



# Thank you for downloading this script from the Great War Theatre project.

The project team has undertaken a significant amount of work to identify the copyright status of the plays made available on the website and strives to indicate as clearly as possible what others are able to with it within the boundaries of the law. For more information on this please read the **Copyright and Reuse Guidelines on the website**. If you have any questions about how you can use the script please contact [greatwartheatre@kent.ac.uk](mailto:greatwartheatre@kent.ac.uk).

---

## Eva Elwes, *Billy's Mother*, 1918

### Citing this script.

If you wish to use the script, or cite from it, please reference it in the following way.

Eva Elwes, *Billy's Mother*, British Library, Lord Chamberlain's Collection of Plays 1918/17, Add MS. 66199 M. Licensed for performance on 7 October 1918. Great War Theatre Project database, ([www.greatwartheatre.org.uk](http://www.greatwartheatre.org.uk), accessed *insert date*)

Subsequent citations to the same manuscript (consulted at the same time) could use a shortened form, such as:

Elwes, *Billy's Mother*, GWT, LCP1918/17

### Copyright Status: Creative Commons-Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives licence

This means that the work is still in copyright, but that the author / rights holder has allowed us to make it available on the website and is happy for others to use it as long as there is always a credit to the author, the work isn't used for commercial purposes and it isn't adapted into a 'derivative work' (e.g. making a film from a play script). However, you may be able to get permission to do these things if you contact the copyright holder directly.

### Script Source: Transcription

This script is a transcription from a manuscript which is part of their Lord Chamberlain's collection at the British Library. The script has been transcribed by a volunteer on the Great War Theatre project and we are grateful for the time and effort they have given to make this text available.

BILLY'S MOTHER

AN ANGLO-AMERICAN DRAMA

By EVA ELWES

## CAST

Captain William Fortescue	U.S. Army.
Captain Cyril Beecher	R.A.F.
Cadet "Billy" Fortescue	R.A.F.
Private Sam Boston	21 <sup>st</sup> Infantry U.S. Army.

Lucy Fortescue.

Brenda Roscoe.

Winnie Peg.

Deborah (Mrs. Dee).

Scene 1.

FORTESCUE'S RANCHE. CUT CLOTH, SHEWING FULL  
INTERIOR.

ENTER SAM TO BEGIN. COW BOY DRESS, CHAPS ETC.

SAM.       Boss about? I say, is the boss about? H'm, I reckon there ain't nobody about –

(ENTER WINNIE PEG, SMART DRESS)

WIN.       I reckon you're out of your reckoning then, cos I'm about, very much about.

SAM.       Snakes alive, gal, what in thunder brings you here?

WIN.       Guess if I told you, that you'd be as wise as myself.

SAM.       Gee, but I do reckon that you do go some style, reckon now that ar suit yer wearin' came direct from Paris?

WIN.       You've hit that nail right on the head, go up one.

SAM.       And what might the glad rags be built for anyhow?

WIN.       Built for me, sonny, express by cable order, built for me to work in –

SAM.       Work - ? WORK - ? In that outfit – ha-ha-ha-

- WIN. Stop your hee hawing Sammy, and let's understand our relative positions – first of all we're first cousins, -
- SAM. That's so.
- WIN. Secondly you're Mr. Fortescue's foreman?
- SAM. That's so again.
- WIN. And thirdly I'm Mrs. Fortescue's useful help –
- SAM. That ain't so.
- WIN. Oh – cause why?
- SAM. Cause there ain't no Mrs. Fortescue.
- WIN. Well there's a lady called Brenda Fortescue living here - and she's secured my services, - here's her signature (PRODUCING LETTER)
- SAM. Wal – of all the brazen impudence –
- WIN. They say that Mr. Fortescue is a very reserved sort of man, I reckon he's got a history.
- SAM. I allow that he has and a kinder sad one too. Ye see he's an Englishman and his folks are big bugs on the other side. Waal, he come over in 1900 and started ranching, and I'll allow he piled up considerable dollars. Then we learned that Mrs. Fortescue and the little Billy was coming out, and there was to be several square miles of rejoicing, and I tell you that gentleman Fortescue hopped round mighty slick in those days (HE IS ROLLING A CIGARETTE BETWEEN HIS FINGERS AS HE SPEAKS AND NOW HAS FINISHED IT.)
- WIN. (TAKING CIGARETTE FROM HIM) Thanks, can you oblige me with a light?
- SAM. Sure. (BUS.) Then one day I was over to the burgh yonder and the post master gave me a cable for the boss, and when he opened it I

was plumb sorry for him – the boat had gone down with all hands and Billy and Billy’s mother war drowned.

WIN. My – that was real sad.

SAM. Yes, it kinder damped the fireworks that trip, and gentleman Fortescue went as near loco as a man can go and keep outside the deranged asylum, and while he was like that he met with –

(ENTER BRENDA)

the devil –

BREN. Were you speaking about me Boston?

SAM. That’s about the size of it.

BREN. Then please to recollect that my name is “Brenda” not “the devil”.

SAM. Sure, Brenda’s your cognomen right enough, and the rest is an indication of your character.

BREN. You’re an ignorant insulting brute.

SAM. True ma’am, cow punchers are mostly that way.

BREN. I reckon that you’ve finished cow punching on this ranch.

SAM. That’s true again ma’am, Uncle Sam’s joining in the European shemozzle at last, and it’s yours truly for the war trail, I’ve come in to tender my resignation to the boss.

BREN. Your resignation will be accepted, we shall be glad to get rid of you.

SAM. May be ma’am but I’ll take that from the boss and not from his

BREN. His what?

- SAM. His ruin, ma'am, and that's yourself.
- BREN. (DRAWING REVOLVER) – You shall pay for that.
- WIN. (CATCHING HER ARM) Woman, are you mad?
- SAM. I reckon so, clear mad, right through.
- BREN. Will you let me go? I'll kill him for that.
- WIN. Oh no you won't, ma'am, I'm not going to stand by and see you or any other woman commit murder. (WRENCHES REVOLVER OUT OF BRENDA'S HAND) What shall I do with this Sammy?
- SAM. Give it back to her I guess when she's cooled down. She's a rotten shot anyway, couldn't hit a hay stack at 40 yards.
- WIN. There's your gun ma'am, and I hope you'll put it to better use in future.
- BREN. I'll never do better with it than ridding the west of that vermin.
- WIN. Gee, you are a real nice kind amiable sort of lady.
- BREN. And who in thunder are you anyway? And what's your business here?
- WIN. Well, you ought to know I'm – (SAM TRIES TO RESTRAIN HER) – I'm Winnie Peg – your useful help.
- BREN. You – you – ha-ha-ha – you look more like a dressed up doll, or a revue girl, but I'll soon size you up – you can take off your frills and flounces to begin with – take 'em all off, do you get me?
- WIN. What and walk about in my birth day suit?
- SAM. The lady doesn't want the situation ma'am, she gives you the sack afore she starts.
- BREN. There's two sides to that question, and I mean to make her stick to her bargain. (EXIT)

WIN. Well, if that's Mrs. Fortescue, I'm real sorry for him.

SAM. She ain't exactly Mrs. Fortescue.

WIN. Then who is she?

SAM. I guess she's the boss-ess.

WIN. Yes, but how?

SAM. Don't ask no questions and you won't be told no lies.

WIN. (STAMPING) Will you answer me?

SAM. I can't say a word more that I've said already.

WIN. Do you mean that I am to draw my own conclusions?

(HORSES HOOFS)

SAM. That's about the size of it, you've got yourself into a nice fix, and it's up to me to get you out of it, hello, there's the boss, wait here. (EXIT)

WIN. A "nice fix" is right, I came out here to get a husband, and I reckon I've bitten off more than I can chew.

(RE-ENTER BRENDA)

BREN. That's your own look out, just wash them dishes – here's the kettle (POURS HOT WATER INTO LARGE PAN)

WIN. I didn't come here for that sort of work.

BREN. You came here to do as you're told, now then get on with it.



(WINNIE STANDS AS FAR AWAY AS POSSIBLE AND GINGERLY HANDLES THE DISHES, SCALDS HERSELF, ETC. AS SHE SPEAKS)

WIN. I thought a useful help was to read aloud, sew, play the piano and so on.

BREN. That where you wake up, go on, put some ginger into it.

(WINNIE PULLS OUT DISH CLOTH AND SPLASHES BRENDA.)

Why you clumsy little fool – (W. DROPS PLATE) here, that's enough, (THROWS HER ROUND) shake them mats, I'll get on with this.

WIN. Haven't you a patent sweeper?

BREN. No, use a little elbow grease

(WINNIE SHAKES DUST OVER HER)

WIN. Where is it?

BREN. Where is what?

WIN. The elbow grease? (SHAKES MAT AGAIN)

BREN. Confound you, put that down, now sweep the floor, there's the brush, I'll get out of here before I'm smothered, see its done in five minutes, or it will be the worse for you (EXIT).

WIN. What price my hundred dollar frock? Ah – (BUTTONS CHAPS ROUND HER NECK) Now I can get ahead – (TAKES BROOM WITH ONE HAND AND BRUSHES AWKWARDLY) after all work is good for everybody, so here goes. (BRUSHES UP TOWARDS C. SINGING)

(ENTER FORTESCUE, ASTONISHED – LOOKS – BECKONS SAM, BOTH LAUGH – SAM GOES FORWARD WINNIE TRIPS HIM UP)

Sorry but you shouldn't be trapesing around when the hired help is at work.

FORT. (COMING FORWARD) So you are – the hired help. (X'S TO TABLE)

WIN. Sakes alive, I believe its Gentleman Fortescue – (SCRAMBLES OUT OF CHAPS) he mustn't see me in this guy. Yes – (X'S TO HIM) That's me, what do you take me for?

FORT. A very charming young lady.

WIN. Maybe you won't say that when I tell you why I'm here –

SAM. I wouldn't tell if I was you –

WIN. I'm a husband hunter, chasing a man.

FORT. Indeed, who is the fortunate individual?

WIN. That's him (POINTS AT SAM) You see we're cousins. Sam's father Zachariah Boston was my uncle.

SAM. Kerect.

- WIN. They quarrelled years ago because Sam wouldn't go to college, and then this bright spark came out west cow punching.
- SAM. That's so.
- WIN. And Uncle Zack died without being reconciled.
- SAM. Say, don't you're kinder hurting me.
- WIN. Uncle Zack was hard and cruel, he left every cent of his millions to me.
- SAM. What the thunder did I care about the old man's dollars, he might have left it to the States Treasury, or a Home for Lost Cats, I only wanted to know that he had buried the hatchet.
- FORT. Hard lines Boston.
- WIN. The dollars rightly belong to Sam, but he won't let me give them to him, so I want him to take them with me thrown in, ain't that a fair bargain sir?
- FORT. It's not for me to say.
- WIN. Is it "yes" Sam?
- SAM. I hate to say "no" to a lady, but I'm going to be in uniform tomorrow, and in Europe shortly, and I'm figuring that in these times a soldier should be a single man.
- FORT. You're right Boston, he should be so.
- WIN. So you're taking sides against me are you? But what about the birth-rate? – (SAM BUS.)
- FORT. My dear young lady –
- WIN. Don't you "dear young lady – " me – if he's going to Europe, I'm going to Europe too, the gals over there have proved their worth and I'm going to do my bit, so cheer up Sammy, I shall have you yet, cos when a woman says she will, she will – and I shall. (EXIT)

SAM. Darn it all, I believe she will too, some day.

FORT. Boston, your life's happiness is within your grasp, don't throw it away, the love of a good woman can be the salvation of a man, as sure as the loss of that love can be his damnation.

(BRENDA ENTERS, STOPS TO LISTEN)

My wife – god rest her soul – was my very life, my happiness was born with our courtship, expanded with our marriage and reached its zenith with the birth of our son – and ended – with their deaths, since then I have just existed, no use to God nor man, no use to myself –

(BRENDA EXITS ANGRY)

Bah – it's idle talking thus – what did you want to speak to me about?

