! (GOES BACK TO DOOR AND CALLS) Muvver – Muvver, you can say goodbye to your two pounds and sevenpence ‘apenny.

VOICE. Watcher mean?

SALLY. The Major and ‘is pal ‘ave done a guy.

END OF SCENE 2. BLACKOUT.

SCENE 3.

(A TRENCH SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE.

SACK CLOTH SHOWS A BLANK DREARY WASTE, WITH HERE THERE A BIT OF RUIN ON THE SKYLINE, AND A BROKEN TREE OCCASIONALLY. WITH SHELL HOLES IN THE MIDDLE DISTANCE, AND BARBED WIRE STAKES IN THE GROUND. THE MIDDLE OF THIS CLOTH SHOULD BE TRANSPARENT LINEN FOR SPECIAL SHELL AND SMOKE EFFECTS. THERE IS A GROUND ROW ABOUT 5 FEET 6 HIGH RUNNING ACROSS THE STAGE, RISING SHARPLY TO THE R. THIS PAINTED TO LOOK LIKE THE INTERIOR OF A TRENCH. WITH THE OPENING TO A DUGOUT ABOUT L.C. IN FRONT OF THE RISE R. ANOTHER GROUND ROW ABOUT 6 FT TO 7 FT, THE TOP OF THIS CONSTRUCTED OF SANDBAGS AND VERGIN CORK RUBBISH FOR EXPLOSION. A CLOTHES LINE STRETCHED ACROSS L. CORNER, WITH WASHING ON IT. A BRAZIER OF FIRE MADE OF AN OLD BUCKET R.C. ONE OR TWO AMMUNITION BOXES, AND OTHER TRENCH LITTER. THE STAGE WANTS TO BE DRESSED IN THE BAIRNSFATHER FASHION, AND MOST OF THE CHARACTERS PLAYED ON THE BAIRNSFATHER LINE.)

TWO SUPERS DISCOVERED CLEANING RIFLES.

JERRY GOSLIN DISCOVERED WASHING SOME CLOTHES IN A LARGE CORNED BEEF TIN AND SINGING.

JERRY. Oh the boys in Khaki gets the nice jobs,
 And the boys in Blue gets the nice jobs too,
 Bullets by the score
 Shrapnel in galore
 And if you dares to show your head you gets what for.
 Yes the boys in Khaki gets the warm jobs
 And the Sergeant uses language pretty blue

23.

So John – John – John come and put your Khaki on

And you'll have a nice time too.

(IN DISGUST) I don't think.

(ENTER PRIVATE SMITH, DOUBLED WITH SQUIRE, HE IS A
TYPICAL BAIRNSFATHER SOLDIER.)

SMITH. 'Ello – 'ello, anybody ill in this trench?

JERRY. Not as I knows on.

SMITH. Oh, only I thought I heard someone in hagony.

JERRY. Well, you was bloomin' well mistook.

SMITH. Sorry I'm sure. I'm a dab hand at giving aid to the dying.

JERRY. Oh, and who's adying?

SMITH. You will be if I 'as any more of your lip.

JERRY. What – 'ere, just half a minute while I wrings out this sock, and I'll show you.

SMITH. Sorry, I ain't got no time to stay – so have it now or leave it alone.

JERRY. (GETTING UP) Oh alright, anything for a peaceful life. Now then – where will
you have it? (THEY SPAR.)

(ENTER SERGEANT GALLIGAN L.)

SERGEANT. Faith, what the devil's the game here – stop it you blithering idiots.

JERRY. If you please, Sergeant, here's a blooming foreigner from another regiment,
and I was just showing him the the Blankshires are the best in the blessed
army.

SMITH. What – you blooming cross-eyed, hook-nosed – (SPAR AGAIN.)

SERGEANT. Stop it – stop it do you hear! Where's Private Wildmarsh?

JERRY. Down the communication trench on fatigue.

SERGEANT. Well, I want to see him as soon as he returns. He's in luck.

24.

SMITH. Come into a fortune Sergeant?

SERGEANT. No, he's getting leave for Blighty.

JERRY. (SINGS) Take me back to dear old Blighty
Fill me up with Whisky, Gin and Beer.

SMITH. Call that luck – Blimey I wouldn't go if I got the chance. I came out 'ere to get away from my old woman's jaw, and 'ere I jolly well stays in peace and comfort.

JERRY. Calls this peace and comfort?

SMITH. Rather – This is 'Eaven, simply 'Eaven, to my old woman's chin music.

SERGEANT. Don't forget Goslin, I want to see Private Wildmarsh as soon as he returns.

JERRY. Alright Sergeant.

(EXIT SERGEANT.)

SMITH. Seems a decent sort your Sergeant.

JERRY. Not 'arf – he's Irish.

SMITH. Lor lummy – I wish I had a drop now – 'ere have you heard the news of those poor blighters at home in England?

JERRY. No.

SMITH. They've got their beer stopped – not 'arf – and whisky's fifteen bob a bottle.

JERRY. Poor devils – they've missed a lot by not coming out here. 'Ere – 'ave a swig?

SMITH. Don't mind if I do – well happy days, as we used to say in the force.

(ENTER AT THIS MOMENT MAJOR FROM DUGOUT, HE IS NOW A
VERY FUNNY LOOKING SOLDIER. LISTENS.)

JERRY. Force – what force?

SMITH. Why, the police force of course.

JERRY. What – was you a blooming peeler?

SMITH. Nothing 'arf so common. Plain clothes my boy – I was a tec.

(AT THIS MOMENT MAJOR BOLTS BACK INTO DUGOUT, BUT STICKS HIS HEAD ROUND AND LISTENS.)

JERRY. You don't say so – so you was a blessed Sexton Blake.

SMITH. No fear – I was the real thing – and that's what's brought me visiting your trench.

JERRY. What, you ain't come to nab nobody, 'as yer?

SMITH. I don't know --- there's a couple in your push as I've had my eye on for some time.

JERRY. Well, try your 'and on the Quartermaster Sergeant first, he wants hanging.

SMITH. No, these are two privates – suspicious sort of coves – wanted for a jewel robbery – we'd almost run them to earth, but they got clean away one night in a Zeppelin raid. The night my old Chief Inspector Arkwright got done in. Well I'm blessed, here comes one of them.

(ENTER R. SIDNEY WILDMARSH AS PRIVATE, AT THIS MOMENT THE DOUBLE WHO IS DRESSED EXACTLY THE SAME, EXCEPT THAT HE IS WEARING A FUR TEDDY BEAR COAT APPEARS AT DUGOUT OPENING. MAJOR POINTS OUT TO HIM WHAT IS HAPPENING, THEY LISTEN.)

SIDNEY. Hello Jerry lad, you were in luck to miss that fatigue, it's been dirty work pumping the water out, down that communication trench.

SMITH. Hello Ned Henderson my lad, run you to earth at last. This will be grand news for them at home at Scotland Yard.

SIDNEY. I think, my friend, you're making a mistake, my name's not Ned Henderson.

SMITH. Come on, don't try that soft stuff with me – where's your pal the Major, and what have you done with Lady Merton's jewels?

JERRY. Lor lummy – here's a spree – this chuckle headed idiot takes you for a London jewel thief.

SIDNEY. What! – I'll knock his confounded head off.

SMITH. I know you right enough Ned Henderson – and I'll telegraph the news to the Yard at once, and you won't get away this time, unless a friendly bullet lays you out before they arrest you.

SIDNEY. I've told you once before my man, I'm not Ned Henderson, and if you dare repeat it, I'll make you eat your words.

SMITH. Alright Ned my lad.

SIDNEY. What – (GOING FOR HIM.)

ENTER SERGEANT. AT THIS MOMENT.)

SERGEANT. What's this – fall in – Attention.

(THE THREE DO SO, AND TWO SUPERS COME ON. THEY CAN HAVE BEEN MOVING ABOUT THE SCENE.)

SERGEANT. Now then, are ye soldiers, or kitchen cats – Oh it's the blessed stranger again – what do ye want in our trench breaking its lovely peace?

SMITH. If you please Sergeant, that man is a well-known London jewel thief.

SERGEANT. And you're a well-known liar.

SMITH. I recognise him as Ned Henderson, wanted by Scotland Yard.

SERGEANT. And I recognise you as an escaped lunatic wanted by Bedlam. Shure he's Private Sidney Wildmarsh, son of Squire Wildmarsh of Stapylmoor, and I've known him since he was so high. (TOUCHING GROUND WITH HAND.)

JERRY. Yes, and I've known him since he was smaller than that.

SERGEANT. So you'd better learn to see better out of your boss eyes, before you accuse an honest gentleman again. Now Private Wildmarsh – I have some fine news for ye – ye have been recommended for a commission, and are to receive leave of absence, to join a training corps at once. And it's good luck to ye my boy – And proud I am of ye – God Save the King (ASIDE) and bless old Ireland.

(OMNES CHEER.)

SERGEANT. Dismiss.

(THEY BREAK UP. SERGEANT.AND SIDNEY CHAT TOGETHER.)

SMITH. (LOOKING AT SIDNEY) Strange, I would have taken my happy David it was my man.

JERRY. And it wouldn't have been the first time the police have arrested the wrong man, and been sorry for it after when they've seen the right man.

SMITH. I'll warn the Yard to keep an eye on him when he lands in Blighty.

JERRY. Then you'll be wasting your time. He's the Squire's son, and I've known him all my life. But Jumping Jehosephat, I think I can put you on the right man.

SMITH. What --- .

JERRY. Yes, there's a bloke in our platoon the dead spit of Mister Sidney. Ten to one, he's the blighter you're after.

SMITH. Where is he – let me have a squint at him.

JERRY. Come along of me down the trench, chum, and I'll see if I can find him for you.

SMITH. What ho mate, come along – and let me get my digits on him and he'll spend the next ten years in Portland.

JERRY. Blimey – you are anxious to do him a good turn.

SMITH. Good turn – what do you mean?

JERRY. Ten years in Portland with a hammock to sleep in – Lummy what a paradise of luxury that would be – 'ere couldn't you manage to arrest me as well?

(EXIT JERRY AND SMITH BELOW R.)

SERGEANT. Well, me boy, I congratulate you, and you do me proud for the time I've spent on you. What about that little colleen in Stapylmoor – she'll be waiting to receive you.

SIDNEY. Yes, God bless her – but I haven't had a line from her for nearly four months.

SERGEANT. What of that – Shure I haven't had a line from the missis or the kids for nearly six – we're in an awkward bit of country lad, and we're lucky to be getting food and ammunition, let alone letters.

SIDNEY. I suppose you're right – but it's strange – I can't help feeling that there's something wrong.

SERGEANT. Don't you believe it – Anyway, you'll be back in Blighty in a week, and can find out for yourself.

SIDNEY. Yes, thank God.

SERGEANT. Oh, and Master Sidney, you might give my old woman a call.

SIDNEY. With all my heart – what shall I say?

