



# 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).

---

## *The Call, 1915*

### **Citing this script.**

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

*The Call*, British Library, Lord Chamberlain's Collection of Plays 1915/13, Add MS. 66099 E. Licensed for performance on 18 May 1915. 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:

*Call*, GWT, LCP1915/13

### **Copyright Status: Public Domain**

This play has been identified by the project as being in the **Public Domain**. This indicates that the project team have researched the author's date of death and have determined that the copyright in the work has expired. Although we cannot guarantee that our research is 100% accurate and that no one will have a claim to the work, we can confirm that we have carried out a due diligence search and believe that the risk of using the work is low. Even though the material may be free from copyright restrictions we ask that you always provide a citation or reference back to the Great War Theatre project as the source and that you treat the material respectfully.

### **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.

## The Call

Anonymous

Tivoli. Manchester, for production in Whitsun Week, 1915

THE KITCHEN IS AN ORDINARY COTTAGE KITCHEN. THE WINDOW IS AT THE BACK. A CURTAIN GOES HALF-WAY UP THE WINDOW AND, THROUGH THE UPPER HALF, ONE GETS THE IMPRESSION OF SPACE AS THOUGH ONE WERE LOOKING AT THE SEA OR INTO THE SKY.

THE STREET DOOR IS TO THE LEFT OF THE WINDOW AND IS PLACED CROSSWAYS ACROSS THE CORNER MADE BY THE OUTER WALL (WHERE THE WINDOW IS) AND THE WALL ON THE LEFT FACING THE AUDIENCE. A DOOR IS IN THE OPPOSITE WALL (RIGHT). THIS DOOR LEADS TO THE BEDROOMS. WHEN THE CURTAIN RISES THE SCENE IS BEING LIGHTED BY THE RISING SUN. THE STAGE IS EMPTY OF PEOPLE. A MAN OPENS THE DOOR (RIGHT). HE CARRIES HIS COAT AND IS JUST SWINGING IT ON WHEN A 'BOOM' AND A CRASH ARE HEARD. HE LOOKS OUT OF THE WINDOW, THEN STRIDES TO THE DOOR AND FLINGS IT OPEN. A BIRD TWITTERS. THEN THERE IS ANOTHER 'BOOM'. HE STANDS WITH HIS COAT IN HIS HAND, THEN MOVES TO THE WINDOW AND BACK TO THE DOOR AGITATEDLY. A WOMAN'S SCREAM IS HEARD A WAY OFF. THEN AGAIN, NEARER. THEN NEARER STILL AND A [...] YOUNG WOMAN RUSHES THROUGH THE OPEN DOOR.

[ST P2 - THESE PAGE NUMBERS INDICATE THE NUMBERING ON THE ORIGINAL LICENSED SCRIPT]

WOMAN:                    Help! Help! Oh!

MAN:                     (catching her in his arms) My God! Lucy!

WOMAN:                   Oh! Oh! Oh! (Hysterically)

MAN:                     Are you hurt?

WOMAN:                   Oh! Mrs Thompson!

MAN:                     Yes. Yes. Well?

WOMAN:                   Her head. Oh! And her poor. Grey hair. Blood!

MAN: What is it?

WOMAN: The guns and the noise!

MAN: (He leads her to a chair: then he goes to the window. There is a bright flame and a crash outside)

My God! The villains!

Oh if I only could! (He flings his coat aside, strides to the window and raises his clenched hand) Murderers! (He drops his arm and turns with a despairing gesture) I'm helpless! Lucy! (He comes over to her) You see, I'm not a soldier. And even if I had a weapon, a civilian daren't take up arms agAinst the enemy. That's the law.

WOMAN: (Moaning) The law! And Mrs Thompson! O' I'm afraid. I tell you I'm afraid! God pity us women!

[ST P3]

MAN: Yes dear. I know. I understand. If I could do anything to stop it! I'm very sorry!