SAM. Say boss, I hope you'll excuse the shortness of the notice to quit, but the folks in the city are mighty pressing on the point. The 21<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment is just on full strength and we elect our officers this day week. Say, warnt you in the English army once?

FORT. Yes, I was a Captain in the Buffs, but I sent in my papers when I married.

SAM. Then you're just the beaver we want in our dam, join up boss, and I'll guarantee our election.

FORT. Ah no Boston, I – I can't.

SAM. There ain't no such word as "can't" boss, think it over, and I reckon you'll find you can. (EXIT)

FORT. (SITTING, POURING OUT DRINK) Never, never. My exile from my native country is complete and enduring, the strong influence that Brenda Roscoe has fixed on me in my hours of drunken madness I cannot shake off, try as I will. No, there is no fate before me but a drunkard's grave in the Western Prairie.

(ENTER BRENDA)

BREN. Moping again? What is the matter with you? Are you too sober for midday? Have a dose of whiskey man, and drown your thoughts.

FORT. Ah yes – (TAKING DRINK) you are always ready to give me whiskey, perhaps if you had been less ready to do that I should never have become the weak willed fool I am over strong drink, and never have allowed you to influence me as you do.

BREN. Ah I knew you were moping, you leave it to the doctor, I wasn't in the Dallas saloons without learning how to mix a cocktail that would revive a corpse. (EXITS INTO HOUSE)

FORT. I think I know the symptoms she wants another cheque, well thank God I have never married her. She forced herself upon me, and she must be content with the position she occupies (TAKING OUT PHOTO) No, no, Lucy, callous as I have become, low as I have sunk, I could not put this creature in the place you once held.

(RE-ENTER BRENDA WITH DRINK)

BREN. Here, quit snivelling and drink this.

- FORT.        (DRINKING) Here's luck, that's good. How much do you want this time – (PUTTING PHOTO AWAY, AND DROPPING IT)
- BREN.        Not much. (PICKS UP PHOTO) Hello, who's the lady? Oh, I see, it's the late lamented.
- FORT.        Put that down – put it down – you are not fit to touch it –
- BREN.        All right, don't go mad. You needn't grieve over her, you've got me you know.
- FORT.        That's enough. How much do you want. (THROWS CHEQUE BOOK ON TABLE)
- BREN.        Every cent you've got.
- FORT.        Well, you're getting it slowly but surely. How much now?
- BREN.        Not a dollar.
- FORT.        Then what else do you want?
- BREN.        I'm sick of this place. I want you to take me to Europe – to introduce me to your family, and all the tip top swells there.
- FORT.        Woman, you're mad.
- BREN.        No, I am only determined, that's all, what else do you think I've fixed myself on to you for?
- FORT.        God knows, I wish I had never seen you.
- BREN.        It's too late to wish now – I've got you, and you have to do as I tell you.
- FORT.        Oh it's impossible – utterly impossible – I could not do it, even if you were my wife, which you are not.
- BREN.        Why not?

- FORT. Your origin, your antecedents, your upbringing – the daughter of a swindling card sharper, dragged up in vice, educated in a gambling hell – Bah –
- BREN. No matter what I was – or what I am – you were glad enough to let me come to the ranch and now I’m not quitting till you’ve taken me to Europe – that’s so.
- FORT. In this, few words, are as good as hundreds – I will not do so – so put the matter out of your head.
- BREN. I’m good enough for Texas, but not good enough for Europe, eh? You wouldn’t take me even if I was your wife, eh? By Gee, I’ll make you – I’ll make you – You’re mine to twist round my little finger, when I like – mine to come or go or fetch and carry, when I say the word, mine, mine, mine.
- FORT. Ah your power over me is strong when I’m sober, its stronger when I am drunk, but I can’t do this thing, why if I were not the besotted fool you have made me, do you think I should be skulking here when the men of my old country, my old regiment are fighting and dying on the plains of France and Belgium - ? No, your power is just this – that you have dragged me down to something too vile to face my own people.
- BREN. I have dragged you down, yes, and kept you down also, till I have rivetted my chains about you too firmly for you to break, , its memory of that white faced cat which makes you ashamed of me – damn her I say – (TEARING UP PHOTOGRAPH) damn her – damn her – (BUS EXIT).
- FORT. Her photograph – my dead wife’s photograph – my only comfort – utterly destroyed – hopelessly ruined – the one thing that kept a spark of decency alive in me – oh well – there’s only one thing left now – forgetfulness – (POURS OUT DRINK)

(WIN HAS JUST ENTERED)

- WIN. (XING TO HIM) Don't take it Mr. Fortescue, it ain't good for you.
- FORT. Let me alone girl - (DRINKS) let me alone I say – (THROWS HER OFF)
- WIN. You wouldn't have treated a lady that way in England, would you gentleman Fortescue.
- FORT. I I – beg your pardon, I forgot myself. Won't you sit down?
- WIN. Thanks, now try and forget your troubles and listen to mine – look at that – (HOLDS OUT AN OLD DRESS RUMPLED UP) – I've got to wear it, shan't I look a fright.
- FORT. Where did you unearth that article?
- WIN. Brenda Roscoe fetched it out from one of her boxes, she says my frock ain't fit to work in, and I must stay here until arrangements are made for my journey back.
- FORT. Sam is sure to see about that quickly.
- WIN. I hope so, because I don't want to put this thing on – ugh – (SHAKES IT) I should think it came out of the ark (LETTERS FALL OUT) Hello – why it's a letter addressed to you Mr. Fortescue, it must have got put in her box by mistake.
- FORT. To me? (TAKES IT) My God - it's Lucy's writing. What can that fiend Brenda be doing with it?
- WIN. Is anything wrong?
- FORT. I don't know yet my dear. You run along and take that dress back and say you are not going to wear it.



- WIN. I will, but do promise me you'll let the whiskey alone.
- FORT. I promise – I want to get my brain clear and understand what this means – run along, I wish to be alone.
- WIN. I'll give Madam Brenda back this guy – she says she ain't worn it for years, and I believe her. (EXIT)
- FORT. Lucy's hand writing – I almost fear to read it – (URNS ENVELOPE) why it is already open – what's this – "Kisses for Daddy" Can that woman have suppressed my letters. This one is dated the year of Lucy's death – 1911 – JUNE 1911 – June? And the Antonia was lost in April – (OPENS READS) "Briens Hotel, Queenstown Ireland" – My God – "My dearest husband, by the mercy of heaven Billy and I were rescued after floating for hours on some wreckage. We are at present staying at the above address, but are quite without funds, so please cable remittance and we will join you by the first boat. Join with me in thanks to God that we shall soon be re-united, Your loving wife, LUCY." Saved – and I have lived in ignorance all these years.
- WIN. (OFF) The letter fell out and I gave it to Mr. Fortescue.
- BREN. Out of the way, fool (ENTERS)
- FORT. (RISES) What have you to say?
- BREN. What do you expect me to say?
- FORT. Why did I not receive this letter years ago?
- BREN. Because I kept it back, as I have kept back others since.
- FORT. And you have known that my wife was alive all this time?
- BREN. Of course I have known it – and now, I am anxious to make her acquaintance.

(ENTER SAM AND WINNIE)

FORT. You brazen harlot, you – I could kill you where you stand – (HAND ON BOTTLE)

(BRENDA DRAWS REVOLVER)

BREN. Move that bottle an inch and I'll fire.

SAM. (PRESENTING) And you drop your gun ma'am, or I'll ventilate your corsets.

(FORTESCUE DROPS BOTTLE, AND BRENDA LOWERS REVOLVER)

SAM. Sorry to interrupt, but we're just here to say good-bye – What's it to be boss, are you coming along? I've got your favourite mustang saddled.

FORT. Yes – I'll come.

BREN. Curse you, you shall not escape me – (FIRES AT HIM – WIN SCREAMS)

SAM. Don't scare sister, I told you she was a rotten shot. Come along boss, Dallas is only ten miles off, and the recruiting office closes at eight.

BREN. Where he goes I follow –

FORT. Not this time Brenda, your chains are broken, for I'm going to join up, and there's no place for a bad woman in a soldier's life. I mean to regain my self respect, and with God's help the position I lost under the Union Jack, I will win back under the Stars and Stripes.

SCENE 2.

(DECORATED GARDEN OF FORTESCUE HALL.)

(ENTER DEE, A DIGNIFIED BUTLER)

DEE. Well, our grounds certainly do look very nice, decorated for a joyful occasion once again. Ah well, it's a long time since I saw them so. Let me see, it was when Master William – the present Baronet's father - came of age. Poor young gentleman, I wonder what became of him. It's all a mystery, another of the mysteries which surround young gentlemen who go to America and are never heard of again.

(ENTER CAPTAIN BEECHER)

BEECH. Ah good afternoon – what's your name – is young Billy about?

DEE. My name sir, is Dee, sir, and SIR WILLIAM is in the house sir.

BEECH. (ASIDE) I'm afraid I've trodden on the old chap's corns. (ALOUD) Ah yes, of course Dee, I should be pleased to offer my congratulations to Sir William on his birthday, and also to Mrs. Fortescue.

DEE. Captain Beecher, sir, you will pardon the freedom of an old servant, who has served the Fortescue family all his life.

BEECH. Oh yes, useful for the first five years and a thundering nuisance ever after, I know the breed.

- DEE. Then you will know that we have the privilege of speaking plainly to our betters.
- BEECH. Too plainly very often.
- DEE. Not that I consider you so, for I knew your father when he was office boy to Lawyer Jenkins, and your mother when she was barmaid at the Crown.
- BEECH. Confound you – how dare you speak to me like this? By Jove I'll tell your master and have you dismissed.
- DEE. Oh no sir, you can't do that. I have been butler here too long to leave on your account – unless –
- BEECH. Unless what?
- DEE. Unless my mistress so far forgot herself as to marry you, and then the moment you entered the Hall I should leave it in disgust.
- BEECH. Go into the house and attend to your duties.

(DEE DELIBERATELY WALKS UP C. AND STANDS WITH HIS BACK)

- BEECH. Do you hear me?
- DEE. Oh yes I hear you.
- BEECH. Then why don't you obey?
- DEE. Because I am waiting here for a gentleman who has the right to give me orders, and here he comes.
- BEECH. Do you mean Bins the steward?
- DEE. No, I mean Master Billy as was, Sir William Fortescue as is.

(ENTER BILLY)

BILLY. Hello Dee, the mater said you had asked for me.

DEE. Master Billy – er – Sir William, please accept my humble congratulations on your eighteenth birthday sir, and may I beg your acceptance of this small present in honour of the same (GIVES PACKET) with my best respects sir, and wishing you many happy returns of the day. (BOWS RESPECTFULLY, SEES BEECHER AND JERKS HIMSELF ROUND)

BILLY. A pipe and pouch, thanks Dee, it's awfully good of you, but you know I haven't arrived at this stage yet.

DEE. Then the sooner you discard them nasty cigarettes and enjoy a real smoke the better sir. (EXITS)

BILLY. Hello Beecher, I didn't see you.

BEECH. And so you are eighteen today, Master Billy, or I should say Sir William. We should always give honour where honour is due.

BILLY. Oh yes, I've got the handle to my name right enough. When my uncle died the lawyers had a big hunt for my father, but they couldn't trace him and having obtained leave of the Courts to presume his death I came into the title and estates, and that's all about it.

BEECH. Is it? You mustn't forget that today you are liable for military service, whether you are baronet or bumpkin. I suppose that you have put in for a commission.

BILLY. Rather, what do you think? I was in the Cadet Corps at the Varsity and old General Fisher, who is a great pal of the mater's, is using his influence so I'm pretty safe to get what I want.

20

BEECH. And what is that?

BILLY. Well I want to be in your little lot, the Royal Air Force.

BEECH. Good lad, depend on my influence and help and any way it may be useful to you. Where is your mother?

BILLY. Oh, the mater is busy looking after the eatables and drinkables for the villagers on this festive occasion. I say Captain, it takes a bit of doing to give a dinner in these days of rations and coupons, what?