SERGEANT. Faith – ye can say – er – I hope she's quite well, as it leaves me at present – and I got the last pair of socks she knitted me – I'm using one to sleep in, and one to carry my kit in – give my love to the kids, and give her a kiss from me.

SIDNEY. Oh, I say, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. Shure, Sir, it's not meself as will object. And now I must be getting on – ye're relieved from duty, and your ticket for Blighty will be along any minute. Oh Mr. Sidney ---

SIDNEY. Well, old friend ---

SERGEANT. (WIPES HIS HAND ON TROUSERS, THEN HOLDS IT OUT SHEEPISHLY) If ye wouldn't mind Sir.

SIDNEY. (SHAKES IT HEARTILY) I shall be seeing you again before I go.

SERGEANT. (GOES TO L. THEN RETURNS MYSTERIOUSLY) Oh, Mr. Sidney, you might send me a wire if there is any increase in the family.

SIDNEY. (LAUGHS)

SERGEANT. And send me two wires if it's twins.

SIDNEY. If it's triplets, shall I send three?

SERGEANT. Begob no – send one to Buckingham Palace, for the King's Bounty.

(EXIT SERGEANT.L.)

SIDNEY. Dear old friend, I wish he was coming back with me, but no, like the millions of brave lads, he means to stick it to the finish. (SITS BY FIRE) I can hardly

realise that in a few short days I shall hold my darling in my arms again – what has happened since I heard from her last I wonder – but why should I trouble – soon I shall be by her side again – How often in the long hours of the night I have thought of her, and longed to see her, and now the hour has come – it seems almost too good to be true.

(MAJOR COMES FROM DUGOUT. DOUBLE STILL STANDS AND LISTENS.)

MAJOR. Well, my young and distinguished friend – so you're for promotion eh? Lucky dog, sir, lucky dog.

SIDNEY. Oh, so you've heard the news, Private Trevosper?

MAJOR. Call me Monty, dear boy, Monty to my friends.

SIDNEY. (LAUGHING) Thanks for including me among that distinguished fraternity.

MAJOR. That's what I like about you dear boy – you know how to use long words as a gentleman should.

SIDNEY. The Sergeant Major can say a few.

MAJOR. But hardly parliamentary sir – Do you know what he called me the other day?

SIDNEY. Something pretty warm I expect.

MAJOR. You've hit it – he called me the cast of sweepings of a County Council rubbish tip. Now I ask you, is that the language for one gentleman to use to another?

SIDNEY. Well hardly ---

MAJOR. But he doesn't know what I thought about him, by Jove, or I'd have got No. 1 field punishment, and my rum ration stopped.

(SOUND OF HEAVY GUNS THROUGH FOLLOWING, AND SMOKE EFFECTS WORKING ON THE SKYLINE.)

Oh heck, what's that?

SIDNEY. Oh, only our guns wishing Fritz goodnight.

MAJOR. Oh, then I shall have time for my little regerkey supper before they start their evening straff. I perceive there is a spare seat at your table. Have you any objection to my joining you?

SIDNEY. Not in the least.

MAJOR. (SITS BESIDE HIM) I always dine table dotty when I'm at home. Habit, sir, bred in the blood –

SIDNEY. (LAUGHING) But you can't manage that out here –

MAJOR. Well it ain't the Savoy, or even Lockhart's, but I do my best. Gad sir – I was always partial to French cookery. Hors Dovers to begin with.

(HE LAYS BIT OF PAPER, AND PRODUCES VARIOUS THINGS AS MENTIONED FROM HAVERSACK. HE PUTS DIXY ON FIRE.)

Escallots.

SIDNEY. What?

MAJOR. ESCALLOTS. Snails dear boy – snails, a little luxury I learned to appreciate when I used to spend my holidays in Gay Paree – picked 'em off the top of the trench, after the rain this morning – try one.

SIDNEY. No thanks.

MAJOR. (EATING SNAILS WITH RELISH) Course No. 2. Sandbag Soup. (TAKES DIXY FROM FIRE) Sandbag Soup.

SIDNEY. What on earth's that?

MAJOR. Onion boilings flavoured with sand – good for the indigestion. (DRINKS SOUP) And now for a fillet of Argentine Horse. Better known as bully. (EATS) I suppose you will be returning to the ancestral mansions – all the villagers will turn out en feat.

SIDNEY. Well, I shouldn't expect them to turn out on their heads.

MAJOR. Ah, you don't understand French dear boy. I mean, Mayor with his corporation, to meet you at the station – Brass band and banners – Guard of Honour from the Fire Brigade, and all that sort of thing – with the old Dad waiting on the Baronial steps with a cheque book in one hand, and his paternal blessing in the other. Do you catch the picture?

SIDNEY. Not a bit like it – In the first place I have quarrelled with my father.

MAJOR. Ah, that's bad – cut out the cheque book.

SIDNEY. So I don't suppose he'll trouble to meet me.

MAJOR. Um – cut out the paternal blessing – where do you live dear boy?

SIDNEY. Stapylmoor.

MAJOR. Stapylmoor, by Jove – I used to go haddock stalking there. Delightful spot.

SIDNEY. It's my home, and I love every acre of it. My father is the Squire of Stapylmoor – Squire Wildmarsh.

MAJOR. Ah, then I suppose you are the squirrel.

SIDNEY. Eh – what?

MAJOR. I mean his heir.

SIDNEY. I was --- but I'm afraid not now, unless my absence has softened the dear old fellow's heart towards me.

MAJOR. Dear is he? – How much is he worth?

SIDNEY. I believe the estate is worth some hundred and fifty thousand pounds.

(AT THIS DOUBLE WITHDRAWS FROM DUGOUT. TAKES OFF SKIN COAT AND COMES BEHIND BANK R.)

MAJOR. You take my breath away – take my advice sir – make it up with the old boy. Eat humble pie – eat anything you like, but make it up with him – then when the war is over, you can ask me down for the lobster shooting – Well now, for Course Four, Paving Stone with Plum and Apple Sauce. (TAKES OUT BISCUIT SPREAD WITH JAM.) Now my young millionaire, I suppose I couldn't negotiate a small loan on my note of hand for say two bob till pay day.

SIDNEY. I'm afraid not. (RISING) I shall want all I have to see me home.

MAJOR. Then say a sixpence – just a simple tanner.

SIDNEY. I'm very sorry. (MOVING TOWARDS STEPS R.)

MAJOR. Oh, don't mention it – tuppence will do.

SIDNEY. Not tonight – goodnight.

(EXIT SIDNEY BEHIND BANK R. OUT OF SIGHT FOR A MOMENT. THE DOUBLE GOES ON AND STANDS TOP OF STEPS IN VIEW OF AUDIENCE. SIDNEY GETS ROUND NEAR DUGOUT DOOR AND PUTS ON SKIN COAT.)

MAJOR. Stingy beast – Heir to a hundred and fifty thousand pounds and can't spare tuppence for a gentleman in redoooced circumstances. (SOUND OF SHELLS VERY CLOSE.) Oh lor – what the devil's that? – Sounds like Master Fritz doing his goodnight strafe – well here's one for cover.

(HE IS ABOUT TO ENTER DUGOUT. ENTER NED HENDERSON (SIDNEY WHO HAS PUT ON FUR COAT)).

Out of the way, they're shelling the lines.

NED. Come here you fool, they won't touch us.

MAJOR. I wouldn't put it past them.

NED. Did you see that fool who was down the line just now? I recognised him at once – Detective Smith – one of Arkwright's men – He's spotted us right enough.

MAJOR. Are you sure dear boy?

NED. Sure – of course I am, did you see the way he tackled young Wildmarsh – everyone says the likeness between us is marvellous.

MAJOR. Well, what of it?

NED. His suspicions are aroused, and you can bet your life he'll keep nosing round until he spots us.

(ANOTHER SHELL CLOSE.)

MAJOR. Oh, there's another. For goodness' sake let's get under cover.

NED. The others will hear us talking there – we're in a fix and we've got to get out of it, or it will mean ten years in Portland.

MAJOR. Well I's sooner be at Portland than here, you do get your grub regular.

NED. What, for ten years, you fool?

MAJOR. Well, what's ten years – this blessed war is going to last forever.

NED. Oh, well stay here and get nabbed if you like, I'm going to do a guy.

MAJOR. You haven't got a dog's chance – they'll shoot you as a deserter, if they catch you.

NED. Better that than quod – so I'm going to get away tonight.

MAJOR. Ah, I wish I was that lucky beggar (POINTING TO DOUBLE ON STEPS) Heir to a Squire, with a hundred and fifty thousand pounds, and a pass for Blighty as good as in his pocket.

(AT THIS MOMENT A TERRIFIC EXPLOSION, ALL NOISE POSSIBLE, BRIGHT FLASH, AND THE FRONT PART OF THE BANK R. COLLAPSES. THE DOUBLE IS SEEN HALF BURIED IN THE RUINS. HENDERSON FALLS DOWN. MAJOR BOLTS INTO DUGOUT.)

MAJOR. (PUTTING HIS HEAD OUT OF DUGOUT) Blimey, was it an earthquake or a havalanch?

NED. A trench mortar you fool (GETTING UP) and too close to be pleasant. (LOOKS AT PILE OF DEBRIS) Hello, this poor fellow's done in. Private Wildmarsh by God.

MAJOR. He was looking for trouble – I saw him this morning with two others, light their fags off one match.

NED. Well, he'll never light another fag again.

MAJOR. Poor young fellow – and a pass for home and a commission waiting for him.

NED. By God MAJOR – here's my chance.

MAJOR. What do you mean?

NED. Why, don't you see?

(NED GOES TO BODY, TAKES OFF FUR COAT, AND THRUSTS IT INTO RUBBISH. THEN TAKES OFF IDENTIFICATION DISC AND

PUTS IT ON BODY. TAKES IDENTIFICATION DISC FROM BODY
AND PUTS IT ON.)

MAJOR. No, pickle me in pepper if I do.

NED. They say we're so much alike no one can tell us apart. I'm going to put it to the test. (TAKES POCKET BOOK FROM POCKET.) Here, get me his pocket book, and put that in its place.

MAJOR. (DOING SO) Here Ned, what's the blessed game? What do you mean by all these monkey tricks?

NED. Why, don't you see, you fool – Ned Henderson, jewel thief and forger, he's there half buried by a shell –

MAJOR. Yes ----

NED. And Private Wildmarsh, heir to a hundred thousand pounds, and a ticket for England coming to him stands here.

MAJOR. Gawds strooth.

(ENTER SERGEANT, JERRY, SMITH, SUPERS.)

SERGEANT. Hello – what happened here Wildmarsh?

NED. Whizzbang came over Sergeant – done a bit of damage, and I'm afraid this poor fellow has gone west.

SERGEANT. Who is it?

JERRY. Private Henderson Sergeant.

SERGEANT. The worst man in the regiment – well he won't be missed – Thank God lad it wasn't you.

JERRY. (TO SMITH) That's the man I meant – you can't arrest him now.

SMITH. Escaped again.