WOMAN: That's all you can be. Isn't it? Sorry! (Still hysterical) Look at him! Sorry! If they were all like you. Then - God pity us women! (she bends her head to the table)

MAN: Come my dear. You're distraught. I'm sorry about Mrs Thompson, but my hands are tied. Come!

WOMAN: (Jumping up) don't touch me. Or I'll go mad. Don't ever touch me again. You've no place here. You're out of it. You don't count. I loved you. But that's done with. I'm changed. I see clearly. Now. You don't. We part here. Love goes with respect. I don't respect you, now. Love and trust go hand in hand. How can I trust myself, my life to you? You can't stand the test - your hands are tied! Don't touch me. The man who stayed at home! Billy Metcalfe left his wife and his three children. He's buried now in Flanders. Billy did something grand. He gave his life.

You've stayed on here, calmly working. There's a widow and three orphans at Metcalfe's. You've saved a bit more for our marriage. There'll be no marriage. I can't marry a thief.

[ST P4]

MAN: Thief!

WOMAN: You are letting others do your work for you and you are not paying. You are stealing. Stealing your liberty and your pleasures behind the backs of the men. The men! You are a thief. Worse than a common burglar. Here! (Puts engagement ring on table) that's over. I'd shiver now if you touched me. You're a stranger. I don't know you.

MAN: What wild nonsense are you talking? Didn't I talk about joining the colours -

WOMAN: You talked!

MAN: And you said 'don't go. There'll be plenty without my Jack?'

WOMAN: Why didn't you go?

MAN: Without your sanction?

WOMAN: Without my sanction! If the call had come home to you you would have gone. Sanction! (Breaking down again) O' I'm tortured. My woman friend murdered. The man who was all to me - a coward.

MAN: Coward! Take care what you say! (He takes a step towards her and half raises his arm)

WOMAN: O' you'd hit me? Go on. You'd hit a woman! Me! Brave! O brave!

[ST P5]

MAN: No. I wouldn't. But coward is no name for me. I'll not give you up I won you. You're mine. I'll keep you. I'll steal you. But I'll have you (he seizes her in his arms).

WOMAN: (Struggling with him) No. No. Let me go! Coward!

(While they are struggling, a British soldier looks at them through the window. He smiles and then frowns. As the woman cries 'coward!' there is another 'boom' and they fly apart. They see the soldier. She screams and runs near the fireplace (right). The soldier comes round to the door)

SOLDIER: Aw reet 'ere. Thowt I 'eard a scream

MAN: It's nothing. Come in. You frightened her at the window.

SOLDIER: Frightened? Sorry missus. I'm no great 'and wi' women. But I'm not a frightener.

MAN: It's all right

SOLDIER: Are tha sure? It looked curious. Tha knows. A bit queer like. So early i't' mornin'. If tha'd 'ad a spiked 'elmet on I'd a thowt that were a German. Like I' Belgium. O I see. Love birds. Tha'rt a rum pair. Carry on. Don't be frightened missus. They're clearin' off. Wireless 'as been answered. I 'navy's comin! An' quick.

[ST P6]

MAN: Then we're safe?

WOMAN: Safe!

SOLDIER: Safe? (Laughs) O ay. Tha'rt safe. Never thee fear. Safe! I've been sent to tell you all to keep calm. Say, missus, there's an 'owd woman's body in t'next street could do wi' a bit o' lookin' after. A shell did it. Poor awd girl!

WOMAN: She was my friend

SOLDIER: Then tha 'as my sympathy (to the man) Ello. Thee. Where's thy button? (The soldier looks at the coat on the table)

MAN: What button?

SODLIER: T' button that shows you're engaged on gov'ment work

MAN: I work on a farm. I'm a farm hand

SOLDIER: Well. Tha'st no right to be. See?

MAN: No. I don't see

SOLDIER: Well, I'll tell thee (he puts down his gun on the table) there should be two sorts o' men I' England in these times. Them who fight and them who make things for fightin wi'. See?

MAN: But somebody must keep the work going there's corn to be grown -

[ST P7]:

SOLDIER: Corn! This is no time for thee to be botherin' about corn. T'world's full o' corn waitin' for us when we've finished this business - and tha' doesn't even wear a button. Well. Well. (He spies the ring) Is this thine, missus?