BEECH. Oh, I have no doubt that Mrs. Fortescue is equal to the occasion.

BILLY. Rather. You can stand on the mater in housekeeping matters.

BEECH. I'm afraid you've cost her a few anxious hours young man.

BILLY. Me?

BEECH. Yes, you. From what I have heard, you were a sweet youth at Harrow, and not quite a saint at Oxford.

BILLY. I don't quite see that that is any concern of yours sir.

LUCY. (OFF) Don't trouble Dee, I will find him myself.

BILLY. Why, that's the mater's voice.

LUCY. Billy, Billy, where are you?

BILLY. This way dearest. – (TO BEECHER) Here she comes, the sweetest woman in all the world – my mother.

(ENTER LUCY CARRYING LONG ENVELOPE)

LUCY. Billy, my boy, it has come.

21

BILLY. What has come?

LUCY. Your commission in the Royal Air Force, General Fisher sent it by special messenger, look –

BILLY. (EXAMINING) Hooray.

LUCY. And it was accompanied by this letter from the dear old General.

BEECH. Accept my congratulations Mrs. Fortescue.

(BILLY OPENS LETTER)

LUCY. Thank you Captain Beecher, I am very pleased and proud. –

BILLY. Why mother dear, you are crying.

LUCY. (URNS TO HIM) Indeed I am not – look at me.

BILLY. You can't deceive me little mother, I heard the tears in your voice.

LUCY. Your fancy dear, what does the General say?

BILLY. (READS) "My dear boy, I have real pleasure in wishing you very many happy returns of the day, and at the same time to enclose your commission as a King's Officer. As you have now attained man's estate, may you shake off your youthful follies and ever act as becomes an officer and a gentleman, and the son of your honourable mother. Your friend and trustee, George Fisher. Report yourself at once to the Officer commanding the Fernley Aerodrome, Captain Beecher."

LUCY. Captain Beecher?



BILLY. By Jove, then you are my C. O. Captain Beecher, I beg to report myself (SALUTES)

22

BEECH. Mr. Fortescue, I am very pleased to welcome you among us (SALUTES THEN SHAKES HANDS)

BILLY. I'm off to set the wires in motion, so long, mater. (EXITS)

BEECH. My dear lady, you do not know the pleasure it gives me to have your son under my command, you will pardon my saying he is rather wild and –

LUCY. Do not forget that he is very young.

BEECH. True, and like most young men, very selfish towards those who love him.

LUCY. Perhaps thoughtless is a better word than selfish.

BEECH. Yes, perhaps so, at any rate I can add my authority to yours in endeavouring to keep the young rascal within bounds.

LUCY. Ah you do not know how grateful I should be if you will do so.

BEECH. You may rely on me to be his true friend for your sake.

LUCY. I sincerely thank you.

BEECH. I would do far more than that for you.

LUCY. Captain Beecher –

BEECH. Won't you drop the Captain Beecher and call me by my Christian name, and let me address you by yours?

LUCY. I do not understand you.

BEECH. And yet it is not so difficult, can you not guess what I am trying to tell you? Cannot you understand the admiration which must be apparent in my manner?

LUCY. Really –

23

BEECH. You are my ideal woman, the only one who has ever caused me to wish for married life and a happy home.

LUCY. I was never so astonished in my life, are you – are you making me a proposal of marriage?

BEECH. (BOWS) I am -

LUCY. Then my best answer to you is to state frankly the position in which I stand, I do not know at this moment whether I am a wife or a widow.

BEECH. Your son has told me that the law has presumed your husband to be dead.

LUCY. It is not a matter of law with me, but of principle and religion. Ours was a true love marriage.

BEECH. And yet you were a deserted wife within five years of it. Ah Lucy, cast the memory of this faithless man from your heart and turn to one who truly loves you (TAKES HER HAND AND ATTEMPTS TO EMBRACE HER).

(BILLY ENTERS QUICKLY)

BILLY. What the deuce – oh by Jove I think I understand. Captain – ha-ha-ha- I believe – ha-ha-ha- do believe that you are sweet on my mother - ha-ha-ha-

LUCY. Billy, you forget yourself - (GOES UP)

BEECH. And does that strike you as very ridiculous?

BILLY. Why the mater was 38 last birthday.

24

BEECH. Firstly it's rude to mention a lady's name, and secondly I'm 43 myself.

BILLY. And thirdly I'm not pining for a step father just yet. I hope it isn't her money you're after captain.

BEECH. What?

BILLY. Because she hasn't any, it's mine now, and although I will always look after her, I wouldn't undertake to provide for you.

BEECH. You young cub, are you trying to insult me?

BILLY. No, I'm only giving you a straight tip, so think it over Captain Beecher.

BEECH. Are you aware that you are addressing your superior officer?

BILLY. Oh you can't come the Barrack Sergeant over me today Beecher, I'm not in khaki yet.

BEECH. (FURIOUS, TAKES OUT WATCH) Report at head quarters at two o'clock.

BILLY. Why it's nearly one now.

LUCY. Captain Beecher let me have my boy today, we have a fete arranged for this afternoon, you will let him stay?

BEECH. Sorry Mrs. Fortescue, but I never rescind my orders.

BILLY. There mater don't look so pipped, let's make the most of our time, I'll go and tell Dee to hurry up with the luncheon. (KISSES HER AND EXITS)

LUCY. One moment – I – (FOLLOWING)

BEECH. Stay Lucy, I want an answer to my question.

LUCY. Say no more, I loved my husband when we married and I shall love his memory till I die.

25

BEECH. Then I am to consider myself rejected?

LUCY. Since you insist on plain speaking – yes –

BEECH. Lucy Fortescue, I am a man who has never been thwarted in any desire that I have set my mind on. Your doubts and scruples are nothing to me, possession of you is everything. I have tried honourable means and you have repulsed me, now I shall try other measures, and whether you regard me with indifference, with love or with hate

(ENTER DEE)

some day you shall belong to me. (EXIT)

LUCY. His words fill me with dread – yet why should I fear him –

DEE. Why indeed madam – a lady in your position should not fear old Lawyer Beecher's son.

LUCY. He is master Billy's superior officer, Dee.

DEE. Well, what of that, madam? So long as Master Billy does his duty, all the captains in the Army couldn't do him any harm.

LUCY. Oh Dee, sometimes I fear greatly for my boy's future, he is so wild, so headstrong. If his father were only here to guide and counsel me, how different my life would be – how very very different.

(DEE IS HOLDING OPEN DOOR, SHE EXITS AND HE  
FOLLOWS.)

(ENTER CAPTAIN FORTESCUE.)

26

FORT. And so again after an absence of so many years I am back at the old place – how little it has altered - how it all comes back to my memory, and to think that I am near her – Lucy – my own wife – it makes me tremble like a boy.

(ENTER BEECHER.)

BEECH. Excuse me sir, but these are private grounds.

FORT. There seems to be preparation for a fete, and I thought that the owner whoever he may be, would not object to a stranger viewing his beautiful grounds.

BEECH. This is the estate of Sir William Fortescue.

FORT. (ASTONISHED) I beg your pardon, what name did you say?

BEECH. Sir William Fortescue.

FORT. Pardon me, do you not mean Sir John?

BEECH. No sir, Sir John died six months ago, and the title is now held by his nephew, who is like ourselves a soldier. Permit me to introduce myself, Cyril Beecher, Royal Air Force.

FORT. Captain William Fortescue, 21<sup>st</sup> United States Infantry Regiment.

BEECH. By Jove that's odd.

FORT. Very odd indeed.

BEECH. I suppose you are not by any chance related to the Fortescues here?

FORT. I really could not say, there are a good many Fortescues in the world.

27

BEECH. But this young man's father who bore the name of William, was last heard of in the United States, I wondered if you had ever run across him.

FORT. (SHAKING HIS HEAD) I wonder? Who can tell?

BEECH. I take it you are stationed at the camp out yonder?

FORT. Exactly.

BEECH. Then we are neighbours, for I am at the Flying Grounds adjoining.

(RE-ENTER BILLY)

BILLY. Hullo, I thought the mater was here.

BEECH. Your mother is in the house I fancy, may I introduce Captain Fortescue.

BILLY. Namesakes, eh? (BUS)

FORT. Yes. I thought you said (TO BEECHER) this lad was a soldier.

BILLY. So I am sir, in a very few hours from now I shall be in khaki. Lieut. Fortescue at your service.

FORT. You hold a very responsible position for so young a man, a commission in the Army, the head of an old house, the possessor of great wealth –

BILLY. Yes, it's a tall order isn't it, but I must try and rise to the occasion for the mater's sake.

FORT. For her sake I hope you may. (OFFERS HAND)

28

(BEECHER CALLS BILLY TO ATTENTION AND THEY WALK OFF TALKING, FORTESCUE TURNS TO WATCH THEM)

(ENTER WINNIE PEG)

WIN. Waal, I reckon this is about the smartest homestead I've struck in this little old island, I wonder who the boss here may be.

FORT. Do you? Well, I happen to be that personage, young lady.

WIN. How dye do boss – (HOLDS OUT HER HAND WHICH BILLY SHAKES)

BILLY. I'm very well thanks, and hope you're the same.

WIN. You bet, the weather is "set fair" in my barometer.

BILLY. What's your corps, I don't recognise the uniform?

WIN. Not at present, but you will right soon, I'm a sister of the American Soldiers Comforts Association, and say I designed the uniform myself.

BILLY. It does credit to your taste.

WIN. Say young fellow, didn't you ought to be in uniform likewise?

BILLY. I shall be very soon.

WIN. That's O.K. I guess you're a Britisher?

BILLY. Oh yes, of course.

WIN. I'm proud of the Stars and Stripes, but I reckon there's just one reason why I'd like to be a Britisher myself just now.

BILLY. And what is that?

29

WIN. Cause then I could join your W.A.A.C.S. and wear a real government dress instead of floating around in a sort of demi semi quaver get up like this, smart tho' you think it.

BILLY. And you have come across the Atlantic to help your soldiers?

WIN. Partly that, and partly to keep an eye on one valiant warrior on whom I've got the first mortgage.

BILLY. I see, and when do you reckon to foreclose on him?

WIN. Just the first minute I get the chance beau.

BILLY. Oh now, if I had your sort of mortgage on me, the sooner the foreclosure was made the better I should like it.

WIN. Say, you're slinging toffee at me.

BILLY. I never was guilty of such a thing in my life.

WIN. You're rather dense, haven't you ever been to college?

BILLY. Yes, I was a Trinity till the dons rusticated me.

WIN. And I reckon you've been rusticating ever since, till the rust wants chipping off you with a cold chisel.



BILLY. Er quite so - (ASIDE) I'll be hanged if I know what she means (ALOUD) would you like to look through the green houses? We've a lovely show of tomatoes?

WIN. That's just my name and home address, I'm the finest judge of fruits and vegetables west of the river Jordan.

BILLY. Then take my arm.

WIN. You bet – hook and eye is our mode of progress.

30

(THEY ARE GOING UP ARM IN ARM, ENTER SAM IN UNIFORM)

SAM. Hello (JEALOUSLY) And where might you be galloping to on a double yoke?

WIN. This gentleman is going to show me his tomatoes.

SAM. That so? Say, boss have you any objection to me joining the circus?

BILLY. Is this gentleman a friend of yours?

WIN. Not particularly, he's only the valiant warrior I chased across the Atlantic –

BILLY. (TRYING TO RELEASE HIS ARM) Oh then – of course –

WIN. Nothing doing sonny, this coupling ain't going to be broke till the cars arrive at the depot.

BILLY. Yes but he's –

WIN. He's going to do just what I tell him, aint that so Sammy?

SAM. Waal now, I reckon that ar question wants chewing the cud on – firstly I'm your –

WIN. Say hook on – (TAKES HIS ARM SO THAT SHE IS BETWEEN THE TWO MEN) and I reckon you can chew the cud while I'm judging the tomatoes.

(ENTER LUCY)

31

LUCY. Dear me, Billy, who are your friends, won't you introduce them?