SERGEANT. Well Private Wildmarsh – God bless ye – your ticket from headquarters has arrived, and you start for Blighty in the morning. (SHAKING HIS HAND.)

35.

END OF SCENE 3.

SCENE 4.

(INTERIOR OF THE MANSE. REV. THOMAS AND MYRTLE DISCOVERED R. AND L. AT TABLE, ON WHICH THERE IS A LAMP. REV. THOMAS IS READING A LARGE BIBLE. HE LOOKS UP.)

- REV. T. How silent you are childy, you don't seem to have been yourself for some weeks past. Do you find your old Uncle a slow companion?
- MYRTLE. (COMING TO HIM AND LAYING HER HAND ON HIS SHOULDER) No Uncle dear.
- REV. T. Ah, but I am afraid it is lonely for you – young people should mix with those of their own age, and not be cooped up with a sour old fellow like me.
- MYRTLE. I won't have you say that dear – I'm as happy as – as I can expect to be.
- REV. T. Still thinking of Master Sidney – you mustn't dear – there can never be anything more between you and he. The Squire has forbidden it, and although he is no friend of mine, I respect his orders.
- MYRTLE. Have you heard that Sidney is returning home on leave, and they do say that he has been recommended for the Victoria Cross.
- REV. T. Nay – I pay no heed to the common gossip, and you child, for the sake of your own peace of mind, must think no more of him.
- MYRTLE. Think no more of him. (ASIDE) Oh God, if he only knew.
- REV. T. And now tell me dear, why don't you mix with the other girls as you used to do? You keep aloof from all, and I'm afraid your manner is offending them. I've seen them looking at you, and pointing after you very strangely of late.
- MYRTLE. (TO HERSELF) Can they guess? Do they already know?
- REV. T. Know what child?
- MYRTLE. Nothing dear – nothing.
- REV. T. Nay – but there is something on your mind, you can't deceive your old Uncle. Won't you confide in him?
- MYRTLE. If I only dared – if I only dared. (SHE SINKS SOBBING WITH HER HEAD ON HIS KNEES. KNOCK AT DOOR L.)
- REV. T. Why, who can that be? Come my lass, dry those tears. You shall tell me all presently. (KNOCK AGAIN.) Yes – yes, who's there?

ELI. (OFF) Me Minister, I want a word with you on private business.

(REV. T. OPENS DOOR L. ENTER ELI HAGSON.)

ELI. Oh, so the wench is at home? I'm sorry for that. I should have preferred to say what I've got to say ---

MYRTLE. Behind my back Mr. Hagson.

ELI. Well no, not exactly. But if you're wise you'll make yourself scarce, till I've had my interview with the old man.

REV. T. Eli, I don't know what you have to say to me that Myrtle should not hear. But if your business is private, she will wait in the kitchen till you have done.

ELI. Yes, it would be best. So clear out my girl, till I have done.

MYRTLE. Do you wish it Uncle? (IGNORING ELI.)

REV. T. Yes dear – yes.

MYRTLE. (PASSING ELI PROUDLY WITH A LOOK OF DEFIANCE) Very well.

(EXIT MYRTLE R.)

ELI. Ah, you hold your head darned high now – will you be so mighty stuck up in half an hour – I doubt it – I doubt it.

REV. T. Well, Eli, to business. What has brought you here at this time of night?

ELI. We've had a meeting at the Chapel.

REV. T. Without me.

ELI. Yes, without you. I suppose the Deacons and Elders have got a right to call a meeting if they choose, without your interference.

REV. T. Of course they have the right. But they have never exercised it, in all the years I have been their Pastor.

ELI. Well, they have done so now.

REV. T. And what has transpired? I suppose you have come to inform me.

ELI. Well, it concerns Myrtle most. The morals of this village is hawful.

REV. T. I've heard you make that same remark before, and I have told you they are no worse than any other community. But what reason could the Deacons have to hold a meeting about my niece Myrtle?

ELI. Ah, I thought I'd tell you first, and break it gently as it were.

REV. T. Well, speak out like a man, and stop beating about the bush. They've had a meeting about Myrtle – for what reason?

ELI. She's summoned to appear before the congregation tomorrow.

REV. T. (DAZED) She's summoned before the congregation. Why man, why?

ELI. To declare the name of the father of her unborn child.

REV. T. (STANDS FOR A SECOND DUMB, THEN RAISES HIS HAND AS IF TO STRIKE ELI) What – you ---

ELI. (COWERS) Hold hard Minister – curb your wrath. I'm only the bearer of this message.

REV. T. Who – who is the villain who has dared to make this foul accusation – as vile as it is false –

ELI. Is it ----

REV. T. What, do you dare to say you believe a word of it?

ELI. I only believe what others know for certain.

REV. T. What – repeat that again if you dare, and old man as I am I'll stretch you lifeless at my feet.

ELI. There – there – she bain't no worse than many others in the village.

REV. T. Be silent on your life.

ELI. I'm only trying to give you a word of comfort.

REV. T. I don't need your comfort.

ELI. You can make a good thing out of it, if the father be the one we suspect.

REV. T. Be silent.

ELI. Old Squire Wildmarsh will pay up handsomely sooner than have his son's name dragged in the mire with hers. Why, we could make him give us the freehold of the Chapel, and hold the whip hand over him as long as he lives.

REV. T. You hound. You blackmailing scoundrel. If my Myrtle was in trouble, which I say is false, do you think I'd touch one penny of the money brought by her

shame, or would stay one instant in a Chapel got by such means, to minister the word of God to a pack of hypocrites like you?

ELI. Fine words Minister. I wonder if you'll speak so brave when we've forced the confession from her tomorrow.

REV. T. Out of my house, you crawling viper, that I have cherished to my breast. Out of my house, I say!

ELI. When I have delivered my message to your niece.

REV. T. I will do that – and I can give you your answer now – the charge is false – false as Hell – false as the foul minded creatures that dared to make it. Go.

ELI. But ---

REV. T. Go.

(ELI LOOKS AT HIM SNEERINGLY, THEN EXITS L. SLAMMING DOOR AFTER HIM.)

REV. T. (SINKS INTO SEAT) Father in Heaven, it is not for us to judge Thy handiwork. But Thy children's faith is tried when they behold some of the vile reptiles Thou hast made to crawl this earth.

(ENTER MYRTLE R. TIMIDLY.)

MYRTLE. I heard the door slam, Uncle. Has he gone?

REV. T. Yes, and please God it will be many a long day before he dares to cross my threshold again. Myrtle my dear, come here. Oh, how can I tell you the cruel message he has brought for you -- Though it is better you should hear it from the lips of one who loves and trusts you, than from his.

MYRTLE. (IN FEAR) What has he said?

REV. T. You are summoned to meet the congregation tomorrow.

MYRTLE. Oh Uncle.

REV. T. There, be brave dear - I shall be with you, by your side to hear you answer your accusers and deny their charge.

MYRTLE. Their charge – what charge?

REV. T. Oh, how can I say it – Oh, forgive me dear that I should have to speak the words – but the accusation is made – and you must hear it. They say – that you – are – about – to become – a - mother.

MYRTLE. (SINKS ON HER KNEES WITH A MOAN OF ANGUISH.)

REV. T. There – there – be brave dear – never heed the foul breath of scandal – but face it boldly and deny it. Look your accusers in the eye, and strong in the knowledge of your strength and innocence. Give them the lie direct.

MYRTLE. (ALMOST IN A WHISPER) What if I cannot deny it?

REV. T. What? (STAGGERS INTO SEAT) You mean ----

MYRTLE. Oh, can't you understand?

REV. T. For God's sake child, speak – speak and end this torment of fear that is seizing me. You mean ---

MYRTLE. I mean that what they say is true. Before many weeks have passed I shall become a mother.

REV. T. What – merciful God – have I lived to hear you say it – But by Heaven if you must suffer, so shall he. (SEIZING HER WRIST) His name – his name – I say – tell me the villain's name.

MYRTLE. Forgive me Uncle, I cannot tell – I have sworn an oath – an oath before Heaven – that I would not reveal his name, and I must keep it.

END OF SCENE 4.

41.

SCENE 5.

SAME AS SCENE 1.

ELI DISCOVERED OUTSIDE CHAPEL.

(A SUPER ENTERS L.U.E. AND CROSSES TO CHAPEL.)

ELI. Ah Master Walter, it is a sad business, a sad business, so young, and yet so frail. Ah, the morals of this village is hawful.

(SUPER ENTERS CHAPEL.)

Bah, and a pretty lot they care – but I do – yes, the Minister nearly laid his hands on me last night, and he shall suffer for it – aye, I'll see him humiliated to the very dust, as all who uphold the Scarlet Woman of Babylon should be.

(ENTER ANOTHER SUPER FROM L. TO CHAPEL.)

Ah, Master James, come to see the pitiful sight – sad – sad. And to think our poor Minister should have cherished such a serpent in his bosom – not but he let her have her way too much, and let her run wild. A judgement on him - you'll find a good seat right up in the front – goodday.

(SUPER ENTERS CHAPEL.)

Yes Pastor Probyn – I've been a very humble man and worshipped under you – But I triumph today.

(ENTER MAJOR STILL AS A SOLDIER, BUT SMARTENED UP.)

Ah, another man of blood, come to corrupt the morals of the village.

MAJOR. I say my good fellow, is there a pub in this beastly hole?

ELI. I never drink.

MAJOR. By Jove, you must be thirsty – well I do – so can you tell me where I can get one?

ELI. My friend – pause – pause – before you proceed on the path of damnation. Every time you cross the threshold of a public house, you enter the gates of Hell.

MAJOR. Yes, but they darn well chuck you out again at half past two, so what's it matter?

ELI. Drink is a curse.

MAJOR. And to go thirsty is a damn side bigger one.

ELI. I see you are a man of blood.

MAJOR. You're a liar.

ELI. Those who live by the sword, shall perish by the sword.

MAJOR. (LOOKS AT HIM FOR A MOMENT, PUZZLED) I say my friend, this is the village of Stapylmoor, isn't it?

ELI. Yes, why?

MAJOR. Because I was beginning to think it was Colney Hatch or Bedlam, judging from the damn queer specimens I've met since I came here – But can you tell me where Squire Wildmarsh lives?

ELI. Ah, another son of evil.

MAJOR. Really, this is getting quite interesting, is there anyone respectable at all about the place?

ELI. Alas no – except Eli Hagson the grocer.

MAJOR. Really – I should like to meet this delightful specimen – They ought to put him on a film, and show him in a picture palace.

ELI. There ain't no picture palaces here, or any other abode of sin – the Lord be praised – except the Church.

MAJOR. Well, look here my good man, I'm Squire Wildmarsh's son's Batman – I brought his luggage in advance, and I want to find the old boy to see what I'm to do with it.

ELI. What, Master Sidney coming home?

MAJOR. Yes, on the express – he'll be here in less than half an hour.

ELI. Oh, the Lord be praised for His mercies – What a scene – what a scene.

MAJOR. Oh, so you'll be glad to see him back eh?

ELI. Glad to see him back – not I – let him rot.