WOMAN: Yes. At least - it was

SOLDIER: (to man) Thy gift? Eh?

MAN: Yes

WOMAN: I've given it back

SOLDIER: Why?

WOMAN: I can't keep it. Not now. Not while this is on. I can't marry a coward.

SOLDIER: What! Him? He looks none of a coward. (There is another boom) (the woman clings to the soldier)

WOMAN: O. I'm terrified. Save me. Save me

SOLDIER: 'ush missus. It's aw reet. I'm 'ere. They shan't 'urt you. Tommy's 'ere. Good old Tommy Hawkins.

WOMAN: What should we do without you? To protect us?

SOLDIER: Well tha' sees. It's a soldier's business. Protectin'. Couldn't' that lad there do it as well as me?

WOMAN: (Disengaging her arms) No. How can he? He's useless.

[ST P.9]

SOLDIER: 'E's not a soldier, is 'e? Not like me, eh? I can protect thee, can't I? I know the way don't I?

WOMAN: (Sighing) Yes

SOLDIER: (Goes to her) Ay, tha'st a bonny wench. We'd make a fine couple, thee and me (he puts his arms round her)

MAN: (Taking up the gun) Take your arms off her! (He points the gun: the soldier does not move)

SOLDIER: A little lower, mate, tha'st aimin' at t' ceilin'

WOMAN: (Thrusting herself before the soldier) Don't!

MAN: Stand out of the way

SOLDIER: Ay, stand aside, missus. A bit lower still, there now, when I give the word, shoot. Shoot the man who can do what tha' can't. Shoot the man who can protect your girl.

MAN: (Puts down the gun) I can't

SOLDIER: Suppose I'd been a German?

MAN: Yes

SOLDIER: Nay, tha' daren't 'andle a rifle to a German, not if that'st only a civilian. That's the law. I don't want thy lass. Got one o' my own I' Burnley. And two o't' loveliest childer - 'Ere listen (he gives out a letter)

[ST P.10]

Listen to this (reads from the letter)

"Sometimes the place seems as lonely as the grave. Nobody can make the kitchen seem like home but you" I'm missed. You sees. And every

time the milkman or the breadman or anyone else knocks little Herbert calls out 'Daddy'. And afterwards when they are saying their prayers I make them finish with 'God bless Daddy for doing his duty". Two o't' bonniest kids. 'Doing his duty'. Damn it all man, tell me straight, why 'asn't tha' joined?

MAN: We were to have been married this month. And she said there would be plenty without me -

SOLDIER: Wh, lad. Eh Missus. You don't understand. Let me tell you summat. What I've seen no 'earsay. What I've seen. I've been at t'front you see.

WOMAN: In Belgium?

MAN: No. France. And I've seen things. Well 'ere (he whispers in her ear)

WOMAN: My God!

SOLDIER: That's what they'd be doin' 'ere if it wasn't for Tommy - and Jack. D'you want to keep 'im back now?

WOMAN: No.

[ST P. 11]

SOLDIER: An' thee. 'Ow would this suit thee? 'Ere's this kitchen. Thee there, tied 'and an' foot and a German bay'net against thy ribs if tha' stirred. 'Er, 'Er mind you in the 'ands of 'alf a dozen, 'Er eyes appealin' to you for 'elp. Can you imagine 'orror I' those eyes? Can you? Better men than thee 'ave seen it I' their woman folk. Makes thee sweat doesn't it. Impossible tha' thinks. Ay. That's what they thought I' Belgium. But it's 'appened once. Damn it man, why did you 'eed what she said. Women never mean what they say 'alf t'time. Though my Liza's straight enough. Met me comin' from t'mill. "'Eh thee" ee sez, 'Kitchener wants men, Tha'd look fine I' Khaki"". " I'm married" sez I, "let t' single men uns go first" "Can't wait while they make up their minds" Sez she. A good job we didn't wait for thee, eh mate? (Cheering a way off) They've



gone. They've not got one bit o' England yet.  
England! 'Ere, dost ever plough?