BILLY. I would mater like a shot, only I don't know their names.

WIN. Say, that's not going to damp the festivities, let me take hold. I'm Winnie Peg, and that's Sam Boston, and that's Billy, and you're Billy's mother, now we all know each other, let's fraternize.

LUCY. You certainly have cleared away the difficulty in a characteristic fashion. I suppose you are an American Miss Pegg?

WIN. Yaas ma'am – Born in Ohio educated in Toledo, and last hailing from Sacto –

SAM. And now going to inspect a tomato.

(EXITS WITH WINNIE)

BILLY. (CALLING AFTER THEM) Keep to the left.

SAM. (OFF) Right O.

BILLY. Two's company – eh mater?

LUCY. Billy your time is getting short, (TAKES HIM TO SEAT) and I have such a lot to say to you.

BILLY. Don't begin to lecture there's a dear, it's all right and proper that I should have to go of course, but it's a beastly nuisance in another sense, mater. I intended to have a fling, to kick up my heels a bit you know when I was my own master, but of course this has put the tin hat on it completely.

LUCY. In what way dear?

32

BILLY. Well it's duty right away and mater somehow I fancy I'm not going to have such an easy time under Capt. Beecher, not of course that he can order me about as he pleases – but –

(ENTER FORTESCUE AT BACK)

LUCY. Billy dear, don't you think you have already done too much "kicking your heels up" as you call it? I know dear lad, that you have not had a father to control you, but I do think that I have been too weakly indulgent toward you and sometimes I blame myself bitterly (THEY RISE)

BILLY. Don't do that mater, I'm my father's son after all, and he sowed a few wild oats in his time I'm told, and it seems as tho' I take after him, for when I set out for a spree or a row, I'm bound to have one or the other before I'm satisfied.

LUCY. Ah my dear, when people look for trouble they can always find it, now – come round to the stables and say good bye to your favourites and I want you to promise me three things (GOING OFF)

BILLY. I say mater don't lay it on too thick you know (EXIT TOGETHER)

FORT.        (COMING DOWN) My wife and son – what will they say when they know of my existence – today this cruel war which has separated so many loving hearts, must come between that brave mother and her only son – surely this would be the most fitting moment for my return.

(ENTER BRENDA FOLLOWED BY BEECHER)

33

BREN.        I'll help you to break the news, I could supply a few details which you might forget.

FORT.        What – have you followed me here?

BREN.        Yes. – Well – why do you hesitate? Go and claim your wife – and I want to see the joyful meeting.

FORT.        So that you may dash the cup of happiness from my lips - ? rather than my wife should be insulted by your presence her ears polluted with your vile insinuations – I would remain estranged from her for ever.

BREN.        Well you can take your choice – go – and leave her in ignorance – or remain with me beside you.

(DEE ENTERS UP C.)

(LUCY AND BILLY L 3 SIMULTANEOUSLY)

FORT.        (BUS) I will go –

(GOES UP MEETS DEE BRENDA RP C. FORT. C. LUCY L.C.)

DEE. Stay sir – who are you? (EXCITEDLY)

FORT. An officer from the American camp yonder.

LUCY. (HAS RECOGNISED HIS VOICE) William – my husband – (GOES TO HIM)

DEE. I knew it – I knew it – oh tis the master come home –

34

BEECH. Then you are not sir William after all.

LUCY. Oh I was sure you were not dead my heart told me so, but why – why – have you not come back to us before?

BREN. Ah that's the question ma'am – and I hope the wanderer can give you a satisfactory explanation, but if he can't – I can.

LUCY. William – who is this woman? I think you have made a mistake.

BILLY. (TO BRENDA) Excuse me madam, but these are private grounds.

BREN. I know that. There is no mistake – is there “gentleman” Fortescue.

LUCY. William, for the second time – who is this woman?

BREN. Well ma'am, as the party addressed don't seem able to reply, I reckon it is up to me. I am Mrs William Fortescue no. 2 barring that I've cut of the “I will” and the marriage certificate out of compliment to you.

LUCY. My God – (TURNS TO BILLY EMBRACE)

FORT. Are you satisfied now?

BREN. Yes I reckon my bullets just about found the target.

FORT. Now leave these grounds and quickly, before I lose my self control.

BEECH. It seems to me that you ought to accompany the lady sir.

BILLY. No – no – he is master here, my mother and I will go, and leave them in possession.

LUCY. Billy – what are you saying?

BEECH. He is quite right, Lucy, come, I will watch over you –

BILLY. Come mother –

FORT. Lucy – have you no word for me?

35

LUCY. Is that woman's story true?

FORT. Yes it is true.

LUCY. And yet you knew of my existence –

FORT. No Lucy – let me explain –

BREN. There is no explanation.

LUCY. She is right – there is no explanation, you left us all these years without a word – you only return to claim your inheritance – having done so, I now charge you to hold and guard it as a sacred trust for our son – as I have done – there can be no place for me in your life now - may God forgive you for the wrong you have done me. I feel I never can – and may God guard over and bless you, my son, and keep you from all harm.

## SCENE 3.

THE CORRIDOR OF THE OFFICERS' QUARTERS AT THE  
AERODROME.(ENTER BEECHER AND BRENDA TO BEGIN)

- BREN. So the dear kind natives are talking about my frequent visits to the officers' quarters eh?
- BEECH. Yes and it's deuced unpleasant for me.
- BREN. But I ain't the only she male that hangs around, young Billy's mother is generally on the spot or thereabouts.
- BEECH. Yes, that's different, to begin with she's in with some of the instructors, and is as keen as mustard on flying, unofficially she's made a lot of flights, and she's as cool and as daring as any of our boys, and they're all devoted to her. You are a stranger. Now why don't you join some society and get into a uniform? Then you could go where you pleased without remark. (LISTENS)
- BREN. No thanks. Nursin' sick Tommies ain't my line, what are you listenin' out for?
- BEECH. The telephone bell, we're expecting an air raid warning at any minute.
- BREN. Say Cap, I've no doubt it's good fun for you, but these darned air raids kinder get on my nerves.
- BEECH. No doubt, but all the same we may turn even an air raid to our own uses.

- BREN. It's mighty little use I have for one I'm telling you. I guess I'm going to pack my traps and get back over the pond.
- BEECH. What – giving in already? I thought you wanted your revenge on Fortescue and his wife?
- BREN. So I do – but how can I accomplish it? I prevented their reconciliation it's true, I hurt her as I always swore I would – but for her I should hold a very different position – but how can I hurt him now for his treatment of me? If he were not in the Army, it would be different, but hedged in as he is, how can I injure him?
- BEECH. THROUGH HIS SON.
- BREN. What do you mean?
- BEECH. I mean this – Fortescue worships his son – disgrace to Billy would break his heart, bring about the boy's down fall and you have your revenge on Fortescue. Sympathy on my part and a pretence of hiding Billy's deficiencies from the authorities would give me a hold over Billy's mother, and the rest should be easy, she will never give in to me now that she knows her husband is alive, unless it be to save the boy's honour. Come help me, and I will help you.
- BREN. What is your plan?
- BEECH. Listen, the next hostile air raid it is arranged that the lad goes up with the defending squadron, and the chances are a hundred to one that we shall have them over tonight.
- BREN. Ugh – well?
- BEECH. When the squadron is ready to start young Billy will be on the spot, eager and full of enthusiasm, now the lad is fond of a glass of champagne.
- BREN. Well, one glass won't hurt him, nor even two.



BEECH. What became of that phial of spirits of wine you were carrying about yesterday?

BREN. I have it here – one drop in my night cap and I sleep the clock round.

BEECH. Well ---- use your brains.

BREN. I get you – you want me to dope young BILLY.

BEECH. I suggested nothing of the sort, it wouldn't do for a man in my position to be mixed up in such an affair, but I tell you that if, when the squadron is ready to start tonight, the young beggar SHOULD be found too drunk to do his duty, I'll take care that he gets into the worst kind of trouble, court martial disgrace etc.

BREN. Gee, you're cute, I guess that will fix him, his lady mother, and gentleman Fortescue into the bargain.

BEECH. You'll find some champagne in the cupboard in my quarters.

BREN. Right, if I don't dope him good and hard before he's another hour older my name is mud. (EXIT)

BEECH. A clever woman that, by Jove – but I'd rather have her for a friend than an enemy.

(ENTER WINNIE PEG)

WIN. Say sonny, which way to Mr. Fortescue's shebang.

BEECH. Who the deuce are you?

WIN. Politeness demands that you should answer my question before you ask me another.

BEECH. Confound your impudence, do you know who I am?

- WIN. Some one of considerable importance I guess – say – you ain't King George are you.
- BEECH. No.
- WIN. Praps you're the French President?
- BEECH. No.
- WIN. King Albert of Belgium praps?
- BEECH. No.
- WIN. Well I know you ain't the President of the United States, so I guess you must be the Sultan of Turkey.
- BEECH. How dare you?
- WIN. Now don't get raw, if you ain't Turkey, then there's only one guess left, you must be the Kaiser with his moustache shaved off.
- BEECH. By Jove this is too much. Clear out of these quarters. Women aren't allowed here.

(RE-ENTER BRENDA WITH CHAMPAGNE)

- WIN. That so? How do you classify Brenda Roscoe then?
- BREN. You let me alone, Winnie Pegg, and vamoose pronto.
- WIN. I came here to see Lieut. Fortescue and I guess I'm going to see him, run along sonny, and tell him I'm waiting, and I'll give you ten cents.
- BEECH. Heavens, woman, what do you take me for?
- WIN. The bell hop of this hotel I guess.

BEECH. Bell hop be damned I'm the O.C.

WIN. Oh, you're the O.C. are you? Oh I see.

BREN. Then if you see – git –

WIN. Git nothing. O.C. trot right along with my message or you'll lose that ten cents.

BEECH. Oh damn it all – Hi – Fortescue – (EXITS)

WIN. That's better. Say Brenda, what's brought you this side of the pond?

BREN. Same object as yourself I guess, to try and do my bit, what society do you belong to?

WIN. The American Soldiers Comforts Association, don't you like the uniform? What d'you think of the breeches, smart eh? Some uniform I guess.

BREN. And what position do you hold in the association?

WIN. Oh nothin' particular just one of 'em.

BREN. Who's the president?

WIN. Oh I'm the president.

BREN. Who's the secretary?

WIN. I'm the secretary.

BREN. Who's the chairman of the committee?

WIN. That's me again.

BREN. What are the rules and regulations?

WIN. Oh I'm them, I make them up as we go along, and if they don't suit, I alter them.

BREN. I've kinder got a hunch you are the Association, say, who's finding the dollars?

WIN. The Boston estate I guess, oh there's piles of dollars behind it you bet.

BREN. Old Zachariah Boston's dollars, eh? Well, I'd like to join you.

WIN. Taint in your line Brenda, it's on the square.

BREN. And you can't forget that I ran a bit crooked eh? You good gals are all alike when you see one of your own sex down – you'll keep her down.

WIN. You're wrong there, if you mean to play square I'll give you a chance, say, can you drive an automobile?

BREN. Waal I should smile.

WIN. Can you cook a dinner fit to eat?

BREN. I'll put a dinner on the table with any ordinary woman this side of Jordan.

WIN. That's good, what other accomplishments do you possess?

BREN. Waal, I kin ride any broncho that was ever saddled, and flip a deck of cards with any gambler that sharpened a flat.

WIN. Waal, then when you feel inclined to do some good in the world instead of making mischief, come right along and we'll fix you up with a job and a uniform.

(RE-ENTER BEECHER)

BEECH. Fortescue is in the aerodrome.

- WIN. Thanks, here's your ten cents for telling me.
- BEECH. Oh damn it Brenda, I don't know who this crazy woman is, but for heaven's sake get her out of these quarters at once.
- BREN. Certainly, Cap. Miss Pegg, your presence is displeasing to the Commanding Officer here.
- WIN. Gee – who did you say he was?
- BREN. Captain Beecher, Mr. Fortescue's superior officer.
- WIN. I should never have guessed it.
- BEECH. And why not pray?
- WIN. Because I have always understood the British officers were gentlemen. (EXIT)
- BEECH. Did you find the champagne?
- BREN. Yes, I have drugged it, and sealed up the bottle again (HOLDS IT UP) and if that doesn't knock him over he's got a head like an iron pot.