MAJOR. I say, you're a cheerful Johnny, don't you know?

ELI. But it will be worth a week's profit to see his face when all the village points the finger of scorn at him, as the father of the woman's child, who is about to confess her shame in there, in the House of God.

MAJOR. (ASIDE) Hallo, so Private Wildmarsh was not the paragon of all virtues that we took him for out there.

ELI. So he's coming home is he? Well – well. It will be a judgement on him for all his sins. The Lord be praised that I have lived to see it.

(EXIT INTO CHAPEL.)

MAJOR. Well, that's a nice tender hearted old party, I don't think. I'm afraid, Ned my boy, you'll find yourself in a little bit of trouble you didn't look for – I must put him on his guard – And now to find a blessed pub, I suppose there must be one about the place. Dear old dismal Johnny there didn't colour his proboscis on Sherbert.

(EXIT MAJOR R.U.E. ENTER REV. T. FROM MANSE.)

REV. T. Come, dear, come – you must face the ordeal bravely. It will soon be over, and then we will leave this place of backbiters and hypocrites forever.

(ENTER MYRTLE IN BLACK.)

There dear, there – bear up, I shall be by your side, and we will face their scorn together.

MYRTLE. But why should my sorrow bring this shame upon you as well? Why should you leave the house where you have laboured all these years, through me – let me go away and suffer alone.

REV. T. What – shall I turn my back upon the little motherless one that I have reared, almost since a baby – No dear, we have clung together, in good fortune and ill, and we will still cling together till that great reaper, death, calls me to meet the Master I have served.

MYRTLE. Oh, if I could only speak and tell you all – I am not as guilty as you think, believe me I am not – Someday the seal of silence will be taken from my lips, and then those cruel hearts that are waiting in there to witness my so-called shame will hide their heads in sorrow for what they have done.

REV. T. Won't you speak now dear, and let me confront them with the truth?

MYRTLE. I cannot – I have sworn an oath, and I must keep it. But were it not for the shame that I am bringing on you, I would face it bravely, without a qualm.

(ENTER SQUIRE WILDMARSH.)

SQUIRE. Oh, so there you are – I've been looking for you for some days now – I want a word with you.

REV. T. Some other time, Sir. I have weightier matters to attend to at the moment.

SQUIRE. Some other time won't do - by the Lord Harry, you'll hear me, here and now.

REV. T. I tell you Sir, I am needed in the Chapel. (HE MOVES TOWARDS CHAPEL.)

SQUIRE. (COMING DOWN BETWEEN HIM AND THE CHAPEL) Your pack of Jack rangers and Psalmsmiters can wait. In the first place another year's rent will soon be due, and I want it on the nail.

REV. T. It will be paid – my Flock have seen to that.

SQUIRE. Well mind it is. – And in the second – my son is coming home today.

MYRTLE. (ASIDE) Coming home! Oh Heaven, I thank Thee for Thy mercy.

SQUIRE. And I warn you to keep that hussy of a niece of yours out of his way – I'll not have her setting her cap at him again as she did before – By God if I catch them together again – as there is a Heaven above – I'll horsewhip you and her out of the village – Do you hear –

REV. T. I hear.

SQUIRE. And you had best obey – or by the Lord Harry, I shall keep my word.

REV. T. There is no need to use these threats to me, Squire – Neither I nor my niece will ever cross your son's path again. Today, we leave this village, for ever.

SQUIRE. And a good job too. (X. TO L.)

(RE-ENTER ELI.)

ELI. Oh, there you be – the congregation be getting impatient at you keeping them waiting like this – Is this the way for a Pastor to treat his flock?

REV. T. (WITH DIGNITY) I know my duties as a Pastor – Remember yours as Deacon. (TO MYRTLE) Come dear, are you ready?

MYRTLE. (ASIDE) Sidney coming home! (TO REV. T.) Ready yes, and willing to face them now, with a brave heart. For in a few short hours from now, the truth can be spoken without fear to the whole world.

(EXIT MYRTLE AND REV. T. INTO CHAPEL, ELI FOLLOWING.)

SQUIRE. Hagson you crawling hypocrite, come here.

ELI. They need me in the Chapel, Squire. There is something going on I mustn't miss.

SQUIRE. I wonder if they'll need you so much tomorrow, my good man.

ELI. What do you mean, Squire?

SQUIRE. Information has been sworn against you for profiteering.

ELI. (IN ALARM) Oh, good Heavens!

SQUIRE. And selling goods above the controlled price. I've signed the warrant – you come before me in the morning, and by the Lord Harry, I'll make you disgorge some of your ill-gotten gains. (EXIT.)

ELI. (IN FEAR AND RAGE) Who's done it – who's done it – by Heaven I'll find out – and they shall suffer – by God they shall. There's hardly a soul in the parish that doesn't owe me money – and I'll have it from 'em all – aye, to the last

46.

farthing, or I'll sell 'em up, all of 'em, lock , stock and barrel. Oh, the morals of this village is hawful.

(REV. T.'S VOICE HEARD IN CHURCH READING, AND AMEN
FROM ALL.)

Ah, they've started, and I mustn't miss the scene – but somehow now I shan't relish it half as much as I expected.

(EXIT ELI INTO CHAPEL. RE-ENTER MAJOR.)

MAJOR. By Gad, they are making some preparations to welcome the prodigal son at the Hall – Banners on the Lodge gates. Flags on the Hall – and I heard the Squire tell some Johnny to set the Joy Bells ringing. Rum old cock. I wonder how Ned will get on with him – he glared at me as if I was a blessed walrus. I wonder what they would all say if they only knew that the hero they are going to welcome was Ned Henderson, the jewel thief. Would they kill the fatted calf or me?

(ENTER SQUIRE.)

SQUIRE. Ah, there you are my man – why are you not down at the station waiting for my son?

MAJOR. Because I see enough of him as it is.

SQUIRE. Get along with you, and attend to his things.

MAJOR. Here – who are you ordering about – you're worse than a blooming Sergeant Major, you are.

SQUIRE. Damn you man, do you hear me?

MAJOR. Now stop it Clarence – that's not the way for one gentleman to speak to another.

SQUIRE. (FROWNING) Gentleman indeed.

47.

MAJOR. (MOCK HEROIC) Yes, gentleman indeed – and let me tell you, there are as fine gentlemen in the Army as never went into it. And it isn't only a ragged shirt as covers a soldier's back.

(LOUD CHEERING IN THE DISTANCE.)

MAJOR. They're off – 6 to 4 the field.

SQUIRE. What the devil are you talking about?

MAJOR. Here they come round the bend – he's leading – wins it – a walkover – here he is – hurrah! (COD WORK UP.)

SQUIRE. What the devil are you driving at?

MAJOR. Your son of course – Private James Wildmarsh.

(ENTER NED HENDERSON – GRASPS MAJOR'S HAND.)

NED. That's alright MAJOR – passed muster with the clod poles, where's the old man?

MAJOR. (POINTING OVER HIS SHOULDER) There, and Gawd help you, he's mustard.

(NED TURNS AND LOOKS AT SQUIRE.)

SQUIRE. (EAGERLY) James my boy.

NED. Father. (THEY SHAKE HANDS.)

MAJOR. Gawd, if he only knew.

SQUIRE. Welcome home my boy – welcome home.

NED. Ah, it's good to be in Blighty once again.

SQUIRE. We parted in anger James, but that's all forgotten, eh my boy?

NED. Of course it is – I'm home again now to have a real good time.

SQUIRE. And so you shall, my boy – so you shall. But one thing, no more philandering with the Chapel folk – or their women folk – Promise me that – for by the Lord Harry I won't stand it.

NED. Certainly not Sir.

SQUIRE. That's my boy.

MAJOR. (ASIDE TO NED) Go on, now's your time, touch him for a bit. I'm nearly broke, and as dry as 'Eil.

NED. Shut up you fool.

SQUIRE. Well come along my boy – the tenants are all waiting at the Lodge to welcome you – we'll make a real day of it.

(SHOUTS OF SHAME, TURN HER OUT ETC. FROM THE CHAPEL.)

NED. Why, what the devil's that?

SQUIRE. Only those damned Methodists again – Another year and I shall be clear of them.

(ENTER MYRTLE FROM CHAPEL WITH REV. T. FOLLOWED BY ELI AND SUPERS, POINTING AT HER.)

ELI. Then turn her out friends – turn her out – The House of God is no place for sinners.

SUPERS. Shame on her – shame.

REV. T. Where else should a sinner seek repentance, but in the House of God?

ELI. Bah – down with her – drive her out of the village.

SUPERS. Down with her – (THEY MAKE A MOVEMENT TOWARDS HER.)

REV. T. Hold – Let him that is without sin amongst you, cast the first stone.

SQUIRE. Stop – what is the meaning of this scene?

ELI. Look Squire – the Scarlet Woman of Babylon has brought shame on the congregation of the Lord – Let her tell us the father of her child.

MYRTLE. (WHO HAS BEEN COWERING DOWN, HAS RISEN, SEES NED) James, at last, thank Heaven. You have asked me who is the father of my child – I can speak it now without fear – my HUSBAND.

OMNES. Husband!

ELI. Husband – who is he?

MYRTLE. He is here – James Wildmarsh.

OMNES. What – husband – etc.

NED. Good God.

SQUIRE. What, is this woman mad? – It can't be true – James lad – James – tell her she lied.

NED. Of course she does – what can the woman mean – she is not my wife.

MYRTLE. What --- oh James – James you can't deny it!

NED. I do indeed, the woman lies.

MYRTLE. (TURNS AWAY INTO REV. T.'S ARMS) Oh.

SQUIRE. I see it all, this is some cunning trick of you and your psalmingsingers gang, to bring disgrace upon my son. But by the Lord Harry, it won't succeed with me.

ELI. Nor with any of us – eh friends?

OMNES. No – no.

MYRTLE. (APPEALING) James – James – what has happened to you? Can you deny I am your wife – can you deny this ring? (TAKES RING FROM NECK) Oh, by the love you bore me, you cannot look me in the face, and do it.

NED. (FACING HER) I do deny it – you are not my wife.

MYRTLE. (LOOKING AT HIM HARD FOR A MOMENT, THEN RECOILING) No, he is right, I am not his wife – for he is not James Wildmarsh.

PICTURE.

SCENE 6.

(JERRY GOSLIN'S CYCLIST'S REST.

A VERY PRETTY COUNTRY COTTAGE GARDEN ON A MAIN ROAD LEADING OUT OF LONDON. BACK CLOTH. A TURNPIKE ROAD WINDING AWAY WITH A FEW COTTAGES IN THE DISTANCE. CUT CLOTH R. CARRY ON OF COTTAGE. L. PART SHADY TREES. COTTAGE BUILT ON FROM CUT CLOTH R. WITH CREEPER AND PLENTY OF FLOWERS. ACROSS BACK LOW WALL WITH GATE C. TREE WINGS L. ADVERTS – TEAS PROVIDED – LEMONADE – ETC. ON COTTAGE GARDEN SEAT L.C. TABLE AND GARDEN CHAIRS R.C.)