MAN: Yes

[ST P12]

SOLDIER: What dost think when t'ploughshare is turnin' up  
t'soil?

MAN : I think of the seeds to be sown and of the green  
corn springing up

SOLDIER: Doesn't t'earth ever speak to thee? Doesn't it  
say "I'm England. I'm thy mother?" They taught  
us a song at schoo' and one line of it al'ys  
sticks I' my mind, 'specially lately - But I  
love the land that bore me - love it! By crums  
when I saw things I' France I thowt 'This might  
'appen I' England. T' Germans might come to  
Lancashire. They might blow up Burnley. Good  
God. They might be aw o'er Pendle 'i'll" An' I  
set my teeth an' I said, "Not if I can 'elp it"  
An' when I came out o' 'ospital after t'Marne,  
an' they sent me 'ome to serve I' t'ome Defence  
for a while - I cried when I saw t' green  
fields again. I'm not quite fit for t'front  
again. A bit limpy. Couldn't ride nor march for  
long. So that's why I'm 'ere. What mate. A khaki  
said for thee, eh?

MAN: I've a good job. It has been a trouble to get  
it. I don't want to lose it.

[ST P13]

SOLDIER: Job! Tha stay-at-home. That laggard. Next time  
tha' ploughs, t'soil'll spit at thee.

T'orses'lll look at thee wi' their big eyes an'  
say 'Mester, what art doin' 'ere?

T'sheep'll bleat at thee, 'Baa, baa, black  
sheep, 'ave you any pluck?'

T'weeds'll say 'Leave us along, thee, Tha'st one  
of us thyself! A weed?

Tha'st no Englishman

Thee an thy girl! Married! There's a better thing than marryin! There's givin' up all for a cause.

'As tha any pals?

MAN: I keep to myself. I'm a quiet sort.

SOLDIER: I'm none agains't quietness. In its place. There's too much empty blather goin' on. Too much sittin' round wi' cigars an' whiskey an' killin' t' Kaiser wi' their mouths. A quiet sort! I see. Would tha like a pal, a man pal?

MAN: Yes

SOLDIER: Well, tha can 'ave plenty. Rare uns too. Men. All pals I't' army from t'commander - I- chief down to private Tommy. Officers! Like brothers to us. Give their lives like givin' 'a copper to a beggar. As much as sayin! 'Ere, you're welcome"

[ST P14]

Tha wants to get among men. Tha'st got mopy bein' too much by thyself. Thy girl, 'ere. Come 'ere missus. Suppose you get married. An' when t'war's over an' t' Germans licked - aw t'other women's 'usbands an' brothers an' sweet 'earts'll be tellin' their tales about what they did an' what they saw I' t' war. An' thee! Sat mum. Out of it. Men'll 'ush when they see thee comin! Tha'll get cowl looks. They'll whisper 'E were deaf. 'E never 'eard the call'.

The Call!

Owd men an' grannies, o'er there draggin' their legs along t'roads an' groanin! Young childer whimp'rin 'an' duckin' when t'German shells whistle o'er their 'eads, young women, ay, girls, ruined, moanin' o'er their shame, t'men I' t' battered trenches splashed wi' their mates' blood, never givin' in, only growlin, like bull-dogs growlin! It aw rises up, like a great organ, callin'! 'Come, come.'

My pals, my brothers-i'-arms. All 'eroes! Alive  
one hour, dead t'next. But no

[ST P15]

They'll never die. They'll live for ever.  
'istory will say 'they were true men. They  
answered to the call"

MAN: (uplifted by the soldier's speech)

SOLDIER: (seeing the effect of his speech. Springs  
quickly to the salute)

God save the King! And our women!

MAN: God save the king!

WOMAN : (Clinging to the man) Jack! My Man!

SOLDIER: Ay missus. It's aw reet. 'E's a man. England's  
man. 'E's answered the call. (To the man) put it  
there. Chum!

CURTAIN