(TELEPHONE BELL)

- BEECH. Ah that's the coast warning for a million. Wait here (EXIT)
- BREN. Wait here, not likely, I'm making for a place of safety.

(ENTER SAM)

Can you tell me if the air raid warning has gone?

- SAM. Not yet marm, keep cool, I'm straight from camp.
- BREN. Why it's Boston the cow puncher.
- SAM. Wrong ma'am, it is Pte. Sam Boston of the 21<sup>st</sup> United States Infantry.
- BREN. What are doing here?
- SAM. Minding my own business, what are you?
- BREN. This is an unexpected meeting.
- SAM. Unexpected, and to me darned unwelcome, I don't like your branch.
- BREN. You are still as insolent as ever.
- SAM. And you're still as fond of showing up when you're not wanted, so we're quits.
- BREN. Are we? That will be seen, I've a large acquaintance among your officers, and I'll see if I can't even up your chin music.
- SAM. Oh yes, I guess a right smart lot of our officers have been skinned by Poker Brenda of the gild edged saloon, but there's one you ain't got the better of yet, and that's the gentleman I'm looking for, Captain Fortescue.
- BREN. I ain't played all my cards yet, Sammy.
- SAM. Ah, you're a tryer all right all right, I'll allow, but if you can double shuffle my last boss, I'll eat the next cow I punch, meat, bones, horns, hoofs, tail and all. So long.
- BREN. I guess I'm going to give that hombre an attack of indigestion that Beecham's Pills won't cure. Hello, here comes the young cub, and his inseparable mother, I've no desire to meet her – yet. (EXIT)

(ENTER LUCY, WITH BILLY IN UNIFORM)

LUCY. Yes Billy, you flew your machine very well this morning, but there was some indecision in your direction, a kind of nerving which you must conquer if you are to become a really first class pilot.

BILLY. Pon my word mater, you criticize me as if you were my C.O.

LUCY. Billy boy, I only point out your weaknesses because I wish you to excel!

BILLY. Oh well, a fellow can't do much when his own mother takes the shine out of him. Every one of the boys here cram it down my throat that you are a far better pilot than I am.

LUCY. Oh, come Billy, don't sulk, or I shall think you are jealous of your own mother.

BILLY. Oh, that's all rot, now isn't it – ha – ha – ha – well I must go and get into my kit and see that the old bus is right for any call that may come tonight. You get into safety dearest, and don't worry about me.

LUCY. I do worry tho' dear, how can I help it? Sometimes I fear you join in too freely in the wild parties of the reckless lads around you, and Billy, if ever you were unfit for duty when the call for action came, the disgrace would kill me.

(ENTER FORTESCUE)

BILLY. That's not going to happen mother, you can trust me.

(KISSES HER GAILY, TURNS, MEETS FORTESCUE, PULLS  
HIMSELF UP STIFFLY, SALUTES AND EXITS.)

FORT. A stiff necked young beggar.

LUCY. You forget he loves me very dearly, and he cannot bring himself to forgive you the wrong you did me.

FORT. Lucy, I too have my pride – I told you I had an explanation –

(BUS FROM LUCY)

you refused to listen to me, - now it is I who refuse to speak –  
some day you may ask me for it – but for the present – well –  
they used to call me “Pig-headed Bill” at Sandhurst.

LUCY. Do you know that Billy is on duty tonight, should there be a raid?

FORT. I heard so, that is why I came over.

LUCY. I have a presentiment that something terrible is going to happen tonight in connection with him.

FORT. He may be killed on duty, every soldier runs that risk, he must be prepared to accept it and so must we.

LUCY. If that occurred I should be proud of his memory whilst I mourned his loss.

FORT. Then what else can you fear?

LUCY. I do not know. Can you be near and watch over him?



FORT. Impossible, I am on duty at general headquarters and must return to camp at once.

LUCY. Then I must stay myself.

FORT. You cannot stay here.

LUCY. No, but in the married quarters with the wife of one of the mechanics.

FORT. I pass that way on my road to the American G.H.Q., may I walk with you?

LUCY. You did not need to ask that question once.

FORT. Please God that time may come again.

LUCY. Don't, my dear, don't. Heaven knows I love you still, but something died in my heart that day Brenda Roscoe claimed as her right all the weary years that I had lived alone. No explanation can alter that. Perhaps some day I may look on things differently, it all depends on you and BILLY.

FORT. Nay, the decision lies in the hands of Billy's mother (TAKING HER HANDS).

(ENTER SAM, SALUTES)

SAM. Excuse me sir, but thar's considerable stir up at the camp, and you're called for hot foot, Cunnel Vandam's been twice to your quarters, so knowing where you was I made bold to follow you here pronto.

FORT. Thanks Boston, I must return at once.

SAM. I brought yor cayuse along cap, he's hitched outside.

LUCY. Don't wait for me Captain Fortescue, I can find my own way.

FORT. Sam, see this lady safely to the R.A.F. married quarters.

(EXIT WITH LUCY.)

SAM. Gentleman Fortescue and that ar dame seem to be on mighty good terms, I kinder sepicion they have met before. (EXIT.)

(RE-ENTER BEECHER AND BRENDA WITH GLASSES)

BEECH. The coast warning has gone, and in half an hour we shall be at work. Get ready to do your part, I am going to warn our young friend. (EXIT R)

(BRENDA OPENS BOTTLE)

BREN. Well, I've played nearly every card in the deck but doping a man's neck oil, and now I've come to that. Well we live and learn I guess.

(RE-ENTER BEECHER)

BEECH. Now I rely on you – he is coming. (EXIT)

BREN. He won't come far I guess.

(ENTER BILLY IN FULL KIT)

BILLY. The warning's gone, the old bus is right and ready to the last tin tack, and I'm right and ready to the last breath.

BREN. Congratulations, and good wishes for your first fight, won't you wet the occasion? I've got a bottle of the right bubblely water here.

BILLY. That's awfully good of you Miss – Bre – I don't really know your name –

BREN. That doesn't matter, I'm a friend of Captain Beecher's. Let me pour you out a glass, it will steady your nerves, and strengthen your arm. There you are (OFFERS GLASS)

BILLY. Surely you will drink with me.

BREN. Oh of course (POURS OUT GLASS) Here's victory to you and confusion to the enemy.

BILLY. Cheerio (DRINKS, SHE FLINGS HERS AWAY)

BREN. Have another to finish the bottle.

BILLY. Rather, that stuff's too good to waste (BUS, DRINKS 2<sup>ND</sup> GLASS)

BREN. The dear little fly has walked right into the parlour without a kick.

BILLY. By Jove, that's jolly good wine, I wish I had some like it in my own cellars.

BREN. There would soon be a funeral in the family if you had.

BILLY. Why, confound it, I believe it's getting hold of me, that's funny.

BREN. It would be a darned sight funnier if it didn't.

BILLY. The blessed room is going round and round, I'd better get out into the air.

BREN. No, no, you sit down a minute.

BILLY. But I can't stop here – the warning – the warning – has gone – and – the – old – bus – is - ready – and - Billy is – unfit – for duty – (SINKS IN CHAIR) and she – said it – would kill her – (MAKES EFFORT TO RISE) Ah – (SINKS BACK UNCONSCIOUS)

BREN. I guess that's put paid to your account pard.

VOICE. Fortescue – Fortescue – where is Fortescue –

BREN. I'd better be non-est. (EXIT)

(SOUND OF MACHINES)

(ENTER LUCY)

LUCY. Billy, Billy, the first warning has gone – and my boy not by his machine. Where can he be, Billy – Billy – what have you been doing (SHAKES HIM)

BILLY. (SLEEPILY) I'm all ri' give me 'nother glass –

LUCY. Oh my God, he has ruined himself – how can I save him – Billy – Billy – (SHAKES HIM) no use – in a few minutes the signal for ascent will be given, and he will be disgraced for ever, no – no – I can handle a machine with the best of them, his spare kit is lying idle, I'll take my boy's place, and save him from disgrace.

SCENE 4.

(C. C.'S OFFICE AND ROOMS NEAR FLYING GROUND. NIGHT.  
A RAID IS JUST OVER. BEECHER DISCOVERED AT  
TELEPHONE.)

BEECH. All clear? Good. Much damage – h'm – did they all get away? Two Gothas down – that's good – promotion for someone eh? Not known yet who brought them down – no – hope it's one of my men. No, I'm not turning in just yet, I shall wait till all the machines land safely. Good night (HANGS UP RECEIVER)

(ENTER BRENDA FROM INNER ROOM.)

BREN. By Jingo, that's been two hours of hell, with a capital H, I'm not going to stir away from here tonight.

BEECH. Nonsense, the all clear has gone, it's as safe as houses, we've brought two of their infernal machines down.

BREN. Oh, who's the hero?

BEECH. We can't tell yet who the lucky chap is.

BREN. No, but we can tell who it isn't – young Fortescue (KNOCK)

BEECH. You'd better not be seen here –

BREN. Why not? I've no character to lose - (KNOCK)

BEECH. Just wait in my room.

BREN. Right beau – I'll have another pop at the fizzy (EXIT.)

BEECH. Come in

(ENTER SAM, SALUTES)

BEECH. What do you want?

SAM. The telephone to American headquarters is damaged by shrapnel and I have been sent over for messenger duty, if required, till our wiremen repair damage.

BEECH. Are you mounted or on foot?

SAM. The broncho's hobbled outside.

BEECH. Put him in one of the sheds and then return here.

(SAM SALUTES AND EXITS.)

(RE-ENTER BRENDA)

BEECH. And so you succeeded with the young pup?

BREN. Easy as tumbling off a log, he fell in for liquidation in one minute, was yawning his head off in two, and as fast as a squirrel in winter in three.

BEECH. Good, where did you leave him?

BREN. In the corridor snoring.

BEECH. Splendid, I've got him this time and by this means I'll bring his mother to my terms, and I'll guarantee he will receive no mercy from the court martial when my evidence is given.

BREN. Say, I reckon you do love that boy, don't you?

BEECH. Love him – the insolent young hound, I could kill him with my own hands.

BREN. I guess you're doing better than that if you disgrace him beau.

BEECH. Right. He's in the corridor you say, I'll go and see him in the drunken sleep which will prove his ruin and my triumph. (EXIT)

BREN. Waal, I reckon this evening up process is all right all right, but it cuts mighty little ice financially (SITS AT DESK)

(RE-ENTER SAM)

SAM. Report for duty sir. Gee – Poker Brenda, what in thunder are you doing here.

BREN. Still cavorting round Sammy.

SAM. Yaas, hatching some serpent's eggs like the Devil's hen you are. Jerusalem – but I'd give a few dollars to see your game double crossed, whatever it is.

BREN. Ah, that's what you don't know, sonny.

(TELEPHONE BELL RINGS, BRENDA RISES TO GO TO IT, SAM INTERCEPTS)

SAM. I reckon not Brenda, I'm right here and don't you forget it (BUS)  
Hello, yes, hold the line – the captain will speak to you (HOLDS  
RECEIVER, HAND OVER IT) guess that's one to me, Brenda.

(RE-ENTER BEECHER)

BEECH. Damnation, he's not there (SEES SAM)

SAM. Wanted on the phone, sir (HANDS RECEIVER TO BEECHER, WHO  
PUTS HIS HAND OVER IT)

BEECH. Right, wait outside

(SAM SALUTES, EXITS)

Where the devil can he have got to? Are you sure he wasn't  
foxing?

BREN. Sure as death.

BEECH. (ON PHONE) Hello – hell – yes, I'm Captain Beecher – what –  
Lieut. Fortescue has just descended by American headquarters.  
Fortescue – are you sure? Order him to come over and report at  
once (HANGS UP RECEIVER) What devil's trickery is going on, by  
God, is our plan going to fail after all.