(ENTER JERRY FROM COTTAGE.)

JERRY. 'Ere's a nice blooming country for any chap to come 'ome on leave to – no bacon – no butter – and about as much meat as would feed a canary – and when you goes to the boozer to try and drown your sorrows, the only bit of comfort you get, is a blessed label No Beer. I wish I was back in peace and comfort in the trenches – And they calls it Merry England. How can one be merry on lemonade, and ginger beer? By Gawd I'll give Fritz one for this when I get back, and not 'arf.

(ENTER SALLY WITH BASKET THROUGH GATE C.)

JERRY. 'Ello, where have you been?

SALLY. Down at Houndslow, standing in a queue.

JERRY. Lor lummy, have women taken to billiards now, as well as wearing trousers?

SALLY. No, you don't understand – a queue.

JERRY. I know well enough what a cue is stupid, a thing you pots the red with.

SALLY. I don't mean that sort of cue.

JERRY. Well, what sort do you mean? I don't believe you know what a cue is.

SALLY. Yes I do – a queue is a – sort of a – well a queue.

JERRY. Very clear.

SALLY. A queue is a sort of a thing – where you stand in a line, with a policeman treading on your toes, where you gets your ‘at knocked off – your pockets picked – catches pneumonia – tells your past life – loses your doorkey – and in the end gets half an ounce of margarine.

JERRY. How interesting – new sort of war game I suppose – Well, what have you got for dinner – I’m fair famished.

SALLY. Two Oxo cubes – and a carrot.

JERRY. What? (COLLAPSES INTO GARDEN SEAT.)

SALLY. You can’t have nothing else, this is a meatless day.

JERRY. It’s been a blooming meatless day every day since I come home.

SALLY. Well, what are you grouching at – You had half a pig’s tail the day before yesterday – to ‘ear you talk one would think you was a blooming glutton.

JERRY. That’s enough, I won’t have you swear at me, as well as starve me – Give me my pack and ‘elmet, I’m going back to the trenches, they ‘ave got some grub there – I don’t mind being swore at by the Sergeant Major, but I’ll be hanged if I’ll let my wife do it – give me my pack.

SALLY. Jerry – oh Jerry – what’s the matter – where are you going?

JERRY. Out of my way woman.

SALLY. (CLINGING TO HIM) I ain’t a woman (CRYING) Oh Jerry –

JERRY. Well find me something to eat, or I shall expire.

SALLY. I’ve got nothing but the sweets in the shop, and some bread and jam.

JERRY. What sort of jam – if you say plum and apple, I’ll brain you.

SALLY. No dear, it’s strawberry.

JERRY. Well that’s better – come along – but I never thought I should live to come to Hingland and sigh for a lump of Bully or a tin of Machonicie Hash. (PUTS HIS ARM ROUND HER) ‘Ere, how many more days does my leave last?

SALLY. Six.

JERRY. What – why I shall be medically unfit before my time is up, and get discharged, and have to stay at home and starve. (SINGS) Oh what a happy land is England.

(EXIT INTO COTTAGE WITH SALLY.

ENTER SQUIRE AND MAJOR GATE C.)

SQUIRE. Here's a seat here – we can sit down.

MAJOR. But it's somebody else's garden.

SQUIRE. (SITTING) What does that matter – now listen to me – this extravagance has got to stop – three times his account at Cox's has been overdrawn, and I've had to put it right. But for the last time, do you hear, for the last time.

MAJOR. Yes my lord Squire - I hear.

SQUIRE. He's a very different fellow to what he was before he went away.

MAJOR. Yes, the Army is a bit of an eye opener to some young chaps, ain't it?

SQUIRE. Eye opener – it's an operation – but it's got to stop, and you can tell him so from me – What the devil does he spend his money on?

MAJOR. He do make it fly – just as a real gentleman should.

SQUIRE. Gentleman – damn it sir – to be a spendthrift is no qualification for a gentleman – that's all I've got to say – now you can go, and tell them to get the trap ready to take me to the station.

MAJOR. Yes Sir. (GOES TO GATE.)

SQUIRE. Oh, and one thing more. (MAJOR COMES BACK.) Tell him I'm annoyed – damned annoyed that he wasn't here to meet me.

MAJOR. Yes, I'll tell him you were damned annoyed.

SQUIRE. Don't swear sir – get out.

MAJOR. Yes Sir. (GOING AGAIN.)

SQUIRE. Oh, and another thing. (MAJOR COMES BACK.) Where the devil is he?

MAJOR. I don't know Sir.

SQUIRE. Why don't you know?

MAJOR. Because I don't, Sir – he often goes out up to London in the afternoon.

SQUIRE. You're a fool.

MAJOR. And you're a fine old English gentleman, Sir.

SQUIRE. Get out.

MAJOR. Yes, Sir. (HE GOES TO GATE.)

SQUIRE. Oh, and one other matter ---

MAJOR. Yes Sir?

SQUIRE. I – I – there – there, get down to the inn and order the trap – and don't stand fooling there.

MAJOR. Yes, Sir. (GOES TO GATE, PAUSES) no more false starts, we're off. (EXIT MAJOR.)

SQUIRE. Over two thousand pounds in four months – I'll not put up with it – he shall live within his allowance – son, or no son – officer or no officer.

(ENTER SALLY.)

SALLY. Tea, or Lemingade, Sir?

SQUIRE. Eh?

SALLY. Tea, or Lemingade?

SQUIRE. Get out.

SALLY. Well of all the blessed cheek, to order me out of my own garden. (GOES TO COTTAGE AND CALLS) Jerry – Jerry, here's a blooming lunatic from 'Anwell escaped his keeper – get your gun and shoot him.

(ENTER JERRY.)

JERRY. 'Ello Sally – what's the trouble – Why bless my 'eart if it ain't the Squire.

SQUIRE. Hello my man, you know me?

JERRY. Yes Sir – don't you remember me – Jerry Goslin, who used to work on your estate.

SQUIRE. Why, bless my soul, so it is – how the army has improved you.

SALLY. It ain't the army Sir – it's married life.

SQUIRE. Well, I'm glad to see you lad – here's a sovereign for you. (GIVES HIM NOTE.)

JERRY. Thank you sir, but what can I buy with it – There ain't no beer, or meat, worse luck.

SQUIRE. Then buy the baby a present.

SALLY. Oh sir.

JERRY. We haven't got one.

SQUIRE. Well, when it comes along.

JERRY. Thank you Squire, I will – How's Mr. James Sir, doing fine I hope?

SQUIRE. Going to the dogs, damn him – the dogs.

JERRY. And how's all at Stapylmoor – Mr. Probyn and Miss Myrtle?

SQUIRE. How dare you mention that brazen hussy to me – or her confounded uncle – they tried to blackmail me – yes, blackmail me – but I was too clever for them – a jolly side too clever for them – And they've cleared out of the village, and gone the devil knows where.

JERRY. Blackmail you, Sir – I don't believe it.

SQUIRE. What –

JERRY. Mr. Probyn, or Miss Myrtle wouldn't harm a fly.

SQUIRE. How dare you contradict me – I tell you they did – And I ought to know. (AT GATE) So good day to you, and if you want to get on in this world, you'll learn to mind your own business and not contradict your betters.

(EXIT SQUIRE THROUGH GATE.)

JERRY. Mind my own business, yes I will – There's something going on that I don't understand – I wrote to Master James saying I was coming home on leave, but he never answered it – I wired to the Pastor, but it was returned. Master James loved Miss Myrtle with all his heart, and yet the Squire said she tried to blackmail him. There's some mystery going on – and by Jove, I'm going to find out what it is.

SALLY. Hello, what are you muttering to yourself about?

JERRY. Never you mind – I'm going to shut up shop for the afternoon as we've got nothing to sell, and take a run to Stapylmoor.

(EXIT INTO COTTAGE.)

SALLY. What's the matter with him now? Going off his rocker I should think. They say soldiers is often took like that – comes from living in the trenches.

(ENTER MAJOR AT BACK OF GATE.)

MAJOR. Hello my dear - got anything to drink – the pub's shut up, and I'm as dry as an orstritch.

SALLY. We've got Lemingade and gingerbeer.

MAJOR. Lemonade and gingerbeer – oh well, anything to wash the dust out of my throat. (COMES THROUGH GATE.)

SALLY. Hello Mister, I think I've seen your face before.

MAJOR. I've carried in front for a good many years.

SALLY. I know you – you're the Major.

MAJOR. Ah – discovered – I knew my rank was bound to tell even through my private uniform.

SALLY. (DRAMATICALLY) Yes, there's many a dishonest heart beats beneath a khaki jacket.

MAJOR. Dishonest – can it be possible that you suspect me?

SALLY. I don't suspect, I know – where's the bill you owes my muvver?

MAJOR. Oh yes, the William – the little Willie.

SALLY. Yes – the two pounds and sevenpence 'apenny you owes my poor old muvver – where is it?

MAJOR. Well, really, I haven't got it on me.

SALLY. Well, I means to have it or know the reason why.

(MAJOR MOVES TOWARDS GATE, SHE INTERCEPTS HIM.)

SALLY. Oh no you don't – CALLS) Jerry – Jerry!

JERRY. (OFF) Hello – what is it?

SALLY. Here's the blooming Major.

JERRY. (OFF) What, the Sergeant Major – well tell him to go and fry his face in dripping – he can't touch me now, I'm on leave. (ENTER JERRY) What, Montmorency Trevosper, well I'm blowed.

MAJOR. Private Goslin – how do you do dear boy?

SALLY. Oh, you knows him, do you?

JERRY. Knows him, of course I does – he's one of ours.

SALLY. Nice company you keeps in them blessed trenches, I don't think.

JERRY. Why, what's the trouble?

SALLY. He owes my muvver a bill for eighteen months.

JERRY. Well, I hopes you get it – he's owed me two packets of Woodbines for nearly a year. What are you doing here old son?

MAJOR. I'm assisting Mr. James Wildmarsh in the menial capacity of Batman to train for his commission, at the barracks up the road.

JERRY. What, is Mr. James here? Hurrah – he will be pleased to see me.

MAJOR. (ASIDE) I don't think.

JERRY. Sally, we won't go to Stapylmoor after all, but up to that blessed barracks to see a friend. (TO MAJOR) You cut along old 'oss and tell him we're coming, and for the love of glory see if you can't find something in the canteen in the way of a decent feed – I'm nearly starving.

MAJOR. (ASIDE) This will mean trouble if they meet, I'll get along and warn Ned, and if he's home from London, I'll pack him back again. (ALOUD) Right you are, Jerry my boy, I'll tell him at once – my word he will be glad to see you.

SALLY. 'Ere, what about my muvver's bill?

JERRY. Oh, that's alright – if he can't pay it I will. Get on old son, and don't forget to have some grub ready.

MAJOR. (AT GATE) Right oh Jerry my boy – Ta Ta Mrs. Goslin – and if anything should happen to your old man at the front – well just keep me in mind for number two. (EXIT MAJOR.)