BREN. If that lad has sold me then I guess we're in the soup, he could  
easy prove that I attempted to dope him, and if I'm copped, I'll  
take care you don't escape, get me?

BEECH. We can do nothing till we know. (PACING UP AND DOWN) By  
God, I can see that court martial I intended for him trying me –  
and you.



- BREN. And what will that mean?
- BEECH. Most likely a brick wall and a firing party.
- BREN. Ave Maria – I couldn't face that. Say, can't we do anything? I'm not going to kick in while there's a fighting chance left.
- BEECH. Go and see if you can find out anything, and clear the bottle and glasses away, they're still there.
- BREN. Right, that will be better than chewing my heart here. (EXITS)

(ENTER LUCY IN UNIFORM, SALUTES)

- LUCY. Returned safely sir, engaged one Gotha and drove him down in flames over Long Plain. My own machine slightly damaged.
- BEECH. By God, who the devil are you?
- LUCY. Lieut. Fortescue sir.
- BEECH. Oh (RECOVERING) Of course, you have done very well for your first fight, who was your observer?
- LUCY. Flight Sergeant Tompkins sir.
- BEECH. (REFERRING TO LIST) Oh just so, and it was you sent the Gotha down over Long Plain, very good indeed, (there's some trick here, but for the life of me I can't discover it.)
- LUCY. Do you want me any further sir? I'm feeling pretty fagged.
- BEECH. Yes you would be. You've done remarkably well, what do you say, shall we crack a bottle?
- LUCY. Not at present, I don't care for drinking when on duty.
- BEECH. By Jove, you did your share before you went up eh?

LUCY. Not a spot sir.

BEECH. Ah, I thought differently. By the way, where were you when the second warning went?

LUCY. In my quarters, changing, sir, I just reached my bus when the ascent signal was given.

BEECH. Ah – who gave it?

LUCY. Why you did yourself sir, from the door of the aerodrome.

BEECH. Your voice seems strange Fortescue, it doesn't sound a bit like your own.

LUCY. I got some of the cloud in my throat sir, and it's made me rather husky.

BEECH. (BAFFLED) Ah yes, just so, of course.

LUCY. Can I report myself off duty sir?

BEECH. Have you housed your machine?

LUCY. Flight Sergeant Tompkins and the mechanics have taken it into the repair shop.

BEECH. Very well, you may go –

(ENTER SAM)

LUCY. (ASIDE TO SAM) Fetch Captain Fortescue –

(EXIT SAM)

and now to deal with Billy.

(RE-ENTER BRENDA DRAGGING BILLY)

BREN. I found him, he had tried to get to his quarters and had fallen again, he is as helpless as a blind kitten (FLINGS HIM IN CHAIR)

BEECH. Then who the devil is this – (TEARS OFF LUCY'S FLYING CAP, HER HAIR FALLS DOWN)

BREN. Rully Gee, it's Billy's mother.

BEECH. Ah ha – I think the cards are in my hands this time. Drag that drunken lout back to where you found him, and see that I am not disturbed here (HELPS HER WITH BILLY)

BREN. (AT DOOR) Say cap – revenge is sweet – happy days. (EXITS)

LUCY. What are you going to do?

BEECH. Can't you guess? It doesn't always pay a mother to flout a man who happens to be her son's superior officer.

LUCY. What do you mean?

BEECH. I mean that I have got you in a cleft stick at last, and by God you'll yield to me this time, or I'll grind your heart to powder under my heel. Oh, you were clever, you knew your spoilt darling had drunk himself into insensibility because he feared to go up tonight.

LUCY. It's a lie.

BEECH. The fact is proved – you tried to save him by going in his place, and as near as an ace succeeded. Discovery came just in time to deliver you into my hands. Do you hear? Into MY hands.

LUCY. Billy's work was done, no suspicion has been aroused, now let me go.

BEECH. Not yet, my dear Lucy, not yet. I can drag your boy before a court martial on a triple charge, absence from duty, being drunk whilst on duty, and cowardice in the face of the enemy. The penalty for the last is death.

LUCY. No, no, I went in his place, I saved him.

BEECH. Not quite – but you CAN.

LUCY. How?

BEECH. I will raise no question, everything shall be right for the young fool, if you – who risked your life to save his – will yield to my love, and stay here the night.

LUCY. No – no – no –

BEECH. Then he must face the court martial, after all it is a fair bargain, your honour for his.

LUCY. (WITH SCORN AND TERROR) And you call yourself a soldier.

BEECH. I call myself your lover, whose passion once aroused can only be appeased by that boy's death or your love.

LUCY. Oh God in mercy save me from this choice.

BEECH. Prayers and tears won't help you, you are utterly in my power, come now, make up your mind, am I to have Billy's life or Billy's mother?

FORT. (DASHING ON) Neither sir, for you have yet to deal with Billy's father.

INTERVAL.

SCENE 5.

ANOTHER PART OF THE FORTESCUES' GROUNDS.

(ENTER DEE TO OPEN)

DEE. Ah dear, 'tis a sad day, and a sad lady that I have had to wait on this morning. Master Billy's disgrace has well nigh broken Mrs. Fortescue's heart, and as for the lad himself, 'tis pitiful to watch him.

(GOES UPSTAGE)

(ENTER BILLY, CROSSES TO SEAT AS HE SPEAKS.)

BILLY. It's no use, I dare not face her – my little mother, whom I have disgraced, what does she think of me – ah mother, mother, you cannot blame me more bitterly than I blame myself.

(DEE COMES DOWN)

DEE. Now sir, you must not give way like this. Every young man has made a fool of himself – begging your pardon sir – at one time or another, and you are no worse than the rest.

BILLY. You don't quite understand, Dee, no son was ever guilty of such wickedness towards his mother before, I'm the most miserable wretch alive.

DEE. Tut tut sir, you're a Fortescue and come of a fighting stock. Be up, and fight your enemy boldly – and your worst enemy is – yourself.

BILLY. I've half a mind to do away with myself.

DEE. (INDIGNANT) Now that's downright cowardly, for shame, sir, for shame.

(ENTER CAPTAIN FORTESCUE)

FORT. Strong words, Dee.

DEE. He deserves them sir, he talks of doing away with himself.

FORT. Ah – well, leave him to me.

DEE. Yes sir - (DRAWS HIM ASIDE) Excuse me sir, but do you know that Captain Beecher has sent an escort to fetch Master Billy?

FORT. I am aware of it, and have made myself responsible.

DEE. That's good hearing sir, I'll go and see what I can do for the mistress. (EXIT)

FORT. William – (BILLY RISES)

BILLY. Don't rag me sir, I feel I couldn't stand it. I'm pretty well desperate.

FORT. I'm not here to preach to you my boy, but to advise you to try and help you.

- BILLY. Thanks sir. I suppose it means court martial and disgrace. I deserve both, but oh – if only I could spare my mother.
- FORT. There is a way out, but I warn you it's over a hard and stony road.
- BILLY. Tell me sir.
- FORT. I have just left your old friend General Fisher, we have been talking over your affairs, and in his decision I concur.
- BILLY. What am I to do?
- FORT. Send in your papers, resign your commission, and enlist in the ranks.
- BILLY. As a private?
- FORT. As a private, my lad, there are better men there than you or I amongst them. (BILLY GOES UP, TURNS, AND COMES DOWN) What do you say?
- BILLY. I'll do it sir, and I'll do my best to wipe out the disgrace I've brought upon your name – and hers.
- FORT. The General has written privately to the Recruiting Officer of the district explaining something of your case, so that you will find matters expedited for you.
- BILLY. That is very kind of the General, but have I got to hand in my papers to that cad Beecher?
- FORT. No, Capt. Beecher is superseded, you may send them direct to headquarters.
- BILLY. Then I'll be off at once, wish me luck sir.
- FORT. (PLACES HAND ON BILLY'S SHOULDER) I am your father Billy.
- BILLY. I would not call you so yesterday, because I thought you had wronged my mother – today – I KNOW that I have doubly wronged her, and I deserve that you should disown me.

FORT. No, no, my boy, we are both under a cloud, but if we work together, and help each other, we will pull through yet.

BILLY. By Gad sir, we will. (EXIT)

FORT. That boy may be wild and foolish, but he is no coward whatever his faults may be.

(ENTER SAM)

SAM. See hyar Captain, I've just had orders that get my goat, I am mad, clear through. The Colonel has attached me to some darned Soldiers Comfort Association, as armed escort.

FORT. Well, that's not so bad, is it?

SAM. You haven't heard it all yet sir, I'm to report myself to and to take orders from a WOMAN.

FORT. Well, you'll have to do it, Boston.

SAM. Thunder, I'd give a trifle more than ten cents to be back West punching cows, where there ain't no skirts to come bossin' around.

FORT. Who is the lady to whom you are to report?

SAM. The commandant of the Field Motor Squadron but who the dame is I don't know.

(ENTER WINNIE)

WIN. Don't you? Then, Sammy boy, I'll tell you. It's ME.



- SAM. Stars and stripes, I might have guessed it. She means to have me dead or alive – there's no escape. I'm a gone coon sure.
- WIN. Report yourself for duty sir.
- SAM. I'd sooner ride the maddest bucking broncho that ever busted a saddle girth.
- FORT. You must obey orders Boston. Poor Sam. (EXITS LAUGHING)
- SAM. (RELUCTANTLY) Waal, I suppose I must. (COMING STIFFLY TO ATTENTION, AND SALUTING) Report for duty sir – ma'am – miss – commandant – captain – oh darn it all I don't know what you are.
- WIN. (SEVERELY) I am commandant here young man, and don't you forget it.
- SAM. No ma'am – commandant I mean.
- WIN. Do you know your duties?
- SAM. Oh I suppose I've got to trail round after you, and see that none of the guys get too fresh.
- WIN. You will have to do more than that. You will have my automobile ready at my quarters at six o'clock every morning, cleaned and ready.
- SAM. Darn it, I ain't your chauffeur.
- WIN. Silence sir, speak when you're spoken to.
- SAM. Yes, commandant (SALUTES)
- WIN. You will sit beside me at attention, with your arms folded – and your head erect, eyes front.
- SAM. Say hold on, I'm no nigger footman.
- WIN. Silence. ATTENTION.

- SAM. Yes commandant (SALUTES)
- WIN. You will remain in the auto when I alight, and take charge. You must not speak to, nor look at any other female of the association.
- SAM. Gee, I am going to have a heluva time. I hope to thunder some sniping Jerry will pump lead into me first trip.
- WIN. Silence. ATTENTION.
- SAM. Yes commandant (SALUTES)
- WIN. We go to France next week.
- SAM. I wish to thunder I was there now.
- WIN. Attention.
- SAM. Yes commandant (SALUTES)
- WIN. When did you clean your equipment last?
- SAM. This morning commandant.
- WIN. (WALKING ROUND HIM) Disgraceful.
- SAM. Say Winnie, you're going a darned sight too far – you –
- WIN. Silence. ATTENTION.
- SAM. Yes commandant (SALUTES)
- WIN. You will polish your boots every day so that I can see to fix my hair in them, they're just filthy. When did you have your hair cut last?
- SAM. Waal –
- WIN. Don't answer me, get it cut tonight. Let me look at your teeth. (SAM OPENS HIS MOUTH) I said your teeth, I don't want you to turn yourself inside out. Ah, they're stained with tobacco. Clean them with soda and spirits of salts, let me look at your hands. Ah,

they're stained with cigarettes – you will give up smoking altogether.

SAM. Say that's –

WIN. Silence, attention, right turn, dismiss. Report to me at six tomorrow morning, and let me see some improvement in your appearance.

SAM. Thank the Lord that's over. (EXITS)

WIN. Ah Sammy my son, I think I've got you where I want you now, but by ginger I'll teach you what discipline means. (URNS) Why here comes Billy's mother, I wonder if I dare stay and speak to her

(ENTER LUCY AND DEE)

DEE. Yes madam, I left Master William with Captain Fortescue.

LUCY. And have you seen nothing of Captain Beecher?

DEE. No madam, and I don't want to (EXIT)

WIN. Excuse me madam, but judging by the yarns that are going around, I don't think Captain Beecher will appear in public just yet.

LUCY. What do you mean?

WIN. The boys are saying that Captain Fortescue gave him such a thrashing with his riding whip last night, that he has got as many stripes on his back as all the sergeants in the camp have on their arms put together.

LUCY. Ah, we all get our deserts at some time or other.

(ENTER BEECHER)

- BEECH. And Lieut. Fortescue gets his today madam, where is he?
- WIN. Well of all the brazen impudence.
- BEECH. I sent an escort to bring him back to barracks.
- LUCY. Ah –
- BEECH. The men returned saying that an officer of the United States Army had undertaken his return. I refuse to accept such an undertaking. Where is Lieut. Fortescue?
- LUCY. That is for his enemies to find out, not for his mother to tell them.
- WIN. Thar's one for his nob I guess. (SMACKS HIM ON THE SHOULDER – HE CRIES OUT)
- BEECH. Ah – be careful.
- WIN. Sorry – I forgot your stripes – you don't wear gold ones on your arm – but red ones on your back I hear.
- BEECH. Madam, I demand that you give Lieut. Fortescue up to me at once, or I will have you placed under arrest for harbouring an absentee

(ENTER BILLY)

- BILLY. You can't do that – for I am not under your command now Captain Beecher.
- LUCY. Billy my boy – (GOES TO HIM – REALISES CHANGE) Why what is this – you – you are – oh my God –

(ENTER FORTESCUE)

- BEECH. Ha, ha – ha – Private Fortescue – what a come down –
- FORT. Aye, Private Fortescue, come down as you say – but the lad will never sink so low as you have done Captain Beecher. Now go – (BUS) – GO.
- WIN. Aye go, or you may get stars as well as stripes – (BEECHER TURNS TO GO, SHE DANCES ROUND HIM) – you know discretion is the better part of valour. (PULLS HERSELF UP, SALUTES FORTESCUE AND EXITS)
- LUCY. What does it all mean? I – I do not understand.
- FORT. Billy has resigned his commission.
- LUCY. Resigned his commission – why should he do that?
- FORT. Under the circumstances he could do nothing else.
- LUCY. Then you advised him to do so?
- FORT. I did.
- LUCY. Oh Billy, my poor boy – and I was so proud of you – but now – oh Billy – Billy –
- BILLY. Hush mother - don't pity me – I don't deserve it – and my heart tells me that I have done the right thing – it was the only clear way out of the trouble – and I took it – for your sake.
- LUCY. For my sake –
- BILLY. Yes – but you haven't heard all yet. As I am practically a trained man, I have been included in a draft for France, and tonight I shall be on my way to the front.

- LUCY. Oh my God – (TO FORTESCUE) And you – you have done this. Because he was led away you have sent him – my son – my only boy – to death – oh go away – go away – and leave me to my sorrow – Go – and leave my boy alone with me.
- FORT. Lucy – he will be no nearer death in France than he would have been last night, and remember there was no other way.
- LUCY. Go.
- BILLY. Don't send him away mother.
- LUCY. You ask me to forgive the man who prompted you to - to –
- BILLY. To face the music - yes. I do. He's grit right through, I proved I wasn't, and he has shown me a way to win back my honour and prove myself a soldier and a man, and worthy of the name of Fortescue.

SCENE 6.

(A HUT OF THE AMERICAN SOLDIERS COMFORTS ASSOCIATION, THE CENTRE IS GAUZED FOR VISION. CAMP BED – TABLE – CHAIR – BRENDA IN UNIFORM TO OPEN.)

BREN.       Waal, this life is pretty exciting, and keeps one on the rush a bit, but thars intervals of routine work, and this is one of them.

(ENTER CAPTAIN BEECHER)

Hello, what wind blew you here, I reckoned you were sticking close to England.

BEECH.       Oh, we can't always do as we like. I have been over here a week and take the first opportunity to pay my respects to and old friend.

BREN.       That's put very pretty, but translated into plain American it means that you want me to help you in another frame up.

BEECH.       I may do so perhaps, do your duties ever take you into the first line trenches?

BREN.       Not if this old court knows herself sonny, and she thinks she do. Say do you think I'm out here to commit genteel suicide?

BEECH.       I should never suspect you of any such intention, but I'll be hanged if I know why you are here.

BREN. T'ain't necessary that you should, but I'll tell you tho'. I'm out here to finish the job I commenced in England.

BEECH. Good girl, I never did believe in half measures. Can I help you?

BREN. You can, this very night if the chance occurs, and you bet I'm on the watch – and – I'm going to risk my own skin - jest for once. Young Billy Fortescue's in -

BEECH. Hush – tell me later, there's someone coming in.

(ENTER SAM)

SAM. The Commandant on a visit of inspection.

BREN. Bust it.

(SAM SPRINGS STIFFLY TO ATTENTION, AND BRENDA THE SAME. THEY BOTH SALUTE AS WINNIE ENTERS. BEECHER TOUCHES HIS CAP IN A SORT OF CONTEMPTUOUS WAY.)

WIN. (TO BRENDA) Are you in charge of this hut?

BREN. Yes commandant.

WIN. The condition of the place is disgraceful, that bed has not been straightened, your table not been scrubbed since breakfast, floor looks as if it hadn't felt a broom since the deluge.

BREN. Well commandant, I've only one pair of hands –

WIN. You'll have to make 'em do, hired helps are not allowed out here.

BREN. But –



WIN. Silence. You will be transferred to hut 21 nearest the firing line.  
Where are your traps?

BREN. Yonder.

WIN. Be off and pack 'em up.

BREN. Oh but say –

WIN. Git.

(BRENDA SALUTES AND EXITS.)

BEECH. You have a very short way of dealing with your subordinates,  
commandant.

WIN. I guess this association is out to provide comforts for soldiers,  
Captain, not photos of ladies who do nothing, but just look pretty  
in the illustrated papers.

BEECH. Ah just so, well I wish you good evening.

WIN. Good evening, if you are going up the line, you can squire Miss  
Roscoe, she will be along in a few minutes.

BEECH. Sorry, I cannot wait, but I wish to speak to her, will you allow –

WIN. I NEVER RESCIND MY ORDERS CAPTAIN. (HE EXITS.)

SAM. Commandant, shall I mind the auto, they might take a fancy to it.

WIN. No, stay where you are, I want a heart to heart talk with you.  
You've been my armed guard for a month – how have you liked  
yourself?

SAM. I've had the toughest time I ever had – and I've had SOME tough  
ones.

WIN. I guess I've made it pretty hot for you.

SAM. Hot. If ever I land in blazes it will jest feel like an ice house.

WIN. Well, the matter lies in your own hands, Sammy boy.

SAM. I wish to thunder it did.

WIN. You've only got to marry me and my money.

SAM. I'll stick it till I drop first.

WIN. Then sonny, I'll give you something to stick.

SAM. You can't do much wuss than you have so far (WEARILY)

WIN. Can't I? We'll see – Attention.

SAM. Yes commandant.

WIN. Right about face. (HE DOES SO) What is that auto coming down the road?

SAM. Looks considerable like a British Staff car, pears to me thar's a lady travelling in it.

(SOUND OF CAR STOPPING.)

VOICE. Sorry madam, but I dare not take you a foot nearer the front line than this.

LUCY. (OFF) Then I must find some other means.

WIN. Can I be of any assistance to you, Mrs. Fortescue?

(ENTER LUCY)

- LUCY. Ah, Miss Pegg (SHAKES HANDS)
- WIN. What in thunder brings you here, ma'am?
- LUCY. I wanted to see my boy so badly, that at last by General Fisher's influence I obtained permission – but the Staff Officer who escorted me so far, refuses to take me any further.
- WIN. And you want to get right up the line? Waal, we might fix it but how can we get his locality?
- LUCY. His officer sent a special report to General Fisher, he's doing splendidly Winnie, fighting hard to win back the position he lost. His Captain speaks most highly of him (TAKES OUT LETTER – READS) "Junction trenches, just where the British line joins the American."
- WIN. Then I'm sure we can help you. Sam. (HE STANDS MOTIONLESS) Sam-u-el. (NO RESPONSE) ESCORT. (HE SALUTES)
- SAM. Yes commandant.
- WIN. Beg, borrow or steal the first horse you come to with four legs, and ride lickety split to Captain Fortescue, by Junction Trenches, and tell him to send me a pass for self and a lady.
- SAM. Yes Commandant.
- WIN. And listen, you just drop half a word or a whisper of a hint as to who the lady is, and I'll make you wish you had died ten years before your birth.
- SAM. I'll be back with the pass by midnight commandant. (SALUTES AND EXITS.)
- LUCY. Surely that is your cousin Pte. Boston.
- WIN. Oh yes, that's him right enough. I've reduced him to discipline.

LUCY. It appears so – (STAGGERS) – oh dear, I hope I’m not going to be troublesome – but – I’ve been travelling since yesterday morning, and I –

WIN. Gee, what a careless creature I must be – just sit down there whilst I get you a revive. (EXIT)

LUCY. And so I am within a few miles of my boy at last, heaven has preserved him so far – and I pray –

(ENTER BRENDA)

BREN. Tain’t everybody’s prayers that gets answered now-a-days. (SEES LUCY.) What in thunder are you doing here? Oh, I guess you’re still far too high and mighty to answer ME – have you come across to try and do the duty of your coward son? (LUCY FACES HER THEN TURNS AWAY) or are you in search of OUR husband, cos he’s busy at the Red Cross Hospital, I’m told, quite a jack of all trades is gentleman Fortescue.

LUCY. Don’t dare to mention my boy or his father, they are both out of your power now.

BREN. Guess it’s a case of out of the frying pan and into the fire, but if the Germans don’t finish your precious son he’ll never get back to Blighty alive. I mean to get back on you my lady stuck up, and the surest spot to hit is at yer offspring.

(ENTER WINNIE WITH CUP OF TEA)

LUCY. What do you mean?

- BREN. That I doped him on the night of the air raid.
- LUCY. Then you shall answer to the law, and when your treachery is proved my boy's name will be cleared.
- BREN. But you can't prove nothing ma'am.
- LUCY. You have confessed.
- BREN. That's what you'll have to prove, but my statement was for your private ears alone – nobody else will ever hear me say them words. I'm not quite a fool, and you stand just where you did, and so does the boy.
- LUCY. You have admitted your guilt to me, and shall be forced to confess the truth.
- BREN. Not if hell ha me.
- WIN. Don't worry Brenda, you will find your way home some day.
- BREN. Damn (ASIDE) I wonder if she overheard.
- WIN. Here, drink this Mrs. Fortescue - and you – git.
- BREN. I will – to business – (EXIT.)
- LUCY. Oh Winnie, that woman is our evil genius, but for her we should have been a united family long ago, she's stolen years of happiness from me – and now – oh God, why is she here to torture me still further?
- WIN. Give her rope enough and she's safe to hang herself, now you're going to take a rest here. (PUTTING BED READY) Come now - the guns will be starting soon for sure, but don't take any alarm, you sleep right on till I come and call you. (ASSISTING HER)
- LUCY. To go to Billy.
- WIN. That's it. Sam will get the pass for certain, now off you go into the land of dreams. (EXIT)

LUCY. The land of dreams – I seem to live in the land of dreams, to close my eyes is but to see more plainly the danger that surrounds my loved ones – God keep them safe – God keep them safe –  
(SLEEPS.)

(LIGHTS DOWN IN FRONT, UP BEHIND THE GAUZE.)

(VISION OF – WHAT TOOK PLACE IN THE TRENCHES IN DUMB SHOW.

BILLY ON FIRING STEP USING HIS RIFLE. BRENDA COMES TO HIM AND TRIES TO ENGAGE HIS ATTENTION – OFFERS HIM SPIRIT FROM CANTEEN, HE REFUSES AND SIGNIFIES THAT SHE WAS THE PERSON WHO DRUGGED HIM BEFORE AND ORDERS HER AWAY.