SALLY. (SHOUTING AFTER HIM) Not if you was hung with pearls and rubies. You blooming bilker.

JERRY. Come along Sally old girl – come in and clean yourself up, we’re going visiting to as fine a gentleman as ever lived. Why, I’m so blooming happy, I could eat the Kaiser with pickles.

(EXIT INTO COTTAGE.)

(PATHETIC MUSIC. ENTER MYRTLE CARRYING BABY, AND REV. T. BOTH VERY SHABBY AND WAYWORN.)

MYRTLE. Come along dear, you can rest here in the shade, and perhaps I may be able to buy some milk for baby.

REV. T. How far is it now to London?

MYRTLE. About twelve miles I think. After a little rest you will feel much stronger, and we should be able to reach it before the night sets in.

REV. T. (SINKING ON SEAT) Oh, it has been a weary tramp, and how bravely you have borne it.

MYRTLE. There – there, don’t talk about it, it is nearly over now, and once in London I shall be able to find some work to tide us over till better days shall dawn.

REV. T. Better days – how far ahead they seem – and how far behind seems all the peace and happiness we used to know.

MYRTLE. And I have brought it all upon you. But for me you would still have been amongst those who loved and trusted you. Happy and contented – sometimes I long to die, until I look into your dear face my little one (TO BABY) and then you seem to give me new courage to fight on – and there is something in your eyes that tells me that all this sorrow will one day pass, and there will be peace and happiness once more for me. With the Joy Bells ringing once more at Stapylmoor. (SHE CROSSES TO DOOR OF COTTAGE AND KNOCKS.)

SALLY. (OFF) Hello, what do you want?

MYRTLE. Please can you sell me a little milk?

SALLY. (OFF) Milk – no, we’re not allowed to sell it except to --- (ENTER SALLY) Why, my dear, how ill and worn you look, and a baby too. (MYRTLE STAGGERS.) Why, what’s the matter? (SHE TAKES HER IN HER ARMS AND LEADS HER TO SEAT.) There – sit down there – you will be alright in a moment.

- MYRTLE. If you would please let me have a little milk for baby –
- SALLY. Of course I will – And something for yourself and the old gentleman as well – he seems well nigh done. (TAKES TABLECLOTH AND SPREADS IT ON TABLE.)
- MYRTLE. He is my uncle, he's not been well of late, and we have tramped many miles today.
- SALLY. Then you shall have a good long rest, and we'll see what we can do to set you on your feet again. (CALLS) Jerry – Jerry – hurry up you blockhead – come and make yourself useful – there's customers.
- JERRY. (OFF) Coming – coming – but mind you mustn't serve them with more than an once and a half of cake. Remember the Food Controller's orders.
- SALLY. Oh blow the Food Controller – hurry up.
- MYRTLE. Thank you, you're very kind, but we must not rest long, we have to reach London before dark.

(ENTER JERRY.)

- JERRY. Now then, what's this blooming fuss about? (SEES MYRTLE) God bless my soul – Miss Myrtle.
- MYRTLE. Jerry.
- JERRY. And Pastor Probyn too – well, well, I am so pleased. (SHAKING BOTH THEIR HANDS WARMLY) But what's the matter – how ill you look – and how –
- REV. T. And how shabby – don't be afraid to say it – the hand of fortune has dealt heavily with us of late.
- JERRY. Sall, you remember Miss Myrtle and the Minister's house there in Stapylmoor?
- SALLY. Of course I does – I thought I knew their faces.
- JERRY. Well then, bustle about and get them something to eat.

(SALLY EXITS.)

And now tell me sir, what has brought you to this part?

REV. T. We're on our way to London – our money has almost gone.

JERRY. You mean to say you're walking it?

REV. T. Yes, and we must reach there before nightfall or we shall be too late to find a shelter.

JERRY. That you shall not – at least not tonight. We've room enough to put you up, and you shall stay with us until you're fit to take the road again.

REV. T. I knew the Lord would not desert us in the hour of our need.

JERRY. But tell me sir, what has brought you to this?

MYRTLE. I have.

JERRY. You?

MYRTLE. Yes – I was secretly married to Squire Wildmarsh's son, and fearing his father's anger I promised to keep silent till he gave me leave to speak. But when the man who calls himself James Wildmarsh came back from the war, he would not acknowledge me, and said I lied.

JERRY. The man who calls himself James Wildmarsh – what can you mean?

MYRTLE. That the man who returned to Stapylmoor as the Squire's son, was not my husband. We had to leave our home, and afterwards the birth of my little one took all the store of money that we had, and now we are making our way to London on foot, to try and find employment to support us in our misery.

JERRY. You are neither of you fit to face the struggle, and for the present you shall stay here with Sally – I knew there was a mystery somewhere, and I'm going to find it out. So you come in with us. It isn't much of a place to boast of, but it shall be your home, yours, and your Uncle's (PASSING HER TO COTTAGE) until we have unmasked an impostor, or forced James Wildmarsh to acknowledge you his wife.

(EXIT MYRTLE.)

REV. T. (CROSSING TO COTTAGE) The Lord will reward you my lad, for your kindness to the homeless.

60.

(EXIT REV. T.)

JERRY. I knew something was going to happen today, I spilt the salt at breakfast, and I saw a cross-eyed beggar on the road. Now what's to be done – I know, I'll .
go up to the barracks and confront the so-called James Wildmarsh, or make him suffer, as this poor girl has done.

(EXIT INTO COTTAGE.)

(ENTER JAMES SLOWLY LEANING ON STICK. IN KHAKI, WITH A HOSPITAL BLUE BAND ON HIS ARM.)

JAMES. What place is this, and where am I? – There's shade at least here from the sun. (SITS ON SEAT.) Discharged, unfit for further service. The whole wild world before me to take my choice from – but without a name, without a friend, a home. My mind is a blank – no past – no future – to look forward to. Oh God in Heaven who am I – is there nowhere in this great bright world, a heart that beats in love for me – in your mercy restore my memory – and leave me not to wander forever on the highways of life – unknown – unloved. They called me by some strange name back there in the hospital, but it was not mine – that at least I know – I have tried to think for hours together and recall the past – but it was all no use – a heavy weight is pressing on my brain, and shuts the past off like some great black wall, between me and my identity. Heaven be merciful to all poor souls like me. (BURIES HIS FACE IN HIS HANDS.)

(ENTER MYRTLE FROM COTTAGE.)

MYRTLE. Oh, I must breathe the fresh air for a moment – To thank Heaven alone for its great mercy – to thank the Heavenly Father for guiding our weary footsteps to this place, where in the blackest moments of our despair, we have found friends to succour us. (SHE SLOWLY WALKS UP TO THE GATE AS SHE IS SPEAKING, NOT SEEING JAMES.) Can it be that a new life is beginning for us, that after all, there may be some happiness left in life for me? I still have

61.

my child to live and work for – And if I could only hear his dear voice calling to me again, Myrtle my wife!

(JAMES LOOKS UP AND STAGGERS TO HIS FEET.)

Even though it were from the grave I would be content.

(SHE IS NOW STANDING WITH HER BACK TO AUDIENCE
LOOKING OVER GATE.)

(JAMES LOOKS PUZZLED FOR A MOMENT AT HER, THEN HIS
MIND SEEMS TO CLEAR. HE SLOWLY HOLDS OUT HIS ARMS.)

JAMES. Myrtle (SOFTLY, SHE TURNS) Myrtle – my wife.

MYRTLE. (IN A GLAD VOICE) James!

(SHE RUNS INTO HIS ARMS, THEY EMBRACE. JERRY AND REV.
T. APPEAR AT DOOR OF COTTAGE.)

PICTURE.

(TAKE ACT DROP ON THIS, AND CALLS.)

SCENE 7.

A COUNTRY LANE NEAR STAPYLMOOR.

(ENTER ELI, MUCH MORE SHABBY THAN BEFORE.)

ELI. They are all going up to the Towers to indulge in the lusts of the flesh, to eat and drink their fill, and listen to the devil's music. To cheer and dance, and all for what? Because a son of Arrah is given a commission to lead men to shed each other's blood. Bah, the morals of this village is hawful. And I, because I tried to make an honest profit, am an outcast from it all – My trade ruined – my custom gone – even the Chapel is shut up, and they say I am the cause – curse them – curse them all, for the children of the devil.

(ENTER DETECTIVE BULMER.)

BULMER. Hello my friend, you seem to be enjoying yourself – cursing is a cheap occupation, but I notice it seldom harms the ones who're cursed, but often recoils upon the curser. Is this the way to Wildmarsh Towers?

ELI. Yes, that's the way, keep straight on. I suppose you're another fool who's going to feast and guzzle, because the Squire's son has been given a commission to slay his fellow men.

BULMER. I understand the young gent earned it for bravery on the field of battle – and if you call me a fool for wishing to see a hero honoured by his friends and neighbours – well I'm proud to say I am. But doesn't happen to be my business at the present moment – I'm a detective officer from Scotland Yard, and I'm here on business.

ELI. Oh indeed – well, well, I'm not surprised, the morals of this village is hawful – but might I ask –

BULMER. You might, but you would not be answered, so you can save your breath. And let me give you a word of advice my friend – you seem to be one of the men who are forever running down the brave lads who fight for us – be warned by me, and stop it. The country is getting a bit fed up with rogues and pacifists like you, and before long, if you're not careful, you will find yourself in queer street.

ELI. Oh, I meant no harm I'm sure.

63.

BULMER. No, your sort never do – but they do it all the same. So good day – that's the way to the Towers I think you said – I want to find the Squire.

ELI. Then you won't have to go to the Towers to find him, for here he comes.
(ASIDE) I wonder what he's after – I'd like to know, it may prove useful.

(EXIT ELI.)

BULMER. A pretty specimen for our lads to fight for – I never met one of his kidney, but my boot itches to kick him.

(ENTER SQUIRE R.)

BULMER. Good morning Sir – Squire Wildmarsh I believe – I should be glad of a few words with you – my card.

SQUIRE. (READING CARD) Inspector Bulmer of Scotland Yard. God bless my soul – what do you want with me?

BULMER. A very urgent and important matter – a cheque cashed at the Great Southern Bank just before closing time yesterday afternoon, for a large amount, bearing your signature.

SQUIRE. What?

BULMER. The signature was very good, and the cashier passed it, but later on noticing something wrong, examined it more closely when he discovered it to be, as he believes, a forgery. I was sent for and instructed to make enquiries at once. Here is the cheque Sir, (PRODUCING CHEQUE) do you acknowledge it?

SQUIRE. (LOOKING AT CHEQUE) £3,000!

BULMER. A large amount – is that your signature?

SQUIRE. Certainly not.

BULMER. That is enough Sir. The bank has instructed me to proceed at once and try and trace the forger.

SQUIRE. Yes, by Gad, proceed at once – run the scoundrel to earth. Get him convicted, and I'll double any reward the bank has offered you.