SHE MOVES AWAY A LITTLE AND BEECHER ENTERS – BRENDA TELLS HIM AND URGES HIM TO SHOOT BILLY IN THE BACK, AS HE IS FIRING ACROSS THE PARAPET.

BEECHER IS RELUCTANT BUT EVENTUALLY DRAWS HIS REVOLVER (OR BETTER STILL AN AUTOMATIC) AND SHOOTS BILLY WHO FALLS. AT THE SAME MOMENT A SHOT IS SUPPOSED TO BE HEARD, AND HITS BEECHER ON THE WRIST. HE DROPS HIS REVOLVER, BRENDA TIES HER HANDKERCHIEF ROUND HIS WRIST AND LEADS HIM OFF TO HAVE IT BANDAGED.

CAPTAIN FORTESCUE ENTERS, PICKS UP BILLY, INDICATES WITH HORROR THAT HE HAS BEEN SHOT IN THE BACK. SEES PISTOL, AND INDICATES THAT THE SHOT HAS BEEN FIRED – REPLACES PISTOL.

SAM ENTERS – THEY EXAMINE BILLY, AND INDICATE A CHANCE OF SAVING HIS LIFE – CAPTAIN FORTESCUE PROBES

AND EXTRACTS THE BULLET WHICH HE MAKES A POINT OF KEEPING. THEY CARRY BILLY OFF.

CAPTAIN BEECHER RE-ENTERS, HAND BOUND UP – INDICATES SATISFACTION AT FINDING REVOLVER. VISION FADES.)

(TOTAL DARKNESS FOR A FEW SECONDS, THEN A KNOCKING IS HEARD . LIGHTS UP TO HALF IN FRONT. LUCY AWAKES.)

LUCY.           Where am I? MY DREAM – (KNOCK) Who is there?

(ENTER CAPTAIN FORTESCUE.)

FORT.           Ah then I was right, when Boston came to me for the pass, I divined who it was for, and brought it myself.

LUCY.           William - you must not stay here – go to him, go to our boy – he is in danger – treachery and death are around him. - Go.

FORT.           Lucy, my wife – are you raving?

LUCY.           No no – as sane as you – I have been warned in a dream. Our boy is in danger, and you – you alone can save him. Go – go.

FORT.           Hush Lucy – his life like that of all our brave lads is in the hands of heaven.

- LUCY. Heaven has shown me that you can save him – go – go – don't waste the precious moments – I tell you I KNOW that what I say is true.
- FORT. You have never led me wrongly yet my wife – and though I don't understand your meaning – I trust you blindly – and I WILL go (SALUTES AND EXITS.)
- LUCY. (ON HER KNEES) Thank God, thank God.



SCENE 7.

(BACK AT FORTESCUE HALL.)

(DEE TO OPEN.)

DEE. (ENTERS FROM HOUSE WITH TELEGRAM.) Here's a telegram in the letter box, it may have been there for hours. These telegraph girls are worse than the boys used to be, and they were bad enough.

(ENTER WINNIE)

WIN. Hello, is that my wire you've got there unopened?

DEE. I've only just found it, miss, they just dropped it in the letter box and made off without even ringing the bell, drat the hussies.

WIN. Well, I sent it from the Junction, to warn you of the general advent.

DEE. What are you talking of?

WIN. Mrs. Fortescue and her son Billy, who has been discharged from hospital in France and is allowed home on sick leave.

DEE. That's the best news I've heard for many a day, and it's about time that some of the family were at home to

contradict some of the lies that are being told by Mister Billy's enemies. Where are they?

WIN. They've just waltzed along to the general headquarters to make a few arrangements for the benefit of Captain Beecher and his amiable friend Brenda Roscoe.

DEE. That's good.

WIN. Well, I must be getting off to change, I've no right to this uniform now.

DEE. How is that miss?

WIN. Well, you see, I made one big mistake when I bossed that Association.

DEE. Open confession is good for the soul.

WIN. Waal, I let Brenda Roscoe join the outfit, and her conduct didn't tend to shed glory on us, so I just handed over the whole caboodle to the British Canteen Board and quitted.

DEE. Well I've no doubt you did right, tho' I did hear that it was kept up entirely by your own private income.

WIN. Well it's all gone now – I haven't a dollar of Uncle Zack's left – only my own little bit which ain't much – I handed the lot over with the Association.

(EXIT DEE, ENTER SAM.)

SAM. See here, you Winnie girl, I reckon as how you've put me in considerable of a tough anyhow.

WIN. What's the source of your lamentations?

- SAM. When you handed over your darned old Association, you tried to pile the dollars with it, onto the British Canteen Board.
- WIN. Tried to? I did Samuel.
- SAM. That's where you miss your guess, sister. The Britishers accepted the goods, but not the money, they passed that over to Uncle Sam.
- WIN. Waal, it's gone anyway.
- SAM. No it ain't, kase Uncle Sam has passed it over to me as heir at law to Zack Boston, and here am I – a doughboy , with five million dollars.
- WIN. Hurrah – I've done it – I've done it – Hail Columbia. – Long wave the Star-spangled banner. (DANCING.)
- SAM. Stop roaring like a lassoed cayuse. You've got me into this all firedness and you've got to get me out of it again.
- WIN. I don't see I can Sammy.
- SAM. Waal, I reckon you said plenty about me sharing the dollars when you had them, now you've got to share them with me.
- WIN. Ah, but you were always as obstinate as a jack mule, so now I'm going to be as obstinate as a - jenny – see?
- SAM. Not you girl, not when I tell you one little bed rock fact – I've loved you ever since the day you came West to find me, and I want you real bad.
- WIN. Do you really mean it Sammy?
- SAM. On my honour as a citizen of the United States.

WIN. Then I'll tell you a secret in exchange, I've loved you ever since the same time.

SAM. (OFFERS ARM) Hitch teams gal, and by thunder we'll show these Britishers how quick two Yanks can get married when they both get hustlin'.

(RE-ENTER DEE.)

DEE. Here they come – walking up the drive – stopping to look at every stone and tree – how they love this place – and how they love each other – if only Captain Fortescue and his wife were reconciled – but that I fear will never happen - she can't forgive him staying away all those years with that woman – when he knew she – his wife – was alive.

WIN. If that's all that is keeping them apart, I reckon I can put that right.

DEE. What do you mean?

WIN. Wait and see.

(ENTER LUCY AND BILLY.)

LUCY. Here we are at last – ah Sam and Winnie – (SHAKES HANDS)

(DIRECTLY THEY ENTER WINNIE KEEPS ON TRYING TO SPEAK AND EVERY TIME SOMEONE ELSE JUST SPEAKS FIRST, SO THAT AT LAST SHE IS NEARLY BURSTING WITH WORDS.)

- DEE. (BUS WINNIE) Glad to see you back sir.
- BILLY. (BUS WINNIE) Thank you Dee –
- SAM. (BUS WINNIE) And now we must be off hot foot –
- WIN. WILL YOU WAIT A MINUTE – I’ve been trying to speak for hours, and if I don’t cough this item up I’ll bust – Say Mrs. Fortescue I’ve only just learnt the reason you and Sir William ain’t pally – sure I could have explained matters months ago if I had known.
- LUCY. What do you mean?
- WIN. Just this – that he never knew you were alive all those years – directly he did he came straight to England –
- LUCY. But my letters – I wrote – oh so many times – they were not returned to me – they must have been received?
- WIN. You’re right there ma’am, they were received all right all right – but not by gentleman Fortescue –
- LUCY. By whom then?
- WIN. By Brenda Roscoe, and kept back by her, for fear she’d lose the soft place she’d hitched on to.
- LUCY. That fiend again – this then was his explanation – oh why wouldn’t I let him speak.
- BILLY. Well, that’s the best news we could have had on my return home, eh mater? Thanks Winnie.
- SAM. And now we must vamoose pronto.
- WIN. Say sonny, we shall want some witnesses.
- SAM. We’ll hire them at a dollar a time – come on.
- LUCY. What’s the hurry?

WIN. It's a wedding ma'am, I've run after him for five years, but I guess it didn't take him five minutes to catch me – come on, old Anno Domine - come and earn a dollar. (THEY HUSTLE DEE OFF.)

LUCY. Home once more dear boy, doesn't the sight of the old place make your heart glad, please God you, your father and I may spend many happy days together here, when the war is over.

BILLY. Amen to that. Yes mater, I am glad to be back, but why did the people stare at me so? As though I was a stranger – when Tom Smith the baker's son was invalided home, his pals all gave him a rousing welcome.

(ENTER BEECHER AND BRENDA)

BEECH. Tom Smith was a hero – not a coward.

LUCY. How dare you enter these grounds – why have you come?

BEECH. To see you my dear Lucy, you see it has not paid you to flout my offer of friendship, your son – degraded to the ranks – a common soldier – now bears the coward's stamp – a bullet in the back.

BILLY. You be damned Captain Beecher, take back those words – or –

(LUCY RESTRAINS HIM)

LUCY. How did you learn that?

- BEECH. It was talked of freely enough.
- LUCY. And you encouraged the talk, because you were the man who fired the shot.
- BEECH. That be damned for a lie.
- BILLY. You were standing behind me at the time, and I repeat my mother's accusation, you fired the shot.
- BREN. So in this country a common soldier can accuse an officer, in America they would place him under arrest for his insolence.
- BEECH. By Jove, if he utters another word, I'll send for an escort.
- LUCY. There is no insolence in stating a fact, and if you can silence him, you cannot silence me –
- BEECH. Can I not? In this time of war the Defence of the Realm Act has far reaching powers, and you jeopardise your liberty in bringing such an accusation against an officer in His Majesty's Service.
- LUCY. Oh you are coward enough to shield yourself behind any cover. But I repeat that you have worked evil against my son from the first, and you have been aided and abetted by that woman.
- BREN. I guess that's where you step too far over the mark, you shall prove your words and eat them.

(ENTER WIN AND SAM)

- WIN. Then she'll prove them first and choke you with them after, you disgrace to the Stars and Stripes. It was you who led the boy to drink the night of the air raid –
- BREN. He wanted mighty little leading –
- LUCY. You confessed to me that the wine was drugged.
- BREN. That's a case of my word against yours.
- WIN. And mine – I was in the hut at the time, and OUR report is already in the hands of the proper authorities – I guess it won't take them long to get their hands on you.
- SAM. Say Poker – you'll find this climate somewhat unhealthy in a minute.
- BEECH. You all seem in a remarkably belligerent mood, but by Jove I'll give you a run for your money. I'll have that young cub courtmartialled for what he has said against me. I'll fetch the military police at once.

(ENTER FORTESCUE.)

- FORT. I've saved you the trouble sir, they are waiting at the gate – for you.
- BEECH. What do you mean?
- FORT. Private Boston, you were with me when I extracted the bullet from that young man's wound.
- SAM. Yes sir.
- FORT. What sort of a bullet was it?



SAM. Blunt nosed calibre 44 fired from a Smith pattern automatic pistol.

FORT. And where have you seen such a weapon?

SAM. Right here in Capt. Beecher's holster (SPRINGS ON BEECHER) here is the very shooting iron.

FORT. And here's the very bullet. Now Capt. Beecher, what have you to say?

BEECH. Nothing, you have won the day, but by God I'll face no tribunal, I'm off. (GOING)

BREN. By hell I won't kick in either – I'll finish my work –

(FIRES AT BILLY, FORT. SEIZES HER, AND BEECHER RECEIVES THE SHOT IN THE BACK. SAM HOLDS BRENDA.)

SAM. That's found him for keeps, he's got the coward's mark, a bullet in the back.

BILLY. May God forgive him.

LUCY. Can you ever forgive me, my husband, for refusing to listen to you? I have heard the explanation of your absence from Winnie – my pride nearly kept us apart for always.

FORT. Nearly, my wife, but thank God not quite –

LUCY. Home once more – restored to my husband and to Billy –

FORT. And I am restored to "Billy's Mother."-