BULMER. Very well Sir, I will – I have one or two clues already that lead me to think I shall not be long in running down my man.

SQUIRE. I wish you luck – though I am sorry this should have happened on such a day – My son has been given a commission won by his bravery on the field. And I am proud of him. He is returning to the front tomorrow.

BULMER. Yes, I have heard the news Sir – and I congratulate you.

SQUIRE. Thank you. Ah, he's been a bit wild lately, but a good lad all the same. I suppose you won't have time to stay for the festivities?

BULMER. I'm afraid not Sir. I am expecting an important telegram that may recall me back to town. But if not, I may look in. Good day Sir.

(EXIT BULMER L.)

SQUIRE. Three thousand pounds. Gad, I wonder who the scoundrel is – by the Lord Harry I hope they don't take long in running him to earth, and sending him to a good stiff term of penal servitude.

(EXIT SQUIRE R. ENTER ELI L.)

ELI. So it's forgery is it? Who can it be I wonder – it might mean a good deal to me if I could find out – there's nobody about these parts who'd have the brains to tackle a job like that for such a large amount. But I'll keep my ears open all the same – there's no knowing what an old man with long ears may pick up, if he keeps them open wide enough.

(EXIT R. ENTER NED AND MAJOR L. NED IS NOW IN A SUB-LIEUTENANT'S UNIFORM, TROUSERS, NOT BREECHES.)

MAJOR. Don't do it Ned – don't do it. We don't want the old life over again, with damned dismal damp Portland always hanging over our heads.

NED. Shut up you fool - I've made all arrangements, and there's not the slightest risk.

MAJOR. Why can't you be content to remain here and play the gentleman in safety?

- NED. Because the old fool keeps me so short of money. Besides, do you think I'm anxious to go back to the front again tomorrow? Oh dear no – I'm going to make one bold coup – to make myself for life – and then lie low until the war is over.
- MAJOR. If it ever is over.
- NED. Now listen – I've got everything planned – a fast car will be waiting at the private gate to the park – if anyone sees it they'll think it belongs to one of the guests – Here is a key to the old man's safe – During the speechmaking everyone will be on the terrace listening to the old fool spouting – you will have the house to yourself – slip into the study, open the safe and there you are.
- MAJOR. Oh am I? – and where will you be?
- NED. On the terrace you fool with the others – You'll find the family jewels in the drawer to the left, and he always keeps a tidy sum in notes in the cashbox – get the swag to the car and wait for me.
- MAJOR. Oh dear – oh dear.
- NED. I'll join you as soon as possible, and before the things are missed – while the fools are talking and the joy bells are ringing – we shall be fifty miles on the road to Scotland.
- MAJOR. Yes, but if anything goes wrong, and we are nabbed, we shall be fifty miles on the road to Bow Street.
- NED. What's the matter with you man – you used to be a cool enough hand in the old days when there was work to be done. Here, living soft has spoiled your nerve.
- MAJOR. I don't know, Ned, but I don't like this job – How are we going to get rid of the stuff when we've got it?
- NED. Oh, the jewels can wait till the war is over.
- MAJOR. But how are we going to live in the meantime – we're not like the little dicky birds – we can't go and scratch for our food.
- NED. Oh, that's alright – I've seen to that – and it's one of the principal reasons why we must get away at once. I've forged the old man's name to a cheque for three thousand pounds.
- MAJOR. Oh Ned – now we are in the soup.
- NED. Shut up you fool, the forgery can't be discovered for a day or two. But now you see why we must get away.
- MAJOR. I see now – let's do a bunk at once.

(ENTER ELI AND LISTENS.)

- NED. What, without the jewels, not if I know it. Go and get a stiff glass of brandy, that will pull you together for the work, and in less than a couple of hours we shall be speeding up the Great North Road, with the diblets in our pockets. I'd give a bit to see the old Squire's face when he learns that his supposed son, and his faithful servant, are Ned Henderson and Ben Fields, alias the Major – Bank Forgers --
- MAJOR. and Jewel Thieves.
- ELI. (COMING BETWEEN THEM) Well I'm blessed!
- NED. What – the devil ---
- MAJOR. I knew it – we're diddled, dished, and done for.
- NED. Shut up you fool – Now my man, what do you mean by listening to our conversation?
- ELI. I'm not your man Mr. Forger. I know you now for what you are. You're not James Wildmarsh, but Ned Henderson, who the police have been searching for for years.
- NED. Oh I am, am I?
- ELI. Yes, and blest if I haven't had my suspicions for some time.
- NED. What do you mean, you old scoundrel?
- ELI. Well, the real James Wildmarsh used to buy his tobacco at my shop, for one thing, and for another, he used to be uncommon sweet on that girl Myrtle Probyn, and as like as not was married to her.
- NED. Well, granted that I am the man you say, what do you intend to do?
- ELI. My duty as Deacon of the Chapel is perfectly plain. I must inform the police.
- MAJOR. Come on Ned – let's do a scarper.
- NED. Hold your row - And what will you be the better off for that my friend? In the first place who would believe your word alone my friend – they don't trust you overmuch in the village – and in the second, I could wring your confounded neck before you could go a yard.
- ELI. Yes – there's a lot of truth in what you say.
- NED. On the other hand, it might pay you very well to keep your mouth shut.

ELI. Oh sir – I have a conscience.

NED. Well, I must be able to find a very soothing salve for it. (HE PRODUCES POCKET BOOK.) Now, what will you take to keep our secret? Say a hundred pounds?

ELI. I'll take that to hold me tongue – but what about my conscience?

NED. Damn your conscience.

ELI. It would be damned if I assist you in your scheme – so what do you say to another hundred pounds?

NED. What – you thieving old humbug!

MAJOR. Don't haggle Ned – don't haggle. We're in a hole, and we must pay to get out of it.

NED. Oh very well, there you are. (GIVES NOTES.) But I warn you, if you play me false – before the police can get me I'll cut you into mincemeat.

ELI. (SHUDDERING) Oh sir, don't talk like that – this makes me an accessory before the fact. And for my own sake I shall be as dumb as an oyster.

NED. Mind you are, or it will be the worse for you. Come along Major, we've got to get to work. And remember this, Mr. Eli Hagson, Deacon of the Chapel, play me false, and I'll slit your throat, if I wait twenty years. (EXIT R.)

MAJOR. Yes, and I'll cut you up, and fillet you with parsley. (EXIT R.)

ELI. What a nice pair of beauties – and how kindhearted – oh the morals of this village is awful.

(ENTER JERRY AND SALLY, SHE IS DRESSED IN HER SUNDAY BEST, WITH LARGE FEATHERS IN HER HAT, L.)

JERRY. Come along Sally, or we shall be late for the fun.

SALLY. Don't walk so fast, I'm all of a persification. How do I look?

JERRY. Top hole – you look like an ostrich farm and Covent Garden rolled into one.

SALLY. I want to make an impression – to give the country girls a shock.

JERRY. Shock – shell shock would be a fool to it – they'll take you for a bloomin' earthquake – Hello, here's old Eli Hagson and looking just as cheerful as usual.

ELI. What, Jerry Goslin – how do you do young man?

JERRY. None the better for seeing your old cheerful dial.

ELI. I suppose you are going to the fete?

JERRY. Then you suppose right – me and my wife.

ELI. Your wife – Allow me to congratulate you, young man. (OFFERS HIS HAND.)

JERRY. Don't touch it Sally – it will bring bad luck. It's as bad as walking under a ladder – falling downstairs on a Friday, and seeing a cross eyed man rolled into one.

ELI. Ah, you are not polite to a poor old man who has come down in the world.

JERRY. Come down in the world. I'm sorry to hear that. I always said you ought to go up in the world.

ELI. Thank you kindly.

JERRY. Yes, on the end of a rope! (BUSINESS OF HANGING.)

ELI. Oh, you're very funny, aren't you?

SALLY. Not half so funny as some things that grows in the country and walks about on two legs.

JERRY. Come along my girl, we've no time to stop talking to this old hypocrite. I've more important business to attend to.

SALLY. Business Jerry – what do you mean?

JERRY. They say the Squire is giving a feed to all his servants and I'm not going to miss it. I've gone hungry too long to lose this chance of filling up my controlled aria (POINTS TO HIS STOMACH.)

(EXIT JERRY AND SALLY R.)

ELI. Where young people gets their morals from nowadays passes my understanding, and them as comes from this village is the worst. Never mind, I've got enough now to clear out of this place, and shake its dust from my feet forever. (TAKES OUT NOTES.) Two Hundred Pounds in Bank of England notes. (CRACKLING THEM) How nice and soft they feel. Just enough to set me up in another village where nobody knows me. And where there's a decent Chapel. But I should want some capital as well.

(ENTER BULMER R.)

Now I wonder how much the Squire would pay me, if I put him on his guard against the little robbery those two are ----

BULMER. (LAYING HIS HAND ON HIS SHOULDER) Hello, you still here?

ELI. Who the devil --- (TRIES TO SLIP NOTES INTO HIS POCKET. BULMER IS TOO QUICK FOR HIM, CATCHES HIS WRIST.)

BULMER. Oh no you don't. (TAKES NOTES FROM HIM.) Hello, what have we got here?

ELI. (WHINING) They are mine, give them back to me.

BULMER. Oh, I'm not going to steal them. (TAKING OUT HIS POCKET BOOK) Rather a large sum of money for a man like you to carry about.

ELI. (STILL WHINING) I'm going to buy a little business, and I drew them out of the bank yesterday.

BULMER. (LOOKING AT POCKET BOOK) Yesterday, eh?

ELI. Yes, yesterday as ever was ---

BULMER. Indeed – then you must have drawn them from the Great Southern Bank in London. For these notes form part of the proceeds of a forgery.

ELI. What ---

BULMER. So, my friend, I arrest you for being a party to the forgery of Squire Wildmarsh's name, to a cheque for Three Thousand Pounds. (TAKING HIM BY THE COLLAR.) Come along.

ELI. Oh, the morals of this village is hawful.

(EXIT BULMER AND ELI.)

END OF SCENE 7.

SCENE 8.

THE TERRACE OF WILDMARSH TOWERS. EN FETE.

BACK CLOTH. A VIEW OF A FINE PARK.

ACROSS BACK AND DOWN R. SIDE OF STAGE ARE PARK BALUSTRADES, WITH AN OPENING ABOUT HALFWAY DOWN R. WITH RETURN AS IF LEADING DOWN STEPS. DOWN L. SIDE OF STAGE IS A FINE BARONIAL OLD MANSION WITH BIG HALL DOORWAY. THIS IS GAILY DECORATED WITH FLAGS. ALSO FESTOONS OF FLAGS HANGING IN BORDERS. VENETIAN MASTS SHOWING AT BACK.

(THE SQUIRE IS STANDING BY DOORWAY AS CURTAIN RISES. DOUBLE IN LIEUTENANT'S UNIFORM IS STANDING WITH HIM.)

(ONE OF THE SUPERS IN COUNTRYMAN'S CLOTHES ENTERS OPENING R. AND CROSSES, SHAKES SQUIRE'S HAND AND ENTERS HOUSE L. ANOTHER, ALSO IN COUNTRYMAN'S CLOTHES, ENTERS, AND STANDS CHATTING TO SQUIRE AND DOUBLE.)

(THEN JAMES ENTERS, DISGUISED AS AN OLD COUNTRYMAN IN SMOCK FROCK, SPLIT DOWN THE BACK, WITH PATENT FASTENERS, AND TALL TOP HAT, LEANING ON STICK. HE SHOULD HAVE A REALLY GOOD DISGUISE WIG ON WHICH THE SCALP COMES DOWN TO THE EYEBROWS, WHITE WHISKERS, ETC.)

SQUIRE. Ah, welcome Farmer Jordan (SHAKES HIS HAND) . Fine weather for the crops.

JAMES. Eh? (HAND TO EAR.)

SQUIRE. I said, fine weather for the crops.

JAMES. Oh yes – yes – yes, and 'ay be cuttin' fine.

SQUIRE. I'm glad to see you out again.

71.

JAMES. Eh – oh no – I don't think we'll have any rain.

SQUIRE. (TO SUPER) Take the old fellow into the dining room and see he has everything he wants.

(SUPER TAKES OLD MAN INTO THE HOUSE.)

SQUIRE. (TO DOUBLE) Bless my soul my boy, it's good to see everyone enjoying themselves. And all in your honour – by the Lord Harry, I haven't felt so happy for years.

(CHATS TO HIM. LAUGHTER OFF R.)

(ENTER SALLY AND JERRY R.)

SALLY. What are they all laughing at – have they never seen a lady in her London clothes before?

JERRY. Blimey, it's that hat – you said you wanted to give 'em a shock and you have – Hello, there's the Squire – hope he asks us to stay to dinner.

SQUIRE. (COMES FORWARD) Hello Goslin, and Mrs. Goslin, glad to see you. Hope you will thoroughly enjoy yourselves. Come along James.

(EXIT SQUIRE AND DOUBLE INTO HOUSE.)

JERRY. Well I like that – how can I enjoy myself when I'm as empty as a shell hole. Never even told me where the canteen was.

SALLY. Did you see the bloke who was with him? And he's the dead spit of Master James.

JERRY. Not 'arf, and I fancy I knows who he is now. Something a bloke once told me in the trenches. I believe he's already wanted by the police.

SALLY. Lor, you don't say!

JERRY. Well if he ain't, he jolly soon will be, and no error.

SALLY. (LOOKING AT HOUSE) Oh Jerry, ain't it lovely, just like a Foresters Day at the Crystal Palace, or a fancy dress ball at 'Oxton Town 'All.

JERRY. Yes, only I can't find the refreshment room, and you can always find them easy enough at the Palace.

SALLY. Lumme, you're always thinking of your stomach.

JERRY. Well, if I don't I'd like to know who will – I'm blooming well famished, that's what I am. Hello, here comes a bloke, perhaps he can help us.

(ENTER MAJOR FROM THE HOUSE.)

Well blow me if it ain't Private Montmorency Trevosper. What 'o Monty!

MAJOR. Damn – Private Goslin – he'll spoil the whole blessed game if I don't get rid of him.

JERRY. What 'o Monty old pal, where's the boozer? I've got sand running down my throat. Put us on the right track old pal, and I'll give you my photo.

MAJOR. I wouldn't have it as a gift, unless you had your gas mask on.

JERRY. Oh, funny ain't yer. But I see you've got yours on.

MAJOR. Got what on?

JERRY. Why, your gas mask of course. But no, after all, I see it is your face. Struth, I never realised what a disfigurement it was before.

MAJOR. Here, get out of this, or I'll call some of the servants to put you out.

JERRY. 'Ark at it Sally. Thinks himself somebody he does. Struth, I might take him for a gentleman if I was deaf and dumb.

MAJOR. Here, are you going to clear out?

JERRY. Well, show us where the refreshment tent is, and we will.

MAJOR. (POINTING OFF R.) You see that Marquee?

JERRY. Mark who? Don't you try it on.

MAJOR. Marquee – tent.

JERRY. Oh, tent – well?

MAJOR. Well, that's it.

JERRY. What, and we've blooming well come past it. Come along Sally, and if I ain't outside a half a gallon in two winks of a bull's tail, I'm a halligater.

(EXIT SALLY AND JERRY R.)

MAJOR. That's got rid of him. Now how long are they going to be, before they give me the chance to get to work? Oh, I wish this job was over. I'm all of a shake like a calves' foot jelly.

(ENTER NED, AND PUTS HIS HAND ON HIS SHOULDER.)

(IN ALARM) Let me go, I ain't done nothing, straight I ain't.

NED. Shut up you fool, what's the matter, you're as nervous as a kitten.

MAJOR. Well, ain't I got all the dirty work to do, it's all very well for you, but it's me as has to face the music.

NED. You'll face something else besides the music, if you don't shut up. The old man is coming out in half a minute to start the speechifying – so keep your eyes open and get to work. You know what you've got to do.

MAJOR. Oh yes, I know what I've got to do alright, and I wish to 'Eil it was over.

NED. (X TO DOOR OF HOUSE) Very well then, look alive, and see you don't make a bigger fool of yourself than nature made of you. (EXIT.)

MAJOR. Gawd knows I made a big enough fool of myself when I chummed in with you. But once let me get safely out of this mess, and for the future we shall meet as strangers, Mr. Ned Henderson.

(EXIT MAJOR INTO HOUSE. ENTER JERRY AND SALLY R.)

JERRY. Where is the blighter – where is he – I'll give him what for – making a fool of me like that.

SALLY. Wasn't it the refreshment tent Jerry?

JERRY. Of course it wasn't, it was a blooming – a blooming ---

SALLY. What?

JERRY. A Blooming Hoop la – Let me get hold of him, and I'll try and knock his blessed dial handsome for him, if it ain't impossible.

SALLY. Look out Jerry, here comes the Squire.

JERRY. Lumme, I'm so thirsty – I've half a mind to ask him to show me to the canteen.

(ENTER SQUIRE, SUPERS AND DOUBLE. SQUIRE CROSSES TO R. AND LOOKS OVER BALUSTRADES. LOUD CHEERS OFF R.)

SQUIRE. Thanks, my good people, thanks – this is a proud day for me (MORE CHEERS) And I'm not going to keep you long. But I want my brave son, who tomorrow will again go forth to face our country's enemies in France, to say a few words of farewell to you.

(MORE CHEERS. SQUIRE BECKONS TO DOUBLE WHO CROSSES AND STANDS BESIDE HIM. THE BAND PLAYS "SEE THE CONQUERING HERO COMES" AND THE BELLS RING OUT, AND KEEPS ON TILL END. LOUD CHEERING. THE SQUIRE RAISES HIS HAND FOR SILENCE.)

(ENTER REV. PROBYN AND MYRTLE, COME C.)

REV. T. Stop – stop – James Wildmarsh as you call yourself. Before you dare address these people, you must answer to me.

(JAMES DISGUISED AS OLD FARMER ENTERS AND STANDS IN DOOR LISTENING, ALL TURN.)

SQUIRE. What – you old hound, and that shameless woman too, how dare you venture here?

REV. T. To demand justice, and we intend to have it.

SQUIRE. And by the Lord Harry you shall – more than you bargain for. James my boy – fetch that gentleman over there, it is Inspector Bulmer.

(EXIT DOUBLE L.I.E.)

Now you shall have an opportunity of stating your case before an agent from Scotland Yard, who will know how to deal with the likes of you.

(ENTER DOUBLE AND INSPECTOR BULMER, WHO ALSO HAS ELI WITH HIM.)

Now girl, state your case if you dare. What do you want?

MYRTLE. I want my rights as your son's wife.

SQUIRE. By Heaven!

MYRTLE. He is the father of my child.

SQUIRE. You blackmailing adventuress, you lie – you lie.

JAMES. (AT BACK AS OLD FARMER, COMING FORWARD) No Sir, she does not, she speaks the truth.

SQUIRE. What – who – who dares to say so?

JAMES. (THROWING OFF DISGUISE) I do.

SQUIRE. What – James my boy – (THEN PULLING HIMSELF UP, AND LOOKING AT DOUBLE) What – am I dreaming – yes, you are my James, but who – who then is this? (POINTING TO DOUBLE.)

BULMER. Ned Henderson, forger and jewel thief. He's given us a long chase, but we've run him to earth at last.

(SLIPS HANDCUFFS ON DOUBLE. HE STRUGGLES FOR A MOMENT, THE TWO SUPERS COME FORWARD AND HOLD HIM.)

SQUIRE. What – is this the man who forged my name?

BULMER. Yes Sir, and this is one of his accomplices. (POINTING TO ELI.)

ELI. Only too true – oh Squire have mercy – he tempted me in my poverty, and I fell. Oh, the morals of this village is hawful, and I'm no better than the rest.

BULMER. A good day's work – now if I could only lay my hands on Ben Fields, alias the Major, the bag would be complete.

(ENTER MAJOR FROM HOUSE, SEES WHAT HAS HAPPENED, TRIES TO ESCAPE, BUT BULMER SEIZES HIM.)

Oh no you don't, Major dear boy, the game's up.

MAJOR. Ah, an uncommonly neat bit of work Inspector – allow me to congratulate you – say, what's it worth if I turn King's Evidence?

BULMER. Nothing doing – the case against the pair of you is more than complete. (HAS BEEN RUNNING HIS HANDS OVER HIM.)

JERRY. Monty dear boy, you'll enjoy a few years' enforced retirement where no followers are allowed.

BULMER. (TAKES JEWEL CASE AND NOTES FROM MAJOR'S POCKET) Hello, what's this? (HANDS THEM TO SQUIRE.)

SQUIRE. By God, the family jewels, and the money from my cash box.

BULMER. I was but just in time it seems – you didn't know the pair of beauties you were entertaining unawares.

SQUIRE. By the Lord Harry I didn't. (TO JAMES) And James my boy, to think that I could mistake that scoundrel for my son – But where have you been? Lad, why did you not return to unmask these villains?

JAMES. I have been wounded – wandering in the dark – my mind a blank. And but for this poor girl whom you have all so deeply wronged – I should never have regained my memory.

SQUIRE. This girl – (SUDDENLY HARDENING) But is it true lad what she says – is she your wife?

JAMES. Yes, thank God – my true and honoured wife – (SQUIRE MAKES AN EXCLAMATION OF ANNOYANCE) Come Sir, you won't turn your back upon me again? Now with our friends around us, and the Joy Bells ringing? (TAKES MYRTLE'S HAND, AND SQUIRE'S) Come.

(SQUIRE HESITATES A MOMENT, THEN TAKES MYRTLE'S HAND, AND DRAWS HER TO HIM, AND KISSES HER.)

77.

CURTAIN.

SECOND PICTURE. SQUIRE SHAKING HANDS WITH REV.
PROBYN, AND JAMES WITH HIS ARM ROUND MYRTLE.

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